



Tower Notes – December 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

Friends,

Saying “good-bye” has never been easy for me, especially leaving such a vibrant community of faith. And yet, this is my last Newsletter at First Congregational United Church of Christ and so it’s time to say “good-bye.”

First, a few words of gratitude. I have served several congregations, none had a pulpit as open and free. I was able to speak the truth I believe God gave me to share in ways that were authentic to me and the congregation. We didn’t always agree and when we disagreed, we talked it out as adults and moved on. Thank you. You have shown yourselves to be good stewards of the building and ministries of the church. I have been blown away by your commitment to the Community Meal, Seekers, and the way you embraced Church of the Wild. You have also opened your hearts, minds, and lives to the community beyond 54 S. Jackson. In particular, your partnership with the Town Hall Task Force to host the Town Hall Meeting and then to follow up with the Good Trouble Rally put the church on the radar of new people. Those efforts are bearing much fruit with numerical growth and increased spiritual depth. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of it.

Now for the hard part. Following Jesus often means that we have to say good-bye to the familiar so that we can embrace the future. For me, that means that at this time I must leave First Congregational United Church of Christ of Janesville to serve elsewhere. Here are a few of the ways that make my parting easier.

- You have called a more than competent pastor in Pastor Benjamin J. Barlow. I believe you have made the right choice for the church and for Janesville.

- With Debi, Becky and the rest of the staff you are set to continue the growth we have seen in the last year.
- We have updated the Bylaws and have prepared a draft update to the Constitution for review and approval by the congregation at the next Annual Meeting.
- Very soon you will have a newly updated church website.
- I love the appreciation you have for music, especially the Choral Scholars. I pray they will become the backbone of an even larger choir soon.
- God. Everything else is superfluous. God, who was there at the foundation of the world, is with you today and will continue to be there, nurturing, supporting, and guiding you individually and as a congregation.

Goodbye?

I really don't like that term. It's so final. I much prefer the German term, "Auf Wiedersehen," until we see each other again. In accordance with proper pastoral boundaries, I will remain apart from the congregation for at least a year. This is so that you may have time to develop healthy relationships with your next pastor and, quite frankly, to free me up to focus on my next congregation. We will remain friends, but I will no longer be your pastor. Perhaps we will bump into each other at Conference-wide events like a retreat or Annual Meeting, I will be happy to "Catch up." We can chat about our general wellbeing, the Packers, and anything else except the church. Again, I need to step away so that Pastor Barlow can become and remain your pastor. I look forward to the day, after I retire in a year or two, to come sit beside you in the pew, listen to a great sermon by your pastor, and be nurtured by the worship experience. Then to spend some time over coffee listening to your stories about all the wonderful ways you are engaging God's mission in the world. May it be so.

I'd love to greet each of you before I go with at least a handshake after worship one Sunday or Christmas Eve. My last Sunday will be December 28. We'll sing Christmas Carols, there may be cake afterward, and most of all we will praise God together as we celebrate this time in the life of our community of faith. There will also be a Liturgy of Release formally ending my service in Janesville. Will you join us?

Auf Wiedersehen,

Pastor Bob

December Worship Themes

December 7, Holy Communion, Second Sunday of Advent, “Vision of Peace,” Isaiah 11: 1-10

December 14, Intergenerational Children’s Pageant

December 21, Fourth Sunday of Advent, “God with Us,” Matthew 1:18-25.

December 24, Christmas Eve

4 pm, Family Friendly Service

7:30 pm, “In the Beginning,” John 1: 1-14

December 28, First Sunday in Christmas, “Go Tell it on the Mountain Carol Sing!,” and Liturgy of Release for Pastor Bob.

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

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

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 “Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian” by Paul Knitter.

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



December *BIRTHDAYS*, Happy Day to All!

1 Jim Hyzer	13 Diane Holtz	24 Joan Kalweit
1 Norm Prom	14 Jill Gant	24 Dave Lennox
2 Ron Hull	19 Karen Teubert	25 Quinton Greer Jr
3 Martin Huckstep	20 Ann Forbeck	25 Bill Lalor
9 David Jensen	22 Richard Eddings	29 Summer Huckstep
11 Katie Shebesta	22 Nathan Roehl	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.



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 contributed.

