



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST



THE LINK

76 South Wisconsin Street Elkhorn, Wisconsin 53121

Office Hours: Mon. Tue. Fri. 9:00 am - 1:00 pm
Wed. 11:00 am - 1:00 pm Thurs.- Closed

E-mail: ElkhornUCC@gmail.com
Pastor: Rev. Carly Gaeth

Web: ElkhornUCC.org
Phone: 262-723-3246

FEBRUARY 2026

Pastor Carly's Corner:

As I sit in my office this morning huddled under the warmth of a blanket, wishing I had a space heater and trying to remember why I live in Wisconsin (no hurricanes, no earthquakes, no mudslides), doing my best to channel the spirit of my ancestors who have bravely stood outside in sub zero temperatures in the name of grilling the perfect bratwurst, I find myself focusing not on the icy chill but the warmth I feel within these walls.

Though I may *literally* feel frozen to my core, spiritually I feel nothing but the warm glow of grace and faith coming from all around. The love that has been reaped and cultivated throughout the years is so palpable to me when I enter into our sacred space. And I wonder if you all feel the same? If that same sense of love and warmth is what brings you back time and again to our beloved community?

It's no secret that the last few years (COVID namely) have affected our congregation immeasurably— we have seen members fall away, key events and fundraisers dissolve, and a tangible dip in our collective spirit. It has been a difficult and uncertain time for us all; it's easy to feel defeated. And that's okay! The world is a mess and we are all just trying to slog through it with our sanity intact, day by day.



So, on the days when I feel optimistic and hopeful for the coming journey, I celebrate and cherish the joy and the blessings of everyday life. And, on the days when I feel exhausted and unable to see the glass as anything other than half empty (or sometimes completely empty), I lean into the warm glow of generations; the sacred space of all those who have gathered here in the spirit of hope for the future and a desire for a peaceful world.

Perhaps, if you're like me, the act of leaning in can prove salvific. For it is in our perseverance, and in seeking the light, that we find resilience and hope.

Peace and blessings,
Pastor Carly

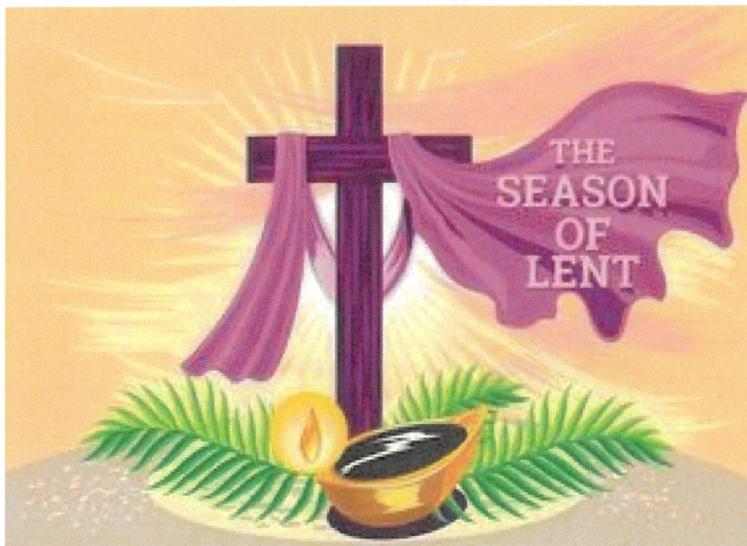
ASH WEDNESDAY is FEBRUARY 18th



Our church will be having our Ash Wednesday service on February 18th at 6:00 p.m. Mark your calendars for this date and watch your bulletin and church emails for more information about our Ash Wednesday service.

Lenten Punch Cards!

It's hard to believe that we are just a few weeks away from the liturgical season of Lent. As my grandfather used to say— *The days go slow but the years go fast.* Ain't that the truth???



I know that in years previous, members would write a Lenten devotional to share their thoughts and ideas about the season and about certain scripture passages. I love that idea! And I would love to, eventually, return to that practice. But, this year I thought we might do something a little different: Lenten Punch Cards.

