

First Congregational United Church of Christ

218 W. Second Street, Gaylord, Michigan 49735

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March 2026 Newsletter



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

Tell Me Something Good!

For many, things are difficult right now. There is a lot happening beyond our control. The weather has been confusing, frustrating, and hard to deal with. There may be family issues...you name it! That leaves us feeling tired and worn out. The news cycle is no help.

Then Lent comes along which many people think of as a “downer”. The truth is that Lent is meant to help free us from that which keeps us in bondage. Often things around us keep us bound. Yet Jesus’ message has always been about love and liberation, compassion and release. That’s why our Lenten theme this year is **“The good news is...”** It’s both because we need to hear good news and because there is a lot of good news to share even, and perhaps especially, in Lent.

Sadly, our Ash Wednesday service was canceled due to weather. I was looking forward to it because the initial Lenten service in this series was on invitation: **“the good news is...you’re invited!”** I’m not sure that many of us think about Ash Wednesday and invitation, but the accompanying scripture was about being invited to a dinner (Luke 14: 15-21). Who was invited? Anyone and everyone were invited who would come to the banquet. The banquet is a metaphor for the kingdom of Heaven. Come one, come all: sit at the table Jesus presides over and feel love, feel welcome, feel release, feel liberation, and, most of all, feel God’s presence. Lent begins with an invitation to a life that can be hard to imagine, given all the problems around us.



From there...we hear a lot more good news:

First Sunday in Lent: the good news is...so good it catches us by surprise.

Second Sunday in Lent: the good news is...great love for God and neighbor.

Third Sunday in Lent: the good news is...together, the impossible is possible.

Fourth Sunday in Lent: the good news is...protection and care for the vulnerable.

Fifth Sunday in Lent: the good news is...rooted in justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

Palm/Passion Sunday: the good news is...inspiring us to act.

Maundy Thursday (subject to change a bit): the good news is...even Judas is included.

Easter Sunday: the good news is...alive in the world.

In the meanwhile, we will participate with our partners at Convergence in a couple of training sessions. The first, **March 1**, we will learn about the great changes in our world and culture that provide opportunities for ministry. The second, **March 29**, will look at creative solutions other congregations have employed that have changed their lives and the lives of others for good! I hope you’ll attend both (or either) following worship. These forums will move us closer to our goals for the Convergence initiative.

There is a lot of good happening in the world. Our task is to do our part of the good. I treasure partnership with you toward that end. See you in church or online!

Blessings,

Pastor Greg

Committee Minutes are available and attached.

CONVERGENCE CONGREGATIONAL TRAINING

On Zoom



11:15 AM SUNDAY, MAR 1 AND MAR 29

[HTTPS://US02WEB.ZOOM.US/J/4047903
348?OMN=84803030013](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/4047903348?OMN=84803030013)

Convergence: Next Steps

On March 1, we will participate in a training/learning session with Dr. Cameron Trimble, Executive Director of Convergence. We will meet in Fellowship Hall about 11:30 or on zoom. This first session will be called “Lifting the Veil” and talks about cultural shifts and trends in this post-COVID era.

On March 29, we will again participate in a training/learning session with Dr. Trimble via zoom or in Fellowship Hall at 11:30. This time, she will show us examples of creative church ministries around the country. These are designed to spark our imagination about what we might do here in Gaylord.

Please speak with Pastor Greg or a member of the Convergence team if you have questions. All are invited to come to either or both sessions as your schedule allows. They should last no longer than 1.5 hours.

March Birthdays and Anniversaries

Birthdays:

- 3 Sharon Wade
- 6 Pete Amar
- 8 Natassja English-Wilberding
- 11 Eric Anderson
- 12 Kay Boughner
Roger Brummel
- 14 Maryetta House
- 18 Jack Wambold
- 27 Carol Leinerth
- 30 Ryan Anderson

Anniversaries:

- 28 Norm & Pat Dressel

Hospice Volunteers Needed

Care Team Hospice is looking for volunteers to offer comfort, companionship, and a caring presence to patients and families in their final season of life. Many of those we serve live in small towns or rural areas and a simple visit from a caring neighbor can mean more than words can express.

In communities like ours, people look out for one another. Hospice volunteering is a beautiful way to live out Christ's command to love and serve others. Even short visits with a patient, praying with a family, sharing conversation, or simply being present can bring peace, dignity, and comfort to someone.

If you are interested in making a difference and learning more, please contact Care Team Hospice Volunteer Coordinator, Amber Pape at apape@tctcares.com or (833) 483-2273.

Office Hours

- **Liz** will be out of the office on Thursday, March 12.
- **Rokko** will be off the week of the 22nd and on that day.

New Church Closure Policy

At the February 19 church Council meeting, Council approved the following regarding closure due to weather-related issues:

During the week we will follow the direction of Gaylord Community Schools. If they are closed, then the church will also be closed for all church activities. Exceptions are made at the direction of those in charge of that event (i.e., choir may choose to meet if conditions permit and Rokko will email choir members directly in that event).

