

First Congregational
United Church of Christ
Gaylord

January 2021

*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
Gaylord, MI 49735
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Pastor: Rev. Greg Watling
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Moderator: Maggie Wallin
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**Communications
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Church Service: Sunday, 10 am
*In-person worship has resumed—
please see inside for details and*



Pastor's Column – January 2022

I receive Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation from the Center for Action and Contemplation each day. On Thursday, December 2, Rev. Jacqui Lewis wrote a powerful meditation about the purpose of religion. I believe she identifies well the difference between healthy religion and toxic religion. May the religion practiced at our church mirror Rev. Lewis' reflection.

The following is used by permission of the Center for Action and Contemplation.

God As Fierce Love

Like many of us, CAC friend Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis has struggled with both the possibility and the pain-points of religion. Healthy religion unites but toxic religion uses God to create more separation and hurt in the world:

Before I made my living talking about God, thinking about God, writing about God, I was a person struggling to have a relationship with God. I had been given a god to believe in, some mixture of what my parents believed, what my preachers taught over the years, and what my imagination made of the parts of the Bible I read. In my early twenties, I often had more doubt than faith—doubt in what I'd learned, doubt in what those teachings implied for my life and for the world. I was frustrated; how is a God whose name is Love appropriated to justify violence, hatred, and enmity around the world? Over and over again, I was struck by how religion—which means to bind together—gave humankind license to hurt others, to put people out, to leave people behind. . . .

In its truest sense, religion should reconnect human beings—bind them again—to the creation, to one another, to the Divine, to Love. Rituals, song, prayer, preaching, reflection, dancing, meditation—all of these religious practices are intended to bind us together in love and restrain us from harming one another. Religion should reconnect us to the ground of our being, to the source of our existence. . . . Religion should help us see how our biases about color, gender, sexuality, and class cause deep hurt to both body and soul.

Jacqui suggests there are harmful images and beliefs about God that need to be let go of before we are able to embrace God as Love:

Unfortunately, religion is too often weaponized. Wars are waged in the name of religion. People are enslaved and terrorized in the name of religion. Wealth has been amassed on the backs of the poor in the name of religion. I'm a Christian pastor, and these are things *my* tribe has done, all in the name of Jesus. Jews were exterminated, in the name of a poor, brown, *Jewish* baby who was at one time homeless and at another a refugee.

If humankind is to thrive, we need to let go of any religion that wounds and kills. Some of what we believe about God is *actually* about us; at times we create God in our own image. In other words, some of us imagine *God* as punitive, angry, and vengeful because these are aspects of ourselves that make us feel powerful and protected, rather than vulnerable. But we need to exercise a spiritual imagination free of fear and shed the constraints of unhealthy religion. Hate-filled religion needs an exorcism!

In the interest of exorcising hate, I find myself preaching and teaching folks to see through the eyes of Love, to believe with all their heart in Love. I invite them to worship Love, to pray to Love, to be part of Love.

Jacqui Lewis, *Fierce Love: A Bold Path to Ferocious Courage and Rule-Breaking Kindness that Can Heal the World* (Harmony: 2021), 129–130, 193–194.



THANK YOU!!

Thank you to all of you for your thoughtfulness this Christmas. Cards, well-wishes, baked goods, and the collection of a gift of money were so much appreciated. It is my pleasure to serve among you, and I was so surprised by all of your gifts. Most of all, I appreciate you for being you, striving to be the best version of yourselves possible. I strive to do the same and appreciate all the love here.

I also want to say thank you for all the extra hours that Rokko put in to make a beautiful musical offering for Christmas Eve. And, to all of those who sang, played instruments, greeted people, decorated the sanctuary...you name it! You are all appreciated a great deal.

