

First Congregational United Church of Christ - Rhinelander — March 2026

Lent: A Season of Mess and Hope

Our word "Lent" comes from the Old English *lencten*, which simply means *springtime*. And if you've lived through enough Wisconsin springs, you know springtime is a gloriously messy season — never quite sure if it will offer hopeful sunny days with dripping snowmelt or arctic blasts with ten more inches of snow. Spring doesn't apologize for its contradictions. It holds grief and hope in the same gray sky.

We all know the very real grief that comes with late winter. The cold has overstayed its welcome. The days are getting longer...but still feel too short. At least we have had snow to cover up bare branches and brown grass, but we still ache for color. And yet — even right now today — the tulips are already pushing up beneath the snow whether we notice them or not. The birds have begun their long journeys home to us. Something is stirring that the cold cannot stop.

Spring is fitting for our Lenten journey of preparation for Easter. Lent doesn't ask us to pretend winter is over before it is. It doesn't rush us. Instead, Lent invites us to be right where we are, to name the grief we carry, and to feel the weight of all the losses that have accumulated.

And yet Lent also dares us to hope. Not a naive hope that pretends the cold isn't real, but a *stubborn* hope that trusts that resurrection is coming even while standing at the tomb. The kind that sees the tulip pushing up through frozen ground and says, *yes, something is stirring here*.

The cross we journey toward in these weeks is not the end of the story. It never was. We walk through Lent not as people who don't know how it ends, but as people who know exactly how it ends — and who are invited, year after year, to let that ending surprise us all over again with its joy.

So in this season, hold both. Hold the grief honestly — it is real and it is holy and God is not afraid of it. And hold the hope stubbornly — because the same God who calls the birds back north and coaxes tulips through frozen ground is not finished with us yet either.

Spring is coming. It always does.

- submitted by Rev. Tim Grade



BOARD OF TRUSTEES FINANCIAL CORNER

At the end of last month. our income year to date for expenses was\$ 32,987.28

Our expenditures for the same period were.\$ 33,255.39.

This amounts to a shortfall of \$ 268.11

This has been a relatively normal period of expenditures and income. Our investment account continues to show excellent returns during January, with a balance at the end of the month of \$714,810.00. we are in the process of re-structuring some of our accounts, to make the reports more concise. We hope to have this completed before the net newsletter and plan to offer a more detailed report for you at that time.

Your Board of Trustees:

**Dave Havel (Investments), Pat Juday (Secretary and Stewardship),
Jane McEldowney (Stewardship), and Tom Winquist (Chair)**

2026 Rhinelander Area Food Pantry - Annual Spring Challenge Announcement

The Rhinelander Area Food Pantry (RAFP) is challenging local residents to contribute to the Annual Spring Challenge. Two local families, who wish to remain anonymous, have agreed once again to make a partial match for all donations or pledges received from March 1st through April 30th.

To help the Food Pantry with the Annual RAFP Spring Challenge, monetary donations can be made to Rhinelander Area Food Pantry PO Box 1306, Rhinelander, WI 54501. Food items may be dropped off at the Food Pantry at 627 Coon Street from 9 am to 12pm, Monday through Friday. For more information, go to www.rhinelanderareafoodpantry.org or call 715-369-7237.

March Birthdays:

Gary Wefel	03/07
Kate Larch	03/19
Linda McKenzier	03/22
Deslyn Dahlquist	03/29

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

Like Us/Watch Us on Facebook:

1st Congregational UCC Rhinelander



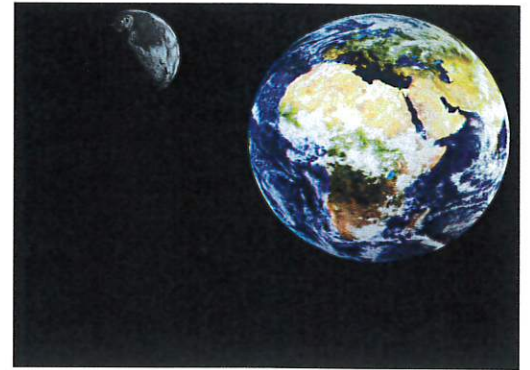
March Lay Readers:

03/01	Beth Studer
03/08	Sandy McKitrick
03/15	Beth Studer
03/22	Mary Dork
03/29	May Dork

March Greeters:

03/01	Dave Havel
03/08	Larry McKitrick
03/15	Ted & Judy Fisher
03/22	Jackson Hoffein
03/29	

CREATION CARE CORNER



This is a time when we have concerns about basic human rights and powerful people taking advantage of others. These concerns spill over into our alarm about climate change, because powerful people and groups are taking advantage of the powerless in climate change issues, as well. The poorest people struggle with the worst effects, and the powerful change laws and ignore the plight of our planet to the advantage of the rich and powerful oil interests and polluters. Finding ourselves in these circumstances, we must continue to learn and push back at the powerful to protect the planet and the lives God gave us. To this end, we will continue to discuss in this space current information and science which can help us all, even helping those who would sabotage our planet.

