

THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
Neillsville, Wisconsin
Church 715-743-2147
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Pastor Sue Vornholt
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OCTOBER 2023 NEWSLETTER

PASTOR'S MESSAGE FOR OCTOBER NEWSLETTER

Recently I've come across a number of articles and opinion pieces in newspapers about the drop in church participation. This trend seems to be happening throughout the country and among all sorts of denominations. Scholars have studied this trend and even published books about it. Among them is ***The Great Dechurching: Who's Leaving, Why Are They Going, and What Will It Take to Bring Them Back?*** by Jim Davis, Michael Graham, and Ryan P. Burge. The problem isn't, as those of us in so-called mainline churches feared, that people are switching churches to the "cool" so-called "non-denominational" churches (which aren't really without a denomination – they just conceal it). The problem is that people just aren't going to church or identifying with what they call "organized religion" (whatever that means).

This trend is not totally new. I remember reading about a trend in the last century for people to just construct their own religion. One commentator labeled this "Sheilaism" after a woman named Sheila who just created her own religious faith. Back in 1986 I exchanged churches for five months with a German pastor. At that time in Germany people were excited when they had half a church filled. My exchange partner warned that this same trend would happen here in the USA. And it has.

However, this trend doesn't mean that people are not searching for community. One writer recalled his upbringing in a conservative black congregation where his father was pastor. He has abandoned much of his father's theology, but he still wishes to be part of a community in which people care about one another and search for meaning. In the end he would like to find a church for "nones," people who do not claim a particular religious faith.

Here in Neillsville, we are not immune from this trend. When I moved here in 2000 it seemed that Neillsville was a bit behind the trend. Worship attendance was better than where I had served in Ripon. Often the church seemed full. But over the years the church has become less full, and when Covid struck the physical church emptied and the virtual church attempted to pick up the slack. During our recovery from Covid we've come back to worship, first with masks and then mostly without masks, but our worship numbers have diminished, and the average age of worshipers has increased. Like other churches we are facing a significant challenge.

One of the bright spots in this post-Covid time has been the creation of our Called to Care team, which has made contact with all of our shut-in members. Now this group is expanding its vision to see that it can do about bringing back to worship and participation those whose membership has lapsed a bit. We'll see what happens.

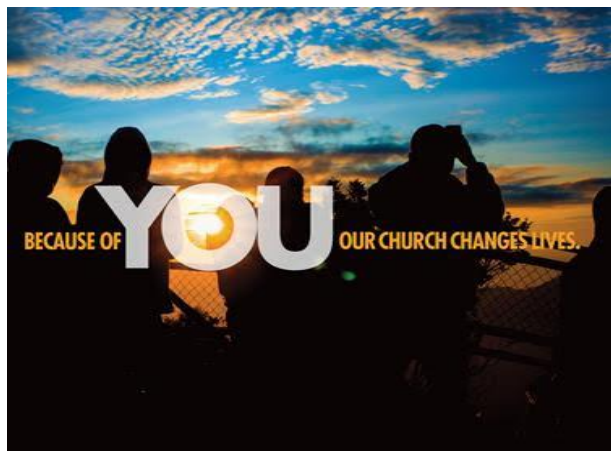
In my darker moments I've thought: Perhaps we need to establish a sort of "Alumni Club," like colleges do with those of have graduated from their institutions. Just invite these departed "alumni" back for an annual "homecoming" and send out an occasional appeal for contributions and leave it at that. No commitment to believe in anything or do anything. But then my mood brightens, and I consider all that our faith and community have to offer and I realize we need to face the challenge of this day to "keep on keepin' on."

In reaction to the above-mentioned book one friend of mine asserted that the church needs to do a complete change. No more sermons. No more "loud" organ music. Just an opportunity for people to gather and share with one another. Personally, I'm not ready to "throw out the baby with the bath water," but I do

know that change is inevitable and we have to be open, with Reinhold Niebuhr (the great UCC theologian of the 20th century), to ask God to give us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, courage to change the things we can, and wisdom to know the difference.

In God's grace,

Pastor Jim



NEIGHBORS IN NEED

Neighbors in need "NIN" is one of the "five for five" missions of the United Church of Christ. In 2023 the "BEHOLD" theme continues. "BEHOLD" is used 1,298 times in the King James version of the Bible. It is derived from the Greek word 'eido', which has the literal translation of: be sure to see or "don't miss this". One third of the NIN funds support the council for American Indian Ministries. Two thirds of this offering is used by the UCC church justice and witness ministries to provide funding grants to UCC churches and organizations leading justice initiatives, advocacy efforts and direct projects to their communities.