With love,
Pastor Greg

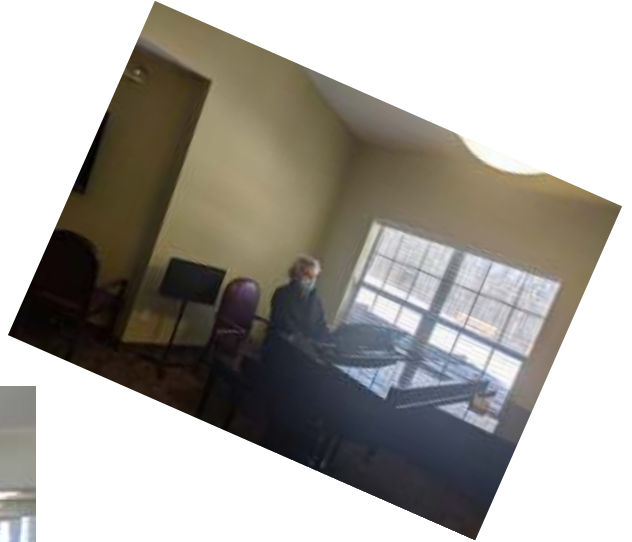


I would also like to thank everyone for their thoughtful and very generous gifts to me! I am left speechless by your Christmas wishes and love. I am so grateful to have such beautiful people in my life!

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

Lots of Love,
Jessica

CHRISTMAS CAROLING 2021



Places

The Brook

Aspen Ridge

Hellenbergs

Sparr Area

Thanks



Report from Your Trustees – January 2022 Newsletter

Although we held our formal dedication of pledges in November, it's not too late to turn in your pledge for 2022 if you've not already done so. We are at 73% of our goal in terms of pledges returned (based on last year's record), and 74% of the way to achieving our budgeted tithes/offerings for the coming year. Drop your pledge in the collection plate or mail it to our church office at 218 W. Second St.

We are so very grateful for our many church participants who have made contributions throughout the year. For the first 50 weeks (through December 12) of 2021, we have received \$88,011 in tithes and offerings, almost matching our budgeted amount of budget of \$88,731 for the same period.

We encourage anyone wishing to do so to make a year-end contribution during the month of December. You can contribute through our website using PayPal, mail a check to our church office at 218 W. Second St., or place your donation in the offering plates located in the church narthex.

In looking back over the past 12 months, it is interesting to note that the installation of our new audio-visual system began a full year ago. It is wonderful to be able to expand our reach beyond the walls of our building by streaming our worship services online. It has also been a blessing to be able to share funeral services in the past few months to distant friends and relatives who were otherwise unable to participate. This is just one of many ways that your gifts have helped to support our church ministry.

In addition to your generous tithes and offerings, our church family has supported other ministry efforts through a variety of collections and contributions. To date, church participants have contributed \$3,921 in support of special ministries ranging from Blanket Sunday to Neighbors in Need, the Refuge, Food Pantry, and more. In addition, the church raised \$785 through salad luncheons and has received \$1,165 in memorial contributions.

Thank you for the many ways in which you provide continued financial support of our vibrant church community.



We appreciate the many pledges already received for 2022. If you have not returned your pledge for the coming year, it's not too late.

If you misplaced your pledge form, feel free to complete the form below and drop it in the collection plate or return via mail to the address indicated.

Every gift matters, and we appreciate your help in reaching our pledge goals for the coming year.

COMMITMENT CARD - FOR CHURCH RECORDS:

(see giving chart on back)

Name _____

Envelope # _____ (for office use)

Mailing Address:

I plan to give beginning (date) _____ each _____ week ☐ month..... Annual Total

For Our Congregation's Ministries

\$ _____

COMMITMENT CARD - FOR YOUR RECORDS:

Date:

With others in my congregation, I commit myself to give in proportion to what I have for the ministries of the church and the shared love of Jesus Christ.

I plan to give beginning (date)

Each _____ week ☐ month

Annual
Total

For Our
Congregation

\$ _____

Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning, for in you I put my trust. Teach me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. (Psalm 143:8)

Announcements

First Sundays - On the first Sunday of each month (*01/02*) all students from K-12 will be meeting together for a special project. This may involve a field trip on a related subject. A permission slip will be required for the field trips. ***The class will meet at 10:00 am*** and end at 11:00 unless otherwise notified. Students are encouraged to bring friends. If you have any questions, please contact Brenda Brummel (brendabrummel@me.com) or 810-623-1691 (call or text.)

