

Congregational Tidings

*No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey,
you are welcome here!*



A weekly newsletter



www.facebook.com/FirstCongregationalUCCWaterlooIowa

November 18, 2020

Taking Care of Our Family

Please let Pastor Bret, Michelle, or Paul know of those we should be keeping close
Prayers for Pete Blankenfeld as he recovers with COVID at Mercy One.
Prayers for Diana and AJ and Mike as they continue to help with Pete's struggles.
Prayers for Karen and Robert Dew as they both recover at home from COVID.
Karen has been admitted to the hospital with her more severe COVID symptoms.
Prayers for Rocky and Mary Kay Petersen as they recover from COVID at home.
Prayers for Michelle Wolfe's father as he recovers from COVID in the hospital.
Thanks for Kaden McConnell and family as they have recovered from COVID.
Prayers for Lucas Greene's partner, Dora, who is hospitalized with COVID invading her spinal cord.
Prayers for our community, county, state, and nation as COVID numbers continue to rise.
Continued prayers for our nation in the aftermath of a historical election. May there be peace.
Continued prayers for all of those caring for loved ones, especially in these times of isolation.
Continued prayers for educators and students as they continue so many new ways of doing school.
And prayers for our church family during our stewardship and budgeting season.



Oh, no, Church Family! We missed a BIG ONE!!



Frieda Biesanz turned 100 in June!!! We noted her birthday, but didn't realize it was such a monumental one. Even though it's five months after the big day, we need to let her know we are still thinking of her.
Please send a card to Frieda, if you'd like. It doesn't need to be a birthday card. She would love to receive any note from you. Her address is:

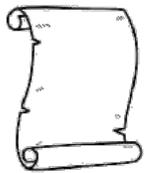
312 Southbrooke Dr #37
Lakeview Lodge
Waterloo, IA 50702



Dick and Joan Grimm wanted to express their appreciation for all the cards, calls and prayers in the last few months. Everyone's care and concern meant a lot to them!

Do Unto Others

- Wear your face mask, not just for yourself, but to protect everyone around you.
- Stay at least 6'0" from everyone WITH your face mask on
- Stay away from all places where you cannot maintain a safe distance from others
- Remind others to follow the same guidelines ... it's a group effort ... a family effort



First Congregational UCC Reopening Protocol ...

The First Congregational UCC Board of Trustees approved a set of documents explaining the protocol we will follow to allow small groups to begin using the church building & grounds for meetings and events, when appropriate. Our Reopening Committee also recommended these documents. The documents are available for your review and download from our website at www.firstcongucc.org.

If you have a group of six or less who are interested in using the church for a meeting or event, please review the documents, fill out the request form, and submit it per instructions for review and approval. The decision to allow the gathering will depend on many variables including the current status of COVID in Black Hawk County. Please call Paul with any initial questions you may have. The Reopening Committee can assist to make your gathering a success.



Did You Ever Notice?

Did you ever notice how as the seasons change how sometimes our emotions and needs change, too? Did you ever notice how that is true for everyone around us, as well? Typically, as we begin our journey into the holiday season, we can get caught up in the hectic times of celebration and preparation. This year is different. This year we face different stressors. This year we will be figuring out different ways of celebrating and we will be missing the usual ways of gathering with friends of family. Take care of yourself during these different times, but take care of others, too. Think of all the people you know who will be alone and who could use

a phone call, a card, a distanced visit, a simple gift, or just to know that you are thinking of them. Let's take care of each other this holiday season ...



Start Practicing!! It's Coming!!

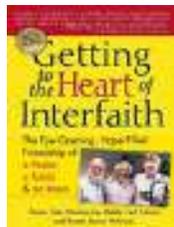


There is something for you to be looking forward to ... the return of the First Church Talent Show!!

After the holidays we will be sharing our many talents, this time virtually, but the fun will be the same. So, whether you are a polka dancer, country singer, poetry reciter, pogo stick hopper, marshmallow juggler, kazoo hummer, instrument player, joke teller, acrobatic tumbler, or whatever, it's time to start practicing and putting your act together.

You'll hear more and more as we get closer!

