

**February
2023**

Still Speaking

Newsletter of First Congregational United Church of Christ of Alpena

Board of Directors

- Beverly Bodem
- Deborah Butler
- Bill Dempsey
- Ann Diamond
- Joe Garant
- Boris Gerber
- Sandy Jarmuzewski
- Jim McNeil
- Nancy Wedge

Dates to Remember

February 5
Worship Service
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February 12  
Worship Service  
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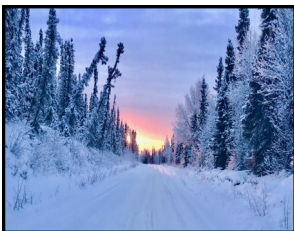
February 13
Board of Directors
Meeting
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February 14  
Happy Valentine's  
Day!  
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February 19
Worship Service
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February 22  
Ash Wednesday  
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February 26
Worship Service



February – A Quirky Little Month

Pastor Jon Gougeon

Here it is February already. It seems like only a few days ago we were doing Christmas. Maybe it is just me but, I thought “Does the month February have any redeeming qualities?” So I “googled” it, or as my brothers say, asked the “Oracle.” I found this... “February comes from a Latin word that means ‘purify.’ February days steadily grow longer, with a promise of spring just a calendar page away. February brings Groundhog Day and Valentine’s Day and Mardi Gras.” It is also Black History Month and has Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the season of Lent this year.

Of course when I think of Groundhog Day, I think of the movie of that name with Bill Murray as the obnoxious TV reporter who gets the remarkable series of do-overs of “Groundhog Day” until he gets it right, finds love, shows mercy and changes his entire life.

That is what Lent is about, spending time with God seeking forgiveness of wrongs and making relationships right again. Lent isn’t just about giving up something or some practice; it is a season of renewal. Let’s try something different this year. Let’s try spending the 40 days of lent being more forgiving, more caring and more in tune with God’s will for our lives. Give up some screen time and do more prayer time. After all, how can we be more like Christ if we don’t know Christ? How can we profess to be Christ followers if we don’t want to spend time with Christ?

We have several opportunities this year to join together with other faith communities during Lent. We have Ecumenical Services starting on Ash Wednesday and every Wednesday in Lent. During Holy week we will have our own Holy Thursday communion service, and on Good Friday the Ecumenical Service in the afternoon and an evening service in our church.

So February really is a time of renewal and refreshment. It tells us days are getting longer, spring is coming, and it is the shortest month of winter. Since February comes from the Latin for “purify” maybe we can use the month to cleanse our lives of those things that turn us from God and each other. Then we can get those relationship do-overs reflected in the movie and move past the hedonistic Mardi Gras celebrations to the season of Lent.

God’s blessings and grace to you all,
Pastor Jon

Meeting Notes

Worship Committee

The Worship Committee met January 2, 2023 with lots of planning on their agenda. The quickly approaching season of Lent and the Sunday service children's message were the major items on the agenda.

In regard to the children's message, it was decided to present a children's message two Sundays each month, the 2nd and 4th Sundays were chosen, and if we were able to identify seven to eight individuals willing to present the children's message, it would be something that could be accomplished. Pastor Jon said he would be willing to be on the scheduled rotation. We have identified seven additional people, and a schedule has been established from January 22 through the end of June.

Tentative plans for Lent and Easter celebrations are well underway with the re-establishment of the ecumenical mid-week services, and some ideas from Pastor Jon, and some shared ideas from committee members this tentative schedule has been established:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Host Church</u>	<u>Guest Preacher</u>
Feb. 22, Ash Wednesday	St. Paul Lutheran	Reverend Nystrom
March 1	First United Methodist	Reverend Orth
March 8	Grace Lutheran	Reverend Rayment
March 15	First Presbyterian	Reverend Bacon
March 22	First Congregational UCC	Reverend Shipman
March 29	St. Paul Lutheran	To Be Determined
April 6, Maundy Thursday	Trinity Episcopal	To Be Determined
April 6, Maundy Thursday	First Congregational UCC	Special Service by Rev. Gougeon
April 7, Tre Ore Service	Grace Lutheran	Shared Preaching
April 7, Good Friday Evening	First Congregational UCC	Evening Service by Rev. Gougeon
April 9, Easter Sunrise Service	First Congregational UCC at Boat Harbor	Reverend Gougeon
April 9, Easter Sunday Service	First Congregational UCC	Reverend Gougeon

On Wednesdays, February 22 through March 29, each host church will provide a simple soup and bread supper. Simple suppers will be served at 5:00 with worship services beginning at 6:00.

