



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Church News	2
Outreach Ministries	2
Congo Cackles	2
What's Happening	3
Picture Time	4
Children & Youth	5
Love Takes Root	6
Military	7
Tithe.ly	7
Birthday/Anniversary	8

SPECIAL POINTS OF  
INTEREST:

- Church News
- Outreach Ministry
- Annual Meeting & Installation Of Officers
- Congo Night Out
- Picture Time
- Church Family Winter Social
- Love Takes Root
- Tithely Giving



# Congregational Communicator

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## “NOTES FROM THE PASTOR”

Greetings, Congo family,

Unfortunately, my original article did not appear in the December newsletter as intended, so I will share it this month, and since we are still in the Christmas Season on the liturgical calendar, it is certainly relevant. But first of all, I would like to thank everyone who sent me a card, texted me, called me, and of course, who personally gave me a hug for pastor's Appreciation Month. It really means a lot to me, and I am truly blessed with an amazing congregation. As I write this article, my focus is on the last month of the year, when we usually find ourselves packing away Thanksgiving décor and preparing for Christmas.

What a year it has been, and it is not even over yet! I wonder if you have found yourself, like me, looking back over the past year in wonder and amazement. It often leaves me shaking my head a bit and even saying out loud from time to time, "I never saw that coming"! Nevertheless, the year 2025 will soon be a thing of the past, and I am sure many of you will agree that it couldn't come a moment too soon.

I know 2025 has had many challenges. There have been months of difficulty and struggles on so many levels for many people. I am sensitive to the various forms of grief and loss that many of you have experienced and are still experiencing. In addition, many of us are still recovering from the flood, while others are back to normal, at least for the most part.

However, all the challenging times have also provided us with the opportunity to exercise our faith. We have witnessed acts of profound kindness, discipleship, and spiritual growth that remind us of the angels within us and in our community. We have helped and taken care of each

other. I like to think that we are one of the few churches in Spencer that are incredibly adaptable, flexible, and resilient. Here at First Congo, our staff have worked long hours to ensure all church aspects are flowing, along with the core ministry teams, and Matt and his guys in the AV booth have done their best to provide a better worship experience for everyone.

There have been times when staff and ministry leaders, myself included, have felt close to burnout. And I understand it is sometimes difficult to see the good when we feel so overwhelmed by despair; but Christmas reminds us of something critical to keep in our minds, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1:5). My friends, there are many more reasons to be grateful and filled with hope because of our faith. God has, and will continue to help us see all of this through.

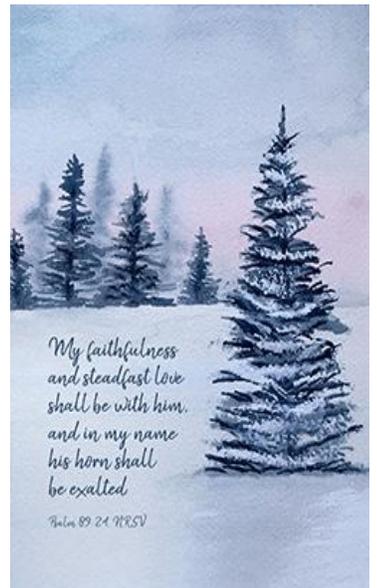
Therefore, I want to remind everyone that we are a Christmas people and that Jesus is incarnated in every act of love and kindness we extend to one another. God can reach us beyond all the barriers and obstacles the world creates and revive us by giving us strength in times of great distress. So, we can do this, and we will overcome, because we are the Church, the body of the risen Christ!

Furthermore, if you can remember when I first came to First Congo, my goal was, and still is, to encourage one another to shift from an inward focus to an outward one, following Jesus' example. I pray you may see what is ahead because a bright future awaits. I believe, as many of you do, too, that God is leading us into a new season of life and ministry together, here at First Congo. My only request is to ask you not to give up. Let me encour-

age you to stay connected with your church family and the ministries and outreach here at First Congo, and to get involved where you are able. Don't underestimate the value of your presence, service, prayers, witness, and giving/pledging. Please reach out to each other and encourage one another. We can only do this if we stay together and true to one another in unity. As your pastor, I pledge to you that I will continue to draw on every resource available to us that will help us move forward into the new season God has planned for us.