This year's focus is environmental justice. Plastics, electronics, and other non-compostable wastes are being shipped across or even tossed into our waterways, launched into space as well as buried in landfills. As people of faith we believe these egregious acts are sinful and unholy.

Psalm 24:1 "The earth is the LORD'S and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.

Grants are available to UCC churches that have programs to address the environmental crisis. We must step forward and answer the call.



Stewardship Scripture Quotes

Proverbs 11: 24

One gives freely, yet grows all the richer

Attend "Thank You" Sunday , Oct. 22nd!

The Stewardship Committee invites you to meet the Ukrainian family we supported as part of the "Unifying for Ukraine" efforts earlier this year. They will attend our church service along with their host family on Sunday, October 22th. Besides finding out how the family is adjusting to Clark County; you'll have an opportunity to sample some of their favorite Ukrainian foods following the church service. Please plan to attend this special Sunday service.

*****Christian Education Update*****

J. A.M. Club and confirmation at 5 PM



Oct. 11th -at Calvary with kids singing at their Wednesday church service
Oct. 22nd - kids singing - Stewardship Sunday at UCC
Oct. 25th – at UCC



Meal Giveaway

UCC NEILLSVILLE
515 WEST SECOND STREET
October 15, 2023
11:00 -11:15 AM



Search Committee Update

September has been a busy month for the Search Committee. We had a prospective Pastoral candidate that the committee met with, however, we received the following message from the candidate: "After prayerful consideration, and looking at the current needs of my family, I have decided to decline your offer to serve as pastor of the First Congregational Church of Neillsville, WI. This was a difficult decision for me because you are all so wonderful and I could feel the Spirit of God in your presence and in your beautiful sanctuary. You are an amazing community and I pray that God will bless you in the search for a full-time minister."

While we felt confident that a potential minister profile was before us, it did not work out the way we had prayed and hoped. We now await for another profile for us to consider for the full time settled Pastor position.

We continue to ask you to pray for the ministerial profile whose gifts match those identified in the UCC-Neillsville Profile. Another aspect we are looking for in this journey is to call a pastor that can foster and grow a healthy relationship between the pastor, the congregation, and the community.

IN OUR Thoughts and Prayers

Continuing the following in our thoughts and prayers.

Janet Harrington

Dave Beck

Lisa Schermitzler

Gayle Schermitzler

Please let us know if others not listed
(with their permission) would like prayer requests.

†

Our condolences go out to **Roger Carl, family & friends** on the death of his mother, **Berdella Carl** who passed away on September 1, 2023;



she was a devoted member of our church who served as a Deacon for many years, and was also a member of the Circle of Friends. Tentative plans are being made for a memorial service here at the church on Saturday, November 4th.

†

Our deepest Sympathy goes out to **Debbie & Mike Perkl, family & friends** on the death of Debbie's mother, **Marge Goetsch** who passed away on September 3, 2023. Marge was a long-time faithful member here at our church, who served on numerous state committees for the United Church of Christ, including the board of directors for the Neillsville UCC and the Interfaith Volunteer Caregivers as well as church Moderator for several years. She also hosted a weekly Bible Study at her home which will now be called the Marge Goetsch Bible Study. Her service was held here at the church on September 23rd.

We are deeply saddened by your loss. We pray that God will give you strength and grant you comfort in your time of bereavement.



Sunday, September 3, the radio broadcast was sponsored by Rosie Repinski in celebration of Jim's 86th birthday.

Sunday, September 10, the radio broadcast was sponsored by Kirk & Nancy Rodman in celebration of their 61st wedding anniversary.

Sunday, September 17, the radio broadcast was sponsored by Byrl & Sharon Buddenhagen in honor of their granddaughter, Ashley Buddenhagen's birthday.

Sunday, September 24, the radio broadcast was sponsored by Jim Repinski in celebration of Rosie's 70th birthday.

OFFERINGS FOR SEPT – OCT 2023

September 19, 2023

General Offering	\$5,113.00
Circle of Friends	51.00
Neighbors in Need	140.00
Ukraine	75.00
Radio Broadcast Fund	<u>75.00</u>
	\$5,454.00

October 2, 2023

General Offering	\$3,603.00
Memorial Fund	445.00
Neighbors in Need	50.00
Radio Broadcast Fund	<u>750.00</u>
	\$4,598.00

VANCO for September \$ 633.44

Facts and Figures of September 2023

Attendance for In-Person Worship

September 3	online 5	Sunday 31
September 10	online 3	Sunday 51
September 17	online 7	Sunday 80
September 24	online 8	Sunday 47



