

The Vine



Newsletter of the First Congregational Church
Rochester, Wisconsin

December, 2026

Contents this month:

Calendar, Lectionary
Pastor's Ponderings; Congregationalism,
Council/Committee Reports; Other News
Devotional: See Me, Feel Me

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 Tai Chi 9AM Advent Bible study 11-Noon FCCR parlor	2	3 Choir Rehearsal 5:30	4 Community treelighting 6pm	5
6 Sunday Service 10AM 10AM Sunday School	7 Advent bible study @ Honey Creek 4:30	8 Tai Chi 9AM Advent Bible study 11-Noon FCCR parlor	9	10 Choir Rehearsal 5:30	11 Ladies Luncheon and cookie packing 11 AM	12
13 Sunday Service Communion Sunday Finance Committee Meeting	14 Advent bible study @ Honey Creek 4:30	15 Tai Chi 9AM Advent Bible study 11-Noon FCCR parlor	16	17 Choir Rehearsal 5:30	18	19
20 Sunday Service 10AM 10AM Sunday School Council Meeting after church	21 Advent bible study @ Honey Creek 4:30	22 Tai Chi 9AM Advent Bible study 11-Noon FCCR parlor	23	24 Christmas Eve Service 7PM	25 Christmas Day	26
27 Sunday Service 10AM Hymn Sing	28	29	30	31		

Next month's Newsletter deadline: email JoAnne, mrspotts51@hotmail.com, by December 26

December Lectionary

Dec 6:Isaiah 40:1–11 Psalm 85 2 Peter 3:8–14 Mark 1:1–8 **Dec 13**: Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11 Psalm 126 1 Thess. 5:16– 24 John 1:6–8, 19–28 **Dec 20:** 2 Sam. 7:1–11, 16 Psalm 89:1–5 (19–29) Rom. 16:25–27

Luke 1:26–38 **Dec 24**:Isaiah 7:10–14 Psalm 110:1–4 1 John 4:7–16 Matt. 1:18–25 **Dec 25**: Isaiah 9:2–7 Psalm 96 Titus 2:11–14 Luke 2:1–14 (15–20)Isaiah 62:10– 12 Psalm 98 Titus 3:4–7 Luke 2:(1–14) 15–20 Isaiah 52:7–10 Psalm 2 Heb. 1:1–6 (7– 12) John 1:1–14 (15–18) **Dec 27**:Isaiah 61:10– 62:3 Psalm 111 Gal. 4:4–7 Luke 2:22–40 **Dec 31**:Isaiah 30:(8– 14) 15–17 Psalm 90:1–12 Rom. 8:31b–39 Luke 12:35–40

Just a Pastor Pondering… Making Room for Christmas



First Congregational Church Family,
December has a way of filling our calendars before we have time to prepare our hearts. There are gifts to choose, gatherings to plan, and familiar traditions to enjoy. In the midst of it all, I invite us to pause and ask a simple question: How can we make room for Jesus this Christmas?

As we journey through Advent toward Christmas, may we practice a different kind of preparation—not simply getting everything done, but becoming more attentive to God's presence. A few quiet moments of prayer, a thoughtful act of kindness, or time spent listening to someone who needs encouragement can help turn our attention from the rush around us to the hope within us.

Making room for Christ also means making room for one another. Perhaps there is a neighbor who would welcome an invitation, a friend who needs a phone call, or a family whose burdens we can help lighten. We do not need grand gestures to share love. Sometimes the most meaningful gift is our unhurried presence.

I also want to speak gently to those for whom this season is difficult. If you are grieving, feeling lonely, facing uncertainty, or simply worn out, you do not have to pretend that everything is merry. There is room in our church family for both joy and sorrow. My prayer is that you will find companionship, comfort, and the freedom to come just as you are.

This December, let us make space for worship, gratitude, and generosity. Let us carry the spirit of Christmas beyond our gatherings and into our homes, our conversations, and the everyday choices we make. May our welcome be warm, our patience generous, and our hearts open to the people God places in our path.

