



# 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](mailto:ElkhornUCC@gmail.com)

Pastor: Rev. Carly Gaeth

Web: [ElkhornUCC.org](http://ElkhornUCC.org)

Phone: 262-723-3246

# MARCH 2026

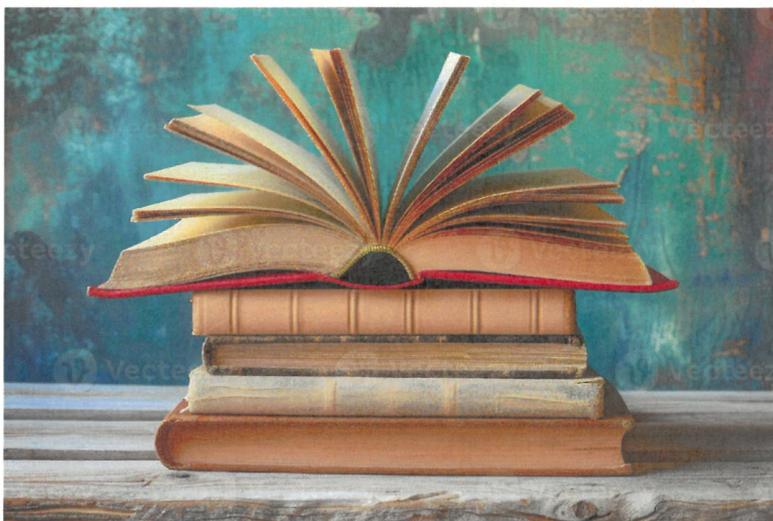
## Pastor Carly's Corner:

I've never been a big reader. When some might spend all day sitting in a comfy chair with a cup of coffee and a good book, I paint or write or cook. When others host book club, I host Zoom meetings about reality TV. When others listen to audiobooks, I listen to podcasts. I've just never gravitated towards studying the written word (interesting that I'm a pastor, no?)— I'm such an audio-visual person, with a soft spot for drama. Staring at words on a page sometimes feels too still, too quiet, and too inward.

But in the last couple of weeks, I've found myself soaking up all kinds of texts: our book club book *The Paris Library*, poetry by Maya Angelou and Mary Oliver and Jan Richardson, articles on global news and politics, short stories about resistance groups and activists all over the world, and harrowing first accounts of people's real, lived experiences of all kinds.

It seems like I've reached a point in my life where I am hungry for information, yearning to know more and desperate to dig deeper. Perhaps everything going on in Minnesota and all of the changes we've seen in the world have catapulted me into a different mental space where I want, desperately, to understand the complex systems of the world and its people, to see where the fault lines of

injustice lie, and to read stories of resilience and hope. Perhaps I've simply lost touch with it all over the years and my soul has said: "enough." Perhaps my anxious mind can no longer withstand the ambiguity of the current climate. Perhaps it is all of these and more.



Regardless of why I feel compelled to read all of these things, I find it to be the perfect time to do so. The theme for the season of Lent is *Listen* and it is my hope that it will be a time for us to return to simplicity and to look inward toward ourselves and our faith journeys. It is an opportunity for us to take stock of who we are and what we believe and, in turn, allow ourselves to listen to the voice of our still-speaking God. It is a time for us to lean in to the nudging of the Holy Spirit and reflect on where we've been and where we'd like to go.

So in this time of Lenten quietude, I invite you to lean in with me so that we might discover old truths and new values, cobalt woes and marigold joys, steadfast hope and unshakable love.

Peace,  
Pastor Carly



## Lenten Punch Cards!

Millennials, like myself, are famous for incentivizing the menial tasks of our everyday lives. And, it is a well-known fact that I need the promise of a reward to get through the monotonously grueling parts of my day. So, as encouragement for all of us to lean in to our Lenten theme of *Listen* I have created Lenten punch cards. Each card has 10 spaces to be hole punched— one for every time you take the opportunity to listen, intentionally, to the still-speaking voice of God.

And, if you manage to fill your whole punch card, you can bring it to my office and receive a handmade bookmark from me. It's not much and it might seem silly, but think of what can be gained from consistently creating time to listen, to pray, and to meditate.

