



# Congregational Connections

Monthly Newsletter of First Congregational Church, UCC | Port Washington, Wisconsin | January 2025

## A NEW YEAR FULL OF HOPE AND PROMISE

A Message from Our Church Council Executive Team

The new year is always a good time to reflect on what's been and what's to come. We can't help but feel we are blessed in so many ways. We're still here, and you're still here. Even though things may not look as they did in the past, we choose to focus on all the positive things happening within our church.

We have experienced individuals stepping up to help with the Confirmation Class and our Church School program to enrich the church experience for our youth. Both groups have made wonderful memories this fall. Church School acted out Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem as they traveled all over our church. They also received their very own wooden nativity set to take home.

Our attendance has held steady and even increased with some services. This is due in part to our talented Chancel and Handbell Choirs.

We continue to support our local service organizations with Community Outreach initiatives while managing our own needs. Thanks to all of you who believe in our church and continue to make financial contributions and fulfill your pledge commitments. Even though we haven't had a minister in several months, we continue to support each other. Our Congregational Care team sends birthday and anniversary cards as well as cards of support. Upon request, home and hospital visits are made.

Looking ahead, we are overjoyed to announce that we have found an interim minister! On December 16, Church Council voted to move forward with a call to Rev. James Schleif as a designated part-time interim minister. You may recall that Pastor Jim was our guest leader on October 27, when he provided information about our church camps, United Church Camps Inc. (UCCI), where he works.

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## MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE TEAM continued...

Pastor Jim will begin by leading our first three Sundays this month, giving everyone an opportunity to meet him (and hopefully his wife, Beverly). In the coming months, Pastor Jim will add other pastoral duties to his half-time schedule with us, as his role with UCCI will be reduced to half-time. Church Council has been in contact with Pastor Jim since this past summer and it has given us time to share good conversation and keep in touch as both our church's journey and Pastor Jim's path have evolved. We feel blessed and honored that he will be providing theological and spiritual leadership for our congregation.

We are excited to think about all the possibilities that 2025 will bring. We hope to see you at church soon!

Church Council Executive Team

Jodi Cowen, Moderator

Phil Stepanski, Treasurer

Tracy Greymont, Associate Moderator

Rhonda Thompson, Clerk



## MEET OUR INTERIM - REV. JAMES SCHLEIF

Jim was born and raised in West Bend in a family of five children. His father taught both German and orchestra in the West Bend School District, and his mother taught in the district after the kids finished high school. Jim and his family enjoyed camping, and he was active in Boy Scouts, earning the rank of Eagle Scout. He graduated from West Bend East in 1975.



Following high school, Jim enlisted in the Navy nuclear power program and served eight years as an Electrician's Mate, four of those years on a fast attack nuclear submarine, USS Philadelphia, SSN-690, stationed out of Groton, CT. Jim was honorably discharged with the rank of E-6, Petty Officer First Class, in 1984.

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## JOIN US

We have one Sunday morning worship service at 9:00 each week. On the first Sunday, a second service is held at 10:30.

## HOLY COMMUNION

The first Sunday morning of each month we celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion, open to all who seek to follow in the way of Christ, both children and adults.

## LINKED UP

Be on the lookout for orange text - it's linked up to documents and web pages you might find helpful or interesting.

## SUBMIT INFO FOR THE NEWSLETTER

If you have a celebration, prayer request, or other contribution for the newsletter, please email the church office 7-10 days before the first day of the month.

# MEET OUR INTERIM - REV. JAMES SCHLEIF continued...

Following discharge from the Navy, Jim worked for 28 years in the commercial nuclear industry in nuclear generating station operations and operations training. The last 16 years of Jim's nuclear career were at Point Beach Nuclear Plant as a licensed senior reactor operator.

Jim finished a Bachelor of Science degree in Nuclear Engineering and Science along the way. He held several organizational leadership positions in both plant operations and emergency management.

Jim experienced a profound sense of calling to ministry in 2005 but it was at a challenging time in his life, so he ignored it for nearly eight years although that experience never faded away. After leaving the nuclear industry, the sense of calling finally won out and Jim trundled off to Chicago Theological Seminary in the fall of 2013.

