

Tower Notes - December 2024

Celebrating 179 years of Community Based Ministry



First Congregational United Church of Christ
An Open & Affirming and Immigrant Welcoming Church



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#Love&JusticeChurch

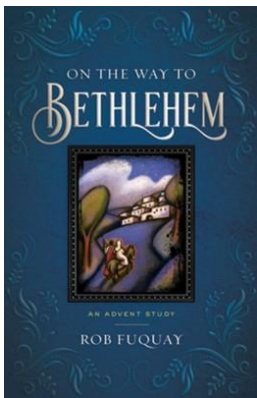
Rev. Dr. Bob Gross



Pastor's Message

***From Pennsylvania, folks are travelin' down to Dixie's sunny shore,
From Atlantic to Pacific, gee, the traffic is terrific.***

When our kids were young, we lived about halfway, roughly 500 miles, between both sets of grandparents. I would lead worship on Christmas Eve and then we would rise early on Christmas Day to make it to Grandma's house for dinner with extended family. In those trips, and often when we travel, we're often focused on the destination in our travels. It's not just us. "Where are you going?" is the most common question upon hearing that someone is heading out of town. While the destination is perhaps the impetus for deciding to "go," it is often the journey itself that offers the most memorable moments—frustrating or delightful. This Advent season, we will pay attention not just to the destination of Christmas, but also to the places where events occurred that led to a starry night on which a child was born who would change the world. And we will ponder our own milestones—the progress and the potholes "on the way."



Several people have taken the book and/or the devotional. There are still more copies, and I encourage you to pick up one, the other, or both and read along as we journey, ***On the Way to Bethlehem.***

The Advent and Christmas season is a time for friends, families, and friends who have become family to reconnect and renew relationships. Doctor Seuss put it this way, "Christmas Day is in our grasp, so long as we have hands to clasp." I invite you to join us on Sunday mornings at 10 am and on Christmas Eve at 4:00 or 7:30 pm. Arrive early for worship at 7:30 pm to secure your favorite seat! Pre-worship music will begin at 7 pm. If unable to be here in person, I encourage you to log in and join us online.

***O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant, O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem.
Come and behold him, born the King of Angels. O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.***

May the blessings of this Advent be yours at Christmas and all the year through, Bob



Home Communion - If you would like Pastor Bob to bring Communion to your home, don't hesitate to contact the church and let him know.

Worship in December



- December 1: *Rome: A Place of Longing*
December 8: *Jerusalem: A Place of Waiting; Children's Pageant-The Mysterious Animal*
December 15: *Nazareth: A Place of Simplicity*
December 22: *Bethlehem: A Place of Humility*
December 24: Family Christmas Eve Worship 4:00 pm
Candlelight Christmas Eve Worship 7:30 pm w/ special music at 7:00
The Stable: A Place of Care
December 29: Christmas Carol Sing, submit your requests to the office by December 19
January 5: *Persia: A Place of Return*

Thank you to our November liturgists: Patti York, Nathan Roehl, Sarah Beers, Nancy Stabb.
If you would like to be a liturgist, sign up in the Fireside Room on the clipboard.

Thank you to our November Fellowship Hour hosts: Diana Huckstep, Personnel Committee.

We would love to have you host Fellowship/Coffee Hour. Sign-up on the clipboard in the Fireside Room.



Welcome Quilts Exhibit at First Congregational in November.

There were more than 70 attendees to the Exhibit during the week of November 10. Over 30 "welcome" squares were made which is nearly enough for 3 quilts!

Many Thanks to Debi Cox, Neil Deupree, Pam Maxson, Bonnie Stalker and Jeanne Carfora for their immeasurable collaboration on setting up and taking down the Welcome Quilts Exhibit. It could not have been done without them. Also thanks to the volunteer Greeters and Guides Tani Abendroth, Mary Jo Manus, Darla Dernovsek, Rita Feirn, Jill Gant, Mary Williams, Diana Huckstep, Karel Cripe and Barb Bendlin.

Nancy Stabb, Exhibit coordinator.

December *BIRTHDAYS*, Happy Day to All!

1 Jim Hyzer	11 Katie Shebesta	22 Richard Eddings
1 Norm Prom	13 Diane Holtz	22 Nathan Roehl
1 Joan Skyles	14 Jill Gant	24 Joan Kalweit
2 Martin Huckstep	15 Ed Atkins	24 Dave Lennox
2 Ronald Hull	19 Karen Teubert	28 Larry Beck
9 David Jensen	20 Ann Forbeck	30 Melissa Newton



December *ANNIVERSARIES*, Congratulations

26 Bill & Mary Williams
31 Jim & Diane Holtz



If your name ever gets missed from the birthday or anniversary list, please let Becky know.

