



THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH United Church of Christ January 2026



Friends in Christ:

Back in 1966, when I was a kid, my father brought home the Dean Martin Christmas Album, a very groovy and swinging take on some seasonal music. It became a favorite of mine—although I have no idea what happened to the album over the ensuing years.

I thought of this when I read that Senior White House Aide, Stephen Miller, woke up on the day after Christmas and posted on X: “Watched the Dean Martin and Frank Sinatra Family Christmas with my kids. Imagine watching that and thinking America needed infinity migrants from the third world.”

Set aside for right now that Bill Melendez, an American who immigrated to this country from Mexico, was the driving force behind the now 60 year old classic, *A Charlie Brown Christmas*.

As *The Daily Beast* reported: “Sinatra was particularly outspoken against “race- and color-haters,” whom he blasted in a 1991 op-ed for The Los Angeles Times titled “The Haters and Bigots Will Be Judged: Some words from a ‘saloon singer’ to those who still haven’t figured out the whole point of America.”

“Who in the name of God,” Sinatra continued, “are these people anyway, the ones who elevate themselves above others? America is an immigrant country. Maybe not you and me, but those whose love made our lives possible, or their parents or grandparents. America was founded by these people, who were fed up with other countries. Those weren’t tourists on the Mayflower—they were your families and mine, following dreams that turned out to be possible dreams.”

In a sermon a couple of years ago I mentioned Sinatra’s relentless championing of Black jazz artists like Ella Fitzgerald and Count Basie. When Sinatra once noticed singer Nat Cole eating dinner in a hotel dressing room, he invited him to the main dining room, where Black people were not allowed. Sinatra then warned the hotel’s management that he would get the entire serving staff fired if they didn’t integrate the dining hall.

That was the first time I had ever used Frank Sinatra in a sermon as an example of what it means to follow in the way of Jesus Christ: Inviting others, welcoming everyone at the table.

Now I say it again. Be more like Frank. It’s the groovy, swinging thing to do as we continue to figure out the whole point of America.

On Epiphany Sunday (January 4), we remember the story of Joseph and Mary, fleeing with the baby Jesus, becoming refugees from the murderous King Herod, living in Egypt for some time.

On the Sundays after Epiphany this year, our Mission Board is sponsoring a series of speakers addressing immigration issues in our nation and our community. There is more information about this inside this newsletter.

The fact is, we do need immigrants. The living Christ welcomes all people—and we hope that we too might extend such a welcome, share such grace, and, you know, be more like Frank.

Peace,

Bill

P.S.: I thank everyone in the congregation for your gift at Christmas. I am filled with gratitude, not only for your Christmas gift but also but also for the ongoing gift of your call to me to be your pastor. Thank you for your support and prayers throughout the year.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS



Congregational UCC Iowa City Christian Education

January 2026

We had a busy and excellent Advent season during December 2025. We braved an early wintry weather season with pageant rehearsals and a field trip to see Malia and Oscar perform in the Nutcracker. The flip side of having such talented and community driven families is the challenge of adding church events that fit in the scheduling puzzle of our lives. While it's a delicate balance, it occurs to me that the more regularly our young people attend, the more they feel a sense of belonging and responsibility to our church community. This is in large part to our CE board, teacher team and the congregation as a whole, who not only support our programs, but go the extra mile to have one-on-one conversations, seek out performances or sports events to attend and generally extend radically welcoming arms to our children and youth.



Sunday, January 4 NO Sunday School

9:15 Sunday School Teacher Meeting
/Teens serve as hospitality
Children's Church during 10:15 worship
Nursery 9:00-11:30

Sunday, January 11 Sunday School resumes 9:15

Children's Church during 10:15 worship
Nursery 9:00-11:30

Sunday, January 18 Sunday School 9:15

Children's Church during 10:15 worship
Nursery 9:00-11:30

Sunday, January 25 Sunday School 9:15

Children's Church during 10:15 worship
Nursery 9:00-11:30



CHURCH NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS



EPIPHANY CELEBRATION ON JANUARY 4.

Epiphany (the revelation of Jesus to the Gentiles, the coming of the Magi) falls twelve days after Christmas, on January 6 each year. This year we'll celebrate Epiphany on Sunday, January 4. In our 10:15 worship service we will bring our observance of Christmas to a conclusion, hearing the story of the Magi from the Gospel of Matthew and celebrating the sacrament of communion.

