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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Church News
- Orientation of Officers
- Valentine Tea in Peterson
- Ski Trip
- Middle School Dance
- NAPF/HOPE
- Next Step/Mission Trip
- Tith.ly Giving



Congregational Communicator

Volume 5, Issue 2

February 2025

“NOTES FROM THE PASTOR”

Greetings, family,

As we head into the second month of 2025, I reflected on February in general. The original calendar consisted of 10 months, beginning with March and ending with December, as the Romans considered winter a dormant period. Thus, February did not exist until approximately 713 BC. It was then that January and February were added to the Roman calendar by the Roman king Numa Pompilius to better align the calendar with the lunar year. Therefore, February was the very last month until it was eventually moved to its place as the second month in approximately 452 B.C.E.

February has many memories for me, both joyful and sorrowful. My late mother would have celebrated her birthday on February 6, and many years later, that date reminds me of the day my life as a firefighter and paramedic ended abruptly as I was flung 60 feet into the air while at a fire incident. A joyful reminder is how the Lord blessed me with my beautiful daughter, Bonnè, on 13th February. February is also the month we celebrate Valentine's Day. How can we forget this, since we are constantly reminded of it beginning in December when red hearts and stuffed animals fill the store shelves?

Did you know that February comes from the Latin word “februum,” which means “purification,” derived from the Roman purification rituals held during this month?

Considering the origin of the word February, I will share another significant event that took place in that month, and I pray that moving forward, in preparation for Valentine's Day and other days important to you, you may add this to your February events: the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord is a vital event in the life of Jesus, which we read about in **Luke 2:22-38**.

In the quiet town of Nazareth, a young couple named Mary and Joseph, carrying their precious baby Jesus, embarked on a journey to Jerusalem, following the ancient Jewish tradition to present their firstborn son at the temple forty days after his birth. Although the journey was long and dusty, their hearts were filled with quiet joy as they carried their child, who was destined for great things. As they reached the temple, which was bustling with activity, they saw crowds of people offering prayers and sacrifices. Mary and Joseph brought baby Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem, where he was formally presented to be purified or consecrated according to Hebrew law. This was a great act of obedience and devotion by Mary and Joseph, showing their commitment to God.

Approaching the altar, a devout old man named Simeon, guided by the Holy Spirit, stepped forward and reached for the child. Simeon had been waiting for years to see the Messiah, and as he held the baby Jesus, his eyes filled with tears of joy. Simeon praised God, saying,

“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.”

By bringing Jesus up through the law, they fulfill not only the promises of the prophets but the Lord's promise to Simeon that he would witness the coming of the Messiah. Mary and Joseph were deeply moved by Simeon's words, realizing the profound significance of their child. Simeon conveys to Mary that salvation through Christ will be painful, but it will be a necessary pain. This is the most critical part of the nativity narrative, and it tells us that every moment of Christ's life leads to the Crucifixion and the salvation of all mankind.

Mary and Joseph also encountered Anna, a prophetess who had spent many years in the temple, praising God for the arrival of the Messiah. As they left the temple, Mary and Joseph reflected on Simeon's words, their hearts filled with wonder and a sense of the weighty responsibility entrusted to them. Journeying back to Nazareth, the young parents had a new understanding of the extraordinary nature of their baby boy, Jesus, and the vital role he would play in the world.

Therefore, February is often linked to the theme of purification, reflecting the practices of presenting offerings at the tem-

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ple after childbirth, as seen in Luke's Gospel. I pray that moving forward, we can reflect on the significance of February not only as it relates to our lives, but the significance it played in the Life of our Risen Savior, Christ Jesus.

Have a blessed month, my Congo family.

Pastor Shazzy

CHURCH NEWS

HOSPITALIZATIONS/SURGERIES, TESTING...

- Grace Simpson was hospitalized for pneumonia at the beginning of January.
- Sandi Nielsen had surgery on the 23rd of January in Sioux Falls.

THANK YOU...

