



THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
United Church of Christ
December 2023



Friends in Christ:

Life in our congregation is changing. When the Church Council met in November, I told them I'm not using words like "difficult" and "challenging" nearly as much as I have in the past 3 ½ years. Instead, I'm using "exciting," "new," and "energizing" when talking about our life together. A new spirit seems to have come upon us. We are looking forward, trying new things, and finding energy for the tasks ahead.

And while I also usually don't say things such as this, I have also expressed my sense that this is nothing less than the Spirit of God creating something new in us and among us and through us. I'm not ready to say just what that new thing is, but I keep looking for it and seeking to understand it.

Our theme for Advent this year is "Keeping Watch Together." It reminds us that discovering the new things that God is doing is a group activity. No one of us sees it all. We need each other. Advent is a season that looks ahead as much as behind. In these days—and, really, in all our days—we are urged to stay awake, to keep alert, to watch. We look with expectation for what has been called "the coming again of our second chance."

The days grow short. Almost as an act of resistance, we begin our worship with adults and children standing where all can see them and lighting a candle—a reminder to us that the light of God still shines in the darkness. The light fades early, but we say it will not always be so.

The leaves turn brown and fall. We take pine and balsam and holly—*evergreens*—and turn them into living circles with neither beginning nor end. As nature points toward death and decay, we turn our sights toward resurrection and new life.

God is doing something new. Let us keep watch together.

Peace,

Bill

P.S.—Along with the rest of the staff here at Congregational UCC, I want to wish all of you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. In this year of renewal and rebuilding, this church continues to be a wonderful place at which to work and do ministry. Each of you makes this congregation the special community that it is.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

News from Christian Education

Sunday, December 10th ALL Church ADVENT Potluck. Please make plans to attend the Special Christmas Music Sunday and **all-church-potluck**. A special treat is waiting for little ones at our family-friendly table. **Families** with children, please come as our special guests...we will provide your meal.



Sunday School will be presenting **A Christmas Story...A True Story** for the Christmas pageant on **Sunday, December 17th**. The children will be narrating the Nativity story in their own words. Rehearsals for this darling play will take place during December's Sunday School hour.

Sunday School Breakfast. To encourage better attendance in our Sunday School, we have been offering a light breakfast at 9:00. We depend on members of the CE Board and the congregation to contribute tasty homemade treats like breakfast pizza, empanadas, and muffins to entice our sleepyheads to church. We are looking for chefs for the Second Semester (January-May)! Please look at the sign-up sheet on the fridge in the church kitchen...and volunteer!



Sunday School Offering. We were able to choose 2 pigs and 20 flocks of chickens for the \$440.00 gathered for Heifer Project. We gathered \$299.00 for Trick or Treat for UICEF at Coffee Hour. Congratulations church!!!

Children's Choir (all ages) Children's Choir will share on **Sunday, December 17th** at our Christmas Pageant. Come to rehearsals Sunday morning during worship!



ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

News from Christian Education

Blessing Bags. Sunday School students will be collecting NEW single-use personal care/hygiene products for their January mission and outreach project: Epiphany Blessing Bags. Please contribute to this effort: toothpaste and toothbrush, hairbrush and comb, hand sanitizer, hand wipes, bars of soap, shampoo and conditioner, hand lotion, and Band-Aids. This is a perfect solution for distributing those hotel-sized products that are gathering dust in your bathroom drawers!! Please put these items in the brown baskets found in the Children's Corner. In addition, the students will be adding cash, breakfast bars, socks, and gloves to the Blessing Bags...so monetary gifts marked "Blessing Bags" can also be placed in the Offering plate on Sunday.



Youth Group Gathering Sunday, December 17th. First Presbyterian Church on Rochester will be hosting the Youth Group gathering and Christmas Party from 4-5:30. Bring a wrapped gift for the gift exchange!

Children's Offerings This is a reminder for everyone, adults *and* children, to please place your offering in an envelope and place it in the Offering Plate *during worship*.



Childcare in the Church Nursery is offered every Sunday 9:00-11:15 for folks to attend adult education, sing in the Choir, teach Sunday School, and attend worship. Come enjoy adult education classes, adult choir, and even teaching Sunday School!