Seaweed Invasion

Scientists are warning that the world's oceans may be undergoing a fundamental "regime shift", as vast mats of seaweed spread rapidly, fueled by global warming and fertilizer runoff. A new analysis found that floating seaweed blooms expanded by 13.4% each year between 2003 and 2022 in the tropical Atlantic and western Pacific. The Great Atlantic Sargassum Belt now stretches thousands of miles and is visible from space, and others exist near New Zealand and off Florida. The researchers say this could alter ocean chemistry and ecosystems by blocking sunlight, destabilizing surface waters, and potentially speeding up climate change. In Florida, the annual cost from disrupted fishing, reduced tourism, and damage to coastal infrastructure has been estimated as high as \$13.5 billion.

— from The Guardian, British newspaper of record

Should We Correct the Ocean's pH?

Scientists are testing a bold new approach to curbing climate change. They hope to slow the increasing acidity of the ocean by adding alkaline chemicals to seawater. Since the industrial revolution, the seas have absorbed roughly a third of human-caused carbon dioxide emissions. That's made seawater about 40% more acidic than it once was, threatening shellfish, coral reefs, and the marine food web. In a recent experiment, scientists released 16,200 gallons of sodium hydroxide or lye, into the Atlantic to see whether it could safely increase the water's pH. It temporarily lifted the pH of nearby waters from 7.95 to 8.3 without obvious short-term harm to marine life. If this was pursued, it would be "the largest thing humanity has ever done". Without some kind of action, the oceans could start losing the ability to absorb carbon by 2100.

— from the New York Times

-Sandy McKittrick

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	Second Sunday in Lent 10:00am –11:00am In-Person and Facebook Worship, plus Kids Club and Youth Group 11:00am –12:00pm BRUNCH	2	3 10:00am –11:00am TOPS (Lounge) 10:00am –11:00am Worship Service for Friendly Village at Sue Bartels (Dean & Fellowship Hall) 11:30am –2:00pm P.E.O. Sue Bartels (Dean & Fellowship Hall) 6:30pm –8:00pm Northwoods Choraliars Rehearsals (Fellowship Hall)	4 3:30pm –4:30pm Chancel Choir	5	6	7
8	Third Sunday in Lent 10:00am –11:00am In-Person and Facebook Worship, plus Kids Club and Youth Group 11:00am –12:00pm Fellowship Time/Coffee Hour (dependent on volunteer availability)	9 4:00pm –2:00pm Trustees (Conference-Room) 4:00pm –6:00pm Warm for Winter Distribution	10 10:00am –11:00am Spiritual Life Board (Conference Room) 10:00am –11:00am TOPS (Lounge) 6:30pm –8:00pm Northwoods Choraliars Rehearsals (Fellowship Hall)	11 9:30am –10:30am Building and Grounds 3:30pm –4:30pm Chancel Choir	12 1:00pm –3:00pm P.E.O. (Dean Theatre) 4:00pm –5:15pm Northern Arts Council (Conference Room) 5:00pm –7:00pm NATH Board Meeting (Fellowship Hall)	13	14
15	Deadline to Order Easter Flowers Fourth Sunday in Lent Youth Bowling at Hodag Lanes 10:00am –11:00am In-Person and Facebook Worship, plus Kids Club and Youth Group 11:00am –12:00pm BRUNCH	16 Wendy Off/Mary Moxon Subbing this week	17 10:00am –11:00am TOPS (Lounge) 6:30pm –8:00pm Northwoods Choraliars Rehearsals (Fellowship Hall)	18 3:30pm –4:30pm Chancel Choir	19 Non-Fishin' Book Club (Lounge) 5:00pm –6:00pm GEM Handbell Choir	20	21
22	Fifth Sunday in Lent 10:00am –11:00am In-Person and Facebook Worship, plus Kids Club and Youth Group 11:00am –12:00pm Fellowship Time/Coffee Hour (dependent on volunteer availability) 11:00am –12:00pm 'Townhall Listening Post' after Worship (Lounge) 3:00pm –6:00pm 4-H Positive Youth Development (Fellowship Hall)	23	24 10:00am –11:00am TOPS (Lounge) 6:30pm –8:00pm Northwoods Choraliars Rehearsals (Fellowship Hall)	25 3:30pm –4:30pm Chancel Choir	26 1:00pm –2:30pm Book Bags Book Club (Lounge) 3:30pm –4:30pm Executive Council 5:00pm –6:00pm GEM Handbell Choir	27 Newsletter Articles Deadline	28 9:30am –11:30am Warm for Winter Distribution
29	Sixth Sunday in Lent - Palm Sunday 10:00am –11:00am In-Person and Facebook Worship, plus Kids Club and Youth Group 11:00am –12:00pm Fellowship Time/Coffee Hour (dependent on volunteer availability)	30	31 10:00am –11:00am TOPS (Lounge) 6:30pm –8:00pm Northwoods Choraliars Rehearsals (Fellowship Hall)	1 B&G GFL cancellation before May 12, 2026 3:30pm –4:30pm Chancel Choir	2 5:00pm –6:00pm GEM Handbell Choir 6:00pm –7:00pm Maundy Thursday (Immanuel Lutheran)	3 7:00pm –8:00pm Good Friday at United Methodist (Combined Choir) at 7:00 pm as of 2-27-26?	4 Holy Saturday

