

First Congregational
United Church of Christ
420 Wilson Ave.
Menomonie, WI 54751
(715) 235-5838

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

The Bell

May 2026



May Activities

Sunday Services: May 3rd, 10th, 17th, 24th, and 31st

8:30am Contemplative Service

10am Traditional Service (in-person & livestream)

Saturday, May 2nd

9am Mission for Peace and Justice, FH

Tuesday, May 5th, 12th, 19th

6:30 Wisconsin Conference UCC *Nice Racism* book study, R1

Wednesdays, May 6th, 13th, 20th, and 27th

4pm Kid's Club, R2 (not on 27th – Summer Break)

5:30pm Chancel Choir rehearsal, Sanctuary

6:30pm Bell Choir rehearsal, Music Room

Sunday, May 10th - Bridge Sunday

Saturday, May 16th

2-5pm Gathering to Remember Tom Richards, FH

Tuesday, May 19th

4pm Early Service Committee, R1

Wednesday, May 20th

9am Thursday's Table meeting, R1

Sunday, May 24th Pentecost

Confirmation of Aly Kluge

Church Office Hours:

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

Monday, May 25 – Office Closed for Memorial Day

Thursday's Table:

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

Link to the full church calendar:

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

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Pie Social

Tuesday, June 16th -- Save the Date!

Thank you to Cathie Weissman for representing First Congregational at the Ludington Guard Band Pie Drawing! We got a date, which is Tuesday, June 16th.

Mark the event on your calendar and watch for sign-ups on how to help in mid-May.



From the Pastor's Desk

Dear Beloved Children of God:

"Gentleness"

That is my 2026 Star Word. What is yours? Have you looked at yours lately? Have you considered how that word is showing up in your life, intentionally or through the Holy Spirit?

Mine is on a standing file folder on my work desk, so I see it often. When I first read what I picked, I was frustrated and a bit miffed. As 2026 was starting, I wanted something like, "discomfort" or "truth" or "disrupt" or "courage." Some word to propel and encourage me for the work I felt was ahead. Little did I (or others) know how discombobulating and whip-lashy the beginning of 2026 would actually be!

I shared my disappointment with a friend who kindly and insightfully shared, "maybe that's how you are to be treating yourself."

Well, that wasn't what I really wanted to hear! And yet, it's probably true. Sometimes we are the least kind to ourselves as we get caught up in the busy-ness of life: care-giving; juggling appointments for self or others; work; school; keeping up (or not) with news and events at the local, state, national, or international levels; figuring out how to live a life as a Jesus follower in this wild wilderness of our world.

I am much better at extending gentleness to others. Reminding them that even Jesus was gentle with himself as he went away to pray. Jesus wasn't always hustling every minute throughout his ministry.

Sometimes the pastor/preacher needs to take their own advice!

All of this is to ask once again: What is your star word? I encourage you to take a bit of quiet time, extending gentleness to yourself, and consider how the word is showing up in your life. Perhaps even ask a loved one or trusted friend their opinion. Remember, the star is to guide you throughout the year. It makes my heart happy when I see others' stars.

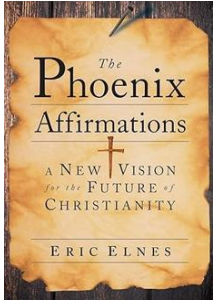
Yes, Jesus overturned tables in the Temple, which wasn't gentle at all. Jesus spoke truth to power during the time of Roman oppression. And, Jesus extended gentleness to those most in need, as he convicted others ("You who are without sin cast the first stone."), and to himself. Perhaps that's the bigger picture we all must remember.

Prayers and blessings for you all~

Pastor René

From the Director of Faith Formation

Karen Miller



Affirmation Six --

Standing, as Jesus does, with the outcast and oppressed, the denigrated and afflicted, seeking peace and justice with or without the support of others.

