



Northwest Word

Northwest Association News
Wisconsin Conference UCC

December 2017

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Next issue - January 2018. Please submit articles to NorthWWord@gmail.com by January 15th.

Christmas Greetings

I am sending you, the clergy and congregations of the NWA of the WI Conference of the United Church of Christ, my deepest hope that you experience the closeness of God's heart and spirit during this our time of welcoming the Christ child.

Advent and Christmas are times of longing, and vulnerability, and generosity, and hope, and awe. For some people this time of year brings a lonely vulnerability and for others it brings an unleashing of pent up joy and giving. When we proclaim that God is coming to us in the tenderness of a child our self-protective shell gives way and something of the divine seeps in. Surrounded by God's presence we experience the miracle of life more fully exposed in all its joy and terror.

In a recent conversation a friend described how she thought the Christmas miracle stripped people of their/our strength. She said we are taught that God is the one who takes care of us because we do not possess what we need to care for each other and the world. I found it strange that the season that affirms God's presence among us, the season that celebrates God coming to us as a helpless child calling upon those who gather around the manger to be tender and strong, that this season would somehow be understood as one that strips us of all the miraculous attributes of being children of a loving God. The Rev. William Sloan Coffin put it this way: "Too many Christians seek an all-powerful God so that we might be weak when God in Christ became weak that we might become strong."

Not disregarding the heart ache this season brings to many, the Christmas miracle draws us into the messy, perilous, resilient gifts of life. Faithfully seeking the Christmas miracle, Howard Thurman wrote:
I affirm my faith in the little graces of life:

The urgency of growth, the strength of laughter, the vitality of friendship.

I affirm my confidence in the dignity of humankind:

Our fortitude in despair, our strength in weakness, our love in hatred.

I affirm my joy in the experience of living:

The fragrance of nostalgia, the scattered moments of delight, the exhilaration of danger.

I affirm my need of my fellows:

The offerings of faiths, the gifts of variety, the quality of difference.

I affirm my hunger for God:

The desire for fulfillment, the ache for understanding, the sense of peace.

Christmas is my season of affirmation.

May the Christmas miracle expose you to the fullness of God's love,
Rev. Rob MacDougall

St Paul's UCC Ellsworth

We have updated our Vision and Mission Statements. Please see below:

Tag Line:

We are a church at the crossroads of life and faith.

Mission:

To Love God, To Love Others, and To Feel Joy, and To Have Fun Doing It All!

New St. Paul's UCC Aspirational Vision:

We aspire to love God with the whole of our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

We aspire to love ourselves, too, by regularly exercising self-care and taking Sabbath (rest).

We aspire to prayerfully listen for those places God invites us to be on mission with God at the crossroads of our faith and life.

We aspire to grow and mature in our faith in God by intentionally committing to regularly practice our Way of Life together and apart.

We aspire to collaborate with others—with other churches and other organizations in our community—to uncover the kingdom of God in our midst and to work with God to bring healing to our world.

Finally, in all things, we aspire to have fun, enjoy the good life, and laugh often.

Way of Life:

1. Pray regularly.
2. Gather often as a witness to the presence of Jesus Christ.
3. Know the Bible and allow it to transform us.
4. Intentionally develop and encourage spiritual friendships.
5. Give freely of ourselves through, and from, the blessings God has bestowed upon us.
6. Find one's place of service within (and without) the local church.
7. Strive for simplicity.
8. Slow down. Breathe. Take Sabbath (Rest).

Covenant:

Believing that together we are stronger, we promise to grow in our faith maturing in our ability to be more like Christ. We promise to work with God to bring God's healing love, transformational activity, and God's salvation to our community, our region and our world. Therefore, we pledge to be one in Christ, bound by God's love, called together by God's Spirit, and empowered to live faithfully by God's Holy Presence. Amen.

The Christmas Fund Special Offering

Our joy at Christmas is a response to God's promise of new life through the birth of Jesus. It is a joy we are called to share widely, through our witness and gifts, both to loved ones and to distant neighbors.

You have the opportunity to be a part of this ministry that cares for the active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ through your participation in this year's Christmas Fund Offering.

Your gift to the Christmas Fund will not only assist pastors like the one above, but also provide for the Supplementation of Small Annuities, Supplementation of Health Premiums, Emergency Grants, and Christmas "Thank You" Gift Checks next December to lower-income retirees.

Your gifts are needed more than ever to help the growing number of retirees whose low-income annuities make it difficult to meet increasing living costs. This is your opportunity to participate in God's promise of renewal by enabling this ministry of compassion and care.



What is our "Five for Five" initiative in the United Church of Christ?

Being "Five for Five" means that your church supports **Our Church's Wider Mission** – the mission-oriented budget which enables our various ministries to thrive and do their important work. We hear the most about OCWM (see Conference Minister Franz Rigert's excellent video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=idesCAGoAHY&feature=youtu.be>), but it is by no means the only way our individual members and local church support our denomination – others are collectively known as "Special Mission Offerings," and they are:

One Great Hour of Sharing – contributing to OGHS makes us partners funding health, educational and agricultural development, providing emergency relief, sustaining refugee ministries, as well as enabling the response to disasters, both here at home and around the world;

Come to learn and experience **Picture the Bible**.