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPCOMING EVENTS



“KEEPING WATCH TOGETHER” ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS at CONGREGATIONAL UCC

Our theme for Advent this year is “Keeping Watch Together.” Join us for worship on Sunday morning and for special events throughout the season. Together we will watch for signs of hope, watch for signs of peace, awaken to signs of joy, and wonder at signs of love.

December 3—First Sunday in Advent; Communion
December 10—Second Sunday in Advent; Special Music Sunday
December 17—Third Sunday in Advent; Children’s Christmas Pageant
December 20—Winter Solace Service at 7:00 p.m.
December 24—Christmas Eve Morning (Fourth Sunday of Advent); Worship at 10:15
Christmas Eve is Sunday, December 24—Worship at 5:30 p.m.
December 31—Seventh Day of Christmas—Worship at 10:15 a.m.
January 7—Epiphany Sunday; Communion

Beginning on the first day of Advent, December 3, we will be sending out an email Advent Calendar with the theme **Keeping Watch Together**. Each day's entry will be provided by someone in the congregation.

Here are the themes for each week:

Dec. 3-9: **Watching for signs of hope**
Dec. 10-16: **Watching for possibilities of peace**
Dec. 17-23: **Awakening to signs of joy**
Dec. 24: **Wondering at signs of love (filled)**

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPCOMING EVENTS



MAGNIFICAT BY TAYLOR SCOTT DAVIS: Please join us on Sunday, December 10, when the Congregational UCC Choir, directed by Dr. Chris Nakielski and accompanied by Bill Crouch, will perform *Magnificat* by Taylor Scott Davis. Premiered and recorded by the acclaimed Voces8 in 2020, this gorgeous five-movement setting of the Magnificat is scored for SATB divisi voices and soprano solos (featuring Rachel Burchett and Marie Von Behren) with organ, harp, and percussion. The second movement is in English, opening and closing with a soloist. The remaining movements are choral only and are in Latin.

THE ADVENT LUNCH RETURNS ON DECEMBER 10!

Our always-joy-filled Advent Lunch is back this year—and it will be better than ever if you are a part of it. Join us in Rockwood Hall after worship and Special Music on Sunday, December 10. There is a sign-up sheet in Rockwood Hall to help the Membership Board with their planning. The Membership Board is providing a main dish and the rest of the meal will be potluck. Plan to bring a salad, vegetable, bread, dessert, etc. to share.



MEN'S BREAKFAST—DECEMBER



The December Men's Breakfast will be held at 8:00 a.m. on Saturday, December 16, at the Waterfront Hy-Vee. All Congregational UCC men who eat breakfast are invited. This is a great way to catch up with old friends and meet new friends. Join us!

THE WOMEN'S LUNCH WILL BE HELD on Thursday, December 21st at Monica's in Coralville at 11:45AM. Call or text Martha Ann Crawford—319-855-8340—to reserve a seat.



WINTER SOLACE SERVICE—DECEMBER 20



The days before Christmas can be difficult, especially for those who are dealing with loss, illness, and other challenges. On Wednesday, December 20, Bill Lovin will be leading a Winter Solace Service in the sanctuary at 7:00 p.m. We are trying to bring out as much joy as possible in this season, but as we do so, we can also acknowledge our sorrow, our losses, our concerns and our fears. This will be a time of prayer and scripture reading and music. The worship service will be both in person and live streamed.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPCOMING EVENTS



Join us for worship on Christmas Eve, Sunday, December 24, at 5:30 p.m.

This is a service for people of all ages. Our worship includes a time for children, special music, Christmas carols, a reading of the Christmas story from the Gospel of Luke, and lighting of candles. If you would like to be an usher for this worship service, please sign up in Rockwood Hall or call the church office.

Everyone is invited to the gala reception in Rockwood Hall after worship. This is a warm and wonderful time of fellowship and a chance to catch up with students and friends who are home for the holidays. The reception will be even better if you volunteer to bring some cookies or other goodies to share. Sign up in Rockwood Hall or call the church office to let us know what you're bringing.

Members and friends may provide poinsettias for the sanctuary for our Christmas Eve worship service. If you would like to remember or honor someone with a poinsettia, please let the church office know that you will bring a poinsettia and the name of the person by Monday, December 18.

