

May 2026

A Regular Sharing of our Mission and Ministry

MARCH HYMN MADNESS FINAL FOUR SUNDAY

Come raise your voice with the top four hymns from this year's "shot" at some Lenten fun on 5/3! Thanks for playing along!

MENTAL HEALTH SUNDAY, 5/17

Mental healthcare is spiritual healthcare.

Join in a worshipful day of entering into understanding about and ending the stigmas around mental health and health care.

Keep reading the Tidings to find out all about how we honor and affirm mental health care!

STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH Mission Offering, 5/24 & 5/31

*See the back page for all the ways
Strengthen the Church changes lives!*

PEACE POLE INSTALL: Rescheduled, 5/30

Come join in making a bold statement: *Let peace begin with us!*

See p. 4 for more information

THANK YOU SUNDAY, 5/31

Come offer a prayer of thanks for Graduates, Teachers, Choirs, Helpers, and YOU!

See p. 9 for more information



OUR MISSION: To be WISE about Mental Health

Mental health care and its treatment has a long and sordid history. Physicians in the Middle Ages prescribed bloodletting and exorcisms for the treatment of mental illness because it was believed to be a spiritual disease.

In the Victorian era, asylums were used to house the mental ill along with others whom society wanted to hide away. In the early 20th century the belief that mental illness was hereditary made eugenic practices on persons with mental illness acceptable. What previous generations would have accepted as mental health care would in the present time be seen as malpractice.

Clifford Beers, a graduate from the Sheffield Scientific School at Yale, authored an autobiography that would change mental health care in America. In 1900, after his college graduation, Beers was admitted to private and state run mental health institutions for the care and treatment of depression and paranoia.

Following his release from mental health care Beers began recording his accounts of patient maltreatment during his hospitalization. The writing was published in 1908 as *A Mind that Found Itself*. The book gained the support of the medical community and reforms to improve mental health care began.

Continued on page 3...



**Find Our
Extravagant
Welcome**

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 May?

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 5/1-5/2

5/2 8:00 am Men's Ministry Group

Week of 5/3-5/9

5/5 6:00 pm Property Team Meeting

5/6 5:30 pm NAMI Family-to-Family

5/6 6:00 pm Care & Community

Week of 5/10-5/16

5/12 6:00 pm Church Council

5/13 10:00 am Wellness Ministry

5/13 5:30 pm NAMI Family-to-Family

5/13 6:00 pm HOYA Pinning

Week of 5/17-5/23

5/18 6:30 pm Mission & Outreach Team

5/19 6:30 pm Subversive Book Club

5/20 5:30 pm NAMI Family-to-Family

Week of 5/24-5/31

5/24 11:30 am Worship and Education

5/27 5:30 pm NAMI Family-to-Family

5/31 11:30 am Pentecost Potluck Picnic

5/31 2:00 pm Confirmation

SAVE THE DATE!!

FREEPORT

PRIDE

**FREEPORT PRIDE
 PICNIC**

6/13, 11-3 PM

Oktoberfest

**OKTOBERFEST
 10/3**

CARING FOR MENTAL HEALTH



Mental Health Awareness Month

...continued from front cover

Beers personally helped to begin the predecessor bodies to Mental Health Connecticut and Mental Health America. In 1913, he opened the Clifford Beers Clinic, the first outpatient mental health clinic in the US.

In 1949, a predecessor body of Mental Health America began observing Mental Health Month as a strategy to raise awareness and improve education about mental health illnesses. Every year since 1949, organizations choose to host awareness events and campaigns for mental health during the month of May and beyond. Examples of these campaigns include: National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day (May 7), Bebe Moore Campbell National Minority Mental Health Month (July) NAMI's Mental Health Awareness Week (First week of Oct), NAMI: Pride to support mental health care within the LGBTQIA+ community, National Depression Screening Day (Thursday during first full week in Oct).

The community at St. John UCC is working to take the necessary steps towards an ever-wider welcome to those impacted by mental health experiences. On Sunday, May 17, our worship will center our prayers around the topic of mental health and our radical hospitality for all of God's people.

Our Wellness Ministry team has accepted Mental Health as their wellness focus for 2026. Conversation around seeking the WISE designation from the UCC Mental Health Network is beginning.

Read the next article for more on what it means to be WISE!

Becoming a WISE Church: Caring for Mental Health in Our Community

The United Church of Christ Mental Health Network (UCC-MHN) exists to remind us of a simple but powerful truth: caring for our mind is a sacred part of human life. Through its work, the Network seeks to reduce stigma and promote the full inclusion of people living with mental health experiences and neurodiversity in the life and leadership of faith communities.

