



# THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

## United Church of Christ

### May 2026



Friends in Christ:

One of the nice things about Easter is that it just keeps going. Christmas gives us only “twelve days” and then the tree and decorations come down, the candles are extinguished, and we are left with the cold of winter.

Easter, however, lasts for fifty days in the springtime of the year. Those of you who are familiar with the calendar of the church year know that Easter is a “season” stretching from Easter Sunday until the day of Pentecost (when we celebrate God’s gift of the Holy Spirit). Traditionally, Congregationalists haven’t had much to do with the church year. In the last 50 years or so, however, we’ve come to a new appreciation of some of the special days and times. Now when Easter arrives, we give ourselves seven weeks to reflect on the meaning of the resurrection for our lives and our world.

The season of Easter continues into May, giving us further time to let the good news of the resurrection seep into our souls and our lives once more. Certainly Easter can be, and is, celebrated in the Southern Hemisphere as it now finds the cooler weather of fall. Certainly. But maybe—maybe spring itself is a holy symbol, a visual sign that life does conquer death, that God brings new life out of desolate situations.

Resurrection is made known to us in many different ways. Monika Hellwig writes, “The Resurrection becomes a tangible fact in a very different way from that which we should expect. Not by direct empirical verification but by the radical transformation of the community into a fellowship of justice, truth, compassion, reconciliation, and sharing of all things, is the presence and power of the risen Jesus known.” Resurrection is concrete and in the world as much as it is spiritual and in our hearts. Resurrection is seen in who we are as a Christian community.

If we are willing, we can by God’s grace make resurrection a reality in our lives as much as in our spirits. Easter continues. Resurrection happens. The trees and the ground are speaking the good news. Stop. Look. And Listen.

Peace,

Bill

P.S.: Once again, I will be taking a mini-sabbatical for the month of June, taking time to further reflect on and write about preaching. I thank our Church Council and all of you for making this possible. By taking a month at a time, rather than the traditional three months at once, I receive valuable time for work that couldn’t be done otherwise and I am able to actively plan for the coming 2026-27 year as we continue in this time of growth, renewal, and vital ministry and mission.





## May 2026 Christian Education

### “What if Jesus is in disguise walking around today?”

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart.” Proverbs 3:5*

On April 12, the second Sunday of Easter, all ages of Sunday school classes combined for a staged retelling of Jesus appearing to his disciples in the Bible story “Breakfast on the Beach”. (*John 21:1-14*) Shortly after Jesus’ death, the disciples had a long, disappointing night of unsuccessful fishing. After the sun rose, a man appears on the beach, asks how the fishing is going and offers the suggestion of “trying from the other side of the boat.” To Peter and the disciples amazement, they catch more fish than they could have wished for. Then, he invites the disciples to the beach to have breakfast together and they recognize this helper as their friend Jesus.

The middle and high school students acted out the story for our elementary class. The fisherman, played by Peter S., grew weary of his empty net. The sun, played by Cecily C., brings the light of hope in a new day as Jesus, played by Finn N., offers the fisherman counsel and encouragement. The skit ended by inviting all of the children to share in a snack of goldfish as Swedish fish. In our discussion, we acknowledged that Jesus offered encouragement and hope, but it was the fisherman who had to show up with trust and cast those nets.

Through this type of retelling, the children are engaged and often find the very human feelings and motivations of Biblical characters relatable. As one student put it, “What if Jesus is in disguise walking around today?” What an amazing question to transition into a discussion of a living God that we have access to in our lives today! We shared current worries and discouragements in our own lives and how we get through difficult times. We recognized how God’s faithfulness shows up in our lives on a daily basis, through the love and caretaking of our families and the sun rising each day. Even more inspiring, is how we might seek out “Jesus in disguise” today: seeking kindness, helpfulness and patience in ourselves and others.

On this particular Sunday, several of the students were anticipating a week of standardized testing. We discussed the lessons of trust and faithfulness, even as we walk into times ahead that feel daunting. We ended by praying together:

**O Holy One, thank you for being with us when we are worried or tired.  
Help us to listen for your guidance and grant us the patience and trust  
to keep working for good when things get hard.  
Remind us, every day, that the sun rises again  
and your love awaits us each day.**

Congratulations Charlotte Nakielski!



### UCC Climate Hope Art Contest

Congratulations to all of our students who participated in the annual national UCC Climate Hope Art Contest! Each student was encouraged to use symbols that reflect love, care and stewardship of our Earth. All entries are on display in Rockwood Hall, thank you to Rebecca Weatherford.