Humor for the month: It's perfectly OK to talk to yourself and it's perfectly OK to answer yourself. But it's totally sad that you have to repeat what you said because you weren't listening.



We no longer collect for Grocery Bag Sundays each month, but ECHO is always in need of food and non-perishables, which you can drop off during their business hours, or at church. Thank you to everyone who has contributed.

*Life is an echo...
what you send out,
you get back!*

ECHO December Needs:

Breakfast bars	Diapers (sz 4-6)	Toothbrushes	Spaghettios
Shampoo	Peanut butter & jelly	Feminine products	Tuna Helper
Paper bags	Spaghetti & sauce	Deodorant	Toilet paper
Hamburger Helper	Diced tomatoes	Canned Tuna	Laundry soap

SEEKERS BOOK CLUB NEWS

Seekers book discussion group meets on Thursdays from 4:00-5:30 pm in the Atrium of the church. They are reading the book, "If the Church Were Christian: Rediscovering the Values of Jesus" by Philip Gulley.



You can attend even if you haven't read the book.

For further information, contact Barbara Bendlin at Barbara.bendlin@gmail.com

Free Community Dinner



Community Meal is an outreach that our church has participated in for over 15 years. We serve a healthy, balanced free meal to those in our community who need or desire a freshly prepared meal. It is served the first Saturday of each month. We began serving it as an indoor sit-down meal but has transformed into a to-go style meal. We currently serve over 100 meals each month.

The next Community Meal will be on Saturday, December 7 at 4:00 pm. A warm to-go meal of Chili or Chicken Dumpling Soup (choose one), carrot and celery sticks, corn bread/butter, fresh fruit, banana bars and cake.

Guests can drive up or walk up to the back parking lot door and meals will be brought out to them.

Want to volunteer for Community Meal? You can donate pumpkin bars, food prep and assist serving meals on the day of the meal. Desserts can be dropped off during office hours or a pick-up can be arranged. Volunteer by contacting Nancy Stabb, Jeanine Fry or Bonnie Stalker, directly, email bonniebrewer17@hotmail.com, or sign up in the Fireside Room on the clipboard.

‘Imagining Together’ Leads to Stewardship Pledges

Thank you for helping First Congregational UCC “Imagine Together” to plan for the year ahead as part of the 2025 stewardship pledge drive.

Our members have pledged \$127,495 in 2025 gifts as of Nov. 15, 2024, which leaves the stewardship campaign about \$15,000 below its goal. Pledge cards are still being accepted and can be turned in, emailed or sent by U.S. mail to the church office at 54 S. Jackson St., Janesville, WI, 53548.

Members also used the pledge drive to offer their time, talents and ideas. Time and talents cards will now be shared with church ministries so they can follow up. Pastor Bob will review ideas for the church’s future and share them with ministries as well.

The Stewardship team continues to reach out to members to make sure everyone has an opportunity to participate. If you need a pledge packet, please contact the church office at (608) 752-8716 or by email anytime at janesvilleucc@janesvilleucc.org.

Thank you!

The Stewardship Team

Darla Dernovsek; Diana Huckstep; Dave Schollmeier; Nancy Stabb, Treasurer;
and Pastor Bob Gross

CONSISTORY MEETING November 26

Consistory shared appreciations for Nancy Stabb for coordinating the Migration Art & Hope Welcome Quilt exhibit that 77 people attended; to all the members who helped decorate the sanctuary for the holidays; to everyone who visited Linda Stehura and helped her family; to the hosts of Cottage Meetings to make everyone feel comfortable in a different environment; to Pastor Bob's sermons on It's a Wonder-full Life; and to Ruth Robinson's doctors who are helping her heal after a dog attack.

The church's October projected budget has fallen short of projections. The computer Becky uses needed to be replaced unexpectedly at a cost of \$1,200, and our property and liability insurance rose 50%, an increase of \$8,000 over the 2024 invoice. Finance is looking for a better rate. The Stewardship committee received 49 pledge cards. If you haven't sent your card in yet, there is still time.

