

TIDINGS

September 2026

A Regular Sharing of Our Mission and Ministry



Living Water

Season of Creation 2026

Each year from September 1 to October 4, the global Christian community unites in celebration of prayer and action to protect our Earth home. It is a special season where we celebrate God's creating Spirit, and acknowledge the whole of creation as the God's continuing act of love. It summons us as collaborators and caregivers for the gift of all that is created.

As followers of Christ's Way, we share a common call to care for creation from wherever we live our life's journey. We are co-creatures with all living things, and a unique part of all that God has made. Our well-being is interwoven with the well-being of our Earth home. We rejoice in this opportunity to safeguard our common home and all beings who share it with us.

This year, the theme for the Season is "Living Water," inspired by Ezekiel 47: 9 and 12.

As Rev. Prof. Jerry Pillay, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches puts it:

"Ezekiel's vision of Living Water, chosen as the Season of Creation theme this year, is not one of despair but of hope for all creation. Even the Dead Sea — a symbol of a devastated ecosystem such as we see today — is healed by the Living Water."

Over the five Sundays from August 30 to September 27, you are invited to embrace your place in God's creation as we witness the world from the feast of Creation: from forest to land, from wilderness to river, and all the places that connect them.

Come share in worship, engage our social media posts, and listen for your call as Creation Justice caregivers. Creation is not a commodity but a communion of interdependent life entrusted to our care. Singing with hymn-master and musical theologian Amanda Udis-Kessler, we add our voices:

All the earth belongs to God, so we must love the earth!



HYMN SING

HYMN SING

During Worship, Sunday, 9/6

This all-ages celebration brings our old favorites and our new-to-me hymns to voice.



OKTOBERFEST

10/3, 4:00-7:00 pm

Find alles Zeug und der ganze Kram about this year's pretzel party on page 3.



Whirl



FAITH FORMATION FOR ALL AGES

For September's offerings and schedule, see pages 5-6.



**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

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

A MONTH AT A GLANCE



SUMMER GIVING CAMPAIGN REPORT: THANK YOU!!

Wow, team, what a fun July we had, hitting a Home Run for our congregation! From our lead off event at the Beloit Sky Carp game to the closer at Little Cubs Field, and every week in between, we knocked it out of the ballpark during our Summer giving campaign!

And “It’s out of the park!” This summer, together we were able to hit our Home Run goal of \$20,000 and make it back around to First Base. Typically, our summer special campaigns raise between \$6,000 and \$10,000. Your generous sharing raised a total of \$25,249 for our General Fund! Thank you all so much for raising our team batting average to AMAZING!

On behalf of the Church Council, we sincerely appreciate your participation and generous support of the ministries and missions of St. John UCC!

Thank you for Swinging for the Fences with us!

Your Team Captains: Lisa Ebbers, Jill Gastel, Anita Bicksler, Carla Meyer & Kelly Priewe

SUMMER CAMPAIGN BOX SCORE	
Gift Range	# of Gifts
\$1-\$500	39
\$501-\$1,000	7
\$1,501-\$2,000	2
\$7,501-\$8,000	1
Total Players	41
Total Gifts	49
Total Giving	\$25,249

JULY & YTD FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Income	Actual	Budget	Difference
Pledges/Gifts	\$16,831	\$27,083	\$-10,252
Monthly Income	\$44,990	\$38,267	\$6,723.53
Monthly Expenses	\$33,191	\$38,560	\$ -5,369
YTD Pledges/Gifts	\$132,596	\$189,583	\$ -56,988
YTD Income	\$220,133	\$267,867	\$ -47,734
YTD Expenses	\$270,200	\$272,061	\$ -1,861
YTD Total	\$ -50,067	\$ -4,194	\$ -45,873

Stewardship Note: The Summer Campaign raise significant income. Additional gifts will also report in August's income statement. Pledges and Identified Gifts are receiving behind budget. Expenses remain under budget. If you have not made a Faith Promise commitment for 2026, it's not too late! Speak with Pam Wessel or Jeff Williams today! Thank you for your continued generous support of St. John UCC!

STAFF NEWS: WELCOME MYLES!



Myles Halberstadt joined the office team as the new Creative and Administrative Assistant in June 2026. They majored in English at the undergraduate level with a minor in sociology, at Rockford University.

