

The Hilltop Chimes

First Congregational United Church of Christ
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December 2024

From the Pastor's Desk



As we gird up for Advent and Christmas yet again, no doubt somewhere along the line—maybe in church, maybe in a random line of a Christmas carol—we'll come across the theological concept central to this story: *incarnation*. A basic surface-level description

of Christian incarnation explains that it's the idea that God became a flesh-and-blood human being in history known as Jesus. It's a notion grounded in ancient understandings of the divine, but it's one of those touchstones with a meaning that remains true.

Unfortunately, the incarnation often gets limited to how the earthly Jesus ended up; in cultural Christianity, God comes to us in Jesus to die for our sins. If we're able to put aside this dismissal of everything Jesus did and taught, we can see how the incarnation opens up to mean so much more.

The incarnation reminds us that God can indeed dwell in human flesh. One way to understand the incarnation is that it is God's *showing up* for humanity—more particularly for those considered “lowly” and the hungry (as Mary herself sings in Luke 1), for the shepherds (on the economic margins), for the refugees and immigrants (a nativity scene without refugees would be

completely devoid of people), for those for whom there is no room at the inn.

Here's the other thing about incarnation: the Christmas story is not the only time the New Testament relies upon incarnational imagery. When the apostle Paul writes in his letters of the Body of Christ—specifically with each of us as the members—that's also incarnational language. And it means much the same thing: *we are also called to show up for humanity*. We are also called to show up for the lowly and the hungry and those on the economic margins and the refugees and the immigrants and all those otherwise excluded. *In fact, that's the whole point of incarnation!*

As we again hear the cultural clashes of an imaginary “war on Christmas,” let us remember that to keep Christ in Christmas is really to embody the incarnation in the Body of Christ today.

-Chris



Christmas Eve Tuesday Dec 24th
7:00 p.m. Candlelight service with Holy
Communion.

Christmas Day, Wednesday Dec 25th
There will be NO worship service held.
The Church office will be closed.

Adult Sunday School for Advent

As we enter Advent and begin hearing stories surrounding Jesus' birth in Roman-occupied Palestine, do you ever wonder about the origins of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict?

If so, Pastor Chris has got the perfect Advent adult educational opportunity for you! For three Sundays in December (8th, 15th, and 22nd) at 9 a.m., he'll be offering a short series on Palestine and Israel. The gatherings will be very basic, so hardly any knowledge of the geography or history of the area is necessary.

We'll be meeting in the conference room (adjacent to Laurel's part of the office). If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask Chris. All are welcome!

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You may remember reading back in October that, before my week of vacation during Halloween, I was scheduled to do some "continuing education." Did you wonder what I was doing?

I recently joined a program of the Wisconsin Conference that's part of an international church partnership with the Pennsylvania Central Conference (that's not the international part...) and the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland, part of the church in Germany that served as the root of the E & R (Evangelical and Reformed) side of the UCC. After Easter, I will have the opportunity to visit our counterparts in Germany. But for that week in October, the German delegation was visiting the U.S., and we met at Daycholah Center.

It was an intense week. The focus of this group is to study White Christian Nationalism in both the U.S. and German contexts. Each day included group devotions, but diving into the hard stuff made up most of our work. We looked at the differences in political systems between Germany and the U.S., including the role of the church in both countries. We discussed the basic tenets of White Christian Nationalism. We heard from a former member of a hate group. We visited the Black Holocaust Museum in Milwaukee.

All of our sessions directed us toward creating an action plan and covenant as a response to White Christian Nationalism in each of our settings. So, as a result of our often long conversations, we developed a draft of what we've been calling the "Daycholah Declaration." Here it is:

Daycholah Declaration

We observe that the church is in crisis.

We are dismayed to see the gross perversion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ by using a narrative of fear, manipulation, scarcity, violence, domination and hate as a political means to perpetuate the heresy of White Christian Nationalism.

We confess we have not offered sufficient opportunity to offer a perspective of hope as an alternative to fear.