May the peace of Christ steady you, the hope of Christ encourage you, and the love of Christ fill your home this Christmas and in the year ahead.

With love and Christmas blessings,
Merry Christmas!
Pastor Joe and Chris

The Congregationalist Church- The Relationship between Congregationalism and the UCC



There has sometimes been confusion regarding the relationship between Congregationalist churches and the United Church of Christ (UCC). They are not the same, but they are related in some ways. This is the way they evolved: the Congregational Church and the UCC have a direct ancestral and structural relationship: Congregationalism is one of the primary historical streams that came together to form the UCC.

The UCC was created on June 25, 1957, through the union of the General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church.
The Congregational Christian Churches traced their lineage back to the New England Puritans and Pilgrims of the 17th century, meaning the modern UCC inherits that historical legacy and the theological roots of American Congregationalism.

The UCC adopted the traditional Congregational model of church government. In this system, each local church is an autonomous entity that owns its property, calls its own pastor, and makes its own decisions rather than answering to a central church hierarchy.
However, not all Congregationalists joined. When the merger happened in 1957, a portion of Congregational Christian churches chose not to join the UCC. FCCR was temporarily affiliated with the UCC, but severed that connection completely in 1992. In general, those churches who preferred to remain independent or hold stricter traditional governance formed separate bodies, such as the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (NACCC), of which FCCR is now a member.

December Birthdays!

Brought to you by your Pastoral Care Commission:

Kristina Mingus	Dec 2
Gary Larson	Dec 11
Dana Mingus	Dec 12
Sue Beach	Dec 17
Brian Mingus	Dec 17
JESUS	**Dec 25**
Dave Hilgenberg	Dec 27
Jane Larson	Dec 28
Mark Dahms	Dec 30
Agneta Ray	Dec 30



Council Meeting Report

First Congregational Church of Rochester
Council meeting, November 15, 2026

Present: Joe Hackett, Rose Seeger, Bev Jensen, Kelly Ball, Steve Dolphin, Ruth Frost, Vicki Will, Lisa Hilgenberg, JoAnne Potter, Mark Dahms, Sue Beach
Meeting called to order with prayer at 11:13.
Minutes from the October 18 meeting were distributed and corrected to clarify the statement regarding members at large attending meetings of the council and committees. It is to read as follows:
Attendance at all meetings by any member for observation is welcome. If that member wishes to speak at and contribute to the meeting, however, and agenda item is required to be arranged in advance.
Steve moved, and Kelly seconded, that the minutes be approved with that change.

Pastor's Report – Joe Hackett

- The candlelighting program for Advent is completely
- The WCA is planning a mission trip for summer, 2027. Ideas are welcome.
- The National meeting will be held in WI in 2028. Local churches need to develop a theme, a scripture, and a logo. A location is being worked on.

Education – Joe Hackett

- The Advent study begins the Monday and Tuesday after Thanksgiving. Book have been ordered.
- Sunday School – Santa sacks for the treelighting have been packed and will include invitations to the Christmas Eve service.
- Sunday school students will setup and cleanup for communion on Dec. 13.
- Background checks for teachers completed but not yet charged.

Finance/Treasurers Report – Mark Dahms

- nearly $4000 year to date loss however expects we will make it up before year's end.
- Will make donations to WCA and NACCC as usual
- OCC cash donations up $300 from last year
- Committee will begin budgeting meetings after Thanksgiving
- Next meeting Dec 13 at 9:15AM

Marketing – Mark Dahms

- Website updated through Christmas Eve
- Joe had an outdoor banner made for Christmas Eve services
- Posting online on Facebook

Worship – Rose Seeger

- Bulletin planning done, Advent and Christmas Eve covers ordered
- Chimes need repair before they will be available for play
- Special music booked into January. Harpist returning in January.

Fellowship – Kelly Ball

- Thanksgiving potluck next weekend.
- No coffee hour for treelighting, High school choir entertaining. DW will provide hot chocolate.
- Village advertising treelighting.
- Ladies' lunch and cookie packing Dec 11. Need suggestions for cookie recipients.

