

April 2026

A Regular Sharing of our Mission and Ministry



the good news
is alive
in the world!

Christ is Risen! Indeed, *this is good news!*

All through the season of Lent, we've taken on the challenge from our friends at *A Sanctified Art*, to "Tell Me Something Good." And, to be honest, it's not always been easy. Over these six weeks, we have seen challenges to peace between the world's nations. We have worried with our immigrant neighbors for their safety. We have witnessed dehumanizing attacks on LGBTQ+ people and those who love them. We have seen the rollercoaster effects of Climate Change, and communities destroyed by nature's might.

Still, to be honest, we've also seen a community of faithful witness standing together in peace, denouncing acts of global violence. We have prayed together across faith and community lines for immigration justice. We have recommitted to honoring the full personhood of every beautifully made image of God, affirming all gender identities and expressions. And we have gathered in mission to support the communities most devastated by the global impact of extreme weather.

Lent is hard. It always is a hard journey in faith and purpose. The stories we hear were tests of faith to those who lived them, and are the same for us in our days. If we take away one thing from this Lent's stories, let it be this: the most shadowed days lead to an empty tomb, and the truth that *the good news is alive in the world!*

May the Resurrection you experience this Easter build a hope in you that thrives throughout the year. God's peace to you, friends! Hallelujah!

Pastor Hank

Holy Week

3/29 Palm / Passion Sunday, 10:00 am

The good news is...
inspiring us to at

Mark 11:1-11: Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem

4/2 Maundy Thursday.

Tenebrae Worship, 7:00 pm

The good news is...

Even Judas gets his feet washed

John 2:1-11: The wedding at Cana

4/3 Good Friday.

a time for personal reflection

The good news is...

revealed through nonviolence

Luke 22-23: The journey to the Cross

4/5 Easter /Resurrection Sunday

Easter Sunrise, 6:00 am

Celebration Service, 10:00 am

The good news is... alive in the world:

Matthew 28:1-10: "Do not be afraid..."



Come together in the Sanctuary or share in
our streaming Online Worship every Sunday, 10:00 am:
[facebook.com/stjohnuccfreeport/live](https://www.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 April?

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!

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
5:15 pm Mat Yoga
6:30 pm Chair Yoga

Tuesday: Music Ministry

6:30 pm Bell Choir
7:30 pm Chancel Choir

Wednesday: HELIX Youth Outreach, 3:00 pm

Thursday:

Boy Scouts Troop #4, 7:00 pm

Week of 3/29-4/4

3/29 2:00 pm Confirmation Class
4/1 6:00 pm Care & Community Team
4/2 7:00 pm Maundy Thursday / Tenebrae
4/4 8:00 am Men's Ministry Group

Week of 4/5-4/11

4/5 6:00 am Easter Sunrise Service
4/7 6:30 pm Property Team
4/8 10:00 am Wellness Ministry Team

Week of 4/12-4/18

4/12 11:30 am Worship & Education Team
4/14 6:00 pm Church Council

Week of 4/19-4/25

4/20 6:30 pm Mission & Outreach Team
4/21 6:30 pm Subversive Book Club
4/23 6:00 pm Girl Scouts

Week of 4/26-5/2

4/26 2:00 pm Confirmation Class
4/29 5:30 pm NAMI Family-to-Family
5/2 8:00 am Men's Ministry Group

SAVE THE DATE!!



**SAFE CONDUCT
TRAINING**
Sunday, 5/3
11:30-2:30 pm
RSVP by 4/19

Oktoberfest

OKTOBERFEST
10/3

ADULT FAITH FORMATION IN MAY



May is Mental Health Awareness Month

Mental Health America established May as mental health awareness month in 1949. The observance emphasizes the critical importance of mental wellness in a person's overall health, and it encourages communities to support people who are facing mental health care needs.

On Sundays during Mental Health Awareness Month our adult faith formation class will be exploring how our congregation can be a community of support for persons with a mental health care need. A collection of facilitators with expertise in various topics that concern Mental health will be leading our education and discussion.

The United Church of Christ Mental Health Network (UCCMHN) proclaims and celebrates the basic sacred right that each person has to their own mental health. For congregations who desire to widen their welcome and support the Mental Health Network's mission may earn the designation WISE (Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged).

April and May's Adult Faith Formation series will introduce us to what it means to be a WISE, and join in ministry with UCCMHN by becoming a WISE congregation.



Adult Faith Formation Series Sundays in April and May 4/12 - 5/17

Come and join the Sunday Morning Adult Faith Formation group during Mental Health Awareness Month. An arrangement of facilitators will offer education on topics of mental health and guide or discussions. Each week we will learn a little more as we contemplate if God is calling St. John UCC to partner with the UCC Mental Health Network by becoming a WISE congregation (welcoming, inclusive, supportive, engaged).