I am privileged to be your pastor, and I feel incredibly blessed and honored to be with you. My prayers are with you always. May you be filled with the wonder of the Virgin Mary, the obedience of Joseph, the joy of the angels, the eagerness of the shepherds, the determination of the magi, and the peace and hope of the Christ child.

Feliz Navidad!  
Pastor Shazzy



# CHURCH NEWS

## HOSPITALIZATIONS/SURGERIES, TESTING...

- Curt Miller had knee replacement surgery on December 1.
- Gloria Tingle was diagnosed with basil cell carcinoma on her head December 10.
- David Lynn has had some health issues recently.
- Fran Grover fell and broke her hip December 24.

## THANK YOU...

- Thank you for the Confirmation gift bag, card and cake. I love the pretty glass butterfly, the cute key chain, and the beautiful white rose. Thank you again!  
Vivian Whittenburg
- Thank you so much for the beautiful gifts, card, and delicious cake. Your support has been truly amazing during my confirmation journey and I couldn't think of another perfect way to end it. Thank you!  
Pearl Whittenburg

## OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD



Hello First Congo! Once again, thank you for making it possible for our congregation to provide almost 300 shoe box gifts to children all over the world!

Have you had a chance to track your box? If you used a label that had a scan code on it and paid the freight donation for that box you will be able to trace where it went. Some of our boxes went to Liberia and the Philippines. Last year most went to Mexico.

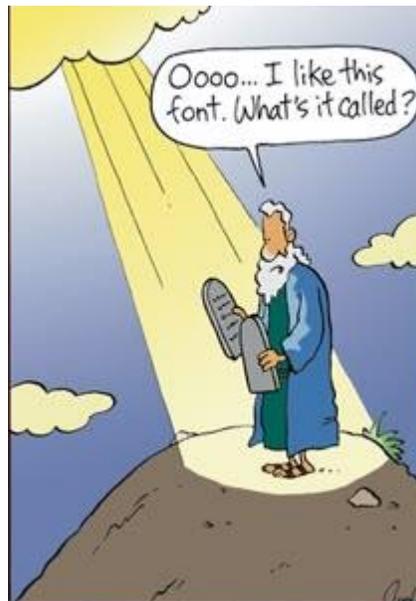
I'd like to keep the shoe box ministry in your mind by suggesting while you may be shopping after Christmas sales for great bargains pick up some small items that could be placed in the shoe box. Socks, combs, hairbrushes and small toys. You can bring them to the church and we will save them for next year.

Thank you again for helping to spread the Good News of our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, to the ends of the earth. Such a blessing! Kathy Anderson

## CANGO CACKLES...



"As slim as your chances are for salvation, it's nice to see you keep trying."



"Oooo... I like this font. What's it called?"



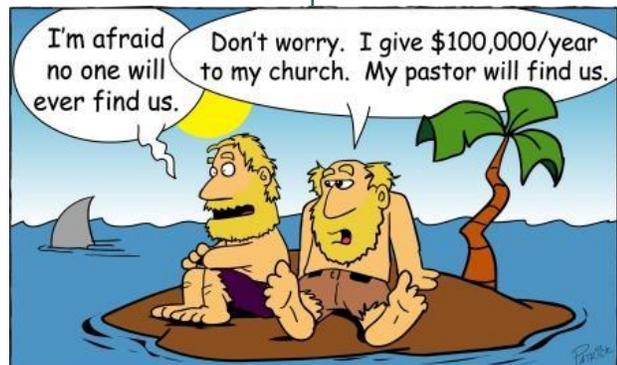
"I understand you are newcomers. Welcome. So glad you're here. Oh, by the way, you're in my pew."



"Sorry, our finances aren't as good as I thought. I had the chart up-side-down."



"I can't run the worship slides anymore... IT'S TOO MUCH PRESSURE!"



"I'm afraid no one will ever find us." "Don't worry. I give \$100,000/year to my church. My pastor will find us."

## WHAT'S HAPPENING



### CONGO NIGHT OUT



**Tuesday, January 6th**  
**PIZZA RANCH • 5:30 -**  
**7 p.m. Order by 4:59 to**  
**get a discount.**



*mmm*  
**Good Soup!**

THE ANNUAL SOUP COOK-OFF IS  
 SUNDAY, JANUARY 25TH!

All church members with yummy soup recipes are encouraged to participate! This annual fundraiser for the Spencer Congo Youth will go towards their Big Stuff trip to Florida in June.

