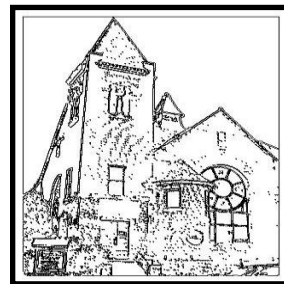


First Congregational
United Church of Christ
420 Wilson Avenue
Menomonie, Wisconsin
(715) 235-5838

e-mail: office@menomonieucc.org
website: menomonieucc.org

The Bell

December 2025 / January 2026



December ~ January Activities

Sunday Services: December 7th, 14th, 21st, 28th

January 4th, 11th, 18th, 25th

8:30am Contemplative Service

10am Traditional Service (in-person & livestream)

Sundays, Dec. 14th, Jan. 11th - Bridge Sunday

Wednesday, Dec. 24th, 5pm – Christmas Eve Service

Tuesday, December 2nd

5:30pm Mission for Peace and Justice, R1

Wednesdays, December 3rd, 10th, and 17th

January 7th, 14th, 21st, and 28th

4:00pm Kid's Club, R2

5:30pm Chancel Choir rehearsal

6:30pm Bell Choir rehearsal

7pm Morris Dance practice, FH (not on Dec. 3rd)

Thursday, December 4th

5pm Personnel Committee, R1

Saturday, December 6th

10am-2pm Tour of Homes, various locations

Tuesday, December 9th

12:30pm Women's Fellowship, FH

5pm Planned Giving, R1

Tuesday, December 9th, January 13th

4pm Executive Committee, R1

Tuesday, December 16th and Monday, January 19th

11:30am Church Council, R1

Tuesday, January 20th

4pm Early Service planning, R1

6pm Menomonie Singers auditions, Sanctuary

Wednesday, January 21st

9am Thursday's Table annual meeting, R1

Church Office Hours:

Monday – Thursday, 9:00am-2:00pm; Friday – closed

Office is closed on December 25th and January 1st

Thursday's Table:

Community take-out meal each Thursday 5-6:00pm

No meals on Christmas and New Year's Day

<https://www.menomonieucc.org/monthlycalendar>

2025

Tour of Homes

SATURDAY
DECEMBER 6, 2025

10:00am to 2:00pm
in Menomonie, Wisconsin

Visit:
RASSBACH MUSEUM
1820 John Russell Road
Menomonie, Wisconsin 54751

HOME OF SUPPRISES
N7886 555th Street
Menomonie, WI 54751

Shop and Enjoy Tea:
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UCC
420 Wilson Ave.
Menomonie, WI 54751

Admission is
FREE

Tour of Homes is sponsored by:
WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP
First Congregational UCC
Menomonie, WI

From the Pastor's Desk

Dear Beloved Children of God:

November 30 begins a new church year with the season of Advent. Advent marks four Sundays before Christmas when we purposefully prepare our hearts for Jesus' coming, both as a baby in the manger and for his return once again.

This preparation can get lost in the shuffle and bustle of the secular Christmas season. Christmas decorations are up. Many annual Christmas productions are being performed. I'm costuming MTG's production of "White Christmas" so "Christmas is All Around" already. (A quote from my favorite Christmas movie. If you know, let me know.)

Not only is it a new church year, but a new calendar year will be here soon. This is a December-January edition of "The Bell." Make sure to read the weekly e-news to stay up to date as additional events and activities get added. It's not just me who struggles to think 2 months ahead, especially in the midst of the busy holiday season.

My prayer for all during this Advent season and the time ahead is to continue to hold space and grace for yourself as you generously extend grace and space for others. I was reminded of this after someone said something similar at an early morning service. I have seen people get caught up in the oh so many things we can not control (often people), that we try to control things we shouldn't (often people as well). This often comes out in judgement and bad behavior. Remember, "Everyone is going through something" or "fighting a battle" that we simply do not know. Lead with love, extend a smile, and breathe deeply when needed asking for God's love and peace to be upon you.

