

TIDINGS

December 2025

A Regular Sharing of our Mission and Ministry



WELCOME TO ADVENT

Come prepare for God's season of Light and Love with the community at St. John UCC. With the young spirit of our elders and the sage words of our youth, we will encounter "What Do You Fear? Insisting on Hope this Advent." This Advent series comes to us from our friends at A Sanctified Art and takes seriously the angels' message and trusts that Christ's birth truly is good news of great joy for all people.

See Page 3 for Advent worship, devotionals, and gatherings



Advent's light begins shining on 11/30 with *the Hanging of the Greens*. One of the great traditions of sharing our faith across the generations is our preparing for Advent and Christmas. We will gather for a Soup and Salad luncheon and decorate the church for the season. All ages are warmly invited to help.



Does holiday music strike a chord with you? Come share in a gathering of instruments, choirs, and much more at the Third Annual *Twelve Songs of Christmas* Music Celebration!

A free-will offering will be collected to support the FSD 145 Shoe Fund



HOLIDAY BAKE SALE AND PEANUT BRITTLE MAKE-AND-TAKE PARTY

Need a little Christmas crunch? Come join with friends and make our traditional peanut brittle on Saturday, 12/6, starting at 8:30 am.

Do you miss the Cookie Walk? So do we! So come and share in this year's *Holiday Bake Sale*! Holiday sweets and treats will be available on Sunday, 12/7 after church, with proceeds supporting our congregation's mission and ministry.

See Page 4 for all the sweet details

CHRISTMAS SWEATER SUNDAY, 12/21



Come share in the warmth of worship in your favorite Christmas Sweater as we celebrate the Fourth Sunday of Advent.



Come together in the Sanctuary or share in our streaming Online Worship every Sunday, 10:00 am:
facebook.com/stjohnuccfreeport/live

Wherever you are on life's journey, worship as one community every Sunday

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS AT ST JOHN UCC

ADVENT DEVOTIONALS

This Advent, you can journey through the month of reflection with your choice of Devotionals:



The first is a partner to this month's Adult Formation Series, *What Do You Fear? Insisting on Hope this Advent.* Our friends at *A Sanctified Art* look to give us hope:

"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will fulfill the good promise." The promise of truth, compassion, restoration, and justice. These four promises are how we will orient this daily devotional guide. Everything wrong will be made right; everything bad will be made good; everything empty and devoid of love will be filled.



The UCC *Stillspeaking Writers' Group* invite you to plan your Advent observances around the theme, *Soon and Very Soon*. The theme acknowledges our need for radical hope, and encourages us to prepare for God's best.

In both, you'll find each day includes a scripture reading, reflection, and prayer from the first Sunday of Advent to the celebration of Epiphany (11/30 – 1/6).

Pick up one (or more) in the Narthex



THE LONGEST NIGHT SERVICE

12/21, 4:00 PM

The Wellness Ministry is hosting a time for worship on the afternoon of the winter solstice, a date where we experience the shortest amount of sunlight. During a season whose signs demand us to be merry and bright this worship intentionally creates a space for people to acknowledge the shadows that grief and loss cast in our lives.

Together during *The Longest Night Service*, we will reserve time to acknowledge the loss we are feeling and look toward the comfort, hope, and healing that comes with the birth of Jesus and the steadily growing sun which will begin to shine a little longer with each coming day.



MITTEN TREE FOR AMITY

From November to December, our congregation works with Amity's Daycare, collecting mittens, hats, and gloves. Additionally, sweatshirts, sweatpants, sweaters, heavy socks, and boots are appreciated.

Please place your donations on the Christmas tree in the entry way or in the nearby baskets

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS AT ST JOHN UCC

November 30 First Sunday of Advent: Hope

"In the time of Herod, we long for god to break in"

Come and listen to the hopes of the prophets and begin Advent's hopeful waiting. The Chancel Choir will lead us in singing out our "Glorias" together as we find our hope in the words and wisdom of the prophets. Finish the morning with our ***Hanging of the Greens*** Soup & Salad Luncheon and Decorating Party.

December 7 Second Sunday of Advent, Peace

"When we're running out of hope, God is at work"

Come gather at Christ's Table as Advent's hope continues to build. The songs of the season continue singing in the key of peace and the blessings of the season.

Come back for a second helping of Christmas and Holiday music at the 3rd Annual ***12 Songs of Christmas*** community music celebration at 2:00 pm!

December 14 Third Sunday of Advent, Love

"Even in our fear, we are called forward"

Come and connect in the Joy of worship, as the Star guides our way. Find your voice in the songs of the season with The Bell Choir empowering our worship, as they ring in the message of God's blessing.