One of the most meaningful ways a congregation can live into this calling is by becoming a *WISE Congregation*. To seek the WISE designation is not simply to adopt a label, but to embrace a transformation. It calls a church to:

- **Welcome** people fully just as they are, without stigma or judgment
- **Include** their voices in church leadership and community life
- **Support** individuals and families with compassion and care
- **Engage** in advocacy and justice for mental health locally and beyond.

Why would a church want to become a *WISE Congregation*? The simplest answer is because mental health touches everyone. The church is called to be a place of refuge, not silence; of healing, not stigma; of radical welcome and not exclusion.

Becoming *WISE* helps us live our faith out loud: reaching out and creating a community so that all people are seen, valued, and loved. In choosing the WISE path, a congregation proclaims that no one walks alone—and lives the statement that no matter who you are or what you are facing you are welcome here.

OUR COMMITMENT PEACE AND HEALTH



A WISE Conversation with Friends during Adult Formation, 5/17, 9:00 am

The UCC's *WISE Congregation* initiative is one way that our churches actively work to create a safe and supportive environment for individuals experiencing mental health challenges. The goal is to reduce stigma around mental health and mental healthcare; and promote inclusion both within the church and in the community that we serve.

In 1992 the UCC Mental Health Network (UCC-MHN) was formed to combine the voices and raise their volume throughout the denomination. Twenty-three years later General Synod 30 asked the UCC-MHN to build a program to encourage and assist churches and partner bodies with what it means to embrace people living with mental health experiences and their families. From this resolution the *WISE Congregation* certification was created.

On 5/17 members of the WISE team at First Congregational Church in Downers Grove will gather with the Adult faith formation class over zoom to share their experiences with becoming WISE and what it has meant for the congregation.

The members of First Congregational Church, UCC, in Downers Grove became the 75th *WISE Congregation* in February 2025. Members of their team will join us to share their experience living their WISE covenant within their congregation and in the wider community.

PEACE POLE PROJECT:

Rescheduled Prep & Installation Day, 5/31



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* got rained out in mid April. The new date for the installation project is rescheduled for Saturday, 5/30, 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 prep work and install day,
sign up on the Narthex bulletin board.***

SUMMER FAITH FORMATION NEWS

With our Youth & Families:

Do you have a busy summer planned? Worship and Education Leadership Team would like to invite you grab a **Summer Church on the Go Kit**. Families with young people in Grades 8 and below can pick up a box of summer fun on **Sunday, 5/31** (our last day of Church School until August!).

Inside each box, there will be activities to help you connect with each other and with your St. John UCC community all summer long. You will find fun invitations to praise God, pray, learn God's word, give thanks, and serve. Summer Church on the Go will help you remember that even when you are outside the walls of the church, you are still members of the family of God.

And your kit includes a special friend: **Flat Jesus!** Take him on your summer adventures and keep an eye out for opportunities to show us what you and Flat Jesus are up to.

What else will be going on in Faith Formation this summer?

Monthly Sunday Meet-Ups for Godly Play and Whirl! We won't be holding weekly Faith Formation classes for children and youth this summer. Keep an eye on your email, your mailbox, and *Tidings* for more information about meet-up dates.

And Summer Camps at Tower Hill and Pilgrim Park! Check out the dates and registration links below!

Illinois Conference Outdoor Ministries Summer Camp:

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

With our Adults:

Thank you all for exploring your faith together is so many diverse ways this year! As we wind down with the *WISE Congregation* series, we will take a moment to listen for the Spirit's guiding presence and plan for our summer and fall.

- On **5/31, at 9:00 am**, we'll be chatting with the **Adult Faith Formation** class about what those classes can look like over the summer. Come and share your thoughts!
- In early June, you'll receive our annual **Adult Formation and Sunday School Check-In Survey**. Please take a moment to respond with your thoughts on how to make our Formation Ministries more impactful for every member of our community!



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

CELEBRATING OUR COMMUNITY



FREEPORT PRIDE PICNIC 2026 **6/13, 11-3 pm**

Great news – it's almost time for the Freeport Pride Picnic!

This year's celebration will be held Saturday, 6/13, from 11:00 am - 3:00 pm on the Park Boulevard/East Lawn at St. John UCC-Freeport. There will be food, vendors, games, crafts, and more. Everyone is invited, so come join us, and bring your family and friends.

We are also looking for volunteers to help with the event. We need volunteers to help set-up in the morning, and others to help take down after the event. During the picnic we need to fill two shifts (11 am-1 pm and 1-3pm) of two volunteers to help:

- Serve food
- Lead games
- Create crafts

If you would like to help before, during, or after the event please email Liz at lizzybeth123@gmail.com.



