

JOY
Joy

JOY TO THE WORLD!

THE LORD

IS COME.



A Christmas Welcome!



Merry Christmas to you and your loved ones this year! What a gift it is to have you with us celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. We are people on a journey together which is why we say, "No matter who you are or where you are at on life's journey, you are welcome here." Just like those who journeyed to witness the miracle of God's love taking human form and being born into this world, you have journeyed here to be with us. Just like the Wise Men, who brought their greatest treasure to share with the Christ child, know that we treasure your presence with us here in this place.

Our hope is that today you are blessed; by music and sound, by warm relationships and grace filled moments, by words in scripture and sermon, by prayers and traditions that ground us in the meaning of what it means to be human: That God is love and love came down. We hope that you might be changed by your time with us and filled with the hope that we long to share.

We are a progressive and Open and Affirming church that is a gathering place for those who seek to grow deeper in their faith, appreciate diversity, and long for justice. With creativity, curiosity, and courage, we worship, work, and seek God's presence as we follow Jesus Christ into the world to love and serve our neighbors.

Christmas Eve is just one of the many occasions we gather to celebrate, grow and travel together on a journey. In the coming months our vital church has a lot of great opportunities to join in. A few include:



Weekly Youth & Children's Groups: Beginning in late January, a 10-week mini- "Our Whole Lives" program will be offered on Sundays to ANY AND ALL 9th-11th graders. Email swilterdink@firstcongoappleton.org or call Sarah at 920-851-9559 if you would like to receive more information in a couple of weeks!

Youth Groups: MS volunteers at Assisted Living Homes and HS volunteers at Pillars on the 3rd Wednesday of each month. On the other Wednesdays, come discuss and live out progressive Christian values, social justice, mission work and more! An evening at Appleton Axe and a morning making a Pancake Breakfast are just a few of the things that are coming soon...

Children's Ministry: Join us during 9:30AM church services on Sundays as we learn how Bible stories help teach us to be kind, reflective, and productive people of God. Stay after church for Children's Musical practices that start soon.

Romans Bible Study via Zoom: Wednesdays at 6:30PM, January 3-February 7. Join Pastor Mary Jo and others in growing deeper through the richness of scripture study of Romans on Wednesday nights. Bible study books available: free in front office.

New Co-Pastor Candidate Sunday: January 14, 9:30AM: Come be the church in action as we meet and welcome our new Co-Pastor; as our congregation gathers to vote on welcoming the candidate. Reception is 3:00-5:00PM on Saturday, January 13!

Sanctuary Choir, YHB, Children's Musical: Our Sanctuary Choir & Youth Handbells resume rehearsals January 3. Children's Choir resumes on January 7. Children are also invited to participate in a children's musical which we will enjoy in worship on March 17!

We invite you to consider unwrapping the gift of our wonderful community in the coming months. We pray that this Christmas renews all of us in the Joy of Jesus Christ. We are grateful for all that the Lord has done and continues to do to through us and creation to cause us to celebrate, further expand our understanding of justice, and equip us to follow the baby who would become the great "I Am."

Hope to see you again, soon!

The Members and Staff of First Congregational United Church of Christ in Appleton

NOEL HALLELUJAH MERRY CHRISTMAS HAPPY NEW YEAR
New Hallelujah Merry Christmas Happy New Year

*Welcome to
The Church of the Open Door.*

Our door is open to you at whatever point you are in your journey of faith.

TODAY AT FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UCC, APPLETON ~ December 24, 2023

9:25 – 10:30AM	Childcare – <i>Childcare Room</i>
9:30 – 10:30AM	Christmas Eve Worship
4:00 – 5:00PM	Family Do-It-Yourself Nativity Service
7:00 – 8:00PM	AL ANON – <i>Chapel / Alateen – Upper Lounge</i>
7:00 – 8:00PM	First Things First AA Meeting – <i>Fellowship Hall, Commons Grounds</i>
8:00 – 9:00PM	A Service of Lessons and Carols, Candlelight, and Communion

*We are glad you are here today! You are welcome to worship in person with us
in the Sanctuary or watch it livestreamed in the Chapel, Upper Lounge, or Narthex.
The Nursery also has livestreaming.*

Baptisms are held on the third Sunday of each month. To schedule a baptism, contact the church office six weeks before your desired baptism date.