Sunday Morning Book Study



The book study group will be finishing up its discussion on Ibrahm Kendi's How to be an Antiracist this coming Sunday, November 22. On this same Sunday, if time allows, the book study group will start a new conversation on

the first two chapters of Getting to the Heart of Interfaith. Please feel free to join the lively discussion and fellowship. This is a great place to share thoughts, get new thoughts, and sometimes just sit back and listen to others' reactions to a good read.

Join us on Sunday mornings at 9:20 at

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81036068682?](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81036068682?pwd=dDgwREs0OWRLR280cThCbDA4aEZ3Zz09)

[pwd=dDgwREs0OWRLR280cThCbDA4aEZ3Zz09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81036068682?pwd=dDgwREs0OWRLR280cThCbDA4aEZ3Zz09)

Meeting ID 81036068682 Passcode: 360704

Dial in: 312-626-6799

Welcome to the Fine Arts Corner!

All are welcome to submit to this corner. We have been blessed with some wonderful entries so far--creations of all kinds, and we welcome yours! It's a way for us to share with each other, our church family, things we love and things that inspire us. Please submit your contribution to Michelle Wolfe at fcuccoffice@gmail.com or Anne Hoekstra at annelousiehoekstra@gmail.com with a short description and why it is important to you. Thank you!

All of the contributions to date have been collected on our Fine Arts webpage. If you missed a week or just want to review some of the works that have been featured, you'll find them all at <http://www.firstcongucc.org/finearts.html> with the newest one added each week!"

From Evie Waack:

This simple ink and watercolor drawing has profoundly affected me. In November of the year Dale and I moved into my childhood home, the coneflowers in the backyard had just turned brown. The "cone" of this flower caught my attention. In the fading sunlight of a Sunday afternoon I sat before the flower and dabbed in the yellowish orange colors of the cone. I then continued with the pinkish brown of the petals. By the time I finished painting and drawing the dying flower it had come to life.

Title of this work: *Dancing Coneflower*



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TO CHURCH ROW RESIDENTS

HELP CREATE A **SHARED VISION** OF
THE CHURCH ROW NEIGHBORHOOD

**ATTEND A VIRTUAL
NEIGHBORHOOD
VISIONING SESSION!**

MEETINGS TO BE HELD ONLINE VIA ZOOM
Join Online on Zoom Using the Meeting ID: 935 1872 1213

WEDNESDAY NOV 18, 2020 | 7:00 PM

THURSDAY NOV 19, 2020 | 7:00 PM

SATURDAY NOV 21, 2020 | 10:00 AM

Please Select **ONE** Session from the Dates Above to Join the Discussion

Hello Church Row local church members,

This is Benjamin Davison with the Church Row Neighborhood Planning Team. In the past two months, our Team has been meeting with residents, neighborhood businesses, non-profits, city officials, and schools in the Church Row area. Our Team is conducting a partnered series of Zoom meetings with the local chapter of Habitat for Humanity. These meetings will serve as visioning opportunities for residents of the Church Row neighborhood to discuss what they like and dislike about their community and share thoughts and ideas on how to improve it.

We invite any residents of the Church Row neighborhood and any church members who are interested to attend these meetings.

No one is expected to attend multiple meetings, just that one of the five available times works for anyone interested in attending. There is also a link below to our website, with the same date/time information and Zoom links.

If you have any additional questions about the events, feel free to contact our team at studorg-ChurchRow@uiowa.edu or Anna Patch of Habitat for Humanity at apatch@webuildhabitat.org

<https://studorg-churchrow.wixsite.com/churchrowplan/upcoming-events>

Sincerely,
Benjamin Davison
Graduate Student
The University of Iowa School of Planning and Public Affairs"

Scan the QR
Code with your
phone's camera
to learn more.





