

The Community Messenger January 2026

Erica Extemporaneous

In sixth grade I learned how to write a term paper. At least I think that's what it was called. It involved notes painstakingly hand written on index cards and many trips to the public library. I was fascinated by the Readers Guide to Periodical Literature. I still remember their canned pea green binding and tissue thin paper. What a thrill it was if the periodical in question was old enough to require use of microfiche or microfilm. The latter of the two always startled me when it got to the end of the reel and it flapped right off the machine!

I also enjoyed the books found by happenstance for which you didn't even know you were searching. My paper was on the Big Band Era, so I spent a fair amount of time in the music section. A title caught my eye – *Their Words Were Music*. It wasn't quite a coffee table book, but close enough. It contained page after page of lyrics from all of the Broadway greats, and quite a few hidden gems. I recently was able to acquire a used copy of this book and I am thrilled.

I have always enjoyed musicals. Classic Rogers and Hammerstein and the like were staples when I was a child. Singing along, usually horribly off key, I considered "How to Solve a Problem Like Maria," and wondered what it might be like "If I Were a Rich Man." Andrew Lloyd Webber, Stephen Sondheim, Lin Manuel Miranda... I marvel at their ability to create a world where folks break into song at the slightest provocation.

Somewhere along the line I had an idea that lodged in my mind and morphed into a dream. I was quite fond of Margery Williams' *The Velveteen Rabbit*. True story – I somehow or another managed to come down with scarlet fever as a child. I adamantly refused the comfort of my favorite doll Betty Bean, because I was terrified that she would end up in the garbage once I got well.

I thought that I would try my hand at being a lyricist and turn the story of the Skin Horse and the Velveteen Rabbit into a musical. I hadn't thought through the logistics of a composer, but I did have several friends far more musically inclined who surely might be up for the challenge.

Off and on through the years I jotted down possible songs. I might have even started to play with the poetry I imagined such an endeavor would require. Time passed, my passion shifted, and this particular project was relegated to the half empty notebooks and scraps of paper from whence it came. But every now and then, I would daydream about toys with shiny but sharp springs and skin horses measured and slow and nursery magic.

Not too long ago, I read somewhere that an adaptation was headed to Broadway. I wanted to be excited. At the very least, curious. Instead, I felt a significant sadness settle over me. A dream I had long held died. Someone beat me to it. Someone found the time and put in the work and made it happen, doing the thing I always thought I would somehow do.

As we usher in 2026, I wonder... What dreams do you hold in your heart? How long have you been wishing and waiting, hoping and harboring, planning and pondering? What are you going to do about it? Don't let them slip away. As a dear friend once reminded me quite a few years ago when I most needed to hear it, Philippians 1:6 powerfully proclaims, "I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ." Of course, we need to find the courage to take that first step. Sometimes, though, that first step is a doozy!

POSTSCRIPT: This is why it is important to check and double check your research. Turns out, the book has been adapted into musical theater several times, if not wildly successfully. Maybe I still have time...



Take good care,

Erica



Greetings from Gabby!

Happy New Year, friends! John Howland and I hope that you had so much fun celebrating Christmas and ringing in the new year. Did you stay awake until midnight? I tried very hard, but I just couldn't do it. Monkeys really need beauty sleep!

Erica's office has been very full of Christmas things and everything she needed to help the church celebrate together. It's a lot of fun, but it's also a little scary. She had so many things on her desk, John Howland and I got lost! Thankfully, it didn't take her long to find us! The New Year is a good time to clean up and have a fresh start. I can't wait to see what kind of fun we will have in 2026!

Your friends~ Gabby
and John Howland

Brain Game!

How many words can you make from the phrase?

HAPPY NEW YEAR



Thanks to everyone that assisted with the Spaghetti dinners, especially our chef,

Jill Gardlock!



The money raised will help us continue to improve the office computers and network.

From the Open and Affirming Committee

The O&A Committee understands that there are many questions concerning the work of the committee and our goal of becoming an Open and Affirming congregation. We have therefore scheduled a series of meetings to present information and to receive questions and hear concerns. On January 18 Brandy Pauline will present "An Unconventional Walk with God". Brandy is a popular influencer on YouTube and worships regularly here at Howland Community Church.

At our Annual Meeting on February 1, Sarah Sanders will speak on "Graceful Engagement", reminding us how to listen to, and learn from each other--even when we disagree. Rev. Erica Brown will teach us what the scriptures say about "Sexuality and Sin" on February 15. On March 15, the O&A Committee will host a discussion on "What Being Open and Affirming Means". Topics will include the challenges and opportunities our congregation might face and how we might change.

