

First Congregational United Church of Christ – Rhinelander – January 2026

Happy New Year!

I don't know how you would describe your 2025, but I think "moving" is a good word to describe my year. Perhaps you saw Merriam-Webster Dictionary's choice of word for 2025, "Merriam-Webster's human editors have chosen *slop* as the 2025 Word of the Year. We define *slop* as 'digital content of low quality that is produced usually in quantity by means of artificial intelligence.' All that stuff dumped on our screens, captured in just four letters: the English language came through again." Gladly here at the First Congregational Church we did not produce Slop in 2025! Together we turned the page to the next chapter in our 142 years as a church.

My choice of word looking back at 2025 is "revive." Susie and I arrived on June first to a very cold sanctuary and a very warm welcome. As we settled in, got to know all of you, learned the history of the church, we heard over and over, "We used to have that here," or "We did that before." Truly this church has done it all throughout the years. But the realities of culture, change, and covid took their toll to put past programming on pause. Our job was to blow on the embers that remained and ignite the fire once again.

And now what awaits us in 2026? If I can choose a word that I hope will define our year ahead, I choose "bridge." Bridges are pretty essential around Rhinelander. With the mighty Wisconsin River cutting through the middle of the city and the Pelican River meandering along the southern edge, bridges are the only way to get from one side of town to the other. Bridges do the hard work of connecting two sides together.



Our job now as a church is to connect the past with the future. Will you be the bridge?

My prayer is that we honor the past with gratitude, remembering the saints who built this place with vision, hard work, and faithful prayer. We stand firmly on the foundation they laid, and we receive their gifts as a sacred trust, not a binding tether. Now it is our turn to be the bridge—connecting past to future, memory to hope, legacy to possibility, faithfulness to courage.

Together let's listen to God's spirit and follow. May we carry the light of Christ into what is yet to be, walking together into God's unfolding future.

Happy New Year everyone!

- Submitted by Rev. Tim Grade

Happy New Year ♪ Happy New Year ♪ Happy New Year

Letter from the Moderator

How does one summarize the last year in the life of our church? I have had the opportunity to work with many of you in 2025. In the first part of the year, I worked with the worship planning committee, supply pastors, and office manager Wendy to plan the services as we all tried to hold things together while we waited for Pastors Susie and Tim to begin their ministry with us. We were ever so fortunate that the committee found them without too much time elapsing. It had been a long time since we had a “settled” pastor, but from the time the search committee was able to begin its work, it was not very long. Considering the continuing shortage of available pastors and the fact that many pastors now want to serve churches in big cities, I think God must have had a hand in bringing them to us.

Since June 1, when Susie and Tim began their ministry with us, we have been getting to know them and experiencing some changes to a more informal worship style. We have also been attracting some new worshippers and finding that some long-time members are returning to worship with us. This has been very exciting and positive.

We now have a Kids’ Club and Youth Group in our church again! We are hosting the Warm for Winter mission project, which relocated to our building when they lost their previous home. We have had good attendance at our Sunday brunches, and wonderful food! People who have questions or comments meet in the lounge on the fourth Sundays after the service for free-ranging discussions at the “Listening Post”. We have some new vocal choir members, and if we gain a few more, will be able to sing more often. The bell choir continues to add to our services with their music, and they also have room for new ringers. We held a Christmas Bazaar and luncheon and a Christmas candlelight dinner, thanks to the organizers and many volunteers.

In the Executive Council this year we have begun working on re-stating and simplifying church operations. I want to personally thank the members and chairpersons of our standing boards for taking care of their many responsibilities. Please see the annual report to learn what the boards have done this year and thank the members for their time given on our behalf.

The annual congregational meeting will be held immediately after the service on Jan. 25. We will vote on the 2026 Proposed Budget at that time, and on the slate of officers and board members for 2026. Please plan to attend.