Myles lives with their partner, Will, and their daughter, Andromeda, or Andie for short. Myles enjoys reading, art and writing. In their free time, Myles has been published for both their prose and poetry

Myles is excited to be serving the St. John UCC community and beyond, and hopes to aid in creating a welcoming and inviting space.

Myles can be reached via email: myles@stjohnuccfreeport.org

FELLOWSHIP AND COMMUNITY



Join with the community at St. John UCC in our Second Annual Oktoberfest! Dress in your finest German attire (lederhosen and dirndls welcomed!) and celebrate our community's German roots with great music and food activities!

For your enjoyment, the German folk band will be back again this year! There will be stein-holding and yodeling contests, silent auction and so much more! Stay tuned for more information in the bulletins, online, and in your emails.

Adults \$15.00

Children (under 10) \$10.00.

Tickets will be available on Sunday mornings, in the church office, or at the door on Oktoberfest Day.

Oktoberfest Silent Auction

It's not too early to start thinking about items you might want to donate for the auction. Possible ideas are gift baskets with various themes, artwork, baked goods, jewelry, gift cards for restaurants or stores, books, new and gently used items. The possibilities are endless! If you have questions, contact Jan Kunkle.

We hope this will be a fun-filled event for St. John UCC and the whole Freeport community. Plan on arriving early and staying until the root beer ends! If you'd like to participate or want to volunteer to help, please let us know by contacting Lisa Ebbers or the office.

Can't wait to see you there! Prost!



WISE Congregations:

Our next steps towards our Commitment

The Wellness Ministry is working to take the necessary steps towards an ever-wider welcome as a WISE Congregation. Returning from this spring's series on the UCC Mental Health Network, the WISE Team has planned out our next steps towards affirming our covenant supporting mental healthcare in our community.

Our next item on the list is tuning the sense and scope of our mission and ministry as WISE Congregation. To do this, we need your help by completing the Wise Church Survey. The survey will ask how you believe our congregation can be a healing force in community and the wider world through our welcome, inclusion, and support of those with mental health experiences. It will also help us define our engagement with mental health advocacy and justice work. You can fill one out in two ways:

1. Follow this link, or use the QR Code:
bit.ly/sjucwisesurvey
2. Pick up a paper copy in the Narthex or Church Office.



The survey will be open from 9/1-9/31, and a summary will be published in November's newsletter.

We thank you in advance for sharing your thoughts, reflections, and opinions!

*Need a refresher on how we become
WISE for Mental Health? Follow this link:*

www.mhn-ucc.org/becoming-wise/

LOCAL AND GLOBAL MISSION IMPACT



FACC FOOD PANTRY

Our congregation's generous support of the Kreeger Memorial Food Pantry at FACC and its clients offers us a way to spread care and compassion throughout the year.

In September we are asked to collect:



Ramen Noodles

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

CHICAGO AVENUE MISSION DINNERS

Help provide a homestyle meal for the residents at the Chicago Avenue Mission. You can join our culinary master team, preparing a home-style meal every Wednesday, for the guests at the Chicago Avenue Mission. Your generous gift of time and love fills hungry people with food and friendship!

Prepare the meal yourself, or gather a group of friends! Sign up on the Narthex bulletin board, or contact Marla Kreeger or Pam Wessel for more info!

GREEN ENERGY REPORT



Month	Generated	Used	Difference
June	5218 kWh	2211 kWh	-3007 kWh
July	5065 kWh	2658 kWh	-2407 kWh
August	3692 kWh	3379 kWh	-313 kWh

Green Team Note: Over the summer, our energy bank balance rose to a total of 8295. This is roughly equivalent to two and a half months of our typical electric utility usage!



Global Ministries
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
and the United Church of Christ

ACCEPTING OUR MISSION AS A GLOBAL MISSIONS CHURCH

What does it mean to be a *Global Missions Church*? Our Mission & Outreach Team is spending this fall answering that question!

To claim the name as a *Global Mission Church*, a congregation prayerfully discerns how God is calling them engage in mission *beyond our national boundaries* in covenantal partnership with Global Ministries, the common witness of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ. For thirty years, our two denominations have a formal partnership through which DOC and UCC share common staff, budget, programs/projects, and governance in our presence and witness with international partners throughout the global community.

Over a three-year period, our congregation would take on the task of defining our commitments in shaping our engagement beyond our city and nation. We will set marks of our impact with the guidance of our mission partners at Global Ministries.

