

THE MESSENGER

NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2023



First Congregational Church UCC
412 4th Street Manistee Mi



From The Pastor

Dear Friends,

About 6 weeks ago many of us gathered for worship on January 8th, the Sunday closest to Epiphany Sunday. As has become our tradition we were invited to draw a new star word.

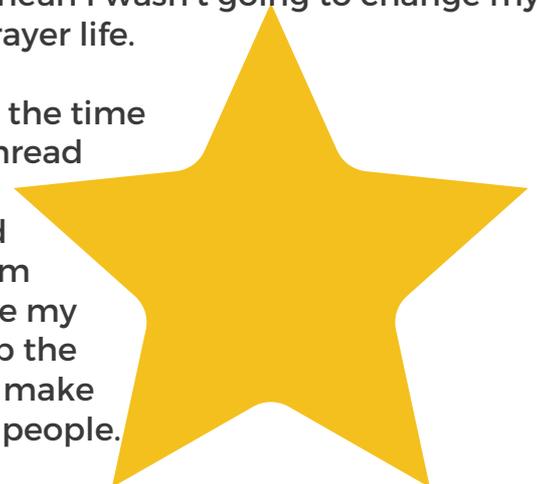
This year I hope to revisit our star words throughout the year to help remind us to keep them close to our hearts and spirits throughout the year.

This year my star word was "increase". I put my star word on my bathroom mirror so that it would be a constant reminder for me. Despite this prominent location, for most of January and February I didn't do much with my star word other than look at it every day. Although as we have gotten closer to Lent, my attention to my star word has shifted.

For many of us it feels traditional to give up something for Lent. Coffee, dessert, alcohol, junk food, swearing, etc. When I was a waitress I noticed the high number of people who would change from their usual cheese burger and fries to have fish and chips every Friday night. Up until the beginning of fifth grade I attended a parochial school and we had to report what we were giving up for Lent to our teacher, and while I did always participate in this assignment I was never very sure why such an emphasis was put on giving up things, and I didn't see how my relationship with God was going to change just because I stopped eating chocolate for a few weeks.

In the weeks leading up to Lent I was asked more than once what I was giving up for Lent. My first and maybe my fast answer was "nothing." But as I thought about my star word, I realized that just because I wasn't going to give up anything didn't mean I wasn't going to change my normal routine. This season I was going to "increase" my prayer life.

I'm making more time and space to be with God. By taking the time to meditate, to read that devotional that has been sitting unread for months now, to take time to connect with that person I've been meaning to call, to take the long lunch with an old friend, rather than rushing back to the office. This season I'm trying to increase the things that feed my spirit and energize my heart. But in a way I'm giving up some things. I'm giving up the urge to be productive all the time, I'm giving up the urge to make laundry and dishes a higher priority than peace, prayer and people.



My prayer for all of you is that if you are fasting this Lent, or adding in something meaningful you find and increase in peace, faith and hope during the season of reflection.

Blessings Pastor Liz



March Birthdays

- March 18- Evan Germanese
- March 19- Adriana Persenaire
- March 20- John Simoneau
- March 22- Jessica Rozga-DeBoni
- March 24- Kristen Kimm
- March 25- Sally Schreiner
Ann Bifoss
- March 28- Sally Mason
- March 31- Meredith Rose

Monthly Mission

Thank you all for donating birthday supplies for the Children's Advocacy Center! They'll be excited to see that we completed 20 bags for them to give to children and their families to help make their day special!

Our mission for March will be for Blessings in a Backpack! There will be a list of items they could use on the mission's bulletin board.

Please let me or Pastor Liz know if there are any services or charities near to your heart that we could help out! Thanks!



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- March 3- Joe Strouse
- March 4- Barb Ilgen
John Gumper
- March 7- Kevin Postma
- March 8- David Ohman
- March 10- Leah Wachlin
- March 12- Nancy Goodwin
- March 16- Dan Ilgen
Phyllis Cowden



March Anniversary

- March 31- David and Chere Ohman



2022 Giving Statements are ready. If you would like a copy, let Deb know. They can be sent to you via email or picked up at the church office.

