



THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
United Church of Christ
February 2026



Friends in Christ:

Lent begins early this year. Unlike Christmas, which is always celebrated on December 25, the date for Easter moves around. The date is determined by the sun and the moon. So, Easter is the first Sunday after the first full moon falling on or after the vernal equinox. This year that Sunday is April 5. Our Lenten preparations for Easter begin roughly 40 days (not counting the Sundays) before that—on Ash Wednesday, February 18. Some see this season of Lent as a journey, a pilgrimage from one place to another. Certainly, in the days ahead we move from winter into spring, from darkness into increasing hours of daylight. We also move from ashes to resurrection. In the process it is hoped that we will become new people, freshly aware of God’s love, mercy, hope, and strength in our lives.

And something else comes to mind this year.

Rabbi Simcha Bunim, the eighteenth-century Polish rabbi, taught that every person needs to have two pockets, and in each pocket they have to carry a different note. The note in one pocket says, “The universe was created for me.” And in the other pocket the note says, “I am just dust and ashes.”

That might be what these days of preparation for Easter are all about.

We need both pockets. We dare not go into the world with only one. If we do we will wreak havoc on either the world or ourselves—or maybe both.

Ash Wednesday reminds each one of us, as does the note in one pocket, that I am just dust and ashes. That day highlights our mortality, but we need a sense of our finitude and our limitedness as we move through all days.

At the same time, each day we can affirm, “The world was created for me.”

We, the creatures of this earth, find ourselves embraced by the love of the Creator—who brought all things into existence that we—each one of us—might live in love. And this same God calls us to love one another and to love this creation. This vast creation was made for us; that in it we might know and share love.

Peace,

Bill



Walking a Labyrinth

Our teen Sunday school class is starting the new year with a focus on developing spiritual practice. One Sunday, we explored prayer through a walking a humble yarn & tape labyrinth modeled after the centuries old 7-circuit path. It was a quiet, reflective practice. As they walked the single path inward, they prayed about their own lives; at the center, they paused to rest in God's loving presence; and on the way out, they offered prayers for others, their community, and the wider world. Though it may look like a maze, a labyrinth has one clear path with no dead ends, inviting us to slow down, listen, and experience prayer with our whole bodies.



News from Christian Education

Mark Your Calendar

Sunday, February 1
9:15 Sunday School/Breakfast
Children's Church during 10:15 worship
Nursery 9:00-11:30

Sunday, February 8
9:15 Sunday School/Breakfast
Children's Church during 10:15 worship
Nursery 9:00-11:30

Sunday, February 15
Sunday School 9:15
Children's Church during 10:15 worship
Nursery 9:00-11:30
4-6 PM Youth Group!

Sunday, February 22
9:15 Sunday School/Breakfast
Children sing and children's church during 10:15 worship/Nursery 9:00-11:30

We renewed the tradition of the Epiphany cake on January 11. Many thanks to Rebecca Weatherford for baking this year's Epiphany cake, featuring a traditional hidden token—a dried apricot tucked inside. Congratulations go to Finnegan Nakielski for finding the apricot, which comes with an important (and joyful!) tradition: providing next year's Epiphany cake and delivering the children's message. We are already looking forward to Epiphany 2027 and celebrating this sweet moment together as a church family.



WELCOME OUR NEW OFFICE MANAGER: NANCY LEAVESSUER

The Church Council is happy to announce that we have hired a new office manager, Nancy Leavessuer.

A search committee made up of Bea Hicks, Sharyn Reitz, John Fieselmann, Andy Bertolatus, and Bill Lovin received and reviewed over 20 applications for the position. We personally interviewed the two best candidates.

Nancy was chosen based on her skills, office management experience, and references. We think that Nancy offers what we are looking for in an office manager and that she will be a good fit with our congregation. She will work 20 hours/week, from 9-1, Monday-Friday. Nancy will start working on Monday, February 9. We invite members and friends to stop by the church office in the coming weeks to meet her.