December 21 Fourth Sunday of Advent, Joy

"When you're afraid, give me your hand"

Come share in the warmth of worship in your favorite Christmas Sweater and sing out with love! Carl and Dianna Cole return for a second Advent offering to start the Christmas week, welcoming us into the final days of Advent's expectations.

And, if you're feeling blue this holiday season, come back for our ***The Longest Night Service*** at 4:00 pm.

December 24 Christmas Eve, Light

"Good News is louder than fear"

Come and worship! Christ, the Light of our world is born anew in our hearts! A Candlelight celebration of Lessons and Carols begins at 5:00 pm for all ages.

December 28 First Sunday after Christmas

"Let fear fuel a fire for justice"

O Come, all Ye Faithful and celebrate the Christmas weekend, joining together in our annual Christmas Hymn Sing, awaiting the New Year's brightening light!



**An Adult Faith Formation Series,
Advent Sundays, 9:00-9:45**

This Advent, we'll be inspired through the work of our friends at *A Sanctified Art*. They have crafted a series inspired by the stories in Luke 1-3 and the question, "What do you fear?"

"The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight." These lyrics from "O Little Town of Bethlehem" (Phillips Brooks, 1868) cycle through the years, echoing the refrain of biblical wisdom to stand up to our fears. Each weekly sub-theme is a "we" statement because confronting fear is deeply relational and rooted in the fact that God calls us into community. As we move through our series, we hope to create space for acknowledging the fears of our world while celebrating God's closeness with great joy.

11/30 – *"In the time of Herod, we long for God to break in"*

Luke 1:5-13 | Lamentations 3:55-57

12/7 – *"When we're running out of hope, God is at work"*

Matthew 11:1-11 | Isaiah 43:19-21

12/14 – *"Even in our fear, we are called forward"*

Luke 1:26-39 | Jeremiah 1:4-10

12/21 – *"When you're afraid, give me your hand"*

Matthew 1:18-25 | Isaiah 41:5-10

Throughout the season, we will hold space for our weariness and our joy. We will seek a *"thrill of hope"* in our hurting world. We will welcome joy—even and especially if, like the shepherds, we cry out in fear. In this fear-full world, may we find many ways to hear the Angels' praise:

"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace."

GENEROUSLY PREPARING FOR THE HOLIDAYS



ANNUAL FAMILY CHRISTMAS TREES

The Care and Community Team celebrates the return of our family Christmas trees, sharing our hope, peace, love, and joy. This year, the trees will spread their light from the Narthex, Entryways, and Chapel Hearth Room.

Your family can sponsor a tree by bringing decorations from your home and share your family's style with the congregation! If you are unable to decorate the tree yourself, volunteers will purchase and decorate for you for \$15.

***Every family who wants to decorate
will have a tree waiting!***

Please contact the church office to claim your family tree!

*Trees can be decorated at the Hanging of the Greens on 11/30,
or can be scheduled at your family's convenience before 12/7*



CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS

You are invited to "remember a loved one or honor a family member" by placing a poinsettia in our sanctuary at Christmas. We are offering 6" potted plants at \$20 each. You can take your plant home after our Christmas Eve Service, or the flower can be delivered to a shut-in if you prefer. Order forms are available in the Narthex or in the Office.

Please return your form to the church office by 12/8.



HOLIDAY BAKE SALE 12/7, Following Worship

Come and share in this year's ***Holiday Bake Sale!*** Holiday sweets and treats will be available on Sunday, 12/7, following worship. Proceeds will support our congregation's mission and ministry.

You can help make our Bake Sale a success! Bring cookies, muffins, breads, bars, pies, cupcakes, snack mix, or a sharing portion of your favorite holiday treats! Items can be delivered to church on 12/5 before 2:00 pm or 12/6 before 12:00 pm.

Contact the Care & Community Team to volunteer or with any questions.

***Come share some holiday joy,
and your family's traditional treats!***



PEANUT BRITTLE MAKE-AND-TAKE PARTY 12/6, 8:30-12:00ish

If you've always loved eating or gifting our "almost" world-famous peanut brittle and are curious how it's made, we have just the deal for you! Help make a bunch of batches on Saturday, 12/6, 8:30-12:00ish, ahead of the bake sale on 12/7. Absolutely no prior experience is required –It's easy! Measure ingredients, Stir a pot! You will do great!

We will make as many batches as time allows.

Please let Lisa Ebbers know you'll be there!

