GLAD TIDINGS!

December 2024

Gathered by the lake,
we are
Embraced by God
to **grow**
Empowered by Christ
to **care,**
Enriched by the Holy Spirit
to **celebrate**



Congregational United Church of Christ Neenah / Menasha

"Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before!
What if Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store.
What if Christmas...perhaps...means a little bit more!"
Dr. Seuss, How the Grinch Stole Christmas!

Hello Church!

It is hard to believe that December is upon us. And yet, here we are all wrapped up in holiday shopping and Christmas lights, "FA-LA-LA LA-LA-ing" all over the place. My sincere hope as we journey through Advent together preparing our hearts and minds to rediscover Jesus as Emmanuel, *meaning "God with us,"* is that we may all be surprised by a little Christmas magic.

I've been fascinated with Christmas magic long before we had Hallmark Christmas movies to tell us all about it. As a child Christmas was all wonderful and excitement. My parents told me anything could happen at Christmas, and I believed them. As an adult Christmas is more reflective and peaceful; Yet every year when I intentionally try to live out the meaning of Christmas, there it is – Christmas magic. So much so I continue to believe that anything can happen when you let the Christmas spirit into your heart at any time of the year.

What does intentionally living-out the meaning of Christmas look like? "Peace on earth and goodwill toward all" is the easy answer. Realistically, I remember several years where estranged family members offered each other a little grace, forgave each other, and let go of things that really don't matter in the grand scheme of things. Life is short. Do your best. When you mess up, say you're sorry, do better, love more. This is what they did when they let go and let the love of Christ fill their hearts, heal their wounds, and lift their spirits – Christmas magic.

I remember being a young child on Christmas Eve. Four generations of my family sitting at one table with every leaf being used and a couple of card tables given the honor of being designated the "kids table." Then my grandmother just stops, looks around the table, gets a tear in her eye, and says something like: "I'm just so happy we can all be together." A simple expression of gratitude that draws forth the litany of family Christmas stories from years gone by. Christmas magic.

Like the year my grandfather was very ill at the VA in Milwaukee and wasn't going to make it back home to Green Bay for Christmas. Cue Christmas Eve, a mother and her two children are sitting there staring at the Christmas tree desperately missing their husband and father, when suddenly there's a

(Continued on next page)

knock on the door. It's my grandfather! He checked himself out of the hospital and talked a taxi driver, *(a fellow veteran)*, into driving him more than 100 miles home. The joke was when he got there, he told my grandmother she needed to pay the fare ($40 in 1950). A family reunited – Christmas magic.

If my time as a minister has taught me anything it is that our lives are our own for the making. Take a risk this holiday season. Let the spirit of Christmas into your heart. Forgive one another. Love one another. Surprise one another. Because the incredible thing about Christmas magic is that it can't be contained. It's meant to be shared.

When two people bury the hatchet and let go of the past to live more fully in the present, everyone around them gets a good dose of Christmas magic too. It's contagious.

When a family takes a moment to give thanks and walk down memory lane everyone in the room is touched by the love, grace, inevitable grief, and glory, in which they may find comfort, and I believe, a peace that passes all understanding.

When someone does something crazy in the name of love, almost impossible even, and surprises everyone with what we now call "the Christmas miracle of 1950," every year when we remember, now with a generation of the family passed on, we are still blessed by the love of Christ, the Christmas magic.

Never underestimate the power of Christmas magic.

Amen and alleluia,



Rev. Rob Van Ess

DECEMBER Birthdays & Anniversaries

12/02 Bruce Brahe
12/03 Judy Grist
12/04 Dar Schuff
12/10 John Tschudy
12/11 Sophie R.
12/13 Jenn Abing
Lena H.
12/14 Sharon Wegner
12/15 Leslie Cooper
12/15 John La Prairie
12/16 Anna B.
12/18 Carol Sweet
12/19 Jennipher Janness
12/20 Garrett M-L.
12/20 Gay Dickson
12/21 Liza H.
12/26 Quinn S.
12/28 Mary Zurbuchen

Wedding Anniversaries

December 5th
Ellen and Tim Montour
December 21st
Bruce and Judy Brahe
December 24th
Ayanda & John Crispin

We would like to wish all a happy birthday or anniversary. If your birthday or anniversary was omitted , or you would rather not have it published, please contact church office.



Please keep the following in your thoughts and prayers:

Shirl Alix
Gerry Benthein
Tiffany Williams
Jerry Hupe
Homebound:
Judy Doornbos
Paul Franke,
Carol Wilcox



BLUE CHRISTMAS

A Service of Remembrance and Hope

December 15th
3:00pm

At Congregational United Church of Christ
Neenah/Menasha

Find solace and hope in the midst of grief this holiday season. A reflective gathering for those experiencing loss, loneliness, or difficult times. Join us for quiet reflection, comforting music, and a message of peace.