- **Amazing! Thank you, congregation, for helping to make First Congregational Church's first-time collecting shoe boxes a huge success!**

Our church collected 243 shoe boxes out of 451 total boxes, that is more than half of the boxes that were taken to Sioux City. That includes the 2 packing parties we held for group packing and the individual boxes that people brought to the church. What a great ministry mission this was for us to complete and be a part of bringing the Gospel to children all over the world! We had 38 volunteers that came and helped. Some prayed for the box and the child receiving it, others helped by packing the shoe boxes into containers and hauling things up and down the stairs, loading the trailer with the carton containers, and helping to do the paperwork that is involved! A total of 192 hours were put in by our volunteers. Thank you to all who helped in any way!

This being our first year we will know next year what works for our church and how we can improve and streamline our process system. I am so proud of the way our church always steps up to help with a project that reaches out to others whether that is right next door here in Spencer or all the way across the globe! Thank you, Pastor Shazzy, for presenting this as a possible project, the Mission committee for agreeing to the project, and all the members of the congregation that volunteered in some way to make this a success. First Congo YOU ROCK!!!

- Kathy Anderson, chair for Operation Christmas Child

- We would like to thank each and every one that served on a Core Ministry Team for their tireless dedication and work for our church. A salute to those that are going off and to those that have taken on a new role.
- Fist Congo, Thank you for the beautiful flowers and angel statue for Samuel's funeral. Thank you for thinking of us during this difficult time.

- Nicole & Brian Fay



CONGO CACKLES

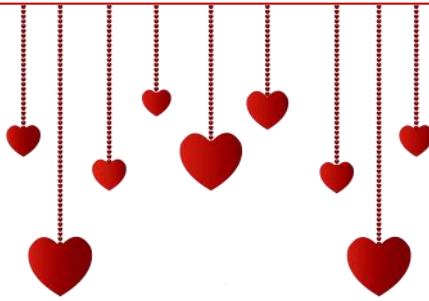


WHAT'S HAPPENING

CONGO NIGHT OUT



Tuesday, February 4th
PIZZA RANCH
5:30 - 7 p.m.
Dutch Treat



YOU'RE INVITED

Valentine Tea

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 8TH
AT 2 P.M.

Women's Fellowship
CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
PETERSON, IOWA



LifeServe Blood Center is a non-profit 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.

February 3 • 9:30 a.m. - 2 p.m.
February 17 • 1 p.m. - 6 p.m.



ORIENTATION OF OFFICERS

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5TH
7:00 PM
Fellowship Hall

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

You will be discussing meeting dates and times, electing a chairperson, vice chair, and secretary. There will also be discussion on what activities each CM team is working on, goals for the new year etc.



Mayflower Circle will meet at Family Table at 11:30 a.m.
Thurs., February 20th
ALL WOMEN OF THE CHURCH ARE INVITED.



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

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



DO YOU SING OR PLAY AN INSTRUMENT?
All ages are welcome and encouraged to share their talents during worship. If this is something you or your child might be interested in, call the church office or Elina and let us know!



FOOD FOR THE SOUL

ADVENTURES IN INSIGHT

BY HAROLD E. KOHN

Rest Your Soul in a Patch of Light

Some of our four-legged friends have a habit that we humans could well develop for our spiritual profit. They make a practice of playing and resting in a patch of light. Not far from my study desk is a sunlit knoll where long ago a vixen fox dug her den on the south side of a hill where the sun peeks through an opening in the encircling trees. There in the spring of each year fox cubs frolic upon the sun-drenched grasses and wrestle among the sun-warmed ferns.

On a dark day, when the sun bursts through a rift in heavy storm clouds, our dog Lass will find a small circle of sunshine where a few rays drift through our windows. There she will lie, basking in a soft, warm splendor.

When we are at our best we humans do a similar thing. We seek out a sunny spot of spiritual light and warmth, and from time to time we return there and allow our minds to play in the golden radiance or let our souls rest in the beneficent warmth.

This is one way we encourage the growth of faith. We let memory spread light from the past upon our present situation. In that patch of light the mind plays and rests. When days were dark with discouragement, the ancient Jews would recall the admonition of the book of Deuteronomy, "Remember the day when thou camest forth out of Egypt," and "Remember the way which the Lord thy God led thee." The Israelites had been slaves of the Egyptians, but God freed them. If God could help them in such an extremity in the past, He could help them again in their present or future distresses. What God had done He could still do. In that thought their souls stretched and grew, rejoiced and found repose.