March Liturgist

- Mar 5- The Patterson's
- Mar 12- Loren Bach
- Mar 19- The Patterson's
- Mar 26- Loren Bach

March Greeters

- Mar 5-
- Mar 12-
- Mar 19-
- Mar 26-

March Clock Winders

- Mar 5- Jake DeBoni
- Mar 12- Sandy Turk
- Mar 19- John Helge
- Mar 26- Stu Swiger



Sandy dropping off our "Birthday Bags" at the Lakeshore Children's Advocacy Center

Please Consider Signing up as Greeters, Coffee Hour Hosts or Liturgists. Sign up sheets are located in the hallway next to the name tags.

March Coffee Hour Host

- Mar 5- The Patterson's
- Mar 12-
- Mar 19- The Patterson's
- Mar 26- Rozga/DeBoni Family

NEWSLETTER MARCH 2023
Moderator's Musings

January and February are tough months. Long stretches of gray, gloomy days punctuated by blowing snow, icy roads, and bitter cold. All this might make you wonder why we ever decided to live here on the northwest shore of Lake Michigan. I hope that, like me, you are able to take solace in those days when the sun peaks through the clouds and illuminates the brilliant white landscape. We are also fortunate to have days when there is a slight breeze out of the south that carries the hopeful breath of spring. We can look forward to the better days that may be taking their time to get here but are certain to arrive and transform our world once again!

Our congregational family has certainly not been in winter hibernation. We had a wonderful 5th Sunday potluck after worship on January 29th. The Banned Book Club continues to challenge us to think outside of the box. Our worship services in Fellowship Hall are well attended by the hearty souls who enjoy spending winter in Manistee. The treats at fellowship time after the worship services have been especially wonderful this winter! We have a committee working to support Pastor Liz's sabbatical and they have lined up excellent resources to provide us with pastoral care in her absence this summer. The contractor is finishing up the installation of the small boiler and we will be moving forward with the replacement of the leaking big boiler later in the summer. We have applied for grants that might be able to help us with the \$80,000 cost of the big boiler replacement. We are also continuing to negotiate for the best deal on natural gas to fuel these new high efficiency hot water boilers.

I hope you have noticed that the sidewalks and entryways to the church are shoveled and de-iced early every Sunday morning. Our wonderful custodian Doug Savela is always right there to ensure we are able to provide a safe and welcoming entry to our Sunday worship services. We are so fortunate to have Doug taking care of not only the building, but also of us!

So, as we enter the season of Lent, I hope we can all take the time to reflect on your own spiritual journey and how we can prepare for the new life that is coming with the celebration of Easter.

See YOU in church!

John Helge.

Cell Phone: 616-915-2403. Email: johnmhelge@gmail.com

Worship Report

Lent has begun! By the time you receive this newsletter, we will have already had our Ash Wednesday Service. On April 6, there will be a Maundy Thursday service, followed by the Community Good Friday service at OUR church the next afternoon. Besides special services, there are several other ways that worship will be enhanced during Lent. On Sunday mornings, upon entering, children will be able to pick up a paper sack with an activity which follows the message of the service that day. A Lenten Devotional entitled "Seeking: honest questions for deeper faith" for your personal study is available where the bulletins are located. If you do not find one, please talk with Nanci Swenson or Pastor Liz, and we will print more! For each week of the season, this devotional from the Sanctified Art team offers poems, hymns, artwork, commentary and scripture. If the name sounds familiar, that is because Pastor Liz has utilized works from this team during Advent as well. Each Tuesday we will also have an in-person small group study at church. Pastor Liz can give you the link if you wish to join us online.

