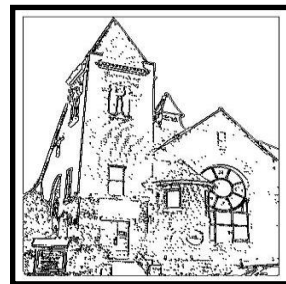


First Congregational
United Church of Christ
420 Wilson Ave.
Menomonie, WI 54751
(715) 235-5838

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

The Bell

February 2026



February Activities

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

8:30am Contemplative Service

10am Traditional Service (in-person & livestream)

Sunday, February 8th – Bridge/New Member Sunday

Sunday, February 15th – Fool's Sunday

Wednesday, February 18th – Ash Wednesday, 6pm

Tuesday, February 3rd

5:30pm Mission for Peace and Justice, R1

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

4pm Kid's Club, R2

5:30pm Chancel Choir rehearsal (not on 18th)

6:30pm Bell Choir rehearsal

7pm Dance Practice

Sundays, February 8th, 15th, and 22nd

11:30am Progressive Christians Discussion, R1

Tuesday, February 10th

4pm Executive Committee, R1

Tuesday, February 17th

11:30am Church Council, R1

Wednesday, February 18th

11am Tour of Homes meeting, FH

12:30pm Women's Fellowship, FH

Church Office Hours:

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

Thursday's Table:

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

Link to the full church calendar:

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

Together for Tomorrow



Join us for a fun night at Applebee's all
while raising money for

First Congregational UCC

Tuesday - February 3, 2026

All Day

2303 State Hwy 25 N

Menomonie, WI - 54751

Available **TO GO** with code **DoinGood**

*Doin' Good in
the Neighborhood*
Applebees

Mark your calendar for Tuesday, February 3rd for
the Together for Tomorrow "Dining to Donate"
fundraiser at Applebees, sponsored by April and
Lisa Cody!

15% of all proceeds on February 3rd will be given
to our church, including both delivery and in-
restaurant orders. Gift cards also count.

Thank you Lisa and April for your creative
contribution to Together for Tomorrow!

From the Pastor's Desk

Dear Beloved Children of God:

The start of 2026 has been more than challenging for so many, if not us all. It certainly feels like winter with the recent bitterly cold temperatures and windchill. Many have had surgeries, still recovering from one, or are making plans for one. Others are in the midst of health challenges, treatments, or caregiving for themselves or others.

And then – do I even need to say it? -- the state of our country, affecting our whole world.

We are living in a time of empire within our own borders by too many individuals of our own federal government in ways never experienced before. I am writing on January 26, knowing that there are members and former members in the Cities. There are many here with children, grandchildren, extended family and friends directly and severely impacted by the events happening in Minneapolis and through Minnesota. My prayers and love are with you all.

It has been a roller coaster: neighbors protecting the vulnerable; a killing; more mobilization for protection, care, and love; thousands peacefully protesting in sub-zero temperatures; clergy of all faiths gathering reminding us we follow a God of love, care, compassion, and justice FOR ALL! And then, another killing of another innocent 37-year old. Renée Good and Alex Pretti died loving and protecting their neighbors, if they knew them or not. They gave their lives standing up to the empire which reacted in fear, hate, and deadly violence. That is a deep call to discipleship.

Many are responding to that call here as well, here in Dunn County and through Western Wisconsin.

We all have different gifts and abilities to resist the empire in this time: contact your elected officials over and over and over again, pray, support businesses of those more at risk, financially support organizations in the Cities or here helping support individuals and families who are sheltering in place. If you want to know more specifics on this, contact me.

As I preached this past Sunday, we must stay alert to the empire and there is some hustle needed, AND we can not and will not allow the empire to steal our joy or dim the light of God's love, which we must shine, in these times.

While we may cry out as the psalmist, "How long, O Lord, how long?" we do so knowing that God is with us.

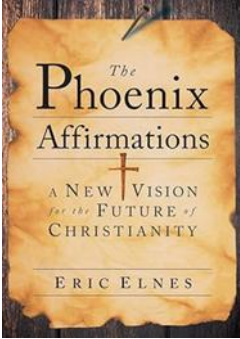
Share God's light and love as we work together in the ministry and mission Jesus has called us to.

Prayers and blessings for you~

Pastor René

From the Director of Faith Formation

Karen Miller



Affirmation Four is our focus during the month of February:

Engaging people authentically, as Jesus did, treating all as creations made in God's very image, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical or mental ability, nationality, or economic class.

What inspires or drives Christians to widen God's circle of love and compassion? Scripture? Tradition?