Sandy McKitrick, Moderator



BOARD OF TRUSTEES FINANCIAL CORNER

The Board of Trustees met on December 8 to bring us up to date on the financial working of the church. We are pleased that our Schwab Investment account continues to show accumulating dividends. We will continue to monitor the investments in this account during the coming months. As of November 30 our income year to date for our general fund is \$118,163.52. Our budgeted annual income is \$133,775.00. Our expenses are as expected at this point in the year. As always, we are now monitoring our income and expenditure as well as considering several suggestions from Tim and Susie that will advance our ministry in 2026. We will report on these as they are finalized and dates of implementation are determined. If you have not submitted your pledge card and plan to do so, we ask that you bring it or mail it to the church office as soon as possible so that we can better determine our anticipated income for 2026. If you are unable to submit a pledge at this time, that is fine. We know that you will support the work of the church with whatever you are able during the coming year. We are sincerely grateful for all pledged and non-pledged income, and will endeavor to use it wisely. As always, we are planning funding sources on various projects, and will let you know how you can help.

Your Board of Trustees:
Dave Havel, Investments
Pat Juday, Secretary
and Stewardship
Jane McEldowney, Stewardship
Tom Winqvist, Chair

	November 2025	Jan-Nov. 2025	Budget 2025
Income	\$ 4,134.52	\$118,163.52	\$133,775.00
Expenses			
Ministerial	\$7,700.08	\$48,843.05	\$63,086.00
Temporary	\$40.98	\$4,573.77	\$9,500.00
Staff	\$3,107.70	\$35,067.10	\$35,640.00
Music	\$169.24	\$1,083.10	\$200.00
Education	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$800.00
Mission	\$1,166.67	\$13,833.37	\$15,000.00
Maintenance	\$1,667.73	\$42,488.31	\$51,300.00
Office	\$893.61	\$8,922.83	\$12,300.00
Boards	\$179.99	\$3,732.37	\$6,900.00
Total Expenses	\$14,926.00	\$159,543.87	\$194,726.00

January Birthdays:

Gary Buntrock	01/04
Ann Van Buren	01/08
Rebecca Corey	01/14
Darrell Schmidt	01/20
Justin Jahn	01/20
Jackie Schmieder	01/21
Tom Winqvist	01/25
Shirley Dahlquist	01/25
Michael Hamman	01/27
Leo Norden	01/31

Contact Information:

**Mailing Address: 135 E Larch Street,
 Rhinelander, WI 54501**

**Church Office Hours: Tuesday
 thru Friday,
 8 a.m. to Noon**

Call Us: 715-365-1535

Prayer Chain: 715-360-5306

Visit Us Online: rhinelanderucc.org

E-mail Us: rhiucc@newnorth.net



January Lay Readers:

01/04	Beth Studer
01/11	Mary Dork
01/18	Beth Studer
01/25	Mary Dork

January Greeters:

01/04	Larry McKitrick & Todd McEldowney
01/11	Mary Dork & Cherie Gilmeister
01/18	Des Dahlquist & Jan Winnicki
01/25	Jackie Schmeider & Everlie Jackson

CREATION CARE CORNER



Here are excerpts from an article by Melanie Nesheim, a member of the Coordinating Committee of Third Act New Hampshire: The effects of climate change are so obvious to me that I was confused by the response from some friends and family when I told them about Third Act. They would be nice about it, but then there'd be an odd sliding sideways into another topic, even among people I thought would be more into it. It's just not on the top of people's radar.

I think I understand why. Something else is always front and center! Climate change feels far away and something we cannot impact, while front and center..."My parents need to move into assisted living and I'm looking into it."..."My adult son had an accident at work and is staying with us while he recovers."

The same thing happened to me in the 1990's. It's not that I didn't take climate change seriously back then. Bill McKibben's organization "350.org", made an impression, named after the maximum ppm of carbon dioxide the atmosphere can hold before global warming changes the weather. (There's over 420 ppm now.) But front and center for me was raising my young kids and volunteering in church. I helped put on retreats to keep a youth program going. My parents plus two elderly aunts were still living and deserved attention.

I joined Third Act New Hampshire in 2023. Now the weather has changed and become front and center...and I still get glazed looks. I learned that the work feels a bit like pushing on fog. Climate change has one clear cause: excess carbon dioxide in the atmosphere acts like a blanket around the earth, trapping heat, and it comes from burning stuff, primarily fossil fuels. There are many and varied reasons for burning stuff, so it seems too big to comprehend. It's like the Grand Canyon, too big to comprehend, and yet what caused it was just many small drops of water passing through...many small drops that had quite an impact!

