



February, 2024

*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

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Church Service: Sunday, 10 am



Pastor's Column – February 2024 “Hard to Believe”

Remember back in December when it was so warm, and we had no snow (or little) for Christmas? People wondered if we'd ever have winter at all. I'm sure some businesses in our area that rely on snow and winter activities were concerned for their bottom line. Others may have been glad at the prospect of no snow for winter, and warmer temperatures. Nevertheless, it was hard to imagine that winter would come, even though we knew in the back of our mind that Gaylord and Northern Michigan rarely go snow and cold free.

Faith is the same way. As the book of Hebrews relates, faith is a thing unseen. Faith is believing something that is hard to prove by looking out the window and taking a temperature. To look around our world, it wouldn't be hard to imagine people struggling with faith. Is God really active? Will the visions of Revelation (the final joy of reconciliation) actually happen? Do we, as people of faith, actually have a conviction about things unseen?

~Continued~

It's a hard question for some among us to answer. Maybe it's tough for all of us from time to time. It is okay to ask questions and to wonder sometime what will happen as we look around and see signs that what we believe to be true doesn't have a lot of evidence to support it right now. War is rampant. People are hurting everywhere. Society seems to be falling apart. We're just not sure.

Meanwhile, our Bible and the story of the life of Jesus remind us that amid the worst that the world has to dish out, God surprises us in ways we could never imagine. Whether it's the people of Moses finding their freedom, or the resurrection of Jesus, or a host of other "unbelievable" surprises, God is never finished. Love does win. And just like winters in Northern Michigan, God's activity may surprise us. But that doesn't mean that God is unreliable, or inactive, or that our faith is misplaced.

Yes, it is sometimes hard to believe. But our faith is real. May you find the hope that comes from knowing God is active, even when it's hard to see and hard to believe.

In Christ's Love,

Pastor Greg

SNOW BLOWING

Thanks to our dedicated volunteers who have done a great job with keeping our walks clear this winter. We could use one more person. Typically, the snow blowers have signed up for a week and keep the walks clear, especially on Monday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday for church activities.

If you will help in February, March (and beyond?), please sign up on the credenza in the fellowship hall, or speak to a member of the staff or Trustees. The church has an easy starting snowblower that make the task easier. Very little shoveling is needed.

A Brave and Startling Truth

Friday, January 26, 2024

We, this people, on a small and lonely planet
Traveling through casual space
Past aloof stars, across the way of indifferent suns
To a destination where all signs tell us
It is possible and imperative that we learn
A brave and startling truth

And when we come to it
To the day of peacemaking
When we release our fingers
From fists of hostility
And allow the pure air to cool our palms

When we come to it
When the curtain falls on the minstrel show of hate
And faces sooted with scorn are scrubbed clean
When battlefields and coliseum
No longer rake our unique and particular sons and
daughters
Up with the bruised and bloody grass
To lie in identical plots in foreign soil

When the rapacious storming of the churches
The screaming racket in the temples have ceased
When the pennants are waving gaily
When the banners of the world tremble
Stoutly in the good, clean breeze

When we come to it
When we let the rifles fall from our shoulders
And children dress their dolls in flags of truce
When land mines of death have been removed
And the aged can walk into evenings of peace
When religious ritual is not perfumed
By the incense of burning flesh
And childhood dreams are not kicked awake
By nightmares of abuse

When we come to it
Then we will confess that not the Pyramids
With their stones set in mysterious perfection
Nor the Gardens of Babylon
Hanging as eternal beauty
In our collective memory

Not the Grand Canyon
Kindled into delicious color
By Western sunsets

A Brave and Startling Truth Con't.

Nor the Danube, flowing its blue soul into Europe
Not the sacred peak of Mount Fuji
Stretching to the Rising Sun
Neither Father Amazon nor Mother Mississippi who,
without favor,
Nurture all creatures in the depths and on the shores
These are not the only wonders of the world

When we come to it
We, this people, on this minuscule and kithless globe
Who reach daily for the bomb, the blade and the dagger
Yet who petition in the dark for tokens of peace
We, this people on this mote of matter
In whose mouths abide cankerous words
Which challenge our very existence
Yet out of those same mouths
Come songs of such exquisite sweetness
That the heart falters in its labor
And the body is quieted into awe

We, this people, on this small and drifting planet
Whose hands can strike with such abandon
That in a twinkling, life is sapped from the living
Yet those same hands can touch with such healing, irre-
sistible tenderness
That the haughty neck is happy to bow
And the proud back is glad to bend

When we come to it
We, this people, on this wayward, floating body
Created on this earth, of this earth
Have the power to fashion for this earth
A climate where every man and every woman
Can live freely without sanctimonious piety
Without crippling fear

When we come to it
We must confess that we are the possible
We are the miraculous, the true wonder of this world
That is when, and only when
We come to it.

