

# Tower Notes – March 2026

## Celebrating 181 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. Benjamin J. Barlow

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## Pastor's Message

### The Path Before Us and the Joy of Growing Faith

Lent invites us to slow down and pay attention—to our lives, our neighbors, and the path Christ walks toward Jerusalem. It is a season of preparation, not just for Easter, but for deeper love and truer discipleship. As we move through these weeks, our congregation is also preparing for something meaningful and public: the **Palm Sunday Path**, a witness rooted in Jesus' call to "love your neighbor—no exceptions." Lent helps us practice what we will proclaim: humility, courage, and hope shaped by love rather than fear.

This preparation is happening not only through prayer and planning, but through the life that is growing among us—especially in our children and youth. Recently, **seven youth attended their very first outing together**, a moment worth celebrating. It was joyful, hopeful, and a clear sign that something new is taking root. Because of the growth we are seeing with our younger members, we are already preparing to add another class to our children's Sunday School, ensuring we continue to create safe, welcoming spaces where young people can belong, ask questions, and grow in faith.

These moments remind us that the future of the church is not abstract—it is already here, laughing, learning, and showing up. When we invest in children and youth, we are not just offering programs; we are nurturing faith, community, and leadership that will shape our shared life for years to come.

### Upcoming Opportunities for Children & Youth

We invite you to mark your calendars and help spread the word:

- **Every Sunday** – *Elementary Sunday School*  
Offered during worship for elementary-aged children.
- **March 8** – *Youth Group (Middle & High School)*  
Meeting during worship.

- **Palm Sunday** – *Children’s Palm Procession*  
Children and their families are invited to arrive a bit early to prepare for a joyful palm-waving procession during worship.
- **Easter Sunday** – *Easter Egg Hunt*  
Immediately following worship—fun for children and families!

As we continue this Lenten journey together, may we notice where new life is emerging among us, give thanks for it, and make room for it to grow. The path ahead is holy—and we do not walk it alone.

On the Path with You,  
Pastor Barlow



Thank you to our February liturgists: Sarah Beers, Linda Salter, Barbara Bendlin, and Neil Deupree.

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

*Thank you to our February Coffee Hour hosts: Membership Ministry, Brian & Jan Knutson, Outreach Ministry, and Finance Ministry.*

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

- Thought for the month: Flowers for Easter:**
- Easter Lily** – symbol of Purity and Resurrection
  - Daffodils** – symbol of Arrival of New Life
  - Hyacinth** – symbol of Constancy and Sincerity
  - Tulips** – symbol of Love, Belief and Forgiveness
  - Crocus** – symbol of Youth and Happiness
  - Hydrangea** – symbol of Gratitude and Understanding
  - Azalea** – symbol of Temperance, Moderation and Love

March *BIRTHDAYS*, Happy Day to All!

- |                   |                   |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| 2 Brian Knutson   | 17 Amy Mohr       |
| 3 Darla Dernovsek | 17 Roberta Tucker |
| 3 Geri Frase      | 19 Greg Shebesta  |
| 13 Pat Scott      | 24 Nancy Restivo  |
| 14 Warren Myers   |                   |



March *ANNIVERSARIES*, Congratulations

- 1 Gerald & Sally Albers
- 7 Bryan & Bruna Rundle
- 11 Bill & Jeannine Fitzgerald
- 25 Sybil Streeter & Tabitha Ebert



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



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 March 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 |

**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, March 7<sup>th</sup> at 4:00. The menu is meatloaf, mac-n-cheese, veggies, applesauce, bread/butter, and cookies.

Guests can walk into the church from the back parking lot door and pick up meals. 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](mailto:bonniebrewer17@hotmail.com), or sign up in the Fireside Room on the clipboard.

## **CONSISTORY MEETING February 16<sup>th</sup>**

Appreciation was expressed for all the volunteers helping with the Pancake Dinner. Also, for Neil Deupree for his thought-provoking sermon on Sunday, February 15, 2026. Appreciation was also expressed for Bonnie Stalker, Nancy Stabb and Jeanine Fry for all they do to organize the Community Meal every month.

