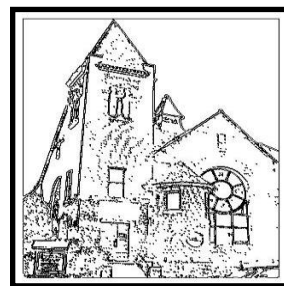


First Congregational
United Church of Christ
420 Wilson Ave.
Menomonie, WI 54751
(715) 235-5838

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

The Bell

September 2026



September Activities

Sunday Services: September 6th, 13th, 20th, and 27th

8:30am Contemplative Service (**not on 13th**)

10am Traditional Service (in-person & livestream)

Wednesday, September 2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd, and 30th

5:30 Chancel Choir rehearsal, Sanctuary

6:30 Bell Choir rehearsal, Music Room

Thursday, September 3rd

3:30pm Executive Committee, R1

Thursday, September 10th

10am Mission for Peace and Justice, R1

6pm Church Council, R1

Sunday, September 13th

Rally Around Event, Potluck @ 11:30am

Monday, September 14th

6pm Christian Education, R1

Wednesday, September 16th

9am Thursday's Table Board meeting, R1

Tuesday, September 22nd

10am Equinox Gathering, Church Courtyard

Church Office Hours:

Monday – Thursday, 9:00am-2:00pm; Friday – closed
September 7th, Labor Day - closed

Thursday's Table:

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

Community Meetings:

AA Meetings, Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, 6:30am

Al-Anon Meetings, Mondays, 6:00pm

NA Meetings, Tuesdays, 7:00pm; Fridays, 6:30pm

WOODWIND PARK'S
Play it Forward
for
COMMUNITY MEALS
12 PM - 4 PM

Menomonie
MONDAY'S MEAL
TUESDAY'S TABLE
WEDNESDAY'S TABLE
THURSDAY'S TABLE

FREE ENTRY

SATURDAY, SEPT. 12, 2026

WoodWind Park • Wheeler, WI

CAR SHOW • LIVE MUSIC • DISC GOLF • FOOD & DRINKS

Dash plaques to the first 50 cars & prizes all day!

5th Annual CAR SHOW & CONCERT

E7115 1058TH AVE, WHEELER, WI

CRAFT SHOW • SILENT AUCTION • YARD GAMES

WOODWINDPARK.COM INFO@WOODWINDPARK.COM

Play it Forward.

From the Pastor's Desk

Dear Beloved Children of God:

It's school transition time! UW-Stout banners are on the light poles. Students are moving in. Soon the blue "free downtown parking" bags will be removed. Thursday, August 27th is the first day of school in Menomonie.

This time of year brings much excitement for so many. And yet, my heart and mind is very much thinking of those whose school year start will not be filled with joy and excitement. I learned this morning of the Alma Center high school football player who died following Friday night's game. This is not supposed to happen.

Thursday, August 27th is also the one-year anniversary of the Annunciation School Shooting which took the life of Harper Moyski and Fletcher Merkel. With First Congregational's connection to the Merkel family, this anniversary for the family, friends, Annunciation, and the surrounding community has been forefront on my mind. There has been much press about the upcoming anniversary, including stories about Fletcher on Minnesota Public Radio's website and even CBS Sunday Morning.

[Minneapolis bench honors Annunciation victim Fletcher Merkel at his favorite lake](#)

[Inside shooting victim Fletcher Merkel's bedroom](#)

We will most definitely celebrate the start of a new school year and pray for the families, students, staff, and all working, participating in K-12 education and higher ed as well, with a backpack blessing, representing all that is to come. AND, we hold in prayer the Merkel, Moyski, and the other families who will have one less backpack returning to school this year as their loved one is now part of the communion of saints watching us from above.

In a world full of joys and sorrows, life and death, kindness and meanness, choose life for yourself and others. Love as our Triune, Still Speaking loves us. When things get tough, reach out as there are people who care and love you and will help see you through.

Blessing the Backpacks by Kate Bowler

God, bless this school year, this new season,
this chance to discover the world anew.
We sense the anticipation of something about to
happen,
of all our preparation and worry and excitement
for new friendships and challenges and
opportunities.