-- Maya Angelou



"TUNING YOUR HEART" a service for Ash Wednesday

Wednesday, February 14, 5:00 p.m.

Beginning with Ash Wednesday, we enter a new theme for Lent called "Wandering Hearts". It is from Sanctified Art, the same material we used for Advent. Rich in art, music, reflection and new experiences, our theme delves into Peter's life and journey with Jesus. Most of us know Peter, but we learned about him in a scattered way. This way, we explore many of Peter's triumphs and tragedies, and perhaps see ourselves in him.

Our Ash Wednesday service will combine some music, some reflection time, and maybe even some brief conversation with others who attend. Of course, ashes will be offered to those who wish to receive them, but even if you don't, this service could be very moving. At this point, we don't believe we'll be able to livestream, but we will let you know if that changes.

The service will last no longer than an hour, but perhaps shorter, depending on how much we engage with the material offered.

You are invited to attend, even if you have no desire to receive ashes. Please see Pastor Greg with any questions.

February 2024

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
First Congregational UCC				1 Pastor Greg Out of Office Bible Study, 11 AM Wmn's Fellowship 12:15 PM Choir, 4 PM	2 Pastor Greg Out of Office Gratitude Group, 6 AM Community Meal, 4 PM Talking Circle, 7- 9 PM	3 Pastor Greg Out of Office
4 Pastor Greg Out of Office Worship 10 AM No first Sunday til March	5 Pastor Greg Out of Office Gratitude Group, 6 AM Fellowship Hall in use 2:30 - 4:30 PM	6 Fellows hip Hall in use 2:30 - 4:30 PM	7 Gratitude Group, 6 AM	8 Bible Study, 11 AM Choir, 4 PM	9 Gratitude Group, 6 AM Community Meal, 4 PM Talking Circle, 7- 9 PM	10
11 Worship 10 AM	12 Gratitude Group, 6 AM Reaching In @ noon Fellows hip Hall in use 2:30 - 4:30 PM	13	14 Trustees, 7 PM Ash Wednesday, Church open 5-6 PM	15 Bible Study, 11 AM Choir, 4 PM	16 Gratitude Group, 6 AM Community Meal, 4 PM Talking Circle, 7- 9 PM	17
18 Worship 10 AM	19 Gratitude Group, 6 AM Reaching Out, 7 PM VIA ZOOM	20	21 Gratitude Group, 6 AM Gratitude Group, 6 AM Trustees 7 PM VIA ZOOM	22 Bible Study, 11 AM Choir, 4 PM	23 Gratitude Group, 6 AM Community Meal, 4 PM Talking Circle, 7- 9 PM	24
25 Worship 10 AM	26 Gratitude Group, 6 AM	27	28 Gratitude Group, 6 AM Church Book Club 1 PM	29 Bible Study, 11 AM Choir, 4 PM		



Birthdays & Anniversaries

Birthdays:

- 3 Alan Trendera**
- 5 DeLayni Brown**
- 6 Joanie Sietsema**
- 7 Callie English**
- 7 Evelyn Pratt**
- 10 Margaret Hellenberg**
- 18 Aysia House**
- 27 Jay Anderson**

Anniversaries:

- 28 Jim & Vicky Rigney**



Caring Closet Needs

Mona Viviano continues to work diligently on the Caring Closet. She checks it regularly, tracks which items seem to be in demand, and keeps it all organized. Recently she has noticed an increased need in baby supplies and boys gloves/mittens, socks, and hats.

We are in need of new or gently used onesies, hats, baby blankets, or mittens, as well as boys gloves, mittens and hats.

Thank you in advance for your support of this project.