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.



SPRING SUNSHINE BASKETS: **Donations Needed**

The Wellness Ministry Team will be assembling *Spring Sunshine Baskets* for our friends and members who are aging in place, residing in senior living communities, or in rehabilitation care.

If you would like to donate a few items, please place them into the basket in the narthex. Some suggestions might be candies, crackers, cookies, Chap-Stick, Kleenex, body wash, window clings, or other small gifts (we have lots of puzzle books and lotions).

Please drop off your donation no later than Monday, 5/3. Thank you for spreading some sunshine and brightening someone's day!



CLIMATE CHANGE SPEAKER SERIES **5/6, 6:30 PM**

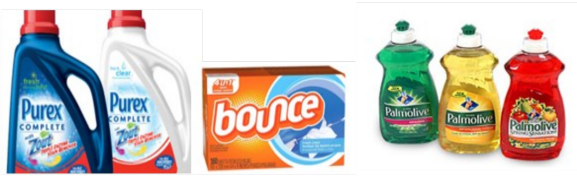
There is just one more opportunity to learn about the cost of living with climate change. The fifth and final lecture is scheduled for Wednesday, May 6, at 6:30 at the Freeport Public Library. The featured speaker will be Dr. Jessica Rudnick, State Climate Resilience Specialist with the U of I Extension. She will be joined by Randi Kohlbauer, Environmental, Health & Safety, and Operations Coordinator for the City of Freeport, and Rob Boyer, Freeport City Manager. Refreshments will be provided.

OUR COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY



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 May we are asked to collect:



Cleaning 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 meal 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
January	1861 kWh	5250 kWh	3389 kWh
February	2547 kWh	4686 kWh	2139 kWh
March	3414 kWh	4256 kWh	824 kWh

Green Team Note: In March, we didn't quite make it to 100% self-generated electricity. We were behind 842 kWh (about one-fifth of our used electricity). But April production is trending similar too last year, when we produced 1000 kWh over our need!



STAR WORDS:

A quick check-in on your Empowering Word

How's your 2026 Star Word engaging you? Is it helping guide you in your faith practices? Or is it creating a spiritual pause, as you look for its meaning? Has your word been a blessing, or will it be a blessing when it's a memory? Has it given 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

Take a moment today to center yourself on your Star Word.

Listen where God is calling your spirit to go!



MARCH & YTD FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Income	Actual	Budget	Difference
Pledges/Gifts	\$18,079	\$27,083	\$-9,004
Monthly Income	\$25,206	\$38,267	\$-13,061
Monthly Expenses	\$37,426	\$38,559	\$-1,133
YTD Pledges/Gifts	\$36,106	\$54,167	\$-18,061
YTD Income	\$75,361	\$76,533	\$-26,378
YTD Expenses	\$115,774	\$79,264	\$-916
YTD Total	\$-40,412	\$-3,023	\$-37,389

Stewardship Note: 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. Expenses are again under budget. 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:

- 5/3** *Everyone in Church Sunday*
- 5/10 Helping Others Out
- 5/17 Knowing Jesus in Waiting
- 5/24 Known by the Holy Spirit (Pentecost)
- 5/31 The Part Not Yet Written

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.

- 5/3** *Everyone in Church Sunday*
- 5/10 Advocate: The Spirit of Truth
- 5/17 Ascend: Jesus Ascends to Heaven
- 5/24 Empowered: Filled with the Holy Spirit
- 5/31 Nations: The Great Commission

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.

5/6

5/13

5/20

5/27

Popcorn:

Youth-choice events, planned at our last April meeting

6/3

HELIX Summer Celebration

Celebrating this year, and looking forward to next fall!

Parents, we thank you for entrusting your youth to the HELIX program! Youth, we thank you for putting up with our shenanigans!



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, Empowering Spirit, and our Redeeming Christ.

- 5/2 – Prairie Association Spring Meeting
(Check email for details)
- 5/10 – Zoom Meet-up:
Topic: The Trinity
- 5/31 – In-Person Class
Topic: The Spirit & the Church

THANK YOU SUNDAY IS FOR EVERYONE!

Pentecost, the celebration of God's Spirit empowering the church, came a week early this year! Our regular "Pentecost Picnic" and Thank You Sunday for choirs, teachers, graduates, and helpers across our ministries welcomes you on Sunday, 5/31.

We'll gather as community. We'll lift voices in thanks and praise.

We'll break bread together.

We will celebrate together our call to be church that God is calling us to be in Freeport and beyond!

Come and welcome the summer with Spirit raised in celebration for all that God is doing in our midst!