Missions – Sue Beach

- 200 OCC shoeboxes packed out and ready to deliver
- 18 Adopt a Family tags for 2 families will be out next Sunday for distribution
- Love Inc meal to be served Nov 23. Next meal Jan 23.

Building and Grounds – Steve Dolphin

- Furnace inspection on Nov 24. Will string lights on tree that day.
- Wayne cleaned gutters with Jay
- TS signs working on addition to corner church sign advertising service time
- Roof will have to be inspected in the spring
- Flower beds will be cleaned out next week.

New Business:
Will talk to Mark Dahms about church financial audit.
Next meeting Dec 20 after church

Kelly moved, Steve seconded the meeting be adjourned at 12PM.

Financial Report –

First Congregational Church of Rochester, Wisconsin
Finance Commission Report for the period ended October 31, 2026

In October, there was a small surplus of $476 for the month. That reduced the year-to-date loss to $3,987 with operating income of $62,819 and operating expenses of $66,805. Despite the year-to-date loss, the year can end in a surplus if November and December offerings match last year (about $20,000) and expenses finish within the full year budget ($14,664 remaining). Unrestricted cash remains healthy at $23,344. Additional details can be found on the reverse page.

Attendance averaged 35 in October bringing the year-to-date average to 37, which is 1 less than the same time as last year.

Deposits for the month included:

- Regular offerings of $6,783 including $33 of In-Kind Donations

Disbursements for the month included:

- $386 to Pie Insurance to renew the Workers' Comp policy.
- $316 to Village of Rochester quarterly sewer bill.
- $303 to Brother for replacement toner cartridges (black and cyan).
- $231 to the NACCC for advent devotionals, lent devotionals, and 5 calendars.
- $100 to Concordia Supply for an outdoor banner to advertise the Christmas Eve service.
- $48 to Cokesbury for advent bulletin supplies.

Annual Voluntary Donations – each year the Church makes voluntary donations to the Congregational associations at the national (NACCC) and state (WCA) levels. The budget included $1,000 for the NACCC and $100 for the WCA, both consistent with 2025 donations. Donations will be made in these amounts next month.

Painting Projects – approved projects for the parsonage and pastor's office have not started and are likely delayed until Spring.

Missions Income – as of the end of October, church members donated an amazing $700 for Operation Christmas Child shoebox shipping costs. After the November 8 deadline, an online donation will be made via the Samaritan's Purse OCC website.

Annual Budget –the Finance Commission will begin budgeting for 2027 the week of Thanksgiving and conclude in early January. Provide input by email to Mark or speak to Mary, Rose, Christine or Dave.

Next Meeting: 9:15 am Sunday December 13

COMMUNION SCHEDULE

DATE	TABLE SETUP	TABLE SETUP	BREAD/ JUICE
13-Dec (Sunday School)	Lisa Hilgenberg	Greta Frost	Chris Hackett
10-Jan	Brian Mingus	Kim Mingus	Melanie Mingus
14-Feb	Sue Pope	Lisa Hilgenberg	Greta Frost
March 25 Maundy Thursday	Sue Beach	Tom Beach	Ruth Frost
11-Apr	Christine Gall	Joyce Gerard	JoAnne Potter
May 16 Pentecost Sunday	Sue Beach	Tom Beach	Ruth Frost



A joint confirmation class between English Settlement Church and First Congregational Church
is launching on Sunday January 24th from 1-3pm here at First Congregational Church Rochester.
This Class is open to any youth in 7th grade and up.
We will be meeting each month for 2-3 hours from January 2027 until May of 2027.
More information will follow after Christmas.
If you have a youth that might be interested, please reach out to Pastor Joe



Hymn Sing!

Christmas Hymn Sing will be on Sun.Dec. 27th. If you have carols you'd love to sing again or even for the 1st time this season, please

share your voice and request your favorite carol. We'll sing as many as we can! Let me know as soon as you can so I can make up the list!
Let us sing to the glory of the Lord!