WOMEN'S READING GROUP RESUMES THIS MONTH

Starting Saturday, January 10th, a group will be reading and discussing *Holy Envy -Finding God in the Faith of Others* by Barbara Brown Taylor. We'll meet from 10-11am in Rockwood Hall the second Saturday of each month through June. If you're interested, contact Marsha Lowe or Rebecca Weatherford or sign-up in Rockwood Hall.



**Check
this out**

ADULT EDUCATION CLASSES WELCOME MISSION PARTNERS DURING JANUARY AND FEBRUARY

Our Mission Board is sponsoring six weeks of the Adult Forum from January 11 through February 22, looking at issues of immigration. Our scheduled speakers are:

- January 11: Mazahir Salih, Immigrant Welcome Network
- January 18: Jerilyn McCarty
- January 25: Stella and Brahm Elias, University of Iowa School of Law
- February 1: Sheriff Brad Kunkel
- February 8: Deb Dunkase, Open Heartland
- February 15: Alejandra Escobar, Escucha Mi Voz
- February 22: Discussion Sunday

This series promises to be informative and interactive, addressing timely and important topics. We hope you will join us.

OUR NEXT HOPE LODGE DINNER WILL BE MONDAY, JANUARY 12.

If you would like to provide food see the sign-up sheet in Rockwood Hall. As always, any congregation members are welcome to be there to visit with the Hope Lodge residents.

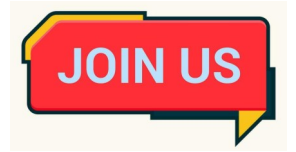


CHURCH NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

ZOOM BIBLE STUDY BEGINS ON JANUARY 14

The winter months provide a great opportunity to meet and study together—all in the comfort of our homes! Join us for a Zoom Bible Study of Paul's Letter to the Galatians. We'll meet on Zoom from 7:00-8:30 p.m. on Wednesday evenings from January 14-February 11.

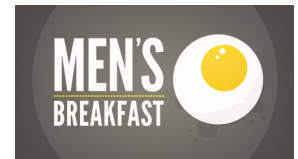
Bill Lovin will lead the study. Because we'll be on Zoom, we expect to see local people and friends from other parts of the world. Let Bill know that you're interested (319-337-4301 or uccicrev@uccic.org) and he'll send you the link.



THE WOMEN'S LUNCH WILL BE HELD on Thursday, January 15 at Blackstone in Iowa City. Call or text Martha Ann Crawford—319-855-8340—to reserve a seat.

MEN'S BREAKFAST—JANUARY

Start the New Year off right, come to the January Men's Breakfast at 8:00 a.m. on Saturday, January 17, at the Waterfront Hy-Vee. All Congregational UCC men who eat breakfast are invited. This is a great way to catch up with old friends and meet new friends. Join us!



ANNUAL MEETING ON JANUARY 25

The Annual Meeting of the Congregational United Church of Christ will be held at 11:30 a.m. on Sunday, January 25, in the sanctuary, following our 10:15 worship service. We will receive reports of Boards and Committees, vote on the budget for 2026, and transact any other business that is fitting and necessary. Copies of the annual report will be available by Sunday, January 11.

BABY SHOWER!—JANUARY 31

Our Membership Board is holding a church baby shower for Nathan and Torie and Sylvie on Saturday, January 31 at 2:00 p.m. in Rockwood Hall. It will be a fun time to celebrate Sylvie's birth. Everyone is invited!



CHURCH OFFICE CLOSURES

The church office will be closed on Thursday, January 1 in observance of New Year's Day and also on Monday, January 19 in observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

CHURCH NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

ADVENT LUNCH—DECEMBER 7

After glorious music from the choir during worship, 115 members and friends gathered in Rockwood Hall for our annual Advent Lunch. It was a great time for everyone. A big thanks goes to the Membership Board and all who helped them make this such a wonderful event: Sue Dayton, Rick and Phyllis Ruppert, Kathi Koegle and Kevin Richards, Vicki Thomae, Jean Koch, Chuck Dayton, Martha Ann Crawford, Joyce Myer, Dean Logan, Bryan Clemons, Rebecca Weatherford, Sharyn Reitz and Ann Molsberry.



CHURCH NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

CHRISTMAS FUND OFFERING UPDATE:

We have received \$1612 so far for the UCC Christmas Fund. We appreciate all of your generous contributions for this important supplement to pensions and health premiums for both clergy and laity, and emergency assistance to the families of those currently working in churches. There is still time to add to this total by using the envelopes in the pews or marking your check with **Christmas Fund** in the memo line. Thank you for donations.