We confess that this has often led us into exclusive safe spaces, indifference, or frightened silence.

We confess the church's complacency that allowed for perverted versions of the gospel to spread.

We confess the Truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as a living narrative of hope, liberation, abundance, compassion and loving invitation to all people to seek reconciliation with one another.

We honor God's promise of abundance for all.

We offer an invitation to a faith that proclaims a Christ who joins in suffering rather than a Christ who seeks power and domination.

We offer an invitation to faith that proclaims God's Kingdom is already present, and we are invited to participate in it in all we do and say.

We believe faith spaces must be courageous spaces.

We honor different interpretations of scripture.

We are people of the resurrection, standing with the disciples who were shocked, frightened and devastated.

We proclaim the resurrection as a joyful surprise in times of uncertainty.

We affirm that the Church is salt and light.

We proclaim a gospel that encompasses all people and all of creation.

We affirm that all creation belongs to God.

We affirm our call to be good stewards of our resources for the betterment of the global community.

In response to fear, we proclaim hope.

In response to manipulation, we proclaim liberation.

In response to scarcity, we proclaim abundance.

In response to hate, we proclaim compassion.

We commit to walk humbly towards this vision.

We commit to teaching critical thinking in our communities.

We commit to be counter cultural.

We commit to find the courage to act out of love instead of fear.

We commit to recognize the belovedness of all people.

We commit to resist and protest dehumanization.

We commit to interfaith dialogue.

We commit to create educational resources.

We commit to breaking down walls between God's people.

We commit to remembering the Source of our faith.

We commit to being good stewards of scripture.

We promise to offer abundant opportunities to experience joy together, learn together, and pray together.

Amen.

The Germans have taken this document home with them, and we plan to continue our work together through Zoom calls until we meet again in Germany in April. If anyone would like to know more about this program, please let me know!

-Chris

Meeting to be held December 15th
for the 2025 Budget and Approval
of New Church Council Members

There will be a Congregational Meeting held after the service on December 15.

At that time we will ask the Congregation to approve the Budget for 2025 and the Slate of Officers for 2025-2026. Paper copies of the Budget and Slate of Officers will be available on the Narthex table on *Sunday, December 8th.*

Please attend. We need your input and approval!

--Tom Rusch, Moderator



Notes from the Music Director

Thank you to Tom Rusch and Cooper Wood who played keyboard during November, and who both accompanied the choir, as well.

Senior Choir-continues to rehearse at 9:00 a.m. on Sunday mornings. We rehearse and sing in service almost weekly, but there will be some pre-planned days off. We can always use additional singers and you do not have to make a weekly commitment to be a part of the choir. High school aged and above are welcome.

Stories from the Music

Recently the choir sang the anthem, "When There's Trust in the Room." The text was written by John Thornburg in 2012 for the members of HOLY CITY, a community of creativity made up entirely of members of The Hymn Society in the US and Canada. They were purposed to create liturgies about what it means to be called, how to value the spiritual gifts, and how to engage in the ministry of justice and peace. At the close of one of their gatherings, one of participants commented "Well, when there's trust in the room, lots of things are possible." John took that phrase as the basis of the text of this song.

Mark Miller was the music composer and has a passion for building community through music. He adheres to Cornel West's belief that "Justice is what love looks like in public." His sacred music is widely published and sung by communities of faith around the world. You can find numerous YouTube recordings his music.

This song is available as a congregational song, in addition to being a choir anthem.

Juanita Edington

c.920-988-2416 (feel free to text)

jaemusiclover@gmail.com



Annual Advent Recital

Soon we turn the calendar to December and that means Advent will be here sooner than we can imagine. The 22nd Advent Recital at First Congregational UCC in Watertown is scheduled for Sunday, December 15 at 7:00 p.m. This is always a wonderful way to enjoy the musical gifts of members, family, and friends of the congregation and spend an evening contemplating the music of the season and enjoying fellowship.

