

The Hilltop Chimes

First Congregational United Church of Christ
120 Kuckkan Lane Watertown, WI 53094
Website: www.firstcongwtn.org

Rev. Dr. Christopher Ross, Pastor
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M-TH 10-noon and 1-4
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December 2025



From the Pastor's Desk

Theologians and biblical scholars have long noted a big problem with how we celebrate Christmas. I don't mean the consumerism, commercialism, or overconsumption that happens in December. Much more

specifically, there is a problem with how scripture is used and read and heard when it comes to the Christmas story, and that problem is called *supersessionism*.

Supersessionism is the theological idea that Christianity has *superseded* or replaced Judaism as God's true covenantal religion. In this scheme, the Hebrew Scriptures—what we call the Old Testament—exist only to point to the New Testament; the prophets serve only to “predict” the coming of Jesus. This idea is very common, present in all kinds of Christmas programs and music. Unfortunately, it is also very wrong.

Our Old Testament, as part of a larger group of Jewish scriptures, stands as a foundational testament to God for the Jewish religion. It contains its own stories, its own themes, its own ideas—that, by themselves, *have nothing to do with Jesus*. Despite a wide misunderstanding, the prophets do not predict anything about Jesus' life. Rather, they delivered God's message to the people in their own time and place. When they did talk about the future, they often referred to both God's judgment as a consequence for present actions and God's promise for a future without suffering.

Occasionally, we may find a reference to a coming messiah, which simply means “anointed one” or “chosen one”. It's important to understand that it means different things not only to Jewish people today, but even within the Hebrew Scriptures themselves. It can be understood as when God—in all God's fullness—comes to earth. Some Jews still expect a Messiah. In some passages, *messiah* refers to Cyrus, the ruler of Persia who allowed the Hebrew people to return home after the Babylonian Exile. *In the Hebrew Scriptures, “messiah” never was meant to refer to Jesus.*

When the New Testament writers experienced or heard about Jesus, they used the language of their scriptures—the Hebrew Scriptures, our Old Testament—to describe his importance. They did see him as God's Messiah, but the difference is that's not the perspective of the Hebrew Scriptures, nor, of course, of Jewish people today.

The purpose in pointing all this out is that we need to recognize that we *share* our Old Testament with another religious tradition, a tradition to whom those scriptures belonged originally. Because of this shared heritage, we should be thoughtful when interpreting the Hebrew Scriptures, respectful of the whole non-Christian tradition of understanding them, and acknowledge the historical fact that due to their composition centuries before Jesus, only an after-the-fact interpretation sees them as being about Jesus. Most scholars go so far as to point out that to interpret our Old Testament in a supersessionist manner is to accept an inherently anti-Semitic (anti-Jewish) position. And that is not faithful.

(continued →)

(From the Pastor's Desk, continued..)

In worship this Advent, the sermons will focus on hearing the Hebrew Scripture texts in their own voice—that is, hearing what they have to say on their own without our automatic assumption that they're about Jesus. Often, the simple inclusion of one more verse reveals enough context to a passage to show its meaning as completely different than what we might expect.

-Chris

Rev. Dr. Christopher Ross, Pastor

Pastoral concerns:

Please call(don't text) his cell (920) 838-5630.

Email: rev.fatmoses@gmail.com

****Reminder that Chris does not use texting.**

Congregational Meeting

Sunday, December 14th after worship.

There will be a Congregational Meeting held after the service on December 14.

At that time we will ask the Congregation to approve the Budget for 2026 and the Slate of Officers for 2026. Paper copies of the Budget and Slate of Officers will be available on the Narthex table on *Sunday, December 7th*.

Please attend. We need your input and approval!

-Jim Ortega, Moderator



I give thanks for our choir members who continue to serve faithfully leading the singing of our hymns. They also sang an anthem each Sunday during November, and most were also part of the Community Thanksgiving service held in The Grove at the Marquardt on November 23rd, as well. We give thanks for Tom Rusch and Cooper Wood who rehearsed with, and accompanied the choir, as well as played keyboards on our hymns and for other service music. I also give thanks for Jennie Ortega as she stepped in to direct the choir, while I played cello with one of this month's anthems.