OUR COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE



CHRISTMAS FRIENDSHIP TEA FOR GIVING, 12/6, 10:00 am

Women of the St. John UCC community are invited to a Christmas Tea on 12/6, from 10:00-12:00 in the Chapel Hearth Room. This gathering time is hosted by our Mission & Outreach Team. In the spirit of Christmas, and recognizing the financial stresses that exist in our society today, we will be creating Period Packs (*like the ones we made for UCC General Synod in 2023*) for distribution in our community.

Mission & Outreach is partnering with FSD #145 through Empire Elementary School’s Community Pantry, Jones Farrar IB World School, Freeport Middle School, and Freeport High School and FHS Athletics, to provide a stock of the Period Packs at each location. Our goal is to create 50 identical packs, based on the Church World Service (CWS) Period Pack list.

What is a Period Pack?

Period packs include a month’s supply of products to get a person who menstruates through their period: pads, tampons, wet wipes, flushable wipes, hand sanitizer, bath soap, laundry detergent sheets, and trash bags, all inside a large resealable bag.

How can you help?

Before the Tea: Pick up the Friendship Tea handout from the collection table in the Narthex. This contains the “shopping list,” and the link to the Amazon cart and donation page.

At the Tea: Come and enjoy the fellowship, and pack the kits! Bring a friend into Advent’s fellowship!



FACC FOOD PANTRY Pantry Bag Collection

Thank you all for your generous support of the Pantry Bag collection! Each week since the beginning of November, we have exceeded our “Ten Bags a Week” goal! A big thanks to HELIX Youth Outreach for their weekly sorting and bagging!

Our collection boxes have been full every week, with a backstock of several key items. The cash collections have exceeded expectation! More than \$2,000 has come into the Red Can, and is being used to round out the gathered supplies each week. We will keep collecting and bagging through the end of December, and work with the FACC Food Pantry on the best way to continue our support in the January and beyond.

CHICAGO AVENUE MISSION DINNER PROGRAM

Help provide some Christmas joy by preparing a Wednesday meal for the Chicago Avenue Mission. Prepare the way yourself, or gather a group of friends! Please sign up on the bulletin board if you can help with a meal, or contact Marla Kreeger or Pam Wessel.

GREEN ENERGY REPORT



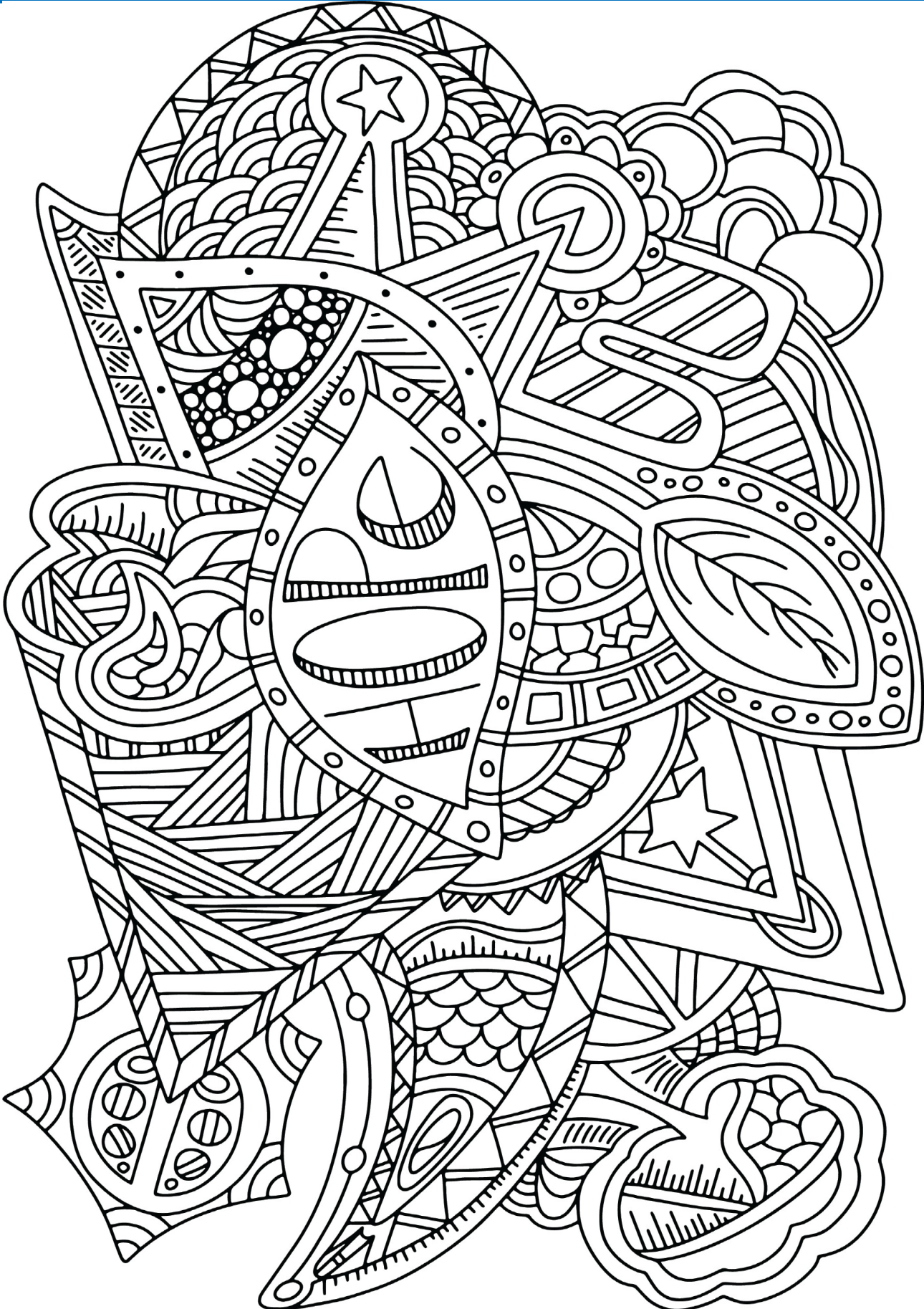
Month	Generated	Used	Difference
August	5,035 kWh	2,317 kWh	-2,718 kWh
September	4,878 kWh	2,656 kWh	-2,222 kWh
October	2,313 kWh	4,940 kWh	2,627 kWh