A SONG OF THANKS WITH OUR MUSIC MINISTRIES

Come add your voice in thanks and praise for our Chancel Choir, Bell Choir, Solo and Ensemble Musicians, and Music Ministry staff, Brittney and Randy!

They will bless us into our Summer Music Ministry season of friends and special guests.



HONORING THE 2026 GRADUATES 5/31 during Morning Worship

St. John UCC celebrates with our members and friends who graduate high school, college, or graduate school this spring.

Please submit names, honors, and information to the church office by 5/17.



PENTECOST POTLUCK PICNIC after Worship

Start the summer off with a gathering of friends! Add your names to the Sign-Up Sheet located on the Bulletin Board or call the church office.

Save the date, and plan your favorite summer dish to pass!



COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIPS:

The Kampmeier Fund in the St. John Church Endowment was created to extend the generous spirit of our members and friends for educational scholarships. Members of our church community with acceptance to college are invited to apply.

While a specific amount of award cannot be determined until all applications are received, applicants should anticipate assistance with books and supplies.

Applications are available from the church office, or by emailing pam@stjohnuccfreeport.org.

Deadline for Applications is Sunday, 8/2

COMMUNITY FELLOWSHIP



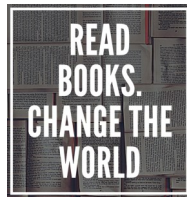
MAT & CHAIR YOGA AT ST. JOHN UCC MONDAYS STARTING AT 5:15 PM

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 5/19, 6:30 pm

Our next meeting is Tuesday, 5/19, 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.



DAY TRIP TO THE MILTON HOUSE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD MUSEUM

The Mission & Outreach Committee invites you to escape and go North for a family friendly historically educational time at the only certified Underground Railroad site in WI. Come learn about historical figures and experience what former African American slaves encountered, escaping slavery, on their travels north to freedom. Feel free to invite friends. Good fellowship time follows over lunch and our travels together.

Date: Saturday, June 20, 2026

Time: Leave church parking lot at 8:00 a.m.

What: One hour tour of the museum and grounds begins at 10:30 a.m.

Lunch: In Janesville after the museum tour (Location TBD. Each person will pay for their meal.)

Tour Ticket Prices:

Adults 18-61	\$15 ea
Senior Adults 62+	\$10 ea
Youth 6-17	\$10 ea
Child 5 & under	Free
Military Vets	Free

Please sign up on the bulletin board in the Narthex by 5/17. Make checks payable to St. John UCC or through the Online Giving Portal noting "Milton House Trip" on the memo line.

OUR CHURCH COMMUNITY

MAY BIRTHDAYS

5/2 Fiona Hughes	5/16 Lisa Condie
5/4 Asher Graham	5/18 Kathryn Ebbers
5/6 Judy Garkey	Rae Ann McMurray
5/7 Marilyn Klever	5/19 Benson & Delilah Kennedy Marcum Kamholz
5/9 Maggie Cich	5/20 Dylan Kuntz
5/11 Dennis Garkey	Jill Collin
5/12 Michelle Schieder	5/23 Mary Frazee
Ken Schrock	Sarah Knapp
5/13 Larry Frazee	5/25 Scarlett Walsh
5/14 Celeste & Vivienne Walsh	5/27 Kristi Kamholz
	5/30 Amanda Vizcarra

MAY ANNIVERSARIES

5/5 Mike & Alyson Graham	5/21 Glen & Jan Kunkle
5/17 Dave & Olivia Shaffer	5/28 Tommy & Kristen Prieue
5/18 Brett & Michele Piefer	5/29 Phil & Barb Copus



STAFF NEWS: THANK YOU, KARLA!

We celebrate with Karla Hardersen on her acceptance into SSM Health's Clinical Pastoral Education program. Karla will begin her pathway to Board Certified Chaplain. Unfortunately to complete this 16-month program, Karla will be relocating to St. Louis. This means she will be transitioning out of her position as our Creative and Administrative Assistant, effective 5/8/2026.

Congratulations, Karla!

Please celebrate with her the next time you see her!

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

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, 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



ONE MORE THOUGHT: STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH OFFERING, GATHERED 5/24 & 5/31

The **Strengthen the Church** offering in the UCC is used to support the expansion and vitality of ministry across the denomination, especially in new and renewing congregations. The funds are shared between your local Conference and the national UCC, and are directed toward:

Starting new churches: supporting innovative and diverse ministries that reach new people in new ways.

Revitalizing existing congregations: Providing grants, coaching, and resources for churches undergoing renewal.

Youth and young adult ministries: Empowering the next generation of leaders through leadership development and mission engagement.

Leadership development: Equipping lay and ordained leaders with tools for effective ministry in today's changing church landscape.