Vicki Will

Community Book Club

No book club meeting in December, but the next one will be January 25.
The new book will be Mad Mabel by Sally Hepworth.
The complete year's choices:

Date	Title	Author
1/25/2027	Mad Mabel	Sally Hepworth
2/22/2027	The Maid	Nita Prose
3/29/2027	Theo of Golden	Allen Levi
4/19/2027	My Friends	Frederick Bachman
5/24/2027	The Boy who met Jesus	Immaculee Ilibagiza
6/21/2027	Dinner with Edward	Isabel Vincent
7/26/2027	The Other Einstein	Marie Benedict
8/30/2027	The Book Club for Troublesome Women	Marie Bostwick
9/27/2027	How the Penguins Saved Veronica	Hazel Prior
10/25/2027	Ordinary Grace	William Kent Krueger
11/29/2027	The Dictionary of Lost Words	Pip Williams

Ladies' Luncheon



It's that time again!
Time for the annual Ladies' Christmas Luncheon!
Mark your calendars for Friday, December 11, 11AM
We'll meet at Chances and afterward, those who are able will navigate back to the church to pack cookies for delivery to those who need a bit of cheer.

Sign up on the clipboard at the rear of the church to make sure there's enough room for everyone!

Holiday Cheer Cookie Delivery

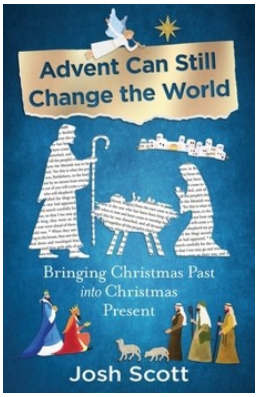


We will again be packing cookies for delivery to shutins and to those otherwise out of regular contact with the church and whom we think would benefit from a visit and a plate of cookies. They DO NOT need to be members of the church. If you know of someone, please add their name to the list at the back of the church or tell JoAnne Potter. 608-604-3137.

Calling For Bakers!

If we are going to deliver cookies after December 11, we need something to deliver. There are a lot of names on the delivery list this year, a dozen of them at this count. There may be more as the day approaches, so those who are able, please bring two or three dozen of your homemade creations to church by December 11 at your convenience and leave them in the kitchen marked for sharing. Thank you so much!

New Bible Study - Discover the meaning of Christmas in its own time and place.



Christmas is a global celebration wrapped in nostalgia and tradition. The movies we return to each year, the carols we know by heart, and the rituals we repeat connect us to Christmases past and to one another. Yet beneath these familiar layers lies a story rooted in real life, unfolding in a specific time and place. To experience the enduring power of the Christmas story today, we must first understand what it meant then before we can discern what this sacred story offers our own moment.

Join us for this Advent Seasons Study

We will meet for 4 weeks and use this book and accompanying video to guide us on this journey.
You will have two times to participate again this year. Once at Honey Creek and First Congregational.
Monday from 4:30-5:30pm on November 30, December 7,14,21 at Community Baptist Church Honey Creek
Tuesdays from 11am-Noon on December 1,8,15,22 at First Congregational Church of Rochester

Book Cost, if you want one is $22.00
If you have any questions, contact Pastor Joe

LeMutt on the Origin of Christmas Cookies



"Winter is the time for comfort, for good food and warmth, for the touch of a friendly hand and for a talk beside the fire: it is the time for home." 🏠
By Edith Sitwell

Hi folks it's me, LeMutt ! So December has arrived and I've been scratching my head trying to figure out where 2026 went! But for those of you who can't wait for Christmas 🎅 well it's just around the corner now! When I sat down to write this months article I had the idea I would talk about Christmas 🍪 We know it's not Christmas without cookies but if I had told you everything I learned about cookies, I

would have not been done till Christmas so I will give you a short version. If you want more, suggest you google the history of Christmas cookies. There's a lot!