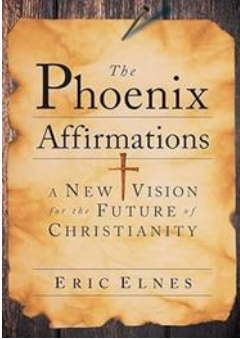
This Advent we'll hear about vigilant hope, prophetic peace, unexpected joy, and magnificent love. Let's live these out loud and proud to make Mary's song of bringing down the mighty, lifting up the lowly, filling the hungry with good things, and sending the rich away empty (because their money and wealth have been given to back to those it was built off of) for our neighbors near and far to be housed, clothed, and abundantly fed.

Prayers and blessings for you~

Pastor René

From the Director of Faith Formation

Karen Miller



This edition of The Bell covers December and January so “Greetings, Merry Christmas, and Happy New Year to All!” Affirmation Four is our focus during the holiday season:

Expressing our love in worship that is as sincere, vibrant, and artful as it is scriptural.

I don’t think anyone would ever accuse this congregation of viewing the arts “as trivial or merely tangential” to the life of our Christian community. Having participated in the work of the Worship Committee for several years, I know that we strive mightily to integrate “sincere, vibrant, and artful” expression into our worship services.

The authors bring the Book of Leviticus, “simultaneously the weirdest and most boring book of the entire Bible” to the discussion of worship (see specifically Leviticus 9 and 10). The story is about the death of Israel’s first two priests, Nadab and Abihu, during a traditional “tent of meeting” (a movable worship structure or Tabernacle). Apparently these two initiates were so wowed by the display of God’s fiery glory during the meeting that they decide to bring that fiery glory back one more time. Nadab and Abihu “offered unholy fire before the LORD, such as he had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. (Leviticus 10:1-2)

The authors of the Phoenix Affirmations assert that this story screams at us to understand that “God’s presence is so potent that if we don’t follow a ritual – a Tradition – very carefully, we won’t know what hit us.” Or, as Annie Dillard writes in *Teaching a Stone to Talk*,

Why do people in churches seem like cheerful, brainless tourist on a packaged tour of the Absolute? . . . Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? . . . It is madness to wear ladies’ straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews.

Ritual is followed not in order to make God come, but to “*withstand the force of God’s coming!*” In other words, we need to balance staying connected to, and protected by our Tradition and stay open to the direction in which God’s spiritual flame is moving.

May the warmth and illumination of God’s presence touch your hearts this holiday season!

Karen

First Congregational UCC Endowments to Transfer to Wisconsin UCC Foundation

As Planned Giving kicks off the Together for Tomorrow year-long initiative, we are happy to share that on October 21, 2025 the Church Council unanimously approved the transfer of our investment funds to the Wisconsin Foundation UCC. Our total investments are approximately \$300,000, including the General Endowment, Milnes fund, Knapp Trust, Cornerstone Fund and Wisconsin Council of Churches Community Investment Program. \$15,000 of the approximately \$30,000 in the designated, flow-through funds that are not endowed will continue to be invested in a money market fund. (\$15,000 is currently invested with a money market fund at Edward Jones). The remainder of the flow-through funds will continue to be available in our checking account at the Old National Bank (previously Bremer bank).

Essentially the Wisconsin Foundation UCC operates as a community Foundation, investing for approximately 45 UCC local churches and for the conference itself. Investing together gives us better rates and access to services we may not be able to have as individual churches.

The primary reasons that we decided to transfer from Edward Jones to the Wisconsin Foundation UCC include the following:

- 1) No commission fees for new donations/gifts/memorials/bequests.
- 2) The UCC Foundation will provide management and administrative support for our endowed gifts.
- 3) Closer alignment of UCC values with our investments.
- 4) The management fees we pay support our Wisconsin UCC Conference.
- 5) Competitive rates and fees.

This past year the Wisconsin Foundation UCC investigated new options for their investment management. Through a competitive process, the Foundation selected TIFF Investment Management. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and other nonprofits formed TIFF as The Investment Fund for Foundations in 1991.

TIFF provides superior investment services, noticeably beating their industry benchmarks and peers. Bret Bicoy, President of the Door County Community Foundation and Vice Chair of the Foundation's Board of Directors, observed, "TIFF was exclusively created to serve foundations. They are a well-regarded institution."