Approved 2-26-26

Executive Council, Thursday, Jan. 22, 2026, 3:30 pm

Present: Sandy McKittrick, Tom Winqvist, Tom Peterson, Gale Willcox, Sue Bartels, Cecily Dawson, Tim Grade, recording secretary Mary Moxon

- 1) Call to Order & Opening Prayer
 - a) Meeting convened at 3:30 by Sandy. Rev. Tim offered a prayer for the work undertaken.
- 2) Agenda Additions/Changes
 - a) Peace walk
 - b) Sanctuary roof
 - c) Flooring
 - d) By-law issue
- 3) Approval of Dec Meeting Minutes
 - a) Corrections pertaining to the Outreach Board and clarification about a door release button were requested. Motion to approved as corrected by Cecily, second by Tom W. Carried.
- 4) Presentation of Treasurer's report
 - a) A detailed discussion of the spreadsheet version of the treasurer's report was deferred. The Treasurer's Report in Annual Meeting booklet is not the correct document; the correct document was provided for those in attendance and the booklets will be corrected. Questions regarding the report before the council:
 - i) Clarification of the *Ministry* Expenses line was requested. The figures offered are for the seven months of Grades tenure in 2025, not what is requested for 2026. That also includes visiting clergy.
 - ii) Clarification requested regarding *Music Staff* Salaries as a \$0 entry. Our three musicians, Marilyn Norden, Mary Peterson, and Darlene Cole generously donate their time. They work as a team coordinating schedules and planning music. It should not be assumed that all musicians would have the same salary expectations.
- 5) Pastors' reports
 - a) Tim asked for clarification of his role at Annual Meeting. Tim and Susie's written report will be available on Sunday. Ex. Council asked that one of them begin the meeting with a prayer. A brief recap of the year past and plans/goals for 2026. Tom W. asked Tim to be prepared to speak to special budget requests for education, sound system, and marketing.
- 6) Board Reports
 - a) Spiritual Life – Sue reports that coffee, usher, and lay reader volunteers are a struggle to recruit. SLB has determined that if there are no volunteers for coffee hour it will not be served. Brunch will continue two Sundays a month. There was some discussion about simplifying the usher duties by modifying how offering is collected and lighting/extinguishing candles before/after worship. Eccumenical Ash Wednesday worship will be in our sanctuary at 12:30 on February 18. Immanuel Lutheran will hold Maundy Thursday services to include a dramatization, United Methodist will have an additional Ash Wednesday service at 6:00, plus Good Friday at 7:00. Discussion of drive by Ashes at Lakeland Realty.

SLB would like to institute a "Prayer Box" rather than congregants requesting prayers from the pews. It's hard for the pastors to hear and is missed by others in the room and online. Tim will provide a box. Ushers reluctant due to candle lighting – could light candles before service and extinguished after worship. Tim will notify Wendy so that she can include an announcement slide about the Prayer Box.

- b) Building & Grounds – Completed since last report: repair of flush handle in men's room, assurance that the furnace blower is working effectively. In process: Installation of battery backup so that the handicap door buttons work in the event of a power failure; a door release button to grant building access from the office; installation of automatic flow valve required by insurance company; installation of chancel railings;

negotiation with WPS regarding their easement request; Clean out of Room 125; New chair and secretary to replace Tom Peterson and Gale Willcox respectively.