Pastor Liz will be gone the week of March 13 – 22. Pulpit supply for the March 19th service will be Rev. Jeff Rhodes, a retired UCC Navy Chaplain. A committee has been planning for sabbatical time for Pastor Liz from July through October. The pulpit will be covered during that time. After five years a sabbatical is afforded to ministers for rest, renewal, and study. Sabbaticals usually only are taken if the pastor feels that a congregation is "in a good place." And, after a sabbatical, a pastor is bound for AT LEAST a year with the same congregation. What a wonderful opportunity both for a pastor and a congregation! We are glad that with a grant to cover the cost of pulpit supply, we can offer this time away, EXPECIALLY after all the extra efforts that Pastor Liz put in during the height of the Covid Pandemic. We look forward to a renewed energy once she returns!

~Nanci Swenson and Joanne Cotugno

Faith Formation

I was certain that all my questions would be answered by Lee Strobel. For too long I had depended on the Bible and Sunday sermons for answers to all the whys and wonders I held close to my chest. Why does cancer run so rampant in my family? Why is it so difficult for us to listen to & learn from others? I wonder why it is so difficult to begin again, to escape the high rate of relapse?

Certainly, The Case for Christ would be able to resolve all these questions and points of uncertainty.

Sadly, even though the back cover endorsements told me Strobel was going to provide all the answers I needed to not only defend my faith but also to assuage my ongoing wonders and fears, it did quite the opposite and left me with more questions than before I first cracked open that iconic hand stamped cover.

It wasn't until years later, and a few significant conversation and life choices, that I came to understand that a life with Christ cannot be built on facts and answers alone, but created and woven together through questions and explorations, disruption of assumptions, and revelations found in holding mystery both tenderly and with adoration and consistency.

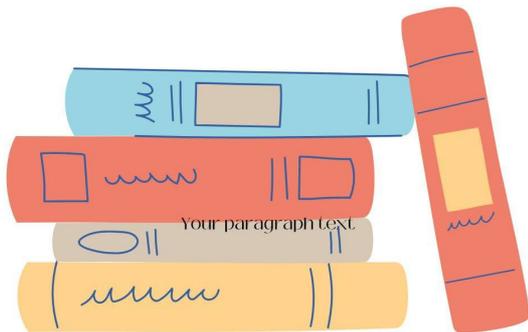
This year, our walk together through the Lenten season will both take us through the many questions we often ask when we are seeking. Can these bones live? Who will listen? How do we begin again? And in the company of characters found throughout scripture, together we will seek clarity when we feel like we're slogging through mud, connection when we feel like we're alone, wonder when the world seems predictable and aggressive, justice when the power dynamics of our community seem unfair, and balance when all we feel is overwhelm and exhaustion.

We would love for each of you to join us every Tuesday evenings, throughout the Lenten season, beginning on Feb. 28th at 7:00pm, for a small group study session that will usher us into taking a closer look at some of the themes and art from our Lenten Worship Series, Seeking: Honest Questions for Deeper Faith.

Banned

Book Club

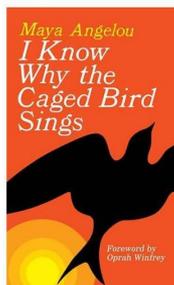
March 29th - 7:00pm



This month's selection is
Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

By: Maya Angelou

First Congregational Church
412 4th St, Manistee, MI 49660



I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings was banned for language and being too explicit in the book's portrayal of rape and other sexual abuse.

Future Banned Book Readings:

April: The Glass Castle

May- Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic

June: The Bluest Eye

Our Banned Book club is a great place for important conversation and everyone's opinion is welcome. We'd love to have you join us.

We meet to discuss each book the last Wednesday of the month at 7:00pm. We would love to have you join us.



Don't miss our next Raising Ally's Event

March 14th at 6:00pm

Everyone is Welcome!

Crafters Information:

News from the craft group. Our group is growing. Some come at nine and stay until two. Some come at 10 and leave at noon. You can drop in any time and stay as long as you can. We will be glad to have you. Our home schoolers have been coming and even bring their own projects on occasion.