The interesting part of these marks? *We already live many of these commitments in our community life at St. John UCC!* This process will codify what we already know God is calling us to do and to be.

The Mission & Outreach Team hopes to bring a resolution to our Annual Meeting in 2027, affirming our commitment to be a *Global Missions Church*. Watch for news in Tidings about listening sessions and other ways to learn more about their efforts.

For more information about this work, please visit:

www.globalministries.org

YOUTH FAITH FORMATION

YOUTH FAITH FORMATION RESUMES THIS MONTH!

Sunday, 8/30 is Rally Day, when our regular faith formation classes for youth take return during the worship hour, following the *Moment for All Ages*.

Updated registration forms will be available on Rally Day. These are required for each child or youth for each new program year and must be completed before 9/30.



GODLY PLAY—PRE-K-3RD GRADES

The Godly Play class teaches Bible stories to younger children through Montessori-style play and materials. This year, we’re enjoying the revised series of lessons with a focus on sharing our Bible’s stories:

- 8/30 **Rally Day Party**
- 9/6 The Creation
- 9/13 The Flood & the Ark
- 9/20 The Great Family
- 9/27 The Story of Jacob



KIDS’ WORSHIP—4TH-8TH GRADES

The Kids’ Worship class helps 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.

- 8/30 **Rally Day Party**
- 9/6 Commandment: Love One Another
- 9/13 Forgiveness: The Unforgiving Servant
- 9/20 Generosity: First & Last
- 9/27 Action: Two Sons in the Vineyard

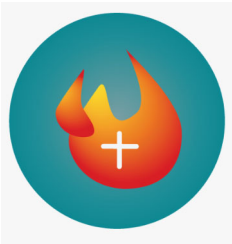


HELIX is an after school program sponsored and hosted by St. John UCC that focuses on community-building and social-emotional learning.

HELIX Middle High starts the Wednesday fun from 2:30-5:00 pm. And this year, HELIX Senior High returns from 5:30-7:30 pm! And one week every month, HELIX will be preparing the Chicago Avenue Mission dinner, expanding their culinary expertise.

Our veteran HELIX Team returns this year with their creativity and commitment to connecting with all kinds of youth, wherever they are on life’s journey. Madison, Tay, and Marissa are ready to greet our youth with an inclusive, caring, and ever-listening spirit.

Contact us to find out more about HELIX, our Social/Emotional Learning (SEL) goals, and our focus on youth needs first at: helix@stjohnuccfreeport.org



