

Tower Notes - May 2025

Celebrating 180 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

What Brings You Joy?

When I meet with clergy colleagues, we often lament the state of our nation and world. That said, it's not all bad news. When they ask how I'm doing, joy wells up in me because I am so grateful for the opportunity to serve alongside this congregation. In times like these, the insightful quote by a David Steindl-Rast, a Benedictine Monk, rings true. He says, "It is not joy that makes us grateful; it is gratitude that makes us joyful."

In the last month, I have experienced much that has brought me joy. Here are the highlights.

I am grateful to our Membership Ministry who hosted the Spring Celebration. They reached out to members of the congregation inviting everyone to a wonderful after worship luncheon. It was a joy to see the Spiritual Arts Center filled with people eating, chatting, and laughing together. That's not all, they were just getting started. They produced a new banner to post out on the corner of Jackson and Court Streets extending Easter blessings to all who passed by. Then they pulled together a Rummage Sale that welcomed over a hundred people into the building providing treasures at a reasonable cost for those in need and brought in some cash to support the church budget. In particular I want to thank Diana and Martin Huckstep for their tireless efforts. Well done and thank you!

I am grateful to our Music Ministry. (I know they're not an official committee like our other Ministries. Still, ministries get things done and our musicians pulled out all the stops for Easter.) I am grateful for Robyn Doege-Brennan's leadership who gathered a stellar team of musicians. The music was glorious. Our choir, handbells, and brass were all in top form. I'm also grateful that we saw 144 people in worship on Easter Sunday. Well done and thank you!

I am grateful to our Consistory who decided to host a Town Hall Meeting in our sanctuary. I'm particularly grateful to all those who stepped up to provide a warm welcome to 360 guests that evening and especially to Gale Rundle for her leadership. Well done and thank you!

Finally, I am grateful to the Search Committee, another important ministry of the church. I am grateful for the opportunity to work with such a dedicated team as we prepared your Local Church Profile. It's now live for potential candidates to find the church and submit their application to serve as your next pastor. You can read that Profile here:

https://oppsearch.ucc.org/web/fastdetails.aspx?id=6643&KeepThis=false&TB_iframe=true&height=&width= Well done and thank you! I am confident that God will direct your Search Committee to connect with the right candidate to come alongside and walk with you into God's preferred future.

I'm not leaving yet. We still have some time together and work to do. In the meantime, what are you grateful for? What brings you joy?

Pastor Bob

May Worship Themes and Scriptures

May 4 – Freedom to Follow, Holy Communion, Acts 9: 1-20, Psalm 30, John 21:1-19

May 11 – Freedom to Rise Again, Mother's Day, Acts 9: 36-43, Psalm 23, John 10:22-30

May 18 – Freedom to Love, Acts 11: 1-18, Psalm 148, John 13: 31-35

May 25 – Freedom to Heal, Memorial Day, Revelation 22:1-5, Psalm 67, John 5: 1-9

June 1 – Freedom to Open, Holy Communion, Ephesians 1:15-23, Psalm 93, Luke 24:44-53

Thank you to our April liturgists: Barbara Bendlin, Neil Deupree, Sarah Beers, Nathan Roehl.

If you would like to be a liturgist, sign up in the Fireside Room on the clipboard.

Thank you to our April Fellowship Hour hosts: Membership Ministry.

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



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.

From the Search Committee:

Our church profile was posted on the UCC Ministries Opportunity website on Monday, April 21. We have already had candidates apply for the position. The Search Committee is finalizing interview questions, and soon we will begin interviewing candidates by Zoom. Please pray for God to connect us with an awesome pastor!

Prayer Vigil



Many of us are upset about the people who are “disappeared,” arrested, incarcerated, and deported to a prison in El Salvador or Honduras without due process. We feel helpless to do anything about it. As people of faith, our first step is to pray. Join us for a prayer vigil on **Wednesday, May 14, at 6:30 p.m.** We will call on God to protect those falsely incarcerated, comfort for those in fear of deportation, and guidance for our next steps.