Green Team Note: October’s generation was lower than typical for our history. This meant that our Net Metering Credit “Bank” drew down 2,627 kWh of its stored energy (about the same as we over-generated in September). We’ve still got two month’s energy stored in Credits for the colder months of the year.

FAITH AT PLAY

THE ART OF CHRISTMAS

Hope into the Advent season with this centering coloring page from *Illustrated Ministry*.
Use your colored pencils, markers, or whatever creative supplies bring you Hope.



YOUTH FAITH FORMATION



GODLY PLAY—PRE-K-3RD GRADES

Godly Play is a Montessori-style learning environment focused on the needs of children at this place on life's journey. This year, we're launching a new series of stories that focus on sharing our Bible from different and diverse places within the stories:

11/30 The Faces of Advent 1

12/7 *Everyone in Church Sunday*

12/14 The Faces of Advent 2 & 3

12/21 The Faces of Advent 4

12/28 No Godly Play - *Come for the Hymn Sing!*

This set of stories shares more inclusive and expansive witness of the Bible's many people. Ask a youth what the most important part of this week's story was in their hearing and understanding!



WHIRL—4TH-8TH GRADES

The *Whirl* class will be spending Advent with our friends at *Illustrated Ministry*. Through their mini-curriculum, *Will to Dream*, our class will help us find our place in the Advent story of hope, love, and light.

11/30 Will to Dream - *Isaiah's Vision*

12/7 *Everyone in Church Sunday*

12/14 Will to Dream - *Mary's Joy and Resilience*

12/21 Will to Dream - *Zechariah's Blessing*

12/28 No WHIRL class - *Come for the Hymn Sing!*

Whirl encourages children to ask questions, interpret Scripture in community, and connect with God and one another.



HELIX—5TH-8TH GRADES

HELIX is an after school program sponsored and hosted by St. John UCC that focuses on community-building and social-emotional learning. HELIX meets each Wednesday from 3:00 to 5:00 pm.

December Schedule

12/3 Choices: What influences us?

12/10 Choices: How do we choose?

12/17 Holiday Party

12/24 & 12/31 School Holidays—No Meeting

helix@stjohnuccfreeport.org

www.stjohnuccfreeport.org/helix

www.facebook.com/helixyouthoutreach

www.instagram.com/helixyouthoutreach



CHILDREN ON CHRISTMAS EVE

Children attending our 5:00 pm Christmas Eve Worship Service will have a few ways to participate.

First, as is our tradition, children will be invited to put on costumes at church and represent the Nativity story during the service. If your child plans to participate, our teachers request that they come to church as often as possible during Advent, at least once or twice. This will allow teachers time to fit children for costumes and plan for this portion of Christmas Eve.

Second, older children will be invited to lead worship during the *Lessons and Carols*. Rev. Hank will reach out to families of children in the applicable age group. Please be on the lookout for that invitation.

COMMUNITY FELLOWSHIP



CHAIR YOGA AT ST. JOHN UCC MONDAYS AT 6:30 PM

Bless your spiritual and physical self with yoga at St. John UCC. Join yoga instructor Katherine Ray of *Hippy Yoga* for a one hour session.