That is the nature of this cause. Many actions, some by individuals, some at the local, town, or state level, all have an impact together. There's no single big fix, no one policy to do it. Instead, there are many things we each can do to stop burning stuff:

- Putting solar panels on our houses, or on our adult children's houses if we can afford it.
- Adding batteries to our solar installation.
- Installing heat pumps.
- Working with local government to smooth out solar permitting
- Driving an electric car, charging it when the sun is out when possible.
- Switching from gas stoves/dryers to electric.
- Follow your state legislature and advocate for climate-friendly bills. Third Act can help you with this.
- Seeing if your bank, insurance company, or credit card company invests heavily in the fossil fuel industry and if it does, switching to one that doesn't.
- Writing to the bank, insurance company, or credit card company you switched away from to tell them that you don't like their investment in fossil fuels.
- Letting others know you're doing these things and that they could do them, too.

We have mentioned Third Act before, an organization started by Bill McKibben, nationally-known and respected climate activist, to encourage and educate Seniors to take on important issues of climate change in their retirement years. Contact them at wisconsin@thirdact.org. The Wisconsin group is working on legislation to protect us from tech billionaires and high utility prices caused by AI centers locating in Wisconsin to exploit our resources.

-Sandy McKitrick

Minutes
Executive Council
November 20, 2025

1. Call to Order and Opening Prayer

Meeting was called to order at 3:40 pm by moderator Sandy. Prayer offered by Susie Grade.

Present: Sue Bartels, Cecily Dawson, Susie Grade, Sandy McKittrick, Tom Peterson, Tom Winqvist, Carla Chropkowski (Recording Minutes in lieu of Gale Willcox this date)

2. Agenda Additions/Changes

Add under "Old Business: (e) \$2000.00 Outreach account

3. Approval of October Meeting Minutes

Moved by Cecily, seconded by Sue B., to accept the minutes of October 23, 2025 as presented. Motion carried.

4. Pastors' Reports

Pastor Susie's report is attached to and becomes a part of these Minutes. Of note is that the previous weeks attendance at church was 82! Transition from PowerPoint to ProPresenter is moving along. Still working on the sound system. New connection card design should be in pews soon. Moving forward with a churchwide database. Kiahna, youth group leader's last day is November 23rd. Looking for a new leader and job description is out.

5. Board Reports

Spiritual Life

Sue reports the greens will be hung in the Sanctuary November 29th . Nativity will be having the Thanksgiving evening service this year. Christmas Eve service is at 4pm this year, not 5pm. December 28th there will be a Carol Sing at Church.

Building and Grounds

Tom P reports Gary was given permission to purchase a vacuum and leaf blower. Rappley Plumbing will install an autoflow valve, costing approximately \$1500.00. Snow plowing has been arranged. WPS contacted us about a 30 foot right of way on the west side of our property regarding moving to underground utilities. Steve Dahlquist will be talking to them about an easement. Discussion about power stations for electric cars.

Trustees

Tom W. reports that the Stewardship mailings have been completed.

Outreach

Carla thanked EC for the invitation to join the EC for meetings as part of the Outreach Board. She reported she has an interest in doing things differently, and being more mission focused and involving others in the congregation rather than being "board focused". She was invited to talk about her areas of interest in involvement in the Community at the December EC meeting.

6. Old Business

- a) **Outreach Account** - Discussion about this bank account, a possible youth ministry account, where it is held at, and the need to have this resolved. Susie suggested as it's been passed over to several people, that Jackie be approached to get all the information. Moderator Sandy asked the Trustees to transfer those funds to the church's checking or savings account.
- b) **The Policy and Procedures** for Trustees was presented. Tom W. made the motion to accept, seconded by Cecily. Discussion ensued. Motion carried with all in approval.
- c) **The Policy and Procedures** for Buildings and Grounds was presented. Tom P made a motion to accept, seconded by Carla. Discussion ensued. After discussion, it was decided to table this document due to items #2, and 5. They will be discussed further by Building and Grounds, and then brought back to the Executive Council in December.
- d) A motion was made to **revise the October 25 meeting's motion** regarding investment earnings. The motion should read "Beginning in 2025, we will utilize the earnings from the Schwab account as income that we can use for our annual budget for the following year." Cecily made the motion. Carla seconded.
A lengthy discussion ensued. Moderator asked for a vote. Motion carried.