God, bless these backpacks,
these symbols of fresh beginning.
And bless every kid who carries their heavy load,
as all the new questions rise up in their hearts and
minds.

God, bless this new environment and everyone in it.
The teachers and professors who ready their
classrooms,
creating opportunities for learning and belonging.
The administrators and staff as they stretch hearts and
minds,
and feel their own stretching too.
The parents and caregivers who carry the weight
of loving, protecting, and raising these kids.

God, bless all who begin this journey of a new year,
With every step they take, may they feel your presence
and hear you say, "I love you. I am with you. You are
loved."

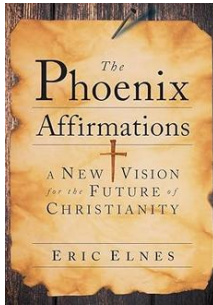
Each and every one.

Prayers and blessings for you all~

Pastor René

From the Director of Faith Formation

Karen Miller



Affirmation Nine --

Basing our lives on the faith that in Christ all things are made new and that we, and all people, are loved beyond our wildest imagination-for eternity.

I find this month's affirmation a wonderful counterpoint to the first "damnation" sermon, *Weeds Among the Wheat: Preparing for Eternity*, I delivered last month. In the Gospel parable of Matthew 13, we are told in no uncertain terms that the responsibility for judgment and salvation in the world to come rests solely with the Almighty. Today's affirmation instructs us that the responsibility for transformation and salvation in this world rests solely with Jesus Christ.

In Luke 19, the despised and crooked tax collector named Zacchaeus climbs a tree to get a better view of Jesus as he passes through Jericho. The crowd tells Jesus that Zacchaeus is a Jew who collects ungodly taxes from his own people, a traitor Jew who has gotten rich through his participation in the Roman looting of the land. Jesus calls Zacchaeus down from the tree *"for I must stay at your house today."*¹ The crowd is not happy with this extravagant welcome, but Zacchaeus offers half of his possessions to the poor, and promises fourfold restitution to anyone he has defrauded. Jesus says to Zachhaeus, *"Today salvation has come to this house."*²

Jesus' salvation has to do with physical or spiritual transformation in this world, not the next. Jesus does not say to Zaccheaus, *"When you die, salvation will come to your house."* Finding other Gospel stories of in this world salvation is not difficult – Luke 7:44-50, Luke 8:12, Luke 17:11-19, Luke 23:39-43, Matthew 9:20-22, Matthew 9:27-29, Mark 5:25-34, Mark 10:46-52, etcetera.

Transformation, renewal, and salvation continue to unfold in our world, in our time, and among us today. I experienced this transformation in 2018 when I sought forgiveness for rejecting Jesus. My depression lifted immediately, I joined this faith community, and I began my journey as a Native American student of Jesus. The little faith I had left was my only hope, and my healing was complete.

Salvation, as defined in the Gospels, and in our personal faith experiences is *"discovering that we are loved beyond our wildest imagination and then determining to live our lives according to this discovery."*³

May your faith make you well,

Karen

¹ Luke 19:5 (NRSV)

² Luke 19:9.

³ Elnes, Eric. *The Phoenix Affirmations: A New Vision for the Future of Christianity*. (Jossey-Bass: CA), 2006, 106.

Thank you for your Continued Support of Planned Giving!

Planned Giving is gearing up for the completion of the *"Together for Tomorrow"* initiative, which will end on Heritage Sunday. We look forward to Rev. Andrew Warner joining us for his final Heritage Sunday worship and Saturday gathering. More to come as we finalize plans for our Heritage Sunday celebration!

Since May 1st, over \$5,000 in additional contributions have been given to the General Endowment through the *Together for Tomorrow* initiative and from gifts and memorials, bringing the total of the General Endowment to \$193,056. Your gifts to the General Endowment truly keep on giving, because 4% of the total endowment annually is given to the church. In June, the General Endowment provided the church with the annual Planned Giving gift of \$7,628.80. The General Endowment fund is getting close to \$200,000, which would provide \$8,000 every year to support the church.

The more the endowment grows, the greater the annual gift that the church receives.

