

THE SHINING LIGHT



The Voice of the Congregation

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UCC
of Grand Marais

First Congregational United Church of Christ

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Moderator: Tom Yuhasey Treasurer: Kevin LeVair
Board Members: Stephen Aldrich, Francie Beaster,
Jenny Delfs, Bruce Tyler, Carol Winter



Mission Statement



First Congregational United Church of Christ is an open, inclusive church that exists to worship God and practice the gospel of Jesus Christ. We welcome all people of goodwill who seek to share the love of God and honor the diversity of creation in a spirit of tolerance and flexibility. As a Just Peace Church, we invite all who seek the reign of God to join us in reaching out in healing ministry, working for justice, witnessing for peace and striving to overcome all forms of oppression. We recognize two sacraments: Baptism and Communion.

Contributions to the newsletter are encouraged! Please submit writing of no more than 500 words, poetry, or artwork to the office. We reserve the right to edit for space and clarity.

Cover Art: Madonna & Child, Marce Wood



Prayer of the Month

God of Light, as the days get shorter and night gets longer, we turn our attention to you. Your true light shines in our hearts, in our lives, and through our church. Through this season of Advent, help us prepare our hearts and our homes to receive you. May we be renewed in our relationship with you. May we see you in this world and in our neighbors. May we share your hope, peace, joy, and love with all. In Jesus' name we pray, who with you and the Holy Spirit reign over our world and our hearts. Amen.

Worship in December

December 3rd, [1st Sunday of Advent: Hope.](#)

On this Sunday, we hear from the Prophet Jeremiah who sees abandoned cities and proclaims they will be filled with mirth and gladness. He doesn't dwell on the current situation, rather, Jeremiah gives a vision of the future that is filled with justice and abundance. Is he speaking to us also, assuring us that even if the worst happens, it is not the end? Do we have hope for a better future?

December 10th, [2nd Sunday of Advent: Peace.](#)

On this Sunday, we hear from the Prophet Isaiah in the 40th chapter where hope is once again given to the people of Judah. We hear part of this chapter every year and many a time, "A voice cries out: In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD." In our time of Advent, not only are we to prepare for Jesus' birth and coming again, Isaiah tells us God is also working to make the way easier for all to come and find Peace.

December 17th, [3rd Sunday of Advent: Joy](#)

On this Sunday, we gather together to walk through, stumble through, and live out the story of our the Messiah's birth. We will once again gather at 9:00 am this Sunday for all who wish to share in a part of our Christmas Pageant. As we continue the Advent journey, don't just listen to it again, but re-imagine it for our day.

December 17th, [Blue Christmas Service.](#)

As the nights get longer and longer, and for some the holiday season is not of joy but of sorrow when loved ones are no longer with us, or of depression as the suns hides and we feel all alone. This service is to acknowledge that for some, this season is full of mixed emotions and darkness. God's love is present, even in the darkness.

December 24th, [4th Sunday of Advent: Love and Christmas Eve.](#)

As Christmas Eve falls upon a Sunday, the church leadership decided to just have one worship service this day, which will be in the evening starting at 5:00. Our Christmas Eve service will be centered around the story as told by the Gospel of Luke, carol singing, and lighting of the candles. We welcome all to join us for this very special service.

December 31st, [1st Sunday after Christmas.](#)

This Sunday will be led by the capable Rev. Rolf Morck who has preached in our service before. As we are in the Narrative Lectionary, we begin in the Gospel of Mark. There is no birth narrative, but the gospel does pack a lot into it.



Board Member Message



In Advent, all Earth is hopeful

Borealis Choral and Orchestra are deep into rehearsals for concerts on 12/8 and 12/9. I love these Sunday evenings.

The music is lovely and breathing/singing together is a shared prayer.

These are some of the beautiful words we say:

- Love is on the way.
- God's humbleness in Christ gives birth to humble hearts, to peace on Earth.
- Gaudete! (REJOICE!)
- Hail redemption's happy dawn!
- There shall a star from Jacob come forth.
- O, Jesus bright and morning star, your love is where our longings are.
- Gloria in excelsis, Deo
- Bear in mind what our good God for us has done in sending his beloved Son.

- Sleep in heavenly peace.
- Still their heavenly music floats o'er all the weary world.
- Hope of nations, Light of all the World

The lyrics and tunes buzz around my head during the week between rehearsals. There is a new piece that Bill Beckstrand created just for us this year. A special debut. The lyrics are on a loop in my head. These are the words we most need to hear in this time: All Earth is hopeful.