May *BIRTHDAYS*, Happy Day to All!

5 Marlene Gilmore	17 David Bagley	22 Rita Feirn
6 Ann Bidwell-Hyzer	17 Tabitha Ebert	23 Lyle Anderson
6 Larry Maxson	17 Jazlyn Murwin	25 Blake Budrow
10 Sonja Bagley	19 Whitney Cioni	26 Larry Barton
10 Dan Metzler	19 Andrea Slack	26 Keegan Spooner
14 Sally Albers	19 Tom Hopkins	29 Mike Rundle
14 Logan Slack	21 Joy Prom	31 Jim Briggs



May *ANNIVERSARIES*, Congratulations

3 Tim & Jo Green	29 Larry & Pam Maxson
17 Barbara & David Bendlin	31 John & Joellyn Merz
22 Norm & Joy Prom	



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



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.

ECHO May 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

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

CONSISTORY MEETING April 21st

Consistory shared appreciations for Pastor Bob's amazing Easter service; MaryJo Manus' creation of our Easter sign on Jackson St; Robyn Doege-Brennan, music director, for her impressive direction at our Easter service; Diana Huckstep for her prep work for organizing the upcoming rummage sale. Membership Ministry for Spring Fling Fellowship after service to gather and catch up with one another. Pastor Bob for reminding us to invite others to our Easter service and forward our FB page. Mary and Joan for putting festive decorations on the outside doors for our Easter service.

Nancy Stabb, treasurer, reported that income is stable; a new snow removal contract is out for bid; and we're saving \$400/month on insurance due to Nancy's impeccable attention to detail. The April 23 Empty Chair Town Hall was a success with over 300 people in attendance from 6:30p to 8:30p. More details to follow.

The Memorial Committee will meet with Darla Dernovsek and Nancy Stabb to review committee procedures and create a straightforward process moving forward for Memorial Giving.

Consistory agreed, at a closed session, to extend Pastor Bob's contract as an open-ended extension of the current term until we find a settled pastor. Consistory also agreed to hold a prayer vigil on Wednesday, May 14, at 6:30pm for all those who are imprisoned without due process.

Rummage Sale volunteers are needed Friday, May 25 from noon to 5p and Saturday, May 26 from 8a to 1p. Contact Diana Huckstep to sign up.

Submitted by Patti York

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 "Caste: the Origins of our Discontents" by Isabel Wilkerson.

You are invited to attend the discussion even if you haven't read the book.

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



Thought for the month: Life doesn't come with a manual. It comes with a mother.



SUNDAY SCHOOL AND YOUTH NEWS

MAY SUNDAY SCHOOL FUNDRAISER



Kids and Youth: Be sure to turn your completed Jar artwork in to Becky's Desk or Diane Huckstep. They will be entered into the contest. Whichever Jar gathers the most cash during the month of May will be the winner and receive a special prize!

SPECIAL PROJECT: BANNER FOR FIRESIDE ROOM

BRAINSTORMING: This portion of the project will wrap up at the end of April so get your ideas in as soon as possible. **So far this has been a great success!**

FORMATTING: Banner Committee will meet in May to choose the phrases to be used.

DESIGNING: Future date

PAINTING: Watch for date announcements. This will be an **intergenerational event!**



Don't forget that camp time is coming up! Contact Debi if you are interested in info or would like a scholarship. Check out the schedule on line here: <https://ucci.org/summer-schedule/>



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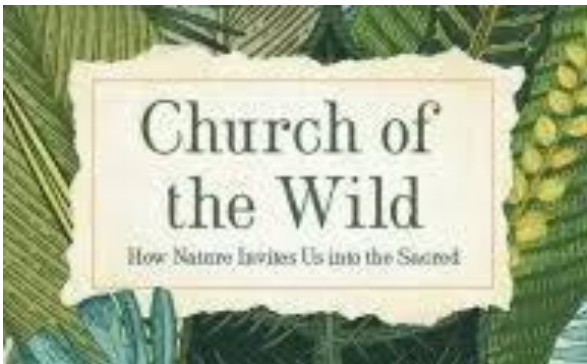
**Summer Kid's Bulletins
Will be back for 2025!**