Childcare is available for ALL infants and toddlers. Please see an usher for directions to the Childcare Room.

Communion: The sacrament of Holy Communion is celebrated on the first Sunday of each month. Communion elements are gluten free. All are welcome to join us!

Donating to First Congregational UCC, Appleton: We have many convenient ways to donate. Giving envelopes are in the pews and may be put in the offering plates, checks can be mailed to the church, you can visit our webpage and click “Give,” or you can text FCUCC GIVE to 73256. *Messages and data rates may apply. Message frequency varies. Text HELP to 73256 for help. Text STOP to 73256 to cancel.

Flowers: Today’s flowers were arranged by Cindi Ritcey Fox.

Hearing Loop: Need help hearing our service? Ask an usher. They can help get you in the loop!



Online Streaming and Podcasting are available on Facebook: FCUCCAppleton or Youtube: First Congregational UCC Appleton.

Open Door Announcements can be shared by emailing opendoor@firstcongoappleton.org or calling the office.

References to God in our worship may at times be gender specific. You are invited to substitute terms that reflect your understanding of the inclusiveness of God.

Sunday School: Our PreK - 5th graders begin in worship. After the children's message, they walk together to the CYF wing for our Children's Ministry Program. Youth gather on Wednesday evenings.

THE ORDER OF WORSHIP

December 24, 2023 9:30 AM
Christmas Eve ~ Fourth Sunday of Advent

Children's Ministry Locations for 9:30AM Service

Childcare for 0-4-year-olds in the Childcare Room. K-8 th Grade may go to the Scripture Tent after the Children's Message or they may stay in the service.

PRELUDE

Music for Christmas

Dr. Nathan Birkholz, *piano*

Jann Kostecke, *flute*

Various

WELCOME

**Please Rise in Body or Spirit*

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLE – JOY

The Tseffos Family

INTRODUCTORY SENTENCES

READING OF SCRIPTURE John 15:9-11

"As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.

If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete."

LIGHTING OF THE CANDLES

UNISON PRAYER

All: O Holy One, as Christmas draws near, there is a sense of excitement in the air. We can feel a joy in our lives and see it in those around us. Still, for some of us, this is a sad time because of unhappy things that have happened in our lives. Help us to have the joy that does not depend on earthly happiness, but on you. Help us to be filled with your joy so that we may share it with a joyless world. Amen.

*RESPONSE #129

Of Eternal Love Begotten

DIVINUM MYSTERIUM

St. 1 – Solo, St. 2 & 3 – ALL

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE

One: The prophet, Isaiah, told of a time when those who walked in darkness would see a great light. He said that a light would shine, and a child would be born to us.

All: Luke, the Gospel-writer, "painted" the sky with the song of the angels, "Glory to God, peace on earth and goodwill to all!"

One: John told us that this great light is Jesus. He is the light who lives among us!

All: O God, our Life and Light, thank you for coming to us. May your light of hope and peace shine in every corner of the world. May your light of love and joy shine in every corner of our hearts. Amen.

One: We light the candle at the center of our wreath and of our faith. We light it in the name of the One who is the light. As Mary did so long ago, we name this light, "Jesus."

*CAROL #144

O Come, Little Children

IHR KINDERLEIN KOMMET

SCRIPTURE READING Luke 2:1-20 NRSV

Debbie Hoogesteger

The Birth of Jesus

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place in the guest room.

The Shepherds and the Angels

Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them, and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them.

SERMON *"Evermore and Evermore!"*

Pastor Mary Jo Laabs

*CAROL #137

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

MENDELSSOHN

OFFERING

CALL TO THE OFFERING

(During this time, you are invited to a virtual offering. Please visit our webpage and click "Give" to make your weekly offering, or text FCUCC GIVE to 73256.)