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

ECHO Reverse Advent Calendar

Each day take the item and put into a box. At the end of the month, tape up the box and take to ECHO. Fun project for everyone, especially families with kids.

Dec 1 package of toilet paper	Dec 13 box of oatmeal
Dec 2 bottle of shampoo	Dec 14 can of tomato sauce
Dec 3 canned fruit	Dec 15 box of kleenex
Dec 4 toothpaste	Dec 16 hat or pair of gloves
Dec 5 canned meat	Dec 17 canned soup
Dec 6 boxed meal	Dec 18 bar of soap
Dec 7 bottle of 100% juice	Dec 19 toothbrush
Dec 8 laundry soap	Dec 20 pkg of feminine product
Dec 9 peanut butter	Dec 21 roll of paper towels
Dec 10 one canned vegetable	Dec 22 bottle of all-purpose cleaner
Dec 11 package of spaghetti	Dec 23 box of rice
Dec 12 one pkg diapers (size 4,5 or 6)	Dec 24 box of cereal

CONSISTORY MEETING NOVEMBER 17

Appreciations for everybody who made “baking day” a success. For Deb Lalor for accepting the position of clerk. For Neil Deupree for stepping in as our pastor in Pastor Bob’s absence. For Willa Bagley for all the ways she has contributed to the church over many years.

The treasurer presented a summary of Income and Expenses for the month of October and for Year to Date. Both Income and Expenses YTD are ahead of projected. Income exceeds expenses by \$6361. There was a question about why there was only \$700 rent in October. Treasurer will follow up on that? Slightly over \$9000 has been raised for Barlow moving expenses. First installment has been made.

The consistory recommends that the changes to the constitution be presented to the membership for approval at the February 8, 2026 Annual Meeting,

Fund raising for moving expenses continues. We have ample funds to make up any differences. Down payments have been made on initial expenses. Darla will coordinate plans for the congregation to say “Good-bye” to Pastor Bob and “Hello” to BJ, Jean will do a basket.

A request was made by the “No Data Center” group to use our church to collect signatures. This request was denied with the explanation that the church supports forums that are intended for the exchange of ideas and information, but we do not take sides on public issues.

Pastor Bob is recovering well from his surgical procedure.

Our stewardship drive resulted in 47 pledges. We are ahead of where we were last year.

Outdoor signs announcing upcoming craft and bake sale are ready to display. A Christmas sign will be displayed after the bake sale. Plans for a rummage sale to take place in April.

Patti York has agreed to chair the Nominating Committee.

Next Consistory meeting on December 15, 2025.

Submitted by Deb Lalor, clerk.

from Nominating...

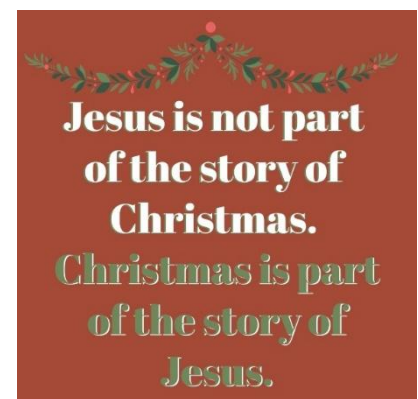
Do you like to be involved in church affairs? Are you someone who enjoys working in small groups? Would you like to be part of the church's internal fabric?

If you said 'Yes;' please consider being on our church Leadership Team.

The Nominating Committee is currently seeking to fill remaining open positions in our ministries and committees.

Please reach out to one of us with your questions.
We'd love to hear where you would enjoy being of service.

Nominating Committee Team
Patti York, chair - 608-751-4836
Jean Schollmeier - 608-295-4237
Nathan Roehl - 608-755-1122





Church Financial Report

Year to Date October 2025

EXPENSES (Personnel, Building, Administration, Program)	\$262,176.69
INCOME (Donations, Rent, Fund Raising)	\$268,537.97
INCOME FROM RESERVES and MEMORIALS	\$ 42,876.38
INCOME OVER EXPENSE	\$ 6,361.28

ADDITIONAL ASSETS on OCTOBER 31 ,2025

Wisconsin Foundation UCC*	\$649,364.01
Wells Fargo Scholarship	\$ 38,084.79
Memorials	\$ 43,277.54
Scholarship etc. Checking	\$ 9155.33
Building and Property	Priceless:)

*includes: Property, Program and Leadership Endowments, Music Scholars funds, Gonstead Education funds, Youth funds and \$270,888.60 of undesignated reserves.

