

First Congregational
United Church of Christ
Gaylord

December 2020

*Embracing people at every age and every stage of life, helping them
to become the most loving version of themselves possible.*

First Congregational
United Church of Christ
218 W. Second Street
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Pastor: Rev. Greg Watling
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Moderator: Rokko Jans
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**Communications
Coordinator:** Jessica Benoit
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Church Service: Sunday, 10 am
**at this time, all services are being
held virtually. Please visit our web-
site.*

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From Your Pastor

CHRISTMAS AND COVID 2020

Back in February, when the whole pandemic began to hit in the United States, everyone hoped that we could conquer it quickly. We thought with a shut down, we would stop this virus in its tracks. For a while, this was working. The problem is this pandemic is not going away. In fact, it is getting worse. This calls for even more creativity on our part. It seems likely that we will not be able to have in person worship anytime soon, including for Christmas. This hurts a great deal. This is hard. This is not what anyone wanted. This crisis will call for us to plumb the depths of our faith and our character to weather this storm well. This community, though scattered, is here for you and for each other as we weather the storm together. Don't hesitate to call on me, or on another member of the congregation even if it's just to talk. Isolation is difficult, especially in the winter up here. Please don't try to do this all on your own.

Our Advent theme this year will be gathering. People and animals came from far away places to see Jesus in the manger. However, they didn't all come at the same time. Contrary to popular belief, all the characters we know well from the story came to see Jesus over the course of days, even weeks. I think this can be instructive for us as we can't all gather at once to celebrate the birth of Christ. We will have a virtual Christmas Eve service.

Continued on next page ...

One way we would like to gather is following the service on Christmas Eve (which I believe is at 5 p.m.), we would gather at 6 p.m. in the adjacent parking lots around the church and sing Silent Night together. We could stay in our cars, or stand just outside them, but socially distanced, light our candles (if the weather allows) and enjoy this great memory that we all have of Christmas Eve together. No, it won't be the same. However, it is one way to be close to one another and remain safe. The Council may put more detail to this plan, so stay tuned to your email. But for now, plan to come at 6. Bring your own candle, or we'll supply one. Bring your mask. Dress warmly. Unless there's a blizzard, we'll gather and sing Silent Night. More details to follow.

Not having holidays, the way we're used to will be difficult, but I wonder if it will lead us to a deeper understanding of that first Christmas. Mary and Joseph all alone, with no place to go and feeling so abandoned. And yet, through the miracle of Christmas, God visited them. Even if we're alone this Christmas, perhaps God will visit us in a miraculous way this year? Perhaps through this suffering our faith will grow stronger, and we'll find even more ways to make community.

I wish you all a Merry Christmas. Know you are loved, both by God and by this community of faith.

In Christ,

Pastor Greg



FROM YOUR MODERATOR

This is my final moderator's message, as my term is up at the end of the year; what a fulfilling period of service it has been!

Most years, the moderator is a fairly low-key position, chairing the church council and serving as the lay leader of the church for legal purposes. During many years, one might not even notice which of us has volunteered to hold the position. But in the absence of a pastor, and in the midst of a global pandemic, new responsibilities arose for all of us, and moderator, council, committees and congregation cheerfully met the challenges one by one.

Looking back on the last three years, there is so much to be grateful for. Because of the committee restructuring we did under Toby's guidance, we were in good shape to carry on after his departure. The Reaching In and Reaching Out Teams and the Trustees continued to skillfully handle the concerns of the church, and the Council took up the special responsibility of searching for and calling a settled pastor to serve our congregation. The "path of discernment" is both arduous and subtle, but hard work and prayer has brought exciting new leadership to us in Rev. Greg Watling, who has hit the ground running in his first weeks in Gaylord. Everyone has done their part to keep our community thriving through the crises of these last years, and to each of you are sent profound thanks.

Our moderator-elect, Mischelle Stone, is well-positioned to serve in the months ahead; her years of dedicated work on the Council have earned her the respect of her peers, and she has the knowledge and skills to do a fantastic job in the new position. Let us give Mischelle and Pastor Greg the support they deserve as we begin a vibrant new chapter in the life of our church!