Senior Choir continues at 9:00 a.m. on Sunday mornings in the choir room and meets weekly, unless noted ahead of time. We can always use more singers. There are no special requirements to be in the choir. Familiarity with music reading is helpful but not required. In the past few years, I have been choosing and adapting the music that I use to the skills and numbers of the singers that attend. We generally work on 2-3 pieces of music each week, so that we are working ahead and have several rehearsals on the same piece of music before singing it in a service.

You do not have to be a church member or make a weekly commitment to be a part of the choir. High school age and above are welcome (and I would consider musically enthusiastic or advanced 8th graders.) Drop-ins are also welcome. If you play an instrument, please let me know. You never know when there might be an opportunity to play.

Church musicians, vocal or instrumental, are providing ministry in another way. We not only serve as leaders of the hymns but also add an anthem or special music to the service which is intended to expand upon the theme of the lectionary or the service, or provide music as a backdrop for prayerful meditation.

Juanita Edington
c.920-988-2416 (feel free to text)
jaemusiclover@gmail.com



Christmas Eve Wednesday Dec 24th

7:00 p.m. Candlelight service with Holy Communion.

Christmas Day, Thursday Dec 25th

There will be NO worship service held.
The Church office will be closed.





Annual Christmas Program
 Sunday, December 14th
 Worship Service



Annual Advent Recital

When you read this issue of the Chimes, the Advent Recital will be less than a week away. The recital will be held on **December 6, 2025, 7:00 p.m.** It is looking to be an enjoyable recital once again. We have a brass quintet, woodwind quintet, a vocal quartet and women's trio, flute solos, youth instrumental and vocal music, and piano music all on the schedule, with perhaps more to be added still before the date.

We hope that you will schedule this event on your December calendar. It is a wonderful time to sit in our beautiful sanctuary and take in the musical gifts of our performers, while finding stillness and joy for just a few moments in this busy season.

And.....there will be goodies following the recital in fellowship hall. Sue Harms has graciously volunteered to organize the reception. If you have baking or cooking talents and you would like to volunteer an item for the reception, please contact Sue.

The recital will be video recorded and shared on our website, although it will not be available on cable, in the event that you are not able to attend on the date.

Recital contact: jaemusiclover@gmail.com
 Reception contact: robsue900@charter.net

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

Tech Opportunities

Thank you to Dale Bakke, Bill Edington, and Pamela Martin who recorded during November.



We record each service and are looking to expand our camera operators. 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.

Juanita Edington

c.920-988-2416

jaemusiclover@gmail.com

Coffee Fellowship:



Rotations of servers and Bakers are needed each Sunday of the month. Bakers provide the snacks. Prior to worship, "servers" get the coffee started and place the snacks out in

time to attend worship.

***SIGN UP to help* by contacting Jennifer Rhodes at myvibe04@yahoo.com or call her at (920) 296-1378

**Schedules are on the narthex table, if you need to switch dates please contact one of the volunteers directly.

DECEMBER SCHEDULE:

Dec. 7: Bake:, Ellen Brown, Dale Bakke
Serve: Dale Bakke

Dec. 14: Bake: Brian Cowan, Jennifer Rhodes
Serve: Brian Cowan, Jennifer Rodes

Dec. 21: Bake: Tom Rusch, Diane Koch
Serve: Sue Harms

Dec. 28: Bake: Joce Uglow, Barb Weiss
Serve: Jesse Fremont





✓ **The Watertown Food Pantry**, 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 Bread Basket Pantry**, is located at 208 S. 3rd St., Watertown and is another amazing local resource for our community. In addition to food items, clothing is especially needed. Many individuals and families don't arrive prepared for our seasons

There is a shopping cart in the narthex You are welcome to bring any food at any time . **There is always a need for** egg cartons.



THE BREAD BASKET HOURS ARE:

- Mondays 12:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.
- Tuesdays 11 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.
- Fridays 12:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m

Learn more at their website:

<https://www.breadbasketwisconsin.org/>

✓ **KOATS FOR KIDS (AND ADULTS):** If you have new or gently used coats, scarves, mittens, gloves or snow pants consider donating them to Koats for Kids. You can drop things off at church on Sunday mornings, or at the Office M-TH 10-4:00. *From there they will go to the Bread Basket pantry.*

✓ **Undies Sundays:** Continuing through December, our special drive to collect packages of new underwear and socks for kids in our local grade schools. All children's sizes are welcome! Drop off donations to church and place them in the Undies Collection Cart in the narthex. Denyce Derleth makes sure they are delivered!