ASH WEDNESDAY SOUP SUPPER AND WORSHIP SERVICE BEGIN THE SEASON OF LENT ON FEBRUARY 18

On Wednesday, February 18, our Board of Christian Education will host a soup supper in Rockwood Hall starting at 5:30 p.m. Bring your family and friends and join others for a soup potluck and fellowship. If you'd like to contribute to the meal, please sign up online: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/70A084DA4A923A75-61501951-ashwednesday> or in Rockwood Hall. We only need a few food contributions, please join us either way!

After eating, we will hold our Ash Wednesday worship service in the sanctuary at 7:00. This will be a time of music and song, scripture and prayer, and the distribution of ashes for those who want them. The worship service is designed for people of all ages.

Easter is Sunday, April 5, this year.

LOOK AHEAD TO LENT AND EASTER

Easter is early this year—and that means an early start to the season of Lent.

Ash Wednesday is February 18.

The First Sunday in Lent is February 22.

Palm Sunday is March 29.

Easter is April 5.



Please watch the Sunday bulletins and other announcements for more information.

WRITE A REFLECTION FOR THE LENT DEVOTIONAL

Each year during Lent, members and friends write reflections that are shared with the congregation and the larger community. We're inviting you to write a short, one paragraph reflection on a particular Biblical text—we'll provide the text, you'll provide the reflection. If you are interested in being a part of this or have any questions, please contact Bill at uccicrev@uccic.org or call the church office at 337-4301 or Bryan Clemons at 330-7882. Lent begins on Wednesday, February 18. Easter is Sunday, April 5.



One Great HOUR OF SHARING

Your offering helps rebuild from disaster, feed the hungry, provide clean water to the thirsty, empower the oppressed, and restore hope.

ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING

On Palm Sunday, March 29, we will dedicate our One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) offering. This offering has long been an important part of the life of our congregation. For many years now, we have been on the list of Top 50 giving churches.

One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) involves us in disaster, refugee/immigration, and development ministries throughout the world. When a disaster strikes or people are displaced or made refugees by violence or extreme poverty, through our offering, we are part of the immediate response and of the long-term recovery.

Through OGHS we engage in holistic development programs including health care, education, agriculture, food sustainability, micro-financing and women's empowerment. Because the UCC relates in mutual partnership to churches and organizations through Global Ministries and worldwide response & recovery networks, our contributions to One Great Hour of Sharing put us in the right place at the right time for the relief, accompaniment and recovery of the most vulnerable. We meet immediate needs and you address the underlying causes that create those needs in the first place.

Let us continue this great tradition and give generously.



WOMEN'S LUNCH—FEBRUARY 19

The Women's Lunch will be held at **Mexico Lindo Grill and Cantina**, 1857 Lower Muscatine Rd. in Iowa City, on **Feb. 19 at 11:45 a.m.** Please call or text Martha Ann Crawford at 319-855-8340 to reserve a seat at the table.

MEN'S BREAKFAST—FEBRUARY 21

The February Men's Breakfast will be held on Saturday, February 21. Sure, Lent will have started, but join us for sausage, eggs, or whatever you'd like—we're Congregationalists, after all. We'll gather at the **Waterfront Hy-Vee at 8:00 a.m.** Good food, great people. All Congregational UCC men who eat breakfast are invited. This is a great way to catch up with old friends and meet new friends. Please join us.

2025 GIVING STATEMENTS

We have learned that some people did not receive their year-end giving statement. If you still need a statement of your giving to the Congregational Church in 2025, please send a request to uccicadmin@uccic.org or call the church office (319-337-4301) and leave a message. We are sorry for the oversight and will send the 2025 giving statement asap. Thanks.



