

February 2023 Newsletter
First Congregational United Church of Christ
1000 Willson Avenue - Webster City, Iowa 50595
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<http://www.firstcongregationalwc.org/>

When you were buried with Christ in your baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth; for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Col. 2:12; 3:1-3

What do you make of Ash Wednesday? I once read an article that spoke of Ash Wednesday being a “holy-day” but not a “holiday,” and I had to agree: we don’t celebrate Ash Wednesday as a holiday the way we celebrate other Christian holidays like Christmas or Easter. No one gets time off work for Ash Wednesday; we don’t give or receive Ash Wednesday presents (unless you count a daub of ashes on your forehead as a “present”); there’s no merry making or partying on Ash Wednesday; there’s no Ash Wednesday greeting cards, or Ash Wednesday carols to sing...

No, Ash Wednesday is definitely not a holiday. It’s an anachronism in some ways, a throwback to earlier times when the faithful would prostrate themselves with guilt and mark themselves with ashes, confess their unworthiness and depravity, and ask for mercy from a just, fearful, and often angry God. No wonder no one thought to commercialize it and make the day into a holiday! No wonder so many Christians have forgotten it, ignore it, or just don’t take it very seriously...

But I wonder if we lose an important opportunity when we forget it, or dismiss it in an age in which confessions are now fodder for the tabloids or Tic Toc rather than food for the soul, and repentance is usually the consequence of getting caught, rather than a sincere desire to turn our lives around. I wonder if by being reluctant to take an accounting of our lives and ask ourselves how we are doing—not in terms of dollars, or awards, or votes, or comfort but how we are doing in terms of growth, faithfulness, integrity, compassion, and service to others-- we have somehow lost sight of the purpose of human life when it is lived in a loving relationship with God.

The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, speaks to my mind of what Ash Wednesday is all about: setting our minds on the “things that are above.” Now perhaps that seems impractical or unimportant when staying on top of things—or even just staying sane—seems like a full-time job down here on planet earth. But it is the “things that are above” that ultimately hold our destiny as spiritual beings, and on Ash Wednesday we are reminded by a smudge of ashes on our foreheads that *everything we hold dear on this earth will eventually perish*. Every treasure we accumulate will one day be lost; every relationship we hold dear will inevitably change; our own bodies will eventually return to the dust from which they came. Even the stars in the heavens will one day stop twinkling, *leaving us in the end wondering why we were so infatuated with the things that will pass, the things of this earth, and so uninterested in the things that are above, the things that are eternal...*

Things like the love that lives inside each of us that we bury underneath a mountain of unneeded fears, selfish ambitions, and negative feelings...

Things like the peace that passes all human understanding that we so easily trade for the favor and good opinions of others...

Things like the joy of communion with our Creator that we forsake for the idols and the half-gods that fill our lives.

Ash Wednesday reminds us that the things that are above—love, peace, the empowering presence of God in our lives--are what ultimately matter in human life. And Ash Wednesday reminds us that if we have forgotten the importance of these things because we are so fixated on the things of this world, then we have the opportunity to change; to repent; to choose another way by setting our minds on the things that are above.

So perhaps we should make Ash Wednesday a holiday after all! We could make Ash Wednesday greeting cards to mail out to our friends that say: *“Hey—are you setting your mind on the things that are above?”* Then we could mail one to ourselves from time to time to remind us, as Paul suggests, that our lives are hidden with Christ in God--not in the things of this world. That way we could keep Ash Wednesday alive in our churches *by keeping the meaning of Ash Wednesday alive...in us.*

February 22 marks the beginning of our observance of Lent with our Ash Wednesday service. I pray that each of you choose to use this holy day to help make Lent *your* holy time: a holy time for your growth and renewal; a holy time when you set your eyes, your minds, your hearts—your very lives—on the things that are above.
 –Pastor Craig