ADDITIONAL CHOIR MEMBERS NEEDED FOR CHRISTMAS

Get in the Christmas spirit and join the Christmas Choir! We'll be singing at the 4:00 service on Christmas Eve, and will be rehearsing Wednesday evenings in December from 6:30 - 7:30. Please contact Jill @ jellenrosen@gmail.com if interested.

COMMUNITY TABLE
DECEMBER 17th



We will be preparing and serving a meal at the Community Table on December 17. We are in need of cooks to make casseroles. It is a ham and potato dish that is easy to prepare. Recipes are next to the sign up board. We also need milk and juice. All these items can be left at church Sunday or before 9 AM on Tuesday to be picked up and brought to St. Paul's or dropped off at St. Paul's on Tuesday after 10 AM. It's a fun fellowship time with other church members and our guest and we'd love to have you join us from 10:30-1:00pm. Questions…contact Gay Dickson

BAGS FOR BENCHES

TUESDAY, DEC 10TH
12:00-2:00 PM



Want to be a part of our recycling program and have fun at the same time? Come and fellowship while we and sort plastic bags for our next bench. Questions contact Alanna at ce@cuccnm.org

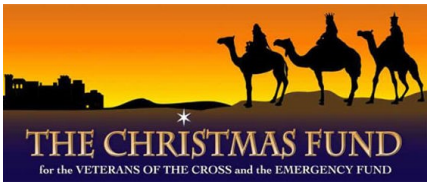
COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS DINNER
DECEMBER 14th



Our church along with 11 other churches will be sponsoring this holiday meal for members of the community at St. Paul's Lutheran church. Please sign up to donate or help with the meal on the sign up sheets in the hall. Contact Ann Luebke or Gay Dickson with any questions.

DECEMBER SPECIAL OFFERING

WHAT IS THE CHRISTMAS FUND – AND WHY WE SUPPORT IT



The Christmas Fund is our Special Offering for December. UCC congregations have been supporting the fund for well over 100 years. Gifts from the fund provide direct financial support to those who serve the church and are facing financial difficulties. We may be "Post-Pandemic," but their needs are as great as ever.

Here at CUCC-NM, we try to pay our pastors and employees as fairly as we can. We sort of succeed some years, but even when we succeed, we try to help pastors and employees of small, poor churches which are often unable to put much aside for funding retirements. Like Social Security, pensions based on low salaries produce low benefits. Working for a poor church is a calling to serve - not a path to security.

If you are able this 2024 Christmas season to extend a hand to those who have given greatly to our UCC churches, please contribute to the Christmas Fund offering which will be collected through the end of the year.

You can contribute in several ways. Gifts will receive a match from the Ministry of Service.

Write a check to the church.
Authorize an on-line check from your bank.
Go to the church's website, hit the GIVE BUTTON and you'll find ways to donate, including credit card and PayPal.
HOWEVER YOU GIVE, INDICATE "CHRISTMAS FUND."



And THANK YOU very much for considering a gift.

THE LIVE NATIVITY



DECEMBER 13TH 5-8PM

This event, which takes place on the same night as the Menasha Hayrides, is very popular.
We have heard it is the official start to the holiday season for many people. You can help by coming to church that night, getting into costume and portraying one of the characters in the Christmas story. You may also be in charge of a miniature horse, donkey, or llama!
Sign up on the church bulletin board or email malojann@yahoo.com.

Dinner is provided to all who participate.



December 1st
– Preparing for Hope – Luke 21:25-36 Sign of Things to Come (World AIDS Day)

December 8th
Preparing for Peace – Children's Program

December 15th
Preparing for Joy – Luke 3:7-18 Looking forward.

December 15th –
3PM Blue Christmas Service
A soul-searching service where we acknowledge grief & loss while offering hope & healing.

December 22nd – Preparing for Love – Luke 1:39-45 (46-55) Mary's Song

December 24th – Preparing for Christ –
4PM Xmas Eve (Family Style Service)

December 24th – Preparing for Christ –
11PM Xmas Eve (Traditional Candlelight Service of Lessons & Carols)

December 29th – Luke 2:41-52 –
1st Sunday of Christmas – Rev. Paige Puguh preaching.

