

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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Church Office hours:

M-TH 10-noon and 1-4

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January 2026

From the Pastor's Desk



Christmas has come. Maybe that's not what we expect to read in a January Newsletter, but according to the church calendar, it's the season of Christmastide until January 6, when we remember the story of the arrival of the Magi. Note that I did not say Christmas has come and gone. In a hymn found in our *New Century Hymnal*, a verse reads, "When the song of the angels is stilled, when the star in the sky is gone, When the sages and the shepherds have found their way home, the work of Christmas is begun" ("I Am the Light of the World," #584).

It's no mistake that each new year begins in the midst of the true Christmas season. The incarnation—God taking on flesh—is not a reality we should stop celebrating on December 26. The claim that God can reside in real, physical, tangible bodies—in us, even—is central to our faith and life as Christians. That is why the work of Christmas is merely beginning when the song of the angels is stilled, and the star in the sky is gone, and the sages and shepherds have found their way home.

The reminder of this truth brings newness each year; it refreshes us. It allows us to see new possibilities and new life in the coming twelve months. With the promise of *Emmanuel* (God with us), we can begin anew and we are called to live into our new reality by showing God's presence in not only our hearts, but in our hands and feet and words and deeds. As Jesus was, we are called to embody God's love as the Body of Christ today. That means putting into practice those things our faith teaches us are true about

God, things like grace, mercy, compassion, peace, and justice—those same things to which Jesus pointed and practiced (often in the face of great opposition).

Let us ring in the New Year by celebrating the power and promise of God's incarnation *everyday*.

--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.

Church celebrates bright future with solar panels. Renewable energy to reduce carbon footprint.

Watertown Daily times – December 26, 2025

ED ZAGORSKI, Author

"I think it's important for the church to take part in the preservation of God's creation — a creation constantly under threat by forces more willing to follow a golden calf than the God of new life," First Congregational United Church of Christ Senior Pastor Rev. Dr. Christopher Ross said.

Activated Monday, First Congregational United Church of Christ Moderator Jim Ortega said that the church's new solar panels reduce their electricity bills, minimize their carbon footprint, and honor their faith and good stewardship of the environment.

Ortega said the solar panels are expensive, but because they were installed by year's end, the First Congregational United Church of Christ will realize a tax credit/refund for about \$40,000.

"They are configured to produce our electrical usage level," Ortega said. "We don't have storage batteries,

instead we just sell it (power) back to the utility grid and the utility company will discount our electrical bill every month accordingly."

He said for the First Congregational United Church of Christ and its members it makes sense to have solar panels because it fulfills their green initiative and reduces their carbon footprint.

"It helps the planet, and in the long run, we're also going to save a great deal on our electric bills," Ortega said. "We were fortunate to have Appleton Solar install them and complete the project before the end of the year."

He said long before the solar panels were installed the church membership needed to make a decision on whether or not to have them.

"About 75% of the total cost is to be paid by pledges and donations made by our church members," Ortega said.

He said for the remaining amount the church membership decided to use other available funds for it (rather than take out a commercial loan).

"It's definitely a good investment for us," Ortega said. "Our panels have a 25-year warranty and the payback will be less than 10 years because we are cutting our electric bills."

He said with electricity costs increasing it was a wise investment. "The higher the rates go the more we are saving," Ortega said.

He attended a conference in October given by Phius, a non-profit organization committed to decarbonizing the built environment.

"They basically work with the contractor to lower the carbon footprint," Ortega said. "The speaker said, 'If it's a skyscraper or a residence, you can extrapolate the electricity costs over 30 years. It grows and grows exponentially.' Even if we have to replace the system in 30 years, we will gain better technology. As they become older, the panels will still work, but they won't be at 100% efficiency."

He said old solar panels are often donated and turned over to poverty-stricken countries for use. "They still work and can lower the carbon footprint, but they are not working at full capacity," Ortega said. "It still makes sense to pass them along and keep them running to help another country or neighbor with their power needs."