- 3- Tim Steinbach
- 4- Jake Keller
Mickey Marty
Alex Northup
- 7- Brian Eddy
Joe Felser
Corliss Fields
- 10- Luke Erickson
- 11- Tim Voigt
- 12- Clarissa Rochester
- 17- Dante Erickson
- 21- Marian Vornholt
- 25- Dave Harnisch
- 30- Derek Zschernitz

*Happy Birthday to all who have an October birthday!
Did we miss your birthday or have the wrong date?
Let us know if we did.*



- 4- Michelle & Lucas Bergemann
James & Rosie Repinski
- 5- Erik & Jenna Sigurdson
- 7- Fritz & Dixie Hediger
Joe & Debbie Holman
- 8- Darwin & Ruth Zwig
- 9- Clinton & Julie Woods
- 14- Karen & David Northup
- 16- Tim & Sue Voigt
- 17- Kevin & Jenny Erickson
- 18- Byrl & Sharon Buddenhagen
- 19- Gary & Christy Anding
- 20- Dave & Carol Harnisch

*Happy Anniversary!
Did we have the wrong date or miss your Anniversary?*



Left to Right- Pastor Jim Mohr, Karen Mohr, Paul Vine, Kelley Burch, Nancy Rodman, Byrl Buddenhagen, Kirk Rodman, Barb Petkovsek, Jo Ann Voss, Doris Bakker

UCC Caregivers Group Update - October 2023

In March 2023 members and friends of the UCC formed a Caregivers Group. The volunteers visit other members and friends who are homebound, hospitalized or in a care facility. In addition, when requested caregivers serve communion to those desiring to receive the elements.

To ensure visits are planned and consistent, The Caregivers use a common set of guidelines *“Called to Care: Guidance for Caregivers”*, developed by the national UCC. When possible caregivers visit in pairs, and leave a UCC business card. They keep hospital care facility visits to 15-20 minutes and home visits around one hour. Caregivers document their visits and UCC Administrative Assistant Janice Miller, maintains a log of each visit. Over the summer Caregivers members have visited many friends and members of UCC and will continue.

The group meets regularly to review how visits are proceeding, discussing additional members who could benefit from a visit. If you, or someone you know, would be interested in becoming a caregiver please contact one of the caregivers pictured above. Also if you know of someone who would welcome a visit please contact any of the members above, or contact Janice Miller, Administrative Assistant at 715-743-2147 or email at neillsvilleuccoffice@gmail.com.

Help! Our Church is Too Small!

In [CPR Connects](#) by anna@convergenceus.org

September 21, 2023 [Leave a Comment](#)

Or “*How To Stop Worrying and Love Your Small Church*”
by: Rev. Dr. Anna Hall

I recently rediscovered on my bookshelf an old book I inherited from a retiring pastor’s library – Lyle Schaller’s *The Small Church is Different!*

While the book itself is literally falling apart, and some of the information in this 40 year old text is outdated at this point, the key ideas are sound.

Small Churches are Normal

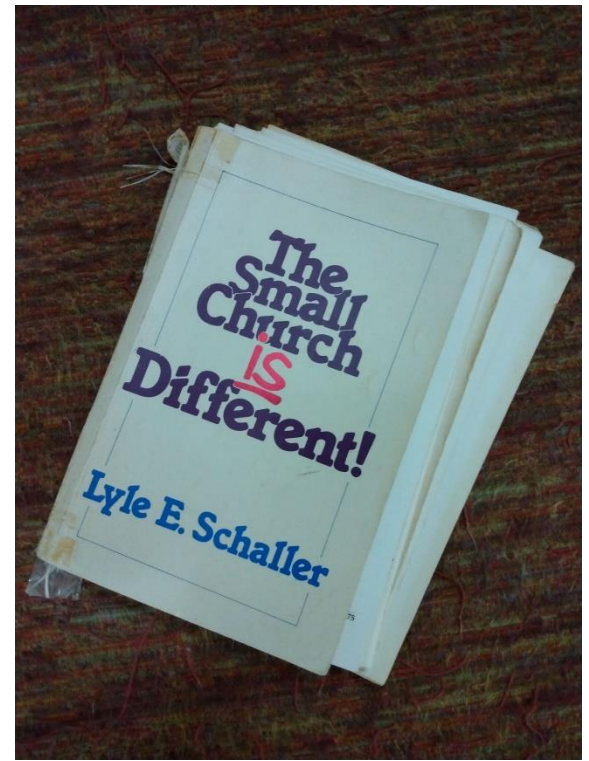
Small churches, or those with less than 100 congregants, are the majority of congregations in the US. The percentage of small churches is increasing, but even back in 1982, Schaller asserted that the small church was the “normative institutional expression of the worship congregation among the Protestant denominations on the North American continent.” This is even more true today, as many churches have seen their participation drop dramatically over the past 5 years.