Annual Meeting

Board of Directors

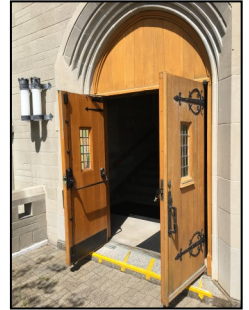


Many thanks to all who joined us for and participated in our 161st Annual Meeting of the Congregation on Sunday, January 29. Making our voices heard and sharing our ideas, concerns, and hopes are paramount to the continued success of our church. Additional copies of the 2022 Annual Report are available on the table at the back of the sanctuary and in the church office.

Committee Updates

The Welcoming Committee

At the Sunday afternoon, January 15, “Congregational Conversation”, facilitated by Jay Kettler of the Welcoming Committee, a lively discussion was held about the process to become, and the reasons for our church to become, an Open and Affirming church in the United Church of Christ. We thank all who attended! Ideas were presented about both the style and content, and specifically about what items should be included in our own Open and Affirming covenant. Sample covenants from 16 UCC churches nationally were reviewed. The group especially liked the covenant adopted by the Manistee, Michigan church, and picked this as the **first draft** for our church. Changing just the name of the church from Manistee to Alpena:



The Members of the Congregation of the First Congregational United Church of Christ in Alpena, MI aspire to embrace the inclusive love of Jesus Christ, so we make this covenant with the help of the Holy Spirit. We believe that all persons are created in God’s image and are loved, valued, and blessed equally by God. This community of faith is an open and affirming congregation who seeks to welcome all persons, including those of all races, ethnicities, ages, sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, family structures, faith backgrounds, abilities, and economic circumstances. All persons are invited to fully share and participate in leadership, ministry, fellowship, worship, sacraments, responsibilities, blessings, and joys of our church family. Therefore, no matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome in this house of worship.

We encourage one and all to carefully review this first draft. What are your thoughts? Would this covenant convince all individuals in our community that we truly are welcome to all? Please give your thoughts and ideas to any member of the Welcoming Committee (Avery and Marcia Aten, Terry Bell, Bill Dempsey, Edith and Boris Gerber, Dottie and Bill Haase, Jay and Marilyn Kettler, and Beth Petty). Please continue to review the items on the Resource Table in our church middle hallway (next to the Feed-a-Family tables). If you have ideas of other educational resources (movies at church?) let us know. The end point of the Open and Affirming review process would be our congregation deciding to adopt, or not adopt, a specific covenant statement. We will be scheduling another “Congregational Conversation” to review all ideas presented and have further discussion regarding our own church’s Open and Affirming covenant.

Lest Ye Forget

A Few Quick Reminders

- ◆ The 2023 hosting line-up for Sunday Fellowship Hour is available on the podium in the middle hallway. Please review and sign-up for hosting/helping services where needed. Thanks!
- ◆ Remember to check the members’ mail pouches in the hallway outside the pastor’s office for correspondences, notices, etc.
- ◆ Please call or email the church office if you know of someone who would appreciate receiving a care letter.
- ◆ Donations for our Feed A Family program are always welcome. Kindly leave donations on the long tables in the middle hallway.



Stewardship Drive Wrap-up

Stewardship Committee



The Stewardship Committee met twice in September, 2022 and made plans for kicking off the 2023 drive in early October. The members of the committee were Bill and Debbie Dempsey, and Bill and Dottie Haase. Judy Suszek and Nancy Wedge volunteered to prepare and mail the stewardship packets, which went out the week of October 10. The packets included an introduction letter, pledge cards, and return envelopes.

Stewardship Moment messages were presented to the congregation during Sunday worship services throughout October and November. A special thank you goes out to Max Lindsay, who presented the Stewardship Moment message to the congregation on October 30.

The pledges for the General Fund came in at \$97,218, the pledges for the Mission Fund were \$18,944; bringing the total 2023 stewardship campaign pledges to \$116,162.

The Committee wishes to thank all of you for your generous contributions. And again, a special thank you to Judy Suszek, Nancy Wedge, and Max Lindsay.

Bill Dempsey

Display Case Space Available

Cindy Straley

All church groups and committees are encouraged to utilize the lighted display case in the main hallway. There is a sign-up sheet posted in the hallway by the church office. If you would like to use the display case for a special event, please pencil it in, and we will reserve that time slot for you. We can split a month into two-week increments, or longer if needed. Please include your name and phone number when you sign up. Drop ins are welcome, of course, as time and space allow.