VOLUNTEERS SCHEDULE

Upon receiving the schedule, please review it to ensure you are available when scheduled. If you are unavailable, please use the contact information to find a replacement for yourself. Please notify the church office **office@cuccnm.org** with the schedule change. Thanks to all for your continued support and service as volunteers! **If you would like to be added to the schedule please contact the church office. We are always looking for substitutes !**

TASK	12/1/24	12/8/24	12/15/24	12/22/24	12/29/24
LITURGIST	Sherri Jischke	Youth Program	Susan Knuth	Cheryl Humleker	Gary Zurbuchen
HEAD USHER	Susan Knuth	Susan Dollhopf	Terri Flesburg	Bonnie Pozolinski	Wendy Remmel
USHER 2	Jack Fry	Youth	Scott Olson	Wendy Remmel	Bonnie Pozolinski
USHER 3	Kerry Fox	Youth	Wendy Rem-mel	Scott Olson	Mary Janness
USHER 4	Mary Janness	Youth	Jenn Abing	Susan Knuth	Susan Dollhopf
ACOLYTE	Christopher S	Christopher S	CeCe L.		
SINGING BOWL		Colin S.			
REFRESHMENTS	Terri Flesburg	Cookie Walk	Scott Olson	Ginny Stutzman	Jack Fry
COMMUNION PREPARATION	Gay Dickson				

YOU CAN HELP SERVE!



As our church gets back into the swing of things for fall, the Ministry of Spiritual Life would like to continue to offer a time for fellowship and snacks after worship each Sunday, but needs your help. We are asking those with surnames starting with "K" through "L" to bring in 1 dozen cookies, bars (need not be homemade) or a gallon of juice sometime during the month you are assigned. Label the item "Fellowship" and take to the kitchen freezer/or bring them to the lounge .Your contribution is much appreciated! Watch for your turn to share as your "letter" comes up! Questions contact Terri Flesburg .Here is the schedule:

January: M-N,

February: O-R, **March:** S, **April:** T-V, **May**: W-Z



SUNDAY SCHOOL DURING DECEMBER

3K-8th grade Sunday School is during worship every Sunday.

9th-12th grade meet from 9:00-10:00 the 2nd-4th Sunday

PreK-1st grade will start in worship at 10:15am. Pick your child up in room 4.

2nd-5th grade will start in worship at 10:15am. Pick your child up in room 6.

6th-8th grade will start in worship at 10:15am. Your child will be in room 7.

High School on the 2nd-4th Sunday youth will meet at 9:00-10:00am at Sweet Lair in Menasha. On the 3rd & 5th Sunday of the month the youth will meet at church working on Community Service projects.

*The 1st Sunday of each month is "What's The Scoop?", an all-age class where the youth 3K-12th grade will learn about different lessons about the church, such as communion and baptism, etc. The youth will come back to worship in time for communion.

Youth ages 3-5th grade have a basket raffle they can put their names in every time they come to church! Make sure your child stops by the baskets at the back of the sanctuary.

We are always looking for more teachers, if you are interested in teaching or subbing any grades email Alanna at ce@cuccnm.org

We rotate our teachers allowing them to still enjoy the service while following their personal mission; to teach the youth of our church. The curriculum is very easy to follow, everything is laid out for you therefore only a little prep work needs to be done.

YOUTH GROUP



The next Youth Group (grades 6-12) will meet on **December 13th from 6-8.** We will be working alongside other members of the church to put on the **Live Nativity** for the Menasha Holiday Hayride. The event and dinner begin at 5 so feel free to come early with your whole family. Middle School and High School will each get a turn outside with the animals and a turn inside for another activity, starting at 6:00pm. Families are encouraged to join at 5:00pm to participate in the Live Nativity. Dress warm and be prepared for some fun. We can't wait to see everyone**. ALL YOUTH GRADES 6TH-12TH GRADE ARE WELCOME- PLEASE BRING A FRIEND!!**



Youth's Christmas Program

God Blessed Them One and All

by Dee Leone

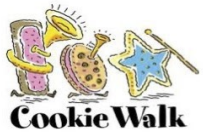
Sunday, December 8th at 10:15am

There will be practice on Sunday, December 1st during Sunday School, Saturday December 7th 9:00-11:00am & Sunday, December 8th from 9:00-10:00am in the Sanctuary.

SPECIAL MUSIC FOR CHRISTMAS PROGRAM



If your youth would like to share their talent with the congregation, please let Alanna know. at ce@cuccnm.org Youth can play/sing solos or as a group. Music will be shared as the prelude to worship starting at



Cookie Walk

New this year, we will be hosting a Cookie Walk after the Children's Christmas Program on Sunday, December 8th. Get your Christmas cookies and candies all in one place. Grab a container and load up on your holiday favorites! Sign up to bake here (Go to Dec 8th)

SANTA & MRS. CLAUSE



Santa & Mrs. Clause will be making an appearance at our Cookie Walk, stop in and get a picture with them when you buy your Christmas goodies!