Chairs are provided.

Bring cushions or a blanket for your comfort.

Wear loose, comfortable clothing.

Price is \$5 a person, per class.

Cash, PayPal, Venmo, and Cash App accepted



SUBVERSIVE BOOK GROUP 12/16, 6:30 pm

Our next meeting is Tuesday, 12/16, beginning at 6:30 pm. Information about the chosen book can be found in the Book Group mail slot outside the church office or by contacting sbgfpt@gmail.com.

Happy Reading!



First Saturdays, 8:00 am

Come join the next gathering of the Men's Ministry. Join the lively group in the Chapel Hearth Room.



HOLIDAY OFFICE HOURS

The church office will be open by appointment only from Friday, 12/26/25 to Friday 1/5/26. Please contact the staff by email or cell phone during this holiday week.



2025 END OF YEAR GENEROSITY

Your end-of year generosity helps us be ready for the mission and ministry needs that come as the next year begins. The last day to receive gifts toward this fiscal year is 12/29/25. Gifts received after that date will be credited in the new year.



A CUP OF FELLOWSHIP

Thank you to those who have volunteered to bring weekly treats and host a Sunday. We really do appreciate you. Hosts are needed to prepare treats and share in our extravagant welcome. Also, please plan to help share in setting up, serving, and clearing the hospitality station at the end of the hour.

Please sign up on the bulletin board in the narthex or call the church office to reserve your week.

OUR CHURCH COMMUNITY

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

12/01 Jim Klever	12/12 Colin Ebbers
12/03 Ray Nieman	Joy Busker
12/07 Vicki Standley	12/16 Thompson
12/09 Jack Krumm	Brandt
12/10 Mary Beth	12/20 Holly Edler
Whiton	12/23 Judy Barney
12/11 Patrick Busker	

DECEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

12/23 Marvin & Sandy	12/29 Jeff & Sally
DeBoer	Wagner

OUR HOMEBOUND FRIENDS

Our friends who reside in senior living facilities or are homebound would love a visit or a card from those thinking of them.

Parkview: Jean Koch

Ascension St. Joseph Center: Marilyn Ruthe

Rock River Health Care: June Nagel

Liberty Village:

Stan Bomgarden, Arnold Eder, Anna Carroll

Pearl Pavilion: Delores Siemens

Oakley Courts: Mavis Clark

Winn Prairie: Ray Nieman

Evansville Manor: Wayne Bahn

In their homes: Marilyn DeVries

Please contact Pam for addresses.

ST. JOHN UCC MINISTRY TEAM

Senior Pastor

Rev. Henry E. "Hank" Fairman 703-473-3534
hank@stjohnuccfreeport.org

Visitation Pastor

Rev. Ted Michalsen 440-536-1044
ted@stjohnuccfreeport.org

Director of Congregational Life

Pam Wessel 815-275-7202
pam@stjohnuccfreeport.org

Creative & Administrative Assistant

Karla Hardersen
karla@stjohnuccfreeport.org

Digital Media Assistant Max Gibson

Music Director

Britney Kieselhorst
britney@stjohnuccfreeport.org

Church Musician Randy Cook

Pastor Emeritus Rev. Dr. Donnley Dutcher

Contact the church office at:

815-235-2824 office@stjohnuccfreeport.org

SHARING OUR GIFTS:

Online Giving and Automatic Donations

To honor our Faith Commitment to St. John UCC, you can donate electronically:



www.bit.ly/GiveToStJohnUCC

Check the box in the lower left-hand corner to cover the fees for this transaction. The fee will be credited to your giving. And as always, you can send your check to the church office.

You can also sign up for ACH transactions, automatic deductions from your checking or savings accounts. See Pam in the church office with any questions.

Thank you for your continued generous support of St. John UCC!



1010 South Park Boulevard

Freeport, IL 61032

www.stjohnuccfreeport.org

Change Service Requested

Place
Stamp
Here



ONE MORE THOUGHT: THE CHRISTMAS FUND

“...When they saw the star, they were filled with joy...”

The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas “Thank You” gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees.

Last year, because of your gifts, the Christmas Fund provided over \$1.3 million in pension and health benefits supplementation, emergency grants, and thank-you checks to retired servants of the church and their families. Every cent of that money came from the pockets of people like you.

United Church of Christ congregations and members have blessed the Christmas Fund with their generosity for many years. This year, your care and compassion will be especially appreciated by those servants of the church who are facing a time of need. Please give as generously as you are able this year! Thank you!

