

January 2026

A Regular Sharing of our Mission and Ministry

EPIPHANY, A SEASON OF STAR LIGHT

What are star words?

The use of star words, also called “star gifts,” is a prayer practice connected to Epiphany and the new year that has been growing in popularity in Protestant churches for nearly a decade. The idea is that a list of intention words, or guiding words, are written or printed on paper stars. These paper stars are then placed in a large basket, ready to inspire each person into the season’s continuing light. During our morning worship on Epiphany Sunday, January 11, everyone is invited to draw a word from the basket, and to use that word as a guiding word throughout the year.

How do Star Words work? That’s up to you! Some folks place their star word somewhere they will see it regularly throughout the year. This can help you consistently reflect on how God is moving through, around, or in connection to your word. Others use them as bookmarks in their daily readings. *(For example, Pastor Hank kept his in the pulpit, and was reminded every Sunday to “CREATE” something meaningful with God every week).*

What words did you get last Epiphany? Did it help guide you in 2025? Or did it create a spiritual pause, as you sought its meaning through the year. If your word was a blessing, be blessed with its memory! If your word gave you pause, that’s okay. Maybe its meaning isn’t quite ready to be known. Sometimes, that’s how God’s still creating Spirit works.

So this year, let’s prepare again to follow the Star Words again! Typically, participants are encouraged to trust the word they have drawn, and not to replace the word. However, there are no “star police.” If you find that the first word you draw doesn’t speak to you, place it back into the basket after worship, and draw anew, or find a friend with whom to trade words.

Come share in the Star’s Guiding Light! See you in Church!

Pastor Hank



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

A MONTH AT A GLANCE

What's going on at church in January?

It's a pretty common question heard in the church office: *What meetings are going on this month?* The St. John UCC campus is busy six days and nights a week (and often there's something on the seventh day, too!) See what's happening this month, and discover a new way to share your time, talents and treasures. Help us be the church God is calling us to be in Freeport and beyond!

Week of 12/29-1/3

The church office will be open by appointment only from Wednesday, 12/24/25 to Friday, 1/2/26.
Please contact the staff by email or cell phone during this holiday week.

Weekly Church & Community Activities

Sunday: Worship, Fellowship, & Faith Formation
9:00 am Adult Formation
10:00 am Worship &
Youth Faith Formation
11:00 am Fellowship Hour

Monday: Girl Scouts Troop #832, 5:30 pm
Hippy Yoga
5:00 pm Mat Yoga
6:30 pm Chair Yoga

Tuesday: Girl Scouts (New Troop), 5:30 pm
Cub Scout Pack #836, 6:00 pm

Wednesday: HELIX Youth Outreach, 3:00 pm

Thursday: Music Ministry
6:30 pm Bell Choir
7:30 pm Chancel Choir

Week of 1/4-1/10

1/3 8:00 am Men's Ministry Group
1/7 6:30 pm Care & Community Team

Week of 1/11-1/17

1/11 11:30 am Epiphany Brunch
11:30 am New Members Welcoming Session
1/13 6:00 pm Church Council
1/14 10:00 am Wellness Ministry Team
6:30 pm Mardi Gras Meeting
(at Judi B.'s House)
6:30 pm Property Management Team

Week of 1/18-1/24

1/19 **Office Closed for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service**
6:30 pm Mission & Outreach Team
1/20 6:30 pm Subversive Book Group

Week of 1/24-1/31

1/25 11:30 am Worship & Education Team

SAVE THE DATE!!



**MARDI GRAS
POTLUCK / BINGO
2/7, 4-7 pm**

**CHURCH LEADERS
RETREAT
2/21, 8:30 am-12:00 pm**

OUR COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE

GLOBAL MINISTRIES MONTHLY PRAYER PARTNERS

JANUARY - NAMIBIA

The United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) has had congregations in Namibia for many years, but it was only after independence in 1990 that the first North American UCC and Disciples mission coworkers were assigned to the country. Today, the Namibia Synod of the UCCSA understands poverty as the unequal distribution of resources that denies access to knowledge.