A YEAR OF LGBTQ+ LEARNING, ADVOCATING, & ACTIVISM

Our Mission Board LGBTQ+ Subcommittee is looking forward to a year of learning, advocating and activism. Join us and mark your calendars for the following dates:

Monday, February 23: LGBTQ Day on the Hill- all day field trip to the State Capitol. Agenda includes a morning session held at the State Historical Society of Iowa on the legislative process, current anti-LGBTQ+ bills impacting LGBTQ+ Iowans, how to take action and advocate for LGBTQ+ rights in Iowa. A march to the Capitol and rally in the rotunda follow in the afternoon with opportunities to meet with legislators. Contact Julie Wittig if you would like to join the carpool and for more information visit: <https://oneiowa.org/event/doth2026/>. Registration deadline is February 13 to participate in the luncheon at the Capitol. Plan to leave from church at 8:00am, returning early evening.

Friday, May 1: Rainbow Graduation for the Pride Alliance Center- afternoon graduation ceremony for LGBTQ+ students will be held at our church. Details and opportunities to help will be announced soon.

Saturday, June 20: Iowa City Pridefest- 11:30am-4pm parade and booth shift opportunities will be available.



CONGREGATIONAL UCC T-SHIRTS

The Membership Board is once again taking orders for our church's T-Shirts that have the church rainbow logo. Orders will be taken at church on February 8 and February 15. Cost is \$20 per shirt. If you have any questions, call or text Martha Ann Crawford at 319-855-8340. Order forms will be available at a special table during coffee hour on those dates.

AWE 2 BEGINS IN MARCH

After Worship Encounter (AWE) will start up again after worship on Sunday, March 1st. We will plan on two 5-week sessions. We will meet for 5 weeks and then take a break on Easter Sunday, April 5th. On Sunday, April 12th we will reconvene for 5 more weeks and end on Sunday, May 3rd. Generally, we gather on the Sundays that the choir meets after worship to rehearse for their Special Music Sunday on May 17th.

We will be using Living the Questions-The Wisdom of Progressive Christianity. In this study we will be meeting again progressive theologians that were introduced in the original Living the Questions series: Borg, Crossen, and Spong. This is a beginning class that will introduce you to Progressive Christianity.

Rev. Ann Molsberry will be leading the discussions. Please purchase your own book and for Sunday, March 1st read Chapter 8: Restoring Relationships (the first chapter of Section Two: Reconciliation). See you on Sunday, March 1st in the library!

SENDING USED MEDICINE BOTTLES TO AFRICA FOR REUSE IN CLINICS



100 Grannies, a local environmental activist group, is sending used plastic medicine bottles to Africa to assist clinics in distributing medication. Donna Hirst is in charge of this project and would be pleased to have participation from members of our congregation. If you are interested, the labels from the plastic bottles need to be removed, and the bottles need to be washed in soapy water. Typically, labels can be peeled off in a matter of seconds from the edges; attempting to wash the labels off tends to make them more difficult to remove. For more information contact donna-hirst@uiowa.edu. She will pick up bottles on Sundays.

More information: A church in Ohio sends medical equipment and supplies to Africa. They use the medicine bottles as packing material. When the bottles are received in Africa they are distributed to clinics in Africa. In 2019 the church sent 1,000,000 bottles to Africa. In 2025 they sent 2 million. Donna sent 6 shipments to Ohio in 2025. She'll be sending many more in 2026 since two churches, 2 nursing homes, and the Grannies are collecting bottles. The list will grow.

Thank you for considering joining this effort.

THANK YOU!

HOPE LODGE NEWS

Thanks to those who helped with the Hope Lodge dinner on January 12: Andy Bertolatus and Dianne Atkins, Diane Dahl-McCoy, Rebecca Weatherford, Linda Muston, Ginny Clemons, Marsha Lowe, Sharyn Reitz, Ruth Bradley and Bruce Tarwater, Shelagh Hayreh, and Sue and Chuck Dayton. **Our next Hope Lodge dinner will be Monday, March 16.**

