

First Congregational United Church of Christ

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January 2026 Newsletter



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Our mission is to embrace people of every age and stage of life and help them become the most loving version of themselves possible.

The Pastor's Column

Laughter, Joy, and Play

Part of the preparation for our recent Advent series involved reading *Hope: A User's Manual*, by MaryAnn McKibben Dana (you're welcome to borrow it after January 4, just ask!). In the third section of her book, Dana talks about hope in bodily form. Drilling down further, there is a chapter about joy.

Everyone expects people to be joyful at Christmas. The truth is that many of us are not. It may be even tougher as we enter the new year, putting away our decorations and burrowing in to survive a cold, snowy winter. It is okay for us to feel whatever we feel at any time of year, but consider this quote from Stephen Colbert, "You know what I like about comedy?

You can't laugh and be afraid at the same time...of anything. If you're laughing, I defy you to be afraid."

Maybe comedy is not your thing, but somehow, we are invited to explore the link between fear and laughter. Dana invites us into the world of *Harry Potter* through a fascinating creature called a boggart. "A boggart is a shape-shifter—it takes the form of whatever the person fears most, which means that the boggart looks different to every person."

The cure? "The incantation against a boggart is the word '*Riddikulus!*' But the incantation alone is not enough; one must also imagine something funny, something that makes the person laugh. The boggart then morphs from something scary into something, well, ridiculous. Giant spiders suddenly skitter about on roller skates. A cobra turns into a jack-in-the box."

All laughter is not helpful, of course. Some laughter can wound. So, it is important to be careful when and how we laugh. At the same time, laughter is another invitation to look at the absurdity of things.

Dana's chapter ends with the story of Auburn Avenue in the city of Atlanta during the civil rights movement. The Ku Klux Klan would often march down the street. People drew their shades, locked their doors, and cowered in their homes. Later, when the civil rights movement started to take hold, and when people "could see justice on the horizon," the Klan marched. This time, the people lifted their shades, threw open their doors, stood on the sidewalk, and laughed, and laughed, and laughed. And the Klan never marched down Auburn Avenue again.

All these stories are in the abbreviated version. Change and laughter didn't come right away, but I hope that this January, we will spend some time reflecting on the power of laughter in the face of fear.

In Christian love,

Pastor Greg

Thank Yous

A sincere thank you to all who left cards, gifts, treats and well-wishes for us this holiday season. Your financial gift was also appreciated. Most of all, we give thanks for this community of faith as together we partner in Christ's mission in the world. We feel very loved and supported here and hope you feel the same from us.

With much love,

Pastor Greg, Cindy, and family

The holidays are full of endless cards to write, gifts to buy, cookies to bake, meals to cook, snow to move, gifts to wrap, miles to drive, and errands to run. It is dark. It is cold. It is expensive. It is hard. I get it.

The reality is that all these things you are busy with make your kindness and generosity even more special and meaningful. Thank you for the cookies, candies, and Chex mix. Thank you for the gifts and cards you shared.

Thank you for visiting shut-ins and those recovering from surgery and sickness, going caroling, and praying. Thank you for fulfilling the Christmas hopes of the children who had ornaments on our tree. Thank you for donating to those impacted by the reduction in SNAP benefits. Thank you for weaving pieces of yourselves on the Advent Tapestry. Thank you for volunteering at the church, the food pantry, Community Meal, and everywhere you did not *have to* be but were because you were sharing the love of Christ.

You are seen and appreciated. You are cared for and prayed for. You are loved. Thank you very much.

Peace and love,

Liz

Committee Minutes are available and attached.

Epiphany

That aha moment? That is an epiphany. In the Christian church, January 6 marks both the Orthodox Christmas and the Christian Epiphany. For both Protestants and Roman Catholics, the Feast of Epiphany is twelve days after the birth of Christ and is considered the day that the three kings—the Magi—arrive to visit baby Jesus, marking His manifestation to gentiles. This symbolizes that Jesus came for all people.

Epiphany Potluck and Forum

On Sunday, January 4, we will celebrate the holidays together with a potluck following worship. Sign up in Fellowship Hall for what you might be willing to bring for that celebration. As part of that, Pastor Greg will lead us in some reflections on the recent community interviews as part of our Convergence process. We expect this part of the day to take about 20 minutes. This way, we have plenty of time to talk with friends over a meal.

