



DECEMBER 2023

**Family Fellowship
December 3rd at 5:00pm**

Come and join us in December for a fun evening of fellowship, food, and Christmas cards!

December 3rd at 5:00 p.m. we will have a potluck dinner followed by crafts! We will be making Christmas cards to send out with turkey dinners the following week.

Plan on bringing a dish to pass and your creativity!



***The Fabulous Smoked Turkey Dinner will be
Sunday, December 10th at Noon***

This is a wonderful dinner for the whole family provided by the men of the church. This fellowship event is a perfect time to invite a friend to come and meet others.

Call the church to sign up if you plan on coming and if you can help provide one of the designated side dishes.

Gifts for Teens

The Mission Board has set up the annual **Christmas giving tree**. This year We Care has asked us to collect gifts for teens. We will be collecting items for 12 baskets (6 boys, 6 girls).

The items (*\$ 25 gift cards, blankets, candies & toiletries*) we are asking for are fairly specific so that each basket is similar.

If you would prefer to donate cash and let board members do the shopping, or have any questions, contact Louise Wepfer, 637-8395, or Patty Gruber, 269-214-1470.

The collection will end **December 10th** so we have time to assemble the baskets.

Thank you in advance for your generosity.

Prayers for continued healing of our church family:

Kathy Campbell
Linda Olsen
Tom Barczak
Art Ayers
Joyce Thompson
Rick Olsen



Celebration

Dedication of Eleanore and
AmirahKay Peterson on
Sunday, November 26.



OFFICE NOTES

2024 **Offering envelopes** have been ordered. As soon as they arrive the office will put them in the Narthex.

Year end gifts to the church need to be received by Noon, December 30th. Donations have to be deposited in the bank on the 30th to be included on your 2023 statement.

Statements will be mailed out in January. Thank you for your support of the ministry of FCC.





Cookies and caroling

Women of the church, join us Wednesday, December 6 at

1 p.m. in Fellowship Hall, for our December program.

It is our cookie/carol or craft event. People are asked to bring 3-4 doz cookies (extra if you can for concert on 12/8). Candy is also an option.

If you are unable to attend but can provide some cookies to share, please drop them off to the church office the day before, or day of our gathering, during office hours.

We will be discussing officers and future activities. Please try to attend and RSVP Kris Ayers by calling 637-8762.

A Note from your Music Directors



We are looking forward to bringing our holiday concert to First Congregational on **Friday, December 8 at 6 pm**. Tickets are \$10. This will also be a fundraiser for the church.

Women's Fellowship will provide refreshments afterwards. Please join us!

Please plan to come early to the **7 pm Christmas Eve service**. The choir and various singers and instrumentalists will share their gifts, starting at 6:30 pm. If you have a song you would like to share, please let us know!

Thank you for all your song suggestions over the year. We include them in our planning for each service. Please keep them coming!

-Diane & Lisa



While recovering from hip replacement surgery, we were blessed with tasty meals provided by Elaine Kitchin, Nancy Daugherty, Elaine Fluck, Ann Habicht, and Ann Raue, all coordinated by Mary Pietenpol. Thank you for your generous and kind gifts.

-Elaine & Wes Stephens



My personal thanks to everyone who helped me in my time of loss. Your support has amazed me and I couldn't have made it without you all. Thank you for being there for me. You all have greatly touched me.

-Shirley Sollman



Special thanks to Jordan Fleming and Bob Linderman for raking the west garden area and clearing a few gutters of leaves.

Once again, the **Luminous Partners** (First Congregational, Peace Lutheran, and SH UMC) are joining efforts for a holiday event--in this case a joint children's Christmas pageant.

They will have rehearsal dates of Nov. 30, Dec. 7, and 14th, at 6 p.m. at First United Methodist Church.

The performance date is **December 21st**, 6 p.m., at the United Methodist Church.

United Church of Christ Christmas Fund

This fund has been caring for active & retired clergy and lay persons of the UCC for over 100 years. It provides emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities, health premiums and Christmas “thank you” gift checks each December to our lower income retirees.

This fund is administered by the Pension Board and 100% of the donations go to retirees.

Envelopes are in the pews now **through December 17th**, to allow you to contribute to this worthy cause.

Thank you for your generosity.