If I had to explain Affirmation Six to the children in our Wednesday afterschool Kids' Club program, I would say,

Jesus stands with people we see as undesirable, the outsiders and rejects; those who are abandoned, discarded, left out, not picked. Jesus stands with people subjected to harsh, cruel, or unjust treatment, often through the abuse of power, which denies them freedom, rights, or opportunities. Jesus stands with the denigrated – people whose value, character, or importance is diminished through insulting or malicious remarks. Jesus stands with people suffering from severe physical or mental pain, disease, or distress. Jesus actively looks for peace and justice for these people. Jesus does this alone or with others.

I am certain that the children would be able to identify someone – by name - who is an outcast, who is oppressed, denigrated, made fun of, or afflicted. Bullying is just one of those developmental phases we all get to experience at least once. My question for the children would be: So how does Jesus stand with people like this? **Does Jesus stand with compassion, empathy, pity, or sympathy?** Does Jesus stand with all of these emotions? Does it matter what Jesus felt as he stood with these people? Do some emotions demand action? If you believe the incarnated Jesus meant to show us how to be in this world, especially in our relationships with one another, then emotions matter.

Also, I received a copy of Brené Brown's *Atlas of the Heart* last month for my birthday, and I was determined to find a way to use it in my article this month. Words used to describe emotion are often used interchangeably, and I find my desire for precision getting sharper, not duller, the older I get. Being clear about what emotion words mean improves our chance of cultivating respectful connections with others.

Let's start with **empathy**. As humans we are born with the foundational brain mechanisms for empathy; but if that innate emotion is not developed through appropriate social interactions and education, our ability to express empathy will be limited. According to Brown, empathy is *"the most powerful tool of compassion, an emotional skill set that allows us to understand what someone is experiencing and to reflect back that understanding."* Empathy is about learning how to listen to the story someone tells us about what it's like in their shoes and believing them even though it doesn't match our experiences. Empathy is a willingness to *"be present to someone's pain"* rather than trying to put myself in your place (walking in someone else's shoes).

Now imagine how you would feel if I said to you, “I **pity** you.” Brown says, “*pity is the near enemy of compassion.*” There are, according to Brown, four elements in play with pity:

1. *A belief that the suffering person is inferior;*
2. *A passive, self-focused reaction that does not include providing help;*
3. *A desire to maintain emotional distance; and,*
4. *Avoidance of sharing in the other person’s suffering.*

Doesn’t sound like Jesus, does it? In Luke 18:10-14, Jesus shares the parable of two men who enter the temple to pray – a Pharisee and a tax collector. Consider how Jesus describes the Pharisee, “*standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’*” The Pharisee believes others, including the tax collector are inferior. The Pharisee is only concerned with his actions; he does not pray that God help him help others. The Pharisee stands by himself, maintaining both a physical and emotional distance, avoiding sharing in anyone’s suffering.

On the other hand, the tax collector, unwilling to even look up to heaven, prays, “*God be merciful to me, a sinner.*” Do not confuse **pity** with **mercy**. In the biblical context, mercy reflects **compassion**, forgiveness, and steadfast love towards humanity.

Perhaps Jesus felt **sympathy** for the people he stood with. Or perhaps not. Brown claims sympathy and pity are first cousins: “*We feel bad for you. From way over here where the kind of misery you’re experiencing doesn’t happen.*” Sympathy is a form of disconnection. Research with cancer patients shows most patients describe sympathy as “*unwanted, superficial, pity-based . . . that, although well-intended, is focused on the observer’s discomfort rather than on alleviating the patient’s distress.*” What patients preferred was **compassion** and **empathy**.

We covered **empathy** on the first page; so what is **compassion**? According to Brown, “[c]ompassion is the daily practice of recognizing and accepting our shared humanity so that we treat ourselves and others with loving-kindness, and we take action in the face of suffering.” Other researchers confirm Brown’s definition: compassion is “*a virtuous response that seeks to address the suffering and needs of a person through relational understanding and action.*”

Compassion is one of the most obvious traits of the incarnated Christ: “*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them.*” (Matthew 9:36). Jesus didn’t just feel compassion. Jesus was moved by compassion to **act**; he taught the spiritually lost, he fed the physically hungry, he healed the afflicted.