Dear Members of Our Congregation,

We are excited to share joyful news with you—our child care ministry is growing! Thanks to your continued prayers, generosity, and encouragement, we will soon be opening a **second child care center location** to better serve families in our community.

This expansion is a wonderful milestone for our ministry. Each day, we see how deeply children thrive when they are welcomed into a safe, nurturing, faith-filled environment. Opening a new location will allow us to extend that same care to even more little ones, offering additional classroom spaces, more family support, and continued opportunities to share God's love through early childhood education.

We are profoundly grateful for the role you have played in making this possible. Your support—whether through volunteering, giving, or simply holding our teachers and families in your prayers—has laid the foundation for this next chapter. We truly could not have reached this point without you. If you are interested in volunteering or giving, please let me know!

As we prepare for this expansion, we look forward to keeping you updated and welcoming you to celebrate with us. Please continue to pray for our staff, the children who will soon join us, and for the continued success of our growing ministry.

Thank you for walking alongside us as we care for children, support families, and strengthen our community.

With gratitude and blessings,

Melissa Mattke-Executive Director
Gingerbread Preschool & Child Care Center

Gingerbread Phone: 920-261-9727

Email: gbchildcare120@gmail.com

Website: www.gingerbreadchildcare.com



December was a busy month for the choir. They sang each Sunday during Advent, including the Christmas pageant, and on Christmas Eve. Laura Yurs joined the choir on flute one of those Sundays,

The WUSD Carolers made their annual visit on December 21st, and while this article is being written well before, we expect several guest singers on Christmas Eve, including "grown and flown singers" and next generation singers. I'll name those in the next newsletter. James Ortega joined us already on Dec. 7th. And, of course my continuing thanks goes to Tom Rusch, who serves the music program of our church in so many ways!

Senior Choir continues at 9:00 a.m. on Sunday mornings in the choir room and meets weekly, unless noted ahead of time. We will meet at 6:00 on Christmas Eve to rehearse, but **we won't rehearse on December 28th.** **We will resume rehearsals on Jan. 4, 2026.**

Something extra to look forward to will be an Ecumenical Choir as part of the service that our church will host on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

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

Community Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Worship at Our Church

This year, the day honoring the justice work and legacy of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Junior falls on Monday, January 19. The congregations involved in Building a Welcoming Watertown are joining together to offer a special worship service that evening, beginning at 6:30, right here in our sanctuary.

Come, be part of this community that seeks to remember—and be inspired to put into action—the same principles that grounded the Civil Rights Movement.

When? Monday, January 19, 6:30 p.m.

Where? The sanctuary of First Congregational United Church of Christ

Tech Opportunities

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

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



“The Best Old Fashioned Christmas Pageant Ever”

With Melissa Mattke needing to be out for another surgery, but with a Christmas program already scheduled into the worship services for December, Jennie Ortega and Juanita Edington took on the challenge of filling in for Melissa to organize and present a program. We chose a pageant that could be easily pulled together with people of any age in the congregation on the given morning (and of course, the scheduled date gave us one of the coldest of this winter’s beginning)!

Tom Rusch provided piano interludes, underscore with narration, and accompaniment for all the songs sung. The choir, a women’s trio, and the congregation, all sang familiar carols woven through the narration and the congregational costumed volunteers playing the parts of the Nativity story.

We would like to thank our actors: Jill and Greg Kulick, Mary and Joseph; Colin Kulick, Barb Weiss, Shepherds & Joyce Uglow, sheep; Laura Yurs, herder & Amos, donkey; Lee Buescher, cow; Kylie Kulick, sheep; Denice Derlyth, dove; Fran Milburn, Ellen Brown, & Jennifer Bakke, wise (wo)men;

Pastor Chris for at the last minute agreeing to serve as stage manager-giving entrance cues to all of the actors; choir soloists, Bill Edington, Jim Ortega, Juanita Edington, Kristin Chowanec; Jennie Ortega, director and narrator; Juanita Edington, music direction; and Tom Rusch, accompanist.