The Apostle Peter wasn't moved by either when he baptized the first group of non-Jewish people at Caesarea (Acts 10). Scripture and Jewish tradition forbade association with these "uncircumcised" and "unclean" people. But as Peter met with the group and began to preach, the Holy Spirit descended upon the believing Gentiles, and Peter ordered them baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, extending to them initiation into the Christian faith.

Martin Luther was not inspired to nail his 95 Theses to the door of the Wittenberg Church by established practices and the scriptural teachings of the Catholic Church. Contrary to papal authority, Luther demanded that the Church widen its sphere of transformative grace by promoting a new rereading of scripture, doing away with indulgence practices, even questioning the Pope's authority to grant indulges. Luther suffered personally for his effort to bring people back to the Path of Jesus, but the Reformation movement eventually inspired Christians to "work for the liberation of slaves in the United States and to ordain the first woman minister in America."¹

Christian tradition and scripture are as susceptible to being co-opted as any other system.² Keeping the circle of God's love and compassion has been used to keep "undesirable" people out while protecting the comfort and security of the "desirable" people. But as time passes, the list of people seeking to belong to God's party keeps growing. Imagine divorced people wanting full church membership and the ability to remarry! Imagine brown and black skinned Christian people demanding the same civil rights enjoyed by white skinned Christian people!

Imagine Christian people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender who want to practice their faith within a community that does not condemn or expel them!

Unfortunately, we as a "Christian" nation, have been moving toward a smaller circle of God's love and compassion for a number of decades now. Some have seen this change happening for

¹ Antoinette Brown Blackwell was ordained by the Congregational Church in 1852

² If you have time and interest, check out the article in Christianity Today, How Politicians Use the Bible (July 2025) at <https://www.christiancentury.org/online-columnists/how-politicians-use-bible>

a while; others thought it would never progress this far. But today we see and hear of behavior that looks and sounds like monarchy, oligarchy, empire, fascism, Nazism, and totalitarianism.

The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) movement is playing a subtle, but active role in downsizing God's circle of love and compassion. Having no use for religious pluralism, individual rights, or constitutional democracy, the NAR embraces ***Dominion theology***. This theology suggests that Christians should attempt to institute God's kingdom by conquering the "seven mountains" of society, which include (1) politics, (2) education, (3) media, (4) business, (5) religion, (6) family, and (7) entertainment.

Popularized by Lance Wallnau and Bill Johnson in *Invading Babylon*, the Seven Mountain Mandate (7M) becomes the means by which "Christians extend God's Kingdom...we slowly but surely exercise dominion over the seven spheres of human life." In a nutshell, the NAR seeks to abolish the secular state. (See how easy it is to co-opt Jesus' message!)

The Atlantic reports that, "*tens of millions of believers—about 40 percent of American Christians, including Catholics, according to a recent Denison University survey*" now embrace the NAR movement.(Feb 2025)³ The survey found that 42 percent of American Christians agree with the statement "*God wants Christians to stand atop the '7 Mountains of Society.'*"

If, in the midst of today's context, you are looking to tradition or scripture alone to widen God's circle of love and compassion, you will not be successful. Our Christian history teaches us that there are three things that move us to widen God's circle: a cross, an empty tomb, and the will to follow Jesus through both.⁴ Like the Apostle Peter and Martin Luther, "*we are called at the foot of the cross to surrender our desire for esteem in the beloved community, our thirst for personal security, and even the assurance that both Scripture and Tradition are fully on our side. Indeed, we are called to surrender everything.*"

When Christians lose all confidence in human ability, knowledge, and righteousness to break through barriers, we find something at the base of the cross that makes us walk on in God's love.

*May you walk on in God's love,
Karen*

³ See <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2025/02/new-apostolic-reformation-christian-movement-trump/681092/>

⁴ Eric Elnes. *The Phoenix Affirmations: A New Vision for the Future of Christianity*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 62.

Together for Tomorrow Update

This year Planned Giving is focusing on building awareness, understanding and financial resources to build our General Endowment.

The General Endowment is the investment arm of our church's finances, and it works similar to a retirement account. Every year we take 4% of the total value of the account to support our general fund. For example, last year the General Endowment gave \$5,359.68 to the church's operating fund (the balance of the General Endowment was \$133,992 x 4% = \$5,359.68). This gift was enough to pay for our Youth Program Coordinator, Music director, or Live stream coordinator. And not just for one year, but year after year! Thus, donating to this account helps the church now and every year in the future.

Thank you to all those who are helping to build the General Endowment through their recent gifts to the Together for Tomorrow initiative through Planned Giving. Gifts to the General Endowment from the following donors have been received since the kickoff on Heritage Sunday, November 23, 2025.

