

Your February *Wide-Open Door*

IT'S HERE!

Here it is! Our first run at a monthly newsletter: WIDE-OPEN Door. The weekly bulletin's Open Door will continue to be a place to get a first glimpse at things coming up. Here, though, you will find more information about missions, services, book studies, initiatives, and more. This monthly newsletter will allow those who want more information about topics to read it. The monthly newsletter will always be attached to your Friday email. A few printed copies can be found in the narthex. Please let the office know if you would like a printed version, as we will gladly print one for you each month! In order to be considered for the next month's edition, articles need to be submitted to opendoor@firstcongoappleton.org by the 25th of the prior month.

A Message from Pastor Susan

As we start our new newsletter, The Wide-Open Door, I want to give you a progress report halfway through this program year 2022-2023. Though I have been here a relatively short time it's been a time of real blessings for me.



Last night I had supper in Fellowship Hall and enjoyed the camaraderie around the tables. Then at Bible Study in the Chapel we talked about the kingdom of God. The free-flowing conversation included time for questions as well as answers, doubts as well as faith. Later, after the class left, I stood for a while in the back of the sanctuary listening to the choir rehearse. The whole evening felt like such a gift.

I know transitions are not easy, but I see so many signs of progress, resilience, and vitality in this congregation.

Listening Sessions: We have heard from over 170 families and individuals in person, online, and through e-mails to the church, so far. We are halfway through the Listening Sessions and will complete the process with the final online session on February 20. Pastor Nick will run sessions with the Confirmation Class and their mentors in February. We'll send all the data we are compiling to Church Council and to the Senior Minister Search Team. It's not too late to weigh in.

Many people have made new friends, discovered new connections, and listened attentively to one another in this process. It has proved to be energizing for all of us.

New Members: One sign of a vital church is that it continues to grow in an interim period. We have welcomed 22 adult members (along with their 10 children) to our congregation since I have been here. That's a wonderful sign of robust strength! Our church is known for its welcome and we proved that this year.

New Church Staff: Our new Church Administrator, Zaina Gonzales, has already done a wonderful job organizing information, leading the office staff, and managing hundreds of details each day.

Administrative Assistants: Ann Hage and Kalyn VanderGrintin have agreed to join us for three months as we assess our administrative needs in the office. They both have stepped up beautifully.

We have seen many changes, and more are on the way, no doubt. But the things that matter have not changed. You can feel the strong heart of faith beating in this congregation. You can feel it on Sundays on Wednesdays, and all week long.

Blessings,
Pastor Susan



Congregational Life

Churches & Mental Health: February 12

In recent years, the UCC Mental Health Network has made a concerted effort to support local churches in addressing mental health stigma through its Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive and Engaged (WISE) initiative. At the WI Conference Annual Meeting in June 2022, in the spirit of unconditional love and radical welcome, a Resolution of Witness was approved to become a "WISE" Conference for Mental Health. WISE stands for "welcoming, inclusive, supportive, and engaged." If 30% of the congregations in the WI Conference engage in a study and embrace the challenge of making mental wellness a priority in our congregation, the resolution to become a WISE UCC Conference will be voted upon at the 2023 Annual Meeting.

The objective of WISE is to encourage UCC congregations to become more welcoming of those with mental health challenges, to expand church and community inclusion of those who are living with mental health challenges, to be supportive of all who are affected by mental health challenges, and to engage in ways to live out a commitment to be WISE about mental health.

Leading up to, and during May, Mental Health Awareness Month, FCUCC's Mental Health Task Force has taken on the challenge to learn more about WISE and to engage speakers that will focus on mental health.

Pastor Mary Jo invited Sue Kaiser to be with us on Sunday, February 12th for an hour of discovery...*What is WISE?* What do we have to study and do to become a WISE congregation? Why is it important? How does mental health become a concern or a focus of our congregation's ministry that we can address and understand? Sue is a member of Ebenezer UCC, Sheboygan, - the first WI Conference UCC WISE Church.

Sue Kaiser says, "I am very excited to be coming to First Congregational UCC, to explain how Ebenezer UCC studied and then became the first WI Conference UCC WISE church in January 2021!

