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# Congregational Communicator

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## ADVENT & CHRISTMAS: A SEASON OF HOPE, REFLECTION, AND JOY

As the holiday season begins, many of us wonder: when exactly does Christmas begin? In the Christian tradition, Christmas doesn't start the day after Thanksgiving or on Black Friday — those may be cultural markers. Instead, the liturgical season of Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas, preparing our hearts for the birth of Jesus.

Advent isn't meant to be just a lead-up to Christmas—it's a sacred season of waiting, reflection, and longing. During Advent, we remember the centuries of hope and expectation that led to the coming of Christ. We wait not only for the celebration of His birth, but also for His promised return.

This year, as we prepare for Christmas, let's use this time to pause. Let's set aside the bustle and noise of shopping, parties, and decorations long enough to focus on what truly matters: the arrival of Emmanuel — "God with us."

Here are a few meaningful ways we can observe Advent and Christmas together:

- Create space for quiet and prayer. Lift up a daily prayer for our church, our community, and the world. Invite family members — including children — to light an Advent candle each week as a reminder of the light Christ brings into the world.
- Remember those who may be lonely or hurting. Christmas can be hard for many. Reach out to neighbors, friends, or fellow church members who may feel isolated. A simple card, a warm meal, or an offer to pray with someone can make a world of difference.
- Offer hospitality and welcome. As many people return to church for seasonal services, let's greet every visitor as if they were Christ Himself. A warm smile, a friendly greeting, and genuine openness can help make our church home to people who may be seeking hope.
- Reflect on the deeper meaning of Christmas. The story of Christ's birth is not just a sweet holiday tale — it's the beginning of a great redemption. It's the moment when God came to dwell among us, to bring hope, healing, and salvation. Let's not lose sight of that miracle amid the tinsel and the lights.

As we journey through Advent and enter into the joyous celebration of Christmas, may we allow our hearts to be softened by awe and wonder. May we offer true hospitality, serve one another in love, and carry the light of Christ into our homes, neighborhoods, and beyond.

In lieu of pastors article, written by yours truly and a sprinkle of AI fairy dust!  
- Merry Christmas and a blessed Advent season!



"Christmas and Holiday Season." Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas\\_and\\_holiday\\_season](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas_and_holiday_season). Turner Christian Church. "December 2024 TCC Newsletter." Turner Christian Church, 2 Dec. 2024, <https://www.turnerchristianchurch.com/blog/2024/12/02/december-2024-tcc-newsletter>.

Lewis Center for Church Leadership. "Make Meaningful Connections During Advent and Christmas." Lewis Center for Church Leadership, <https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/make-meaningful-connections-during-advent-and-christmas/>.

# CHURCH NEWS

## HOSPITALIZATIONS/SURGERIES, TESTING...

- Judy Hemphill had a lung procedure done at Mayo on November 5th.
- Sally Phelps had shoulder surgery on November 4th.

## CONDOLENCES...

- Prayers to the family of Dona Alison (Smock) Roberts who died on November 5th.

## THANK YOU'S & NOTES...

- Thank you to my church family & Pastor Shazzy for the cards, prayers, phone calls and texts during my hip replacement. Pastor Shazzy for being at the hospital for prayer time before surgery and her visits.  
- God Bless John Zinn
- A heartfelt "THANK YOU" to our Church Family for the many acts of kindness during Cliff's long illness, and then at the time of his passing. The cards, flowers, visits, gifts, and sweet treats always brought big smiles to his face, and mine too! Thank you to Pastor Shazzy, Elina, and church staff who made Cliff's service so very meaningful to us. The luncheon served by Women's Fellowship following the service was deeply appreciated by all.  
- Forever grateful, Bonnie Hoover & Family
- Dear Congo Youth Group, Thank you for helping with my backyard leaf cleanup. Your help and support was greatly appreciated.  
- Blessings, Dean Saunders
- Thank you to everyone who dropped off appreciation gifts and cards. Your thoughtfulness truly meant so much to me. I'm so grateful for your support and encouragement.  
- Katie Baltes

## CONGRATULATIONS...

- Celebratory prayers to the Norgaard family on the birth of baby girl Jordi Lyn Norgaard! Born to Eric and Holly on November 11th weighing 7 lbs. 15 oz, She was welcomed home by big brother Gavin and grandmother Linda Norgaard.



The many committees of the church are looking for people to fill their open positions for the next few years. These are the groups in the church which work to make the things happen. If you are interested in helping with our vital missions, please let us know. We don't know unless you tell us!