Times that are not otherwise requested will allow us to decorate the display case with bits of our history, current events, or a celebration of the season. Please contact me if you have any questions. I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you!

Cindy Straley, cindyinspire@gmail.com, 989-464-2361

Free to A Good Home

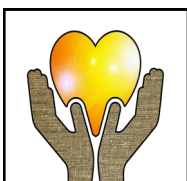
The Cleaning Crew

On the table beneath the bulletin board in the middle hallway, we have placed numerous items featuring our church's crest, emblems and insignia. There are denim shirts, wooden coasters, postcards, and other treasures. Please feel free to take what you would like, and leave a donation if possible.

Thanks so much for your assistance as we continue to clean out and spruce up our beautiful church!
Janet Artley, Mary Minnick, and Nancy Wedge

Missions Committee Request

Boris Gerber



Our church has been awarded a \$5,000 Comstock Fund grant for our Human Needs Fund. The grant funds are used to *“disburse cash amounts on a confidential basis to individuals within the church and the community for mainly emergency needs.”* If, at any time throughout the year, you become aware of someone with such needs, please contact Pastor Jon or Boris Gerber.

Mitten Tree Report

Diana Standen

Thanks to everyone who donated to our 2022 Mitten Tree project. We collected 79 items (37 hats, 21 pairs of mittens/gloves, 8 pairs of socks, 7 scarves, and 6 sweaters). The items were given to The Salvation Army and the Trinity Episcopal Church Sunday Supper folks. Many, many people will be a lot warmer this winter thanks to your generosity!



Flowers for the Altar

Judy Suszek

All who are interested in donating flowers to adorn our altar for Sunday morning worship services are encouraged to complete the sign-up sheet on the bulletin board near the church office. Your flowers can be displayed in memory of someone, in honor of someone, in observance of a holiday, or even in celebration of an event in your life. You may order flowers from a florist of your choice and have them delivered to the church, or you may pick up a beautiful bouquet yourself and bring it in. Of course, you are welcome to take the flowers with you following the worship service.



Heavenly Father,

Help us remember that the jerk who cut us off in traffic last night is a single mother who worked nine hours that day and is rushing home to cook dinner, help with homework, do the laundry, and spend a few precious moments with her children.

Help us to remember that the pierced, tattooed, disinterested young man who can't make change correctly is a worried 19-year-old college student, balancing his apprehension over final exams with his fear of not getting his student loans for next semester.

Remind us, Lord, that the scary looking bum, begging for money in the same spot every day (who really ought to get a job!) is a slave to addictions that we can only imagine in our worst nightmares.

Help us to remember that the old couple walking annoyingly slow through the store aisles and blocking our shopping progress are savoring this moment, knowing that, based on the biopsy report she got back last week, this will be the last year that they go shopping together.

Heavenly Father, remind us each day that, of all the gifts you give us, the greatest gift is love. It is not enough to share that love with those we hold dear. Open our hearts not to just those who are close to us, but to all humanity. Let us be slow to judge and quick to forgive, show patience, empathy and love. Amen.

First Congregational United Church of Christ
201 South Second Avenue
Alpena, Michigan 49707

Phone: 989-356-1795

Web Site: <http://uccalpena.org>

Email: officeuccalp@gmail.com

Office Hours: 9:00 am – 1:00 pm, Monday – Thursday

Sunday Worship: 10:00 a.m.
In Person and Online

Pastor Emeritus: Reverend Dr. H. Robert Case

Part-Time Interim Minister: Pastor Jon Gougeon

Organist/Choir Director: Kat Tomaszewski

Treasurer: Denise Fusina

Office Administrator: Judy Suszek

Custodian: Mike LaMarre

Live-Stream Technician: Brayden Broad

Still Speaking

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Dates to Celebrate

Birthdays

Avery Aten	Feb. 3	Deidra Westenbarger	Feb. 20
Greg Granum	Feb. 3	Alison Bloom-Storey	Feb. 21
Mary Minnick	Feb. 8	Beverly Bodem	Feb. 22
Richard Bloom	Feb. 12	June Perry	Feb. 23
Rebecca Wells	Feb. 13	Roger Snell	Feb. 25
Jay Kettler	Feb. 16	Janet Artley	Feb. 25
Bonnie Watkins	Feb. 17	Joseph Beland	Feb. 28
Jim Straley	Feb. 18		



Anniversaries



Thomas & Judy Cook	February 5	64 Years
Jere & Diana Standen	February 11	56 Years

HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY!