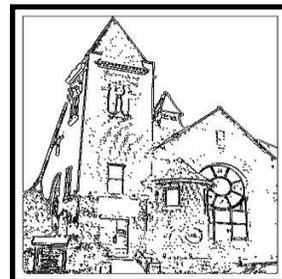


First Congregational
United Church of Christ
420 Wilson Ave.
Menomonie, WI 54751
(715) 235-5838

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

The Bell

March 2026



March Activities

Sunday Services: March 1st, 8th, 15th, 22nd, and 29th

8:30am Contemplative Service

10am Traditional Service (in-person & livestream)

Sunday, March 1st – Potluck

Tuesday, March 3rd

5:30pm Mission for Peace and Justice, R1

Wednesdays, March 4th, 11th, 18th, and 25th

4pm Kid's Club, R2 (not on 18th – Spring Break)

5:30pm Chancel Choir rehearsal, Sanctuary

6:30pm Bell Choir rehearsal, Music Room

7pm Dance Practice, FH

Sunday, March 8th - Bridge Sunday

11:15am Worship Committee, R1

Sundays, March 8th, 15th, and 29th

11:30am Progressive Christians Discussion, FH

Tuesday, March 10th

4pm Executive Committee, R1

5pm Planned Giving Committee, R1

Tuesday, March 17th

9am-3pm Blood Drive, FH

11:30am Church Council, R1

Wednesday, March 18th

9am Thursday's Table meeting, R1

Sunday, March 22nd

11:15am Budget Hearing, Sanctuary

Tuesday, March 24th

4pm Early Service Committee, R1

Wednesday, March 25th

10am Women is Good Company, FH

Thursday, March 26th

5pm Personnel Committee, R1

Saturday, March 28th

10:30am Memorial Service for David Cook

Sunday, March 29th

3pm Palm Sunday Path, Trinity Lutheran, Eau Claire

Church Office Hours:

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

Stewardship

We are continuing our annual Stewardship campaign, "There our hearts will be." This theme refers to Matthew 6:21 which tells us, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." In the past month, church deacons have shared Ministry Moments in which they told us how our gifts make our church mission possible and on February 22nd, pledge cards were blessed and celebrated.

Thank you to all of you who have pledged your support. If you have not yet turned in a pledge card, please take some time to prayerfully consider the choices we make in support of our church, church family, and community. Share your commitment via the pledge card by dropping it off at the church office, or emailing office@menomonieucc.org or cdropella@gmail.com. Your pledge is very important. Even if you give electronically and would like to continue unchanged, your pledge confirms this and helps the church council to build the best budget possible.

Thank you for your generous stewardship of the gifts God has shared with each of us.

Carol Ropella
Stewardship Deacon



From the Pastor's Desk

Dear Beloved Children of God:

One year ago, I recently moved from NW Minnesota, back to my home state of Wisconsin. I was settling in to start my new call, lead my first worship service, experience my first Fools Sunday, preside over communion in a new denomination as your new Settled Ordained Minister, or SOM, as I often refer.

Truth is, I'm still settling into my apartment (it helps when you are there and are motivated). It doesn't always feel like one year has passed. How did it go by so quickly?

And yet, when I think back, a lot has happened. Some other "firsts":

- Joining and playing with Bell Choir, including first playing on Easter Morning
- Easter worship especially experiencing "The Hallelujah Chorus", which was a true delight!
- Pride worship and picnic
- The Farmer's Market; Music over Menomin at Wilson Park; Ludington Guard Band concerts, including our Pie Social – what a success!
- Heritage Sunday
- Enjoying and getting to know local gathering spots
- Being involved in and speaking at No Kings Rally 2.0
- Tour of Homes
- Costume coordinating "White Christmas" for Menomonie Theatre Guild
- Christmas Eve worship
- My first Barn Dance at FLC
- Hosting a Gold Medal watch party for the USA Women's Hockey team with 20-25 people attending throughout the game – AND WE WON!!!
- And so much more including getting to know so many of you and this community I now call home!

I say once again how fortunate and truly blessed I am to have been called as your SOM or "sheepdog" to this congregation and community. To be with you, reminding you of God's everlasting loving presence during the joys and sorrows, the mountain top experiences and the valleys and rough roads of life. The saying goes, "Faith doesn't make life easy; faith makes life possible." I also say, "Community doesn't make life easy; community makes life possible." Thank you for welcoming me into your community as I am to share God's inclusive love with all. I look forward to doing so with you for many more years to come!

Prayers and blessings for you~

Pastor René

Our "Giving Tree" is Growing!