This year, the General Endowment has been the focus of Planned Giving through the *Together for Tomorrow* initiative, but it is only one part of our work. Since May 2026, gifts have also supported a variety of special needs, including a \$3,000 contribution for piano and organ maintenance. Planned Giving also supports the Helping Hands Fund, and we are especially grateful to Neil and Marie Koch for opening their home for a special event, which has raised more than \$2,000 for the Helping Hands Fund.

Through your generosity, this year Planned Giving also provided three music scholarships, helped maintain the Memorial Garden; provided support to Care Ministries in their work with The Bridge to Hope, helped financially support the Mission for Peace and Justice Committee's recycling program; and more. Your continued generosity makes all of this possible.

And finally, through the Legacy Society, Planned Giving provides a way for our church and community members to include First Congregational UCC in their will or other end-of-life plans. We can help you make a plan that connects with your values and provides on-going support for the church after you die.

Thank you to the Planned Giving Committee: Kristen Billingsley, treasurer; Ken Schofield, Secretary, Paul Stauffacher and Sandy Lindow; committee members. And a special thank you to Rose McLean, who is continuing as the PG financial secretary (assisting with the Planned Giving donations that are received). Feel free to reach out to any of us with questions or ideas.

And again, thank you for your kindness, generosity and support of our church family.

Jeanne Rothaupt
Planned Giving Chair

September Worship Volunteers

	Flowers	Coffee Servers	Readers
September 6 th	Kathy Colvin		Naomi Cummings
September 13 th		Rally Sunday Potluck	Sherry Bernick
September 20 th	Judy and Ron Fry		Dawn Ascher
September 27 th	Doris Win		

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

Announcements

Introducing Our Vice Moderator

The search is over! Following a "Yes, I'll serve as Vice Moderator", Sue Halama has been approved by council vote for the position. We thank Sue for her consideration and willingness to serve in church leadership over the next 3 years. She will join council starting in September. Thank you, Sue!

Get Ready for Rally Around Sunday!

The September 13, 2026, theme for our Rally Around Sunday is "Stewardship is Light Work". This year's focus will be how we shine God's light both individually, within our charitable gifts and volunteer time, and collectively, as a church unit within our greater community.

We look forward to:

- Sharing our thoughts and prayers for shining our lights!
- Learning about projects our deacons and committees have planned!
- Deciding how we can each share our time and talents with others and signing up to help!
- Winning prizes!
- Sharing a potluck meal!

The raffle will work the same as last year – you will receive a passport as you come in the door of the Fellowship Hall. Every committee will have a table. Check off each table you stop at then once they are all checked, you can add your name to the passport and drop it in the raffle box in the front. We will draw prizes during potluck.

If you would like to donate a prize, please let Sherry Galetka know at galetkas@gmail.com or phone 715-415-6512 by September 7. Last year's prizes were wonderful, and we know that this year will be another stellar Rally Sunday!

A Mindfulness Experience on September 23rd with Women in Good Company

Join us on Wednesday, September 23rd from 10-2 at Jill Noreen's home for an experience with mindfulness. Jeanne Rothaupt will lead us in a series of activities to help us slow down, increase awareness, and connect powerfully with each other. Activities include silent seated or walking meditation, an introduction to Contemplative Prayer, a simple mindfulness meal of soup and bread, and several guided meditations based on Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). We will have time at the end to share our thoughts and insights.

Jill's address is E3798 650th Ave, Menomonie.

Please feel free to contact Jill (715-210-4545) or Jeanne (715-619-1970) with any questions or concerns. All are welcome. Please RSVP to Jill.

Rally Sunday Potluck

Join us for another delicious potluck on September 13th (also known as Rally Sunday). Bring a dish to pass, either homemade or store-bought, gourmet class or plain. All will be welcome. Please remember to bring your own plates and cutlery but know that extra back-up will be available for those who forget. We will delay the start of the meal until 11:30, giving everyone a chance to make the rounds of all the information tables and the opportunity to win prizes. Let's make this a kick-off to be remembered!

Upcoming Executive Committee and Council Meetings

- Executive Committee meetings, the first Thursday of the month from 3:30-4:30pm in Room 1.
- Council Meetings, the second Thursday of the month from 6:00-7:30pm in Room 1.

These meetings are open to anyone interested.

Creation Justice Reflection

September is being celebrated as the Season of Creation by the UCC and other denominations. The theme is "Living Water".

The following passage is taken from Robin Wall Kimmerer's book "Braiding Sweetgrass". It is part of an indigenous Thanksgiving Address which sets gratitude as the highest priority.

"We give thanks to all the Waters of the world. Water is life, quenching our thirst, providing strength, making the plants grow and sustaining us all. We know its power in many forms - waterfalls and rain, mists and streams, rivers and oceans, snow and ice. We are grateful that the waters are still here and meeting their responsibility to the rest of Creation. Can we agree that water is important to our lives and bring our minds together as one to send greetings and thanks to the Water? Now our minds are one."

New Room 3!

As staff continue to better use the church space for our current needs, there is now a new Room 3. This used to be the nursery. There is now a number outside the door. The room will be used for additional meeting room space and for the storing of winter gear being collected by Care Ministries. There are still some nursery items in the room.

Yes, for a time the room was also known as Room 12, as 12 is a holy number. However, to hopefully ease future confusion, it has been renumbered to Room 3.

Equinox Gathering

Please join the us for a fall equinox gathering on Tuesday, September 22nd at 10am in the Courtyard just outside the fellowship hall at church. This event is sponsored by the Mission Committee for Peace and Justice. Amy Riddle-Swanson will lead everybody in a guided meditation. Also feel free to bring a poem, essay or any other item which is significant or speaks to you to share. You may wish to bring a lawn chair. This event is open to anybody so invite a friend or friends to also share in this time together as we welcome the season of Autumn.

Bible Study to Organize – Don't Miss Out!

Informal meetings after Sunday Worship service will be held in Fellowship Hall to plan and organize a series of Bible studies for the 2026-2027 church year on the following dates:

Sunday, August 30, 2026 - 11:20 a.m.

Sunday, September 6, 2026 – 9:20 a.m.

Sunday, September 13, 2026 – 11:20 a.m.



Possible Study Topics – (and open to hearing about your interests and ideas)

- **HOW THE BIBLE ACTUALLY WORKS:** explore a combination of historical scholarship, interesting reading, clever humor, filled with faith and hope (book read and discussion OR presentations and actual bible study examples).
- **HOW TO READ THE BIBLE:** a bridge for the nonspecialists to learn from the intimidating work of biblical scholars perspectives they can use in their own study of the Bible (book read and discussion OR presentations and actual bible study).
- **JESUS:** explore Jesus' life, ministry, teachings, and miracles.
- **SPIRITUAL GROWTH:** beginning or nurturing your faith through spiritual habits.
- **MYSTICISM & THE BIBLE:** the pursuit of a deeper, experiential knowledge of God, rooted in Scripture and expressed through a life of prayer, contemplation, and union with Christ.
- **ECOTHEOLOGY:** how to read the Bible ecologically from the perspective of the Earth and significant texts including creation accounts from Genesis and the Wisdom literature (Proverbs, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Job).
- **JUSTICE:** joining God in the work of making wrong things right.
- **CONTINUING TESTAMENT:** sharing the gospel and our faith stories through our words and actions.
- **HURT & PAIN:** finding hope and healing in Jesus during difficult situations.
- **BOOKS OF THE BIBLE:** explore a particular Gospel or other text from the Old or New Testament in depth.

If you can't make it to any of these meeting dates, contact Karen at 715-235-5838 or email dirfaithform@menomonieucc.org to discuss your interests and needs.

First Congregational United Church of Christ of Menomonie Partners with *The United States of Kindness*

The United Church of Christ is part of a collaborative effort bringing together national brands, schools, civic leaders, first responders, influencers and nonprofits with one mission: to create a more connected, compassionate country through the simple power of everyday acts of kindness.

"The United States of Kindness" campaign, spearheaded by the [Values in Action Foundation](#), was launched on April 25, 2026. This gives participants 250 days (between April 25 and December 31) to complete one act of kindness a day. But participants can begin their acts of kindness at any time during the year.



First Congregational United
Church of Christ (Menomonie WI)

The hope is to fill America with the powerful message that kindness, throughout history and currently, is our shared strength.