- 4/12 Introduction to Mental Health
Eradicating the stigma
- 4/19 Mental Health in Freeport
What mental health services exist in our community
- 4/26 Mental Health First Aid
Ways to support someone facing a mental health challenge
- 5/3 Family Systems
Families significantly impact a person's healing and recovery
- 5/10 Why go WISE?
What would becoming a WISE congregation mean for St. John UCC
- 5/17 Starting the WISE process
Hear from First Congregational in Downer's Grove about their WISE journey



Please join us during Mental Health Awareness Month as we learn how to be welcoming, supportive, inclusive and engaged in the work of mental health care and be present in the lives of those who are seeking treatment.

OUR COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE

PEACE POLE PROJECT:

Final Prep & Installation Day, 4/18



What is a *Peace Pole*? The *Peace Pole Project* is an international grassroots movement to spread the Universal Message:

“May Peace Prevail on Earth”

Peace poles are planted in prominent locations and are painted with messages of hope and peace in a variety of languages

Our *Peace Pole* installation project is planned to be completed in April 2026 over two working sessions.

- *Session #1* will be for the preparation of materials including preparation of peace messages and painting. *Watch the Announcements for date & details*
- *Session #2* will be for the grounds work and physical installation. This will take place on Saturday, 4/18 starting at 8:30 am.

The *Peace Pole* will be installed on the Park Boulevard front lawn of the church near the flagpole. Its location will be registered with The Peace Pole Project, sharing our commitment to building a more just and peaceful world in our time.

To volunteer for the working sessions, sign up on the Narthex bulletin board. If you have any questions, please contact Denairic Hardersen.



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 April we are asked to collect:




Personal Care, Household, and Period Supplies

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

CHICAGO AVENUE MISSION DINNER PROGRAM

Help provide some 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
December	649 kWh	6505 kWh	6006 kWh
January	1861 kWh	5250 kWh	3389 kWh
February	2547 kWh	4686 kWh	2139 kWh

Green Team Note: Due to the less than wintery weather, our January solar generation was FOUR times higher than December. While we do not have any “solar bank” credits remaining from 2025, we’re starting 2026 on the sunny side!

OUR COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE



EARTH DAY 2026: Celebrating our Commitment to Creation Justice

In the summer of 2021, the Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ spoke boldly about the role of faith communities in caring for and responding to the “Rights of Nature”. Speaking to the local churches and communities around the UCC, the delegates challenged us all with the following prophetic actions:

- *Promote compassionate care, foster love, and co-live responsibly with the Earth Community of Life.*
- *Safeguard the common goods, space and shared resources of the Earth, for humanity and biokind.*
- *Uphold the rights of ecological integrity, biodiversity, and healthy bioregions.*
- *Advocate intergenerational responsibility for the biotic community of the Earth and gratitude of the natural world as divine gift.*
- *Promote the value of interdependence of humans and Nature as fundamental to sustainable life on Earth.*
- *Affirm that co-living with Nature involves distributive justice, a fair sharing and responsible participation of natural resources.*

How can we promote Earth care in our congregation, and in Freeport and beyond?

- Pretzel Pickers are all about “Keeping It Clean” with their weekly trash clean-ups on our city streets Spring through Fall weather permitting.
- 2025 Stephenson County Clean-Up Week, 4/6 to 4/12 at 4 PM. Free clean-up kits and trash drop-off at Greater Freeport Partnership office, 110 W. Main St. 8:00 AM-5:PM. Find out more at this link:

<https://buff.ly/7jrGGg2>



PEACE & JUSTICE LETTERS A Mission & Outreach Project

The Justice and Peace Action Network (JPANet) is our denomination’s grassroots advocacy network composed of individual members and local UCC congregations across the country.

The JPANet educates and engages its members in shaping public policy and keeping with God’s vision of a just and loving society. Our work is grounded in General Synod resolutions, consonant with historic UCC witness, and formed by a biblical understanding of prophetic ministry.

On March 15, 2026, our congregation engaged in the first Peace & Justice Offering of Letters by signing actual print copies from this network. This is an outreach of ministry of “doing justice” which will occur once a month from the Mission & Outreach Committee. Another option is engaging more frequently online by using the link below.

<https://www.ucc.org/action-center/>



OUR COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY



LIBRARY UPDATE

On behalf of the Library Team, thank you for the many generous donations to the Racial Justice Collection in the Uthlaut Memorial Library in honor of Black History Month! Look for these great reads on the shelves soon!



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.



SAFE CONDUCT TRAINING Sunday, 5/3, 11:30-2:30 pm

Church members who work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults and church leadership should attend a Safe Church/Safe Conduct Training every three years to review our policies for protecting people in our care. Lunch is provided.

Please RSVP for the training by Sunday, 4/19 and include special dietary restrictions or food allergies, and accessibility needs to:

safechurch@stjohnuccfreeport.org



JANUARY & YTD FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Income	Actual	Budget	Difference
Pledges/Gifts	\$19,246	\$27,083	\$-7,837
Monthly Income	\$27,113	\$38,267	\$-11,154
Monthly Expenses	\$39,356	\$38,559	\$796.35
YTD Pledges/Gifts	\$36,106	\$54,167	\$-18,061
YTD Income	\$50,155	\$76,533	\$-26,378
YTD Expenses	\$78,347	\$79,264	\$-916
YTD Total	\$ -28,192	\$ -2,730	\$ -25,462

Stewardship Note: We begin the year with a good reserve of funds from 2025. Pledges and Identified Gifts are receiving behind budget. If our generosity was at the budgeted amount, we would have given beyond expenses for the period. Note also that we have not requested the annual Endowment support of \$2,000/month. Allowing those dollars to remain invested until needed adds to the fund's value.