Small Churches are Different

The nature, structure, and energy of small churches are often very different from other size churches. They don’t have much in common with megachurches or even mid-size churches with multiple paid pastors and program areas. They may consist of only a few core families. They can struggle with financial and facility sustainability.

Yet small churches also have their own gifts and advantages which are often missed by those who are stuck remembering the glory days when the church was bigger. When we get outside of the shame and comparison traps which see small churches as “less than,” We can open our eyes to their gifts. Small churches can be:

1. **Places to know and be known** – If you are a part of a small church, everyone will know your name. When open to it, relationships in a small church can be deep and permeate all areas of members’ lives. Members can be there for each other at the hospital, at funerals, and at the birthday party. A true sense of community can grow and thrive.
2. **Focused** – Since a small church can only do one or two things at a time, they can focus all their energy and best thinking on doing those one or two things as well as possible. They can increase impact by not spreading energy thinly across numerous programs and activities. Small churches can be clear with others on that focus and invite them to help fulfill it.



3. **Responsive** – Small churches can, when working well, respond quickly to community needs or changes. Without multiple layers of bureaucracy, a single council can decide within hours how the church will help those who have experienced displacement, disaster, or other emergencies. Small also means the ability to quickly respond to a new movement of the spirit in the congregation. Supporting a new direction is easier when there are only a few dozen people to gather, unify, and work together for good.

4. **Locally Rooted** – Small churches can know their community well, whether it is a neighborhood, town, or rural area. Members usually know others who live in their community, sometimes knowing almost everyone! This makes it easier to understand community needs, generate partnerships, and truly love the church's neighbors.

Unfortunately, too many small churches miss out on these advantages because they are trying too hard to live as if they were larger. Small churches:

- May be stuck remembering past eras with more congregants, or simply buying into the cultural idea that bigger is better.
- Can worry so much about not attracting lots of new people that they neglect knowing and loving each other well. Sometimes, that worry leads to unhealthy behaviors driven by anxiety or conflict, which also weakens relationships.
- Can have bylaws and ways of working that are not suited to a small congregation, using up their energy on meetings and failing to be responsive to the spirit moving in new ways.
- Can be so attached to a building that drains their energy and finances that they fail to listen to the Spirit calling them toward another way of being church together.
- Might try to be all things to all people rather than choose a singular focus, at least for a season, because they are scared that one unhappy person leaving will make them even smaller.
- Can turn inward out of shame about being small and thus fail to know and love those who live in the area around their congregation.

Although these challenges can keep many small churches stuck in place, the thriving small church will find ways to move past them. This work is challenging, but if a small church has maintained strong relationships among its members, this cohesion can help them face the challenge and live into their future.

Is your church small? Would you say you are embracing the gifts of being small? Or do you still have some work to do to break out of old patterns that keep you from those gifts?



*59th Holiday Fair
United Church of Christ
515 W 2nd Street, Neillsville
Saturday, November 11, 2023
9 AM - 1 PM*

*Gift Boutique, Greeting Cards,
Kitchen Cupboard, &
New to You Treasures*

*Lunch from 11 AM - 1 PM
Chicken Salad on a Croissant
Baked Potato Soup & Dessert
Adults - \$8; Kids Under 10 - \$5*





2023

United Church of Christ

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost 10 AM Worship *World Communion Sunday	2 9:00 am Card Making	3 1 PM Bible Study to be determined / bring bible	4 2 PM Stewardship Mtg	5 12 PM - T&C Quilters	6	7
8 Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost 10 AM Worship	9 6 PM - PEO	10 1 PM Bible Study to be determined / bring bible	11 5 PM J.A.M. Club @ Calvary *Meal Prep	12 1 PM – Circle of Friends Picnic Mtg 5 pm Deacon's Mtg *Meal Prep	13 8 PM setup for Follen Pvt event	14 8 AM – 5 PM Follen Pvt event
15 Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost 10 AM Worship *Food Give Away	16 9 AM Card Making 9 AM - T&C Quilters	17 1 PM Bible Study to be determined / bring bible -Trustees Meeting	18 5 PM – Council Mtg	19	20	21
22 Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost 10 AM Worship Stewardship "Thank You" Sunday	23	24 1 PM Bible Study to be determined / bring bible 5 PM – Trustees Mtg 5:30 PM – Council Mt 6:30 PM - HCE	25 5 pm J.A.M. Club @ UCC	26	27	28
29 Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost 10 AM Worship	30	31 1 PM Bible Study to be determined / bring bible HALLOWEEN				