Together for Tomorrow Update

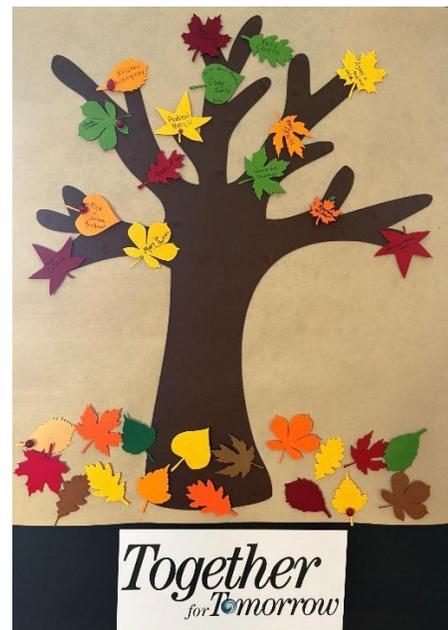
The *Together for Tomorrow* initiative continues to gain participants, with the Cody family sponsoring the Dining to Donate fundraiser at Applebee's on February 2, 2026. The church has received a check from Applebee's for \$262.91, which is the Cody's contribution to *Together for Tomorrow*. It was a very fun day. Thank you everyone who participated!

The first deposit from the *Together for Tomorrow* initiative was sent to the Wisconsin Foundation UCC on February 12, 2026 for \$18,301.84. Gifts were received from 12 individuals or families, ranging from \$25 to \$10,000. A few church members have given several times. One gift was from a non-member. The balance of the General Endowment on January 1, 2026 was \$159,646.60.

The gifts of support to the *Together for Tomorrow* initiative (General Endowment) are very much appreciated and communicate hope for the future of our church. Thank you so much to all who have contributed.

Our tree is filling up! Thank you to those who have donated to the General Endowment during our *Together for Tomorrow* initiative. Your gifts are greatly appreciated.

Kristen Billingsley
April and Lisa Cody
Lyn Collins in memory of Jacq Collins
Sally Conklin
Jim and Jan Erdman
Rose McLean
Karen Miller
Mary Jo Partida
Jeanne and Rich Rothaupt
Tom Schmelzle
Margi and Ken Stauss
Agnes and Andrew Welsch



Respectfully submitted,
Jeanne W. Rothaupt, Planned Giving Chair

Music Committee News

Many people contribute the gift of their time and talents to worship services: the minister, scripture readers, ushers, livestreaming support staff, and communion servers as well as musicians. How do we show appreciation for all those who contribute? Perhaps a word of thanks after the service, or a brief note you send them.

If you have attended a church service since the first of February, you may have noticed a card in the holders on the back of the pews that says, "Encourage One Another;" an image of the card is below. When you hear music during the service and want to show your appreciation for the musician's contribution to the service, you can fill out the card, drop it in the offering plate, and it will be sent to the person you are acknowledging. This is something the Music Committee and Church Council approved to encourage people to use as an alternative to applause, to allow for reflection throughout the service. The Rev. Scott Paczkowski, a Presbyterian minister in Iowa, wrote this message for his congregation about clapping in church and it reflects many of the points discussed by the Music Committee:

When we applaud the performer, it has the unintended consequence of transforming the worship experience into an act of performing, which is not the goal of the service. Clapping can actually diminish the performer by taking their sacred offering and turning it into something focused on them rather than on God...

In this confusing age of worship, it is challenging for a group of hundreds to reach a communal agreement. Yet, when a congregation agrees on a response, you feel its power. The hairs on the back of my neck stand up when a joyous piece concludes, and the congregation, in unison, is moved to stand and applaud joyously. It is just as inspiring when a meditative piece concludes, and you feel the corporate hush in the sanctuary. Silence can sometimes be louder than pounding applause. [Consider] the meaning behind the piece of music... [and] what the person or choir is trying to convey.

Silence after a piece is played or sung allows worshipers to meditate on how the music may have moved them. Members of the Music Committee also recognize that at times the Spirit may move you to applaud after a rousing piece of music or a musician may invite you to join in with clapping during a piece, which is part of the worship experience, too. Holding applause until the end of the service after the postlude is welcomed.

If you attend church services virtually and have a church directory, we encourage you to also show your appreciation by reaching out directly to the person you wish to acknowledge for their gifts and/or contribution to a service.