The theme for Lent is *Listen*. We spend so much time in conversation with others, offering our opinions, and sharing our ideas. How often do we stop and really listen? How often do we sit in the quietude and stillness of creation and intentionally listen for the voice of our still-speaking God? How often do we seek the presence of the Holy Spirit?

Lent is a time for reflection and discernment and meditation. So, as a means of encouragement for us all to engage in our own listening, I've created punch cards. Each time you intentionally set time aside to listen to the Holy One, punch a hole in your punch card. And if you manage to punch all 10 punches, you will receive a handmade bookmark from me.

I know it may seem silly, but sometimes having a bit of an incentive helps us to build healthy habits and lock in to a new practice. Punch cards will be made available at our Ash Wednesday service (February 18th at 6:00 p.m.) and can be picked up at any point during the Lenten season. If you have any questions, feel free to ask! Thanks.

“Giving” for Lent

During the season of Lent we are planning to collect items for the Elkhorn Food Pantry for our “giving” instead of “giving up” campaign.

We will start collecting on Sunday, February 22nd and continue to do so each Sunday through Easter Sunday, April 5th.

You may bring items to church on Sundays or during regular office hours. Place your items upfront in the sanctuary on the small communion table to the left. Our Mission and service team will make sure they are taken to the Elkhorn Food Pantry on the days they are open.

The items that we are collecting are what the Food Pantry frequently runs out of. Following is a list of what items are needed. and the week we will be collecting them. If you miss a week, it is still ok to bring in the item from the week before. All donations are appreciated.

Thank you in advance, The Mission and Service Team.



Items for the Elkhorn Food Pantry

- February 22** - beef and chicken broth and pasta sauce
- March 1** - canned meats (chicken, tuna, spam, and beef stew)
- March 8** - hamburger and tuna helper
- March 15** - granola bars and pop tarts
- March 22** - pasta sides, rice blends and mac and cheese
- March 29** - strawberry and grape jelly and mayonnaise
- April 5** - pancake mix and syrup



Soup-er Bowl Sunday

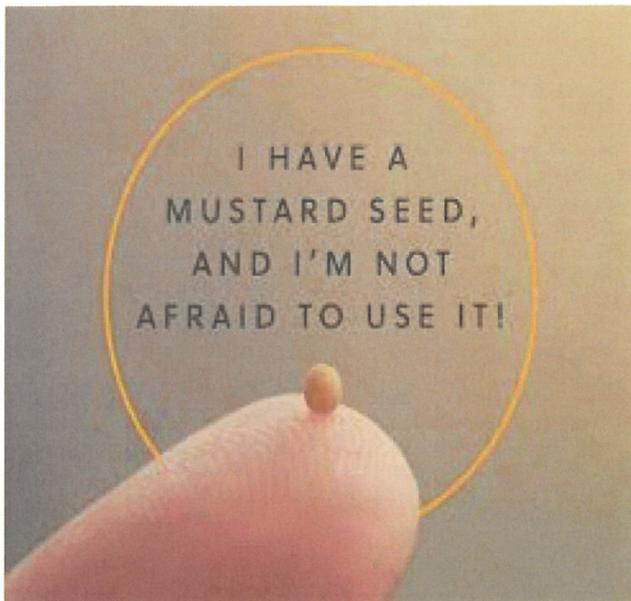
I’m not really one for football (as you might have guessed). When I go to a Super Bowl party, I’m really just in it for the commercials and the snacks. But for me, it’s just another Sunday. And as I was trying to think of different ways for us to connect with one another and come together, I thought that it would be fun to share a cozy meal with a punny name. Thus, Soup-er Bowl Sunday was born!

Here’s the idea: different folks can sign up to bring soup to church on February 9th. We ask that, if you do bring soup, that you bring it in a crockpot so that it can be kept warm during our worship service. Then, after the service is over, we can all head downstairs and enjoy a warm bowl of soup together before

we rush off to our respective Super Bowl parties in the afternoon and evening. For those who would rather not bring soup, you could bring a dessert, a beverage, a side, or something else entirely.

The goal is to come together in community to share a meal at a time of year that can be somewhat isolating.

There’s a sign-up sheet in the sanctuary so we know how many folks to plan for. All are welcome! I look forward to being with you all!