One Great Hour of Sharing

Submitted by Cindy Goller

One Great Hour of Sharing® (OGHS) is one of 5 special mission offerings that our church supports throughout the year. This Lenten Offering supports the disaster, refugee, and development ministries of the United Church of Christ within Wider Church Ministries. We will be asking for contributions to One Great Hour of Sharing starting 2/18/24 through Palm Sunday, 3/24/24.

You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world.

Matthew 5:14-15 (The Message)



"This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine... Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine..."

If Jesus had a playlist of music, surely this familiar hymn would be among the Top Five.

Jesus teaches that faith calls for action. Sharing our light, as the diverse and colorful expression of God's love here on earth, leads to making blankets, staffing food pantries, cooking meals, building houses and schools, signing petitions for worthy causes, and protesting injustices. A simple song with a simple message—our light is on a light stand, for all to see—shine and share.

On any given day, light is shining because we are there through our gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing.

Your contributions make a difference. Your dollars count. Give generously.

Share the light.

~ In Our Prayers ~

During the month of December, the UNA is holding the
Cheboygan First Congregational UCC in prayer.

Vicky Rigney – as she recuperates from her heart valve replacement.

Dr. Edward, Bradley, Lauren Duski, and family – as they grieve the sudden loss of wife and mother, Dr. Janis Duski. Service will be private.

Stacy Wright, friend of Kathy Menkes – Stacy has been battling metastatic breast cancer and is currently awaiting news of further treatment options. Meanwhile, Stacy's mother-in-law has been battling lung cancer which has recently spread.

Trish Jachym and family – as Heather, Trish's granddaughter, passed away recently after a battle with cancer.

Tom and Jenni Johnson – as Tom has begun chemo treatments.

Carol Leser and family – as they grieve Bo's passing.

Jason Peterman and family - as he has been having some health problems. Also, his stepmother, Leona, passed away last week. Services for her are today in Onaway, MI. Let's keep them in our prayers as they grieve her passing.

English Family – as Jordan & Jeffrey's dad, Michael, passed away. Prayers for the boys and Natassja as they grieve his loss. Prayers for the entire family as they struggle to regain custody of Max.

The English Family – as they manage medical and family challenges.

Gloria House's granddaughter, Madison Crawford – as she suffers from cataplexy in narcolepsy along with other neurological struggles. She is at home and adjusting to new medication, which seems to be helping, but Madison is still in need of prayers.

Ariah House – as she is finally home but still in need of prayers. She will be traveling to Grand Rapids for monthly infusions.

Prayer requests are received by the church office. Names will appear on the list for two months; please let the office know if this time needs to be extended, or if it is time to remove a name.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Prayer Cards: In the pews, you will find prayer concern cards. When possible, to ensure accuracy in the bulletin and newsletter, please use the new cards.

Directory – If at any time you have changes, please forward them. You can access the most up-to-date directory via our weekly eblast or stop in the office for a copy. I appreciate your continued input.

Food Pantry – needs a few more volunteers. Please contact Don Storing if interested.





2023 Flower Schedule

January: *Margaret Hafner and Dave Henson*

February: *Margaret Hellenberg*

March: *Jeannine Wambold*

April: *Cathy Otto*

May: *Mary Evans*

June: *Joanie Sietsema*

July: *Helen Mate*

August: *Evelyn Pratt*

September: *Sallie Anderson*

October: *Vicky Rigney*

November: *Louanne Spearman*

December: *Christian Ed.*





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

Received to date: \$744

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 March

Received to date: \$220

Strengthen the Church

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

Collected around Pentecost

Received to date: \$75 (2023)

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

Received to date: \$256 (2023)

Christmas Fund

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

Collected in December

Received to date: \$694 (2023)

As of April, our donations to Blanket Sunday totaled \$509

Maui Fires (\$411)





Current Meeting Times

All are welcome to “attend” these meetings except where noted otherwise.

Reaching In* will meet the first Monday of each month at noon:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84945686588>

Reaching Out will meet the third Monday of each month at 7 PM:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83640729481>

Council will meet the after worship. Check monthly calendar for Specific dates.:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85297662581>

Trustees will meet the third Wednesday of each month at 7:00 PM:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83432888287>

Bible Study meets Thursdays at 11am

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84612895017>