## Leaf Raking



## Heritage Dinner



## WHAT'S HAPPENING



CIRCLE WILL MEET ON  
**DECEMBER • 1 P.M.**  
 AT ST. LUKE'S



MONDAY EVENINGS FROM  
 6 P.M. - 8 P.M.  
 RUNS THROUGH DEC. 15TH



TUESDAY MORNING • 10 a.m.  
 WEDNESDAY NIGHT • 7 p.m.



You're invited to come enjoy a  
 Festival of Lessons and Carols on  
**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7TH AT 7:00 PM**  
 at Sacred Heart Catholic Church  
 in Spencer, Iowa.



**DECEMBER 14TH**  
 DURING WORSHIP

### CONGO NIGHT OUT



**TUES., DEC. 2ND • 5:30 - 7 P.M.**  
**PLAZA MEXICO**  
 DUTCH TREAT



### *You're Invited!*

CANDLELIGHT  
 SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE

Monday, Dec. 1, 2025 • 6:30 pm  
 AT LIVING WORD

This special event is centered on  
 keeping memories of your loved one  
 alive. It is our hope that this service  
 offers you a sense of comfort  
 and strength.

A time of fellowship and  
 refreshments will follow the service.  
 Warner Funeral Home, Avera @ Home of Spencer  
 Hospital, Abben Cancer Center and Area Clergy have  
 thoughtfully and lovingly  
 collaborated in providing this service.



**DECEMBER 6TH**  
 9 A.M. - 3 P.M.  
 FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH  
 1212 1ST AVE WEST • SPENCER

ENJOY A DAY OF SHOPPING  
 AND HOLIDAY CHEER!

COME AND SHOP OUR LOCAL  
 VENDORS FOR CRAFTS,  
 JEWELRY, TREATS  
 AND MORE!

## CHRISTMAS *celebration*

**ROAST BEEF DINNER**  
**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14TH**

FOLLOWING WORSHIP  
 ROAST BEEF • MASHED POTATOES • GRAVY  
 VEGETABLE • ROLLS • CAKE!

We will offer dine in, carry out, and  
 delivery. Free will offering.

We are asking for cake donations to  
 add to the feast! We're hoping for  
 approximately 15-20 cakes.  
 If you're able to help us out, please  
 call the office and let us know!





*We want to wish all our Congo members and friends a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!*

Pastor Shazzy, Michelle, Amber, Katie, Elina Matt, and Lori



CHRISTMAS  
*Open House*

Pastor Shazzy invites you all to a Christmas Open House at her home!

**FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12TH**  
**5 p.m. - 7 p.m.**

**407 11th Ave West**  
**Spencer**

Come when you can,  
leave when you must!

*Refreshments will be served.*



Feed Our Children has been chosen as our Christmas recipient by the Core Ministry of Missions. Feed Our Children are in their fifteenth year of providing weekend bags of food to our local children in need. They are a local Spencer program. Over the years, they have provided so many kids with not only food but self-confidence and the ability to focus on other important needs such as learning. Stories of dumpster diving, and suffering through empty bellies are real and present, even here in Spencer, Iowa.

Rising costs have made it even more difficult to provide the resources needed to roughly 170 children.

Your generosity is much appreciated. All funds collected will stay in the Spencer community.



**THE MITTEN TREE!**

The tree is located in the Education wing. Donations of mittens, scarfs, socks, coats etc. will be warmly received. All contributions will go to UDMO for distribution. Let's keep the spirit of the season going and pack the tree with donations for those less fortunate.



**ADOPT-A-FAMILY /  
ADOPT-A-SENIOR  
PROJECT RETURNS!**

With your kind donations families and seniors will receive Christmas gifts to brighten their lives and truly bless them this Christmas season.

**Please deliver your wrapped gifts by December 2nd to the church office or to the back of the sanctuary.**

Thank you for your generosity to those families that may be experiencing challenges in their lives.

Please note that gifts do not need to be new but do need to be clean and in good condition.



We are nearing the end of the year and coming up on Annual Report season again!

**WE WILL NEED ALL ANNUAL REPORTS BY JANUARY 2ND.**

Please send to the church office via email.

It takes a lot of time and proof reading to complete the reports, and we must have them available one week in advance; so no dilly dallying let's get'em done!

# CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRY



# Youth Group

## MEETS THIS MONTH

- DECEMBER 3RD
- DECEMBER 10TH
- DECEMBER 17TH

6 P.M. - 7 P.M. MIDDLE SCHOOL

7 P.M. - 8 P.M. HIGH SCHOOL

*YOUTH GROUP WILL RESUME ON JANUARY 7TH.*

## Agape Act!

*Making mats for people experiencing homelessness from plastic grocery bags at Grace Methodist.*




# SUNDAY SCHOOL

- SUNDAY SCHOOL WILL MEET ON DECEMBER 7TH.
- CHRISTMAS PROGRAM PRACTICE ON DECEMBER 14TH WILL BE FROM 9:15 - 10:15 A.M.

*SUNDAY SCHOOL WILL RESUME ON JANUARY 11TH.*

# OUTREACH MINISTRY



## OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD

Thank you, First Congo, for stepping up and helping to pack boxes, pick out items for the packing party, and carrying and loading almost 300 boxes from our church alone! We increased our box total from last year by about 70 boxes.

Mike Patten, Ray Grandstaff, and Randall Anderson loaded most of the 69 cartons in our trailer to deliver to Sioux City. We had 1,022 shoe boxes in our trailer from our area district, that is up from 491 last year.

We prayed over each group of boxes that were brought in, thanking God for the gifts and the givers! Our Sioux City region totals were also increased by 2,521 boxes with a total, being shipped to Denver, of 13,654 shoe box gifts for children!

Think of that! 13,654 kids will hear and learn about the love Christ Jesus has from them because of NW Iowa's part in this project! That is something to be proud and thankful for. It's an honor to be part of spreading the Gospel around the world! Great job First Congo for being a part of this Mission Project! Thank you for all of your gifts and help.

- Kathy Anderson



Feed children. Fuel futures.  
Project Nourish

Project Nourish is a sustainable school lunch program at La Concorde School.

Your gift provides a reliable meal for students, when many don't know when their next meal will be.

1 million children in Haiti face critical levels of hunger and starvation.

Please use your smart phone camera to scan this QR code to donate to the Love Takes Root Project Nourish program.





## UDMO Donations Challenge DECEMBER: TOILET PAPER

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.



**Your Blood. Your Hospital. Your Neighbors.**

LifeServe Blood Center is a nonprofit organization that provides blood and blood products to hospitals across Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota.

**December 1st • 9:00 a.m. - 2 p.m.**  
**December 15th • 1 p.m. - 6 p.m.**



**ONLINE GIVING WITH  
TITHE.LY**

### Do You Give With Cash or Check?

We strongly encourage you to switch to digital giving! 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.



## 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  
(nephew of Linda Norgaard)

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?  
9:30 a.m. - 10:25 a.m.  
WHO?  
Children in 5th grade  
and under!



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

SECRETARY  
Mon - Fri  
9:00 - 4:30



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



# DECEMBER

*birthdays & anniversaries*

## BIRTHDAYS

- |        |                                       |        |  |
|--------|---------------------------------------|--------|--|
| Dec 4  | Tom Manley<br>Jim Montgomery          | Dec 28 | Joe Conover<br>Pearl Whittenburg<br>Vivian Whittenburg |
| Dec 9  | Duaine Holck<br>Janice (Howe) Cuperus | Dec 30 | Jane Nelson  |
| Dec 11 | Donna Dailey<br>Greg Wood             | Dec 31 | Bryan Bailey<br>Gerald Wilmot                          |
| Dec 12 | Jeff Heiter                           |        |  |
| Dec 13 | Jack Koencke                          |        |  |
| Dec 16 | Kathy Anderson                        |        |  |
| Dec 17 | Wanda Sundblad                        |        |  |
| Dec 20 | Sally Phelps                          |        |  |
| Dec 23 | Randall Anderson                      |        |  |
| Dec 25 | Jesus                                 |        |  |

## ANNIVERSARIES

- |        |                      |
|--------|----------------------|
| Dec 20 | Steve & Beth Berends |
| Dec 23 | Duaine & Sally Holck |
| Dec 28 | Mike & Lisa Moret    |
| Dec 30 | Jay & Barbara Muggé  |



## 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

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

PASTOR: Pastor Sharon "Shazzy" Britz  
[pastor@congospencer.org](mailto:pastor@congospencer.org)

EMERGENCY CONTACT: 864-407-9022

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[office@congospencer.org](mailto:office@congospencer.org)

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[dcym@congospencer.org](mailto:dcym@congospencer.org)

ORGANIST/ACCOMPANIST/BELL CHOIR/CHOIR DIRECTOR: Elina Ozolins-Leander  
BUILDING MANAGER: Lori Haburn