An old gospel song advises, "Count your blessings, name them one by one." Reviewing the good that has befallen us lets the best hours of our yesterdays—past joys, companionships, and victories—warm the present moment. Some cheering word of a friend, a gay note of remembered laughter, or some thoughtful act of kindness restores our faith in what other people can mean to us. An illness overcome, a temptation resisted, a sin forgiven, a tragedy turned into triumph refreshes our trust in God's ever-present help. "Remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee." In such ways our souls play and rest in a patch of light from the past.

But more is involved here than the use of the past to brighten the present. Choosing a patch of light in which to play and rest also means selecting from the *present* those things most worthy of our reflection and our faith. This world is filled with strange mixtures of good and evil, of light and dark. We shall be in touch with both the best and the worst. Being "realistic" does not mean, as we are sometimes led to believe, to look at life's dark or vulgar side, interpreting the worst as "reality." The true realist looks at life as it is, as the biblical faith sees it, with its slavery in Egypt and its day of emancipation, with its sin and redemption, its squalor and splendor. And the person of faith then chooses to stretch his soul in the sunny awareness of the mercy that is here amidst life's mischief, and the Redeemer who is present amidst the ruins.

Well, then, let's face reality. Our mental health and our spiritual good depend upon it. But reality must include the best as well as the worst aspects of our human situation. A cesspool is real, but so is the clean, happy brook that sings and dances past our cabin door. Promiscuousness and adultery can be found in almost any community if one looks hard enough, but so can pure living and marital faithfulness. Grudgefulness and revenge are here in the world, but so are forgiveness and grace. Cruel gossip can be heard almost anywhere; so can sincere words of appreciation and honest praise. Profanity is real; so is prayer. War is hideously real, but peacemaking is real, too. Judas is no more real than Jesus. Crucifixion is real; so is resurrection.

When sunlight streams through our windows, Lass seeks out a patch of radiance and basks in its warm splendor.

Where does your spirit find rest?

CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRY



We have some exciting events coming up with the PF Youth Group, and we'd love your support!



SAVE the DATE SKI TRIP

lets go Skiing!

MOUNT KATO
March 1st

WATCH YOUR EMAILS FOR MORE INFORMATION!

MIDDLE SCHOOL DANCE

IT'S FREE!

BRING YOUR FRIENDS!

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
1212 1ST AVE W
SPENCER, IA 51301

SATURDAY FEBRUARY 8TH
8:00PM - 10:00PM

Snacks and Drinks Provided by
PF Youth Group of First Congo Chuch

Parents' Night Out

- Let us take care of your little ones for the evening while you relax and unwind.
- We're offering an evening filled with fun activities!

When: February 8th - 5:00-7:30pm
Where: First Congregational Church
1212 1st Ave W
Spencer, IA 51301
Cost: \$10/Kid
Ages 6 weeks to 4th Grade

Reserve Your Spot Today
712-262-4392

Pizza/Daycare Provided by P.F. Youth Group of First Congregational Church

If you'd like to help with crafts or snacks, please contact Katie Balttes at congospencer.ed@gmail.com or text 515-664-8288. Any help is welcomed and greatly appreciated! Proceeds from this fundraiser will go towards repairing the youth room, which was damaged by ground water.

MISSIONS

SAVE THE DATES!

NAPF/HOPE ~ JUNE 22 - 27 (*Exact date TBD*)

NAPF

NAPF is for youth who are entering 9th through 12th grade. NAPF allows teens to meet and bond with other Christians from throughout the country and to share their faith in a fun-filled atmosphere. Small groups are led by dedicated adult counselors, many of whom volunteer and use vacation time to attend. In conjunction with tremendous worship music, worship times may be led by members of the Commission on Youth Ministries or other adult leaders. Local church youth groups are also asked to prepare and lead morning and evening devotionals. Opportunities to express faith through acts of service are always a highlight of the conference. Any time a group of young people is gathered, there is always plenty of fun!