CHURCH OFFICE HOURS

M 8 am - 1 pm
 T 9 am – 1 pm
 W 8 am – 4:30 pm
 Th 8 am – 4:30 pm
 F 9 am – 1 pm

19 - Jenna Short
 22 - Curtis Alan (PJ) Swanson
 23 - Stephanie Hill
 26 - Wilma Taylor
 27 - Luverne Bierle
 27 – Diana Oberender
 27 – Adelyn Oberender
 28 - Midge Tudor

Church Staff	
Rev. Craig Blaufuss , Pastor	
Office: 832-2232 Cell 297-4316	
Pastor's email: revcraigblaufuss@gmail.com	
Michele Omgig : Admin. Assist. 269-7210	
Church's e-mail: administrative.office@fcuccwc.org	
Dale Olson : Stephen Ministry Ldr 839-5619	
Melissa Hindt : Organist 712-351-1074	
Curt/Lorraine McCoskey : Cust's. 832-5341	
Tracy Wehrhan : Church Treasurer 297-0370	
Dale Olson : Financial Secretary 839-5619	

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY TO:
 13 - Dick & Midge Tudor
 17 – Jose Burgos & Dilcia Franco

Parish Nurse News
 Ways to Enjoy the New Year
 Volunteer
 Clean (declutter)
 Regular exercise
 Learn to say "NO"
 Ask for help
 Meditate
 Reduce screen time
 Hydrate
 Practice gratitude
 Improve sleep habits
 Treat yourself



FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO:

- 1 - Chris McNeil
- 4 - Leanna Ploeger
- 5 - Jane Klaver
- 6 - Sharon Perry
- 7 - Gene Royster
- 8 - Michele Omgig
- 9 - Les Ploeger
- 11 - Greta Oberender
- 12 - Blakely Ploeger
- 14 - Curt McCoskey
- 15 - Everett (Bud) Crystal
- 17 - Piper Williams
- 19 - Gretchen McGlynn

Lent Begins February 22

First Congregational will begin the observance of Lent with an Ash Wednesday Service on Wednesday, February 22, beginning at 6 p.m. in the East Chapel. Ash Wednesday is a day of penitence and preparation which begins our Lenten season; it is a day which reminds us of our mortality, and our need for repentance and renewal. We will observe Ash Wednesday with the Imposition of Ashes, and share the sacrament of Holy Communion.

Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper February 21

It's been a while since we gathered for a Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper! Shrove Tuesday is an old tradition that prepared for the austerity of

the Lenten fast by using up all the eggs, butter and fat in a household prior to Ash Wednesday. And what better way to use up those ingredients than to make pancakes! On Tuesday, February 21, from 5-6 p.m. we will host a Pancake Supper in Fellowship Hall, with a free-will offering to offset the cost of the meal. There will be a pancake bar with various toppings for your pancakes, sausage links, coffee, juice, milk and water. Join us for a great pancake supper on the eve of Lent!

The Shalom Circle Continues During Lent

The Shalom Circle, our prayer and meditation group, will continue to meet during Lent. If you have not yet chosen a Lenten discipline, the circle is a wonderful opportunity to explore spiritual practices and deepen your prayer life. We have a place for you in the East Chapel; if you are interested or want to know more, please speak with Pastor Craig.

Adult Education Multiweek Study: LGBTQ Basics

By now almost everyone is familiar with the initialism LGBTQ, standing for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer. But how much do you really know about matters of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression? Beginning Sunday, February 5, the Adult Education class will embark on a multiweek study of "LGBTQ Basics" in order to increase our understanding of this diverse community of people. We will examine some basic definitions used in society today to denote various sexual orientations and gender identities, look at statistics and demographics, explore the influences of biology and sociology in the lives of LGBTQ folk, educate ourselves on the history of the "movement" and listen to firsthand accounts of their lives, struggles, hopes and dreams. Join us for an open and inquiring discussion about LGBTQ basics!

Composting

As we continue to experience extreme weather events, and as our climate changes, do you ever wonder if there is something you could do to help? Have you ever thought about composting? You might wonder what this is and how could composting help. Well, composting takes food waste and turns it into a nutrient-rich mixture that aids the health of the

soil. Home gardeners take note! Composting would help eliminate some of the food waste we all make. An average of 20 lbs/family of food waste is generated each month! This, in turn, would help eliminate some of the methane and carbon dioxide produced in a landfill from all of this food waste. Furthermore, if the methane and CO2 are not produced they don't get spewed into the air.

