

September
2021

Still Speaking

Newsletter of First Congregational United Church of Christ of Alpena

Board of Directors:

- **Dennis Artley, treasurer**
- **Bill Dempsey**
- **Blair Diamond**
- **Boris Gerber**
- **Tammy Veasy**
- **Nancy Wedge**
- **Vicky Lindsay**
- **Jim Mc Neil, chair**
- **Beth Petty**

September Dates to Remember

5

In person & Live Stream
Worship
with Communion

6

Labor Day—Closed

12

In person & Live Stream
Worship

13

Board Meeting at 5:30pm
If not vaccinated,
please wear a mask and
social distance

19

In person & Live Stream
Worship

26

In person & Live Stream
Worship

A Word From Our Minister:

Rev. Dr. H. Robert Case

One of the most difficult questions I have been asked is to explain the polity of the First Congregational UCC of Alpena. Because so many of our members come from so many denominations that function differently, it can be somewhat confusing to people unfamiliar with a Congregational form of government.

*In the United Church of Christ, our denominational name, we have four different **settings or expressions** of the church. All decisions are made in consultation or Covenant with the other expressions. The major expressions of the UCC are the Local Church, Association, Conference and General Synod. Each expression or setting speaks only for itself and then to the other settings. For example if our General Synod, the national body, makes a decision about an issue it speaks only for itself and not the other settings. However, the other settings are expected to listen to the General Synod just as the General Synod listens to the other settings. The role of each setting is to work out the will of God in this time and in this place. No one speaks for the local church except the local church and no one speaks for the Association except the Association etc. We belong to the United Northern Association where all clergy and churches hold their standing that makes them members of the United Church of Christ.*

This is different than other forms of church government where a conference or presbytery or diocese speaks for the local church. When we as a local church make a decision we only speak for ourselves and then speak to the other expressions of the UCC. (Have I confused you yet?)

The Constitution of the UCC states “*The basic unit of the life and organization of the United Church of Christ is the Local Church*” This puts a tremendous responsibility on the local church to speak to the issues of the day. Only the Congregation in a duly called meeting can make a decision or pronouncement on behalf of the church. As a pastor, I can speak for myself as an ordained minister in the UCC, but not for the local church unless it authorizes me to do so. All the boards and committees of the church carry out the wishes of the Congregation or they do studies to bring information to the congregation.

There have been questions about the Welcoming Committee functioning in the church. Neither the Welcoming Committee nor the Board of Directors can make decisions regarding the position of the church. They will study and collect information. The church, in a congregational meeting, will decide the policy of the church. What is important to remember is that in our understanding of the church we, members of First Congregational, are to make decisions that we believe carry out the will of God, under the headship of Christ with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It's not what we want, but what the faithful response to God's call is in this time and in this place. As members we are in Covenant with each other to listen to each other, to pray with each other and together to seek the Holy Spirit's guidance. In short we are a COMMUNITY OF FAITH and not simply a gathering of individuals. The Sole Head of the Church is Jesus Christ to whom we seek to be followers. In the UCC it's our responsibility to have the faith and courage to make decisions.

Bob,
Rev. Dr. Robert Case, Transitional Minister



August 9th Board Meeting Summary

Judy Suszek, Office Administrator

- * Ann Diamond gave a brief report regarding the Search Committee's process. Applications are coming in slowly. The committee is reviewing applicants and continuing to move forward with the process. It looks as though we won't have a new pastor until sometime in 2022.
- * Dennis Artley reports the financials continue to look good.
- * Full reopening of church to community groups is under way.
- * Refinishing and maintenance of the church's exterior doors is underway.
- * Ushers, greeters and offering collection will be discussed again in the future. Currently, the ushers and greeters are not comfortable re-starting the processes due to the increased Covid infections in Alpena County.
- * Following the Personnel Committee's recommendation to hire Judy Suszek to replace Kristi Blackaby and change the position's title from Secretary to Office Administrator, the motion was approved.
- * Boris Gerber reported the Heifer International offering will begin next week and will be dedicated in memory of Gordon Nethercut.
- * Reverend Case will contact the Worship Committee soon to begin planning for the holiday season.
- * Considering the current Covid risk level for Alpena County, the Board decided to continue with the strong suggestion that if you are not vaccinated, you should wear a face mask in church, and will leave masking of vaccinated people to a personal decision.