PRAIRIE ASSOCIATION “UNITED” CONFIRMATION CLASS

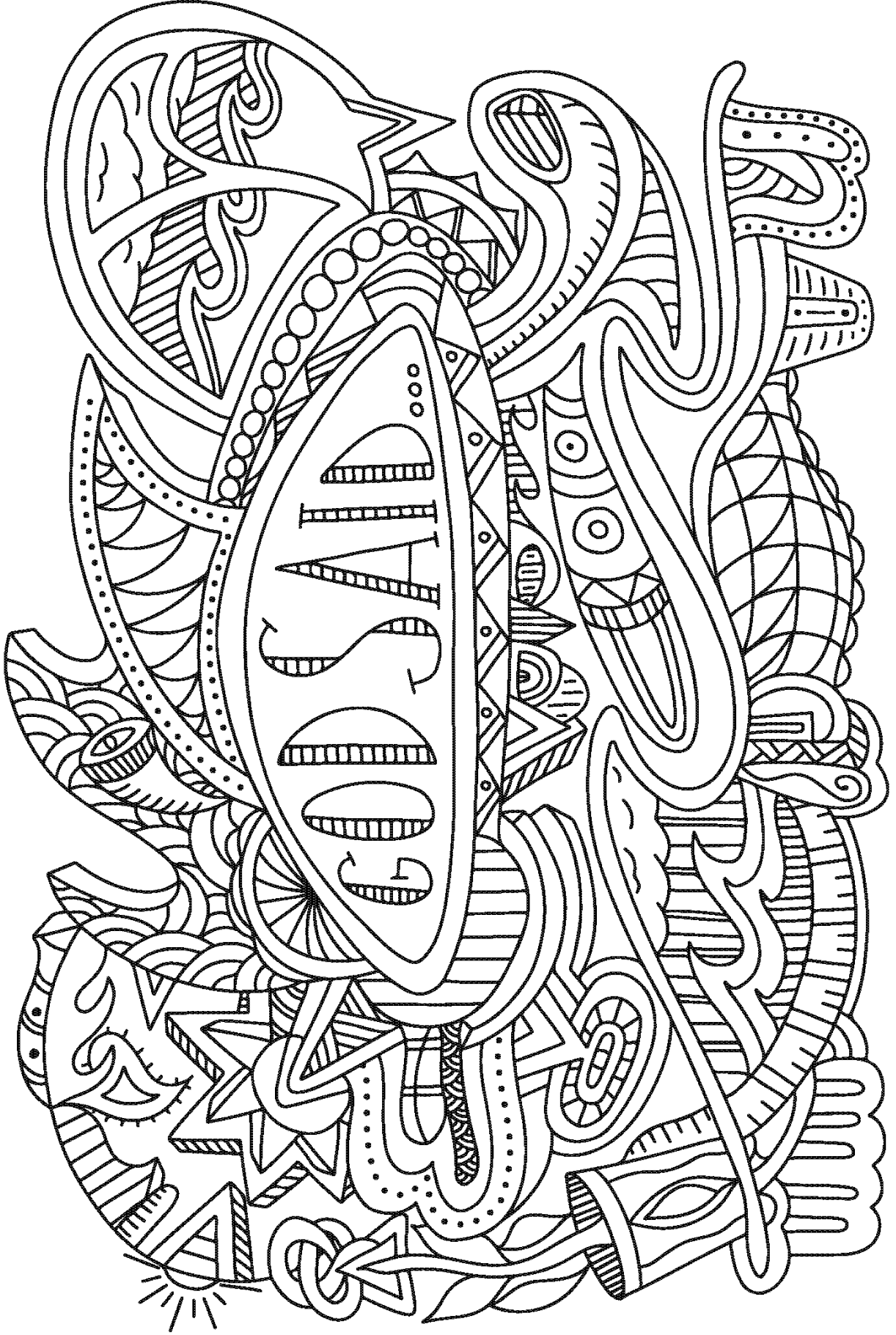
Our four-church-combined Confirmation Class is wrapping up their formative work! Over the summer, the Youth and their Mentors spent time finding the words that describe their faith today. This month, we’re finishing up our conversations, and finalizing our Statements of Faith.

- 8/30 – End-of-Summer Meet-up (In-Person)
- 9/13 – Local Church Meet-ups:
Time with Pastors and Local Church Leaders
- 9/27 – Re-Rally Afternoon, and Celebration Dinner

FAITH AT PLAY

The Art of Creation

God's creating spirit wove creation together with paintbrush and chisel, potter's wheel. Use your colored pencils, markers, or whatever sparks your creative spirit to personalize this graphic of Genesis 1.



ADULT FAITH FORMATION



OUR WORDS SHARE SHOW OUR LOVE: Inclusive and Expansive Language

The Worship & Education Leadership Team has spent the summer exploring the use of inclusive and expansive language with you. First in June, we answered the question: What is inclusive and expansive language? Then in July and August, we talked about why we use it here at St. John UCC.

Inclusive and expansive language says clearly that no matter who you are, and where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here. We say that a lot at St. John UCC, don't we?

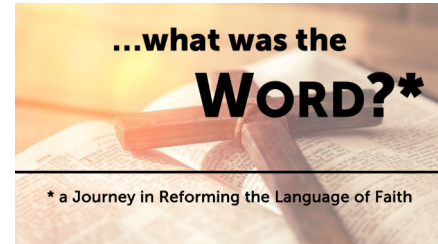
What you may hear a little less often—even though we live them every day—are our Values Statements. What do those say? Central to the rest of our values, we believe that God continues to call us to be the church – Progressive, Inclusive and Engaged – in Freeport and beyond.

We have six statements to help us define and discern what God is calling us to do and be. This fall, we'll expand our focus on one of these:

Language tunes our Love:

It opens our hearts to expanding expressions of an ever-inclusive world.

You are invited to join in this fall's first *Adult Faith Formation* series which will examine the ways in which language tunes our love. We'll learn how the words we use to talk (and sing) about faith have changed over time to become more inclusive, more expansive, and more welcoming of all God's people.