## Wednesday Morning Lenten Devotion

In the spirit of practicing what I preach and moving away from hypocrisy, I am offering a short Lenten devotion on Wednesday mornings at 11:00 a.m. I encourage you, if you're able, to come and join me in the sanctuary for a time of prayer and reflection— a time to listen to the nudgings of the Holy Spirit and to ground ourselves in the quietude of the Lenten season. All are welcome!

## “Giving” for Lent

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

We started collecting on Sunday, February 22nd and will 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 most frequently. This 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

- 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

## Beginnings and Endings

“Every new beginning comes from some other beginning’s end.”

The line written above is taken from a song recorded sometime in the 80s called, “Closing Time”. And right now, the music in our church is at that point. As you may already know, Denise Hofh has been our pianist and even our choir director (back in the days when we had a choir) since 1995. She has come to a point in her life where she feels it is time for her to resign from that role. We have greatly enjoyed her music and are thankful to have had her for so many years! We wish her the best of luck and good health in her retirement.

We are also very pleased to announce that James Letellier will be joining us as our full-time musician. James has been our “third Sunday sub” since the summer of 2022. We welcome him to our church family as our full-time musician and look forward to both his playing as well as his singing!



## One Great Hour of Sharing

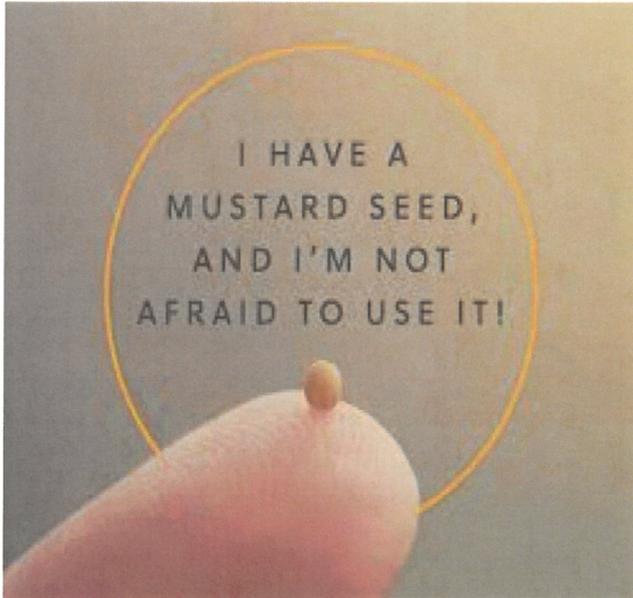
### Our Love Offering to the World

One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) is a vital special mission offering of the United Church of Christ. It connects you to disaster relief, refugee assistance, and development efforts around the globe. When disasters strike, or when individuals are displaced due to violence or poverty, OGHS ensures immediate response and ongoing recovery.

Through your support, OGHS funds comprehensive development programs in areas such as healthcare, education, agriculture, food security, microfinancing, and women's empowerment. By partnering with Global Ministries and international response networks, OGHS maximizes its impact. Your contributions help meet urgent needs while addressing the root causes of vulnerability, ensuring long-term, sustainable solutions for affected communities.

Our church will be collecting for One Great Hour of Sharing on Sunday, March 15th. There will be special envelopes available in the bulletins and at each entryway the Sunday before. Let us share a love offering with and to the world!





# Mustard Seed

## The Chosen

There has never been a time when I have suggested a TV series in this column but that changes as of this month. I began watching “The Chosen” and, over the last couple months, it has sucked me in with its engaging storytelling. If you have a subscription to Prime, I highly recommend this show.

This historical production, which began in 2017, is based on the life of Jesus and his early followers. It is thought to be a rather authentic look at the revolutionary life and teachings of Jesus. There are currently five seasons with eight episodes each. IMDb (Internet Movie Database) has it scored at 9.1 out of 10 possible stars, noting that it is rising in popularity. A sixth season will be coming out next year at this time.

From what I have seen, much of this series coincides to stories and scripture found in the Bible. Its producers state they start from scripture as a primary source but do add things needed to flesh out the stories told. An example of this might be tax collector Matthew who is portrayed with autistic tendencies. Another would be the inclusion of Peter’s wife, Eden. I find these additions help to make the story more real—even adding a bit of humor at times. They don’t distract from the stories I know.

If you do choose to watch this show (or have already watched it), please let me know what you think about it because I would love to hear your reaction. And if you do watch it, I will also suggest you watch the full credits of the final episode of each season because they include the outtakes from that season which can be very amusing!