THE CHRISTMAS FUND OFFERING—CHRISTMAS EVE



Each year, the United Church of Christ's Christmas Fund Offering allows the UCC to assist retired pastors living on limited incomes as well as to supplement small retirement annuities and health premiums and to provide emergency grants to active and retired clergy and lay employees. The mission of the Christmas Fund is to provide assistance dollars in situations of critical need, while preserving the dignity of those who receive the aid.

We will receive the Christmas Fund Offering during our worship on Christmas Eve. Please remember that your generous contributions can and do make a difference in the lives of many people.

A Note from the Diaconate: Cookies Galore at Christmas Eve

Please join the traditional cookie brigade on December 24th. If you are able and willing to bring two dozen cookies, there will be plenty of mounded plates for filling the tables after the evening service. We'll have the cider and cocoa hot and ready.

We were awed by the new helpers in the kitchen last Sunday the 12th. Tina Koepnick led a Sunday school class (Izzy Brown and Ella Lewis) into the intricacies of the Congregational UCC kitchen. (cont'd)



ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

They made it look easy by reading the directions for Sunday morning hostess duties! They made the coffee and lemonade, prepped the cream and sugar, set out the cups, and added two beautiful flower arrangements.

Speaking of easy-to-learn hostess duties, we need volunteers to sign up for December 17, 24, and 31. The Diaconate wants to thank whoever signs up for hosting on those days by sending them home with a holiday center piece arrangement.

Please also consider being a friendly greeter or usher on Sunday mornings in December. As usual, the sign-up sheets are on the wall in Rockwood Hall.

HOLIDAY OFFICE HOURS

Please note: The Church Office will be closed on the following days: Monday and Tuesday, December 25 and 26, and Monday, January 1.



GIVING AT THE END OF THE YEAR

The end of the year is a good time to remember the commitments we made during the year. Sometimes we forget about a gift we wanted to make: a gift to the food pantry; extra support for a particular program; a memorial gift for someone special; or even a commitment to the general work of Congregational UCC.

Now is the time to make that gift! The calendar year is rapidly coming to a close. If you want to include that gift in your charitable deduction for tax purposes this year, now is the time! Everything that happens here happens because we give. And thanks again for your generosity throughout 2023!

ALTERNATIVE GIVING

In anticipation of Christmas, the Mission Board has organized Alternative Giving opportunities. Tree tags for the Salvation Army Angel Tree are now available. Gifts for kids will need to be returned to the church by December 17. The Mitten Tree is ready to be decorated with your donations of hats, gloves, scarves, etc. These items will be taken to the Iowa City School District for use in the schools, in honor of long-time Congregational UCC member, Joan Buxton, who was a school nurse for many years.



Project Holiday tree tags/envelopes are also available. This is the CommUnity annual holiday meal distribution. Donations will be mailed by the donor, and must be received at CommUnity by December 17.

Mission Board members will take orders for Heifer Project gifts after worship on December 3 & 17. **Payments by cash or check** will be received, and Ginny Clemons will personalize gift cards that can be mailed by the purchaser. The catalog can be viewed here: <https://www.heifer.org/gift-catalog/index.html> Church World Service catalogs are also available and items can be purchased for CWS in honor of others. Cards will be available, but not calligraphy. Members of the church are selling some of their art items for Alternative Giving, so be sure to stop by their tables to find a gift to purchase!

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPCOMING EVENTS



HOPE LODGE: Our November Hope Lodge dinner was cancelled and rescheduled for December 4. Thanks to our flexible helpers: Rebecca Weatherford, Linda Muston, Diane Dahl-McCoy, Sally Strang, Jane Kinney, Carson Fixmer, Michelle Birt-Leeds and Adelaide, Darcie Hutzell and Fielding, and Sue and Chuck Dayton. Our next dinner will be Monday, January 15. Watch for a sign-up sheet in Rockwood Hall.

THANKS! We received \$1234 for our annual Neighbors in Need offering in November. Neighbors in Need is a special mission offering of the United Church of Christ that supports ministries of justice and compassion throughout the United States. One-third of NIN funds supports the Council for American Indian Ministry (CAIM). Two-thirds of this offering is used by the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries (JWM) to support a variety of justice initiatives, advocacy efforts, and direct service projects through grants. Neighbors in Need grants are awarded to UCC churches and organizations doing justice work in their communities. These grants fund projects whose work ranges from direct service to community organizing and advocacy to address systemic injustice.