Thanks to all who have kept up with their pledge and especial thanks to those who have gone over and above!

Nancy Stabb Treasurer



Thank you to everyone who is helping with our Arts/Craft/Bake Sale on Saturday, December 13th, 8:00-2:00.

Starting December 9th you can bring your items for sale for the "The Attic" (new and gently used fall/winter/Christmas), and Silent Auction. You must fill out a 'Silent Auction Item' sheet for your item. On Friday December 12th from 2:00-5:00 bring your baked goods.

We could use a few volunteers to help throughout the day to help customers.


Also, thank you to the 12 volunteers who helped on our baking day November 15th. Hooray to our church family.

If you have questions, contact Diana Huckstep 608-774-2648. Blessings, Membership Ministry




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.

SUNDAY SCHOOL AND YOUTH NEWS



GLITTER AND JESUS
ADVENT 2025 SUNDAY SCHOOL
10:00 AM following the Children's Moment



A Very
Mixed-Up
Christmas Pageant



*Sunday Dec 14 10:00 AM
*3rd Annual Inter-Generational Christmas Pageant
*No Sunday School because the kids have invaded the Worship Service!

Rehearsal for the Christmas pageant will be at 2:00 Pm on Dec. 13th!
Please bring your copy of the play and your costume.

**Children-friendly
Family Christmas Eve Service
4:00 PM Dec. 24th.**



Deadline Dec. 11.

AGES 14-23

Winter Soulstice Retreat
JANUARY 16-18 2026
Reserve your scholarship now!



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

Coming soon

SUNDAY MORNING YOUTH GROUP

Planning happening now.



Our next Church of the Wild will be Saturday, December 20, at 3:00pm...note the later time in order to welcome the Winter Solstice, the longest night of the year. The sun sets at 4:25 that day, so you can still be home before dark. We will meet at the Janesville Schools Outdoor Lab, 3550 W Co Hwy A, Janesville.

Winter Solstice marks the first official day of winter. Winter is a time for rest, reflection on the past year, and retreating within ourselves to find the stillness that resides there.

Yes, it will very likely be cold. Last year, we met in a snowstorm, and it was beautiful...but cold. It will be important to dress warmly and maybe even bring a blanket. We will sing several new songs that reflect winter's deep peace, and we will have a candle ceremony to celebrate the returning light.

Any questions contact Barbara Bendlin Barbara.bendlin@gmail.com or 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 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 6th at 4:00. The menu is chili/crackers, corn bread, carrots, mandarin oranges, and holiday cookies.

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



Thank You to our lawn mowers for their work this past summer. This year the mowers were Tim Green, Martin Huckstep, Doug Newton, and Brian and Mike Rundle.

This year presented some challenges with a very wet start to the summer followed by a dry spell.

Thanks, Dave Schollmeier

FROM OUTREACH

December Monthly Mission is The Christmas Fund

The Christmas Fund is one of the UCC-wide special missions. It has been in existence for over 100 years. 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 supplementation, and "thank you" gifts. It is funded exclusively through donations and is managed by pension boards. We encourage you to prayerfully consider your support for this year's mission.



Patty (my daughter) and Crystal are the two English Learner (EL) teachers at Wilson School. With the uncertainty over food stamps last month, and given that Wilson's population is over 90% in the poverty rating, Patty asked **Seekers** if they'd be interested in providing bags of groceries for an EL family event they were having. This was the result.

We gave out 22 bags of food at our event, and an additional 27 the day after to the families who weren't able to attend. The picture of Crystal and me with all the packed bags in my classroom doesn't do it justice... there are 2 rows of plastic bags behind the paper ones.

Diane Henrichs





First Congregational Church
54 South Jackson Street
Janesville, WI 53548



*This page was
attached to the
Tower Notes that
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
Barbara Bendlin, Jeanine Fry, Tani Abendroth, Nancy Stabb,
Mike & Bryan Rundle, Doug Newton, Martin Huckstep, Tim Green