Picture the Bible A Biblical Pictorial Timeline Workshop

January 27, 2018
10:00 am - 3:00 pm

First Congregational Church
110 North Third Street, River Falls, WI
\$ 40 / \$100 for three from one congregation

HAPPENINGS

First Congregational UCC, Wisconsin Rapids



COOKIE DECORATING
Saturday, December 16th beginning at 10 a.m.

COOKIE SALE
Sunday, December 17th
.50 cents each or \$5 a dozen.

Proceeds support our youth for next summers
Regional Event.

**ALL CHURCH WINTER RETREAT
AT MOON BEACH CAMP
February 2-4, 2018**



St Paul's UCC in Wausau



December at Congregational Church UCC, Park Falls

Advent Services: December 10, 17 and 24 at 9
am

Handbell Choir during the service of December
17th

December 23rd Live Nativity, downtown Park
Falls, Triangle Park from 3-4 pm, singing and
refreshments.

December 24th 7pm Christmas Eve Concert and
Service

St Paul's UCC, Ellsworth

Strengthen the Church – it's been said many times that "the church is only one generation away from extinction" – through our contributions to Strengthen the Church, we provide aid for church growth, the development of both pastoral and lay leadership, as well as youth and young adult ministries, so that the church might continue far into the future with new and strong leadership;

Neighbors in Need – Jesus commands us to love our neighbors as ourselves, and the Neighbors in Need collection is one major way in which we live out that commandment. The Neighbors in Need offering supports Council for American Indian Ministry (CAIM), as well as justice initiatives, various advocacy efforts, and direct service projects;

The Christmas Fund – this offering provides direct financial help to both retired and active authorized ministers, lay employees, and surviving spouses in our denomination. This offering provides help by supplementing health and pension premiums, emergency assistance, and even thank-you checks at Christmas.

More information on the Special Mission Offerings is at

http://www.ucc.org/ocwm_special-support

Supporting OCWM and these other offerings is how a local church becomes "Five for Five."

Many thanks to all of our congregations in the Northwest Wisconsin Association which have added their names to the list of Five for Five churches!

Plymouth UCC Eau Claire

Our mighty Plymouth Brass Trio offered their ministry of music in worship on Sunday, Dec. 10. Thank you, Trio! Beautifully played!



First Congregational UCC Menomonie

Featuring
It's A
Wonderful Life

Starring:
Jimmy Stewart



NO AGENDA,
JUST INFORMAL
CONVERSATION
ABOUT
FAITH & LIFE

MONDAY, December 11 • 6:30-8:30 PM
(doors open @ 6:00 PM)



CAROLING

Wednesday, December 13
 5:30 - 6:00pm: Supper
 6:00 - 7:00pm: Caroling
 Group 1: The Oaks
 Group 2: Neighbors of Dunn Co.
 7:15 - 7:30pm: Treats at Church

Prrescott UCC



Parents Night Out: Friday, December 15th 5:30pm until 9pm. Enjoy a night out. Go shopping or to dinner without the kids. We ar happy to help out. We offer games, fun and dinner for the children. Please register with Sue Hildebrandt at suzanneh1980@gmail.com.

Community United Church of Christ, Medford, Wisconsin

Come , join us for our Sunday School Program: "Bethlehem Speaks"... Sunday, Dec.17th..9am All are welcome!

Sneak Peek - St Germain Community UCC

[Click here for video](#)

Wisconsin community embraces young refugee family A River Falls Story

People of faith in a small Wisconsin college town have wrapped their arms around a young Guatemalan family celebrating their first Christmas in United States, settled with the help of several local congregations, in an ecumenical effort organized by two women from the First Congregational Church, River Falls.

"Lupe was a child bride who traveled 2,300 miles across Mexico, to escape extreme gang and domestic violence, with her three children and the clothes on their backs. Since there was not a male in the family who could work and a child of two who needed to be cared for, Lupe needed a bit more hands-on help. And, it has paid off in spades," said Bobbie Kuhn who partnered with the Rev. Barbara de Souza to sponsor the family and bring them to Wisconsin.

Both women, members of First Congregational Church, have been instrumental in getting the mother and her three children to River Falls and seeing to their resettlement, with widespread support from the area's religious community. De Souza, a former missionary who spent 40 years in the favelas of Brazil, was living in North Carolina when she reached out to Kuhn, an old acquaintance, in 2014, hoping Kuhn would join her in finding a way to bring refugee children detained at our borders into this country. Once Kuhn agreed, de Souza moved to Wisconsin in 2015, started taking Spanish language lessons to supplement her Portuguese, and eventually hooked up with an immigration lawyer who suggested an organization on the border that helped the pair find a family to sponsor.

After the family was identified in January, Kuhn appealed to the people of River Falls for assistance, lining up congregations of seven of the community's 12 churches that signed on as financial partners. The sponsoring congregations of several denominations in the town of 15,000 people formed the Ecumenical Asylum Committee (EAC) to cover the family's expenses. First Congregational agreed to keep track of donations, and the Wisconsin Conference of the UCC contributed a large sum to help seed the fund.