Advent is a time of anticipation. We wait for the Light to return. We wait for a birth. We wait with yearning hearts. We hope and hope and hope and hope....

I hope that in this Advent season we can stop and look and breath and believe love is on the way.

-Jenny Delfs

Sock and Mitten Tree

During Advent, please bring hats, socks, mittens, underwear, blankets, sleeping bags, and coats to decorate a tree in our entryway.

The Damiano Center welcomes people in need and serves them without judgment. For more information, check out their website: damianocenter.org.

In January, these items will be taken to the Domiano Center in Duluth.



Pastor's Column



I feel very blessed to be a part of this church and its ministry.

· First is participating in the Community Thanksgiving Meal (and not just because

of the pieces of pumpkin pie), but to see all the people who helped put it together and serve from outside of our regular worship attenders and the community that came together to share good food and fellowship.

IUCC and the UU to inform and open dialogue about our bodies, sexuality, and the values we bring to it).

· Another is the many people who participate weekly in our worship services and the great musical talent we have to offer throughout the month.

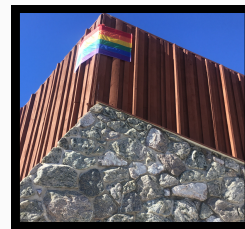
· Another is the guests we have had coming and checking us out this Fall. Evangelism research shows that for every 10 visitors, one will join the church. We had 9 Sundays in a row where a new person or family showed up. One has jumped all in, so we are a little above average.

· Another is our exploration of Process theology, though only two besides me showed up for our 7-week course, I now understand it a lot better and will continue to share how this is probably the future of the progressive/mainline /liberal church.

· Another is the daycare center that is moving into our church. Welcome North Woods Childcare.

· Another is the Building and Grounds work to prepare our church building for the future of our ministry and a continued presence in our community.

· Another is the Pizza and Social Justice focus to slow down and learn how life is a marathon, not a sprint, and to build a balanced life. There is also serious discussion about Our Whole Lives (an education program developed by the



· Another is our Stewardship Campaign and Finances. This year was a little different because Tom Yuhasey wanted to try something new.

There are many things I am missing as I am writing this because time and space requires editing. There are also many things in this world that are against the gospel: wars, genocide, gun violence, patriarchy, racism, homophobia, xenophobia (both Jews and Palestinians are being targeted around the world and in our country with violence), and a planet that is being driven to extinction.

In the time of Advent, we can acknowledge the darkness, the wounds, the apathy, and all that is wrong with the world. However, we also shine the light, proclaim the gospel, and remember that love is stronger.

Peace

Pastor Erno

Thanksgiving 2023 - Wasn't that Fun!

The choir sang it on the Sunday before Thanksgiving: "There is room at the table for everyone."

Many thanks to everyone who contributed to the success of this year's Community Thanksgiving Dinner.

This was the 49th anniversary of the church hosting this meal. It was wonderful to be back face to face around tables in our Fellowship Hall after 3 years of pandemic-forced distance. Many hands make light work. 8 people helped out with the kitchen inventory and deep-cleaning in the weeks before the event. Chris Silence and Lesann Foris distributed posters around town to advertise the event. Many people donated money and food items. Helen Carter took calls for our 46 takeout and delivered meals. Donna and Orvis Lunke did all the deliveries. 18 volunteers were on hand Wednesday to set tables, prep veggies, and make pies. On Thanksgiving day, a buzzing hive of 27 folks cooked, carved, and served up a delicious meal for about 90 happy guests.... and then cleaned up every roaster, gravy boat, and fork. There were leftovers...

So many lovely things happened this year. Over and over the right person for the job at hand seemed to show up at the right time. Kismet.



Lots of new volunteers joined the fun this year. They brought great energy and a willingness to try anything. Old hands like Mike Carlson and Suzanne Weber helped me remember what I was forgetting. I loved watching everyone get to know each other better by working together. I remembered folks I miss from Turkey days past. I had important and heartfelt conversations ...and lots of laughs/hugs. Jeff and I left footsore but heart-filled. It was a wonderful day in the kitchen.

Special thanks to my fellow Thanksgiving Dinner coordinator, Bruce Tyler. His expertise made this meal happen. He did all the food planning and ordering. He kept our turkey prep food safe. He headed up making 26 pumpkin pies on Wednesday and then single-handedly roasted 4 turkeys and made our new menu item, green bean casserole, at the Hub Thanksgiving morning. Gosh, he is fun and easy to work with. My vote for MVP.