Juanita Edington and Jennie Ortega



23rd Advent Recital 2025

This year’s recital was beautiful, thoughtful, and had a nice variety of music. You may not be aware, but the only music that I really have control of, is that which I perform in, unless asked by the performers. So, the soloists or ensembles choose their music and rehearse it on their own.

They get me their titles and other information and I put the music into what I think will be a pleasant order to listen to, and a reasonable order for the musicians to perform their selections.

Our performers this year were: Kristin Chowanec, Kristen Curran, Vicky Daniels, Bill & Juanita Edington, Theresa Janke Oestreicher, Kevin Koehnke, Erin & Kara Lynch, Tim Meier, James, Jennie, & Jim Ortega, Zachary Oster, Tom Rusch, Pamela Whitcomb, Laura Yurs, Eliza & Penelope Zabel.

The recital was recorded and will be able to be viewed through the website or by clicking this link.
<https://vimeo.com/1144746436?share=copy&fl=cl&e=ci>

Our thanks go to Jennifer Bakke, Ellen Brown, Sue Harms, Jill Kulick, Joyce Uglow, and Barb Weiss who brought cookies for the reception, and especially Sue and Barb who coordinated, set up & cleaned up.

This year, our free will donation basket was designated to go to the new *Emergency Warming Shelter* program fund. Thanks to your generosity, this event raised just over \$300!

Juanita Edington & Sue Harms



✓ **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/>

BLOOD DRIVE: We will be having our first blood drive of the year on **January 22nd**. It will start at 1pm. Here is the link to sign up to donate blood:
https://donateblood.versiti.org/donor/schedule/s/drive_schedule/11630864

Please consider donating as the holidays pass there is always a need for more donations. Our personal goal is 12 donors. Let's make a goal to BEAT that goal! If you have questions, please contact me.

From the
Coordinator of
Children and Youth
Ministries



Sunday School: We will start again with our learning on January 4, 2026! Thank you for your patience while I was recovering from surgery!



Gingerbread: We have been very busy at Gingerbread. With the announcement of our expansion in June 2026 we have been planning for the future. Our Holiday program was well attended and the children did great performing! We held a toy drive and were able to help 5 families with toys and other items for Christmas. If you are interested in donating time or funding to help with our future projects, please let us know.



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 Sue Harms at robsue900@charter.net or call her at (920) 296-1378

**Sign up sheet will be on the narthex table in January.

January - February Loose Coin:

At their December meeting Church council moved to change the Loose Coin to cover 2 months at a time.

January and February loose coin offering will go to Building a Welcoming Watertown's [Emergency Warming Shelter Program](#).

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!

BOOK OF LIFE



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

Christmas Poinsettia Memorial and Dedications

The Christmas Eve Poinsettias were provided by:

- * Diane Koch, in loving memory of Dean Koch
- * Bill & Juanita Edington, in honor of our children and grandchildren.
- * Angela Viola, in memory of Ramona Zehm
- * Diane Koch, in memory of Dean Koch
- * Fran Milburn & Lee Buescher, in memory of loved ones.
- * Jennie Ortega, in honor of Dani Lynch, Kelsey Johnson, Emily Savides, Marissa Abbott, Bella Reichardt, Lily Kulick, Sophie Mattke and Charly Ladwig.
- * Norm & Joyce Uglow, in honor of our grandchildren Charley and Hayden.



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 staff behind the scenes in December:

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

Financial Updates - GENERAL FUND November 30, 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
November	\$19,604	\$18,215	\$20,579	\$18,730	\$23,969	\$21,014	-\$2,955	-\$43,683

OFFERING ENVELOPES or EFT

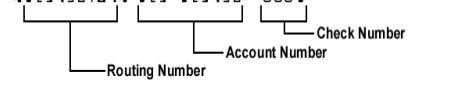
Envelopes for 2026: Using envelopes benefits the volunteer counters when they prepare the bank deposit. If you have used the mailable envelopes in the past or would like to use them in 2026 we have a box at church for you. See Laurel Bentz to get your set.