HOPE

HOPE offers young adults post high school through age 26 a great opportunity to further grow in faith with peers in an environment similar to NAPF. While still including worship, speakers, small group time, and mission work, HOPE promotes closer connection with peers and deeper discussion about faith through peer-led small groups. The experiences and perspectives that each person brings to their small group are valued and can enrich discussions about faith in remarkable ways. In addition, HOPE provides more opportunities for leadership involvement through prayer team, small group leader, or CYM (Commission on Youth Ministries) representative positions. HOPE creates a genuine, meaningful, and fun atmosphere to grow in faith while creating new friendships!

NAPF and HOPE Scholarships

Scholarships have been made available through various funds to assist in reducing the cost of registration to the annual youth conference. Scholarships will be awarded according to available funds and can be used to cover part or all of the registration fee to attend the meeting. Various scholarships include the Lynn Merkel & Joanne Simpson NAPF/HOPE Scholarship. This scholarship was created in 2018 and named to honor the tireless work and the many years of leadership these two individuals gave to the youth ministry of the NACCC. Scholarships assist anyone wishing to attend a NAPF/HOPE conference and event, who has financial need and has shown outstanding development in any or all of the following areas: Christian character, Participation in local church youth programs, Community service. Scholarship applications are available to all who are affiliated with a church that maintains membership in the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches.



UPCOMING MISSION TRIP WITH NEXT STEP MILWAUKEE, WI – JULY 27- AUGUST 1

WHAT IS THIS MISSION EXPERIENCE ABOUT?

During your time in Milwaukee, you may have the opportunity to work on block beautification and home repair projects, or serve at local gardens and food pantries. But at the end of the week, you can know that your understanding of the city, as well as growth in and understanding of prayer will have taken place. Relationships will have formed. Projects will have been completed. And the love of Christ will be made known.

COST PER PERSON: \$449

INCLUDES MEALS AND ACCOMMODATION.

First Congo has secured funding and credited it towards a mission trip, and depending on the number of participants, we will have a fundraiser to raise the additional funds needed. Sign up asap! A deposit of \$50 will be required to secure your spot.

If this is something you'd be interested in, please contact the church. We have 15 spots reserved right now.



UDMO Donations Challenge

FEBRUARY: Canned Tuna & Chicken

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)

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

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

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

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

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

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



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!



BIRTHDAYS

- | | | | |
|--------|---------------------|--------|------------------------|
| Feb 4 | Sandi Nielsen | Feb 25 | Bridget Bailey |
| Feb 5 | Becky Sanders | | Makayla Black |
| | Molly Moser | | David Robison |
| Feb 6 | Darlene Prather | Feb 26 | Bill Green |
| Feb 7 | Brendan Ellis | Feb 27 | Mindy Heiter |
| Feb 9 | Katie Halverson | | Allison Richter |
| Feb 11 | Bill Orrison | Feb 28 | Tanner Korbitz |
| Feb 12 | Isabella Fassbender | | Sara Montgomery-Porter |
| Feb 16 | Scott Simpson | | John Phelps |
| Feb 18 | Steve Berends | | Tom Phelps |
| | Andy Dietz | | Hanna Zinn |
| Feb 20 | Polly Nelson | | |
| | Angie Nielsen | | |
| Feb 22 | Curtis Swanson | | |
| Feb 24 | Carter Johnson | | |
| | Ray Garnatz | | |

ANNIVERSARIES

- Feb 15 Nyle & Lynn Dotson



PASTOR SHAZZY
Mon - Thurs

SECRETARY
Mon - Fri

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



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

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

[FirstCongregationalChurchofSpencerIA](https://www.facebook.com/FirstCongregationalChurchofSpencerIA)

Pastor: Pastor Sharon "Shazzy" Britz

pastor@congospencer.org

emergency contact 864-407-9022

Church Secretary: Michelle Tullberg

office@congospencer.org

Assistant Secretary: Amber Stoutenborough

amber@congospencer.org

Christian Education Coordinator: Katie Baltes

congospencer.ed@gmail.com

Organist/Accompanist/Bell Choir/Choir Director: Elina Ozolins-Leander

Building Manager: Lori Haburn



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