Christmas cookies go all the way back to medieval Europe when new spices became available. Nutmeg, Cinnamon and Ginger were combined with butter and sugar combined to make a once a year tradition. In the 1700's that tradition arrived in America when the German settlers arrived in Pennsylvania. Leaving cookies out for Santa 🎅 started in the depression era of 1930's. Parents were teaching their children about thankfulness and sharing the holiday bounty. There is so much more to tell you about this tradition of cookies, but it would start to be a crumbling article 😉.
How about a few facts about the month of December? The first day of winter always lands on the 21 or 22 day of the month and the full moon in December is called the Cold moon. Besides Christmas some other holidays in December are,St Nicks eve, which comes on either Dec 5 or 6, Hanukkah/Chanukah(the Jewish Festival of Lights), Boxing Day December 26, and News Year Eve on the 31st.

Here's a few fun facts about Christmas! The first artificial Christmas tree was made in Germany with dyed goose feathers in the 1800's. In Hawaii, Santa is called Kanakaloka, Tinsel was invented in Germany 1610, the first Christmas stamp was released in 1962, and Alabama was the first state to recognize Christmas as a state holiday in 1836 and it wasn't till 1870 when President Grant made it a national holiday.

"Christmas isn't a season. Its a feeling"
By Edna Ferber
"It is Christmas in the heart that puts Christmas in the air"
By W.T. Ellis

Here's what I know you all have been waiting for——jokes to tell around the tree on Christmas 🎄
Where do Santa's reindeer stop for coffee? Star- Bucks 🤎
What's red and white and falls down the chimney? Santa Klutz
How much did Santa pay for his sleigh? Nothing. It was on the house!
What did Luke Skywalker say after he planted a Christmas tree farm? May the forest be with you!
Who is the Christmas tree's favorite singer? Spruce Springsteen
and finally
What do you get when you mix a Christmas tree with an iPad? A 🍍 pineapple

I want to you wish all of you a wonderful Christmas season and a 🥳 Happy New Year! See you next year 🐶
"If you look for me at Christmas you won't need a special star; ⭐ I'm no longer just in Bethlehem. I'm right there where you are"
Author Unknown

Thoughts – See Me, Feel Me



How often have you heard it?
"You are made in the image of God."
Sounds pretty good when you think of it. The love that God had for us when He decided to share His creation with a being that bore some kind of resemblance to Him hearkens back to the feeling we have when we look at our newborn and think he has our eyes or she has our smile. We belong together in some way.

And we do.

"**Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness** so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky,"-Genesis 1:26

Hmmm. Made in God's image. You know what that means? If its Hebrew root matters, it comes from the word 'tsalem', which means 'shape' or 'shadow'. Something that kind of looks like something else, but isn't. Something that is connected to its source, something that conforms to its outline and follows it around but shares no common materiality or consciousness with it. Kind of like a mirror image or that dark spot on the sidewalk behind you on a sunny day. There is shape but no substance.

Now, that probably doesn't mean that God, excepting for Jesus, has arms and legs like we do, but it sure does sound like, if we are made in God's image, we are like Him in some very limited and imitative ways.

But, there's a second part to this verse. We are also made in God's likeness, and that comes from a different Hebrew word, 'demut'. This word means something else entirely. This word infers a kind of intimate blood relationship. It means to resemble someone in both appearance and action.

This is where it gets interesting.

It looks to me like 'image' is what we're given by virtue of being made human. It's something we are but 'likeness' is something else. It's something we do. It's what gives us the ability to take our proper place not only among the rest of God's creation but in doing so, also take our place beside God Himself as His earthly agents. God's likeness is what we acquire through living with Him and establishing the closeness to Him that grows our spirit to be more like His. It's what allowed Abraham to be God's friend. It's what allows us to establish a real fellowship with Him and to know Him.

Image is what we are. Likeness is what we grow into.

There's seeing and there's feeling. Promise and fruit. We are never quite done, but the journey is both privilege and joy.

Image: Fernando Rodrigues
Text:https://joannempotter.blogspot.com/2026/10/see-me-feel-me.html