FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
31 W. MILWAUKEE AVE., FORT ATKINSON, WI 53538

January 2026
First Congregational UCC Broadcaster

Kepler and the Star of Bethlehem

Written by William Eamon on December 24, 2011

On the evening of the 17th of October 1604, as the clouds finally lifted over the city of Prague to reveal a clear night sky, the German astronomer Johannes Kepler observed a new star in the feet of the Constellation of Serpens.

The supernova (now known as SN 1604) burned brightly through the night and was even visible the following morning. The star blazed and glittered "like the most beautiful and glorious torch ever seen when driven by a strong wind."

Kepler was convinced that the new star was the same as the one that the Three Kings followed on their way to Bethlehem. With somewhat tortured logic, he reasoned that the new star was the equivalent of one that appeared in the same constellation around the time of the birth of Christ.

He identified the supernova with a star that appeared in a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn during the years 7-5 B.C. Since the supernova of 1604 appeared in the same conjunction, he reasoned, it had to be the same as the Star of Bethlehem that showed the Magi the way to Jesus.

Kepler discovered the math to map the sky and was convinced that God had a plan and intentionality in creating the universe as it continues to be revealed.

This is the amazing phenomenon of Epiphany. It is the deep longing and searching for an internal connection to realize that the Spirit of God is there, yet it is and external looking and desiring for a sign from the universe that our lives are still in line with God's purpose for us. And though there was a star at its rising showing the way, it was directed

to a greater source of wisdom and light. It leads us to the child who knows about life and what it means to live. This Jesus is real to us in our living and because of this gives us hope and assurance for a new life that can be.

Blessings on your New Year and what Hope and assurance for what new life can be.

Pastor Sara

Council Highlights – December 2025

Annual Meeting: Our annual meeting will be held on Sunday, January 25, 2026, immediately after worship. The church and Fort Atkinson Childcare Center budgets were reviewed and approved by the Council to be voted on at the meeting. Council and Ministry members will be approved by the membership. Copies of the Annual Report will be available prior to the meeting. Please plan to attend!

Organ Update: We were all surprised recently that our organ installation was complete and organist Jayne Lubke played it! It is a wonderful sound, and we appreciate Whitewater UCC for offering it to us and all who participated in the installation. An organ fund has been established to cover the installation costs. If you are interested in contributing, please use the envelopes in the church pews and note that your donation is for the Organ Fund. Thank you!

Stewardship: Our Campaign goal is $230,000. We are currently have received $210,000 in pledges for 2026. Many thanks for supporting our church!

Winter/Holiday Market 12/6/25: We had another successful year! Our total receipts were $5339.00. Thank you to everyone who participated! Nurture, Peanuts Team, Cheese Guys, Bakery, Lend-a-Hand and Raffle Basket donations and ticket buyers!

Pastor Sabbatical: Pastor Sara is scheduled for her sabbatical in 2027. Council members are working with her to apply for a grant to assist our church financially during the time she is away. Her time away will be a period of reflection, education and rest.

Church Ministry 2026: There are many opportunities to serve your church in 2026. If you are interested in being a member of a church Ministry, please contact Linda Glendon, Vice Moderator. The Ministries are Worship, Nurture, Outreach, Church Relations, Food Pantry and Delegate.

Parking: When parking for Sunday worship, please keep the front parking spots open for people with mobility issues. We understand that parking is at a premium! Parking is available in front/side of the Hoard's building and at Badger Bank. Thank you for your consideration!

Next meeting is January 20, 2026.

Complete Council Minutes are available in the church office.

Our church celebrated the holidays in style during December. It was a venue for the Dec. 7th Fort Atkinson Winter Market, where the congregation sold baked goods, cheese, peanuts and Lend-a-Hand food jars; Nurture offered shoppers lunch; and a gift basket raffle took place.

On Sunday, Dec. 21, Nurture hosted a hot cocoa bar with sweets after worship.

On Dec. 24, 160 people filled the pews for the Christmas Eve service. It featured music by the vocal and bell choirs, as well as our "new" organ; familiar Christmas hymns; a sermon of peace by Pastor Sara; and a candlelight singing of "Silent Night."

The Nurture Ministry invites you to join us following worship on January 11 for the annual soup luncheon. Nurture will provide an assortment of bread and crackers. This is a fellowship opportunity for you to try a variety of delicious homemade soups. Look for a signup in the Narthex to bring soup, dessert, or help with dishes and cleanup.

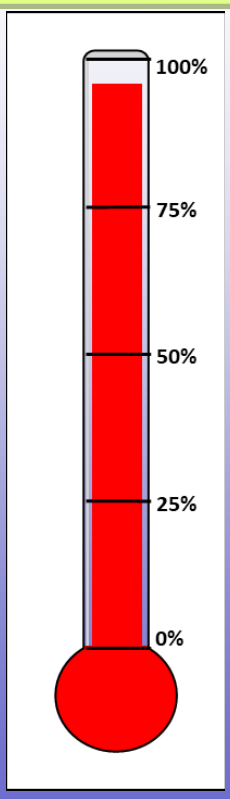
Recipes and Antique Cars

Wednesday January 21, 2026

10:00 AM to 1:00 PM in Fellowship Hall

Join us for a time of sharing. Bring a handful of recipes or pictures of antique cars and a trip down memory lane. It may be group of women gathering around to tell the story of memories making this special recipe and the flavor of joy it brought to those who joined you in company. Or on the other side of the Fellowship Hall a group of men and interested women gathering to tell of their Father's car or first purchase all the memories and fun that were had.

Stick around and share in some soup and continue fellowship over a light lunch.



2026 Stewardship Campaign

WE'RE SO CLOSE!!

Goal: $230,000

95 pledges received

Total pledged as of Dec 23, 2025: $220,945

Percent of goal achieved: 96%

Helper Schedule				
Date	**Greeters**	**Ushers**	**Lay Reader**	**Tech Support**
Jan. 4	Chris & Chad Klauer	Sue & Bob Buell	Roy Hetts	Bob Buell
Jan. 11	Sandy Mittelstadt	Tom & Patty Sehnert	Lynn Klug Stedman	Kevin Becker
Jan. 18	Pam Topel	Jeff & Susan Woods	David Stedman	Kurt Wesemann
Jan. 25	Christine Spangler	Joe & Eunice Ann Slaney	Susan Woods	Bob Buell

The Food Pantry items needed:

Mixed Fruit

Sauerkraut

Chicken Soup

Mac and Cheese

Cheerios

Jan. 4th Communion Team

Chris & Brenda Reed, Donna Abel, and Sharyl Beranek

Chase away the Winter Blewz

Sunday January 18- February 22, 2026- Books, Magazine & Puzzle Exchange Bring in books, puzzles or magazines (with your name on- if you want returned) to share and exchange. There will be a table in the narthex to pick, choose and bring back for exchange.

SAVE THE DATES

January 11—Nurture Ministry Soup Luncheon following worship

January 18—Beginning of the Book, Puzzle and Magazine exchange begins

January 25—Annual meeting following worship

HCFA Needs Donations

Outreach is asking for donations for the Homeless Coalition of Fort Atkinson from December 14 to January 11. Items needed are detergent pods, body wash, underwear (adult men and women), and winter hats and gloves (adult men and women). These items are in high demand at the Homeless Coalition. Please donate new items only. Donation baskets will be in the narthex area starting December 14. Thank you for giving to those in need!

If you would like to have an event or announcement added to the list

Please let Henry know by the 25th of each month at officefortucc@gmail.com

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UCC

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First Congregational Church
United Church of Christ