- c) Trustees – Account balances are as is expected. Our investment account has been profitable in the last month. Current pledges for 2026 total \$89,736. Additional specific budgetary discussion below in New Business. Beginning in February, Pat Juday will represent the Board of Trustees at Executive Council.
- d) Outreach – No report

7) Old Business

- a) Can we get backup battery for handicap door installed free, if it were in original quote? Steve is working on this.
- b) Sanctuary system for hearing impaired – quotes have been obtained. Pocket talkers are still available. Looking for system for boosting sound that is compatible for those with hearing aids.
- c) WPS easement – WPS has requested easement. Steve Dahlquist is working with WPS to find out more about what impact that easement would have on our use of the property in question and what might be worked out to everyone's advantage.
- d) Answers on music supplies budget figures? Some expenses could be pulled from Memorial funds. Tom is working with John Stein.
- e) Publishing Executive Council Minutes in newsletter. Some concern that the minutes are nearly two months old by the time they are approved at the next Ex Council meeting and then forwarded for the next newsletter. Although this isn't ideal, it seems preferable than having to actively hunt for that information.
- f) Charging station for electric cars – Income generating possibility. Grants may be available.
- g) Slate of officers, board and committee positions for 2026. This slate will be voted on at the annual meeting.
 - i) Ex Council: Moderator-Cecily Dawson, Vice Moderator-Tommy Wartman, Recording Secretary-Mary Moxon, Treasurer-TBD, Pastors (ex officio)
 - ii) Board of Building and Grounds: Tom Peterson, Mike Hamman, Gale Willcox, Roger (Steve) Dahlquist, Gary Buntrock (staff), Nick Church
 - iii) Spiritual Life Board: Sue Bartels, Mary Dork, Deslyn Dahlquist, Cherie Gilmeister
 - iv) Board of Trustees: Tom Winqvist, Dave Havel (Schwab Liaison), Pat Juday, Jane McEldowney, Gale Willcox
 - v) Outreach Board: Lisa Johnson, Jackie Schmieder, Amanda Jahn, Carla Chropkowski
 - vi) Christian Education Board: not active at this time.
 - vii) Committees of the Church, supporting Boards and pastoral leadership
 - (1) Nominating Committee: Vice Moderator Tommy Wartman
 - (2) Pastoral Support Committee: Carla Chropkowski, Marilyn Norden, Jan Winnicki, Tom Winqvist
 - (3) Personnel Committee: Current Moderator, Past Moderator, Spiritual Life representative, member at large.
 - (4) Technology Committee: Mary Moxon
 - (5) Lay Pastoral Care Team: not active at this time
 - (6) Worship Planning Committee: not active at this time
 - (7) Climate Care Committee: Sandy McKitrick

8) New Business

- a) Ex Council vote on Proposed Budget – Three lines included at Pastors' requests: Christian Education for youth and kids projects, audio upgrade, and marketing. Income from pledges and donations is north of \$89,000. Non-pledged income is estimated as \$15,000 and that may be low. Some balance in checking due to late year donations carried over into Jan. Will need to find some money to meet all proposed expenses as proposed. Some has been received as a response to the special request that came with the

stewardship mailing. Investment proceeds can be accessed as appropriate. Motion to present the proposed budget at annual meeting by Sue B, Cecily second. Carried.

- b) Peace Walk – Ex Council is in receipt of a letter from Jane Banning asking if our church would support a Peace Walk in April. The event would be downtown and would be organized to support peace without conjuring animosity. There were some questions about the purpose of the Walk, who is organizing and what kind of support is being requested. It was agreed that we would pass this opportunity on to our community.
 - c) B & G has been asked for meeting space by Northern Lights Indivisible. Conference guidance on these issues is that as churches we can advocate for issues, but not for a political party or person. Ex Council has denied this request because it promotes an activity that falls outside our non-profit status. Motion to reply such to Northern Lights Indivisible by Gale, Tom W. second. Carried.
 - d) Sanctuary Roof – When the fellowship/education wing was reroofed, we were told that the sanctuary roof had three years of life left. We are up against that. Ted Fisher, Tom P. and Pastor Tim met with the roofing specialist. A shingle roof would cost \$42,000, a metal roof \$82,000. A metal roof would never have to be replaced and it would not hold icicles.
 - e) Some flooring tiles in fellowship hall and narthex are loose. Ted and Tom met with a flooring person. Tiles or glue may be asbestos; that can be tested so we know what the scope of the project is. Tom W. offered that the tiles are not original, they were replaced in about 1989-92.
 - f) Tim will mention the above two building issues at the annual meeting so that everyone is aware of these significant building maintenance issues in the offing.
- 9) Adjourn 5:06.
- 10) ****NEXT MEETING: Thursday, February 26, 2026, 3:30 pm 4th Thursday**

Submitted by Mary Moxon, substituting for Gale Willcox