Jim started serving St. John's UCC - Hartford and St. John's UCC - Slinger as a

licensed student pastor in September 2015 and was ordained and installed in June 2016. Jim started assisting the United Church Camps, Inc. (UCCI) in 2019 and although that role was never intended to fully replace church ministry, Jim was asked to accept the baton as Executive Director in spring of 2022.

The journey of leading and stabilizing UCCI and working to ensure a sustainable path forward has been a consuming endeavor. Jim now looks to draw back from full-time UCCI leadership, while allowing a part-time return to church ministry at First Congregational Church.

Jim is married to Beverly, and they share a blended family of three children and five grandchildren. They enjoy time with family, camping, biking, kayaking, and cross-country skiing. Prior to the journey to ministry, they enjoyed yearly trips to the Rocky Mountains, camping in the summer and fall and downhill skiing in the winter.



## A NEW TERM AND CONCEPT FOR OUR CONGREGATION - “DESIGNATED” INTERIM MINISTRY

*A designated-term interim pastor is called for a specific time period and is eligible for the settled position or for a renewed designated term, according to the initial call agreement.*

*-taken from Guide to Pastoral Search and Call  
Wisconsin Conference UCC Interim Guidebook*

Our interim candidate, Pastor Jim, will be leading services the first three weeks of January. He has a prior commitment the morning of our Winter Congregational Meeting on January 26. An interim call agreement will be formalized in the coming weeks and will include the concept of “designated” interim ministry. A designated interim can be called as a settled pastor should both the congregation and minister agree. This possibility is discussed before the initial contract is signed. Our Winter Congregational Meeting will be an opportune time for all of us to learn more about the designated-term and part-time interim arrangement with Pastor Jim and forward steps in our Search and Call process.



## A NEW SEASON - LETTER FROM REV. JAMES SCHLEIF

Dear Friends and Family of First Congregational Church,

Ecclesiastes 3, verse 1, informs us, "For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven". This is the Christmas season in the Christian church calendar and the season of a new year as we journey into 2025. It is also, excitingly, the beginning of a season of shared interim ministry for me with all of you!

My first introduction to First Congregational Church was in 2020, but that intersection led us both in different directions, mine being a season of leadership with the United Church Camps, Inc. (UCCI) at a pivotal post-COVID time in outdoor ministry. Although fleeting, that 2020 intersection left a positive impression of FCC as a church that unapologetically spoke loudly and lived into an inclusive, welcoming, and mission-based community ministry.

Fast forward to this season as I look to draw back my role with UCCI and replant at least one foot in local church ministry. The positive impression from 2020 coupled with the opportunity to step into a shared vocational role between outdoor and local church ministry brings us back together. Your Church Council Executive Team and I have been in exploratory conversation over the last few months as we both considered what a pastoral relationship might look like. Those conversations were also informed by wider church leadership and recently led to a meeting with a broader group of your Church Council who voted favorably to move forward into a 'Designated Interim' relationship.

What is a Designated Interim Minister and what does it mean? As with all interim seasons, we recognize that both FCC and for me vocationally, we are in a period of transition. The "designated" term means that as we enter this collective journey, the door is open to a longer-term relationship, perhaps a call to settled ministry, depending on the needs and desires of the church. I see this interim time as an opportunity to provide stability and consistency in a pastoral leadership role and earnestly invest in the future direction and vision for FCC. We prayerfully enter a season of exploration and growth while continuing to discern the path of transition in a mutually supportive pastoral relationship.

Practically speaking, we will do a slow start with me providing pulpit supply for the first three Sundays in January. This allows time together before your Congregational Meeting and budget vote on January 26, and allows me to honor previous Camp Sunday commitments. We should be on track to formally enter a covenantal relationship in February or March, prior to Lent.

I look forward, with eager anticipation, to this next season of shared interim ministry. We know that there will be challenges in exploring how to best utilize a half-time ministerial position, and as I work to maintain a healthy balance between camp, church, and personal life. The process of 'getting to know each other' is always challenging but exciting as well. As we enter this season, and all seasons, we rejoice in the presence of Emmanuel, God with us, and as the days begin to lengthen, we also prayerfully look to brighter days in the emerging future of First Congregational Church!

With blessings,  
Pastor Jim