There will be a reception following the recital and Sue Harms has graciously offered to coordinate. If you would like to contribute food to the reception, **please reach out to Sue.**

I am extending this invitation for performers to share their talents in the spirit of the season with our congregation and community. You can perform a solo, ensemble, vocal, instrumental, and you are welcome to do more than one selection and/or medium. I encourage you to add what you feel called to share. Please feel free to include family members or friends. You don't need to be a member of the church to perform.

If you have any questions, don't hesitate to ask. If you plan to perform, **please reach out to Juanita.**

Juanita Edington
jaemusiclover@gmail.com
920-988-2416



Christmas Program Sunday December 22nd.

We will do short skits/poems for our Christmas program. If you are interested in participating, please let me know. NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY!!! It can be as basic or advanced as you want it to be!

josc.mom@hotmail.com 262-719-1383



Tech Opportunities

We record each service and are looking to expand our recorders. The primary responsibilities are to run the camera focusing on the "action at the

moment" (the liturgist, acolyte, minister, choir, or special musician/s) and make microphone adjustments as needed. I am currently taking care of the editing and production.

Please contact me if you are interested and when you are available. Training is available. Thanks.

Thank you to Pamela Martin who recorded during November.

Juanita Edington
c.920-988-2416

jaemusiclover@gmail.com

DECEMBER MISSION COIN OFFERING: CHRISTMAS WISH Bread Basket Christmas Wish:

for families they serve. Money will be used to purchase gifts and In addition, Gifts collected will go to their office to be disbursed to the families by the Bread Basket.



THE BREAD BASKET PANTRY, located in the YMCA building in Watertown. Another amazing local resource for our community

- In addition to food items, Coats and winter clothing are especially needed. Many individuals and families don't arrive prepared for our winters.
- **Bread Basket** is in need of egg cartons.. Vivian Howard will get them over to them.
- There is a shopping cart in the narthex You are welcome to bring any food at any time .
 - **THE BREAD BASKET HOURS ARE:**
 - Mondays 12:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.
 - Fridays 12:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

THE WATERTOWN FOOD PANTRY

This month's Item: Ramen Noodles



Located in Immanuel Lutheran Church serves the people of Watertown to provide fresh food for individuals and families.

FOOD PANTRY HOURS ARE:

Mondays 10 a.m.- 12 p.m., Tuesdays 1 p.m. - 3 p.m., Wednesdays 12 p.m. - 2 p.m., Thursdays 1 p.m.-- 3 p.m. and Fridays 10 a.m. -12 p.m.



The Christmas Fund *Veterans of the Cross and the* *Emergency Fund*

THE CHRISTMAS FUND has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas "Thank You" gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees.



Gingerbread has been continuing to grow! We are looking forward and working on our Winter program. The program will be held on December 18th. You are welcome to come and watch us.

Our total enrollment now is 117 and we have a short waitlist for the infant and toddler rooms. Our wish tree will be going up soon, so watch for that.

Thank you to Jennifer Bakke and Kevin Driessen for being our guest cooks. We appreciate your help!

Melissa Mattke-Administrator/director

Gingerbread email: gbchildcare120@gmail.com

Melissa Cell: 262-719-1383

Undies Sunday Report

The socks and undies are all counted and divided. They will be delivered to the elementary school social worker. She goes to all five elementary schools and knows where there is the most current need. Altogether we donated 29 pair of boy's socks and 24 pair of girl's socks, 51 pair of boy's briefs and 81 pair of girl's undies. That's 185 items.

I know from past experience how much these are appreciated. Can you imagine a child sitting in wet clothes in your classroom. They would be too uncomfortable and distracted to learn. So, A BIG THANK YOU! All will be used to keep our children warm and dry!

S.O.S. Support Our Students UPDATE

Our church joined a group of 13 other churches to provide school supplies to 450 students who attend school or are home schooled in Watertown.