Mustard Seed

A Season of Love: Family Prayers for Lent

As many of you well know, Lent is the season just before Easter in our liturgical year. It begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday (the day before Easter). There are 40 days in the season of Lent (a significant number as it represents the number of days Jesus spent in the wilderness resisting temptation and preparing to begin his important ministry), but Sundays are not included in that count because each Sunday is considered to be a “mini-Easter”. During this time, we remember God’s great love for us. We also remember the sacrifice Jesus made for us. In 1 John 4:10 we read, “This is love:

not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” (NIV)

This year during Lent, we will be sending daily prayers to you—one week at a time. These prayers will be included with Monday’s email, starting the week of Ash Wednesday. For those of you who do not have email or perhaps for anyone preferring a hard copy, they will be printed out and available on Sunday of that week. This might be a great way for you and your family to think about God’s amazing love during this season of Lent. The prayers will be based on verses from the Bible. Some days you might pray the words of the verse—other days the prayer might help you understand and apply those words to your daily lives. It is our hope that this plan will help you deepen your faith as we look toward Easter Sunday!

Meditation Practice

As winter drones on and the temperatures continue to drop, we have the opportunity to quiet ourselves and bask in the stillness of a Wisconsin February. But, I have to tell you that despite having more time at home and a plethora of occasions to meditate and take time for myself, I rarely do. There’s something about sitting still that I find challenging—which is, arguably, why I so desperately need to practice it—and so I’ve decided to embrace movement and activity. This month, rather than sitting still and repeating a word or mantra to yourself, I challenge you to take that time to create an altar. Find a space in your home—it doesn’t have to be big—where you can clear away clutter and create a sacred corner for yourself. In that corner, I invite you to find things that help you feel grounded and call you home.

Maybe what helps you feel grounded is a blanket from your childhood, a candle that smells like something heavenly, a scarf that someone knitted for you a million years ago, or a family photo. Whatever these items may be, gather them in love and place them intentionally in your new-found space. Feel free to add or change things out as often as you need. Make it feel truly comfortable and full of divine peace and then spend some time there every day.

If you feel so inclined, I invite you to take a picture of your altars and send them to me. I’d love to see them and to hear the stories behind the elements.



RaiseRight Cards

Our next *RaiseRight* order will be due on Sunday, February 8th. Chances are, they will be back by Valentine's Day so you could get that special Valentine in your life a *RaiseRight* card! These cards are available for many area shops and restaurants and can even be used for the purchase of your everyday needs such as gas, groceries, pharmacies, etc. You will find a complete listing of cards available for purchase on the table in the back of the sanctuary. Orders along with payment (check made out to Women's Fellowship) can be turned in to the office by Sunday, February 8th. And if you ARE purchasing something for Valentine's Day, please let us know so we can call you when they come in to arrange for an early pickup. Otherwise cards will be handed out in Church on Sunday, February 15th.



Book Club - February Northern Confidential

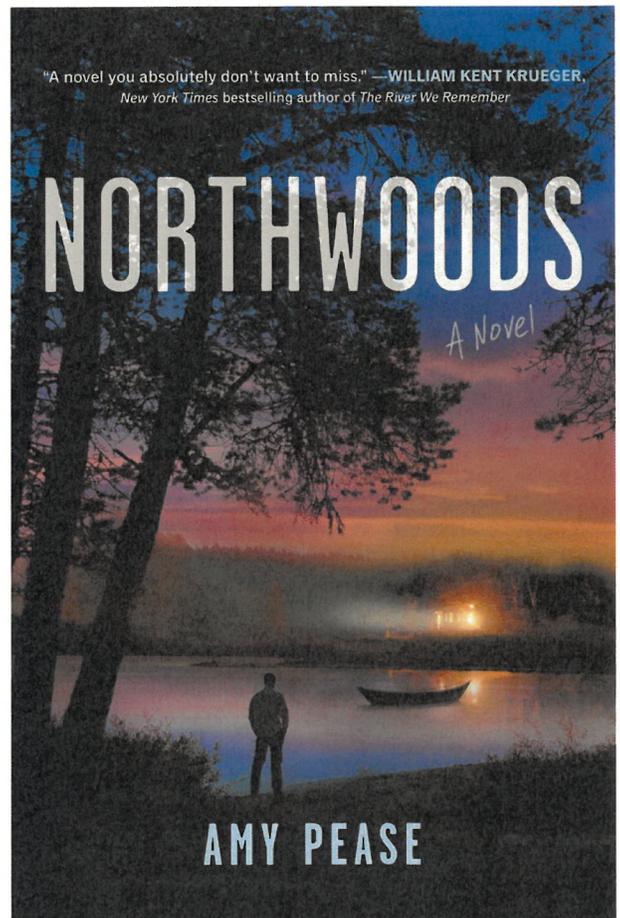
Slippery criminal forces are generally associated with big cities, usually the "seedier" segments of those places. There are, however, a number of authors who are setting their crime novels in less "traditional" locations. The novel chosen for February, *Northwoods*, by Amy Pease uses its title as an obvious indicator, the locale in which the story is set. For us in this part of the country, I am sure that in seeing the title, we would automatically think of Northern Wisconsin. We would be right. The title, I might add, is a play on words, as the main character is named Eli North.