In faith—

Barb

## Meditation Practice

I’m a lover of labyrinths. They are some of my absolute favorite spaces to move and think and pray. I love the action of walking along the path toward center, and using that forward motion to empty my mind and ensnare my senses. It’s such a lovely way to just *be*.

The meditation practice for this month is to engage in that same process to bring about mind-body connection. If you are aware of labyrinths that are available to the public, I challenge you to take the time to walk it. If you are unable to do so, I challenge you to emulate the same idea within your own context. Find a place— either outside or inside— where you can walk, unobstructed. With another space in mind as your center, create a pattern of movement in your particular space, with every repetition leading you closer to that spiritual center. What do you notice coming up for you? Any specific thoughts or images?

Once you have reached the quiet center, spend some time with your breath and noticing the different parts of your body. When your time at center has come to a close, exit its space with the same intention with which you entered.



# Soup-er Bowl Sunday

Thank you to everyone that shared in our Soup-er Bowl lunch in Fellowship Hall that was held after worship, on Sunday, February 8th. There were about 15 of us in attendance. We had plenty of food that include three delicious soups, snacks, cornbread, crackers, cheese, dips, bread, fresh veggies, and cookies and a dessert torte! Great conversations were had at the big round tables as well as a question game for us to play.

Thank you to everyone that attended and to everyone that brought the meal, helped set up and helped clean up afterwards. And especially thank you to Pastor Carly for coming up with this fun Idea for us to get together.



## RaiseRight Cards

Our next RaiseRight order will be due on Sunday, March 8. These cards can be used for many items you purchase on a regular basis such as gas, groceries, pharmacies, etc.). A complete list of participating merchants can be found 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 church office by March 8th. The cards will be available on the following Sunday. Thank you for your purchases!



## Book Club - March

### Odile and Lily

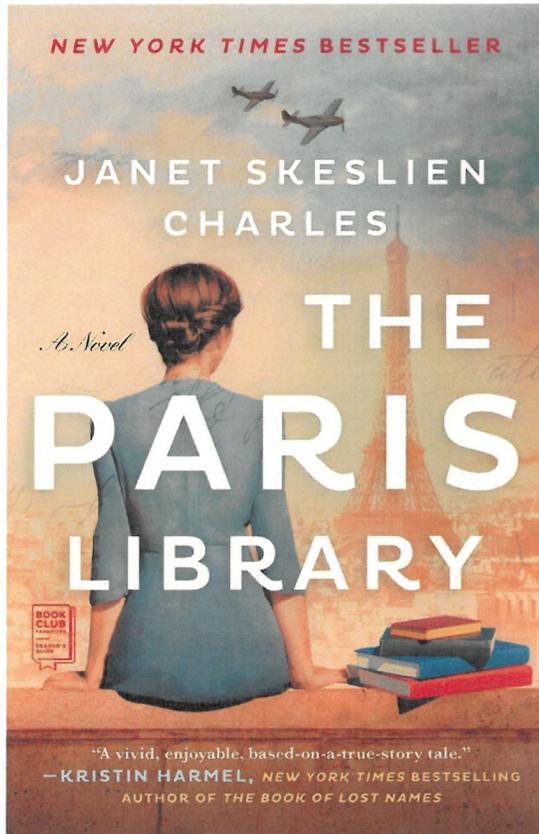
The book chosen for March is *The Paris Library* by Janet Skeslien Charles. Like many novels being written these days, the narrative shifts between two different time periods. Odile's story is the fulcrum around which the story unfolds. The story begins with Odile, as a young Parisian woman, seeking employment at the American Library in Paris. She speaks both French and English. The year is 1939.

The American Library in Paris actually does exist. The novel does not get much into specifics about exactly how it is funded and run, but it is clear that it is directed by sources in the United States. The head librarian is a Mrs. Reeder, who is American. She hires Odile, and the story then revolves around her fellow employees and some of the individuals who frequent the library. Apparently, anyone could be a subscriber. The books, of course, were written in English. Interestingly, the library delivers books to its patrons as well as being a place where they can come and use the reference rooms, or use it in all the other ways which libraries function.