All supplies were gathered and sorted on Monday August 19th into individual, grade level bags for each child who had been registered by a parent. Families drove up to St. Henry's to receive their bags the next day. Many who registered late were able to receive supplies on Wednesday. Items not given out on the 20th and 21st were either given to the schools or stored for next year.

Fifty-six volunteers helped on Monday, 47 on Tuesday and 20 on Thursday. All volunteers were busy. We were also grateful for donated money. In late July and early August many shoppers drove all over to get the lowest price on multiple items. A conservative estimate of all supplies was \$15,949.

The SOS mission program was started by our church. Children were given their supplies in our Youth Room. In 2011 the program was expanded to include other area churches. The program is now run by the Shared Community Mission Group (SCMG), a group of 12 area churches.

Again, we thank you for your support!



From the Coordinator of Children and Youth Ministries

Sunday School: We have been talking about Thanksgiving and how we can show other people our thanks! We are excited to talk about the birth of Jesus and the different ways it is talked about in the Bible. We have been learning a little bit more each week about what the Bible is and how we can use it!



- 1) Join our mailing list: for an email link sent out weekly "Welcome to Worship" from lbentz@firstcongwtn.org.
- 2) Visit our church's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/First-Congregational-United-Church-of-Christ-118640148151341/>
- 3) Watertown Cable channel 985 broadcasts the Sunday service on Thursdays at 10 am and 5 pm and then again on the following Sunday at 6 pm.
- 4) Our church website (see 'Media'): <https://firstcongwtn.org/> Services posted on Monday



Invitation: help to beautify the sanctuary for Christmas Eve service by donating a Christmas plant.

If you would like to provide a Christmas plant for Christmas Eve Worship service *please order with delivery to the church on Monday, December 23rd no later than 3:30 p.m.*

Final Call for 2025 Estimate of Giving Cards

If you have not turned in your 2025 Estimate of Giving Card to the church office, please do so this week. We would like to receive one from everyone, even those that prefer to give as they can throughout the year, but not make a specific identified dollar estimate. If you have misplaced your Estimate of Giving Card, please stop in the church office to obtain another from Laurel.



December Birthdays

Jan Smith	12/01
Cindy Stockhus	12/01
William Piotrowski	12/02
Maverick Schumacher	12/02
Rob Miller	12/11
Ann Vogel	12/13
Lila Bocher (101 st)	12/15
Lily Kulick	12/16
Paul Neitzel	12/16
Denyce Derleth	12/21
Rev. Chris Ross	12/21
Sophia Mattke	12/29
Joyce Larson	12/31

TOTENFEST - Service of Remembrance

On Sunday, November 3 during 10:00 a.m. worship we held a special service of remembrance. Church members were invited to send the names of loved ones who have died since last year at this time