**Evelyn Nakielski's** artwork was selected as a finalist and was featured in the 2026 Earth Summit on April 25. Evelyn is a prolific artist and we are blessed to have her in our church family. Keep letting your light shine, Evelyn!

### May in Christian Education

#### Sunday, May 3

Sunday School/Breakfast 9:15  
Nursery 9:00-12:30

#### Sunday, May 10 Mother's Day

Sunday School 9:15/Breakfast  
Children's Church during 10:15 worship  
Nursery 9:00-12:30

#### Sunday, May 17 Confirmation Sunday

Sunday School/Breakfast 9:15  
Children's Church during 10:15 worship  
Nursery 9:00-12:30

#### Sunday, May 24 Memorial Day Weekend

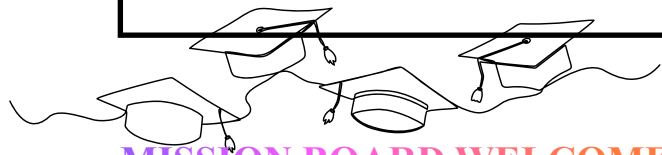
Sunday School 9:15  
Children's Church during 10:15 worship  
Nursery 9:00-12:30

#### Sunday, May 31

Sunday School Celebration 9:15  
Special Music Sunday  
Nursery 9:00-11:30  
Spring Brunch after Worship



## CHURCH NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS



### MISSION BOARD WELCOMES BACK THE PRIDE ALLIANCE CENTER RAINBOW GRADUATION ON MAY 1

The Pride Alliance Center Rainbow Graduation will be held at our church on Friday, May 1, from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. The Rainbow Graduation Celebration recognizes the achievements of LGBTQ+ students and their allies. This annual event honors undergraduate, graduate, and professional students who are graduating this spring semester. The Rainbow Graduation Celebration features UI faculty, staff, students, and community members and is followed by a reception.

This is our second consecutive year hosting this event. Everyone is welcome to attend this joyous occasion and support the graduating students and organizers who are unable to use university spaces, funds, or staff as they have in previous years. If you can help provide refreshments for the reception, please sign up on the sheet posted in Rockwood Hall. Additionally, the Oaknoll LGBTQ+ committee and allies are once again generously supporting the event by volunteering their time and providing food. For more information, contact event organizers Julie Wittig, David McCartney, or Bill Dickinson, or Mission Board LGBTQ+ Subcommittee members: Diane Atkins, Martha Ann Crawford, Carson Fixmer, Dean Logan, Linda Muston, Hope Spragg, and Rebecca Weatherford



### Celebrate Together: Iowa City Pride Festival June 20

Mission Board members invite you to join them and other church members at the Iowa City Pride Festival events on Saturday, June 20, in downtown Iowa City. Participate in the 12 noon parade, volunteer for a shift at our booth from 1 to 4 p.m., or do both! Sign-up sheets for parade participants, booth volunteers, and setup/teardown crews are posted in Rockwood Hall. Join us as we honor LGBTQ+ history and culture, celebrate joy and diversity, and advocate for equality for all. For more information or to get involved with the planning, please reach out to any member of the LGBTQ+ subcommittee: Dianne Atkins, Martha Ann Crawford, Carson Fixmer, Dean Logan, Linda Muston, Hope Spragg, Rebecca Weatherford, or Julie Wittig.



# CHURCH NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

## ADULT EDUCATION—PLANNED GIVING

The Adult Education Subcommittee and the Stewardship Board will sponsor a talk on "Planned Giving" by Paul Morf, a prominent attorney from Cedar Rapids. His talk is scheduled for May 3, 2026, at 9:15 AM in Rockwood Hall. During his presentation, he welcomes questions from participants. The presentation will be taped so that members of the choir or others unable to attend will be able to observe the presentation.



## AWE CONCLUDES IN MAY

After Worship Encounter (AWE) will conclude for the spring in May. They gather on the Sundays that the choir meets after worship to rehearse for their Special Music Sunday on May 31. They are using *Living the Questions: The Wisdom of Progressive Christianity*. This is a beginning class that will introduce you to Progressive Christianity.

Rev. Ann Molsberry is leading the discussions. Please purchase your own book and join them on Sunday, May 3, 10, 17, and 24 in the library!

## THE WOMEN'S READING GROUP—MAY 9

The Women's Reading Group is reading and discussing *Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Others* by Barbara Brown Taylor, Chapters 9 & 10. They 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.