Eli is described as having been a crack investigator for the Wisconsin Fish and Game commission. Subsequently, he was sent to Afghanistan as part of his reserve unit. There, he was severely wounded. Upon his release and discharge Eli found work in his home town as a policeman. His mother, Marge, is the chief of police. The Shaky Lake police force consists of four officers. Phil and Jake are the other two.

Shaky Lake is described as being somewhere north of Chippewa Falls, one of the few actual Wisconsin locations actually mentioned.

At the opening of the novel we see Eli staggering around a small, six cabin resort, extremely drunk, trying to determine the source of some loud music coming from somewhere on the grounds. During the course of his "investigation" he comes across a rowboat tied to a pier, inside is the body of a young teenage boy, Ben Sharpe. The mystery begins. How and why was Ben murdered?

The novel is a murder mystery. Ben was not a drug user. He was murdered; he had been administered an injection of a lethal drug (it turns out to have been Fentanyl). Soon after the discovery of the crime, Marge and Eli are informed that a sixteen-year old girl, Caitlin Wallace has disappeared. She and her mother Rachel were staying at the resort. They were the only guests there. Caitlin was supposed to have



been with Ben the day before. The goal, therefore, of the protagonists, is to find out who killed Ben and where is Caitlin?.

Ms. Pease primary goal seems to be to sound the alarm about drug use and abuse not just in large cities, but in rural areas as well. Drug use, from Pease's perspective, involves not just illegal drugs like cocaine, heroine, and Fentanyl, but also legal drugs like alcohol. A majority of characters in the novel are users and abusers of at least one of these drugs. Some like Ben are not users, but have been forced into being abusers, with deadly results.

Caitlin's father, Calvin, works for a large, fictitious drug company. He has remained behind in Chicago when his wife and daughter have taken their trip to Shaky Lake. Gradually, Cal becomes more integral to the story. Since it is a mystery, there is no sense in disclosing much more.

Pease seems intent on using the novel as a warning that the fabric of any community can be torn apart by the abusive use of any drug. Small towns like Shaky Lake can be devastated, in some ways, even more so than large, urban areas, because, once the insulation of the close knit community is torn, the communities have an even smaller chance of dealing with it.

The only problem with the novel is that her message is not original any more. There are a number of authors who have issued the warning which Ms. Pease echoes.

We will meet at Merry Kay Opitz's house on February 11th, Wednesday at 2:00 p.m.
Bill Neis



Self-care Challenge

Sometimes I catch a glimpse of my sad, cracked, scaly, dinosaur-looking hands and gasp in horror! The bitter cold and the dry air take a toll on my body in more ways than I can count.

You'd think that I'd be used to it by now, but I never seem to learn.

So, our challenge this month, to hydrate our bodies— drink water, give a little extra attention to our skin, run a humidifier.