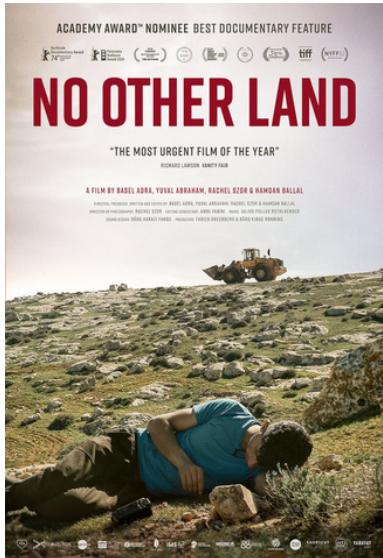
The American Cancer Society Hope Lodge, which opened in 2008, offers 28 guest rooms located near treatment centers in the area. The program provides a free home away from home for cancer patients and their caregivers. More than just a roof over their heads, it's a nurturing community that helps patients access the care they need. Each Hope Lodge community offers a supportive, homelike environment where guests can share a meal, join in the evening's activities, or unwind in their own private room. Patients staying at a Hope Lodge must be in active cancer treatment.

THE FOURTH ANNUAL ART FROM THE INSIDE OUT ART SHOW IS UNDERWAY!

This free show features the incredible artwork of current and formerly incarcerated artists. The art will be on display until February 14 at Public Space One (538 S Gilbert St, Iowa City. Attendees will have the opportunity to gather and build support for artists impacted by incarceration. For more information [see their website.](#)

NO OTHER LAND

St. Andrew's Act Justly group invites you to a screening of *No Other Land*, a powerful and widely discussed 90-minute documentary exploring life in Gaza and Palestine through deeply personal, on-the-ground storytelling. The event starts at **2:00 pm on Sunday, Feb 15 in the Saint Andrew Sanctuary** (140 Gathering Place Lane, Iowa City).



The film will be followed by a facilitated conversation moderated by Rabbi Esther Hugenholtz and Rima Afifi, creating space for thoughtful reflection, honest questions, and respectful dialogue about justice, human dignity, and lived experience. Light snacks and drinks will be served during a 15-minute intermission after the film. The moderated discussion and audience Q&A will follow and last approximately 45 minutes.

This event reflects Act Justly's commitment to learning together, listening across differences, and engaging difficult realities with compassion and faith. All are welcome to attend.

SHELTER HOUSE BOOK SALE PREPARATION BEGINS

Sorting shifts and donations for the 2026 Shelter House Book Sale begin on **Sunday, February 15**. The will continue receiving donations until **Wednesday, March 25**.



Bring your gently used books, CDs, DVDs, vinyl records, puzzles, and board games to the garage door on the south side of the building at 860 Quarry Road in Coralville. **The door will be open Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays from 10 am - 2 pm, and Sundays from 2 pm - 4 pm.**

For 6 weeks leading up to the Book Sale, volunteers will be hard at work (while also having a lot of fun) categorizing thousands of books generously donated by the community. There are plenty of volunteer shifts available to assist with setup, book sorting, operating the sale weekend, and helping to tear down the venue space after the sale. Volunteers are critical to the success of the Book Sale, and we are grateful that we receive so much support from our community! Learn more about available opportunities and sign up today at [Book Sale 2026: Community Volunteers](#).

All proceeds from the sale support Shelter House's essential programs and services in the community. You can learn more about the Book Sale [at the Shelter House website](#).

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

USHERS, GREETERS, AND HOSPITALITY OPPORTUNITIES: Each Sunday morning brings opportunities to greet people coming to worship, to usher, 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.

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.



CELEBRATING
FEBRUARY
BIRTHDAYS!

2/3 Beth Parker	2/23 Ethan Buck
2/11 McKenzie Brown	2/24 Eugene Buck
2/13 Steve Bowers	2/25 Andrew Ghabel
2/14 Laura Ghabel	2/27 Niki Neems
2/15 Sharyn Reitz	2/28 Tom Mittman

ARTICLES FOR THE MARCH NEWSLETTER are due in the church office by Friday, **February 20**.