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

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:

- 4/5 **EASTER SUNDAY**
Everyone in Church + Egg Hunt
- 4/12 Knowing Jesus in Absence
- 4/19 Knowing Jesus in Doubt
- 4/26 Knowing Jesus in Mourning

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

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.

- 4/5 **EASTER SUNDAY**
Everyone in Church + Egg Hunt
- 4/12 *Believe:* Thomas answers Jesus
- 4/19 *Recognize:* Road to Emmaus
- 4/26 *Sheep:* The Lord is my Shepherd

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 will take time in April to focus on our planet, its health, and what we can do to make the Earth a more hopeful, life-supporting place!

- 4/2 **No Meeting: Spring Break**
- 4/8 Climate change & our Weather
- 4/15 Growing Good Green Gardens
- 4/22 **Celebrating Earth Day!**
56 years of caring for our Earth!
- 4/29 Wonderful Water and our World

helix@stjohnuccfreeport.org
www.stjohnuccfreeport.org/helix



PRAIRE ASSOCIATION "UNITED" CONFIRMATION CLASS

Our four-church-combined Confirmation Class is going strong! This month, we're getting into some deep questions and our Bibles, our Creating God, and our Redeeming Christ.

- 4/12 – Local Cluster/Zoom Meet-up:
Topic: The Bible
- 4/26 – In-Person Class
Topic: God and Jesus

COMMUNITY FELLOWSHIP



MAT & CHAIR YOGA AT ST. JOHN UCC MONDAYS STARTING AT 5:15 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 5:15 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 4/21, 6:30 pm

Our next meeting is Tuesday, 4/21, 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.



a contest of musical proportions!

Thank you all for playing along with our 2026 March Hymn Madness Survey. At the time of printing, we're down to the *Final Four*. The songs that have gained our most likes are (in unranked order):

- Let There Be Peace on Earth
- On Eagle's Wings
- Here I Am, Lord
- Amazing Grace

The final ballot went out on Palm Sunday. This round was different, with a "Ranked Order" voting instead of pairs. Check out the bulletin board on Easter Sunday to reveal the rankings!

Remember to sing a joyful song every day!



Rebuilding Together Stephenson County (RTSC) calls all Rebuilders to *National Rebuilding Month* their first *National Rebuilding Day!*

RTSC is a core mission partner of our congregation. Founded in 2021, they have made a huge impact in safe and decent housing in our community.

National Rebuilding Day is held the last Saturday in April to honor the history of our founding. This year it is on Saturday, April 25, 2026.

To Volunteer and/or Donate,
Go to their Facebook page:

facebook.com/RebuildingTogetherSC

OUR CHURCH COMMUNITY

APRIL BIRTHDAYS

4/1 Jill Gastel	4/15 Kathryn Smith
Andie Davis	4/16 Ted Michaelsen
4/3 Kim Kreeger	4/18 Eric Olson
Eli Michaelsen	4/19 Dan Wessel
Jackie Neebel	4/20 Grace Queckboerner
4/10 Vickie Franz	4/21 Lavonne Wagenknecht
4/11 Sylvia Bomgarden	4/26 Judi Buus
4/13 Lanah Queckboerner	4/22 Larry Kuntz Sandra DeBoer
4/14 Gina Bertram	

APRIL ANNIVERSARIES

4/13 Hank & Christina Fairman
4/14 Tim & Patty Weik
4/27 Jaime & Amanda Bertram-Vizcarra

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!

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

Pearl Pavilion: Delores Siemens

Winn Prairie: Ray Nieman

Evansville Manor: Wayne Bahn

In their homes: Marilyn DeVries, Lee Otte, Rae Ann McMurray, Stan & Carol Smith

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

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Pam Wessel 815-275-7202
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Karla Hardersen
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Digital Media Assistant Max Gibson, Elliot Fairman

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



Place
Stamp
Here

1010 South Park Boulevard
Freeport, IL 61032
www.stjohnuccfreeport.org

Change Service Requested



ARE YOU READY FOR ILLINOIS CONFERENCE OUTDOOR MINISTRIES SUMMER CAMP?

Explore an exciting array of camps and retreats offered by Illinois Conference Outdoor Ministries at Tower Hill Camp in Sawyer Michigan, and Pilgrim in Princeton, IL

At Tower Hill:

- HUG Camp** (Tenderfoot & Youth) 7/5-7/10
- GODSTOCK** (Tenderfoot & Youth) 7/19-7/24
- Creation Care Camp** (Intergenerational) 8/3-8/6

Register at towerhill.campbrainregistration.com

At Pilgrim Park:

- Sports Camp** (6th-9th Grade) 6/21-6/27
- Making Memories Camp** 7/7-7/9

Children 4+ with Grandparents/Adults

Register at pilgrimpark.campbrainregistration.com