Kristen Billingsley

Andrew Mercil

Karen Miller

Rich and Jeanne Rothaupt

Margi and Ken Stauss

Tom Schmelzle

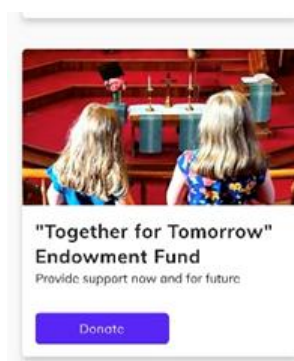
Lyn Collins, in memory of her husband, Jacq Collins

Sally Conklin, in memory of her mother, LaVonne Souther

Sheila Stori, in memory of her son, Hugh Williamson

Please join us at Applebees on Tuesday, February 3rd for the Dining to Donate fundraiser, which is being sponsored by the Cody Family for their Together for Tomorrow contribution. Thank you, April and Lisa!

It is easy to be a part of the Together for Tomorrow initiative! You can write a check and indicate "Together for Tomorrow" in the memo line, or give online through our website at Menomonieucc.org (donate, then "Together for Tomorrow" Endowment Fund). Thank you!!



OCWM

Our Church's Wider Mission is the name used to describe the work done by the United Church of Christ beyond the local church – through our Conferences, national ministries, and UCC-related institutions. Our Church's Wider Mission also describes the financial support given by UCC members and congregations that makes this broader mission possible.



OCWM has two parts: *OCWM Wisconsin Impact* (formerly, Basic Support) and *Four Special Mission Offerings*.

OCWM can be compared to a human hand. Wisconsin Impact is like a our thumb, crucial to the flexibility and dexterity of our hand. The four special mission offerings are like our fingers, helping us reach out. Together, OCWM Wisconsin Impact and the Four Mission Offerings

allow us to reach out to impact the lives of our neighbors, near and far.

OGHS – One Great Hour of Sharing – collected on the 4th Sunday of Lent (March 15, 2026)

Supports partners worldwide with ministries that fund health, education and agricultural development, emergency relief, refugee ministries, and international and domestic disaster response.

STC – Strengthen the Church – collected on Pentecost Sunday (May 24, 2026)

Supports church growth, pastoral and lay leadership development, and youth and young adult ministries within conferences.

NIN – Neighbors in Need – collected on the 1st Sunday of October (October 4, 2026)

Collected on World Communion Sunday, supports the Council for American Indian Ministry (CAIM) and Love of Church. It supports a variety of justice initiatives, advocacy efforts, and direct service projects through grants.

Christmas Fund – collected on the Sunday before Christmas (December 20, 2026)

Provides direct financial assistance to retired and active United Church of Christ authorized ministers and lay employees and their surviving spouses, including pension and health premiums.

The Mission for Peace and Justice Committee is responsible for messaging and promoting the *5 for 5 Special Mission Offerings*.⁵

⁵ More information about the 5 for 5 designation can be found at www.ucc.org/ocwm

February Worship Volunteers

	Flowers	Coffee Servers	Readers
February 1 st		Deb and John Wesolek	Kristen Billingsley
February 8 th Bridge / New Member Sunday	Margea Schultz	Diane Morehouse	Dawn Ascher
February 15 th Fool's Sunday	Doris Win		Heather Jerrie
February 18 th Ash Wednesday	n/a	n/a	
February 22 rd		Susan and Pinkney Hall	

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

Announcements

Food Drive for Stepping Stones - February

In the gospel of Matthew Jesus stated "I was hungry and you fed me..... Whatever you do for the least of these, you do for me."

There are many in our community who are in need and hungry. One way our church responds is our annual food drive for Stepping Stones. The Mission Committee will be collecting items during the month of February. There will be a designated area in the west entrance where you may leave your items.

Protein sources (peanut butter, canned meats, etc.), personal care items and diapers are always a special need. You may also donate by bringing or mailing a check to the church office indicating Food Drive in the memo. Thank you for your continued generosity!

THANK YOU!

Tour of Homes

On behalf of the Women's Fellowship, we would like to thank all the people who helped out with the Tour of Homes this year to make it a big success. As the saying goes, "it takes a village". It could not be truer regarding the Tour. Thanks so much for contributing to the Tour which in turn contributes to the church and to the entire community.

