

**January
2026**

Still Speaking

Newsletter of First Congregational United Church of Christ of Alpena



Board of Directors

Deborah Desimone

**Nancy Wedge
Co-Chairpersons**

~~

**Joe Garant
Vice-Chairperson**

~~

**Sandy Jarmuzewski
Treasurer**

~~

**Beverly Bodem
Bill Dempsey
Ann Diamond
Beth Petty
Craig Waak**

*Happy
New Year*
2026

From the Pastor's Desk

Pastor Dick Hotchkin

Church historians tell us that the earliest Christian creed was the simple affirmation, "Jesus Christ is Lord." Most churches today teach this same essential spiritual truth. Jesus is Lord in a sense that has no earthly parallel; Jesus is Lord of lords.

All the authorities and dominions that we know in this world can exercise only a limited lordship. Earthly dominions are limited in duration; they last only for a while. For instance, we human beings start under our parents, but we grow up and are no longer under their authority. But we never grow up out of the dominion of Jesus. We can't get rid of His Lordship by growing old, not even by dying! For physical death is precisely the place where the controls of life move out of our hands – into His.

Earthly dominions are limited in scope, too. We can move outside of their jurisdiction; we can leave home, quit school, move out of the country. This freedom gives a kind of veto power that stands over against the power of rulers. But we can't move outside of the dominion of Jesus.

Earthly dominions are also limited in how much of us they can command. They may tax our purses; they may govern our time; they may control our actions; but they cannot govern our will. They may discipline our outer person, but they cannot command our spirit. Someone might say, "I will think what I want to think; I will believe what I want to believe." But if we have truly encountered Jesus, we know that He will have none of that. It is precisely there, at the center of each human life, that Jesus would rule.

From earthly dominions, there is the possibility of an appeal. But there is no appeal above and beyond the Lordship of Jesus. The Heavenly Father has committed all judgment into His hands. To Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth.

Annual Congregational Meeting

January 25, 2026

Following Worship

*Please see the Notice (Page 6) which explains
a bylaw change that will be voted on at the
Annual Meeting.*





January Laity Schedule

| | Greeters | Ushers | Lay Readers | Fellowship | Altar Guild | Communion | Counter(s) |
|-------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| 4th | Ron & Lynn Borke | Penny Anderson Gary Jarmuzewski | Karen Bacon | Jeff & Ann Gerow (all month) | Nancy Wedge | Nancy Wedge | Dennis/Janet Artley |
| 11th | Bill & Debbie Dempsey | Max Lindsay Vicky Lindsay | Bill Dempsey | | (all month) | | |
| 18th | Penny Anderson | Nancy Wedge Ashley Wedge | Lori Mayer | | | | |
| 25th | Beth Petty | Penny Anderson Jim Straley | Marilyn Kettler | | | | Tammy Veasy |

Note: If you see openings where you can help, please feel free to step in.

Days to Celebrate in January



Birthdays

| | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Joe Garant ~ 5th | James Park ~ 13th |
| Herb Knowlton ~ 10th | Kathy Thomas ~ 12th |
| Max Lindsay ~ 10th | Beverly Olsen ~ 17th |
| Vicky Lindsay ~ 12th | Vernie Nethercut ~ 23rd |
| | Kathy Moore ~ 27th |

Anniversary

Joan & Sonny Chrzan ~ 26

HELLO
january

Days to Remember

| | | | |
|--------|------|---|------------|
| Friday | 2nd | World Religion Class | 10:30 a.m. |
| | | Ladies Luncheon (Pompeyo Mexican Grill) | 12:00 noon |
| Sunday | 4th | Worship Service | 10:00 a.m. |
| Monday | 5th | Worship Committee Meeting | 5:30 p.m. |
| Sunday | 11th | Worship Service | 10:00 a.m. |
| Monday | 12th | Board Meeting | 5:30 p.m. |
| Friday | 16th | World Religions Class | 10:30 a.m. |
| Sunday | 18th | Worship Service | 10:00 a.m. |
| Friday | 23rd | World Religions Class | 10:30 a.m. |
| Sunday | 25th | Worship Service | 10:00 a.m. |
| | | Annual Congregational Meeting | 11:15 a.m. |
| Friday | 30th | World Religions Class | 10:30 a.m. |

Candlelight Christmas Concert & Open House

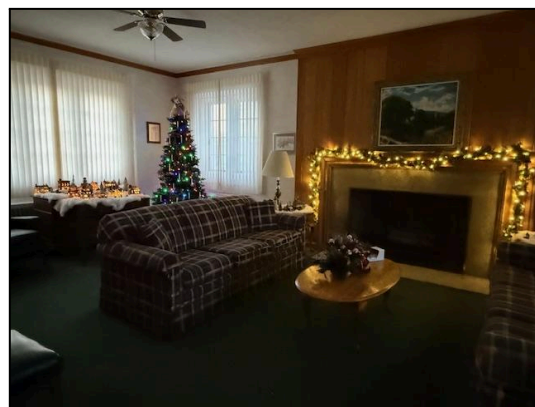
Deb Desimone & Cindy Straley

🌲 What an absolutely incredible Church Christmas Open House and Candlelight Christmas Concert! Attendance nearly quadrupled from last year, and at one point we had **45 people gathered in the sanctuary**, quietly listening to music—what a beautiful sight and sound.

A special thank you to **Sandy Jarmuzewski** for planning the music and playing for the entire two hours, to **Harold Ruder** for sharing his harmonica on several pieces, and to **Kat Tomaszewski** for joining in on the organ. The music truly set the tone for the evening.