MUSICAL REFLECTION

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

Tune by R. S. Willis

Text by E. H. Sears

Arr. Joel Richard Jude Jicha

Joel Jicha, *bass*

*DOXOLOGY

All: Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;

Praise God, all creatures here below;

Praise God above, ye heavenly host:

Creator, Christ, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

GATHERING OF JOYS AND CONCERNS

(You are welcome to submit your prayer requests throughout the week to the church office, or email to a pastor for confidentiality.)

One: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

One: Let us pray.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Note: During the candle-lighting, the ushers will come forward to receive the light of Christ and will share it with the person on the end of each pew. Please tip the unlit candle to the lit one and pass it down the row. We will extinguish the candles after the Benediction.

LIGHTING OF THE CANDLES John 1:1-14

Pastor Nick Hatch

The Word Became Flesh

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

CAROLS:

Away in a Manger

AWAY IN A MANGER

1. **Away in a manger, no crib for his bed,
the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.
The stars in the sky looked down where he lay,
the little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.**
2. **The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
but little Lord Jesus no crying he makes.
I love thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky,
and stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.**

Silent Night

STILLE NACHT

1. **Silent night, holy night,
all is calm, all is bright
round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy infant so tender and mild,
sleep in heavenly peace,
sleep in heavenly peace.**

2. Silent night, holy night,
shepherds quake at the sight;
glories stream from heaven afar,
heavenly hosts sing alleluia;
Christ, the Savior is born!
Christ, the Savior is born!
3. Silent night, holy night,
Son of God, love's pure light;
radiant beams from thy holy face,
with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

*BENEDICTION

*CAROL #134

Joy to the World

ANTIOCH

POSTLUDE

In dulci jubilo, BWV 729 (In Sweet Rejoicing)

J. S. Bach

THANK YOU TO TODAY'S WORSHIP LEADERS

Pastor Nicholas J. Hatch

Pastor Mary Jo Laabs

Dr. Nathan Birkholz, *organ and piano*

Jann Kostecke, *flute*

Joel Jicha, *bass and arranger*

John M. Albrecht, *Director for Music Ministries*

Permission to stream the music in this service obtained from ONE LICENSE, # A-714899. All rights reserved.

Sunday, December 31, 2023 Worship Service

"Living on the Edge"

Pastor Mary Jo Laabs

Luke 2:22-40

Musicians: Shelley Nulton, *organ*; Congregational Carols

Worship Notes (space for your personal notes/thoughts)



RECEPTION
TO
Welcome

**THE NEW PASTOR
AND FAMILY**

Saturday, January 13, 2024
3:00 - 5:00pm
Fellowship Hall

Please join us to meet the new pastor and family for fellowship and light hors d' oeuvres

RSVP BY FRIDAY, JANUARY 5TH

Email: zgonzales@firstcongoappleton.org
Phone: 920-733-7393



ON REALM

2023 Advent/Christmas Gifts

In memory of Evelyn & James P. Vercouteren ~ Beth Vercouteren

In memory of Carlton & Arlene Beyer ~ Joan & Steve Hawkins

In memory of loved ones lost ~ Murphy & Murphy-Pociask family

In memory of Charles Eggenberger ~ Jill Anthony

In memory of our parents, Rollie & Gen Rath and Lloyd & Marie Heinz ~ Karl & Rose Heinz

In memory of Adele & John Bowman and Marion & Elmer Gosse ~ Karen & Dick Gosse

In memory of Rev. Harvey Kandler ~ Nancy Kandler family

In memory of Bill & Jan Dougherty and Tom & Helen Giese ~ Mark & Lori Dougherty

In memory of Marge & Jim Forsythe (mom and dad) ~ Susan Forsythe

In memory of Alicia Rose Arndt Dorn - she is so missed ~ Anne Brahe

In memory of Edwin Heinrich ~ Carol Heinrich and family

In memory of Kristy's mom, Carolyn Snyder ~ John & Kristy Albrecht

In celebration of my greatest loves, Quinn Virginia and Bellamy Dixon ~ Kristen Scheuerman

In celebration of our choir ~ Cheryl & Ron Reissmann

In celebration of another Season of Miracles ~ Pat Hansen & Bill Lenz

In celebration of Esther Gehrt ~ Sara & Bruce Companik

Joys and Concerns of Our Faith Community

Members of our church family benefit from our prayers, support, and words of encouragement as they celebrate special times or struggle with difficulties in their lives.