1939 was the year which saw the opening of World War II. The war years 1939 to 1945 shape Odile's story. Remy, her brother, and Paul a Parisian policeman form two threads which help focus the narrative. Remy, is captured by the Germans, and Odile's letters to and from him make the war more personal early on. Paul and Odile are first acquaintances, and later are in love.

comes to the library first as a patron, and soon as a volunteer. Odile and she become very good friends. Margaret introduces Odile into a world which she could probably only dream of. Once the city is occupied, it becomes more and more difficult for Margaret to maintain the bonds which had developed. There are tragic consequences later in the story.

The protection of the library as the war brings the Germans into Paris as an occupation force becomes the primary focus of the story as the novel unfolds. Luckily, the German commander assigned to oversee, and possibly shut down the library is very sympathetic. The novel is interesting because the evil which the Nazis represented is not as oppressive as we imagine it will be. It is insidious. The menace which the library, its patrons, employees, and the entire city must face builds gradually, and insidiously. Delivering books to the patrons becomes more and more fraught with danger.



Now, Lily's story takes place in Montana from the years 1983 to '88. She is a "typical" adolescent who is navigating some of the difficulties of the high school age girl. The main tragedy which she faces involves the illness and fairly early death of her mother. Lily is looking for ways to be able to stand on her own. Her next-door neighbor, Mrs. Gustafson, helps her to do so. Who is Mrs. Gustafson? She is Odile. The war widow, and former Parisian helps Lily to deal with the trials which she faces. Her mother has passed away. She has a new stepmother, Beatrice. Beatrice gives birth to a son, and soon after, another son. Lily is coping with the typical boy-girl, bullying classmate, confusing adolescent traumas that many middle-high school age girls (and boys) face.

Odile becomes an important force in Lily's life. Lily is drawn to her sophistication, but also is buoyed by her reassurances. It is somewhat simplistic to say that Odile shows Lily the ways that she can be true to herself, and become

the person she wants to be. But that is the basis for their friendship.

So we have two coming of age stories. The stories are different due to the very different circumstances with which Odile and Lily dealt. Odile helps Lily to become the person she wants to become. Lily helps Odile to find a new purpose for her life, after she has lost most of what had been very important to her.

We will meet at Barb Townsend's home on Wednesday, March 11, at 2:00 p.m.

Bill Neis

## Open and Affirming Possibilities

Several people have raised the question of our church becoming an "Open and Affirming" congregation. Open and Affirming (also known as ONA) is the United Church of Christ's designation for any part of the UCC making a public covenant of welcome to persons of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions. At this time there are more than 1,800 UCC churches with this designation.

Because each church in the United Church of Christ is independent, we have our own decisions to make with this. If we were to become an ONA church, we would be developing our own ONA covenant after a journey of discussion, study, and prayer. There are a variety of resources available through the UCC should we decide to look into this as a possibility for our congregation.

This topic was discussed at the February Church Council meeting and Council determined that due to interest from several members, this might be something we look into. If you are inter-

ested in becoming involved to determine the possibilities of this opportunity for our church, please talk with Pastor Carly or Carol Prchal.

## Self-care Challenge

As the weather turns and the frosty ground begins to thaw, I find myself enjoying the sunshine in a way that is beyond anything I've ever encountered. There is something so restorative about feeling the warmth on your face and seeing the bright light shining through the trees. It's a blessing to us, and a balm for healing. So, this month I invite you to feel the sun on your face; to go out and stand with your face toward the sky and your arms outstretched and welcome the light of new life into your heart. We all need vitamin D, and what better way to get it than enjoying the forces of the universe which are wondrous and powerful beyond measure?



## Women's Fellowship

The women of the church have been taking a well-deserved break after a very busy holiday season—all that Christmas baking and decorating takes time! We met in February at The Elk Restaurant to enjoy breakfast and fellowship, very briefly discussing our plans for the coming months. The salad luncheon will be held in May, followed by a rummage sale on the weekend of Elkhorn's city-wide rummage sale (scheduled for June 5-6). We still have some \$36 Kwik Trip car wash cards (good for five washes) for sale—contact the church office if you are interested in purchasing one.

The next Women's Fellowship meeting will be held on Thursday, March 12 at 9:30am. Hope to see you there!