I look forward to sharing with your congregation how Ebenezer has attempted to live into their WISE decision since 2021. Join us as we learn and grow together".

Usually, the concerns about mental wellness come to the surface because of a personal experience, hearing a story about someone's mental health challenges, learning about the UCC Mental Health Network focusing on WISE after the WISE UCC General Synod Resolution was adopted in 2015 or reading about a situation in your town or community where mental health has become news.

However it happens, the UCC Mental Health Network has resources for us to build on those experiences so that our faith community can begin or become WISE-er about mental health. Come find out more on February 12th, 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM.



Find a New Personal Connection

Would you like to make a new friend? Would you like to expand your circle at church? Do you feel it's easier to talk on the phone to someone new, then in a busy narthex? A *Call-to-Connect Ministry Team* member can do just that! Presently, our 25 team members connect with over 60 other members! We want to reach out to any-age members who desire a caring connection within the church. If you would like to receive timely personal calls or have any questions, please let one of us know.

Betty Masaros: (920) 733-1665 or [e-mail](#)

Pastor Mary Jo: (920) 851-9455 or [e-mail](#)



“LET’S TALK 2023”

Starts Feb. 28

A Resource for Sacred,
Transformational
Conversations on Race

This adult curriculum has been designed to invite UCC members and their guests to engage in

safe, meaningful, substantive, and bold conversations on race. Written by five gifted authors with decades of experience teaching about race and privilege, this curriculum intends to help people “see” power and privilege, their manifestations, and their impacts. It aims to illuminate how white people in America, at every economic stratum and in a myriad of ways, receive privileged consideration simply because they are white. It is not about guilt or shame – it is presented in the hope that those who choose to engage in this dialogue can develop higher degrees of awareness of privilege and its consequences. If you're open to it, this curriculum is an invitation to wholeness. Call Wanda Van De Hey at 920-203-1500 or Mary Dees at 920-915-0177 with questions.

Choose Which Group You Attend:

[Tuesdays, February 28–April 4](#)

1:00-2:30 PM via Zoom

[Wednesdays, March 1–April 5](#)

6:30-8:00 PM In-Person, with Childcare

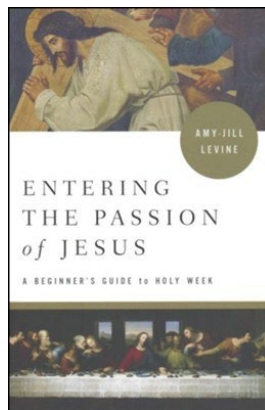
[Thursdays, February 23–March 30](#)

8:00-9:30 PM via Zoom

Sign up for *Let’s Talk 2023* on Realm by clicking the dates above or call the church at 920-733-7393 by **February 14th**.

Entering the Passion of Jesus: A Beginner's Guide to Holy Week

Biblical scholar Amy-Jill Levine delves into the history and literature surrounding the last days of Jesus' life. She sets the narrative in historical context and analyzes the risks and motives of the story's characters. During Advent, we studied Amy-Jill Levine’s book, “Light of the World: A Beginner’s Guide to Advent.”



It was *so well-loved* that we are offering this Lenten study! Pastor Mary Jo will lead us. **Sign up and pick up your book in the church office. Cost: \$9.50**

* Sunday, March 12, 11am-12pm

Ch 1 - Jerusalem: Risking Reputation

Ch 2 - The Temple: Risking Righteous Anger

* Sunday, March 19, 11am-12pm

Ch 3 - Teachings: Risking Challenge

* Sunday, March 26, 11am-12pm

Ch 4 - The First Dinner: Risking Rejection

Ch 5 - The Last Supper: Risking the Loss of Friends

* Sunday, April 2, 11am-12pm

Gethsemane: Risking Temptation

Spring Women’s Retreat

Our women’s retreats have been so successful we have another one planned for [April 21 – 23, 2023 at Moon Beach](#). We are excited to announce Julie Garber will again be our retreat leader. Julie led the October 2022 retreat and her complete bio can be found [online](#). [Email Barb Uehling](#) or call 920-475-2212 with questions.