UPDATE



ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

ANNUAL ALTERNATIVE GIVING FAIR UPDATE

Our Mission Board Annual Alternative Giving Fair was a great success – due to you: our sellers, buyers, and volunteer church members. Thank you to the generous people who offered their wares: Jo Benda, Robin Chambers, Martha Ann Crawford, Hope Spragg, Roberta Martin, and Kathy Fait. Thank you to Ginny Clemons for her lovely calligraphy on the Heifer cards. And thank you to our volunteers at the tables: Chuck Dayton, Jane Kinney, Linda Muston, Julie Wittig, Rick Chambers, and Matt Spragg. Douglas Herrera, our Sexton, assisted with logistics. We have delivered the toys to the Salvation Army. **The Joan Buxton Mitten Tree** will remain until early January, when we will deliver the warm hats, scarves, and mittens to the School District. As we wait for the dust to settle, here is a preliminary report from the Fair. We hope to send \$2,660 to the Heifer Project, \$48 to Church World Service, and \$1,159 to the Food Pantry at CommUnity. With All Good Wishes to our Congregation - John and Sharyn Reitz and the Mission Board



FOOD AND DIAPER DRIVES WERE BIG SUCCESSES

Our October Diaper Drive and November Food Drive were very successful. We donated 3,976 diapers and 493 pounds of food to CommUnity. Donations of cooking oil and flour were given to the Iowa City Free Lunch Program. Over the past year, we distributed all funds allocated to the Mission Board, along with an additional \$45,000 from the church's special funds. A full accounting will be included in the Annual Report. Thanks to Julie

Wittig and Kevin Koepnick for delivering all this to CommUnity.

SHARE THE HARVEST UPDATE

Summer and fall are past. The snow in November covered the final kale crop and meant the end of the harvest. \$1300 was sent to the CommUnity Crisis Center Food Pantry from the proceeds of the sale of produce and flowers. Thanks to John Fuller and Kathy Fait for coordinating this effort, for others who also brought flowers and produce from their gardens and for all who made purchases.



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES AT THE NORTH LIBERTY FOOD PANTRY

Our congregation supports three local food pantries: the CommUnity Food Pantry in Iowa City, the Coralville Food Pantry at the United Methodist Church, and the North Liberty Community Food Pantry. The North Liberty Community Food Pantry (NLCP) recently told us: “Just below the top need of consistent, monthly funding is the need for volunteers. There are many ways to share your time at the NLCP both with the public and behind the scenes. We’ll work with your schedule! Please visit us online to learn about the many opportunities. www.nlcpantary.org/new-volunteers.”

FREE LUNCH PROGRAM NEWS

Providing Good Food and Hospitality since 1983

Our church served 90 lunches at the Free Lunch Program on **Monday, December 29, 2025; a very cold and wintry day in Iowa City!** Thank you so much to all who volunteered by donating food: **Dianne Atkins, Chuck Connerly, Sue and Chuck Dayton, Bill Dickinson, Diane Duncan-Goldsmith, Randee Fiesemann, Betsy Henson, Cynthia Kemp, Alfrieta Monagan, Linda Muston and Connie Parsons.** Additional thanks to **Diane Dahl-McCoy, Bill Dickinson, John Fiesemann, John Fuller, Kathi Koegle, Betsy Henson and her granddaughter Tilly, Jane Kinney, John Reitz, Kevin Richards and Rick Ruppert** for their valuable onsite support. Our next scheduled serving date is **Monday, March 30, 2026.** Additional serving dates this year are June 29, August 31 and November 30. If you would like to begin to receive the signup sheet sent by email, please contact me at vickithomae@gmail.com
Vicki Thomae



ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

WATCH OUT FOR EMAIL AND TEXT SCAMS

As the New Year begins, just a reminder about email and text scams. From time to time, members have received a text stating it was from “Rev. William Lovin” and asking them for a favor—often buying some gift cards. This is a common scam that has previously targeted some of our members, as well as members of other congregations.

Please know that Bill will never send anyone a text or an email asking for a “favor,” for gift cards, or the like. Always check the email address before replying to suspicious emails; if it isn’t from “@uccic.org,” it is a fake email address. And the main phone number Bill uses is the church’s landline: 319-337-4301. Any other number with a suspicious request is another indication of a scam.



See something.
Say something.