-Jenny Delfs

Don't Miss the Cookie Sale
and Pageant!

*Sunday, December
17th*

Cookies will be
available in the
fellowship hall after
morning worship



Borealis Chorale & Orchestra



Please join us for the
Annual Borealis Chorale
& Orchestra concerts on
December 8th & 9th at
7 pm at Bethlehem
Lutheran Church.



We served nearly one hundred community people in person and sent out over 40 meals. The settings were exquisite, the food divine, and the fellowship was truly a blessing.

Thank you to all who showed up to help and to Jenny and Bruce for leading us to the banquet.

Blessings to our wonderful community who gathered to share thanks.



Thank you to all who volunteered to help make our shared meal a reality!



Thanks to KathyAnn Travis for her beautiful place settings.



Service of Farewell and Celebration for Conference Minister Shari Prestemon

The Minnesota Conference Board of Directors invites you to join us for a celebration in honor of Rev. Shari Prestemon's decade of service as our Conference Minister.

The celebration will be held December 9 from 11 am – 2 pm at Mayflower Community Congregational United Church of Christ at 106 E. Diamond Lake Road in Minneapolis. We will begin with a service of farewell followed by a luncheon reception and program. The luncheon reception is \$15 per person. [REGISTER HERE.](#)



To celebrate Rev. Prestemon's contributions to the Minnesota Conference and to send her off to work at our National UCC level with a legacy, everyone is invited to make a special one-time gift contribution to the Re-Imagine Fund. You can [give online](#) or send a check to the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ, 122 W. Franklin Ave., Suite 200, Minneapolis, MN 55404. Thank you!



News from the National Conference

'We've come a mighty long way': Chavis highlights progress at 40th anniversary of Creation Justice Ministries

by *Maic D'Agostino* | published on Oct 31, 2023

Creation Justice Ministries, an ecumenical partner of the United Church of Christ, celebrated its 40th anniversary Oct. 26 with a worship service at Foundry United Methodist Church in Washington, D.C.

The event was headlined by a keynote sermon from the Rev. Benjamin Chavis Jr., a longtime UCC minister, civil rights leader and founder of the environmental justice movement. Chavis coined the term “environmental racism” and lead the UCC’s Commission for Racial Justice, which published the landmark report “Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States.”

“We’ve come a mighty long way in 40 years,” Chavis said. “Some of the people that work over at the EPA right now actually worked for the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice. That’s progress. But it’s not enough. Globally speaking, there are still too many people who are harmed because of what we’re doing to the atmosphere, what we’re doing to the climate. And like 40 years ago, when there were denials of environmental justice, today there are denials of climate justice.

“But that’s where faith comes in. Because, to me, faith overtakes our denial of responsibility. Faith gives us the courage, faith gives us the desire to have the right relationship with the Creator. And, to have the right relationship with the Creator means we have to have the right relationship with what the Creator has created.”

The full recorded service can be viewed on [Creation Justice Ministries’ YouTube channel.](#)



The Rev. Benjamin Chavis Jr. delivers a keynote sermon during a worship celebration of the Creation Justice Ministries’ 40th anniversary.

On a journey

The celebration’s theme was “We’ve Come This Far by Faith.” And that, Chavis noted, was fitting for the environmental justice movement, which exists because of “all of our struggles, all of our journeys.”

“Faith itself is a journey,” he said. “... And so, we’re here to recognize that, 40 years ago, that journey had a catalyst. That journey had an ecumenical and interfaith affirmation. And as a result, people went to work in a very focused way on the importance of the environment, on the importance of the climate, on the importance of having clean water, on the importance of having clean air, on the importance of not contaminating God’s Earth but trying to restore and nurture all of creation.”

Chavis recalled his early activist days in the Civil Rights Movement and, in particular, his efforts to combat environmental racism in

Warren County, North Carolina, around the time the Creation Justice Ministries was born. “Some of you may know that I was the youngest person on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s staff,” Chavis told the crowd. “I was only 14 years old. I was a youth coordinator for SCLC. And the reason why I bring that up is that what happened in 1982 in Warren County, North Carolina, just didn’t happen as a miraculous event.”

Intersections of justice

During the Warren County protests, Chavis recalled his arrest and, ultimately, a realization about the interconnectedness of movements for justice.

“It was in the context of being in the Warren County jail that I first coined the term ‘environmental racism,’” he said. “And, of course, now the environmental justice movement is just not a local movement or a county movement or a state movement or a national movement. The environmental justice movement is a global movement. Thanks to God that people have found ways to connect, people see the intersection between environment and climate.”