On Sunday, Pastor Greg, in consultation with the moderator(s) and staff will decide on closure by 8 am and will use eblast, Facebook, etc. to get the word out. Please see a member of Council if you have a question or concern.

Announcements

- **Food Pantry** needs volunteers. FCC next staffs it March 5th and 6th from noon to 2PM. Contact Don Storing at 989-464-9648 for more information or to volunteer.
- In 2026, **Church Council** will meet on the third Thursdays at 5PM both in-person and via Zoom. The link is: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84173125831>
- **Confirmation** meets on the 8th, 15th and 22nd. We are beginning talks about a confirmation service in May. Stay tuned for more details!
- Mark your calendars for two **Convergence trainings** at 11:15AM on March 1 and 29.
- Share **concerns, joys, announcements**, and/or **news** by contacting Liz at office@firststuccgaylord.org or Pastor Greg at pastorg@firststuccgaylord.org.
- There are two **Good Friday services**: at noon St. Andrew's is hosting that includes our choir and a Tenebrae service at First Presbyterian held at 7 PM.
- Please **update your meetings** with Liz for next month **by the Newsletter Deadline (Monday after the Council Meeting)** so our church calendar is accurate.

What is a Love Offering?

One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) is one of the five special offerings of the United Church of Christ that our church supports each year. We will receive this offering throughout the month of March.

In 2 Corinthians 8-9, the Apostle Paul lays out his stewardship campaign to gather an offering to be sent to the Christian church in Jerusalem. Commonly known as “the collection for the saints,” the offering occupies a significant place in Paul’s missionary work.

Paul’s calling was to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. He preached generosity and hospitality. He brought Jewish and Gentile believers into one community, despite their differences of nationality, tribal affiliation, and economic standing. He encouraged unity, love, compassion, and service.

Paul’s stewardship campaign called for members to set aside money each week, above and beyond their regular tithes and offerings, to help Christians in Jerusalem. The offering was a gift, with no strings attached, no expectation of repayment or reward, and no ulterior motives. This collection was a love offering, embodying the word of Jesus:

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34-35, NIV)

Members of the early church took seriously the command to love God and neighbor. The Apostle’s focus on the collection highlights the hallmarks of community life that God and Jesus emphasized: care of the poor and vulnerable; use of resources to benefit those who need help; loving one’s neighbor; caring for the environment; and advocating social justice so all can live and thrive. Communities grounded in Jesus’ sacrificial life and death embody radical generosity, often pooling their resources for their common good (see Acts 2:44-47).

You may not be familiar with the term “love offering”. A love offering is a voluntary monetary gift: to show appreciation for a beloved pastor, a guest preacher, or special speaker; to support a specific occasion, like an anniversary or commemoration; or, to support a particular church or community program, mission, ministry, or project. The love offering is separate from one’s regular tithe and giving and is often collected on special days or occasions.[1]

One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) has been gathering love offerings for over 75 years. Each year, we are invited to participate in a giant love fest—giving our dollars and time for the sake of sisters and brothers around the globe. Our contributions are our love offering to the world!



ATTENTION: St. Patrick's Day



We have uncovered nearly seven BOXES, 20 PACKS/box, each pack containing 24 NAPKINS of St. Patrick's Day-themed napkins. That is nearly 3,300 St. Patrick's Day napkins! They take up a large area in the storage room. Through March 22nd, please use them for EVERY Coffee Hour, Community Meal, Gaylord Gratitude, Talking Circle, Compassionate Friends, church meeting, etcetera. We also have a full box of Penn Station napkins as well as a box and *three BAGS* of bags. Before you buy paper products, please check the storage room! We have three donation boxes stowed there and we are also donating three bags of socks and a bag of clothing from that space to the Caring Closet.



YOU'RE INVITED
TO BE A
**FOOD PANTRY
VOLUNTEER**

Noon - 2P Th & Fr | Otsego County
 JAN 8 & 9, FEB 5 & 6, MAR 5 & 6 | United Way
 CONTACT DON STORING FOR MORE INFO | 116 E. 5TH ST., GAYLORD
 (989) 732-8929

Holy Week

Work is underway for Holy Week activities. Details are forthcoming, but the schedule will be:

- Sunday, March 29 **Palm Sunday** worship 10am; Convergence learning session, 11:30am
- Thursday, April 2, **Maundy Thursday** worship, 5:30pm for the service, with a simple meal to follow at 6:15pm in Fellowship Hall
- Friday, April 3, **Good Friday** Community Worship Service, Noon at St. Andrew Episcopal Church with community choir. All are invited to participate. Practice 11am at St. Andrew.
- Friday, April 3, **Good Friday** Tenebrae service, 7pm at First Presbyterian Church
- Sunday, April 5, **Easter Sunday** Celebration of the Resurrection with communion, 10 am

Jeannine Wambold

Thank You



for providing the March altar flowers

~ In Our Prayers ~

In March, the UNA prays for Alpena First Congregational UCC.