Please keep these people in your prayers and greet them with a loving word when you see them.

Please call Pastor Mary Jo at 715-351-0450 or [email her](#) if you have a new joy or concern you would like us to pray for, as well as any questions and other assistance needed.

In cases of a pastoral emergency, please call 920-810-2600.

Sue Ahrens	Jean Jepson
Jill Anthony, her sister & her nephew	Kathy Lannoye
Katie Behl and her sister, Barbara	Nancy Kandler
Don Brittnacher	Kandy Kueler
Chris Brittnacher's brother, Steve Reinkober	Helen McKean's daughter, Larri Jacquart
Karen Crawford's niece, Lori	Richard Miller's son-in law, Rick Kramer
Beth Detienne's mother	Our friends in Kerio Valley, Kenya
Jim and Rachel Edwards	Stephen Otto's brother, Gerald
Heidi Mendonca Erstad	Gretchen Revie
Erstad's family friend, Silas, and his family	Larry Schiedermayer
David Galow	Frank and Pat Severin
Art Gandler	Mike Seymour's mom, Debbie
Esther Gehrt and her sons, Steve and Ken	Mark Spindler
Ken Geiger	Kinsley Tarr
Margaret Hankwitz	Gloria Tate
Judy Hanson	Jack Thiel
JoAnn Helms	Peter Thiel
Shirley Hoft	James Totzke
Misty Hofman	Jean Van Wagenin
Phil & Mary Hornseth's nephew, Eric Montross	Brian and Lecia Wardle's daughter, Mya
Joan Jenson's son, John	Diane White

The Open Door Announcements

For more information on these announcements and other events, please visit our website, weekly e-newsletters, and social media.

Business Administrator Job Opening: First Congregational is currently taking resumes for the position of Business Administrator. This person will collaborate with the Co-Pastors and Council to ensure the smooth operations of our church. Key qualities are being a great team player, understanding of business, willingness to lead, and appreciation of our particular faith community. This is a salaried and benefited position. If you have interest, or you know someone who might have interest in being part of a dynamic and positive staff, reach out to Chris Danz at c.danz456@gmail.com for a copy of the job description or to ask questions.

Adult Education Session: You are invited to attend a session on **January 7, 2024**, 11:00AM-12:30PM in the Upper Lounge on the topic of "Challenges and Opportunities for Ministering with Older Adults." For over a year, John and Susan McFadden have been participating in the Wisconsin and Michigan Conferences' Innovative Conversations on Older Adult Ministries. Susan will highlight the work they have been doing with this group and will report on the results of survey responses they have collected from congregations about their older adult ministries. The ways faith communities in the Fox Valley have been contributing to efforts to make our region more age and dementia-friendly will also be shared.

NOAHH needs: NOAHH is looking for donors to adopt families for Christmas. A family is looking to cover the cost of driving school. Its cost is \$350. NOAHH has received many thank you notes to those who have helped out this year. Call Barb at: 920-832-5515 Human Services with your donations. Thank you, Sue Ahrens

SAVE THE DATE: "Come Away - A Women's Day Retreat on Prayer"

Women's
Retreat



Led by Rev. Nancy Zorn Micke

Including a book discussion of Anne Lamott's "Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers"

Saturday, February 10, 2024, 9:00AM - 4:00PM
at First Congregational United Church of Christ

MORE INFORMATION COMING SOON!

The First Congregational UCC Racial Equity Group wants the entire congregation to be aware of our recently developed Vision and Mission Statements. Anyone who would like to be part of the Racial Equity Group can contact the church office or Wanda Van De Hey at wanvandh@gmail.com or 920-203-1500.

Vision Statement of the Racial Equity Group: First Congregational United Church of Christ Appleton acknowledges the racial inequity that has been perpetuated from historical, financial, and educational policies and procedures throughout society for generations. We work to promote racial justice. Together we advocate for all people to live free from discrimination and acts of violence. We actively support structures and systems that enhance God's creation.