## HOPE LODGE

Our next Hope Lodge dinner will be held on Monday, May 11 at 6:00 p.m. If you are interested in helping or providing food please see the sign up sheet in Rockwood Hall.



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.

## CHURCH NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

### **PENTECOST SUNDAY—MAY 24**

We will celebrate Pentecost on May 24. This day completes the long arc from Ash Wednesday through Easter resurrection to the coming of the Holy Spirit to the followers of Christ—a journey “from ashes to fire.” Pentecost marks God’s gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church and our morning will be a spirited time together. The traditional color for Pentecost is red. As we have in recent years, we invite everyone to please consider wearing “flame colors”—red, orange, yellow—to worship on Sunday, May 24.



# Strengthen the Church

### **STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH OFFERING WILL BE RECEIVED ON PENTECOST SUNDAY—MAY 24**

What does church mean to you? Mission? Compassion? Community?...Praise? Prayer? Peace? There are as many different answers as there are people. But the value at the heart of every answer is the same: Love. The church is love.

Each year we receive a special offering that helps the church’s love to grow and thrive. The “Strengthen the Church” offering grows the United Church of Christ’s future by supporting new and renewing churches, youth and young adult ministries, and lay and pastoral leadership development—especially among women and people of color. It also funds the “Stillspeaking” Ministry, spreading the message of God’s extravagant welcome, reaching out especially to those who have felt there is no room for them within Christianity and the church.

The Strengthen the Church Offering supports congregations and leader across the United Church of Christ as they respond to the Spirit’s call to be united in Christ for a more just world for all. The challenges our congregations face vary:

- Some seek ways to strengthen youth ministry
- Some hope to start new congregations
- Some look for innovative ways to renew existing congregations
- Some need help developing leaders

The giving in our congregation can ensure congregations get the help they need from their conference and the national ministries of the UCC. Together we can answer the Spirit’s call to be united in Christ for a just world for all.

On Sunday, May 24—Pentecost Sunday—we will receive this offering. Your generous gift will help the UCC create vibrant church communities of extravagant welcome.

## CHURCH NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS



### Requiem PREVIEW—MAY 20

Please join CUCC member and musicologist, Roberta Marvin, on Wednesday, May 20, at 7:00 p.m. for an illustrated talk on Zoom about the Requiem by Gabriel Fauré, which the choir will perform on Sunday, May 31. Roberta will discuss the composer, French culture and traditions at the time the work was composed, the music, and the work's performance history. Talk with Bill Lovin or contact the church office and we'll send you the Zoom invitation.

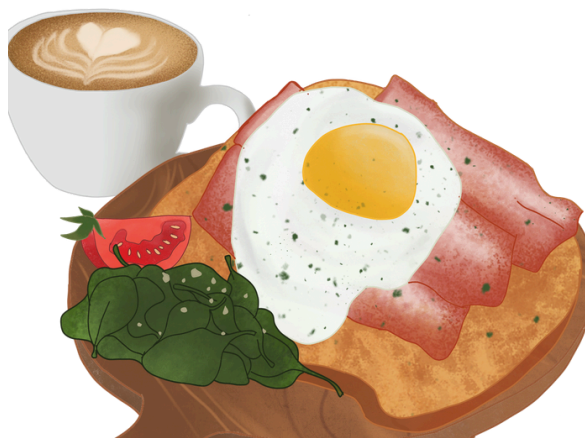
### SPRING SPECIAL MUSIC SUNDAY—MAY 31

Please join us in worship on Sunday May 31st for what promises to be a memorable performance of Faure's Requiem Mass, featuring The Congregational, UCC Choir, conducted by Dr. Christopher Nakielski and accompanied by organist William Crouch. Additionally, this performance will feature an orchestra comprising area professionals, in addition to vocal soloists Marie Von Behren (soprano) and Dr. Benjamin Laur (baritone). You won't want to miss this timeless classic!



### MAY 31 SPRING BRUNCH AFTER WORSHIP

The Membership Board is hosting a Spring Brunch in Rockwood Hall after our worship that morning on May 31, our spring Special Music Sunday. During this time, we will recognize members who joined the church this past year. The brunch will be catered, so, no need to bring anything. To help us plan, we would like to get an approximate count of how many people will attend. Please indicate on the sign-up sheets in Rockwood Hall if you plan to attend and how many may be coming with you. We are looking forward to this time to celebrate spring and enjoy beautiful music.



## CHURCH NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS



### Gratitude

We (the family of Richard Bloesch) are filled with gratitude for the love shown to us by you, the members and friends of this church community as you help us mourn and celebrate the life of Richard. The service on April 25 was a beautiful testimony of this love and a witness to the consolation and assurance of our faith.