Our progressive Christian faith requires that we **act** with **compassion** and **empathy** and stand courageously *with the outcast and oppressed, the denigrated and afflicted, seeking peace and justice with or without the support of others*

May you walk on in God’s love,

Karen

Music Committee News

Spring Arts Festival – “What a great event!”

So many people shared that quote as they left our Spring Arts Festival on April 19. The diversity of visual and performing arts made for a very enjoyable afternoon. What amazingly talented people we have among us! Thank you to all the artists, musicians, dancers, and poet who shared their talents with us, and to Dean Langby for entertaining us as MC while introducing performers.

A big thank you to all who attended the event and donated to help support our church music program and music staff professional development. Your generosity contributed \$592 for this purpose.

There were also many people behind the scenes who helped make the event go smoothly. A huge thank you to Lila Doyle, the UW-Stout Arts Administration student who coordinated much of the event; Ingmar Amberson for managing the sound and Dominique Stewart for helping with microphone setup; the Chancel Choir for the plethora of treats for intermission as well as cleaning up afterwards; the Music Committee for their input in planning the event; church staff who supported our efforts as the event came together; and anyone else who helped in any way with the event.

Gratefully,

Deanna Schultz, Music Deacon

Welcome New Members!

Welcome Sherry Bernick!

Sherry Bernick was received into membership on Sunday, April 12. Her sponsors were Emily and Doris Win, who invited her to attend. Sherry was born in Racine, WI and was an RN for 36 years, working in ICU and the surgery areas. She is married with 2 sons and 2 stepdaughters. She lives near Ridgeland. She loves gardening and animals. Pictured are Emily, Sherry, Pastor René, and Doris. Please welcome Sherry when you see her next! Welcome to the First Congregational Family!



May Worship Volunteers

	Flowers	Coffee Servers	Readers
May 3 rd	Doris Win	Diane Mercil	Kristen Billengsley
May 10 th Bridge Sunday, Mother's Day	Joy and Rose Wesolek	Care Ministries Committee	Ellen Ochs
May 17 th	Renee Howarton		Sherry Bernick
May 24 th	Kathy Colvin		
May 31 st	Sherry Galetka		Sherry Galetka

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

Announcements

Graduation Season

We are collecting graduation information for those graduating from high school, technical school, college, or university. We know some while wanting to honor all those near and dear to our church family. Information will be in the June Bell. A date to recognize graduates in worship is still being determined.

You can submit information through this form [2026 Graduates: Tell us More! – Fill out form](#) or sending the information to office@menomonieucc.org by Friday, May 15th.

- Name of graduate; parent(s) or grandparent(s) name(s);
- Graduating from where?;
- What type of diploma/degree (high school, certificate, BS/BA, Masters, etc.);
- Plans for future study or work.

Please share a photo that can be included as well.

Thank you for sharing with your church family so we can celebrate with you!

Recent Church History Sought

Kathleen Cundiff, who helps keep church history up to date at the Rassbach Museum, is in need of photos from 2017 to present of “Milestone Moments.” These include Heritage Sunday and other annual events such as the Pie Social, or whole church photos. She is looking for printed photos that will be put into a book, with the event name and date included. Names of people are optional.

Photos can be dropped off at church (a place will be designated) for her. Please contact Kathleen directly with questions.

Annual Meeting Follow Up

Thank you to all who attended the 164th Annual Meeting on Sunday, April 26th. A final version of the Annual Report can be accessed at [First Congregational UCC Annual Report 2025-26 Final Version](#) Limited copies are available at church.

Actions taken:

- Approved the Creation Justice Covenant
- Approved the Constitution and Bylaw Revisions
- Approved the Church Budget for 2026-27
- Approved Nominations for the 2026-27 Council and Planned Giving Members (as listed below)

NOMINATIONS

Position	Term length	Name	Term ends
Vice Moderator	1 year (x3)	vacant	2029
Christian Education	2 years	Leah Langby	2028
Treasurer	2 years	Jan Erdman	2028
Mission for Peace & Justice	2 years	Agnes Welsch (2 nd term)	2028
Membership/ Fellowship	2 years	Naomi Cummings	2028
Stewardship	2 years	Sherry Galetka (2 nd term)*	2027
Property	2 years	Lee Theorin (2 nd term)	2028
Care Ministries	2 years	Margi Stauss (4 th term)	2028
Planned Giving	3 years	Sandy Lindow	2029
Planned Giving	3 years	Paul Stauffacher	2029

CONTINUING ELECTED MEMBERS

Position	Term length	Name	Term ends
Past Moderator	1 year	Jeanne Rothaupt	2027
Moderator	1 year	Rick Nagler	2027
Clerk	2 years	Jill Schweps (2 nd term)	2027
Music Deacon	2 years	Deanna Schultz (1 st term)	2027
Worship Deacon	2 years	Kathy Colvin (2 nd term)	2027
Planned Giving	3 years	Ken Schofield	2028
Planned Giving	3 years	Jeanne Rothaupt (3 rd term)	2027
Planned Giving	3 years	Kristen Billingsley	2027

Women's Fellowship meeting schedule

A WF mtg. was held on 4/22 and it was decided to have an indoor, bring your own picnic lunch on June 17th. It will be at noon at the church in the Fellowship Hall. There will be dessert and coffee served. It's a time just to visit and maybe the subject of the Tour just might pop up! We need to talk about homes for the Tour. Also, future meeting times and dates have been set and they are as follows: June 17th at noon, Oct. 21 at 12:30, Dec. 8 at 12:30 for 2026 and Feb. 17, 2027 at 12:30, April 21, 2027 at 12:30, Oct. 20, 2027 at 12:30, Dec. 7, 2027 at 12:30.

Look forward to seeing there.

Women's Fellowship News and Updates

The Women's Fellowship wanted to let you know where money from the Tour of Homes is being distributed and also some money from the general WF account.

Pledge \$3,000.00	Tech support for office \$330.00	Foster Closet \$200.00
Carin House \$100.00	Menomonie Hanging Baskets\$195.00	Arbor Place - \$200.00
Bridge to Hope \$200.00	Congregational Table \$500.00	Stepping Stones \$600.00
Congregational Helping Hands \$500.00		

Community Tables: Methodist Church, St. Joe's and Christ Lutheran \$150.00 each

The Tour is a big plus for the church and for the community and we thank everyone who is involved and makes it possible.

Spring CLEAN UP the MEMORIAL GARDEN

Are you ready to roll up your sleeves and get your hands dirty and get the Memorial Garden looking top notch for summer?

Come and help with some light clean up such as raking, trimming, weeding and spreading light mulch. Bring garden gloves, rakes, trimmers, small shovels, etc.

When: Wednesday
May 6th 2026

Time: 9:30

Place: South side of the church, Memorial Garden

For questions call Deb Wesolek 715-235 -9360



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Faithful Voices in a Critical Hour Webinar Series

First Congregational United Church of Christ will host the Wisconsin Interfaith Voter Engagement Campaign's *Faithful Voices in a Critical Hour* Webinar Series via Zoom in preparation for the fall midterm elections!

Grounded in our shared values and faith traditions, we'll explore ways to strengthen democracy, deepen community engagement, and equip you with the tools to advocate for voter participation in your community.

First Monday of the month at 12 Noon in Fellowship Hall – May through November 2026

Bring your lunch; light refreshments will be available!