Welcome Our Newest Staff Member

We are pleased to announce the hiring of Judy Suszek as Office Administrator (formerly the Secretary position). She comes to us with a career's worth of knowledge and office experience. Welcome to the church team, Judy! With the change in office staff, our office hours have returned to their original 9:00am—1:00pm, Monday through Thursday schedule.



In-House Comstock Fund Grant Applications Due for Board Approval

Judy Suszek, Office Administrator

Reminder—All in-house requests for 2022 Comstock grant funds must be reviewed and approved by the church's Board of Directors at the September 13 Board meeting prior to being submitted to the Comstock Committee .

Welcoming Task Force Update

Boris Gerber, Welcoming Committee Chair



Below is a very brief summary of the 18 surveys submitted during July and early August. If you would like to be emailed a file containing all the responses received, please let Judy in our church office know.

Our members indicate that our church is special for the friends we have made, the choir and music program, our engaging and energetic pastors and preaching, our openness and our mission activities.

Many described our church and its mission with our statement “No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here”. We are an open and welcoming congregation, generous and caring for our members and others in the community and the world.

What do we do well as a welcoming congregation?: Our communion is open to all. We are open and friendly to all who enter our doors. We open our building to many community groups and individuals.

How do we become more welcoming to those who are not yet “at the table” with us?: It was noted that it is each member’s responsibility to invite people into our congregation. Some respondents felt that it is OK to just accept any who enter our doors. Others felt we need to do more “inviting”, identifying groups involved in the “all” are welcome, so that they know we indeed welcome them.

The majority of respondents believe we would benefit from more information about the concerns of people who may question if they are welcome here, such as members of the LGBTQ community, as well as people of different ethnicities or educational backgrounds, and those recovering from substance abuse. It was noted that we do not know enough about the lives of people different than ourselves – to become empathetic we need to learn the barriers they face, their fears and experiences. A few felt we are currently open to all, and need not change to meet any specific group’s needs.

Many of the respondents are interested in opportunities for study and sharing of thoughts. The format most favored is small group discussions with a meal or coffee and dessert with a few folks to discuss the topics.

Overall, the survey results indicate a willingness and a desire to have conversations about welcoming issues, but move gently and be sure all have the opportunity to express and discuss their questions and views. Our Welcoming Task Force will work to provide some of these opportunities this fall. Thanks to all who shared their thoughts with us!

New Pastor Email Address

Judy Suszek, Office Administrator

Reverend Case’s new email address is alpuccpastor@gmail.com. Please begin using this address for all church related email correspondence directed to Reverend Case.



*First Congregational United Church of Christ
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Email: officeuccalp@gmail.com
Web Site: <http://uccalpena.org>
Office Hours: 9:00a – 1:00p Monday – Thursday

**Sunday Worship: 10:00 a.m.
In person and Virtual**

Transitional Minister: Rev. Dr. H. Robert Case
Choir Director/Organist: Kat Tomaszewski
Treasurer: Denise Fusina
Office Administrator: Judy Suszek
Custodian: Mike LaMarre

Still Speaking

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September Celebrations

Birthdays:

Nancy Wedge	9/06
Thomas Grubaugh	9/06
Bill Clegg	9/07
Penny Anderson	9/08
Matthew Bailey	9/10
Blair Diamond	9/14
Connor Caplis	9/15
Lois Gibbs	9/20
Laura Caplis	9/21
Cheryl Mack	9/27
Nicole Petty	9/28
Claire Caplis	9/28

Anniversaries:

September 21 -
Dennis & Beverly Bodem 58 years