Thank you to all who donated cookies: **Bev Olsen, Kay Beland and Sheila, Ann Gerow, Pat Garant, Dottie Haase, Mike and Annette LaMarre, Nancy Wedge, and Marilyn Kettler.** A big thank-you as well to **Lynn Borke** for hosting the hot chocolate bar, and to **Nancy Wedge** for helping organize the cookies, punch, and coffee.

Our greeters, **Craig Waak, Lori Mayer, Marilyn Kettler, and Ann Diamond**, were a tremendous help. Their welcoming smiles, guidance, and warmth made everyone feel truly at home. This event was a true collaboration, and the effort really paid off. **Thank you** to everyone who helped make this such a meaningful and successful evening. ☀️



Stewardship Campaign 2026

Cindy Straley

Your Stewardship Committee would like to thank you for your thoughtful pledges and willingness to help fund our 2026 spending plan. We look forward to carrying our mission of a more stable financial plan into the coming months with some new opportunities to tithe our time, talent and gifts.

We know that together, as steadfast members of this congregation, we can fulfill our mission and God's work can continue from this holy place of worship that was entrusted to us all those years ago.

Yours in Christ,

Cindy Straley, Max Lindsay, Bill Haase,
Lynn Borke, Marilyn Kettler, Joe Garant



Feed-A-Family

Bill & Dottie Haase

The food pantry is currently in need of the following items:

- Chicken or Turkey Gravy (canned or packaged)
- AuGratin potatoes in boxes or pouches
- Tuna or Chicken Helper
- Cereal boxes (all kinds)



10 bags were donated during December.

Feel free to use the bags on the table in the middle hallway for your shopping needs.

Board Notes from December

- ❖ **Nursery Update:** Nursery reorganization and updates are planned for January. Toys have been cleaned and temporarily returned to the room.
- ❖ **Treasurer's Report:** The Treasurer's report was reviewed and approved. The board discussed year-end giving trends and expressed appreciation for the congregation's faithful support.
- ❖ **Board Size Decision:** Upon recommendation from the Nominating Committee, the board voted to operate with **seven board members**, as allowed by the bylaws, due to current volunteer availability.
- ❖ **Safety & Security:** A report was shared from a recent safety seminar. Emphasis was placed on medical emergencies, de-escalation, communication, and overall safety preparedness. Work will continue on written guidelines and training.
- ❖ **Usher Guidelines:** Updated usher procedures were reviewed, including locking designated doors shortly after worship begins and clear emergency response steps. Final guidelines and training will be shared in the coming months.
- ❖ **Annual Meeting Preparation:** The annual meeting is scheduled for **January 25**. Committee reports are requested by **January 8** to allow time for compilation and printing.
- ❖ **Weather Cancellation Protocol:** A clear protocol was discussed. In the event of a weather-related cancellation, notice will be shared via email, Facebook and the church website.
- ❖ **Pastor's Report:** The board celebrated strong fellowship following worship services and the positive response to hospitality and fellowship events. A letter from a newer attendee praising the church's welcome, worship, and inclusivity was shared with gratitude.
- ❖ **Property Update:** The outdoor letter signboard has been refurbished. The board approved the purchase of replacement letters to improve visibility and appearance.
- ❖ The board is grateful for the continued engagement, service, and support of the congregation.
- ❖ **Next Meeting:** January 12, 2026

Treasurer's Report

Denise Fusina

This Christmas season, moving toward a bright new year, is the perfect time to reflect on our blessings and give thanks for the abundances that we may have – be that physical, financial, emotional or otherwise. I am truly thankful for the wonderful people in my life – family, friends, coworkers, and caring church members and volunteers.

A huge thank you goes out to all of you, the members of First Congregational UCC, for sharing your blessings with your church with care and conviction during this past year. Due to your generosity, we will complete the year 2025 with a positive bottom line. (You will see the details of your success in the Annual Report published later in January.) As I write, the year is not yet complete and numbers are approximate; however, I am excited to share that Pledge Contributions are 17% above our expectation. Expenses are on target to be less than or as anticipated. These, together, will put us in a positive end to the year.

Together, your care and generosity have impacted lives. First Congregational UCC is moving forward with compassion and generosity for those around us. I look forward to seeing the increased energy and growth of our shared ministry and mission as we move into 2026 and beyond.

Cheers to all of you for a wonderfully, blessed new year!

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:21



VANCO
FAITH

What happens when there's inclement weather on a Sunday?

**In the event of inclement weather on days of Worship,
notifications will be publicized**

**via Email
on [Facebook](#)
on the [Website](#)**

Please be sure to keep the office updated with regard to your current email address.

Email: [offuceuccal@gmail](mailto:offuceuccal@gmail.com)

Telephone: (989) 356-1795

Notice of Proposed Bylaw Change and Congregational Vote

Notice is hereby given that a vote on a proposed amendment to the bylaws will take place at the Annual Congregational Meeting on January 25, 2026.

The proposed amendment has been shared with the congregation in advance and will be presented for discussion and vote at the meeting. All eligible voting members are encouraged to review the proposal and participate.

Present By-law:

“Article XII – Property: In the event of the dissolution of this Church, all property and interests of this Church, including those assets held in trust, including bequests, gifts and grants in wills made before or after the dissolution, shall be transferred to the Michigan Conference of the United Church of Christ.”

Proposed By-law Revision:

“Article XII – Property: In the event of dissolution of this Church, all assets, real and personal, shall be distributed to funds, foundations or other legal entities organized for religious and/or charitable purposes serving the people of Alpena and Northeast Michigan. All recipients of distributed assets must be qualified as tax exempt under the Internal Revenue Code or the corresponding provisions of a future United States Internal Revenue Law.”