- First Congregational UCC of Menomonie registered its commitment to complete 250 acts of kindness between **September 13, 2026** through **December 31, 2026**.
 - We invite our neighbors and the community of Menomonie to join us in demonstrating our shared strength of kindness!

Where: Front lawn of First Congregational United Church of Christ, 420 Wilson Avenue, Menomonie, WI

What: 7 foot tall garden trellis, multi-colored ribbons, and Kindness Log

When: September 13, 2026 Kickoff at 11:30 a.m. through December 31, 2026

How: Tie a ribbon on the trellis anytime you commit an act of kindness. You can, but are not required to log your act(s) of kindness in the official Kindness Log.

**Join us as we celebrate America's 250th anniversary with purpose
and build a legacy of unity that endures.**

Kindness is a value we can all agree on!

Join us for a weekend of faith and fun at one of the Youth Retreats planned at Daycholah Center



2026-2027 Youth Retreat Dates Announced

Registration for 2026-2027 United Church of Christ Wisconsin Conference Youth retreats will open by September 1. The retreats:

- Youth Faith Formation Retreat 1 (grades 6-12), November 6-8
- Knock, Knock, Retreat (grades 6-8), November 20-22
- Winter Soulstice Retreat (grades 9-12), January 15-17
- Youth Faith Formation Retreat II (grades 6-12), February 26-28
- Youth Faith Formation Retreat III (grades 6-12), March 5-7

The same program is offered at each Youth Faith Formation Retreat. All retreats take place at Daycholah Center. Additional details will be forthcoming. Questions? Email [Lisa Hart](mailto:Lisa.Hart@menomonieucc.org), associate conference minister for faith formation and justice ministries or call her at 608-438-1571.

LINK TO THE FULL CHURCH CALENDAR: <https://www.menomonieucc.org/monthlycalendar>

Thank You

Gail Skamfer for going above and beyond this summer!

- Prep, logistics, and clean-up after Walldogs, "Murals in Menomonie"
- Prepping, being on-site, and returning moved items during this summer's carpet cleaning
- Working to "Clean-out for Christ" the previous Room 3 (the storage area) and new Room 3 (the old nursery) for better room usage for our needs. This included taking many no longer needed items to the Dunn County Humane Society Rummage Sale

Deb Wesolek and Diane Mercil, our watering and tending, garden army this summer, especially with the extremely dry conditions and city watering ban.

Lori Anda, Gail Skamfer, Amy Riddle-Swanson, and Colin Kintzinger for helping move Ahsoka from Plum City into UW-Stout Polytechnic. Also, to Adrienne Harmston who is storing some items of hers.

Neil and Marie Koch for hosting a very successful and delightful Open House with proceeds going to Helping Hands. The hospitality of Neil and Marie and 4 of their 5 adult children on a beautiful August day was a blessing! Over \$2000 was raised by those attending and those who were unable to. Over this past summer, Helping Hand funds have been used to assist people with gas cards, rent, limited hotel stays while being unhoused, car repairs, and utility bills. Thank you for EVERYONES generosity in helping our neighbors in need!

Minutes of Church Council Meeting
First Congregational UCC, Menomonie, WI
July 30, 2026

Roll Call: Naomi Cummings (Membership/Fellowship), Kathy Colvin (Worship), Sherry Galetka, (Stewardship), René Mehlberg (Pastor), Rick Nagler (Moderator), Jeanne Rothaupt (Past Moderator), Deanna Schultz (Music), Jill Schwebs (Clerk), Margi Stauss (Care Ministries), Lee Theorin (Property), Leah Langby (Education), and Agnes Welsch (Mission).

The Council was called to order at 1 p.m. by the Moderator, Rick.

Sherry Galetka offered a reading about "Awe". She then led us in prayer.

Jeanne moved acceptance of the agenda and Margi seconded the motion. It was approved.

Agnes moved approval of the consent agenda, including the June minutes, the Deacon Reports and the SOM report, aka Pastor's report. A June treasurer's report was not available. Naomi seconded the motion. Various items were discussed. At an upcoming meeting, Karen will discuss the Safe Church/Safe Ministries questionnaire from last month. The SOM Report was defined as the Settled Ordained Minister Report. The motion was approved by the Council.