ELECTRONIC GIVING (EFT): giving electronically is an option we have offered for a number of years with great success. You decide how much you want to have sent and when you want it sent through our secure Vanco program. Changes can be made easily within a day or two by contacting Laurel. Records are kept secure and confidential.

If you are interested in using this convenient method for giving to the church, use this form and give to Laurel in the church office. You can direct all questions to Laurel Bentz in the church office (261-6213 M-Th) or via email (lbentz@firstcongwttn.org)

ELECTRONIC GIVING AUTHORIZATION FORM

First Congregational UCC
120 Kuckkan Lane, Watertown, WI 53094

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY		ENVELOPE/DONOR #	DATE
Effective date of authorization: ____ / ____ / ____			
Type of authorization: <input type="checkbox"/> New authorization <input type="checkbox"/> Change donation amount <input type="checkbox"/> Change donation date <input type="checkbox"/> Change banking information <input type="checkbox"/> Discontinue electronic donation			
Last Name		First Name	
Address			
City		State	Zip
Email Address			
Date of first donation: ____ / ____ / ____	Frequency of donation: (please check one) <input type="checkbox"/> Monthly on the 1 st <input type="checkbox"/> Monthly on the 15 th <input type="checkbox"/> Bi-Weekly (every other week)	Amount of first donation: \$ _____	
CHECKING / SAVINGS	Please debit my donation from my (check one): Savings Account (contact your financial institution for Routing #) Checking Account (attach a voided check below)		Routing Number: _____ Valid Routing # must start with 0, 1, 2, or 3 Account Number: _____ 
	I authorize the above organization to process debit entries to my account. I understand that this authority will remain in effect until I provide reasonable notification to terminate the authorization.		
Authorized Signature: _____		Date: _____	

If using a checking account, please attach a voided check at the bottom of this page.

January 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
January and February loose coin offering will go to Building a Welcoming Watertown's Emergency Warming Shelter Program				1 New Year's Day Office Closed 10am - Cable TV Broadcast 5pm - Cable TV Broadcast	2 OFFICE CLOSED	3
4 Epiphany Sunday 9:00 a.m. Sunday School; -Sr. Choir; 10:00 – WORSHIP, Communion; Coffee Fellowship 6 pm - Cable TV Broadcast	5 1:00 p.m. Staff meets	6	7	8 10am - Cable TV Broadcast 5pm - Cable TV Broadcast	9 OFFICE CLOSED	10
11 Baptism of Christ 9:00 a.m. Sr. Choir; Sunday School 10:00 – WORSHIP; Coffee Fellowship 6 pm - Cable TV Broadcast	12	13	14	15 10am - Cable TV Broadcast 5pm - Cable TV Broadcast	16 OFFICE CLOSED	17
18 9:00 a.m. Sr. Choir; Sunday School 10:00 – WORSHIP; Coffee Fellowship *11:30, Social Justice *1:00- Building a Welcoming Watertown at Wttn Public Library 6 pm - Cable TV Broadcast	19 Office Closed Martin Luther King, Jr. Day 6:30 pm, Ecumenical MLK worship service in our sanctuary.	20 6:30, Church Council	21 *NEWSLETTER DEADLINE *Annual Report DEADLINE	22 10am - Cable TV Broadcast 5pm - Cable TV Broadcast 1-6:00 BLOOD DRIVE	23 OFFICE CLOSED	24
25 9:00 a.m. Sr. Choir; Sunday School 10:00 – WORSHIP; Coffee Fellowship 6 pm - Cable TV Broadcast	26	27	28	29 10am - Cable TV Broadcast 5pm - Cable TV Broadcast	30 OFFICE CLOSED	31