A Newcomer’s Reflection on the Women’s Retreat

I have been asked to share my thoughts as a relatively new member of First Congo on the most recent Women’s Retreat at Moon Beach.

I attended the retreat last year knowing only a few of the women that were there. By the end of the weekend, I knew a few more and certainly felt less

like the new kid on the block. That sense of belonging has continued to be nurtured by these same women and this year I came to the retreat knowing almost everyone that was in attendance.

The wonderful thing about these retreats is the opportunity to hit pause and reconnect with yourself. The beautiful and tranquil location of Moon Beach Camp puts you in a contemplative frame of mind. In addition, the presence of other women allowed me to learn from their varied backgrounds, experiences and insights.

It was the perfect combination of solitude and communal sharing.

As I shared during our final gathering before departing for home, the retreat experience affirmed my original decision to join First Congo and for this, I am grateful.

~Mary Mares



Wednesday Evening Bible Study Continues

Led by Pastor Susan and Pastor Peggy in the chapel, the study of the book, "We Make the Road by Walking," by Brian McClaren is continuing with one chapter each week. New comers welcome!
February 8: Chapter 23
February 15: Chapter 24
February 22: Ash Wednesday Service Instead



Ash Wednesday

6:00 Dinner in Fellowship Hall
7:00 Service
Led by Our Confirmands

Lenten Service Schedule
Coming Soon

Worship and Music



Fox Valley Flute

Winter Concert: February 19

The Fox Valley Flute Choir will perform a winter concert in the Church Sanctuary on Sunday, February 19 at 4:00 PM.

Music from composers Casterede, Handel, Boismortier, Catherine McMichael, and Leroy Anderson will be performed. A variation on a Ukrainian Folk song will complete the one-hour concert.

The 15-member Flute Choir will feature members of the flute family: Piccolo, C-Flute, Alto and Bass Flute. The Fox Valley Flute Choir has been performing together since 2011 under the guidance of Director Patricia George and Assistant Director Dr. Marc Sackman. They have appeared at Wisconsin Flute Fairs and a Timber Rattlers game. The group rehearses in our Church Sanctuary Monday evenings!

Come Serve in Music Ministry!

You are invited to make music, celebrating the joy we share in Christ!
Please contact John Albrecht, *Director for Music Ministries*, at 920-851-8097 or jalbrecht@firstcongoappleton.org with questions or to register.

Sanctuary Choir (HS-adults)

Wednesdays, 7:00-8:30 PM

Youth Handbells (grades 7-12)

Wednesdays, 5:45-6:25 PM

Children's Choir (grades 2-6)

Sundays, 10:45-11:30 AM

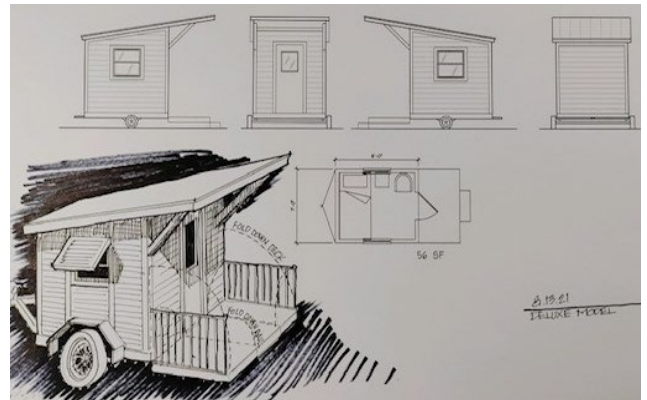
LU Music Scholars (college)

Sundays, 5:00-6:00 PM

Mission and Service

Donations to Support Back Bay

We need donations for our auction!
Please drop off auction donations at the church office before February 19. Gift baskets, individual items, gift or service certificates are appreciated donations. Thank you for your support! Questions? Call or [e-mail](mailto:sheryl@firstcongoappleton.org) Sheryl De Hart.



February 26 Back Bay Brunch

Get your tickets today through February 24 after services or via [Realm](http://realm.com).