Rev. Rachel Bauman, Associate Conference Minister, serves on the investment committee of the Foundation. “TIFF impressed me for the way their corporate values on diversity and inclusion align with our values in the UCC – they’re like us in their values.” Partnering with TIFF allows us to continue investing in ways aligned with our values. The scale of TIFF also allows us access to unique value-aligned opportunities, such as investing in the Carbon Credit Exchanges in California. Across the portfolio, TIFF leans into the economic opportunities created by the green energy transition.

TIFF will work as the “Outsourced Chief Investment Officer” for the Foundation. This is a more strategic, direct, and custom role than a broker. The quality of service from TIFF requires a minimum investment of two-and-a-half million dollars. As Rev. Andrew Warner, President of the Foundation explained, “Our congregations get the unique opportunity to benefit from TIFF’s expertise because we work together collectively.”

Below is the TIFF return rates for June 30, 2025

	<u>Q2</u>	<u>YTD</u>	<u>1 Year</u>	<u>3 Years</u>	<u>5 Years</u>
TIFF Centerstone	9.17%	8.51%	13.89%	14.61%	10.28%
TIFF Multi-Asset	10.85%	10.10%	17.69%	14.66%	10.72%
Anticipated Blend of TIFF Funds	9.74%	9.05%	15.18%	14.63%	10.43%
Custom Blended Benchmark ³	8.12%	7.94%	12.68%	12.30%	8.89%
Centerstone Alpha from Benchmark	1.62%	1.11%	2.50%	2.33%	1.54%

Anticipated Fees: 0.30% for Investment Management & 0.40% for Foundation Administration = 0.70% all in fees.

For more information please contact Jeanne Rothaupt, Planned Giving chair (715-619-1970; rothauptj@gmail.com) or Rev. Andrew Warner President Wisconsin foundation (awarner@wcucc.org).

December'25-January'26 Worship Volunteers

	Flowers	Coffee Servers	Readers
December 7 th	Tour of Homes	Lavonne Solem and Joe Plouff	Leah Langby
December 14 th Bridge Coffee	Deb and John Wesolek	Deb and Alan Benoit	Sheila Stori
December 21 st	Neil and Marie Koch	Leah Langby	Sarah Martinek
December 28 th			
January 4 th			
January 11 th Bridge Coffee			Dawn Ascher
January 18 th			Kim Blomquist
January 25 th			

Signup sheets are by the west entrance & near the coat closet

Announcements

FROM THE MISSION FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE COMMITTEE

Thank you to all who participated in our Bridge Coffee discussion on November 9. The comments were very helpful, and the Committee will be using this guidance to develop future direction in becoming a Creation Justice Church.

And a huge "Thank You!" to those of you who have donated to purchase more Zero-Waste plastic recycling boxes. We were able to purchase more boxes, and will continue to collect and recycle plastic! We will need to continue to collect donations as possible to keep this going.

SILENT BID AUCTION FOR HELPING HANDS A HUGE SUCCESS!

Thank you to all participants of the Silent Bid Auction for 2 tickets for the Menomonie Theater Guild's production of "White Christmas." Karen Miller won the bid and the tickets, with the real winner being the Helping Hands fund as \$1204 was raised! This will help make Christmas a bit more special for those in need, in addition to responding to ongoing requests. Thank you for caring for and loving our community neighbors in this way!

CHRISTMAS FUND

It is that time of year! The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas “Thank You” gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees.

You may give using the envelopes that will be available on the west entrance table, by going to menomonieucc.org to give online, or by writing a check and putting “Christmas Fund” in the memo line. The “official” collection date will be December 21.

Thank you for your generosity! This year, your care and compassion will be especially appreciated by those servants of the church who are facing a time of need.

CHRISTMAS GIFTS OF APPRECIATION TO OUR CHURCH STAFF

We're so grateful to all of our UCC staff. To thank them, you can place cards, cash, or gift cards in their Christmas gift envelopes which are available after church on Sunday and in the church office (see wrapped box with the envelopes). If you'd like to give anonymously, leave your name off the card or envelope—blank envelopes are also provided for this purpose.

The church will not be handling any of the money/gifts given. Envelopes with our gifts will be given to the staff on December 21st.

Questions? Please ask Jeanne Rothaupt, (Church moderator), Rose McLean (Planned Giving Treasurer) or Tom Schmelzle (Church treasurer).