**Color them
Turn them in
Win rewards**

From Outreach Ministry

Monthly Mission for May is STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH

Your support equips leaders, funds new churches, and fosters innovation. The offering is a celebration of who we are as church together, as money is shared between the National ministries of the UCC as well as with Conference settings. **There are envelopes in the pews.**



The next Church of the Wild will be held on Saturday, May 3 at 10:00 am. We will meet at Big Hill Park, 1101 Afton Road, just north of the city of Beloit. The spring wildflowers should be in full bloom there!

When you enter the park, follow the park road to the bottom of the hill, and the road will end in a turn-around. We will meet near that turn-around. There is room to park several cars there. If you would like to car-pool from our UCC church, car-pooling options will be available upon request.

As always, bring a chair. Part of the service will be a 25 minute solo saunter, an alone time where you listen to what the Sacred has to tell you. If you choose to sit instead of saunter, you may want to bring a notebook for journaling or drawing.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Barbara Bendlin 608-530-7510

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, May 3rd at 4:00 pm. A to-go meal of ham/cheese sandwich, chips, carrots, fresh fruit and cookie will be served.

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 desserts, 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.



To Kathy Arndt and her sidekick, the medical interpreter, Edwin! Every Friday they bring smiles and smarts to **HealthNet** by teaching patients all about managing diabetes at home. From learning which foods to avoid to how to keep blood sugar in check, Kathy and Edwin make diabetes education practical, approachable, and even fun!



As many of you know, our beloved Christian Ed Director, Debi Cox, has been diagnosed with cancer. She has created a **Caring Bridge** website to keep friends updated on her journey as she undergoes treatment.

You will need to log in with your email address and create a password, then you can access her daily posts and send well wishes. It may ask you for donations, but there is never any obligation to contribute to the site. It is free to access Debi's story.

If you are so inclined, Becky has recipes from Debi for items she prefers as donations for her special diet.



Our Parish Care members provide a confidential PRAYER CHAIN. You are invited to send your prayer requests to them any Sunday by using a yellow slip found in the pews or by calling the church office.



April 26, 2025

Rev. Bob Gross and Members of the First Congregational United Church of Christ:

“Thank you” seems inadequate to express our feelings to you for welcoming our town hall into your sacred space. Working as we were on a tight timeline it was a great relief to know we had a “home” as we set about doing all the other things that needed to be done to organize a successful event. And you contributed so much beyond the space! There was unanimous leadership support, the willingness of members to help in preparing for and holding the event, and the technical capability to offer sound and recording systems. We also recognized the controversial nature of a program, by an unknown group with no track record, and that saying yes was not without risk.

We hope we adequately justified your faith in us and that you were satisfied, as we were, with the results. It was uplifting to see so many people attend and be willing to stand in front of an audience and a microphone to respectfully express their concerns and questions and dismay about what’s happening in our country and ask why the silence from our representative.

Thank you for all you contributed to our Town Hall for the 1st Congressional District of Wisconsin!

Sincerely,

Co-chairs, Town Hall Coalition (not affiliated with any political party or organization):

Coral Swanson, Janesville, 608-554-3645

Edie Baran, Janesville, 608-931-5705



Our 1st annual church rummage sale was a success. We raised over \$600 from our 2 day event, April 25 & 26. Thanks to Diana and Martin Huckstep for organizing this event and for all their hours put into it. Also thank you to all the volunteers who helped set up and work at the sale.



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
Lawn Mowers:

Darla Dernovsek
Nancy Stabb
Mike Rundle
Nancy Stabb, Barbara Bendlin, Jeanine Fry, Tani Abendroth,
Mike Rundle, Sybil Streeter, Doug Newton, Martin Huckstep, Warren Myers,
Tim Green