Starting 9/13, 9:30 am

Our faith forms and re-forms many times in our lives (and often with every morning's blessings!). Every time we encounter God's Pentecost Spirit working in us, we are challenged to find the language needed to tell that story. And often that means finding *different and more accurate words* to share our stories with others.

This fall, our first Adult Faith Formation series will take the conversation into the history, tradition, and present of the words we use in worship, formation, and mission. Beginning on 9/13, Pastor Hank Fairman will guide each week's gathering on the topics of :

- 9/13 Reforming the Word: *What history teaches us about the language of faith*
- 9/20 The People of the Book: *Reading the scriptures in context of our translations*
- 9/27 The Faith We Sing: *Singing the Songs and Hymns to a different tune (with Britney Kieselhorst)*
- 10/4 DOXA LOGIA: *Worship Words and their Way with Us*
- 10/11 The Final Chapter?: *Finding our comfort and naming our questions on the WORD*

Please join us for one, two, three, or all weeks of this conversation. We can't wait to see you on Sunday mornings at 9:00 am in the Chapel Hearth Room!

OUR CHURCH COMMUNITY



MAT & CHAIR YOGA AT ST. JOHN UCC

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 9/15, 6:30 pm

Our next meeting is Tuesday, 9/15, 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!



9/5. 8:00 am

The monthly gathering of the Men's Ministry happens on the first Saturday of the month. Join the lively group in the Chapel Hearth Room for the latest news, some serious discussion, and a few good jokes. *Coffee and donuts are provided!*



STAR WORDS:

Gazing up at the late summer sky

What has your 2026 Star Word shown you this summer? Has it taken you on paths of Spirit-led discernment? Have you found a place to pause as listen, or is it taking you places “on the go?” What blessings have come from your worldly word?

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

*Listen, because God is still speaking,
calling you to follow your star!*

OUR CHURCH COMMUNITY

SEPTEMBER BIRTHDAYS

9/2 Lisa Elsner	9/15 Bryce Bicksler
Lisa Schubert	Karla Hardersen
Mike	Lexi Schrock
Queckboerner	9/16 Jocelyn Walsh
9/3 Marilyn	9/20 Allen Buus
Underwood	9/23 Barbara Luedeke
Roger Swanlund	Elliot Fairman
9/4 Nevaeh Graybill	9/25 Colton Krumm
Bill Condie	9/26 Maxen Hughes
9/5 Michael DeBoer	9/28 Tim Ebbers
9/8 Carol Ahrens	9/29 Carter Young
9/9 Angeline Walsh	9/30 Drew Dawson
9/11 Heath Atz	Dan King
Michael Weaver	
9/14 Olivia Shaffer	

SEPTEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

9/2 Denny & Judy	9/23 Terry & Deleana
Garkey	Atz
9/3 Jack & Jill Gastel	9/24 Tim & Lisa Ebbers
9/8 John & Paula	9/25 Steve & Kathy
Rawleigh	Monte
9/9 Steve & Lisa	9/26 Logan & Andrea
Schubert	Kuntz
9/16 Allen & Judi Buus	9/29 Steve & Vicki
	Spyrison

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

St. Joseph Village: Marilyn Ruthe

Rock River Health Care: June Nagel

Liberty Village: Stan Bomgarden

Pearl Point: Delores Siemens

Winn Prairie: Ray Nieman

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

Please contact Pam for addresses.

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](http://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!

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

Myles Halberstadt
myles@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



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

Place
Stamp
Here

Change Service Requested



One More Thought: Ecumenical Mission and Fellowship Opportunities



**Sunday 10/4,
Register: 1:00 pm | Walk: 1:30 pm**

The CROP Hunger Walk is a national effort sponsored by Church World Service. Local churches and individuals walk to raise money to help end hunger. Twenty-five percent of the funds raised stay local, supporting community services in Freeport and Stephenson County.

Please meet in Debate Square if you wish to walk!



WOMEN'S SACRED RELAX & RENEWAL Pilgrim Park Camp, 10/2-3

Join for a 23-hour getaway to relax while engaging God's Holy Spirit! It's a time to reconnect with old friends, make new friends, and even bring along some friends. Unable to spend the night for the full retreat, but able to come for a portion? There are options to experience for the day on either Friday, Saturday, or both days. Full retreat with overnights cost is \$173.

To register and for alternate pricing, go to:
<https://pilgrimpark.campbrainregistration.com>