Laura Bantens, who requests prayers for employment and finding where she belongs. Her mother, ***Connie***, needs prayers for the same. Connie's house is on the market—prayers for a quick sale at a great price.

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

Chris Crubaugh – who has medical issues. Continued prayers for Chris and Laura Bantens as they adapt.

The English Family –Joe is now in an inpatient facility in Kalamazoo for a few months working on adjusting his medication. Please pray for Joe to heal and for the family as they adjust to their new normal.

Natassja English-Wilberding is expecting her first baby, Leon, in less than a month. Natassja's pregnancy is considered high risk. She is

requesting prayers for a safe and uneventful pregnancy going forward.

Mary Sue Evans requests prayers for her husband as he goes through health issues.

Maggie Shanahan Menkes (Kathy's daughter-in-law) has had good news that her treatment seems to be working. Please keep her in your thoughts and prayers for strength.

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

Jason Peterman's aunt who has entered hospice care.

Jason Peterman's mother is facing kidney surgery.

Louanne Spearman as she continues to heal at home.



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.

Michigan Conference 2025 Gifts Information

Thank you for your generous support of the UCC Michigan Conference. Your generosity helps our local churches' unique ministries. In 2025, \$147,200 in conference grants went to:

Grants to Leaders--

student scholarships	\$44,000
ministerial assistance	5,500
sabbatical grants	4,000
continuing education	2,500

Grants to Congregations--

new starts & revitalization	53,200
church support	22,000
technology	9,000
outreach projects	6,000
emergency assistance	1,000

Our church participated with special offerings allocated as follows:

Our Church's wider Mission (OCWM)	\$823
Neighbors in Need (NIN)	542
California Wildfire Response & Recovery	500
Christmas Fund	1,405
One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS)	385
Strengthen the Church (STC)	150
Church World Service-Blanket Sunday (CWS)	712

Ideas for a Deeper Lenten Practice

Lent began on February 18 with Ash Wednesday and continues on through Maundy Thursday, April 2. That means the entire month of March falls during Lent in 2026. Many of us grew up giving things up for Lent, perhaps meat or sweets, asking (and practicing) WWJD, fasting. But Lent also includes prayer and almsgiving in an effort to deepen our faith.

Toward that effort, here are some resources to help you in your practice during Lent:

- The Upper Room. This free booklet is available in the literature rack in Fellowship Hall and includes daily devotions and verses aimed at supporting our daily prayers.
- PCUSA is offering multiple Lenten devotionals online including "The Tomb is Empty but the Streets are Full? An Activist Lenten Devotional", "Beatitudes At Home Lent Family Devotional", and "Earth Care Lenten Devotional 2026".
- Nadia Bolz-Weber, an ELCA pastor, offers a lenten discipline for cranky people on Substack.
- The UCC offers "Outgrow: 2026 Lenten Devotional" for \$5 at Pilgrim Press.
- There is a free 2026 Lent Daily Devotional at <https://stjohnsuccallentown.org>.
- Almsgiving is a voluntary act of donating money, goods, or time to the poor and needy as an expression of love, mercy, and justice. Contact Otsego County United Way for organizations that could use your help.
- Sign up in Fellowship Hall for ways to support the church through acting as a liturgist, greeter/usher, or at coffee hour.

March



2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 10a Worship/Communion 11:15a Convergence Training for Congregation	2 6a Gaylord Gratitude NOON Reaching In 6p Compassionate Friends	3	4 6a Gaylord Gratitude 5p Ukelele Group	5 11a Bible Study NOON Food Pantry 4p Choir	6 6a Gaylord Gratitude NOON Food Pantry 4p Community Meal 6p Talking Circle	7
Daylight Savings Time 8 10a Worship 11:30a Confirmation	9 6a Gaylord Gratitude	10	11 6a Gaylord Gratitude 5p Ukelele Group	12 Liz Out of Office 11a Bible Study 12:15p ♀ Fellowship 4p Choir	13 6a Gaylord Gratitude 4p Community Meal 6p Talking Circle	14
15 10a Worship 11:30a Confirmation	16 6a Gaylord Gratitude 7p Reaching Out	17 Spring Equinox	18 6a Gaylord Gratitude 5p Ukelele Group 7p Trustees	19 Spring Equinox 11a Bible Study 4p Choir 5p Church Council	20 Spring Equinox 6a Gaylord Gratitude 4p Community Meal 6p Talking Circle	21
22 10a Worship 11:30a Confirmation	23 Newsletter Deadline 6a Gaylord Gratitude	24 NOON Lunch Group @ Pine Squirrel	25 6a Gaylord Gratitude 1p Church Book Club 5p Ukelele Group	26 11a Bible Study 4p Choir	27 6a Gaylord Gratitude 4p Community Meal 6p Talking Circle	28
29 Spring Equinox 10a Worship 11:15a Convergence Training for Congregation	30 6a Gaylord Gratitude	31	UNA Prayers for Alpena First Congregational UCC	Flowers provided by Jeannine Wambold	GCs Spring Break Mar 30-Apr 3	