✓ **Weekend Food to Go and Grow** is currently filling 46 bags to go home with the children on the weekend. Each of the 11 churches brings one food item for each bag. Because we are a smaller church we divide the number of items necessary with First Baptist. Each church supplying half.

For our special Christmas bag December 18th we are collecting small boxes of pudding mix or the premixed small individual puddings.

Items we will need for January-May are:

- Small box of muffin mix (Jiffy or similar)
- Box of regular crackers (Ritz type or saltine)
- Package of Tortillas
- Box of graham crackers
- We also provide margarine. We will use any money donated to buy the margarine.



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.

How to Join Us for Worship

- 1) Join our mailing list: for an email link sent out weekly "Welcome to Worship" from lbentz@firstcongwttn.org.
- 2) 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.
- 3) Visit our church's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/First-Congregational-United-Church-of-Christ-118640148151341/>
- 4) Our church website (see 'Media'): <https://firstcongwttn.org/> Services posted on Monday.





Our Love Fund

November and December the Loose Coin Mission Offering will go to the Love Fund. As we move into the winter months we continue to see “hard times” fall pretty hard on struggling families.

Today we are severely challenged and ask for your help to provide for emergency needs in our community. (Housing, food insecurity, transportation to work and utilities)

- Housing: Includes rent/security deposits. The uptick in lack of housing opportunities and the loss of employment. 2 week delays/wait for their first paycheck. Domestic Abuse victims seeking help. Winter and summer temperatures are life threatening for those whose only shelter is their car.
- Emergency Utility Assistance: we help families who have had gas & electric shut off during times of extreme heat/extreme cold. They work with We Energies on budget billing but still fall behind.
- Extreme food insecurity: Gift cards for Groceries
- Transportation to work: “Fuel Only” gas cards

(We are not alone. We work with our contacts through case workers in Jefferson and Dodge County, CAC Community Action Coalition and the caseworker at the Police Department.

In addition, we also coordinate assistance with St. Paul’s Episcopal church, the Moravian churches and Immanuel ELCA’s Hometown Missions.)

“Love Offering” Envelopes are always available at the entrance to the sanctuary. Thank you for the continued support during time like these.



We have some very exciting things in the works at Gingerbread. We have full enrollment and full staffing! We were able to provide 2 Thanksgiving meals for 2 of our large families. We also have a growing food pantry with personal essentials available for our families.

Our Holiday Program will be held Wednesday, December 10th 6:00.

If you are looking for volunteer time, or donations to give, please let Melissa know!

Melissa Mattke-Administrator/director
 Gingerbread email: gbchildcare120@gmail.com
 Melissa Cell: 262-719-1383

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From the Coordinator of Children and Youth Ministries

Melissa Mattke Cell: 262-719-1383

Sunday School: We have been having short little meetings on Sunday mornings. I will be having another hip surgery on December 10th so there will not be Sunday School December 14th-Jan 4th 2026.



Thank you to Boy Scout Troop 11 for their donation of the beautiful Christmas wreaths at the front entrance to the church.

Thank you to those that worked to support church behind the scenes: Decorating the tree and the sanctuary; cleaning and tidying the church; setting up for Communion; those who provided coffee fellowship; those who served as ushers and Liturgists. The money counters who took careful care of the offerings.

Thank You!

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BOOK OF LIFE

December

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	12/15
Lily Kulick	12/16
Denyce Derleth	12/21
Rev. Chris Ross	12/21
Sophia Mattke	12/29
Joyce Larson	12/31



January

Brad Niay	01/01
Daniel Edwards	01/04
Nicholas Oxford	01/04
Lee Buescher	01/08
Tracy Livermore	01/08
CJ Zabel	01/20
Frances Milburn	01/21
Bruce Williams	01/23
Charly Ladwig	01/25
Donna Niay	01/28
Kay Fuchs	01/30

TOTENFEST - Service of Remembrance

On Sunday, November 2 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. As names were read the church bell tolled and a candle was lit in remembrance.