Small things often make a big difference! :)

Women's Fellowship

Women's Fellowship will not be holding a formal meeting this month. Rather, we will be meeting at the Elk Restaurant on Thursday, February 12, at 9:00 am for breakfast and fellowship. Please call Donna Riese (262-379-01722) or the church office (262-723-3246) if you are planning to join us. Here's to favorable weather on that day! If it isn't and we have to change our plans, we will give you a call. Hope to see you there!

We are still selling car wash cards for Kwik Trip and our sales are going well! We still have cards available so let us know if you want to purchase one. The cost is \$36 for five basic car washes.



Contact the church office if you need one and take off that layer of salt on your car!

Snow Shoveling Fund

Thank you to everyone that has given to our Snow shoveling fund so far this year! We are happy with all of the donations that have come in and we were able to pay Addison Dillner for all of the times he shoveled our walkways so far!

But as we all know, winter is not over yet. Donations are still being accepted. We have special blue envelopes available in the back of the sanctuary for you to use and place in the offering plates. Thanks again for your help. And a big thank you to Addison!



Spirit of Hope Meal Delivery Update

Our final Spirit of Hope Men's Shelter meal for this winter, will be delivered on Saturday, March 7th. There is a sign up sheet available at church. If you would like to help out by preparing a portion of the meal, please contact Barb Townsend at 262-903-6509.

March 7th will be here quickly! We appreciate any help you will be able to offer. We are fortunate to have this available for those in need in our community.

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Elkhorn, Wisconsin

Church Council Meeting Minutes Via Zoom

January 20th, 2025 at 7:00 P.M.

The meeting was **called to order** at 7:02 p.m. by Moderator Jennifer Neis. Those in attendance were Barb Townsend, Pastor Carly Gaeth, Cindy Waller, Diane Licht, Jean Lile, Carol Prchal, Bobbi Rader, Tina Kruger, Tom Stepp, Jamie Stilling Stepp and Dorothy Bever.

The **Opening Prayer** was given by Pastor Carly Gaeth.

Jennifer Neis extended a big "Thank You" to everyone on Council adding that we have a full slate of officers! **Additions to the agenda:** None at this time.

Approval of December 16, 2025 Council Minutes: Barb Townsend moved to approve the minutes from the December 16, 2025 Council meeting as presented. Seconded by Bobbi Rader. The motion was carried unanimously.

Treasurer's Report - Tina Kruger presented and explained the end of year treasurer's report adding that the OCWM contribution has been sent to Conference. Following slight discussion, Tom Stepp moved to approve the Treasurer's report as presented, seconded by Diane Licht. The motion to approve carried unanimously.

Pastor's Moment: Pastor Carly submitted her monthly report on what things she has done in the last month and the things she is working on. Ash Wednesday is February 18 and this year's theme for Lent is "Listen". Pastor Carly presented additional ideas heading into the new year.

Ministry Leaders' Reports/Updates: A report was submitted from Faith Formation.

Old Business: Snow Removal Payment: Cindy Waller stated that Bobbi has provided blue envelopes to receive donations to help cover costs for snow removal from the church sidewalks and stairs. Cindy Waller stated that \$410 has been received to date and Carol added that Addison Dillner is doing a good job. Cindy will have his payment available.

Ministry Leader's meeting - January 20: Barb Townsend stated that the Ministry Leaders had a productive meeting and gave a report on all that was discussed.

New Business: Audit: Haiden Kruger, Jamie Stilling Stepp and Tina Kruger will set a date to meet to do the church audit. Cindy added that she has a form to sign once the audit is completed.

Office: new computer back up unit: Cindy stated that following some computer issues, Mark Skala was contacted and he has installed a new computer back up unit.

Ash Wednesday/Lent season: Jennifer stated that Lent season begins February 18 and Council discussed trying some of Pastor Carly's Lenten ideas. Barb will provide a prayer calendar.

Lenten Devotional - alternative ideas: Council discussed alternative ideas to the Lenten Devotionals that have been used in the past.

"Giving Away instead of Giving Up": Diane suggested that we again give to the food pantry. **Carly's**

ideas from Christmas letter: ONA, Community Closet, Children's clothing swap, Vacation Bible School: Following discussion, Jennifer and Carol stated that they would work with Pastor Carly to put her ideas into motion.