Nancy Stabb, treasurer, presented a summary of income and expenses for January. We had a \$4000 utility bill in January and paid out \$5,500 for snow removal for the parking lot and sidewalks this season thus far. At the end of January the operating checking account had a balance of \$17,000 but as of February 15 the balance was over \$24,000. Finances are looking good for the beginning of the year.

The Boys and Girl's Club have rented the Spiritual Arts Center for a one time meeting called *Smart Girls* on Thursday, February 26 from 1-3:30.

Rock County Jail Chaplaincy has reached out to our church for involvement with the jail population. The Consistory agrees that since we are involved in supporting many other community programs at present, we would inform the Jail Chaplaincy program coordinators that we will put the decision for our involvement with them on hold for now, but may come around later.

Bonnie Stalker was nominated and elected Vice President for a second term.

Planning continues for the Palm Sunday Path march. There have been two meetings so far. All are welcome to attend the next meeting which is set for February 24 at 3:30 pm. The theme of the march will be "Love Your Neighbor! No Exceptions!"

It was noted that Becky Kingsbury, church secretary updates the Church Directory regularly and keeps printed copies available in the Fireside Room.

Outreach continues to work on creating a land acknowledgement for the church property.

CROP Walk will be starting at Cargill Methodist Church at 1 PM on April 26, 2026. It is not too early to start making donations.

Volunteers are requested for the Janesville Community Center Rock County Daddy/Daughter Dance that takes place Friday, March 27. Monetary Donations will supply scholarships for those who cannot afford to attend. Kid-themed raffle baskets are also requested.

Volunteers are also requested for the YMCA Family Fun Night scheduled for April 17 at Edison Middle School.

The Diversity Action Team will be co-sponsoring with Women's Fund, AAUW, and Zontaa "Potluck and Movie" event at the Woman's Club on February 26. The movie shown will be "Grace and Grit: How I Won My Fight At Goodyear And Beyond".

Youth Group started on Sunday, February 8, 2026. A plan was made by the youth to tour the Milton House. The tour took place Sunday February 15 along with a lunch!

Seekers continue to read "The Great Search" by John Philip Newel.

Pancake Supper will be on February 17 with free-will offering accepted. Future fundraisers include a church rummage sale in April and coin jar fundraiser by the Sunday School in May.

Submitted by Deb Lalor, clerk.





First Congregational has the following available:

- + Bidwell Scholarship – Eligibility for this scholarship is limited to two years and you must be under age 27
- + Saenger, Frick, McBlair, Lee Fund\*
- + General Scholarship Fund\*

\*Awards from these 2 funds will be limited to a total of five (5) years.

Application forms are on the counter in the Fireside Room, and also on our website [janesvilleucc.org](http://janesvilleucc.org) under ‘Uniquely Us’. **They are due in the office by March 27<sup>th</sup>.**



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.

**First Congregational United Church of Christ’s Overnight Warming Site: Winter 2025- 2026 Data**

Activation Date	Guest Attendance Tally
12/3/25 – 12/4/25	4
12/4/25 – 12/5/25	2
12/7/25 - 12/8/25	3
12/10/25 – 12/11/25	15
12/11/25 – 12/12/25	15
12/12/25 – 12/13/25	16
12/13/25 – 12/14/25	15
12/14/25 – 12/15/25	13
12/18/25 – 12/19/25	12
12/29/25 – 12/30/25	10
12/31/25 – 1/01/2026	10
<b>December: 11 nights</b>	<b>December Guest Attendance Tally: 115</b>
1/17/26 – 1/18/26	12
1/18/26 – 1/19/26	12
1/19/26 – 1/20/26	11
1/22/26 – 1/23/26	14
1/23/26 – 1/24/26	17
1/24/26 – 1/25/26	24
1/25/26 – 1/26/26	25
1/26/26 – 1/27/26	22
1/27/26 – 1/28/26	16
1/28/26 – 1/29/26	18
1/29/26 – 1/30/26	21
1/30/26 – 1/31/26	18
<b>January: 12 nights</b>	<b>January Guest Attendance Tally: 210</b>
2/06/26 – 2/07/26	10
<b>February: 1 night</b>	<b>February Guest Attendance Tally: 10</b>
<b>Winter Totals</b>	<b>335 Total Guest Attendance Tally</b>
<b>24 activation nights</b>	