CONFIRMATION



Sunday, December 1st at 6:00-7:30- youth only

Sunday, December 15th at 6:00-7:30 Mentors are invited to join their confirmands during this class.

Wednesday, December 24th, youth are required to participate in worship at either the 4:00 or 11:00pm service at CUCCNM or if they are out of town, they are encouraged to worship with their families at local church. Sign up for participation will be in the Narthex.

CHRISTMAS POINSETTIA'S



The last day to order your Poinsettia is Sunday, December 1st, all donations will go to the Youth Group.

YOUTH MISSION TRIP

The 2026 Youth Mission Trip will be heading to Colorado Springs, CO! All youth who are currently in 7th grade would be eligible to go on this trip. If your youth is interested in joining us on a week-long trip in summer of 2026, please email Alanna at ce@cuccnm.org

ADULTS AND YOUTH VOLUNTEERS NEEDED:

Did you know you don't have to be a youth or a member of Ministry of Faith Development (MoFD) to help make our youth program flourish? There are many ways everyone could help MoFD; you could teach Sunday School, help with Youth Group, Mentor a confirmand, Help with fundraisers and Help with the acolytes. Email Alanna if you are interested in helping with Sunday school or youth group or being a mentor.

To help with Fundraising sign up here
To help with Acolytes sign up here

HOLY PIZZA!



It's that time of the year, our dough has risen! We just finished making pizzas for our 3rd annual homemade pizzas, Holy Pizza. If you didn't get a chance to order any or you did order and you realized how good they are and you can't wait until next year for another one, don't worry… we have you covered! Extra pizzas were made just for you! Email Alanna or buy some after church. There will be a table set up with pizzas most Sunday's in December. All proceeds will go to the Faith Development Fund (FDF) sending all who want to camps, a retreats or youth mission trips.

For Just $8-$11 You Get:

- a FRESH, handmade 12-inch pizza with your choice of toppings: **cheese $8**, **cheese & pepperoni, $9**, **cheese & sausage $9**, **Mega Meat $11** (pepperoni, sausage, & Canadian bacon, **Vegetarian $11** (onions, mushrooms, peppers and black olives), **Hawaiian $11** (Canadian Bacon & Pineapple)

Holy Pizza were homemade by church volunteers on Saturday November 16th from 9-12.

YOUTH IN WORSHIP



Youth can be a part of worship in many different ways. Please talk with your youth and see how they would like



Acolyte: Youth will light the candles at the start of worship and put them out at the end of worship, bringing in the light of Jesus and taking it out into our community. (training is provided) Sign up here



Singing Bowl: Youth are invited to participate in ringing the Singing Bowl to start the service. (training will be provided) Sign up here



Readers: Youth will read the invocation at the start of worship (invocation will be emailed to parents ahead of time for youth to practice. Sign up here



Communion Helpers: Youth are invited to help with communion on the 1st Sunday of the month. They will stand alongside Pastor Rob and hand the plates off to the ushers.



CHURCH BOOKS CLOSE
DECEMBER 31ST

Church Books will close December 31st. Financial gifts to the church for the year 2024 must be received by the financial secretary by **Tuesday, Dec 31st**. If you would like more information about your giving this year, please call the church office before December 20th

Thank you,
Melanie Nault Financial Secretary

There is still time to turn in your **TIME AND TALENT SHEETS** and **PLEDGE CARD.** There are pledge cards & time and talent sheets on the welcome table or you can fill one out on line . Click here . Question contact the church office. Thank you to those who have already turned them in.

Accountant's Corner

	October	Year to Date
Giving Income	$ 16,342	$ 178,224
Interest + Rents	2,385	30,716
Other Income	-	7,141
Total Income	$ 18,727	$ 216,080
Expenses	19,142	176,267
Expenses	**$ (415)**	**$ 39,813**



We were in the **RED** at the end of the month, and in the **Black** for the Year. Thank you to everyone who has contributed!

DIFFERENT WAYS TO GIVE TO CUCCNM

1.Cash or check in the offering plate or by mailing it to the church.