OPEN HEARTLAND VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY:

Open Heartland, an organization meeting a variety of needs of the Spanish speaking population of Iowa City, is seeking volunteers. Our youth are going to be getting involved, and this is an opportunity for adults in our congregation as well. Volunteer times and activities of sorting donations, packaging bulk foods and other needs are varied and flexible. If you are interested, contact Deb Dunkhase, the director, at debdkhase@gmail.com or call or text her at 319-321-5528. Or for a little more information, ask Ray Muston or Jane Kinney about the organization.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION:

New members might not know that our church has an account with HOUSEWORKS, 1800 Stevens Drive, a small consignment business which sells a variety of household goods and furniture. So, please consider taking your used items there as a UCC donation and be sure to tell them that's it's for the UCC account.



USHERS, GREETERS, AND HOSPITALITY OPPORTUNITIES: opportunities to greet people coming to worship, to usher, and to provide hospitality during coffee hour after worship. Please sign up on the sheets in Rockwood Hall or call the church office--319-337-4031.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO SERVE AS A LITURGIST ON SUNDAY MORNING?

This is a great opportunity to welcome people and to lead them in worship. Bill Lovin provides the material. You provide the spirit. Contact Bill if you are interested or would like more information.

CHURCH CALENDAR

December 2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1 -Non-member wedding rehearsal, 5:00pm	2 -Non-member wedding, 3:00pm
3 - 9:00 Choir - 9:15 Christian Education - Children's Church During Worship - 10:15 Worship Service - Chamber Singers rehearsal, 2:00pm - Confirmation class, 4:00pm	4	5 -CE Meeting, 7:00pm - Mission Board, 7:00pm	6	7	8	9
10 - 9:00 Choir - 9:15 Christian Education - Children's Church During Worship - 10:15 Worship Service/Special Music Sunday, Advent Potluck - Chamber Singers rehearsal, 2:00pm	11 - Chamber Singers Dress Rehearsal, 6:30pm	12 - Deacons meeting, 6pm	13	14 - Chamber Singers rehearsal, 6:45pm	15 - Chamber Singers concert and reception, 6:00pm	16 - Men's Breakfast @ Waterfront HyVee, 8:00 am
17 - 9:00 Choir - 9:15 Christian Education - Children's Church During Worship - 10:15 Worship Service/Children's Pageant - Youth Group, 4:0pm	18	19	20 -Winter solace service, 7:00pm	21 - Women's Lunch @ Monica's in Coralville at 11:45 am	22	23
24 - 9:00 Choir - Children's Church During Worship - 10:15 Worship Service - Christmas Eve worship, 5:30pm	25 CHURCH OFFICE CLOSED	26 CHURCH OFFICE CLOSED	27	28	29	30
31 - Children's Church During Worship - 10:15 Worship Service						

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

CELEBRATING DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

- 12/1 Richard Bloesch
- 12/4 Jane Murphy
John Reitz
- 12/9 Chris Knapp
Sue Dayton
- 12/13 Carroll Hanson
Mary Shepherd
- 12/18 Jeffry Schabilion
- 12/20 Dwight Schumm
- 12/29 Sheilah McKenna
- 12/30 Mark Whittaker
- 12/31 Rick Ruppert



FRIENDLY REMINDER!

The deadline to submit items for the November newsletter will be Friday, December 22nd.



**THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
30 North Clinton Street
Iowa City, Iowa 52245-1700**

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

DECEMBER 2023 NEWSLETTER



CHURCH STAFF CONTACT INFORMATION

Office Hours: Monday - Friday, 9 am to 1 pm

Phone: 319-337-4301

Visit our Web Site: www.uccic.org

Pastor:

Dir of Church School

Music Director

Organist

Children's Music Director

Office Manager

Financial Secretary

Custodians:

The Rev. William Lovin

Rev. Ann Molsberry

Chris Nakielski

Bill Crouch

Majesty Constable

Jenn Harden

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For up to date announcements, check us out on Facebook.