Chavis, bring up the recent violence in the Middle East, also made a plea for recognition among faith communities that all people are part of God’s creation.

“We do have to be our brothers’ and our sisters’ keepers,” he said. “... I’m so thankful for the ministries of the United Church of Christ. The United Church of Christ enabled us to publish the toxic waste and race document. It’s become a landmark study. But I actually grew up in the Episcopal church. And the reason why I bring up these different ecumenical standings is sometimes I think that we allow our denominational label to prevent us from having dialogue with one another. But, to me, we’re all part of one human family, and we all worship, love, respect and are thankful to one God.

“And I say that, not just to my Christian brothers and sisters, but to my Jewish brothers

and sisters and to my Islamic brothers and sisters ... Why do we fight each other? Why do we kill each other? Why do we disrespect the sacredness of God’s creation, in human form and all forms?”

‘Much to celebrate’

In addition to Chavis, the service included greetings and thanks from many ecumenical leaders, such as the co-executive directors of Creation Justice Ministries, Karyn Bigelow and Avery Davis Lamb; original music composed by Ken Medema, and songs with lyrics written by Cathy Chamblee; and prayers led by interfaith partners, including the Rev. Brooks Berndt, UCC minister for environmental justice.

The Rev. Brooks Berndt leads an interfaith prayer.

“We celebrate this milestone, grateful for what you’ve brought us through but mindful of what lies ahead of us” Berndt prayed. “We know that your creation is groaning and waiting for your children to speak up on its behalf. We see the warming temperatures, the droughts and the storms, and we know that you have put us here for such a time.”

Berndt, who serves as vice chair of the Creation Justice Ministries’ board, later praised the four decades of justice work by the interfaith environmental organization.

“For 40 years, Creation Justice Ministries has played a leading role in making the ecumenical connections that allow us to effectively work together as the Body of Christ in addressing some of the most pressing issues facing our world today,” he said. “From the beginning, persons like the Rev. Benjamin Chavis Jr. have realized the importance of acting with a common sense of calling, so that we can further God’s will in seeking justice. When it comes to what we have accomplished and what we will continue to accomplish, there is much to celebrate.”

Jessica Quinn contributed to this story.

Grace upon grace.

Grace is truly at the center of everything for us humans. Grace shapes our faith, our family, our friendships, and our identity. Grace is not just being given the benefit of the doubt, or God bestowing favor on the less than worthy. Grace is also the root of gratitude and thankfulness. It is at the heart of our thanksgiving/eucharistic meal. “Grace upon grace” is a reminder of the great gifts of God to us, and an expression of our grateful response to that fullness.

Your gifts to the Christmas Fund allow the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance to provide grace, hope, and joy through financial relief to UCC pastors, lay church leaders, and their families. Thanks to you, no request goes unfulfilled. Your graceful response to the Christmas Fund appeal ensures the flow of loving support will not be interrupted.

(Luke 2:10)



The Christmas Fund provides direct financial assistance to retired and active UCC ministers and lay employees and their surviving spouses, including pension and health premium supplementation, emergency assistance, and Christmas thank-you checks.

In 2022, gifts to the Christmas Fund enabled:

- Monthly pension supplementation for 218 retired clergy and lay employees (\$1,042,726)**
- Health benefits supplementation for 86 retired clergy and lay employees (\$181,389)**
- Emergency grants for 55 individuals and families (\$138,022)**
- Christmas “Thank You” gift checks to 479 retired clergy and lay employees (\$278,500)**

Our Love Changes Lives

The Stewardship Committee would like to thank Gwen Mattice, Nina McClune, Tom Yuhasey, and Carol Winter for sharing their voice during our stewardship campaign. The question they were asked to answer was, "What are you excited about for our church in the next year?"

We have sent out the pledge cards and have already received 14 back for a total of roughly \$52,000 for next year's budget. We ask that you send yours in as soon as you can to help our church continue to change lives.



Please take a look at Pastors Enno's Column on some of the things he is excited about our church and the ways he sees lives changing. Thank you to all who give and have given to support our ministry, the people of our community, and sharing the good news of God's love.

-The Stewardship Committee

Board Minutes

November 14, 2023, in person and zoom

Attending: Tom Yuhasey, Moderator; Steve Aldrich; Francie Beaster; Jenny Delfs; Kevin LeVoir, Bruce Tyler; Carol Winter; Rev. Enno Limvere, ex-officio.

Call to order 5:01 p.m.