2. Have your bank send an electronic check. (Bill Pay)

3. Use our QR Code that is linked to our website. Your giving will be taken through Pay Pal were you will use your credit card. *This option charges a fee to the church.*

If you have any questions, please contact Melanie in the church office. office@cuccnm.org or 920-725-4873

Church Information
1511 Nicolet Blvd.
Neenah Wi 54956
920-725-4873

Website: www.cuccnm.org

Pastor
pastor@cuccnm.org

Church Office
office@cuccnm.org

Christian Education Director
ce@cuccnm.org

Wider Church Contacts:

www.ucc.org
(United Church of Christ)

www.neaucc.org
(Northeast Association)

www.wcucc.org
Wisconsin Conference



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 **NO Sunday School** **10:15 am** Worship **6:00pm** Confirmation	**2**	**3** **8:30 am** Discussion Group **11:00 am** Bible Study	**4**	**5** **6:30 pm** Ministry Council **7-8:30pm** Horizon II AA	**6**	**7** **9-11:00 am** Christmas Program Practice **7-8:30pm** Horizon II AA
8 **10:15 am** Worship: Children Christmas Play **11:30 am** Cookie Walk	**9**	**10** **8:30 am** Discussion Group **11:00 am** Bible Study **12-2:00 pm** Bags to Benches	**11**	**12** **6:00pm** LE Christmas Pro-gram in Sanctuary **7-8:30pm** Horizon II AA	**13** **5-8pm** Live Naivety **6-8pm** Youth Group	**14** **Community Christmas Dinner at S. Paul's**
15 9:00am H.S. S.S. at Church **10:15 am** Worship : **10:15 am** PreK- 8th grade S.S. **3:00pm** **Blue Christmas Service** **6:00 pm** Confirmation w/ Mentors	**16**	**17** **8:30 am** Discussion Group **NO** Bible Study **10:30pm** Community Table	**18**	**19** **7-8:30pm** Horizon II AA	**20**	**21** **7-8:30pm** Horizon II AA
22 **9:00am** H.S. S.S. at Sweet Lair **10:15 am** Worship : **10:15 am** PreK- 8th grade S.S.	**23**	**24** **Christmas Eve** **4:00pm** Family Service **11:00pm** Candlelight Service	**25** **Christmas Day**	**26** **7-8:30pm** Horizon II AA	**27**	**28** **7-8:30pm** Horizon II AA
29 **NO Sunday School** **10:15 am** Worship	**30**	**31**				



DISCUSSION GROUP
Tuesdays at 8:30-9:30 am
We meet at Four Seasons Restaurant in Neenah for breakfast and lively discussion about current events and faith trends
1104 South Commercial Street, Neenah
Everyone is Welcome!



NEEDLERS

Share Fellowship and do Needlework
All who like to do (or learn to do) any type of needlework.

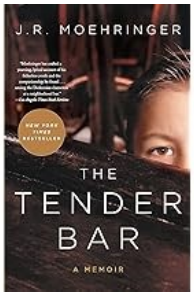
Meet Friday December 20th at 1:00pm in the lounge to visit and work on needlework such as knitting, crocheting, etc. Invite your friends and share in the conversation and creation!

Sunday Worship is in person. Services will be broadcast **live on FB** every Sunday morning and later put on our website.

Click below to find our FB page
https://facebook.com/CongregationalUCCNeenahMenasha/
It will be posted on the church website later in the day.
www.cuccnm.org.



Book Club : January 19th
Sweet Lair
After church
We will be discussing
The Tender Bar : A Memoir by J.R. Moehringer.





Merry Christmas from the staff
Rob Melanie Alanna Jill Alan Dave



Ministry Council

Moderator:
Scott Olson

Vice Moderator:
Signa Meyers

Secretary:
Jenn Abing

Accountant:
Dave Zernicke

Ministry of Faith Development
Dawn Welling

Ministry of Service:
Mary Janness

Ministry of Spiritual Life
Terri Flesburg

Ministry of Stewardship
Jeff Nichols

At Large:
Sue Dollhopf
Connie Regazzi
Sherri Jischke

Church Historian:
Mowry Smith

Communication Coordinator
Marilyn Kostrzak

Time and Talent Coordinator:

Personnel Committee
Scott Olson
Marilyn Kostrzak

Pastoral Relations Committee
Kerry Fox, Sue Knuth,
Patty Hoehne, Bob Nault

Rev. Rob Van Ess Pastor,
pastor@cuccnm.org
Melanie Nault, Admin. Assistant,
office@cuccnm.org
Alanna Smith, Christian Ed. Dir.,
ce@cuccnm.org

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DEC 8TH
CHILDREN CHRISTMAS PROGRAM
COOKIE WALK

DEC 13TH
5PMM-8PM LIVE NATIVITY

DEC 14TH
COMMUNITY TABLE CHRISTMAS DINNER

DEC 15TH
BLUE CHRISTMAS SERVICE

DEC 24TH
4:00 PM FAMILY SERVICE
11:00PM CANDLE LIGHT SERVICE

MORE INFORMATION INSIDE