GET CREATIVE WITH CHRISTMAS WRAPPING PAPER!!

Everyone loves a gorgeously wrapped present, but gift wrap has a surprising dark side.

According to an estimate from Earth911, 4.6 million pounds of wrapping paper is produced in the U.S. each year, to the tune of 12.7 billion dollars.

Sadly, its shimmer and shine are short-lived. Since much of it is not recyclable, 2.3 million pounds of wrapping paper ends up in landfills each year, says Earth911.

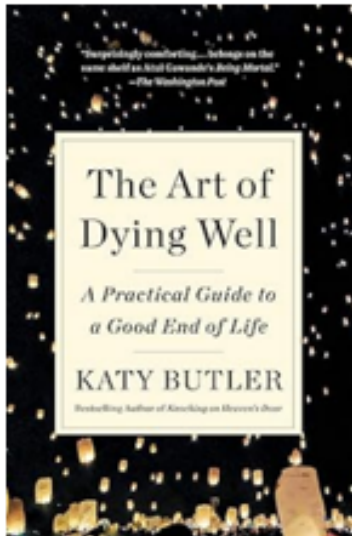
Perhaps it's time to get a bit more creative with dressing up holiday gifts!! There are many eco-friendly, recyclable, compostable (and cheaper!) options. Your Mission for Peace and Justice Committee, in keeping with our creation care theme, will have some examples and ideas on display in the parlor and Fellowship Hall during this Christmas season. We also would like to hear and see your ideas of ways to “do” Christmas in a more sustainable way.

Remember, each of us doing a little can make a big difference!

No Kids Club on Wednesday, December 24, 2025 and Wednesday, December 31, 2025.

PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIAN BOOK DISCUSSION

Those of you who have signed up for January's book read and discussion will be contacted for dates, times, and preference for meeting (in-person or by Zoom) before Christmas. If you haven't signed up but would like to join the group, contact Karen at dirfaithform@menomonieucc.org



PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIAN DISCUSSION OFFERINGS IN 2026

Through the Office of Faith Formation

The Art of Dying Well: A Practical Guide to a Good End of Life by Katy Butler (January 2026)

The Art of Dying Well is about living as well as possible for as long as possible and adapting successfully to change. The author shows how to thrive in later life (even when coping with a chronic medical condition), how to get the best from our health system, and how to make your own “good death” more likely. Butler explains how to successfully age in place, why to pick a younger doctor and how to have an honest conversation with them, when not to call 911, and how to make your death a sacred rite of passage rather than a medical event. This handbook of preparations—practical, communal, physical, and spiritual—will help you make the most of your remaining time, be it decades, years, or months.

MID –YEAR TREASURER’S REPORT, NOVEMBER 2025

We are currently halfway through the Church fiscal year. Pledge income is at 54% of the budgeted amount as of October 31, 2025. Our expenses for this fiscal year as of October 31, 2025 are at 49% of the budgeted amount. Pledges received in October were down from previous months. As the end of the calendar year approaches I am hopeful that the amount of pledge donations will increase. Our Dairy State Bank business checking account continues to hold a healthy balance for which we are thankful.

The Capital Campaign account balance as of November 14, 2025 is approximately \$50,000 which funds ongoing property/maintenance projects.

Thanks to everyone for their continued generous support of our Church, its personnel, and programs. You are much appreciated.

Respectfully submitted!

Tom Schmelzle

BRAVER ANGELS LOCAL ALLIANCE GROUP

Meets Saturday, January 10, 2026 at 10 to 11:30 a.m. at Menomonie United Methodist Church, 2703 Bongey Drive, Menomonie.

THURSDAY'S TABLE UPDATE, NOVEMBER, 2025

Thursday's Table continues to prepare and hand out "To Go" meals each Thursday. The number of "To Go" meals handed out varies with an average of 121 meals per week in January 2025 to an average of 184 per week in November 2025. With highs of 219 on 11-20-24, 206 on 9/4/25, and 202 on 10/23/25 our numbers continue to rise. We aim to prepare and serve meals that are "hearty, healthy, and simple".

Our neighbors and friends are struggling to afford basic needs. They turn to programs like Thursdays' Table and others for support. Thursday's Table is utilizing all the resources we have available to us to keep the costs of our meals as low as possible while serving "hearty, healthy, and simple" meals.