Monday May 4, 2026 "A Legacy Worth Building On - Faith 250"	Monday June 1, 2026 "A Study - From Sacred Texts to Civic Values"	Monday July 6 2026 "A Reflection - America's 250th Anniversary"	Monday August 3, 2026 "A Call to Serve - Poll Chaplain Program"	Tuesday Sept 8, 2026 "A Path to Participation - Reaching Reluctant Voters"
Monday Oct 5, 2026 "A Moral Lens - A Review of WI Amendments"	Monday Nov 2, 2026 "A Gathering - The Faith Community Together"	Register to watch the series at home:		

Or email to let us know you will join us in person:
dirfaithform@menomonieucc.org

• Note: We meet on Tuesday, September 8, 2026 due to Labor Day Holiday

Thank You!

Thank you to the Muffin Monday Volunteers: A BIG thank you to the following people who helped make this another successful semester of handing out muffins to the UW-Stout students: Lyn Collins (regular baker), Bill Grambo (handed out muffins), June Grambo (regular baker and handed out muffins), Cheryl Huenink (substitute baker), Marie Koch (substitute baker), Rose McLean (regular baker), Diane Mercil (substitute baker and handed out muffins), Sara Nagler (regular baker), Joan Sandfort (substitute baker), Tom Schmelzle (handed out muffins), Becky Staiger (handed out muffins), Deb Wesolek (regular baker) and Marilyn Winsor (substitute baker).

Minutes of Church Council Meeting First Congregational UCC, Menomonie, WI Draft – April 21, 2026

Roll Call: Luci Black (Membership/Fellowship), Kathy Colvin (Worship), René Mehlberg (Pastor), Andrew Mercil (Past 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). Rick Nagler (Vice Moderator) was absent.

The Council was called to order at 11:31a.m. by the Moderator, Jeanne. The agenda was accepted.

Carol offered the poem, “When Giving Is All We Have”, written by Alberto Rios, as a prayer.

Andrew moved approval of the consent agenda, including the March 17th minutes, the March Treasurer’s Report, the Deacon Reports and the Pastor’s report. The motion was seconded by Agnes and approved by the Council.

1. Action Items:

- a. Tom introduced the Thursday’s Table agreement with the church. Andrew moved to accept the agreement and Carol seconded the motion. It was accepted. Additional details will be published in the Bell.
- b. Kathy discussed the changes necessary to the By-Laws and the Constitution, adapting the language to current options. These included changing Northwest Association to Northern Region, changing “his/her” to their, and using the term “disabled”. Kathy moved that we forward the changes to the congregation at the Annual meeting and Deanna seconded the motion. It was approved.

- c. Jeanne reported for Rick. The slate of candidates is complete other than vice moderator. Jan Erdman has agreed to serve as treasurer.
- d. Carol reported that the Stewardship Campaign is finishing and the congregation has been generous.
- e. Tom reported on the budget going to the Annual Meeting. He stated that it is a small miracle. Expenses were reduced. Numbers tend to be conservative. Kathy moved to accept the budget. Luci seconded the motion and it was approved.
- f. Jeanne led discussion reflecting on Pastor René's first year.
- g. Andrew presented a sign-up sheet for the Wall Dogs project. Volunteers will direct folks as hosts. We will be doing a Thursday cookout and a Sunday breakfast. Volunteers will be given a meal and a t-shirt. There will be another sign-up for the Thursday night dinner.
- h. Deanne reported that she found folks very friendly at the Wisconsin UCC Annual Conference. The worship services were very meaningful. René enjoyed making connections and found the speakers powerful. Jeanne appreciated the messages around justice in many areas. The motivation was amazing.
- i. Agnes spoke briefly about the Creative Justice Covenant. Approval at the Annual Meeting was discussed.

2. Follow-up Items:

- a. The Church Directory will be presented for review and should be out in the summer.
- b. Lee reported that Property needs some folks that are willing to take on tasks. Then he went on to say that the Solar Project is on hold. He would like to do it without needing a capital campaign.
- c. Tom reported that as of May 1st there will be a transition to an updated accounting system. It is a lot of work, but it will be a better system.

Retiring deacons and officers were recognized and applauded.

Kathy moved adjournment. Margi seconded the motion and we were adjourned at 12:55 p.m.

The Benediction was sung.

Respectfully submitted,
Jill Schwebs, Clerk