This results in people living under the poverty line, being burdened by debt, and suffering diseases. The Namibia Synod realizes that, as the Body of Christ, they must be the catalyst to change these trends. Through Christ's example, the Church is mandated to take up the challenge of addressing the unequal distribution of resources within Namibia. In partnership with Global Ministries, the Namibia Synod accepts this challenge through education, youth programs, ministerial training, leadership development, and advocating transformative justice and social responsibility.

Global Ministries is a partnership ministry between the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). For more information, please visit:

www.globalministries.org



MLK NATIONAL DAY OF SERVICE 1/19/2026

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. devoted his life to equality, social justice, economic advancement, and opportunity for all. He challenged us to build a more perfect union and taught us that everyone has a role to play in making America what it ought to be.

By making service part of our daily lives, we can help realize Dr. King's dream. Together, we can create and sustain opportunities for Americans to strengthen their own and other's economic opportunity, ensure that more young people graduate from high school, support our military families and veterans, and help communities prepare for and recover from disasters. Together, we demonstrate what it means to be citizens.

Thirty years ago, Congress designated the holiday as a national day of service and charged the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) with leading this effort. Taking place each third Monday in January, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service is the only federal holiday observed as a national day of service – **a “day on, not a day off.”** This day of service empowers individuals, strengthens communities, bridges barriers, addresses social problems, and moves us closer to Dr. King's vision of a “Beloved Community.”

Find a place to spend your “Day On”
americorps.gov/serve/volunteer/mlk-day

OUR COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY



EPIPHANY BRUNCH

Sunday, 1/11

With the star guiding us in thankful praise, we will gather in Fellowship Hall following worship for our annual Epiphany brunch. There will be egg bakes to share, coffee cakes and muffins. To ensure we have enough food, please add your family's name to the sign-up sheet on the bulletin board. Invite a friend to join in the fellowship!

New Members Welcoming Session

Are you interested in learning more about St. John UCC and what it means to be an active part of our church community? Grab a plate of hospitality at the Epiphany Brunch and meet in the Chapel Hearth Room for an hour on our church's history and ministry. Childcare will be arranged as requests are made.

| GREEN ENERGY REPORT | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Month | Generated | Used | Difference |
| September | 4,878 kWh | 2,656 kWh | -2,222 kWh |
| October | 2,313 kWh | 4,940 kWh | 2,627 kWh |
| November | 866 kWh | 6,707 kWh | 5,841 kWh |

Green Team Note: November continued our use of our Net Metering "Bank." We drew down 5,841 kWh of its stored energy (that's a LOT!). We've still got part of a month's energy stored in Credits for the colder months of the year.

We'll see how sunny it will be in January!



FACC FOOD PANTRY

Our congregation's generous support of the Food Pantry at FACC and its clients offers us a way to spread care and compassion throughout the year. In January we are asked to collect:



Peanut Butter

Donations can be placed in the collection carts in the Atrium entryway.

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.

Pantry Bag Collection

Thank you all for your donations to the FACC 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!

Through your generous giving, we raised more than \$6,000 in cash and non-perishable food supplies! They have all been delivered to the Kreeger Memorial Pantry, and are being distributed as needed throughout our community. We know if the need arises again, we can count on our community at St. John UCC to step up! **THANK YOU!!**

FAITH FORMATION FOR ALL AGES



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:

1/4 *Everyone in Church Sunday*

1/11 Epiphany

1/18 Holy Baptism

1/25 Parable of the Good Samaritan

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 is a multi-age approach older elementary and middle school youth begin to connect the dots between Biblical stories and their own experiences of God, using the *Whirl* characters and curriculum.