Near the end of the calendar year we ask that you consider assisting Thursday's Table by giving of your time and talent as a volunteer and/or sending a few dollars our way to help us fulfill our mission of "preparing and serving a free meal each Thursday evening for anyone in the greater Menomonie area who would like to participate!"

If you wish to volunteer, you can contact us at thursdaystable@gmail.com or leave a message at the church.

If you wish to make a donation you can leave a check made out to Thursdays Table at the church, or mail it to Thursday's Table, PO Box 669, Menomonie, WI 54751. You can also pay by credit card, Venmo, or PayPal at Thursday's Table - Link [PayPal](#)

AMERICAN RED CROSS BLOOD DRIVE

Thank you to all who participated in the American Red Cross Blood drive on November 25th. What a powerful way to express appreciation for our health during this time of Thanksgiving!

A special thank you to Kathy Colvin, Dave Challe, and Jeanne Rothaupt who volunteered to help with the check in of donors. Also, thank you Deb Challe and Kathy Colvin for providing wonderful desserts for the donors. We exceeded the red cross goal for us.

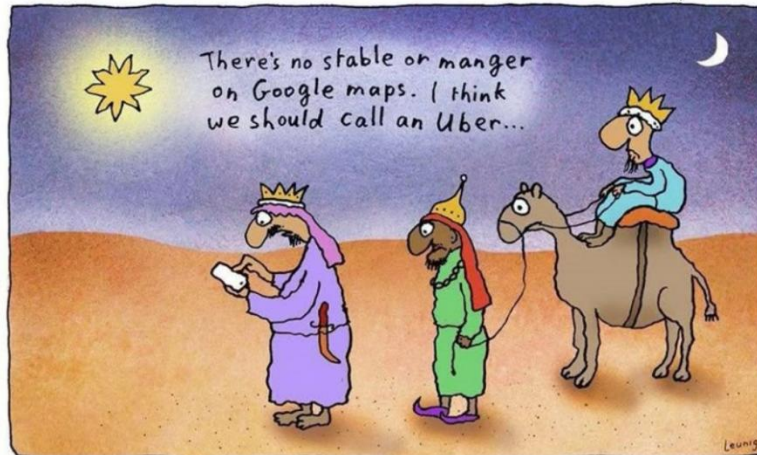
Mark your calendars for our next blood drive on **March 17, 2026** (St. Patrick's Day!)

5th Annual Intergenerational Christmas Party

First Congregational United Church of Christ Kids' Club Players

present

Christmas Tech Support: Trouble with the Star



Wednesday, December 17 from 4:30 to 6 PM

Fellowship Hall



Cookies & Cocoa



Games



Prizes



Carols



The Nativity Story by Tom S.

Thank You!

Thanks to the Early Service Liturgy Planning Team consisting of Rick Nagler, Sara Nagler, Kathy Colvin, Rob MacDougall, Roz Klanderman, Deanna Schultz, Pastor Rene, and Tom Schmelzle. They have met monthly to plan the liturgies for the Early Service.

Draft Minutes of Church Council Meeting
First Congregational UCC, Menomonie, Wisconsin
November 18, 2025

Roll Call: Luci Black (Membership/Fellowship), Kathy Colvin (Worship), Sherry Galetka (Stewardship), René Mehlberg (Pastor), Andrew Mercil (Past Moderator), Rick Nagler (Vice Moderator), Carol Ropella, (Stewardship), Jeanne Rothaupt (Moderator), Tom Schmelzle (Treasurer), Jill Schwebs (Clerk), Deanna Schultz (Music), Margi Stauss (Care Ministries), Lee Theorin (Property) and Agnes Welsch (Mission). Nita Fitzgerald and Karen Miller were also in attendance.

The Council was called to order at 11:30 a.m. by the Moderator, Jeanne Rothaupt.

Andrew offered a prayer.

Andrew moved that the consent agenda, including the October 21st minutes, the October Treasurer's Report and the Deacon Reports, be approved. It was seconded by Margi and approved by the Council.

