



January Whispers 2026

Hope United Church of Christ



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Dear Friends,

The new year is a time for more than just resolutions to eat right or start exercising. As important as these things are for our physical well being, I want to suggest that we need to become intentional about our spiritual health as well. Just as with one's physical health, it really is about developing good habits and committing to regular spiritual exercise. This year, I would like to see the membership of our church commit to the following spiritual disciplines:

- 1) To be regular in worship. Regular means just that. It doesn't mean perfect, but it does mean faithful? It means hearing the biblical injunction "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24-25).
- 2) To show love to others. Because we are in Christ we are connected to one another. But that connection is far more than just those that we worship with on Sunday. The Church is the totality of all believers. As followers of Christ we are just as much brothers to those we will never meet and whose names we will never know as we are to those we are emotionally close to. We need to take that connection seriously and look for ways to be involved with the body of Christ around the world.
- 3) To do good. No one can truly be said to be good but God alone. Yet we are in fact called to be good, called to practice a lifestyle that is modeled on that of Christ himself. Where there is hunger or thirst, we need to be offering food and water. Where there is aloneness, we need to be offering friendship. Where there is poverty and sickness, we need to be offering hope and healing. We do these things not to prove anything about ourselves, but because we belong to the God who is good and he commissions us to serve him as his hands and feet.
- 4) To make Christ known. "We are Christ's ambassadors; it is as though God were making his appeal through us" (1 Corinthians 5:20). By what we do, by what we say or by what we leave unsaid Christ will be made known or kept hidden in the world in which we live. Think now, how will the good news of Christ be shared in the lives of others because of how you intend to live in the coming year?
- 5) To grow in our own knowledge of God and our relationship with Jesus. What are you doing to nurture your relationship with Christ so that you stay in love with God? Are you taking time for private prayer and group study beyond worship, or are you trying to get through on just one hour (or less) a week of devotion? Jesus is reported to have grown in wisdom and stature, and in favor with both God and man, but then Jesus was also known for nurturing his spiritual connection to the Father. If he who was himself God felt the need to do this, how much more do we need to do likewise?

Love and peace,

Pastor Gene

PERIODIC REMINDERS

Most people know the following things, but sometimes it is good to state them publically. The beginning of a new year seems as good of a time as any to share these reminders.

Weddings and Funerals – In the United Church of Christ, the congregation's settled pastor is given authority with respect to the administration of weddings and funerals in the local church. This does not mean that others cannot conduct these services, but that the use of the sanctuary for that purpose is at the discretion of the local pastor and that former or outside pastors are restricted from conducting these services within the parish without the express invitation of the pastor. My personal practice is to make every effort to meet the wishes of people who desire to ask a favorite pastor to conduct a special service, I only suggest that you let me issue the invitation to them directly so that this other pastor knows that I am not only aware of your desire, but also in agreement with it.

Gratuities and honorariums to the pastor -- The Church Council provides that Hope Church's pastor is compensated fairly with a living wage. Thus there is no need for additional gifts to a pastor for the performance of pastoral functions such as conducting weddings or funerals. It has been my personal practice to never charge for any of these pastoral offices. I also try to communicate this to local institutions such as funeral homes that there is no need to put the question to families with regard to what to give to the pastor for a service, but they have many people to remember and so sometimes the question is still asked. Though you may do as you wish in this regard, please, feel free to communicate to those who ask that you know your pastor has no such expectation.

Hospitalizations – Many of us grew up in a time when hospitals regularly would call clergy to inform them when a parishioner was hospitalized. This has not been the case for some time now. Indeed, on some occasions, even when asked the hospital cannot even confirm that a patient is in the hospital. Therefore, the pastor must learn about hospitalizations by other means, most generally from the family. If you are aware of a hospitalization within the congregation, please, call the church office or even call Pastor Gene directly on his cell phone (765-505-1866). He would rather get 20 redundant phone calls with the same information, than miss being informed of a need to visit someone in the hospital. It can, and regrettably sometimes does, happen.