Cook up a pot of any kind of soup, and bring it to church on Sunday, January 25th. Spencer Congo Youth will serve the soup following the Annual Meeting and Installation of Officers.

Everyone is invited and encouraged to attend, even if you didn't make soup!



Mayflower Circle will meet at  
 at 1:00 at the church.

**Thurs., January 15th**

ALL WOMEN OF THE CHURCH  
 ARE INVITED.



The Annual Church Meeting will be held on Sunday, January 25 immediately following the worship service. Please stay after the service so that we can ensure we have the quorum needed to hold the meeting!

The Installation of Officers will be held after the Annual Meeting concludes. We ask that all who are serving on a committee and those running for a position be in attendance if possible.

**ALL Annual Reports must be emailed to the church office by January 2!**

Thanks in advance for providing your reports.

We also applaud all who are currently serving on a ministry team and to those who are at the end of their term. Your thoughtfulness, consideration, and love of the church have not gone unnoticed. Well done folks!



**LifeServe Blood Center** is a nonprofit organization that provides blood and blood products to hospitals across Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota. They will be using our church on the first and third Mondays of the month.

**January 5th • 9:00 a.m. - 2 p.m.**  
**January 19th • 1 p.m. - 6 p.m.**

### ORIENTATION OF OFFICERS

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 4TH  
 7:00 PM  
 Fellowship Hall

This orientation will be for all current Core Ministry members as well as newly elected members.

This is an opportunity for Core Ministries to discuss meeting dates and times and electing a chairperson, vice chair, and secretary. There will also be updates on activities each CM team is currently working on, and goals for the new year etc.



### WINTER BIBLE STUDY

**TUESDAY MORNING**  
**Bible Study • 10:00 a.m.**

**WEDNESDAY NIGHT**  
**Bible Study • 7:00 p.m.**

## PICTURE TIME!

# 2025 Christmas Program



## Agape Act!

*Wrapping Adopt-A-Family Gifts*

## Confirmation

Cate Munter, Pearl Whittenburg,  
Jada McGuire, Grace Simpson,  
Vivian Whittenburg, Harper  
Doyal, Louie Schmidt



## CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRY

Our *People Get Ready* Christmas program was a joy to experience, and we are so thankful to everyone who helped make it happen. The youth stepped up with confidence, and many others gave their time behind the scenes to support the program. It was encouraging to see so many people come together to make this a meaningful morning for our church.

If you missed it, the program is available on YouTube under our First Congregational channel. Look for Sunday, December 14, and start around the 36-minute mark.

Spencer Congo Youth Group's December Agape Act focused on wrapping gifts for Adopt-a-Family, and our youth is truly living out this year's theme: Less Tok and More Walk. Their willingness to serve, give generously, and support our community has been inspiring. Jim and I could not be more proud of their hard work, servant hearts, and joyful attitudes.

Thank you, Youth Group!

With the busyness of Christmas, we were unable to hold a church Christmas Party, but we're excited to invite everyone to a "Winter Is Here" Church Get-Together on January 24. All are welcome—bring friends and an appetizer! More information is below

### **CHURCH FAMILY WINTER SOCIAL**

## *Winter is Here!*

Please join us for a relaxed evening of fellowship, fun, and food as we gather together.

**Saturday, January 24  
5:00-7:00 pm**

Potluck-style appetizers (bring one to share)  
Drinks provided: decaf/regular coffee, hot chocolate

Enjoy time to learn new games, work on puzzles, and connect through conversation with friends of all ages.

Thankful for the opportunity to gather, encourage one another, and enjoy community together.

All ages welcome—bring a friend!

If you have any questions,  
please contact Katie Baltes 262-4392

## MISSIONS

# NOURISH A CHILD TODAY. SUSTAIN THEIR TOMORROW.

Project Nourish is transforming the lives of children in Haiti by providing consistent, reliable access to nutritious meals—often the only balanced food they receive each day. With full stomachs, children are better able to focus in school, stay healthy, and grow stronger, building the foundation for a brighter future. The stability of daily nourishment allows them to learn, play, and thrive despite the challenges they face.

Beyond meals, Project Nourish supports education, the community garden, and a sustainable food initiative that empower students and strengthen communities. This program equips children with the resources and nutritional support they need to reach their full potential and create lasting change in their lives and the communities around them.