Wisconsin Foster Closet

The Wisconsin Foster Closet appreciated the donations we gave them before the holidays. On each visit, I learn more about this wonderful organization. Care Ministries recently donated money to them and on that visit I asked Tammy Wood-Garr to write an article for our church explaining the mission of this organization. Let's remember this organization throughout the year. Margi Stauss-Care Ministries

The Wisconsin Foster Closet is a vital resource for foster and kinship families across our communities. With more than 11,000 children in Wisconsin currently living in the care of someone other than their parents, the need is both overwhelming and heartbreaking. The Wisconsin Foster Closet serves children throughout the entire state, with a primary focus on 14 counties—Dunn, Chippewa, Eau Claire, Polk, Pierce, Pepin, Barron, Buffalo, Clark, Taylor, Trempealeau, St. Croix, Rusk, and Jackson—yet no child is ever turned away.

The need for support exists year-round for these innocent children who are displaced through no fault of their own. Providing clothing, hygiene items, stuffed animals, blankets, and basic necessities is just the beginning of helping children feel loved, supported, and valued during one of the most difficult moments of their lives. The Closet is entirely volunteer-run and funded solely through generous donations, working tirelessly to raise a minimum of \$2,000 each month to cover basic operating expenses.

Looking ahead, the dream is to one day have a permanent building with space to host in-house support groups and efficiency apartments—creating a safe, supportive bridge for the incredible youth aging out of foster care who are too often left to navigate adulthood on their own.

Blessings,

Tammy Wood-Garr

Ash Wednesday Offering - Kaleidoscope Center

The Mission Committee has decided that for the Ash Wednesday service on February 18, the offering will go to the Kaleidoscope Center here in Menomonie. The Kaleidoscope Center is one of the programs under the Wisconsin Milkweed Alliance, which is a peer run organization where all those involved in the organization identify as someone who has experienced trauma, substance abuse, and other life situations and is committed to providing support from a peer perspective.

The Kaleidoscope Center is a drop-in center that provides a safe place and peer support and programs for anyone who is dealing and coping with a challenging issue in their life. We are fortunate to have this resource in our Community. They have indicated that they would be thrilled and grateful to be recipients of our Ash Wednesday offering. If you wish to donate but will not be at the service, you may write a check out to Milkweed Alliance and enter Kaleidoscope Center in the memo. As you always are, please be generous. Thank you!

Women's Fellowship Meeting

On Feb. 18th, Wed., there will be a Tour of Homes meeting at 11:00. This will be to discuss the future of the Tour and to do planning around it. Following that meeting we will have the WF meeting at 12:30. We will elect officers and vote on the organizations to donate Tour dollars to. An invitation is going out to all the women of the church to please consider a leadership roll with the tour and/or WF. Please join us for the meetings and feel free to bring a bag lunch so you don't miss lunchtime but we will have treats and coffee for you. Looking forward to seeing you on Feb. 18th!

Volunteers Needed for Muffin Mondays

Muffin Mondays will be held on the Mondays beginning with March 23rd and the last day being May 4th. Muffin Mondays is a lovely, friendly outreach that we do each fall and spring for our UW-Stout neighbors. Regular bakers usually bake one dozen muffins each week. They are able to contact a substitute baker if they are unavailable. Muffins can be delivered to the church on Sunday or after the office opens on Monday (9:00am). We also have volunteers who hand out muffins to the Stout students in the morning (leave the church no later than 9:40am). Handing out the muffins takes less than one hour. We have received very positive feedback from the students.

We have been hosting Muffin Mondays for many years and would like to continue this tradition. We are mainly seeking additional people to hand out the muffins or become a regular baker. The following people have agreed to continue to help with Muffin Mondays. Please feel free to contact any of them for more information.

Regular Bakers: Lyn Collins, June Grambo, Rose McLean, Sara Nagler and Deb Wesolek

Substitute Bakers: Cheryl Huenink, Marie Koch, Diane Mercil, Joan Sandfort and Marilyn Winsor.

Hand out Muffins: Bill and June Grambo, Diane Mercil, Tom Schmelzle and Becky Staiger.

If you are interested in helping with Muffin Mondays, please contact Rose McLean at pumpkinandangels@gmail.com or call 715-235-6324. Thank you.

Where is my Church Photo Directory???

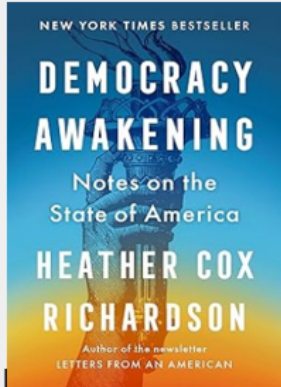
Due to unforeseen circumstances, we experienced a production delay while preparing the directory for printing. We now have the necessary resources and are taking the final steps to submit the directory for printing. Hopefully, your directory will be available soon. Thank you for your patience.