Thank you, Rokko!

Reaching In

A useful tool that keeps our congregation connected in spirit is our “prayer list,” printed every week in our bulletin. We are alerted about who in our circle needs attention—physical or spiritual—and reminded of who may benefit from our prayers and actions.

In an effort to make the list more effective, the Reaching In team has adopted these guidelines: 1) permission must be granted before a name appears on the list 2) a name will appear on the list for a period of two months 3) please contact the church office to add a name, remove a name, or extend the time that a name appears

In addition to those on the prayer list, there may be others in our midst who need attention; please let Pastor Greg and the Reaching In Team know how we may serve.



Reaching Out Update:

Reaching Out will continue collecting new hats, gloves, socks until December 20th.

Community Meal News:

Thank you to everyone who helped with the Community Meal on Friday, Nov. 20th!

We served turkey, green bean casserole, mashed potatoes, stuffing, and rolls.

For dessert we offered apple and pumpkin pie—we had a wonderful response to our request for pies; some families were even able to take an entire pie home!

We also had many of our own offer their time to help prepare and serve!





Report from Trustees— December 2020

- By the time you view this newsletter, we will have completed our “formal” Stewardship Drive, with our Service of Dedication scheduled for Sunday, November 22. If you have not yet returned your pledge of commitment, it’s not too late so ***please*** send your pledge to our church office at 218 W. Second Street in Gaylord. We know that “church” is much more than a building, and our ministry continues in unique and important ways throughout the current pandemic.

- As of mid-November, a total of 22 pledges had been returned, getting us almost half way to our goal of 45. If you are in need of another copy of the 2021 pledge form, please email Jessica or call our church office and we will be happy to mail another form.

“Making an annual pledge allows you to show support for your spiritual home, while providing funds that enable ministry to happen.”

- We continue to extend appreciation to our many church participants who have been faithful in mailing their financial contributions during these times of social distancing. Through November 8 (43 weeks), income from tithes and offerings were below budget by \$4,500 or 5.6%. Until we are able to safely meet in person, we urge everyone to mail your offerings to our church office at 218 W. Second St. so that our vibrant church ministry can continue.
- We look forward to the time when we can again worship together in person. Meanwhile, we are most grateful for your continued financial support.

First Congregational UCC Gaylord - Financials YTD

<u>Through October 31, 2020</u>			
	Budget	Actual	Diff
TOTAL INCOME	\$81,067	\$ 71,048	(\$10,019)
EXPENSES			
Total Payroll	\$60,942	\$17,994	\$42,948
Total Facility	\$17,208	\$18,914	(\$1,706)
Total Other Operating	\$8,750	\$11,633	(\$2,883)
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$86,900	\$48,541	\$38,359
NET INCOME	(\$5,833)	\$22,507	\$28,341

5 for 5

from your Reaching Out Team

OCWM (Our Church's Wider Mission)

Basic support for the Michigan Conference and National Settings.

Collected on an ongoing basis

One Great Hour of Sharing

Supports partners in countries with ministries that fund health, education and agricultural development, emergency relief, refugee ministries and both international and domestic response.

Collected in April

Strengthen the Church

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

Collected around Pentecost

Neighbors in Need

One third supports Council for American Indian Ministry and two-thirds is administered to Justice and Witness Ministers to support a variety projects. Due to Covid-19 the elected UCC officers have deemed this to be a priority.

Collected in October

Christmas Fund

Provides direct financial assistance to retired UCC ministers and lay employees and spouses.

Collected in December



Join us for this Advent Season as we follow those who gathered to welcome the New Born King. Each service will feature a message, scripture and music of the season. Please encourage your friends and family to join us for this special time by either going to our web site or joining us on Facebook. Even in this time of separation, let us be together for this celebration of the birth of Jesus.