Deanna Schultz, Music Deacon

"Encourage one another..." Hebrews 10:25 Your opportunity to write messages of thanks or support to one another.	
An Encouraging Word to: _____	
Statement of Encouragement: _____ _____ _____	
Date _____	Signed _____
First Congregational UCC – 420 Wilson Avenue Menomonie, WI 54751 (715) 235-5838	

Welcome New Members!

On Sunday, February 8 we welcomed the following individuals into membership! Top photo: Kevin and Sarah Martinek, Matina Campetti, Dawn Ascher, Jim Collins, and Pastor René. Bottom photo: members and sponsors: Toby Ellison, Jim Collins, Cathie Weissman, Matina Campetti, Colin Kintzinger, Dawn Ascher, Jeanne Rothaupt, Kevin and Sarah Martinek, Connie Flug.

About Our New Members:

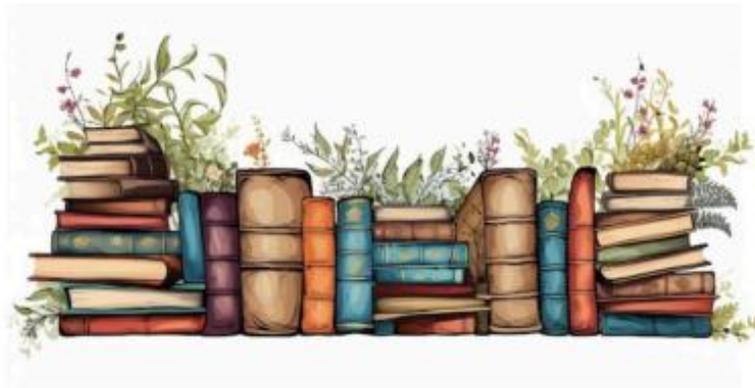
Dawn Ascher has been part of the First Congregational community for many years. Before retirement, she was a chemical dependency counselor, founder of the non-profit “Feed My Sheep”, and public speaker. She is widowed, having 2 sons and 2 grandchildren.

Matina Campetti is a band teacher in Plum City who cares deeply about the people around her. She loves to book/cook and try new hobbies. Matina has quickly shared her musical talents with the congregation in many ways, including helping at last summer's Kids Camp.

James “Jim” Collins is a retired electrical engineer and the son of Jacq and Lyn Collins.

Kevin and Sarah Martinek live in the Eau Galle Area. Kevin is retired from the electrical/mechanical tech field. Kevin enjoys the outdoors, fishing, and keeping up the homestead. Sarah enjoys gardening, making herbal formulas, and the woods. The couple plays cards and board games every evening. They're empty nesters of two married children.





What's Been Happening in the Church Parlor Library?

You may have noticed in the past year there has been activity in the church parlor's library! A group of us, with approval of the most recent coterie members, decided that we would like to see the library cleaned up and re-organized. Agnes Welsch, Melissa Kluge, Sara Nagler, Jaenna Howells and others have been spending time in the library finding homes for the many items that were being stored in there and reorganizing the space. We have been sorting through books and removing those that are no longer appropriate or have not been read or used in many years if at all. Those books were placed in the west entrance for several weeks and offered to anyone who wanted them.

The vision for the library is that it be a resource room and meditation area. We envision a warm, welcoming, calming, uncluttered area where we can come to pray, meditate, read, rest, or have a private conversation. In this spirit, we ask that you **not** use this room for storage, or drop off items randomly. It is important that the room feels warm and welcoming.

There will be a self check-out book on the desk to help keep track of the books taken and a bin to place returned books.

Melissa Kluge has agreed to oversee the maintenance of the library and head the library resource committee. The committee members: Melissa Kluge, Agness Welch, Marian Ellison, Jaena Howells, Leah Langby, Sara Nagler, and Deb Challe. We welcome any questions, suggestions, or comments.

🔔 Look for much more information over time in the e-news and Bell.

March Worship Volunteers

	Flowers	Coffee Servers	Readers
March 1 st , Potluck	Adrienne Harmston	Potluck	
March 8 th , Bridge Sunday		Karen Miller	
March 15 th	Sara and Rick Nagler	Nancy Jackson	
March 22 nd	Cindy and Lee Theorin	Linda and Bill Olson	
March 29 th	Sally Conklin	Deb and Alan Benoit	

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

Announcements

Treasurer's Report to the Congregation - February 2026

We are currently 75% of the way through the Church fiscal year. Pledge income is at 75% of the budgeted amount as of January 31, 2026. Our expenses for this fiscal year, as of January 31, 2026, are at 73% of the budgeted amount. Pledges received in this fiscal year are steady at this point. As the end of the fiscal year approaches, I am requesting that we all take another look at our pledges and offerings to make sure that our donations are up to date. As you can see the difference between income and expenses is very close and we want to end our fiscal year in the black.