Counseling -- As a general pattern, pastors are expected, and I keep this rather inviolate, to meet with persons considering marriage or baptism. Each circumstance is unique, but the goal remains to help people understand how the church views these events (which is often different than the general understanding by the public at large) and to help prepare people for them. Thus the farther ahead that one is able to express a desire for scheduling either of these events the better as there is most certainly an expectation that pastoral conversation needs to precede the actual scheduling of any event.

Therapy – linked with counseling is the concept of therapy. Pastors are trained in the art of pastoral conversation and can often be helpful in providing spiritual insight or providing a sounding board for people who need to talk things out with another individual. But pastors are not professionally trained psychotherapists. Should an individual have issues of a significantly complex nature that he/she is dealing with in life, as your pastor I will be glad to meet with you to help you get a beginning handle on the situation, but I also know that there are limits to my ability to help. Therefore, in seeking to provide the best care possible, all must realize that there are times when a pastor may have to refer those who come to him to others who are more thoroughly trained.

EPIPHANY

The first of the year finds us about halfway through the season of Christmas. At least that's the present season of the church year we are still in on January 1. I'm well aware that the rest of the world finished with Christmas on Christmas day itself and now is fully ensconced in what might be termed "football season". But, for those of us who care about such liturgical things, following the twelfth day of Christmas we will, on January 6, celebrate Epiphany.

Epiphany is a complex feast. Originating in the Eastern Church and formed by the mentality of a people whose thought processes differ sharply from our own, the Epiphany is like a rich Oriental tapestry in which the various themes are woven and interwoven.

Divine manifestation: The Epiphany takes its name from the Greek epiphania, which denotes the visit of a god to earth. The first idea of the feast is the manifestation of Christ as the Son of God -- Begotten before the daystar and before all ages, the Lord our Savior is this day made manifest to the world.

Royal kingship: A second important idea in Epiphany is the extension of Christ's kingship to the whole world. The revelation of Christ to the kings (magi) at Bethlehem is a symbol of His revelation to the whole of the Gentile world. Epiphany presents to us the calling of not merely a chosen few, but all nations to Christianity.

Your Light is Come: Closely linked to both these themes of divine manifestation and world kingship is a third idea running through the Epiphany feast: that of light. During Advent, the world was in darkness, and we prayed and waited in the spirit of the Jewish nation which lived in expectation of the Coming Light during thousands of years. At Christmas the Light shone forth, but dimly, seen only by a few around the crib: Mary and Joseph and the shepherds. But at Epiphany the Light bursts forth to all nations and the prophecy is fulfilled: "The Gentiles shall walk in Thy light, and kings in the brightness of Thy rising." The mysterious star of Epiphany not only leads the magi, but points all the world to the Christ.

The royal nuptials: Besides the important ideas outlined above, there is still another great theme threaded through the Epiphany feast -- the theme of the royal nuptials, the wedding of Christ with humanity. It is an idea on a completely different level from the historical events which the Epiphany celebrates, yet inextricably bound up with them; for example, the historical marriage feast of Cana is used by the Church to suggest the setting for Christ's nuptials with the Church; the wise men represent not only the Persian Magi adoring the Babe 2000 years ago at Bethlehem, but also the Gentile world hurrying to the wedding feast at the end of time when mankind's nuptials with the divine Bridegroom will be celebrated; the gold, frankincense and myrrh are not only tokens for the little Baby King in the stable, but royal wedding gifts for the mystical marriage feast of heaven.

Epiphany lifts our eyes from the family celebrations and demands that we should include in our vision "all the ends of the earth." It demands that, like the wise men, we should have the courage to follow the light of the star we have seen, however hazardous the journey; that the light of our faith, like that of the wise men, should be so strong that we are able to see and recognize our Lord and Ruler in however unexpected a way He may present Himself to us; and that having recognized Him, we should bow down and adore Him, offering Him our total loyalty.

May the light of Christ shine brightly through your life.