A worship series on the **Way to Bethlehem** will begin December 1 and will run through January 5. On December 29, we will have a **Carol Sing** where people can suggest their favorite Christmas carols to sing during worship. Pastor Bob has held 3 **Cottage Meetings** so far with a total of 20 participants. Sign up in the Fellowship Room or call the office if you'd like to participate.

Debi Cox and Pastor Bob are recruiting youth, high school and college students to participate in the Wisconsin Conference Winter Soulstice retreat at the Daycholah Center, January 24-26, 2025. Contact Debi if you are interested or know someone who may want to attend.

Pastor Bob completed the **Animating Anti-Racism** course with the Wisconsin Conference, and continues to serve on the Wisconsin Conference Board of Directors and on the Church and Ministry Team of the Southeast Association.

Church historical records are being digitized by the Rock County Historical Society, per Janet Hay. We will obtain a digital copy for our records.

Ministry Updates

Outreach – Rich Harper has resigned as chair, and Patti York will be the interim chair. The GIFTS Shelter Art Show is on Wednesday, December 4 at JPAC from 5:30p to 7pm and is free and open to the public. The bench seating at the Community Gardens has been installed thanks to Jill Gant. Our December mission is the Christmas Fund and ECHO Gift Cards.

Finance – The pews in the balcony are being cut and shortened to fit appropriately; the downspouts will be installed this month; our website update is ongoing, and a new designer is being sought; Ken Forbeck will be asked to shoot current photos of the church for the website.

Membership – Raised \$280 during the month from the coin collection which will be equally split between Membership and Fellowship Hour. Mark your calendars for December 8 for our Art/Craft/Bake Sale after church service upstairs in the Spirituality Center. Your baked items and silent auction items can be dropped off at church on Saturday between 11am and 4pm.

Submitted by Patti York



SUNDAY SCHOOL AND YOUTH NEWS

COLORING WITH FRIENDS

We will have coloring in the Sanctuary during all Advent Services!



It's Back!
Coloring for
EVERYONE during
Church.

Inter-Generational Christmas Play

Sunday, December 8, 2024

During morning service.



Rehearsal following church on December 1.

TEENS & YOUNG ADULTS

Pastor Bob will be taking a group to

WINTER SOULSTICE RETREAT

January 24-26.

See Debi to get registered



Debi Cox
Director of Christian Education
debi@janesvilleucc.org
Church: 608-752-8716
Mobile: 651-387-4552

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UCC
OPEN & AFFIRMING
IMMIGRANT WELCOMING



54 S. JACKSON STREET, JANESVILLE, WI 53548
JANESVILLEUCC.ORG

The Christmas Fund

Our congregation's December monthly mission is the Christmas Fund. The Christmas Fund is one of five UCC-wide missions. It has been in existence for 100 years and is managed by the pension board. The fund cares for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the UCC who are in need through emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities, health premium supplementations, and "thank you" gifts. It is funded exclusively through donations. We encourage you to prayerfully consider supporting this fund.

You can use this QR code or link to get to Easyithe, or write a check with 'Christmas Fund' in the memo.



<https://app.easyithe.com/App/Giving/janesvilleucc>


Art/Craft/Bake Sale Sunday December 8th after worship

This is a very nice event for all who are so busy during the Christmas season. Stocking stuffers and baking can be crossed off your list. There will be various items for sale and items for silent auction. Bring your family and friends.

We will also have a silent auction for historic pictures from a storage closet in our church.





First Congregational Church
 54 South Jackson Street
 Janesville, WI 53548 



*This page was
 attached to the
 Tower Notes that
 were mailed.*



First Congregational United Church of Christ

Office Hours: Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday mornings 9:00 - 1:00 or by appointment.

Ministers

Interim Pastor
 Christian Ed. Director
 Music Director
 Pianist/Organist
 AV Technician
 Secretary
 Bookkeeper
 Nursery Coordinator
 Custodian

All Members of First Congregational UCC

Rev. Dr. Bob Gross
 Debi Cox
 Robyn Doege-Brennan
 Paul Finger
 Kaydence Troia
 Becky Kingsbury
 Denise Caldwell
 Gwen Charlet
 Matthew Charlet

Church Leadership & Volunteers

President
 Treasurer
 Finance Chair
 Gardeners

Tom Clippert
 Nancy Stabb
 Mike Rundle
 Nancy Stabb, Barbara Bendlin, Jeanine Fry, Tani Abendroth,
 Tabitha Ebert & Sybil Streeter

Lawn Mowers:

Mike Rundle, Sybil Streeter, Doug Newton, Martin Huckstep, Warren Myers