1/4 *Everyone in Church Sunday*

1/11 *Baptism*: John Baptizes Jesus

1/18 *Abundance*: Water to Wine

1/25 *Body*: One Body, Many Parts

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



ADULT FAITH FORMATION

Sundays, 9:00-9:45

What does it take to “*be the church God calls us to be in Freeport and beyond?*” What gifts of Discerning Minds, Engaged Bodies, and Generous Spirits are called for to live out our congregation's vision. We'll ponder these questions together in a short three-week series:

1/11 *Discerning*: Progressive and Expansive Thought and Theology

1/18 *Engaged*: Community Service and Living out justice with the Social Gospel

1/25 *Generous*: Interpreting our Giving Beyond the Offering Plate

Join Pastor Hank Fairman and our Church Council leaders in responding to our call as followers of Christ's way of justice, peace, and inclusive love.



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.

January Schedule

1/17 HELIX: New Beginnings

1/14 District Institute—No Meeting

1/21 HELIX: A Community Project

1/28 HELIX: A Community Project, cont.

helix@stjohnuccfreeport.org

www.stjohnuccfreeport.org/helix

COMMUNITY FELLOWSHIP



MAT & CHAIR YOGA AT ST. JOHN UCC MONDAYS STARTING AT 5:00 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 of mat yoga starting at 5:00 pm. Chair yoga will follow at 6:30 pm.

Bring your own mat.

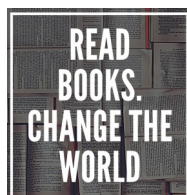
Chairs are provided.

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 1/20, 6:30 pm

Our next meeting is Tuesday, 1/20, 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



MARDI GRAS POTLUCK AND BINGO 2/7, 4-7 pm

Come enjoy an evening of food and fellowship at Mardi Gras Potluck and Bingo night, on Saturday, 2/7, from 4-7 pm, or until the bingo prizes run out!

There will be jambalaya, gumbo, dirty rice, king cakes, and more! Pick your favorite Cajun dish (or any other dish!) and bring enough to share at the potluck.

Following the potluck, we will have an evening of bingo, complete with prizes! If you have any unused gifts from Christmas, or any white elephant prizes that you'd like to donate to our prize box, we will put them to good use! Please bring them to the office by February 1st.

We would also encourage you to decorate a shoebox float, with a Mardi Gras-theme. If you'd like to build a float, or need an idea, please let the committee know.

If you have any other questions or would like to be part of the planning team, please contact Judi Buus or the office.

***"Laissez les bons temps rouler" -
Let the good times roll!***



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.

Please sign up on the bulletin board in the narthex.

OUR CHURCH COMMUNITY

JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

| | | | |
|------|-------------------------------------|------|-------------------------------|
| 1/2 | Marilyn Ruthe | 1/18 | Albert Skwara |
| 1/6 | Sally Wagner | 1/19 | Sandy Dutcher, Jeff Wagner |
| 1/8 | Robert Luedeke | 1/20 | Laura Hartman |
| 1/9 | Ruth Kuntz | 1/22 | Greg Bicksler Steve Young |
| 1/11 | Wayne Bahn Joan Wootan | 1/23 | Jack Gastel |
| 1/12 | Olivia Bertram | 1/24 | Patty Weik |
| 1/13 | Lexi Hartman Gerald Schneiderman | 1/26 | Hazel Musser |
| 1/15 | David Gutschlag Leland Otte | 1/28 | Hank Fairman |

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

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ONE MORE THOUGHT: ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING 2026

All members of St. John United Church of Christ are called to the Annual Congregational Meeting on Sunday, February 1, at 11:30 am in accordance with Article V of the Constitution and Article I of the Bylaws of St. John UCC.

The business conducted shall be:

- The receipt of the 2025 ministry, financial, and endowment reports
- The report of the Property Management Team on Sanctuary Renovations and Organ Renewal
- The report of the Worship & Education Team, and action on, revisions to the Safe Church /Safe Conduct policy
- The approval of the 2026 ministry & operations budget

and any business deemed appropriate by Church Council.

Signed, /s/ Jill Gastel, Clerk of Council

Copies of the annual ministry and financial reports and budget will be available one week prior to the meeting. Watch for information on in-person and hybrid meeting closer to the day of the meeting.

**2026
ANNUAL
CONGREGATIONAL
MEETING**