Except for the Annual Meeting, these meetings will take place in the Taylor Chapel shortly after morning worship.

Operating Fund

	November Activity	YTD Balance	Budget YTD
Income	\$20,648.89	\$262,593.22	\$249,419.00
Expenses	\$15,186.02	\$240,265.31	\$249,727.00
Difference	\$5,462.87	\$22,327.91	-\$308.00

Diaconate and Elders' Schedules – January

Date	Elder	Diaconate Sanctuary (All Month)	Diaconate Kitchen (All Month)
January 4	Dawn Adgate	Becky Philbin – Captain	Sanctuary Linda Raphoon
January 11	Bim Turner	Linda Raphoon	
January 18	Sarah Sanders	Krystal Moison	JHR Jane Walters
January 25	Barb Layfield	Dan Moison	

Lectionary for January 2026

January 4, 2026

Jeremiah 31:7-14
Psalm 147:12-20
Ephesians 1:3-14
John 1:10-18

January 11, 2026

Isaiah 42:1-9
Psalm 29
Acts 10:34-43
Matthew 3:13-17

January 18, 2026

Isaiah 49:1-7
Psalm 40:1-11
1 Corinthians 1:1-9
John 1:29-42

January 25, 2026

Isaiah 9:1-4
Psalm 27:1, 4-9
1 Corinthians 1:10-18
Matthew 4:12-23

CLIENT CHOICE FOOD PANTRY



What a wonderful, giving season this has been! Thank you to our congregation for generously donating your time, talent, and monies. Those in need in our community certainly expressed their appreciation for your efforts. Our food pantries will continue, with the first date being Friday, January 16th between 3-5 pm. We expect to bring in a small order of food on Thursday morning, the 15th, and would appreciate any assistance during either of those times. ~Linda Hitmar

EXTRA! EXTRA! LEARN ALL ABOUT US!

Would you like to learn more about Howland Community Church? We are affiliated with three denominations – the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the United Church of Christ, and the International Council of Community Churches. Erica will lead a three-week study beginning the week of January 18, 2026. Recognizing that there are folks who prefer not to be out and about in the evening, yet also wanting to accommodate those who work during the day, you may choose between an afternoon or evening session – tentatively scheduled for January 20 and 27 and February 3, either at 1:00 pm or 7:00 pm. Please let Erica know if you are interested!



January 2026 - HCC Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 	2	3 1 PM NA (NH) 6 PM AA (NH)
4 10 AM Worship	5 6 PM Trustees 7 PM Boy Scouts (NH)	6	7 1 PM Women's Group (JHR)	8 5-7 PM Boundless Wonders (SH) 7 PM Game Night (JHR)	9	10 1 PM NA (NH) 6 PM AA (NH)
11 10 AM Worship Noisy Coin Offering	12 6 PM Open & Affirming Comm. 7 PM Elders 7 PM Boy Scouts (NH)	13 6 PM Budget	14 1 PM Women's Group (JHR)	15 5-7 PM Boundless Wonders (SH) 6-8 PM Girl Scouts (NH)	16 3-5 PM Client Choice Food Pantry	17 1 PM NA (NH) 6 PM AA (NH)
18 10 AM Worship Open & Affirming Comm. Meeting - after service (Chapel)	19 Martin Luther King Day - Office Closed 6 PM Finance 7 PM Official Board 7 PM Boy Scouts (NH)	20	21 1 PM Women's Group (JHR)	22 5-7 PM Boundless Wonders (SH) 7 PM Game Night (JHR)	23	24 1 PM NA (NH) 6 PM AA (NH)
25 10 AM Worship	26 7 PM Boy Scouts (NH)	27	28 1 PM Women's Group (JHR)	29	30	31 11 AM - 12:30 PM Free Fellowship Meal (SH) 1 PM NA (NH) 6 PM AA (NH)

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ELECTRONIC SERVICE REQUESTED



Reverend Erica L. Brown, Senior Minister
 Andrew Purdum, Director of Music
 Rebecca Shelton, Organist
 Minta Pitts, Custodian
 Diane Andrews, Office Coordinator
 Alan Purdum, Chair of the Congregation
 Sarah Sanders, Vice-Chair of the Congregation

The Community Messenger is the monthly newsletter of the **Howland Community Church** (affiliated with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the United Church of Christ, and the International Council of Community Churches). Our church is “**A House of Prayer for All People.**” We offer Sunday School for children and a fellowship gathering after Worship. Communion is served every Sunday.

Office Hours:
Monday – Thursday
9:00 am – 1:00 pm



International Council of Community Churches