Ways to get Carly and the Church more into the public in Elkhorn: Council discussed different options to get the church and Pastor Carly involved more into the Elkhorn public.

Closing Prayer given by Jennifer Neis.

Adjournment: Barb Townsend moved to adjourn, seconded by Bobbi Rader. The motion carried unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 7:48 p.m.

The **next Council meeting** of the Church Council will be **February 17th, 2026** at 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Dorothy Bever, Church Clerk

*Please note that final approval of the minutes will be made at the February Council meeting.





FEBRUARY 2026



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 10:00 a.m. WORSHIP ONLINE & IN PERSON	2	3	4	5	6	7
8 10:00 a.m. WORSHIP ONLINE & IN PERSON 11:00 a.m. Soup-er Bowl Lunch RaiseRight Due	9	10	11 2:00 p.m. Book Club— Home of Merry Kay Opitz	12 9:00 a.m. Women's Fellowship Breakfast at <i>The Elk Restaurant</i>	13	14
15 10:00 a.m. WORSHIP ONLINE & IN PERSON	16	17 7:00 p.m. Church Council	18 6:00 p.m. ASH WEDNESDAY Service 	19	20	21
22 10:00 a.m. WORSHIP ONLINE & IN PERSON	23	24	25	26	27	28
MEALS ON WHEELS						
	J LILE & L MCCORMICK	B & C KRUSE	R KNUTSON & T BAILEY	T & J STEPP	B NEWMAN & D RIESE	
MARCH 1 10:00 a.m. WORSHIP ONLINE & IN PERSON	2	3	4	5	6	7

Weather Cancellations

Just a reminder:..

If the weather is questionable on a Sunday morning, chances are we will be cancelling our Sunday services to keep everyone home and safe.

If that is the case, a group email will be sent from the church Gmail account by 8:00 a.m. that morning. A notice will also be posted on Facebook.

Should the weather make a turn for snowy or icy conditions, please check your email or Facebook before starting out to church!



From our MISSION AND SERVICE TEAM



Thanks to all of you that donated for the Hungry Hippo in the family room!! We will be sending a check for \$350.00 to support New Beginnings APFV.

The next mission we will support is Lakeland Animal Shelter.
Place your cash donations in our little Hippo found in the family room.
All of your contributions are greatly appreciated!

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

Jim Forster	01
David Neis	01
Maddie Stoltz	01
Ethan Hay	01
Carole Kruse	04
Sammy Morris	04
Emily Gould	04
Craig Stevens	05
Scott Lile	05
Lynn Phillips	05
Steven Brandenburg	09
Dixie Fiegel	11
Tyler Breaman	12
Jean Lile	14
Nicklyn Lile	14
Kyra Brown	19
Sarah Stodola	19
Carla Stevens	20
Kenneth Phillips	21
Cheryl Dillner	24
Randy Hash	24
Darcy Knutson	25
Brett Heckert	26
Travis Breaman	27
Justin Opitz	28
Karen Schaible	28



Coffee Fellowship Time

Hosting coffee fellowship is easy. Bring a treat, brew a small pot of coffee (coffee and pot provided) and sign up on the sheet on the table in the back of the sanctuary. It is always great to gather together after worship for conversation, coffee, juice and a little treat.

Thank you for hosting!

FEBRUARY ANNIVERSARIES



Lay Worship Leaders

Feb. 1	Sara Gould
Feb. 8	Mindy Brunswick
Feb. 15	Jean Lile
Feb. 22	Cheryl Dillner



Ushers

Feb. 1	Jean Lile and Cindy Waller
Feb. 8	_____
Feb. 15	_____
Feb. 22	_____



Coffee Fellowship

Feb. 1	_____
Feb. 8	Soup-er Bowl Lunch
Feb. 15	_____
Feb. 22	_____



**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
United Church of Christ**
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Elkhorn, WI 53121
Phone: 262 723-3246



***SUNDAY
WORSHIP
10:00 a.m.***

Join us for worship
every Sunday in person
starting at 10:00 a.m.
Watch our recorded service
online on YouTube or
on our website: elkhornucc.org

Sunday School 10:00 a.m. September through May