I'd like to invite each of you as the family of First Congregational UCC to do something special for one another. This Advent is going to be extra special. We're going to have a First Congregational UCC Advent Devotional! We make it, and we read it! We are asking you to share your stories, thoughts, or visual creations/artwork about Advent and Christmas about your memories or the importance of the season to you. These will be shared with our congregation and friends of the church. Sharing the meaning of the season with each other encourages us to live out our faith with one another and grow our spirits, and we invite you to do just that! Whether it is a heartfelt

personal or family story, or a significant experience, tradition, or rumination that blesses your soul, we want to see what you have to write, draw, color, or paint to convey the meaning of this sacred time. We need at least 27 entries (one for every day of Advent plus Christmas Day) to be submitted, preferably in digital format and up to one page in length by November 23rd so that we may compile and print them for the reading or viewing of our congregation. If we have 38 entries, we may also cover the remaining 11 days of Christmas. If we have more than this, we can put several on each day. You, children and adults, are invited to contribute more than one devotional piece – perhaps reflecting different times of your life. Please include your name on each submission. Contact Pastor Bret at revbmyers@yahoo.com, or the First Congregational UCC office if you have any questions about how you and your family can contribute to this sharing of our spirits, and to turn in your reflections/creations. The devotionals will be distributed by email (or mail if we don't have your email address) to our members by the 1st Sunday of Advent, November 29th. "To spark your creative juices, here are three advent devotionals for you to read to get your own ideas to put down. We look forward to hearing your stories and thoughts!"

Love and peace,
Pastor Bret

Samples:

Don't Stop Believin'

Katie Swedberg

I believe in Santa Claus. I stood by my roots as a dorky ten year old, arguing this hot elementary school topic at the lunch table with my peers. I pretended to finally be convinced that he wasn't real, but I knew no one could change what my heart believed. I'm sixteen now, and I've never doubted my belief.

My favorite part about the holiday season is the Adopt-An-Angel Tree at my church. My mom lets me and my brother each choose an angel from the tree, and then to buy them presents. These are kids who would otherwise not get any presents that year. They have to believe in Santa. They have no other choice. I am Santa to them, and that's the greatest feeling in the world.

To know that I'm giving someone a belief, a belief that there are good people in this world, a belief in hope, faith, and love. And, ultimately, a belief in Santa Claus. This is something wonderful that they'll pass on, just because someone cared. We all play the part of Santa Claus during Christmastime.

It's not about believing in a fat man in a fire-engine red suit that rides in a sleigh and eats all your cookies. He may not be physically real, but his spirit is with us, and that's what causes us to give to others so selflessly, to care more about what someone else is getting for Christmas than what you want.

Some parenting "experts" argue that you should tell your children from the start that there is no Santa Claus, and to sign the cards on the presents, "From Mommy & Daddy". When I have children, I'm going to encourage their belief in Santa; I'm going to tell them about elves, reindeer and the magic that powers his sleigh. I couldn't bear for them to miss out in the enchantment that is believing in something so simple and pure.

Do I dread the day when they discover that he isn't a real person? No, I look forward to it. Then I can explain to them that Santa's definitely not a regular person, he's so much more than that. His magic is too awesome to be real or scientifically proven. The best things in life can't be measured or seen by the naked eye. I believe in believing in something even when there is no evidence, no proof. Sometimes, unfortunately, these non-tangible things are the only things left to believe in. Santa Claus is the embodiment of all of the generosity in the world. These non-believers may claim that I'm planning on lying to my future children, but it's not lying if you truly believe.

(Continued on back side of this page -->)

The Touch of Kindness

Susan Hedrick

“Absence is to love what wind is to fire; it extinguishes the small, it enkindles the great.” Roger de Bussy-Rabutin

Working in a new hospital at a new capacity can be scary and exciting. A prisoner was brought to the Interventional Radiology and was needing sedation for a procedure. I have previously been accustomed to caring for prisoners in the Emergency Room, so their shackles do not scare me. The doctor in the Interventional Radiology Department was asking the police officer what the man had done to be arrested. I wondered to myself, "What does that have to do with how we would take care of him? The patient's hands and feet are shackled to a table; he is of no threat to us." I felt that all patients should be treated with dignity and respect despite their past.

This patient was a very sick man and sedating him would be a challenge. During the long procedure he woke up in pain and was coughing. Since his procedure was sterile the only part of him that I could see was the left side of his face. I reached under the drape and stroked his forehead and looked at him while asking if he was alright.