We are grateful to all of you who participated in the service, ably led by Pastor Bill Lovin and the dedicated musicians who showed us the healing power of word and music.

Rebecca Weatherford created the beautiful flower arrangements, and Vicki Thomae demonstrated once again her extraordinary commitment and skill in bringing people together for fellowship (and food and cookies). Those of you who came to the service or followed it online completed the circle of support. We are grateful to all of you. -- Ethel Bloesch



### A STRAWBERRY FIELD

Early in our church history, it was recorded that women [sic] of the church often made strawberry desserts for celebrations or fundraisers held in the spring, when local strawberries were in season. We invite anyone who wishes to bring a strawberry dessert to the May 31st brunch which will follow the Special Music Sunday service. The Membership Board provides the main meal.

We will set up a special table called “Strawberry Field” for desserts, or strawberry salads. This might become a Spring tradition.

If you have questions, please contact anyone on the Membership Board: Sue Dayton, Martha Ann Crawford, Randee Fieselmann, Marcy Kuechenmeister, Dean Logan, Marsha Lowe, Sheilah McKenna, Joyce Myer, or Pam Willard.

P.S. When the Beatles wrote their famous song “Strawberry Fields Forever,” they were familiar with a Salvation Army children’s home in Liverpool, UK, named “Strawberry Field.”

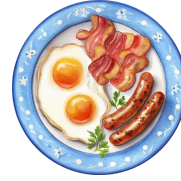


## CHURCH NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS



### WOMEN'S LUNCH-MAY 21

On May 21, at 11:45 am, women's lunch will meet at Big Grove on Gilbert. Please call or Text Martha Ann Crawford at 319-855-8340 to reserve a seat at the table.



### MEN'S BREAKFAST—MAY 16

The May Men's Breakfast will be held at 8:00 a.m. on Saturday, May 16, 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!



### SAVE THE DATES!—ALL CHURCH GATHERINGS

The Membership Board is looking ahead to a couple of much-loved congregational events and we want you to be a part of them. Mark your calendars now and look for more information in the months ahead about:

ANNUAL CHURCH PICNIC—Sunday, June 28, in City Park

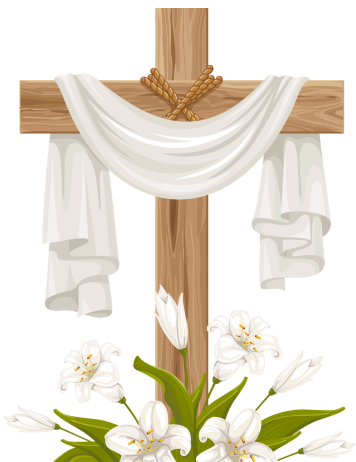
PROGRESSIVE DINNER—Saturday, October 17, at lots of locations

### CHURCH KEYS

There are times when it seems that every member has a church key! In our ongoing efforts to keep track of the church keys, we ask that you contact Nancy LeaVesseur in the church office to let her know if you have a key. And if you have a key that you do not need, please return it to the church office as soon as you are able.



Thanks!



### EASTER BREAKFAST!

We had a joy-filled Easter morning in April, beginning with breakfast in Rockwood Hall. Thanks to Rick Ruppert and Bryan Clemons for leading this effort—and to all who helped!

*Thank You*

# CHURCH NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

## CHURCH REPAIR & MAINTENANCE VOLUNTEER REQUEST

The Trustees are looking to build a list of members who have skills or talents in repairing, maintaining, or improving our church facilities. From time to time, small repairs and maintenance needs arise, and having a group of willing and skilled volunteers will help us care for our church more efficiently and cost-effectively.

If you have experience or interest in any of the following areas, we would love to hear from you:

- General repairs and handyman work
- Plumbing
- Electrical work
- Carpentry
- Painting
- Landscaping or outdoor maintenance
- Basic electronic or mechanical systems
- Any other related skills



If you are willing to be contacted for future repair needs, please share your name, contact information, and areas of expertise.

You can respond by contacting the church office at 319-337-4301—or talk with a Trustee!

Thank you for your willingness to serve and help maintain our church home!

## 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](mailto:donna-hirst@uiowa.edu). She will pick up bottles on Sundays.