Margy Ingram

PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIAN DISCUSSION OFFERINGS IN 2026

Through the Office of Faith Formation
First Congregational United Church of Christ
420 Wilson Avenue, Menomonie, WI
Discussions Open to Public

Contact Karen Miller, Director of Faith Formation, with questions,
or to request a book for any of the discussions this Winter/Spring.



FEBRUARY– *Democracy Awakening: Notes on the State of America* by Heather Cox Richardson (September 2023)

In-Person discussions on Sundays, February 8, 15 & 22, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., Room 1, Lower Level, Fellowship Hall, First Congregational UCC, Menomonie.

At a time when the very foundations of American democracy seem under threat, the lessons of the past offer a road map for navigating a moment of political crisis. In *Democracy Awakening*, acclaimed historian Heather Cox traces the tumultuous journey of American democracy, tracing the roots of Donald Trump's "authoritarian experiment" to the earliest days of the republic. She examines the historical forces that have led to the current political climate, showing how modern conservatism has preyed upon a disaffected population, weaponizing language and promoting false history to consolidate power.

Richardson wrangles a chaotic news feed into a story that pivots effortlessly from the Founders to the abolitionists to Nixon to the January 6 insurrection. Richardson reminds us that democracy requires constant vigilance and participation from all of us, showing how we, as a nation, can take the lessons of the past to secure a more just and equitable future.

Thank You!

A personal MIIGWECH to those of you contributing to staff Christmas gifts! Your generosity, not just at Christmas, but throughout the year, always amazes me.

Karen.

Draft Minutes of Church Council Meeting

First Congregational UCC, Menomonie, WI

January 19, 2026

Roll Call: Luci Black (Membership/Fellowship), Kathy Colvin (Worship), 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). Also attending via zoom, Aly Kluge.

The Council was called to order at 11:32 a.m. by the Moderator, Jeanne.

Deanna offered a prayer.

Andrew moved approval of the consent agenda, including the December 16th minutes, the December Treasurer's Report, the Deacon Reports and the Pastor's report be approved. It was seconded by Margi and approved by the Council.

1. Action Items

- a. René reported on two trainings of more than 400 participants for Monarca responses to ICE. This details information on ways to help those who are afraid, how to respond to ICE, buying groceries for those who won't go out, and taking care of our neighbors.
- b. Jeanne shared the new budget that will be going out to the congregation. Tom thanked Jeanne for help with the budget spreadsheet. Tom reviewed costs including possible insurance savings. We will be very close to meeting the budget for this year. Luci moved and Agnes seconded the goal budget. It was approved.
- c. Carol reported that Sunday begins the Stewardship Campaign. We will start having Stewardship moments this next week. The first letter will go out once materials are received.
- d. Rick reported for the Nominating Committee. The open positions were discussed. He asked for volunteers to help with recruiting. Suggestions for committee members were made.
- e. Andrew reported on the Wall Dog updates. The event will be Wednesday June 24th through Sunday the 28th. We will be recruiting people to serve as church caretakers as well as to prepare a cookout dinner on Thursday so that Thursday's Table can have the kitchen.
- f. René discussed what has been happening with security in the church and asking everyone to carefully lock the doors whenever possible.

- g. Deanna asked for up to \$350 for new microphones to help with sound. Carol moved that we approve the motion with the cost being taken from the Capital Campaign and Margi seconded the motion. The motion was approved.

Deanna also addressed substitutions for applause during worship. She will introduce the idea during her Stewardship moment. We can show appreciation through silence, waving or possible use of “Encouragement” cards. The Music committee is in full support of the idea.

- h. Rick led the bylaw review. In Section 3, 1 through 3 are good as is. Eliminate 4. He reported discussing these options with Ken Scofield.

Purposed-Section 3. PRIVILEGES AND VOTING

1. Only active and associate members may vote on matters affecting the interests of this church.
2. All active and associate members are eligible to hold elected positions in the church.
3. Youth Representatives elected to the Council who have not been received as active or associate members of this church shall be granted special voting privileges in Council matters during their term of Council office.

2. Follow-up

- a. The church photo directory is still being finished due to volunteer availability.
- b. Planned giving will be sending thank yous to donors but not campaigning. The interest earned is important to the needs of the church. The campaign will pick up again in the fall.
- c. Upcoming events were reviewed including a Spring Arts Festival for Sunday afternoon, April 19.

The next Council meeting will be on Tuesday, February 17, 2026, at 11:30 a.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Jill Schwebs, Clerk