November 29

Angelic Announcements (Luke 1: 26-38)

December 6

Meeting the family (Luke 1: 39-55)

December 13

I Have Seen the Light - a presentation by some of the youth/children

December 20

Let Heaven and Nature Sing

December 24

Celebration of the Gathering - a service of messages, scripture and music.
Following the Christmas Eve Virtual service, everyone is invited to gather in the neighboring parking lots and side streets to have a socially-distanced, candlelight singing of Silent Night.
We will sing at 6 p.m., so come a little early. Bring your own candle, or we will provide one.
Please mask and stay at least six feet from those who do not live with you.
See you at 6 on Christmas Eve!

~ In Our Prayers ~

During the month of December, the UNA is holding the Atlanta Church in prayer.

Helen Mate – as she recovers from surgery to treat her recent bladder cancer diagnosis.

Brenda Brummel's sister-in-law, Alma – as she deals with health issues.

Mardee Storing's daughter, Lori – as she has now been diagnosed with brain cancer. Please also keep Lori's family in your prayers, as well as Mardee and Don.

Chuck Falk – as he recently underwent heart surgery.

Dave Henson – as he recovers from having a pacemaker put in last month.

The Boughner Family – as they grieve Becky's passing.

Tony Fobar-Dockery's Father – as he recovers from injuries.

Mirja "Miss Sue" Hoeft – as she recovers from a serious fall, leaving her with a fractured shoulder. She is currently resting at her daughter's home, downstate.

Jim's Brother Bernie Boughner – as he deals with health issues.

The Family & Friends of Eric Larsen – as they grieve his passing. Eric was a longtime friend of Don Storing.

The Andrews Family – on the death of Laurie's husband, Mike.

The Family of Shirley Matevia – as they grieve her passing.

Carol Leser's sister, Barbara Loomis – whose Gladwin home was flooded in the mid-Michigan catastrophe.

Bo Leser – As he continues to experience health issues and is awaiting testing.

All of those working on the frontline to fight COVID-19, those that are considered essential workers, those without jobs, those ill, and those affected by this pandemic in anyway.

Marcus and Samantha Fray – as they navigate Marcus's ALS diagnosis. Marcus is married to George and Judy Dunn's granddaughter. He is in his thirties with two small children.

See the prayer request / joys sheet in the Narthex to add to this list.

If someone has been inadvertently omitted or if it is time to remove a name, please let the church office know.



Prayer Requests

BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

December Birthdays

- 1 *Ryan Watling*
- 3 *Terry House*
- 4 *Travis House*
- 5 *Cindy Goller*
- 5 *Sandra Soderberg*
- 8 *Leila Jeanne Greer*
- 14 *Mike Dockery*
- 16 *Ian Hotelling*
- 19 *Paul Kaczanowski*
- 25 *Ilah Weaver*

December Anniversaries

- 21 *Joel & Joanie Sietsema*
- 22 *George & Carol Lienerth*



December 2020

Sun Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat

		1	2 Council 7pm (as needed) Church Book Club, 1pm	3 Virtual Bible Study, 11am	4 Drive-Thru Community Meal, 4pm	5
6 <i>Communion Worship 2nd Sunday of Advent</i>	7 Reaching In, Noon (As Needed)	8	9 Council 7pm (as needed)	10 Virtual Bible Study, 11am	11 Drive-Thru Community Meal, 4pm	12
13 <i>3rd Sunday of Advent</i>	14 Reaching In, Noon (As Needed)	15	16 Council 7pm (as needed)	17 Virtual Bible Study, 11am	18 Drive-Thru Community Meal, 4pm	19
20 <i>4th Sunday of Advent</i>	21 Reaching In, Noon (As Needed)	22	23 Council 7pm (as needed)	24 <i>Christmas Eve Virtual Worship</i>	25 <i>Christmas Day</i>	26
27 Virtual Worship	28 Reaching In, Noon (As Needed)	29	30 Council 7pm (as needed) Church Book Club, 1pm	31 <i>New Years Eve</i>		

All Sundays will have virtual coffee hour at 11am unless otherwise notified.