7. New Business

- a) Cecily moved to update the October 25 meeting's motion regarding investment "interest". The new motion is "Beginning in 2025, we will utilize the earnings from the Schwab account as income that we can use for our annual budget for the following year." Carla seconded, and a lengthy discussion ensued. Moderator asked for a vote. Motion carried.
- b) Moderator Sandy advised that our Constitution still does not align with the current situation we have with a Financial Secretary, Recording Secretary, and Treasurer, as they are all supposed to be one person with one vote in the Constitution. There are currently three people doing this job, but just one EC vote.

8. Meeting Adjourned at 5:15pm

Next Executive Council Meeting is December 18, 2025 @ 3:30 p.m.

- Respectfully submitted, Carla Chropkowski

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p>28 10:00am –11:00am In-Person and Facebook Worship, Carol Service - No Kids Club and Youth Group 11:00am –12:00pm Fellowship Time/Coffee Hour 11:00am –12:00pm 'Townhall Listening Post' after Worship (Lounge)</p>	<p>29</p>	<p>30</p>	<p>31 New Year's Eve</p>	<p>1 New Year's Day (Church Office will be closed)</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>3</p>
<p>4 10:00am –11:00am In-Person and Facebook Worship with Rev. Missy Miller, plus Kids Club and Youth Group 11:00am –12:00pm BRUNCH</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>6 Epiphany 10:00am –11:00am TOPS (Lounge)</p>	<p>7 3:30pm –4:30pm Chancel Choir</p>	<p>8 1:00pm –3:00pm P.E.O. (Dean Theatre) 4:00pm –5:15pm Northern Arts Council (Conference Room)</p>	<p>9 Reports Due for Annual Meeting</p>	<p>10</p>
<p>11 Youth Sledding & Hot Cocoa Party 10:00am –11:00am In-Person and Facebook Worship, plus Kids Club and Youth Group 11:00am –12:00pm Fellowship Time/Coffee Hour</p>	<p>12 1:00pm –2:00pm Trustees 4:00pm –6:00pm Warm for Winter Distribution</p>	<p>13 10:00am –11:00am Spiritual Life Board (Conference Room) 10:00am –11:00am TOPS (Lounge)</p>	<p>14 9:30am –10:30am Building and Grounds 3:30pm –4:30pm Chancel Choir</p>	<p>15 1:00pm –2:30pm Non-Fishin' Book Club (Lounge)</p>	<p>16 Newsletter Article Deadline</p>	<p>17</p>
<p>18 10:00am –11:00am In-Person and Facebook Worship, plus Kids Club and Youth Group 11:00am –12:00pm BRUNCH 11:00am –12:00pm New Guest Lunch 3:00pm –6:00pm 4-H Positive Youth Development (Fellowship Hall)</p>	<p>19 MLK Day</p>	<p>20 10:00am –11:00am TOPS (Lounge) 6:30pm –8:00pm Northwoods Chorallers Rehearsals (Fellowship Hall)</p>	<p>21 3:30pm –4:30pm Chancel Choir</p>	<p>22 1:00pm –2:30pm Book Bags Book Club (Lounge) 3:30pm –4:30pm Executive Council</p>	<p>23</p>	<p>24</p>
<p>25 10:00am –11:00am In-Person and Facebook Worship, plus Kids Club and Youth Group 11:00am –12:00pm Annual Meeting 11:00am –12:00pm Fellowship Time/Coffee Hour</p>	<p>26</p>	<p>27 10:00am –11:00am TOPS (Lounge) 6:30pm –8:00pm Northwoods Chorallers Rehearsals (Fellowship Hall)</p>	<p>28 3:30pm –4:30pm Chancel Choir</p>	<p>29</p>	<p>30</p>	<p>31 9:30am –11:30am Warm for Winter Distribution</p>