Opening Conversations: Reading Mission Statement, Sharing Joys and Concerns, this month's "question," reading Communication Agreement.

Urgent Business and Housekeeping

October Minutes approved online and published in the Shining Light. Proposed agenda approved as presented: moved, Delfs, second, Winter.

Financial Report by Kevin LeVoir, approved. moved Winter, second, Delfs

·Highlights: income exceeded expenses; cash on hand low but adequate;

·Giving towards year's end is picking up, increasing cash on hand.

·Donations to Architect Fund continue to come in.

News Letter articles due Nov. 28. Jen to write November board message.

December board meeting: Tuesday, December 12, 5 p.m. Zoom or in-person.

Old and New Business

Pastor's Report:

New people are coming to worship and getting involved.

Northwoods Childcare will begin serving children on Dec. 1.

Youth and children's ministries continue solidly.

Interest in offering Our Whole Lives (OWL) sexuality program for all ages.

Planning for young family outreach, including confirmation families, in new year.

Hallowe'en at the parsonage attracted 120 young folks and 5 church members.

Pastor is working on the MN Conference annual meeting planning group.

Pastor is working with a preaching mentor, Dr. Phil Hobson, to improve his sermons.

Advent and Christmas planning in progress.

Dec. 24th falls on Sunday; only worship service to be an evening Christmas Eve service.

Special services: Transgender Day of Remembrance, Nov. 20.

Blue Christmas service either Dec. 17 or 20. Still to be determined.

Annual January Congregational Meeting, January 28, 2024.

Remaining 2023 vacation days are scheduled.

Board Minutes, cont'd 11/14/2023

Mutual Ministry Goals:

Board members and Moderator Tom lead worship on Nov. 19 while Pastor on vacation. Stewardship message by Tom.

Community Building: Thanksgiving Day Dinner planning progressing well. Still need a few turkey bakers.

News of God's Work in the Community announcements: Nov. 19, Bruce;

Nov. 26, Carol; Dec. 3, Jen; Dec. 10, Steve.

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Pastor's evaluation review by the board took place on Nov. 1. The report, to be filed in Pastor's personnel file, was accepted as written, by all parties. To be signed by Moderator and Pastor at earliest convenience.

Salary increase request: Pursuant to the discussion at Pastor's evaluation, a motion was presented to direct that the Pastor's salary be increased by 4% in 2024. Moved, Jen; second, Francie. All in favor.

Preaching Improvement Process:

Pastor has asked board members to review recent and past (recorded) sermons to choose good and not-so-good examples, with specific critiques of each, in view of helping him in his desire to improve his preaching. Board is asked to send their selections and critiques to him individually, not in a group email chain. He would like to have them by Dec. 1 for his next meeting with his mentor.

Time and talent survey, "Gifts and Works" nears completion. Brochure to be passed out as soon as complete. Survey at later date.

Building Security system up and running. Some glitches still to be worked out.

Janitor search: Amber has continued to clean once a week beyond her desired stop time; We thank her. One candidate may yet submit an application. Another has not responded.

Committee Reports:

Stewardship Committee has sent out a nicely-done pledge drive mailing. First mailing to most likely to pledge. Another wider mailing will follow.

Bruce working to secure another solar panel estimate for future planning. Cook County nonprofits eligible for a 40% rebate.

Food Team: Kudos to the team for hosting the October 20 Harvest Potluck.

Meeting adjourned, 6:45 p.m. Respectfully submitted,
Bruce Tyler

Treasurer's Report

The October 2023 Financial Report shows a total income of \$16,187.67 and expenses of \$14,937.79. This means the Church's income was more than its expenses by \$1,249.88.

Income for October 2023	
Pledged Donations	\$ 10,761.10
Non-Pledged Donations	\$ 690.00
Loose Plate Offering	\$ 250.00
Building Use	\$ 171.00
Income from Outside Sources	\$ 838.92
Architect Fund	\$ 2,475.00
Special Gift	\$ 1,000.00
	\$ -
Interest Income	\$ 1.65
	\$ 16,187.67
Expenses for October 2023	
Pastor	\$ 8,785.55
Staff	\$ 1,218.06
Business	\$ 2,324.74
Worship	\$ 450.00
Education	\$ -
Building and Grounds	\$ 791.60
Parsonage	\$ 896.65
Neighbors in Need	\$ 250.00
Loan Principle	\$ 221.19
	\$ 14,937.79
Difference	\$ 1,249.88

The full report is available in the Church office.

-Kevin LeVoir