Remembering all whom we've loved and lost but for a while

VI TULLY, wife of late Rev. Bob Tully

Born: February 21, 1931

Died: November 4, 2023

IRENE NEITZEL

Born: October 15, 1928

Died: March 15, 2024

NORM HURTUBISE

Born: August 24, 1943

Died: January 2, 2024

DAN STILP, John Tomaneng's brother

Born: December 29, 1973

Died: June 24, 2024

JEANNINE B. MALLACH

Born: January 23, 1933

Died: February 25, 2024

MICHAEL SCHEUNEMANN, Rick Scheunemann's brother

Born: June 4, 1958

Died: June 10, 2024

LYNN SPENCER, Diane Koch's sister

Born: November 23, 1948

Died: February 27, 2024

ARLENE R. BENNETT

Born: July 2, 1933

Died: August 9, 2024

WILLIAM BREY

Born: May 16, 1930

Died: March 8th, 2024

EUGENE "GENE" HOFFMANN Dale Bakke's uncle

Born: December 30, 1930

Died: October 15, 2024

MARY BREY

Born: December 24, 1939

Died: September 21, 2024

Financial Report– As of October., 2024

2024	BUDGETED CONTRIBUTIONS	ACTUAL CONTRIBUTIONS	BUDGETED TOTAL INCOME	ACTUAL TOTAL INCOME	BUDGETED EXPENSES	ACTUAL EXPENSES	MONTH GAIN OR LOSS	YEAR GAIN OR LOSS
January	\$19,604	\$15,875	\$20,579	\$17,588	\$22,889	\$19,538	-\$1,950	-\$1,950
February	\$19,604	\$15,095	\$20,579	\$15,620	\$22,890	\$26,020	-\$10,400	-\$12,350
March	\$19,604	\$22,442	\$20,579	\$23,077	\$22,890	\$20,900	\$2,177	-\$10,173
April	\$19,604	\$21,334	\$20,579	\$22,153	\$22,889	\$18,755	\$3,398	-\$6,775
May	\$19,604	\$16,679	\$20,579	\$16,907	\$22,890	\$21,817	-\$4,910	-\$11,685
June	\$19,604	\$19,959	\$20,579	\$22,527	\$22,890	\$35,378	-\$12,851	-\$24,536
July	\$19,604	\$16,513	\$20,579	\$17,719	\$22,890	\$17,409	\$310	-\$24,226
August	\$19,604	\$14,945	\$20,579	\$14,995	\$22,890	\$16,012	-\$1,017	-\$25,243
September	\$19,604	\$15,844	\$20,579	\$15,844	\$22,890	\$24,367	-\$8,523	-\$33,766
October	\$19,604	\$15,942	\$20,579	\$16,442	\$22,890	\$17,930	-\$1,488	-\$35,254

December 2024

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1 1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT Communion Sunday 9:00 a.m. Sr. Choir; Sunday School 10:00 – WORSHIP; 6 pm - Cable TV Broadcast	2 1 p.m. – Staff meets	3	4 4:30 P.M.: Hospitality Committee at the Globe	5 10am - Cable TV Broadcast 5pm - Cable TV Broadcast	6 OFFICE CLOSED	7
8 2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT 9:00 a.m. Sr. Choir; Sunday School 9:00 a.m – Pastor’s Advent Study Group 10:00 – WORSHIP; Sunday School 12:30: Building a Welcoming Watertown at Wttn Public Library 6 pm - Cable TV Broadcast	9	10	11	12 10am - Cable TV Broadcast 5pm - Cable TV Broadcast	13 OFFICE CLOSED	14
15 3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT 9:00 a.m. Sr. Choir; Sunday School 9:00 a.m – Pastor’s Advent Study Group 10:00 – WORSHIP; Coffee Fellowship; 11:00 A.M. CONGREGATIONAL MEETING 11:30: Social Justice Team 6 pm - Cable TV Broadcast 7:00, Advent Recital	16 1:30, Rainmaker Fund meeting 6:30 pm, COUNCIL	17	18 6:00: Gingerbread Holiday Program	19 NEWSLETTER DEADLINE 10am - Cable TV Broadcast 5pm - Cable TV Broadcast	20 OFFICE CLOSED	21 <i>Winter Solstice Labyrinth Fellowship Hall</i>
22 4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT 9:00 a.m. Sr. Choir; Sunday School 9:00 a.m – Pastor’s Advent Study Group 10:00 – WORSHIP; Christmas Program Coffee Fellowship 6 pm - Cable TV Broadcast	23	24 7:00: CHRISTMAS EVE Candlelight Service (Communion)	25 Christmas Day OFFICE CLOSED	26 10am - Cable TV Broadcast 5pm - Cable TV Broadcast	27 OFFICE CLOSED	28
29 9:00 a.m. Sr. Choir; Sunday School 10:00 – WORSHIP; Sunday School Coffee Fellowship 6 pm - Cable TV Broadcast	30	31	January 1 New Year’s Day OFFICE CLOSED	LOOSE COIN MISSION OFFERING Bread Basket Christmas Wish: for a few families’ they serve. Money will be used to purchase gifts and In addition, Gifts collected will go to their office to be disbursed to the families by the Bread Basket.		