A big thank you to everyone who helped with our Pancake Dinner on February 17<sup>th</sup>. We had twelve helpers, and sixty-one people came. Many faces were new and it was a wonderful time of fellowship and good food. The free-will offering covered all expenses, plus extra for other Outreach activities. Thank you again. God's Blessings, Membership Ministry

**ECHO Fundraisers for March:**

**CHECK OUT THESE ITEMS**

**ECHO ONLINE AUCTION**

BIDDING OPENS MARCH 4 AT 12PM AND ENDS ON MARCH 9 AT 6PM

<https://givebutter.com/c/DVjIQ3/auction>



**EASTER KRINGLE FUNDRAISER**

ORDERING CLOSSES: MARCH 20<sup>th</sup> AT NOON  
 PICK UP: THURSDAY, APRIL 2, 1-4PM OR FRIDAY, APRIL 3, 10AM-12PM  
 AT ECHO 65. S HIGH ST  
 JUST IN TIME FOR EASTER

**\$18 EACH**

- Almond
- Apple
- Cherry
- Cherry Cheese
- Cinnamon Roll
- Cream Cheesecake
- Pecan
- Raspberry
- Turtle
- Wild Blueberry
- Wisconsin

Order online or stop into the ECHO office  
 bit.ly/4hnC58K  
 earthur@echojanesville.org for questions

Award Winning Kringle From Racine, Wisconsin - Since 1949

**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 Great Search" by John Newell.

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](mailto:Barbara.bendlin@gmail.com)



# SUNDAY SCHOOL AND YOUTH NEWS



Thank so much to all the amazing people who are supporting the important work we are doing in Sunday School.

**Watch for important announcements!**

We are doing a once-a-month Youth Group Meeting. We are going to get to know each other and talk about what we want to do to **Be the Church**.

At our kick-off meeting in February, the youth planned a trip to tour Milton House. We had an amazing, personal tour the very next Sunday!

**What will we do next? Come and help us plan it!**

**March 8  
April 12  
May 10**



## Sunday Morning Youth Group

Join us as we work on what you would like from a Youth Group.

(During the 10:00 service at the same time as Sunday School.)



**ADULT LENT DISCUSSION GROUP**  
**SUNDAY MORNINGS 9:15-9:45**



### Fireside Banner Update

**THE BANNER IS COMPLETED!**

It will be revealed and hung as part of our Palm Sunday Path.



**Debi Cox**  
Director of Christian Education  
[debi@janessvilleucc.org](mailto:debi@janessvilleucc.org)  
Church: 608-752-8716  
Mobile: 651-387-4552

**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UCC**  
OPEN & AFFIRMING  
IMMIGRANT WELCOMING



54 S. JACKSON STREET, JANESVILLE, WI 53548  
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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	<b>All</b> Members of First Congregational UCC
Pastor	Rev. Benjamin 'B.J.' Barlow
Christian Ed. Director	Debi Cox
Music Director	Robyn Doege-Brennan
Pianist/Organist	Paul Finger
AV Technician	Kaydence Troia
Secretary	Becky Kingsbury
Bookkeeper	Denise Caldwell
Nursery Coordinator	Gwen Charlet
Custodian	Matthew Charlet

### Church Leadership & Volunteers

President	Darla Dernovsek
Treasurer	Nancy Stabb
Finance Chair	Mike Rundle
Gardeners	Barbara Bendlin, Jeanine Fry, Tani Abendroth, Nancy Stabb,
Lawn Mowers:	Mike & Bryan Rundle, Doug Newton, Martin Huckstep, Tim Green