Mission Statement of the Racial Equity Group: The Mission of the Racial Equity Group at First Congregational United Church of Christ Appleton is to support and encourage our church as it works toward becoming a just, equitable and antiracist community of faith. In partnership with other church advocacy groups, as well as community partners, we will continue to provide education to heighten awareness of whiteness, racism, inclusion and break free from our implicit biases. We seek opportunities to increase our awareness about systemic racism and what we can do with that awareness.

Our goal is to create a safe and equitable community where we respect and celebrate the diversity of God's people. We wish to serve as a resource to move, through actions and awareness, towards becoming a Just Peace Church, a designation from the National United Church of Christ as we strive to truly be the church of the Open Door to all.

Begin 2024 with a "Listen Up!" Bible Study, led by Pastor Mary Jo Laabs:

Romans Part 1: Chapter 1-8,

Six sessions on Wednesday nights, 6:30pm, on Zoom only: Jan. 3- Feb. 7

Romans Part 2, Chapter 9-16,

Six sessions on Wednesday nights, 6:30pm, on Zoom only: Feb. 21- Mar. 28

Sign up when you pick up your study guides in the office. There is no cost.

Zoom link will be emailed to you.

Looking for Post-High School Young Adults, ages 18-23: Join us as we make breakfast together after the worship service on Sunday, January 7. We're looking forward to catching up with you! -Pastor Nick, Pastor Dianne and CYF Director Sarah



This Week's Schedule

Monday, December 25 - *Merry Christmas ~ Church office closed*

Tuesday, December 26 - *Merry Christmas ~ Church office closed*

6:30 - 7:30PM

Living Sober AA Group - *Common Grounds*

7:45 - 8:45PM

Fireside AA Group - *Common Grounds*

Wednesday, December 27

12:15 - 1:00PM

Loving Acceptance Meditation - *Upper Lounge*

Thursday, December 28

12:00 - 1:00PM

AA Search for Serenity Group - *Common Grounds*

4:00 - 6:30PM

Wedding Rehearsal - *Sanctuary*

7:00 - 8:00PM

Fox Valley 94 AA - *Common Grounds*

Friday, December 29

2:00 - 6:30PM

Wedding - *Sanctuary, Upper Lounge, Common Grounds*

7:00 - 8:00PM

AI-Anon - *Upper Lounge*

7:00 - 8:30PM

N.A - *Common Grounds*

Saturday, December 30

11:00AM - 12:00PM

Debtors Anon - *Common Grounds*

7:00 - 8:00PM

Fox Valley 94 AA - *Common Grounds*

Sunday, December 31

9:30 - 10:30AM

Sunday Worship - *Chapel, Sanctuary, Upper Lounge*

7:00 - 8:00PM

AL ANON - *Chapel / Alateen - Upper Lounge*

7:00 - 8:00PM

First Things First AA Meeting - *Fellowship Hall, Commons Grounds*

Land Covenant

The land now occupied by Appleton, Wisconsin and surrounding areas - including the current site of First Congregational UCC - was the home, hunting, gathering, and farming land of the First Peoples of this territory: the Ho Chunk Nation and the Menominee Nation. Other tribes were forcibly re-located to this region by the actions of colonialism. Despite centuries of reprehensible treatment, the peoples of these sovereign nations are robust and enduring among us.

We are truly saddened by the genocide of their ancestors, the seizure of their lands, and the repression of their cultures and languages. We acknowledge that we benefit from the economic and social legacy left by settler colonialism.

We are grateful that many members of these original Nations have honorably served and defended the United States. We strive to honor their cultures and their insightful stewardship of this land and all creatures on it, recognizing our common interest in protecting its air, water, soils, and web of life for all future generations.

We commit ourselves through study and immersion experiences to learn the history and cultures of these peoples and their traditional knowledge.



We are “The Church of the Open Door,” a welcoming and inclusive Christian community.
No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here.



—The Church of the Open Door—

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

724 E. South River Street | Appleton, WI 54915
920.733.7393 | firstcongoappleton.org
Office hours: Monday – Friday, 9:00AM – 3:00PM