## THANKS TO EVERYONE WHO GAVE TO OUR ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING OFFERING

On Palm Sunday. We received over \$5800. In a world where communities are being displaced by the catastrophes of war, famine, and natural disaster, our congregation joins with many others in standing in faith, hope, and love with those who seek to move beyond the trauma of displacement toward the promise of healing and peace. Your generous gifts will support the relief work of not only the UCC but also many other denominations united in caring for refugees, in providing medical care, and in disaster recovery efforts.

THANK  
YOU!

## CHURCH NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS



### **THE UNITED ACTION FOR YOUTH'S FESTIVAL OF FLOWERS—MAY 21**

The Mission Board is a presenting sponsor for the United Action for Youth's Festival of Flowers, which provides us with a table for 8. This event, May 21, at the Graduate Hotel at 5 PM is the single fundraiser for UAY. Hors d'oeuvres and wine will be served. The show will feature over 100 floral arrangements from community members and professional florists, available to purchase in a silent auction. Dinner parties, travel packages and more will be featured in a live auction.

UAY's mission is to nurture the potential for all youth to create, grow and succeed. They provide crisis and mediation programs, counseling, health education, music programs, LGBTQ+ programs, homeless youth services, and a young parent program. UAY supports three Mission Board priorities for 2025: Medical/Mental Health, Children/Youth, and LGBTQ+. If you would like to attend, please let Nancy LeVasseur ([uccicadmin@uccic.org](mailto:uccicadmin@uccic.org) or 319-337-4301) know.

# May 2026

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		<b>DEACON OF THE MONTH:</b> <b>Barb Sisley</b>			1	2
					Rainbow Graduation 4:30 pm - 6:30 pm	
3 9:00 Choir 9:15 Christian Ed 10:15 Worship w/Communion & Children's Church 11:30 Choir Rehearsal Confirmation Class 4 PM	4	5 Reading Genesis @Oakknoll 10:00 CE Board 6:00 Misson Board 7:00 Stewardship Board 7:00	6  Staff Meeting 11 AM	7  Prairie Piffari 6:30 PM	8	9  Women's Reading Group 10:00 AM
10  9:00 Choir 9:15 Christian Ed 10:15 Worship & Children's Church 11:30 Choir Rehearsal	11	12  Reading Genesis @Oaknoll 10:00 am	13	14  Prairie Piffari 6:30 PM	15	16  Men's Breakfast 8 AM
17 9:00 Choir 9:15 Christian Ed 10:15 Worship & Children's Church 11:30 Choir Rehearsal	18	19 Membership 5:30 pm Diaconate 7:00 pm Trustees 7:00pm	20  Staff Meeting 11 AM	21 Women's Lunch@ Big Grove 11:45 am Festival of Flowers 5:30 Prairie Piffari 6:30 PM	22	23
24 <b>Pentecost</b> 9:00 Choir 9:15 Children Christian Ed 10:15 Worship & Children's Church 11:30 Choir Rehearsal	25  Memorial Day: Church Office is closed.	26  Church Council 7 PM	27	28  Prairie Piffari 6:30 PM	29	30  Special Music Sunday Rehearsal 8 AM
31 9:00 Choir 9:15 Children Christian Ed 10:15 Worship Special Music Sunday 11:30 Spring Brunch						

# CHURCH NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

## CELEBRATING MAY BIRTHDAYS

5/5 Tim Lowe

5/6 Kris Bode

5/13 Allan Hogue

5/14 Edie Roberts

5/16 Gloria Hanson

Barbara Sisley

5/17 Dylan Beerends

5/19 John Rauer

5/20 Betsy Henson

5/24 Kathy Thede-Reynolds

Megan Carnes

5/27 Cynthia Kemp

Kyle Flippo

5/29 David McCartney

5/31 David Dowling



**THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

**30 North Clinton Street  
Iowa City, Iowa 52245-1700**

**ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED**

**MAY 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](http://www.uccic.org)

**Pastor: The Rev. William Lovin**

Director of CE: Hope Spragg

Music Director: Dr. Chris Nakielski

Organist: Bill Crouch

Children's Choir Director: Rachel Burchett

Office Manager: Nancy LeaVesseur

Financial Secretary: Sharyn Huriaux Reitz

Sexton: Douglas Herrera

Custodian: Claudia Landaverde

**[uccirev@uccic.org](mailto:uccirev@uccic.org)**

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[c.nakielski@cornellcollege.edu](mailto:c.nakielski@cornellcollege.edu)

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[uccicadmin@uccic.org](mailto:uccicadmin@uccic.org)

[sharynreitz@gmail.com](mailto:sharynreitz@gmail.com)

Contact the Office

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For up to date announcements, check us out on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/UCCofIC>