JAYLENE SUE BONHAM-LANE,
Kristin Chowanec's aunt
Born: May 10, 1959
Died: January 2, 2025

ELIZABETH McCABE, Lynda Eicher's sister
Born: December 20, 1946
Died: July 14, 2025

ROBERT SCHMUTZLER
Born: August 17, 1928
Died: January 7, 2025

RUSSEL RISHEL, Cindy Stockhus's uncle
Born: November 24, 1938
Died: July 23, 2025

KONNY RISHEL, Cindy Stockhus's mother
Born: April 30, 1934
Died: February 12, 2025

ELLEN WELDEN, Cindy Stockhus, cousin
Born: October 2, 1961
Died: September 20, 2025

DON ALLEN KELLESVIG, Lynda Eicher's cousin
Born: October 8, 1948
Died: March 17, 2025

Financial Report— As of November, 2025

2025	BUDGETED CONTRIBUTIONS	ACTUAL CONTRIBUTIONS	BUDGETED TOTAL INCOME	ACTUAL TOTAL INCOME	BUDGETED EXPENSES	ACTUAL EXPENSES	MONTH GAIN OR LOSS	YEAR GAIN OR LOSS
September	\$19,604	\$31,925	\$20,579	\$32,905	\$23,969	\$24,289	\$8,616	-\$22,489
October	\$19,604	\$20,153	\$20,579	\$20,653	\$23,969	\$23,660	-\$3,007	-\$25,496

WARM NEIGHBORS WARM HEARTS

In this season of gratitude and giving,
Building a Welcoming Watertown invites you
to help keep our neighbors out of the cold this winter
through a new ***Emergency Warming Shelter*** program!

YOUR IMPACT:

Every donation helps cover the cost of **overnight housing, food, and other needs** for people in need of emergency housing during frigid temperatures and severe winter weather.

SEND YOUR GIFT TO:

**Immanuel Evangelical
Lutheran Church**
209 North Ninth Street,
Watertown, WI 53094

*Checks should be made out to
"Immanuel Ev. Lutheran Church" with
"Warming Shelter" in the memo line.*

**GIVE
ONLINE**



**BUILDING A
WELCOMING WATERTOWN**

Where We All Belong!

December 2025

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1 1 p.m. – Staff meets	2	3	4 10am - Cable TV Broadcast 5pm - Cable TV Broadcast	5 OFFICE CLOSED	6 7:00, Advent Recital
7 2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT Communion Sunday 9:00 a.m. Sr. Choir; Sunday School 10:00 – WORSHIP; Coffee Fellowship 6 pm - Cable TV Broadcast	8	9 6:00: Gingerbread board meets	10 6:00: Gingerbread Holiday Program	11 10am - Cable TV Broadcast 5pm - Cable TV Broadcast	12 OFFICE CLOSED	13
14 3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT 9:00 a.m. Sr. Choir; NO Sunday School 10:00 – WORSHIP, Christmas Program ; Coffee Fellowship; 11:00 A.M. CONGREGATIONAL MEETING 1:00: Building a Welcoming Watertown at Immanuel ELCA church. 6 pm - Cable TV Broadcast	15 6:30 pm, COUNCIL	16	17 NEWSLETTER DEADLINE	18 10am - Cable TV Broadcast 5pm - Cable TV Broadcast	19 OFFICE CLOSED	20
21 4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT 9:00 a.m. Sr. Choir; NO Sunday School 10:00 – WORSHIP; Coffee Fellowship Cancelled 11:30: Social Justice Team 6 pm - Cable TV Broadcast	22	23	24 7:00: CHRISTMAS EVE Candlelight Service (Communion)	25 Christmas Day OFFICE CLOSED 10am - Cable TV Broadcast 5pm - Cable TV Broadcast	26 OFFICE CLOSED	27
28 NO Sr. Choir; NO Sunday School 10:00 – WORSHIP: Blue Christmas ; Coffee Fellowship 6 pm - Cable TV Broadcast	29	30	January 1 2026 New Year's Day OFFICE CLOSED			