## Final Spirit of Hope Meal Delivered

Our fourth and final Spirit of Hope meal will be delivered on Saturday, March 7. Spirit of Hope is the county's men's shelter located at United Methodist Church in Delavan. This is the second year we have participated in providing meals for the 15 men housed there. Thanks go to the Kruger family, Diane Licht, Jean Lile, Jennifer Neis, Merry Kay Opitz, Bobbi Rader, and Barb Townsend for purchasing, preparing, and/or delivering the donated meals. We are blessed and this is a wonderful way to share our blessings with those in need.

### FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Elkhorn, Wisconsin

Church Council Meeting Minutes Via Zoom

February 17th, 2026 at 7:00 P.M.

The meeting was **called to order** at 7:09 p.m. by Moderator Jennifer Neis. Those in attendance were Barb Townsend, Pastor Carly Gaeth, Cindy Waller, Diane Licht, Carol Prchal, Bobbi Rader, Tina Kruger and Dorothy Bever.

The **Opening Prayer** was given by Barb Townsend.

Jennifer Neis extended a big "Thank You" to everyone for attending and asked if there were any additions to

the agenda.

**Additions to the agenda:** Dorothy asked to talk about Easter flowers. Bobbie asked to talk about the Elkhorn Chamber. Jennier asked to talk about Pastor Carly Gaeth's formal job description and to review the worksheet regarding the Committees/Teams.

**Approval of January 20, 2026 Council Minutes:** Bobbi Rader moved to approve the minutes from the January 20, 2026 Council meeting as presented. Seconded by Barb Townsend. The motion was carried unanimously.

**Treasurer's Report** - Tina Kruger presented and explained the January treasurer's report. Following slight discussion, Barb Townsend 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 noting that Ash Wednesday is February 18 adding that she will get in touch with Jamie Stilling Stepp regarding the possibilities of a community garden project.

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

**Old Business: Audit:** The proper paperwork for the 2025 church audit was found to be in good order, signed and submitted. Thank you to Tina Kruger, Jamie Stilling Stepp and Haiden Kruger.

**Snow Removal:** Addison Dillner has been doing a great job. He has been paid for the majority of his work to date. Ironic that it was snowing when he picked up his check for the shoveling he had done but there are still some funds available to cover that and any additional snowfalls.

**Ash Wednesday/Lent Season:** Pastor Carly stated that the 6:00 pm February 18 service is set and that she is looking forward to the Lenten season. Cindy Waller added that she received a request for our Lenten service information from the East Troy UCC. She let them know about our Lent agenda.

**"Giving Away instead of Giving Up":** Diane Licht has put together a weekly list of items for the food pantry. **ONA:** Pastor Carly has reached out to the ONA coalition and has been provided the PDF of the book she requested. Following slight discussion, it was agreed to put an article in the LINK, the weekly bulletin and the weekly email looking for interested volunteers to form an ONA Team.

**Ways to get Carly and the Church more into the public in Elkhorn:** Bobbie Rader presented some Chamber of Commerce information. Following discussion, Barb Townsend made a motion to take money from the Ann Serpe Memorial Fund to participate in the Elkhorn Chamber of Commerce booklets. Seconded by Bobbi Rader. The motion was carried unanimously. Bobbi added that she will provide additional information to the Council.

**Vacation Bible School:** It was agreed that VBS will not take place this year but it was discussed for getting some of the older youth members involved and hopefully VBS can be held in the future.

**New Business: Pianist - Denise Hofh leaving and James Letellier coming. New contract and Job**

**Description needed:** Jennifer Neis reported that Denise Hofh has submitted a request that she will no longer be available to be our pianist. With this, James Letellier has agreed to become our full time pianist beginning March 29 and a new contract for him is needed. Following discussion, Bobbi Rader moved to accept the proposed music agreement with James Letellier. The motion was seconded by Jennifer Neis and the motion was carried unanimously. A big "thank you" goes out to Tina Kruger for putting the music agreement together. Also discussed was a monetary collection for Denise and future wellness checks for her. Council agreed to put an article in the LINK, in the bulletin and the weekly email to let the congregation know that Denise is retiring.

**Pastor Parish met with Carly - need another member for the team. Suggestions?:** Jennifer mentioned that the current Pastor Parish committee of Sally Schleiger and Bill Neis met in January however it was suggested to add one more member. Following discussion, Council was asked to consider who could be an additional candidate.

**Possible Youth Group meeting:** Council talked about the potential of having a youth group.

**Other:** Following discussion, due to both the high cost of Easter lilies this year, and the fact that Pastor Carly is allergic to them, Jennifer and Barb will look into Easter lily alternatives.