Enjoy Cozy Corner pulled pork, coleslaw, mac and cheese, green beans, collard greens, dinner rolls, cinnamon muffins (GF), peach cobbler, brownies.

James Pennington, Executive Director of Back Bay Mission, will deliver the Sunday message and be available for questions at the brunch. The Mission is the only UCC ministry in Mississippi and they need the support of the whole UCC. We are hoping to deliver \$20,000 to Back Bay Mission – enough to build five tiny houses. The Silent Auction at the Brunch will support the food pantry. Back Bay volunteers began with a volunteer-funded matching grant pool last September. Watch the progress on the bulletin board.

Welcome to Our Newest
First Congregational UCC Members
February, 2023



Barb and Tim Bauer are celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary this June. Although both are now retired, Barb was an elementary teacher in Appleton for 32 years, and Tim in flexible packaging & paper sales for 32 years. They have two grown sons, Brian and Chris. Brian and family live in the Chicago area, including his wife Kristel and two grandchildren, Ilyse (11) and Declan (8). Chris and his fiancée April live in Brooklyn, NY and will be getting married in June. Barb and Tim stay busy spending time with family, volunteering, golf and traveling. Barb enjoys reading and making various greeting cards as a hobby, and Tim always has an indoor or outdoor project or two in the works. Both are looking forward to becoming members of the church.



Kristen Dassler-Alfheim is married to member Karianne Carr, joining the Carr family with McKenna and Charlie. They were married by Pastor Nick in October. She is the owner and president of Retirement Dynamix, a financial services firm. She is also an Alderperson on the Appleton City Council. Her hobbies are golf, politics, and biking.



Andy and Jackie Burton live in Neenah with their 3 children, Elise (7), Micah (6), and Reid (2). Andy is an Engineer and Jackie is currently a stay-at-home mom. Jackie enjoys gardening, crafts, the outdoors, and exercising. Andy enjoys cooking, learning French, karate, and Star Trek. They love spending time with their kids, reading, and participating in community events. They have been attending churches of various denominations all their lives but are excited to find a community with shared values at First Congo.



Lori Mackey joins us by a Letter of Transfer from First Congregational Church in Oshkosh. She has two children, Paul (37) and Cara (33) and three grandchildren. She is semi-retired from Oshkosh Corporation as a paralegal. Lori enjoys tennis, pickleball, traveling and sewing.



Anne Planner was born and raised in Appleton, as a cradle Catholic (St. Marys and Xavier). She married and moved to Valparaiso Indiana where they raised their daughter Allison. She graduated from Purdue University with a BSN in nursing. After her divorce she relocated to Tampa Florida where she found her true niche in nursing. She practiced at James A. Haley VA for twenty years with a Board Certification in Primary Care. She returned home to Appleton in 2020 during the height of the pandemic, after she retired to be close to family. Her parents lived close to this church and she walked by it many times with her mother. Her mother used to always tell her, "That's where you belong." Well, here she is, Mom! Anne wants to thank Pat Hirby for bringing her as her guest and making her feel so welcome and comfortable



Erik Gabbey (returning member) & Tamara Thompson, who grew up in Sheboygan County, relocating to Appleton a little over a year ago. She has two grown children, Maitland and Evan, who live in Little Chute. She was introduced to our church through the Gabbey Family and enjoyed everything she heard and saw. She loves that the church says, "No matter where you are in life's journey, we accept you, we are the church of the open door." She looks forward to meeting all of us, contributing to the church, helping volunteer in various positions and being a part of this congregation.



Jan and Monica Stage live in Appleton with their teenage daughters, Annika Klaeser (17) and Vanessa Klaeser (14), both students at Appleton North High School. Jan and Monica's adult children are married and also live in the area. Their son, Nick, and his wife Megan have two sons - Grant (2) and Connor (1). Their daughter, Jennie, and husband, Mason have one daughter Clara (10) are nearby as well. Jan is a Benefit Consultant with USI and Monica is Executive Director of the J. J. Keller Foundation.

**More News
& Fun to
Come
...
Next Month**