We have even taken on making placements for meals on wheels for next Christmas. We have committed to making 200 placements. So if you have some left over Christmas fabric we will gladly take it off of your hands. Or batting or backing. You can even sponsor a placemat for \$5.00. We can even use scrap fabric.

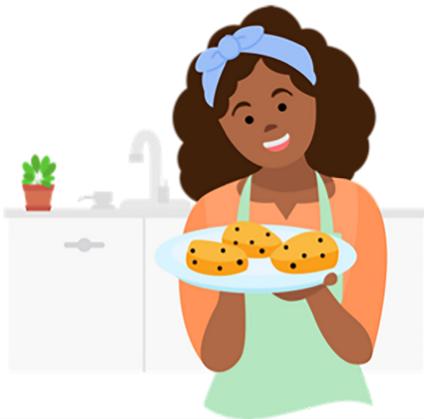
Don't forget MHS has Beauty and the Beast this month and we have kids participating in it.

Upcoming Important Dates to Remember

June 9th & 10th- We want to hold a Sewing/Crafting day camp on June 9th and 10th. Tables can be rented to craft or sew on. Friday 1:00pm-10:00pm with 1 meal provided and Saturday 10:00am-10:00pm with 2 meals provided. Snacks and Fellowship included. Cost and more details to be announced soon.

Nov 4th- Annual Heritage Bazaar

Nov 18th- Maker's Market.



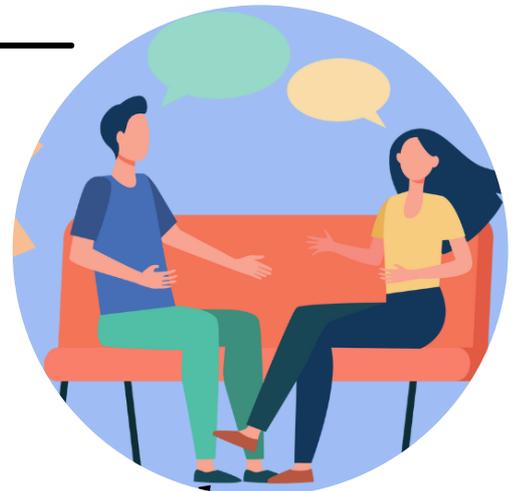
Attention Bakers!

Spring is right around the corner and we are already making plans for our Holiday Bazaar in November. This year.....the Bakery will be back!! I will be managing this area as Chere has so many other details on her plate! So.....I would love your ideas, input, and suggestions! My email is KristenK40@charter.net, please let me know your thoughts and if you can commit to providing some goodies at this time, let me know that too!

Happy baking!

Family Faith Formation Sunday- March 12

Join us for Family Faith Formation Sunday- March 12th. There will be a study in the parlor for the grown ups and lesson and games designed for our youngest church members. All are welcome. If you have questions please talk to Pastor Liz or to Jess.



Beauty and The Beast is coming to Manistee High school. Opening night is Friday March 3 at 7pm. With another show Saturday March 4th at 7pm and matinees Saturday and Sunday (the 5th) at 2pm. Tickets are \$12 for adults and \$7 for seniors and students. For tickets and information visit www.our.show/batb-23. Members of our church family with roles in this production include: Yael DeBoni as a member of the ensemble, Aphe Wojcik as Cogsworth, and Anna Herberger as Belle.

Lent Small Group Study

Join us for a Small Group Study Session this Lenten Season. We will take a closer look at the themes and art from our Lent Worship Series.

*In Person Tuesday at 7:00pm Starting February 28th
Zoom Option available, please talk to Pastor Liz if you are interested.*

Contact the
Church Office
for more
information.



seeking:
honest questions
for deeper faith

*Together
We Can!*

Or as we might say around our church, together we could! Thank you, thank you thank you to all of you who brought in Family Fare receipts. We were able to meet the goal just in time to get them turned in before the program ended. Stay tuned for more exciting news!

Manistee First Congregational Church
United Church of Christ
412 4th Street
Manistee Mi, 49660