**Closing Prayer** given by Pastor Carly Gaeth.

**Adjournment:** Barb Townsend moved to adjourn, seconded by Bobbi Rader. The motion carried unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 8:11 p.m.

The next Council meeting of the Church Council will be **March 17, 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 March Council meeting.



# MARCH 2026



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 10:00 a.m. WORSHIP ONLINE & IN PERSON	2	3	4 11:00 a.m. Prayer and Devotional	5	6	7
8 10:00 a.m. WORSHIP ONLINE & IN PERSON  RaiseRight Due	9	10	11 11:00 a.m. Prayer and Devotional  2:00 p.m. Book Club— Home of Barb Townsend	12 9:30 a.m. Women's Fellowship	13	14
15 10:00 a.m. WORSHIP ONLINE & IN PERSON	16	17  7:00 p.m. Church Council	18 11:00 a.m. Prayer and Devotional	19	20	21
22 10:00 a.m. WORSHIP ONLINE & IN PERSON	23	24	25 11:00 a.m. Prayer and Devotional	26	27	28
29 10:00 a.m. WORSHIP ONLINE & IN PERSON  Palm Sunday  	30  <b>MEALS ON WHEELS</b> J LILE & L MCCORMICK	31  <b>MEALS ON WHEELS</b> B & C KRUSE	APRIL 1 11:00 a.m. Prayer and Devotional  <b>MEALS ON WHEELS</b> R KNUTSON & T BAILEY	2 Maundy Thursday  <b>MEALS ON WHEELS</b> T & J STEPP	3 Good Friday  <b>NO MEALS ON WHEELS Delivery</b>	4

# Thank You!



Dear Mission & Service members at First Congregational UCC

Thank you so much for your support and for your generous donation of \$350.00 to New Beginnings APFV collected at your fellowship worship times. How special that you made us the recipient of those collections. We appreciate being in your thoughts.

With the cuts to our grants that we are experiencing we are more and more grateful to our donors. We want very much to be able to continue delivering our free life-saving services, including medical and legal accompaniment, victim counseling, support groups, safety planning, assistance with restraining orders and relocation support.

We appreciate you and again thank you,  
Warm Regards,

Natalie Spruce  
Assistant to Suzi Schoenhof, Executive Director  
New Beginnings APFV



The hungry hippo jar that sits on the coffee table in the family room, is collecting for **Lakeland Animal Shelter**.

When you visit the table during coffee time, you may add your support by dropping your donations in the jar to help us support this important mission.

Thank you in advance for your donations!

## 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!



**MARCH BIRTHDAYS**

Bergen Brunswick	01
Ed Krostal	04
Stephanie Gapinski	06
Brooke Lile	09
Stephen Flitcroft	10
Luke Truesdale	10
Nicole Morris	11
Megan Ann Beine	11
Zachary Beine	11
Mary Godfrey	16
Eric Morris	17
Nikki Lile	19
Jenny Gapinski	21
Bryn Lile	23
Stacy Whiteman	23
Carol Stevens	24
Kyrin Lile	27



**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!

**MARCH ANNIVERSARIES**

Alice and Dave Hill 20

**Lay Worship Leaders**

<b>Mar. 1</b>	<b>Carol Prchal</b>
<b>Mar. 8</b>	<b>Jean Lile</b>
<b>Mar. 15</b>	<b>Bobbi Rader</b>
<b>Mar. 22</b>	<b>Sally Schleiger</b>
<b>Mar. 29</b>	<b>Jennifer Neis</b>



**Ushers**

<b>Mar. 1</b>	<b>Jean Lile and Dorothy Bever</b>
<b>Mar. 8</b>	<b>Diane Licht and Jean Lile</b>
<b>Mar. 15</b>	<b>Becky and Buck Newman</b>
<b>Mar. 22</b>	_____
<b>Mar. 29</b>	<b>Becky Newman and Jean Lile</b>



**Coffee Fellowship**

<b>Mar. 1</b>	_____
<b>Mar. 8</b>	_____
<b>Mar. 15</b>	_____
<b>Mar. 22</b>	_____
<b>Mar. 29</b>	_____



**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL**  
**United Church of Christ**  
76 South Wisconsin Street  
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*