SEE SOMETHING—SAY SOMETHING: If you notice something in the building that needs attention—a leaky faucet, a loose railing, etc.—please let the church office know right away. Thanks.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO SERVE AS A LITURGIST ON SUNDAY MORNING?

This is a great opportunity to welcome people and to lead them in worship. Bill Lovin provides the material. You provide the spirit. Contact Bill if you are interested or would like more information.



USHERS, GREETERS, HOSPITALITY AND LITURGIST OPPORTUNITIES

Sundays bring an abundance of opportunities to be involved in making the morning a time of joy and renewed energy. Everyone is invited to greet people coming to worship, to usher, to lead the congregation in worship and to provide hospitality during coffee hour after worship. Please sign up on the sheets in Rockwood Hall or call the church office—319-337-4031.



WANT TO GIVE ONLINE? Scan the QR code for our giving app.
Your giving makes a world of difference.

CHURCH CALENDAR

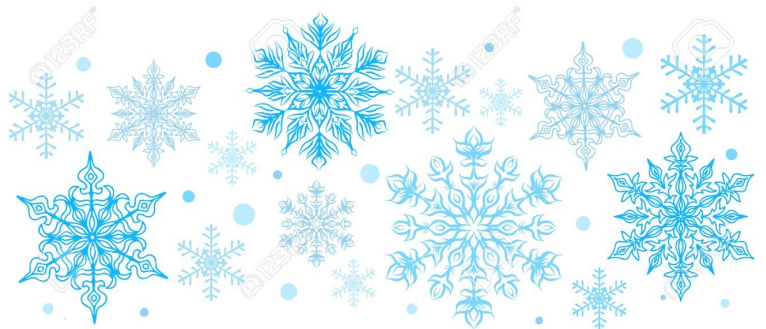
January 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 CHURCH OFFICE CLOSED	2	3
4 - 9:15 CE children & youth - Children's Church During Worship - 10:15 Worship Service	5	6 -Gentle Yoga, Noon - CE, 6pm - Stewardship, 7pm	7 - Staff Meeting, 11:00	8	9	10 - Wonen's Reading Group. 10am
11 - Choir Rehearsal, 9:00 - 9:15 CE all ages - Children's - 10:15 Worship Service -Confirmation class, 4pm	12 - Serve at Hope Lodge	13 -Gentle Yoga, Noon	14 - Zoom Bible Study, 7pm	15 - Women's Lunch, 11:45am at Blackstone, IC.	16	17 - Men's breakfast, 8am
18 - Choir Rehearsal, 9:00 - 9:15 CE all ages - Children's Church During Worship - 10:15 Worship Service	19 CHURCH OFFICE CLOSED	20 -Gentle Yoga, Noon -Membership, 5:30pm -Diaconate, 7:00pm -Trustees, 7pm	21 - Staff Meeting, 11:00 - Zoom Bible Study, 7pm	22	23	24
25 - Choir Rehearsal, 9:00 - Children's Church During Worship - 10:15 Worship Service - Annual Meeting, after worship	26	27 -Gentle Yoga, Noon	28 - Zoom Bible Study, 7pm	29	30	31 - Baby Shower, 2pm

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

CELEBRATING JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

1/7 Olivia Groff
1/8 Bryan Clemons
1/18 John Fieselmann
1/19 Connie Parsons
1/23 Susie Brown
1/24 Isaac Chen
1/25 Bea Hicks
1/28 Tyler Seidl
1/30 Derek Lehman



ARTICLES FOR THE JANUARY NEWSLETTER
are due to the office by Wednesday, January 21.



**THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
30 North Clinton Street
Iowa City, Iowa 52245-1700**

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

JANUARY 2026 NEWSLETTER



CHURCH STAFF CONTACT INFORMATION

Office Hours: Monday - Friday, 9 am to 1 pm

Phone: 319-337-4301

Visit our Web Site: www.uccic.org

Pastor:

Interim Director of CE

Music Director

Organist

Children's Choir Director

Office Manager

Financial Secretary

Sexton:

Custodian:

The Rev. William Lovin

Hope Spragg

Dr. Chris Nakielski

Bill Crouch

Rachel Burchett

Jenn Harden

Sharyn Huriaux Reitz

Douglas Herrera

Claudia Landaverde

uccicrev@uccic.org

c.nakielski@cornellcollege.edu

Contact the Office

uccicadmin@uccic.org

sharynreitz@gmail.com

Contact the Office

For up to date announcements, check us out on Facebook.