Rick talked about Article II of the Bylaws. He is not recommending any changes. It is important to realize that as few as 5% +1 of the congregation could make a change. Some options are vague. Updating the membership is necessary for these numbers and that project will be undertaken in the fall by Jill, Jeanne, and Kathy.

Those who completed the audit were thanked and there was discussion about a new committee member to mentor each year.

René included information about a Congregational Support committee from the Northern Region to meet with leadership to learn about the congregations and share resources. There was discussion of when to meet. There was consensus to be scheduled in coordination with a Council meeting and invite non-council members who are interested.

The church calendar was discussed. There is a link in the Bell to the official church calendar.

The Rally Round Event will be September 13th. The theme will be "Rally Round the Light". The flow was discussed. Members will think about organizing and this topic will be brought back next month. Stewardship will be asking for Raffle Donations for the event.

The Christian Education Committee has signed up to be part of the United States of Kindness, to officially kick off on September 13th, which can be an intergenerational project and community project.

Agnes reported that we will be receiving a banner as a UCC Creative Justice Church. Her committee will also be placing a raised planter on the west side of the Church with signage and native plants.

Kathy asked for Communion help.

Naomi will do the prayer for the next meeting.

Jill moved adjournment. Agnes seconded the motion and we were adjourned at 2:15 p.m.

The Benediction was sung.

Respectfully submitted,

Jill Schwebs, Clerk

First Congregational UCC
Menomonie, WI
Draft – August 20, 2026

Roll Call: Naomi Cummings (Membership/Fellowship), Kathy Colvin (Worship), Sherry Galetka, (Stewardship), Leah Langby (Education), René Mehlberg (Pastor), Rick Nagler (Moderator), Deanna Schultz (Music), Jill Schwebs (Clerk), Margi Stauss (Care Ministries), Lee Theorin (Property) and Agnes Welsch (Mission). Jeanne Rothaupt (Past Moderator) was absent.

The Council was called to order at 6:11 p.m. by the Moderator, Rick.

Naomi moved and Sherry seconded the acceptance of the agenda. It was approved.

Naomi offered a reading about “Water”. Rick asked for a volunteer to pray next month and Deanna volunteered.

Naomi moved approval of the consent agenda, including the July minutes (with the friendly addition of adding Leah Langby to the roll call), the July Treasurer’s Report, the Deacon Reports and the Pastor’s Report. Margi seconded the motion. Various items were discussed. The motion was approved by the Council.

Rick talked about Article III in the Bylaws which addresses the Ordained Minister. It states that the Minister should be an ex-officio member of all committees. René explained that this means voice but no vote, when attending. Section 4 states the Worship Deacon will cover for the minister in the case of illness. Between clergy persons, they were also responsible. There will be no changes.

Rick thanked everyone for helping find a meeting date and time. The Council will meet the second Thursday of each month from 6p.m. to 7:30p.m. The Executive Council will meet the first Thursday of the month from 3:30p.m. to 4:30p.m.

René introduced thoughts on going forward with a Capital Campaign. She shared a document that listed the need for goals and priorities. She also talked about putting together a Capital Campaign Committee. Hopefully we can have some of these ideas (projects and cost and committee members organized by the next Council meeting or October. There will need to be planning involving projects and costs. There will also need to be discussion about the talents necessary to serve as committee members and who those potential members might be. There is documentation from the 2016 Campaign available as a resource.

Rick reported that he, Pastor René, and Naomi will be meeting with Rev. Teri Hanson and Rev. Mike Southcombe to work on the Behavioral Covenant.

Sherry talked about her plans for Rally Sunday and encouraged all the deacons to develop their own fun ideas. Whatever works is encouraged. The potluck will start at 11:30. Prizes are needed.

Committee goals need to be formulated and shared.

Deacon job descriptions are old (2012) and deacons are asked to update them. This will be a huge help to those following. Some old descriptions are in a folder online called Deacon Job Descriptions. Some do not exist. Updated descriptions should be put into that folder.

August 23rd is the deadline for the September Newsletter due to the weekend. Normally the 22nd is the deadline.

Agnes moved adjournment. Sherry seconded the motion and we were adjourned at 7:17 p.m.

The Benediction was sung.

Respectfully submitted,

Jill Schwebs, Clerk