-The Mission Board

Open and Affirming News



Thank you for all of your support and participation this year!

We collaborated with Women’s Fellowship to create 20 emergency flight bags for the Domestic Violence Coalition; worked with Christian Education to offer the book study on “An Altar in the World”; received a grant from the Southwest Association to present a 2-part workshop with Mary Jo Schnell, Executive Director of the OutCenter of Southwest Michigan; and worked with all of you to create our All Saints service.

Our next step into living into our covenant as an ONA church is to create an outward display, letting the community know that all are welcome here. We have heard from many of you that you would like to see a rainbow comma displayed. This is an image that you see in every email and newsletter and is visible on our website. It is an official symbol of the UCC. The comma tells us that “God is still speaking” and the rainbow



acts as a beacon to all who are searching for a faith community where all truly feel welcome.

Please let us know any groups or projects you would like us to work on in 2024. If you would like to contribute to our projects, please write a check payable to First Congregational Church and include ONA on the memo line.

Thank you again! - your ONA Committee

Staff Spotlight-- Victoria Henry

We've been looking at our hired, non-pastoral staff, to better acquaint the congregation with their jobs. Lets look at Victoria, who is our Office Manager!

Victoria has now been here the longest of all our staff. It will be 37 years in February of 2024! As such, she knows an immense deal about the routines, (weekly, monthly, seasonal) of the church, various deadlines, and other planning components. She's the one people are most often directed to, to get an answer to a question.

Victoria does more than (wo-)man the office and answer phones, emails, and such. She oversees the daily aspects of the church's income and bills, ensuring bills are paid. She coordinates with our accountant, to ensure staff are paid, and accountabilities like taxes are managed.

Early each week Victoria reviews the offering report the Trustees put in on Sunday, making sure your offering is placed correctly. If not, she tracks the mistake down until it's entered right.

She's great at prompting boards to get in their minutes, and other reports. She attends and actively participates in the Trustees meeting, as well as the ongoing aspects of Trustee's work.

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Monthly, Victoria is working on putting together a newsletter. She takes great pride in its presentation.

Elaine Fluck is the only steady volunteer she has in the office. Elaine types up the worship bulletin; Victoria then tweaks it before printing the final copy. Victoria types up the insert as well. She makes sure that a weekly e-news goes out. Thanks for your help Elaine.

The church does not have a Building and Grounds person on site every day so Victoria's abilities extends further than office work. Victoria has been many things like a plumber, heating/cooling; the odd tasks are to endless to list.

Beyond that, and so much more to the list -- Victoria stepped in after Jeffrey left, helping with oversight of our janitorial staff, helping our Bridge pastors to keep things going smoothly. She's most recently been assisting Pastor Dave to transition into the routines of the church.

Victoria is NOT retiring at this time, but in a plan-ful manner, is working with the Trustees to create documents of many (many!) standard Operating procedures and routines. Take a moment to stop in and say "Hi."



Birthdays

12/03 Scott Raue
12/08 Margaret Guimond
12/15 Nancy Daugherty
12/17 Sue Gillett
12/27 Jason Turner
12/28 Adam Peterson
12/30 Bob Straits

Anniversaries

12/09 Diane & Lisa Van Deurzen-Otey
12/27 Robert & Theresa Gleason, 15th
12/30 Don & Elaine Kitchin, 45th

{ Just a reminder: only people's names appear who are actively attending church. }

Christmas Flower Fund



This year for Christmas we are offering you the opportunity to order a poinsettia that will be used for adorning our Sanctuary during this Advent season. After the Christmas Eve service you are encouraged to take your poinsettia home with you or share it with someone. Please let us know on the form if you will be doing that.

You may order a flower for a donation of \$15 /each, or more, which can be in memory or in honor of someone. A list of donators will be published in the Christmas Eve bulletin.

To make a donation, fill out this form and place it in the offering plate or mail it to the church office by **December 17th**.
Thank you.

I wish to give \$_____ in memory/honor of
(circle one)

I wish to give \$_____ in memory/honor of
(circle one)

I wish to give \$_____ in memory/honor of
(circle one)

Signature

Note: Whatever name(s) that appear for the signature is what will be printed.

I will be taking my poinsettia home with me. ☐