Winter Office Hours – please note, we will follow Gaylord School Closing policy during the winter months. When school is called off, office hours will be too.

Name Tags – if you are in need of a name tag, please let Jessica in office know.

Bible Study NEW LINK– every Thursday at 11:00am! All are invited. Please join us virtually by using either the following link or phone number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84612895017>

NEXT McLaren Book – *Will not meet again until Jan. 13, 2022. Ch. 20.*

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82057784784?pwd=eWdVbDlzZkRndEFaUFF5bHUvNU5MUT09> Meeting ID: 820 5778 4784 Passcode: 173265

Crop Walk Results—Thanks to all who contributed to the Crop Walk to help many in our country and around the world. Thanks to the 11 walkers from our church who walked that day. Our church contributed \$2060. The walk raised \$9856 with a total of 72 walkers participating. Of this amount \$2468 was given to our local food pantry. Thanks again for your generosity.
Crop Co-Chairs-Helen Crandall and Sallie Anderson



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: \$286

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

Received to date: \$344

Strengthen the Church

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

Collected around Pentecost

Received to date: \$94

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

Received to date: \$344

In Addition, we gave \$587 for Blanket Sunday

Current Meeting Times

All are welcome to “attend” these meetings



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

******January meeting date is 01/10***

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

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

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83220896539>

Council will meet the second Wednesday of each month at 7PM:

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

Trustees will meet the third Wednesday of each month at 11:00 AM:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85470391561>

McLaren *Evening* Book Study meets Thursdays at 7pm

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82057784784>

Meeting ID: 820 5778 4784

Passcode: 173265

Bible Study meets Thursdays at 11am

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

~ In Our Prayers ~

*As a reminder, in an effort to respect each individual's privacy and private wishes,
prayer requests will only be printed once permission has been given.*

***During the month of December, the UNA is holding the Northport Trinity
UCC church in prayer.***

Sandra Soderberg – as she is experiencing trauma with one eye.

The Boughner Family – on the recent passing of Jim's brother, Bernie.

Anna Kalember – as she was recently hospitalized with three blood clots, and a partial collapse of one lung because of a pulmonary embolism. She is recovering at home after a short hospital stay.

Don Storing and Family – on Mardee's recent passing.

The Crandall Family – as they grieve Don's recent passing.

Samantha Fray & The Dunn Family – as Marcus recently passed away.

Marilyn Kaczanowski – as she is recovering from foot surgery to remove a nerve – recovery time is quite lengthy.

John Hellenberg

Gloria House's granddaughter, Madison Crawford – as she suffers from cataplexy in narcolepsy along with other neurological struggles. She is currently at U of M receiving treatment and therapy.

Brad Derenzy—as he has continuing health struggles.

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

Mardee Storing's daughter, Lori – as she is doing better, but still in need of prayers.

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.

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.



Birthdays and Anniversaries

January Birthdays

7 Diane House
18 Joanna Morse
21 Pastor Greg
22 Jeff Kalember
27 Rokko Jans





January 2022

Sun Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat

						1
2 Worship, 10am First Sundays With Brenda	3	4	5	6 Virtual Bible Study, 11am	7 Community Meal 4pm	8
Greg out of office—call cell with emergencies only 920-472-9172						
9 Worship, 10am	10 Reaching In, 12pm Reaching Out, 7pm	11	12 Virtual Council 7pm	13 Virtual Bible Study, 11am Book Study, 7pm	14 Community Meal, 4pm	15
16 Worship, 10am	17	18	19 Trustees, 11am	20 Virtual Bible Study, 11am Book Study, 7pm	21 Community Meal, 4pm	22
23 Worship, 10am	24	25	26 Church Book Club, 1pm	27 Virtual Bible Study, 11am Book Study, 7pm	28 Community Meal, 4pm	29
30 Worship, 10am	31					

All Sundays will have virtual coffee hour at 11am unless otherwise notified, all are welcome!