Before Lupe and her children arrived in River Falls one late night in February, the EAC found her an apartment. Kuhn had contacted the schools, and de Souza handled medical issues, setting up inoculations, finding a dentist and taking mom and the children to doctors' appointments. De Souza, at 86, is the eldest of their American family, and sees herself as Lupe's 'grandma.'

"She is the age of my grandchildren and so for me has become a grandchild," said de Souza. "One day

some time ago, she asked me if I had children and grandchildren. I said yes, and she asked me where they lived and when I told her they were scattered all over the USA and even in another country, she reached over and suddenly emotionally hugged me and called me 'Abuela' or "Grandmother.' She felt closer to me then because we had something in common, our family members were far away. So she has become part of my family--my grandchild!"

And with the help of their American family, the three children and their mom from Guatemala are adjusting -- to the colder Wisconsin weather, the strange food and customs, the English language, to school, and to church.

"Lupe has attended most of the churches that have sponsored her," said Kuhn. "Her children have been to many vacation Bible schools and chose where they wanted to go for Wednesday school themselves. Lupe has met with Father Jerry Harris from St. Bridget Catholic Church, to discuss First Communion for the children. Our new friends enjoyed a wonderful summer filled with parades, carnivals, ball games, birthday parties, picnics, and fireworks."

"Lupe has been here for nine months, and she is almost completely autonomous," Kuhn continued. "She walks everywhere, shops for bargains, calls us if she needs something such as a ride somewhere or something from the pharmacy. They have made a couple of trips to the emergency room, but she and her children live on \$1,200 a month--\$800 of which is rent and utilities--all paid for by generous donations from the local churches and their congregations."

The EAC meets monthly, and fundraisers, such as tamale dinners arranged by committee members, help meet the family's living expenses. Scores of people from the community have offered their time and talents to help the family settle in.

"We feel so safe here, but my daughter has nightmares about being deported. I tell her that Bobbie and Barb are helping us so we can stay here."

On October 17th, an immigration judge, with the approval of Homeland Security's prosecuting attorney, granted asylum for Lupe and her children. On December 2, the young family received an early Christmas present, when the asylum approval documents arrived in the mail. The young family's deportation nightmares have been replaced by dreams of citizenship. And her Wisconsin neighbors are helping her celebrate.

De Souza took the oldest children to see Santa Claus and set up a tree that volunteers decorated. An anonymous donor sent bags and bags of gifts. Lupe chose a few for her children and hopes to send the rest to the Children's Hospital because one of her children spent months being cared for in a similar medical center for which she will be eternally grateful.

"I want to work. I can cook or clean houses or sell Avon. I would like to sell things when everyone is in school. I remind my children that we should be grateful for our new home but we won't have as much when we are on our own, and my daughter said that she is going to do well in school so she can get scholarships."

"There are drivers and babysitters who are still interested in helping as needed, and teachers who keep me informed on what is necessary at school," said Kuhn. "The children speak wonderful English already and are translating for us. Our interpreter, her husband, and cousins are Latino and have become the aunts and uncles the children miss so much."

"This has been an experience of love--of increasing my family and having all of them close and watching them become independent as they settle in among us, my new family," said de Souza. "Bobbie and I feel rewarded for our victory of bringing this wonderful family to River Falls and seeing how this community joined in to make her resettlement such a success. Surely God is smiling as we are!"



Moon Beach will hold two winter women's retreats, each offering an assortment of activities and inspiration. Register soon because this popular event fills quickly.

We're prepared to give you a weekend you won't forget! You'll be enriched, enlightened and uplifted. Your stay will include singing, fellowship, crafts, group activities, quiet time, worship and motivational sessions. These are active weekends, but there are also puzzles, games and books available for personal quiet time. Mealtimes are always special events with scrumptious menus planned especially for our group.

*The twenty-third
Annual Women's Wild
Winter Weekends!*

Feb. 23-25, 2018

March 2-4, 2018

Moon Beach Camp
1487 Moon Beach Road
St. Germain WI 54558-9178
mbc@ucci.org

On-line registration
www.ucci.org
715-479-8255
FAX 715-479-3826

[Brochure](#)

Our Comfort Corner will pamper you as you deserve to be. In addition, short sessions of meditation will help you feel the burdens of the every-day world slip away. Our ever-popular Silent Auction proceeds will go to Camp Scholarships. The camp Gift Shop will be stocked with items to purchase to support the ministry at Moon Beach.

Registration begins at 3:00 p.m. on Friday afternoon and you'll be heading for home by 11:30 a.m. on Sunday after a delicious brunch.

Check with Moon Beach if you would like to extend your stay. There will be no planned program during this extra time.

FOR MORE INFORMATION Maggie Brubaker
715-687-4121
brubakeracres47@gmail.com

***Registration begins
January 2, 2018 9:09am***

(608) 846-7880 | 4459 Gray Road | De Forest, WI 53532

Visit our website