THANK-YOU

Becky and I wish to thank the people of Hope Church for your graciousness towards us this Christmas. We sincerely appreciate the cards and gifts we have received from the congregation as a whole and from many members individually. You have blessed us, and through your generosity we shall be able to bless others. Thank-you for remembering us. -Gene & Becky Ramsey

Bible Studies

Last year, I often included an article in the Whispers about 5 Practices of Fruitful Congregations. These were five traits which one consistently finds in healthy, fruitful congregations: Passionate Worship, Radical Hospitality, Intentional Faith Development, Extravagant Generosity, and Risk-taking Mission/Service. As we begin 2026, I hope we can move from conversation to actual practice. And the practice that I want to focus on as we begin the year is **Intentional Faith Development**.

Scripture makes it clear that all of us, child, teen and adult, need to be growing in Christ. This past year we had a good response to our Tuesday afternoon Bible studies, but not so good attendance in adult Sunday school. So, as we resume classes in January, I'm going to be offering not one, but two different Bible studies.

Our Tuesday afternoon Bible study, meeting at 4:00 pm, will begin January 6 and study Paul's letter to the Romans. This letter is perhaps the theologically richest of all Paul's writings. Martin Luther, John Wesley, and countless others trace the roots of their own spiritual formation back to this letter. Many today think Paul's letter may have done more to shape Christian doctrine than the words of Jesus himself.

Then, because not everyone is free on a Tuesday afternoon, we are going to add an evening study, on Wednesdays at 6:30 pm. Our Wednesday evening study will begin January 7 and examine Matthew's gospel. In it we will see how Matthew connects Jesus to the Old Testament as the fulfillment of God's promise to send a Messiah to save Israel and why a Jewish Messiah might still be important for those who aren't themselves Jewish.

A Prayer to Begin the New year

I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

The above prayer is part of a Covenant service which we will be incorporating into our first service of the new year, January 4th. Like the prayer, this service asks us to take seriously what it means to join ourselves to God through the person of Jesus. It is a service of emphasizing renewal and recommitments.

If you have old habits you want to break, new habits you want to make. Come, declare your hopes and dreams for the new year.

If you have a past you would like to leave behind, and are in search of new beginnings. Come, know that God is gracious in offering forgiveness and the author of second chances.

If your faith walk has gotten stale, if you know that it isn't where it needs to be where you want it to be. Come, ready to be reengaged with God and renewed in your faith.

As Christians, we have participants in a new covenant made with God through Christ Jesus. Therefore, it is wise to from time to time renew our covenant with God. We do this when we reaffirm our Baptismal Covenant or gather at the Lord's table. And this first Sunday of the new year, I invite you to do what generations before us have done and renew this covenant which binds us to God by our own sacred pledge in a covenant service.



Hope Happenings

Debbie Mader, Worship Committee

Happy New Year! As we welcome 2026, consider what an eventful year 2025 was for our church! The highlight was the arrival of Reverend Gene Ramsey as our new settled pastor after many months of searching. It was also a blessing that his wife Becky and daughter Flower were able to get visas and make the big move from Uganda. We can't thank the Search Committee enough for all their hard work.



2025 wrapped up with celebrating our Savior's birth. December services included a Christmas program with bell ringing and singing by the youth, the Waupaca Madrigals performing, and a "hymn sing" with requests from the congregation. All culminating in beautiful and joyful services on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.



As we start planning for 2026, the Worship Committee will be meeting Tuesday evening 1/13 at 5:30 p.m. We will be looking ahead to Lent, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter. Please let us know if you have any ideas on how we can make this season meaningful and inspirational. Was there something from past services you particularly liked? Have you seen something at a different church that you would like us to consider trying? Do you have any music suggestions? We would appreciate your input! Email me at dmader30@gmail.com or reach out to any of the committee members in church.