1. Action Items

- a. We are halfway through our fiscal year. Tom reported that giving is down. Expenses year to date are at 49%. Office expenses are up. He is checking that out. There was discussion regarding insurance expenses.
- b. Jeanne reported on a motion from Planned Giving to move our endowment funds to the Wisconsin Foundation, UCC. Agnes moved and Sherry seconded the motion. It was approved.
- c. Nita Fitzgerald talked about a committee supporting Karen Miller as she explores joining the ministry. That committee voted yes to confirm Karen's gifts and skills. She wants to be considered as a member in discernment. A letter from the Council will go with her application and forms. Kathy moved that we approve and Agnes seconded the motion. The motion was approved and the clerk will write a letter.
- d. Christmas Eve Service will be held at 5 p.m.
- e. The budget processes were discussed for activities above the normal budget expenses. Major immediate expenses can be taken to the Executive Council when the Council is not meeting.
- f. Melissa has resigned as Education Deacon and there is not a current replacement. Karen will attend Education meeting.
- g. We have a leaking water heater. Gail has called Halverson. Tom made a motion to purchase a new water heater not to exceed \$5,000 from the Capital Campaign. Sherry seconded the motion and it was approved. Andrew made a motion to approve work on the gutters not to exceed \$1,100 from the Capital Campaign. Margi seconded that and it was approved.
- h. Lee reported that we have two requests for bids out regarding the Solar Project. Vendors have indicated that they are very backed up.
- i. Luci reported that plans are all in place for Heritage Sunday.
- j. Together for Tomorrow is progressing and Jeanne invited everyone to a party at Blomquists' to ask questions of Andrew Warner.
- k. René introduced the issue of security in the church. The issue is being addressed with various groups. There will be an emphasis on locking the "old" church. The process will be documented in the future.

2. Follow-up

- a. Rick started his discussion of the By-Laws. See the end of this report.

- b. The Directory is in the final stages. A picture can still be submitted and must be in a 4X6 format. Addresses are updated daily.
- c. Agnes reported that the members of her committee, (Mission for Peace and Justice), want to become an official UCC Creative Justice Church. They want to promote native plants on church property, continue recycling and promote other Creation Care Activities. They approve changing investments into more environmentally good programs. They support 3 bloodmobiles annually.
- d. Margi reported that her committee, (Care Ministries), feels that the prayer chain is very important and thanks Margy Ingram for her work. The committee also sends cards to acknowledge special occasions for friends and members. They set up meal trains for those who need assistance and collect appropriate clothing for kids, various times of the year. This year they will be providing Christmas gifts for a family with foster kids. They are also responsible for help to educate the congregation with appropriate reading materials and speakers.
- e. Kathy reports that the Worship Committee is doing well with their weekly preparation for services. Her only request is to have communion servers sign up without being begged.
- f. The Technology Committee has not recently met but will be getting together again shortly.

The next Council meeting will be on December 16, 2025. The meeting was adjourned at 12:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Jill Schwebs, Clerk

Current By-Laws

Section 1. RECEPTION OF MEMBERS

- 1.) Requests for membership may be directed to the Ordained Minister, Clerk, or a Council member.
- 2.) Persons may be received into active membership by:
 - a) successful completion of confirmation program of this church
 - b) presentation of satisfactory letters from other churches
 - c) reaffirmation of faith if letters are not available
 - d) confession of faith and baptism if not previously baptized or exempted from baptism because of conviction.
- 3.) The Ordained Minister or Membership Fellowship Deacon shall present the names of prospective members to the Council. Prospective members who are unable to attend the church service for reception of members may be received by the Council acting on behalf of this church.
- 4.) The individual(s) seeking membership shall be given a copy of the Constitution and By-Laws of the congregation prior to reception as members.

Purposed By-Laws

Section 1. RECEPTION OF MEMBERS

- 1.) Requests for membership may be directed to the Ordained Minister or a Council member.
- 2.) Persons may be received into active membership by:
 - a) successful completion of confirmation program of this church
 - b) presentation of satisfactory letters from other churches
 - c) reaffirmation of faith if letters are not available
 - d) confession of faith and baptism if not previously baptized or exempted from baptism because of conviction
- 3.) Orientation for new member(s) will be provided by the Ordained Minister or their designee.
- 4.) The Ordained Minister, or their designee, shall present the new member(s) to the congregation on New Member Sunday, as scheduled.