As an aside, our next phase with Convergence will be some online training sessions with Cameron Trimble, Executive Director of Convergence. These will likely be in February. You may participate at home or in the concurrent session at Fellowship Hall. Times and dates will be.

January Birthdays and Anniversaries

Birthdays:

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

Anniversaries:

Office Hours

- *Pastor Greg* will not be preaching on January 18 but will lead Confirmation that day. He will also be out February 1.
- *Liz* is having surgery at Munson in Traverse City on January 16. She will be working reduced office hours for the next two weeks.



Announcements

- **Confirmation** meets about twice a month, sometimes at church by ourselves, other times with our friends at Peace Lutheran. In January, we will serve at Community Meal (on January 9), meet on the fourth (after some time at the potluck), and the 18th (Pastor will not be in church, but will be here for confirmation).
- To share **prayer concerns, joys, announcements, or news**, contact Liz at office@firstuccgaylord.org or Pastor Greg at pastorg@firstuccgaylord.org
- **Community Meal** is CANCELLED January 2 due to the holiday.
- Please **update your meetings** with Liz for next month **by the Newsletter Deadline** so our calendar is accurate.
- **Food Pantry** always needs volunteers. During January, our congregation staffs it January 8 and 9 from noon to 2PM. Contact Don Storing at 989-464-9648 for more information or to volunteer.
- We have been unable to secure a volunteer or paid individual to **clear snow Sunday mornings**. We need help. See Pastor Greg or Don Storing if you know someone(s)!

Convergence Forum &

EPIPHANY POTLUCK PARTY



01.04.2026 11:30a
Fellowship Hall

Sign up for dishes to pass in Fellowship Hall

~ In Our Prayers ~

In January, the UNA is holding Old Mission Congregational UCC in Old Mission in prayer.

Mary Sue Evans requests prayers for her husband as he is facing health issues.

Maggie Shanahan Menkes (Kathy's daughter-in-law) –for her healing and for increased energy. Pray for the entire family to restore their spirits and energy levels so they can do all that needs to be done each day.

Louanne Spearman as she continues to heal at home.

Laura Bantens, who asks for prayers for employment and finding where she belongs. Her mother, *Connie*, needs prayers for the same.

Liz Larson who is having surgery at Munson Hospital on January 16.

Jay Jans, Rokko Jans' brother—Jay under hospice care in Illinois.

Jason Peterman – who is dealing with a variety of health issues.

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

Chris Crubaugh – who is dealing with medical issues. Continued prayers
Chris and Laura Bantens as they adapt.

Madison Crawford – as she suffers from neurological and vision issues.



Prayer Requests

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.



JOIN US FOR

*The Un-Hanging of
the Greens*

JAN 11 @ 11 am

Many hands make light work in
putting away our Christmas
decorations.



2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				New Year's Day	1	
Liz will be working a reduced schedule in office Jan 16-28 due to surgery and recovery.						
10a Worship/Communion	4	5	ED:pm: 6 D:pm: 6 Chiono: 7	6a Gaylord Gratitude NOON Reaching in 5p Ukulele Group	6a Gaylord Gratitude NOON Food Pantry Day 12:15p ♀ Fellowship 4p Choir	6a Gaylord Gratitude Community Meal CANCELED 6p Talking Circle
11:30a Epiphany Potluck/Forum						
11:30a Confirmation						
January 1st	11	12				
10a Worship		6a Gaylord Gratitude				
11a Unhanging the Greens						
World Religion Day	18	MLK Day	19			
10a Worship—Greg not preaching		6a Gaylord Gratitude				
11:30a Confirmation		7p Reaching Out				
20	21	22	23	24	25	31
NOON Lunch Group @ Pine Squirrel	6a Gaylord Gratitude 5p Ukulele Group 7p Trustees	11a Bible Study 4p Choir	6a Gaylord Gratitude 4p Community Meal 6p Talking Circle	6a Gaylord Gratitude 4p Community Meal 6p Talking Circle	8:30a Pet Partners	
25	26	27	28	29	30	
10a Worship		6a Gaylord Gratitude 1p Church Book Group 5p Ukulele Group	11a Bible Study 4p Choir	6a Gaylord Gratitude 4p Community Meal 6p Talking Circle		