I will be playing most Sundays in January. A big thank-you goes out to Wendy and Barb for providing the music in February while Ron and I head south for a few weeks! 😊

January 4th - Covenant/Recommittment, Communion, family worship, noisy offering

Liturgist: Todd Gleisner

Ushers: Lori Hahn, Ron Kramer

January 11th - The Baptism of Jesus

Liturgist: Edna Welch

Usher: Jan Lamers

January 18th - Annual meeting after the service

Liturgist: Lori Hahn

Usher: Ben Bodoh

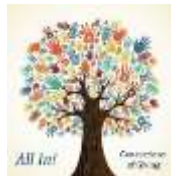
January 25th -

Liturgist: Dawn Mason

Usher: TBD



Circle of Hope participated in the Fremont Christmas Parade, handing out Hope for Hugs candy treats. We also entered a mini version of Hope United Church of Christ float in the parade. Thank you to Kerry Welch- Jones for building the float!



Stewardship

SAY CHEESE!



It's Picture Time! Stewardship committee is starting HOPES in-house directory. Our team will be taking pictures of our members before and after church. We are doing a more casual approach for the 2026 directory. Our goal is to have the directory completed by Easter. No need to sign up, just bring your best smiles on any of these dates and we will get your picture taken for the new directory. January 18th, 25th and February 1st starting at 9:30 prior to church and then after church. For anyone who is unable to attend church we will be making arrangements to get your picture taken or a picture submitted for the directory. Thank you!



On Sunday, December 7th, the children of Hope filled the front of the sanctuary with music and a 'Christmas Joy' message. For special music, Ava, Kenzi and Autumn sang, "Love was Born". If you missed worship on this day, please watch this service on Facebook. It will bring a smile to your face. Especially a few enthusiastic bell ringers.



The Giving Tree collection was a success, plus the noisy offering benefited this family. Thank you all for helping brighten a local family's Christmas morning.

Upcoming dates:

January 4th: Family worship, with noisy offering (no Sunday school classes), youth group until 1pm

January 11th: Sunday school classes resume

January 12th: Board of Christian Education meeting at 5:30pm

January 18th: Sunday school classes, Youth group until 1pm



Join us for Bible Study Tues 4 pm & Weds 6:30 pm

Birthdays

Garrett Arndt 1/01
 Frances Cullen 1/03
 Bryce Kayden 1/05
 Amanda Tagwell 1/06
 Louis Kottke 1/06
 Katherine Hahn 1/09
 Sandra Tangwall 1/13
 Mindy Muskevitsch 1/14
 Rio Hildebrandt 1/14
 Olivia Gleisner 1/16
 Michelle Prosek 1/16
 Marissa Mason 1/17
 Nancy Simons 1/19
 Andrea Nault 1/22
 Penny Peeters 1/24



Anniversaries



Pastor Gene & Becky Ramsey 1/18

BY THE NUMBERS

	<u>Income</u>	<u>Expenses</u>	<u>Attendance</u>
<u>Monthly Average</u>			
January	\$ 8543.97	\$ 5839.22	50
February	\$ 7426.45	\$11186.30	59
March	\$13958.67	\$ 9865.19	50
April	\$16935.87	\$21885.70	59
May	\$15183.15	\$12141.06	60
June	\$10601.60	\$10654.98	49
July	\$ 8369.20	\$17583.07	52
August	\$19933.30	\$12463.21	52
September	\$10027.55	\$13362.69	76
October	\$13,306.87	\$12,590.69	65
November	\$11,758.65	\$19,412.47	75
	\$136,045.28	\$146,984.58	

January 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 	2	3
4 Family worship 10:15 Youth Group	5	6 Bible study Romans 4pm	7 Bible Study Matthew 6:30pm	8	9	10
11 Circle of Hope 9:30am Worship 10:15 Sunday School	12 Christian Educ. 5:30 Church council 6:30	13 Bible study Romans 4pm Worship 5:30	14 Bible Study Matthew 6:30pm	15	16	17
18 Worship 10:15 Sunday School	19	20 Bible study Romans 4pm Whispers deadline	21 Bible Study Matthew 6:30pm	22	23	24
25 Worship 10:15 Sunday School	26	27 Bible study Romans 4pm	28 Bible Study Matthew 6:30pm	29	30	31