We invite you to make a gift to Project Nourish today to help us raise the remaining \$25,000 needed to fund this school year.



**Here is a snippet  
of the kids that  
will be impacted  
by your gener-  
ous donations.**





## UDMO Donations Challenge JANUARY: Soup & Crackers

Any food or hygiene donations can be delivered here to the church in our blue barrel by the office, or taken directly to Upper Des Moines.

## ONLINE GIVING WITH TITHE.LY



### Do You Give With Cash or Check?

We strongly encourage you to switch to digital giving! Online giving with Tithe.ly makes it fast and simple to donate, and also reduces the amount of administrative labor we need to process gifts in cash or with a check.



Scan this QR code with your smart phone camera, click the yellow link that will pop up, it will take you to our online giving webpage.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to email or call the office, we'd be happy to assist you further.

## REMEMBERING OUR MILITARY

Evan Ball  
4120 Van Buren Avenue  
Sutherland, IA 51058  
(grandson of Jackie Ball)

Brandon Black  
1804 Division Rd., Apt #110  
Great Falls, MT 59404  
Bradon.black85@yahoo.com  
(son of Jon & Lori Black)

LTC Mark Ivey  
21326 Thimbleweed Ct.  
Ashburn, VA 20147  
(husband of Cara  
Wilkerson-Ivey)

Nathan Jones  
29 E. Campus Drive  
Campus Center 116  
Bluffton, SC 29909  
(son of Deb Jepson)

Major Kathryn Polking  
949 MDVSS  
APO, AE 09366  
(sister-in-law of Alison Munter)

Lt. COM Patrick Sullivan  
5850 Kyiv Place, Box #176  
Dulles, VA 20189-5850  
(grandson of the late LaVonne  
Peterson)

SGT Daniel Wilkerson  
616 Willow St W, Unit 2  
Harrisburg, SD 57032  
(son of Rick & Barb Wilkerson)



**SEND A CARD, NOTE OR  
CARE PACKAGE  
TO OUR DEDICATED  
SERVICE MEN AND WOMEN.**





WHEN?  
Sundays!  
WHAT TIME?  
9:15 a.m. - 10:15 a.m.  
WHO?  
Children in 5th grade  
and under!



**PASTOR SHAZZY**  
Mon-Thurs  
9:00-4:30

**KATIE BALTES**  
Mon, Tue, Wed &  
Fri 9:00-3:30

**SECRETARY**  
Mon - Fri  
9:00-4:30

**OFFICE HOURS**  
9:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.



First Congregational Church is a member of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches.



**BIRTHDAYS**

- Jan 3 Grace Simpson
- Jan 8 Tami Meendering
- Jan 10 Caroline Nelson
- Jan 12 Beth Berends  
Cate Munter  
Amanda Brigham
- Jan 16 Jane Campbell
- Jan 17 Deb Jepson
- Jan 18 Gayle Conover  
Matt Norgaard
- Jan 20 Sandy Hart
- Jan 24 Sue Biederman
- Jan 25 Josh Munter
- Jan 26 Dave Jacobson

- Jan 31 Janet Swanson  
Mike Conley  
Mary Schomaker

**ANNIVERSARIES**

- Jan 4 Dave & Barb Jacobson

**MISSION STATEMENT**

The First Congregational Church of Spencer joyfully worships and praises God. Bound by our covenant, we strive to be the Body of Christ throughout the world by loving, helping and supporting our church family and others through fellowship, missions, and outreach. Our philosophy encourages all people to experience God's grace by freely thinking and building personal relationships with Christ to the glory of God.



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH**  
 1212 First Avenue West, Spencer, IA 51301  
 712-262-4392 ~ [www.congospencer.org](http://www.congospencer.org)  
 [FirstCongregationalChurchofSpencerIA](https://www.facebook.com/FirstCongregationalChurchofSpencerIA)  
 Pastor: Pastor Sharon "Shazzy" Britz  
[pastor@congospencer.org](mailto:pastor@congospencer.org)  
 emergency contact 864-407-9022  
 Church Secretary: Michelle Tullberg  
[office@congospencer.org](mailto:office@congospencer.org)  
 Director of Children and Youth Ministries: Katie Baltès  
[dcym@congospencer.org](mailto:dcym@congospencer.org)  
 Organist/Accompanist/Bell Choir/Choir Director: Elina Ozolins-Leander  
 Building Manager: Lori Haburn