We have utilized the Capital Campaign fund judiciously to help our annual General Fund budget stretch further by paying for select maintenance and property improvements. At this time the Capital Campaign balance is approximately \$47,000.

Thank you to all the faithful pledge givers throughout this year. Your giving has helped keep the year going smoothly. Please continue your pledge giving so we can finish the year out strong and in the black!

Tom Schmelzle, Treasurer

One Great Hour of Sharing Offering (OGHS) - March 15

We will be collecting offerings for the OGHS, a special mission offering of the UCC on or by March 15. OGHS funds development programs in areas such as healthcare, education, agriculture, food security, microfinancing, and women's empowerment. It focuses on immediate response and ongoing recovery to disasters, violence or poverty. As usual, you can write a check with OGHS in the memo line, or make a donation on the website. Envelopes will be available at the west entrance. Thank you for your ongoing generosity.

Mission for Peace and Justice Committee

Come Join Us! By Vice Moderator, Rick Nagler

Spring is here and fresh, new growth will be coming soon. Similarly, our church leadership will be changing as previous committee heads reach the end of their terms. I am grateful for the time and knowledge they have brought to the many accomplishments we have had in the past year.

I am relatively new to the congregation and will be stepping into the moderator position this coming year. Though I was concerned that I was not qualified to move into my current position, I was supported by other council members who reminded me that I don't have to be an expert, I just have to be a gatherer. "You're not the solitary worker; you're the spark that reaches out to the congregation."

So, will you join me as we be the spark that helps our church with necessities and the outreach, the tending and the creativity? We need nine folks to join us in eight areas in time for the annual meeting on 4/26. Have questions (of course you do!)? Chat with the person leading that activity, conveniently listed below:

Vice Moderator: Rick Nagler

Christian Education: currently open

Planned Giving: Sally Conklin and Rose McLean

Treasurer: Tom Schmelzle

Membership/Fellowship: Luci Black

Stewardship: Carol Ropella

Property: Lee Theorin

Care Ministries: Margi Strauss

Planned Giving Investments Update

Investment funds were transferred from Edward Jones to the Wisconsin Foundation UCC at the end of December, 2025. There were several identified reasons that we moved to the Wisconsin UCC Foundation; 1) Investment values of the UCC Foundation align with our congregational values of socially conscious investing, 2) No commission fees, 3) solid investment performance, and 4) We support our own UCC conference through partnering financially with our association and other UCC churches.

An additional, previously unidentified advantage with using the Wisconsin Foundation UCC is that they are tracking the endowed principle (or basis) and the earnings separately, so we will always easily see what the principle is (the amount that we will not spend) and what amount are earnings (what we can spend). The beginning balance for January 1, 2026 is \$159,646.60, with an endowed amount of \$120,718.19. The Planned Giving policy allows an annual withdrawal of 4% of the total of the General Endowment, as long as it does not dip into the principle. It is anticipated that the gift from Planned Giving to the General Operating Fund this year will be about \$7,100, depending on our final balance on April 30, 2026.

If you have any questions about the investments, or would like further information, please feel free to contact Jeanne Rothaupt, Planned Giving Chair or Tom Schmelzle, Church Treasurer. We are happy to chat!

2026 Prairie Farm Traditional & Green Skills Event *

This is the 16th annual Traditional & Green Skills Event (TGSE) – presenting skills and interests that enhance rural living, promote connection to the land, and build community.

The event features over 25 workshops to choose from (full class list on next page), led by local volunteer instructors, and offering workshops specially designed for children. This year there will also be a seed swap. The event has a local vendor area, with 20 booths highlighting handmade products and services offered by friends and neighbors.

Doors open at 8 a.m., with the final session ending at 4 p.m.

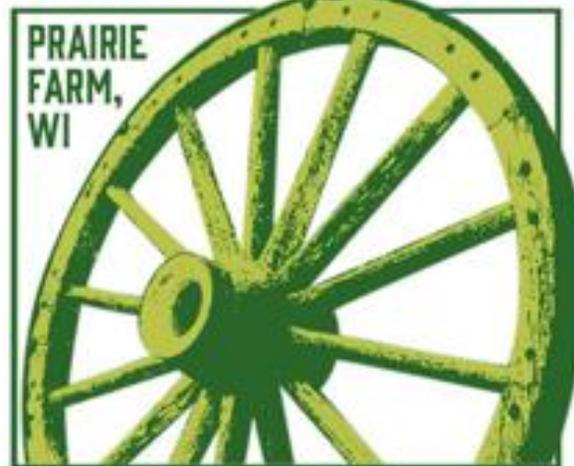
Entry Fee: \$15 for adults & teens, \$30 for families, \$7 for children 12 and under

Fee includes morning coffee, four class sessions, lunch, and childcare.