After informing the doctor that the patient's condition was changing I turned my attention to keeping the patient calm while the doctor finished the procedure. With one hand I held his handcuffed hand and stroked his forehead with the other. Looking under the drape I noticed a tear coming from his eye. Concerned that he might be getting worse, I asked him if was alright. His reply, "You touched me," struck me. I wondered, "Had an absence of love imprisoned him?"

I surmised that he might have enjoyed the clean sheets, and that the sleep the sedation would give him might help him to escape his reality for a short time. However, what he really desired was for someone to treat him with kindness. What a simple act to hold someone's hand and stroke their head. Who would think something so simple could be so healing? At the end of his procedure I shook his hand and thanked him for the opportunity in caring for him today. I left that day realizing that you never how you may touch someone's life. Each day we should let the life of Christ shine within and through us so that we can ignite a flame within someone's dark world.

“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” -- Matthew 25.40

“Christmas Guests”

Rev. Bret S. Myers, St. Paul UCC

While Christmas Eve was always celebrated with my paternal extended family, Christmas morning was always a more intimate nuclear family ritual. Mother would always be first to get up and start breakfast, and if I heard her stirring I would quickly get up to see what new packages were under the tree. If I didn't hear her, I would then usually be awakened by my maternal grandparents coming through the door with presents in hand. I must have been a sight to see as a groggy young lad with a huge smile and sleepy but restive eyes.

It was our custom to share a meal together before presents were to be opened -- one that emphasized to me the importance of family over the presents we were about to possess. Grandma always had brought food from her own kitchen, and would assist mom in finishing the breakfast.

Whether served at the table, or gathered buffet-style, we would -to my recollection- hold hands once seated and my father or grandfather would pray a special prayer, unlike their usual mealtime prayers, that was filled with gratitude about the meaning of the season. It was always a little lesson in the great gift God had given us in Jesus, and how this gift grew up to change the world ever since his birth. Somehow our unbroken circle of hands included not only God and Jesus, but everyone else that had ever lived and celebrated this day, as well as all who ever would. I'm sure there were times I must have had a lump in my throat as I listened and considered these meditative vignettes.

Some years we opened presents immediately after eating, and some years we waited for others to arrive who were not 'technically' members of our family. Kenny and Shirley have been friends of my family since before I was born. They did not, or were unable to (I never really knew), have children of their own. Knowing that so much of the joy of Christmas is expressed in the joy of children's faces, my parents would often invite them to come to our place on Christmas to share our Christmas joy. They would always stay for the midday meal, and often times for the evening meal of leftovers.

I always liked Kenny and Shirley. They were members of our church, and we did a lot of things together -- the most fun being boating and waterskiing in the summers. Outside of my own relatives, they were the people I knew best. When I was very small, I vaguely recall asking mom if I could call them "Uncle Kenney" and "Aunt Shirley," and when mother asked them in my presence if I could do so, they were thrilled in allowing me to so designate them as a members of our extended family.

I don't recall if they started coming to our place for Christmas Day before or after they became "Uncle Kenney and Aunt Shirley," and therefore whether it was my parent's welcome that inspired my welcome, or mine that inspired theirs, but it has remained for me one of the best lessons of the Christmas Spirit. And when, decades later, a family from the congregation I was pastoring asked me to spend Christmas Eve dinners with them and watch their children unwrap some of their presents, I had a grateful joy in knowing that I had for them become "Uncle Bret."



LOVE INC CHRISTMAS Donations

It's that time of year! You may fill out this order form or email Michelle at the church office. Donations may be given any time through Sunday, December 13th. Any donation amount is appreciated!

This year we are giving a donation to LoveINC of the Cedar Valley instead of purchasing poinsettias. You can still make a donation in memory or honor of a loved one and donations will be listed in the Christmas bulletin.

Please make checks payable to First Congregational (*write "LoveINC" in memo*).

Donation given by: _____

"In Memory of...": _____

"In Honor of...": _____

Create an endowment of love. Please consider including our church in your estate planning.

F I R S T C O N G R E G A T I O N A L U C C

First Congregational UCC
608 WEST FOURTH STREET
WATERLOO, IOWA 50702

Congregational Tidings

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Stamp
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