In order to compost you need 4 things to be successful:

- Browns - dead leaves, twigs, small bits of cardboard

- Greens - vegetable waste, fruit scraps, coffee grounds

- Water

- A way to turn it - a barrel that you can spin, or the ability to physically turn a compost pile outside.

Stay tuned for more possible ways to make composting an easy thing for you to do.

Mission Board

Heifer Project

Our giving project for Heifer Project international is still going! Perhaps you have noticed the tube of quarters that gets steadily taller from week to week. Those monies go to Heifer Project International. These monetary gifts go towards buying animals for people around the world to raise, breed, eat or sell. It is a sustainable gift that helps fight hunger and poverty but uses the strength of paying it forward. A \$20 gift buys a flock of chickens, while a \$500 gift buys a cow. Please stop by our display and consider cleaning out your purse or pockets for this worthwhile cause.

Alternative Giving

Mission Board would like to thank all of you for your continued support of the Alternative Giving Fair. This is a project that has been put forward for opportunities for you to share the joy of the Christmas season and you do that! Thank you! This year we had a sock/mitten tree and 25 gloves, 77 hats, 48 pairs of socks, and 3 scarves were placed under that tree. Next came Stepping Forward Romania and \$235 was donated and sent to them to help with Christmas gifts for the kids. The 3rd week we presented the Native American Heritage Association and \$306 was given to help them

purchase small stoves to help heat a room that otherwise never gets to 50 in the winter. The last week was collecting items for hygiene kits for the men at Beacon of Hope and on Tuesday January 24, 6 completed kits were taken and they were very much appreciated.



Thank you church family for your giving and caring hearts and spirits.

Treasurer's Report

INCOME	December	YEAR TO DATE
Pledges and Offerings	\$30,944.88	\$196,393.37
Other Income	0.00	.00
TOTAL INCOME	\$30,944.88	\$196,393.37
EXPENSES		
Outreach and Mission	1,666.67	\$17,250.00
Pastoral Services	8,449.95	98,545.25
Maintenance and Repairs	4,742.23	44,355.43
Church Office	5,773.31	39,534.69
Music Ministry	313.35	4,167.25
Christian Education	40.13	162.28
Local Ministry	2,000.00	2,586.31
Misc. Expenses	49.42	1,317.92
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$23,035.06	\$207,919.13

Ecumenical Human Needs Committee January 17, 2023

Sponsored by Webster City Ministerial Association

Applicants	Totals for 2022			
Number of Families Helped this year. (Approvals)	37 families			
Number of People Helped within the families. (Approvals)	99 people			
Number of Families Denied	6	Reasons for Denial: 1. No Job to pay 2nd month's rent.	2. Wanted rent paid in another county.	4. Being evicted with too many months' rent unpaid.
Number of People Denied within the family	10			

Applications Referred to other agencies	6			
Financial Report	Beginning Balance 12-31-21	Deposits	Payments for Needy Families	Ending Balance 1-15-23
Morrison Trust & Teresa Treat Trust (2022)	\$17,085.42	\$18,042.69	\$11,091.81	\$24,036.30
Ecumenical Human Needs (Money from our member churches)	\$9670.91	\$16,975.82	\$17,995.12	\$8,651.61
Totals	\$26756.33	\$35018.51	\$29,086.93	\$32,687.91

We work together as EHNC to help families in crisis who live in Webster City. Our committee is amazing and we work well together. From Kelly at Trinity Lutheran taking all the applications (49 this year!) to each of our ministers and priest who make final decisions if we help our crisis families, to Judy at Episcopal Church who writes checks to providers and tracts every penny we spend, to Robin from Church of Christ and Sharon of 1st Congregational UCC who do investigations and interviews of each client, we make a great team! We thank each church for their generous support of this important service that we do together. God Bless our mission and each of you!

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Address Service Requested

God is still speaking
to everyone in the home of:

February