We are still in need of volunteers for childcare and registration. Volunteering gets you free admission. Please indicate you want to volunteer while [completing an attendance roster](#) (this helps us a lot with planning ahead), or contact Emily at emilydubay@gmail.com.

* First Congregational United Church of Christ Menomonie is a proud sponsor of the Hay River Transition Initiative and their annual Traditional & Green Skills Event.

TRADITIONAL & GREEN SKILLS



GATHERING AS A COMMUNITY

A full day of learning new skills from local teachers. Includes lunch, childcare, and a local vendor fair.

Saturday March 14th

Prairie Farm School

Pollinator Planting
Container Gardening
Teas & Lemonade
Critical Thinking
Electric Bikes
Seasonal Eating
Farmer-led Research
Seed Saving
Cheesemaking Basics
Surviving Long-term
Unemployment
Wonders of Wool
Creative Gear Design
Beekeeping
Buckthorn Control
Grief
Cross-country Skiing
NRCS Programs
Foraging
Salve Making
Soap Making
Tai Chi
Meditative Walk

And For Children:

Crocheting
Willow Star Wand
Animal
Houseplants

\$15 Adults & Teens
\$30 Household
\$7 Children

Session One

9:30-10:30

Lessons Learned: Pollinator Planting Success Stories, Madlen Kobs

Container Gardening: Growing Big in Small Spaces, Margaret Murphy, County Extension Educator

Teas & Lemonade – Local & Foraged, Barry Iverson

Critical Thinking, Tommie and Shawn Kelley

Electric Bikes, Larry Theberg

Seasonal Eating Directly from the Land, Khaiti Hallstein

Kids Track – Crocheting, Brittney Hunt

Session Two

10:45-12:15

Farmer-led Research: Local Farms, New Ideas, Tryston Beyrer & Tina Barone

Seed Saving, Clint Freund

Cheesemaking Basics, Meg Wittenmeyer

Surviving Long-term Unemployment, Chris Koszalka

Wonders of Wool, Karen Schnell

Kids Track - Willow Wand, Les Macare & Els Dobrick-Racing Heart Farm

Session Three

1:15-2:15

Creative Gear & Clothing Design, Kurt Buetow

Beekeeping, Dan Strehlau

Buckthorn Control Options, Daniel Kuske

Grief, Lama Yeshe

Cross-country Skiing, Larry Theberg

Kids Track - Animal Tracks & Birds, Emily Pieper

Session Four

2:30-3:30

NRCS Programs, Frank Lazar

Foraging Edible and Medicinal Plants, Martha Wright & Lisa Kofalkis

Salve Making, Megan Mastel

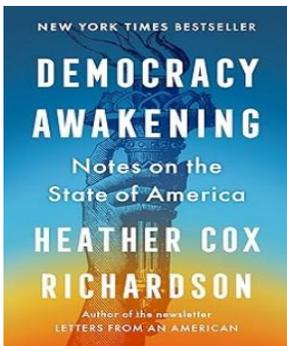
Soap Making, Megan Mastel

Tai Chi, Rob Grunewald

Meditative Walk w/ Lama Yeshe

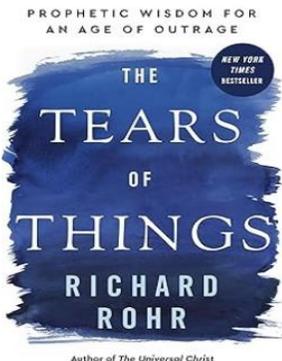
Kids Track -Houseplants, Emily Pieper

Changes To Progressive Christian Discussion Offerings, 2026



Democracy Awakening: Notes on the State of America by Heather Cox Richardson.

In-person discussion **Sunday, March 8 & 15**, 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., Fellowship Hall



The Tears of Things by Richard Rohr.

In-person discussion **Sunday, March 29** 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., Fellowship Hall.

Contact Karen Miller, Director of Faith Formation, to request a copy of either book: dirfaithform@menomonieucc.org or text 715-619-0609.

Thank You!

Thank you to everyone for the cards, wishes, and prayers! The surgery went well and my ankle is in speedy recovery. I really appreciate the support I got from all of you! Thank you! Oxana