

God is still speaking,
**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



Immanuel United Church of Christ

“Following God through Jesus in work & word”

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March/April 2026

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Pastor's Article

Fasting for Lent - Why You Shouldn't Give Something Up

When one thinks of fasting and spiritual discipline, the idea of some sort of monastic hermit figure depriving themselves out in a monastery or the desert comes to mind. And from this the idea emerges that during times like Lent we should try to be more "spiritual" and copy this self-denying practice, and so we give something up for the season - be it chocolate, Facebook, beer, a favorite TV show, or something else. This completely misses the point, and if you're doing this sort of thing I'm telling you - as your pastor and as a priest - to stop it right now. Set down this newsletter right this second and go eat the cookie you were going to give up or check your social media feed and then come back. Did you give up what you were going to give up? Good! You see, the point of both the season of Lent specifically and of spiritual disciplines more generally is not to engage in self-denial for its own sake. Even the greatest spiritual masters of the Christian faith didn't do this. Take St. Anthony, the first Christian monk. Did he live for fifteen years in an old pharaoh's tomb? Yes, and the first picture here is of that tomb. Did he then move out into the desert and live the rest of his life in a cave? Yes, he did, and our second picture here is of the entrance to that cave. But did he do these things just for the sake of being a self-denying, antisocial hermit? No - far from it. The reason he gave up on so much of life was simply so that he could spend more time with God and less time worrying about housing, clothing, etc.



Think about it: if you were to take stock of all the time you spend to prepare an average dinner at home - meal planning, shopping, cooking, eating, cleaning up, etc. - and compare that to the time needed to prepare a simple meal - say a sandwich and a side - you'd spend less time and money on the simpler option, correct? And if you applied that across the board - simple food, simple clothing, simple housing, etc. - you could have a lot more time, energy, and resources on your hands. That is why monks and nuns live the way they do. The fasting is not self-denial for the sake of self-denial, it is to refocus their time, energy, and resources on God rather than on food. Their robes aren't especially holy in-and-of themselves, they are simply a basic uniform that frees up time, energy, and resources they would otherwise be spending on their appearance. And so on, and so forth. In all this the focus is not on giving up something - whether something small like chocolate or something important like a family - it is about reallocating our time, energy, and resources on the spiritual life and on God. So, this Lent, don't give up something just to give something up; that doesn't help you or God. Instead, focus on something you can do with or for God. Perhaps you could buy a devotional book or use the booklets at the back of the Church and dedicate a special 10-15 minutes in the morning or evening to prayer and devotion. Or perhaps you feel called to help at Laura's pantry or some other charity once a week during Lent. Either of those - or any of a

number of pious or charitable activities like them - are infinitely better than giving up cookies. That said, if you have to, say, give up watching an episode of your favorite show in order to spend time on your prayers, that is a valid course of action; because you aren't giving something up for no reason, but are giving it up for a time in order to focus on your prayer life and your relationship with God (or loving your neighbor, or whatever it is you are choosing to do). That is the only reason to give something up for Lent; not as an exercise in self-denial, but a reallocation of our time, energy, and resources away from ourselves and our material desires and onto our spiritual lives and our growth in holiness empowered by and under the direction of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Pastor Sean Cornell (they/them)

Consistory Minutes – December 2025:

Call the meeting to order--7:00 PM. Rodney T.

Opening prayer--Rev. Cornell

Review of the secretary minutes from last meeting (November 10, 2025).

- Motion to pass by: Gene M 2nd by: Brett K Passed

Treasurer's report—Submitted by email and phone by Joya Cox accountant.

- Motion to pass by: Gene M 2nd by: Brett K Passed

a. Review spending plan and any raises for employees for 2026 budget and

annual report—Consult “Wisconsin Conference Guidelines for Compensation for 2026”

Leave salaries as same as last year.

Rev. Cornell's salary will be discussed separately

b. Settle on a church credit card with National Exchange Bank—Whose name

should be put on the card and who can sign for its use?

The church will have 2 credit cards: one for Rev Cornell and one for the church secretary. Each card will have a \$500 limit.

c. Recipient of Christmas Eve offering—Known as “White Gift” -- Past years

Ronald McDonald House—Need to include in bulletins and announce from pulpit

-Motion was made that all lose money on Christmas Eve and any money from white gift envelopes will be donated as part of the White Christmas Offering to the Ronald McDonald house.

- Motion made by Brett K, Jen M 2nd, Motion passed.

d. Rodney asked, “Should the church be giving to the Sheboygan Warming center.”

Jen and Brett putting plan together for this project that people from church will go. (Will be done as a church) If the special gifts fun

exceeds an amount part of that will be given to the Warming Center.

Motion was made to make a sign-up sheet to have people volunteer and make a meal for the Sheboygan Warming Center and be there to serve it on Tuesday, Feb 17, 2026

5. Pastor's report—Worship planning—Church events

a. RCCC churches invited to Blue Christmas worship service at Bethlehem UCC

on Thursday December 18, 2025, at 6:30 pm

b. Congregational Christmas play, produced and directed by Donna Bauer,

presented during church on Dec. 21, 2025.

c. Christmas Eve service 6:30 pm—Will need to distribute candles for "Silent Night"

closing hymn—Instructions to keep certain lights on during last hymn

d. Communion schedule for Christmas and beginning of New Year, January 4,

2026. Dates are set through Ash Wednesday.

e. Report on RCCC Christmas caroling event at a local nursing home and RCF

High School event at St. Peter UCC Kiel

d. Newsletter articles due by Friday December 19

f. What do we do for organ music on the first and third Sunday and the occasional

fifth Sunday? --Advertise on WI-UCC e-news?

So far, we can't find another organist but may have a lead on piano player(s).

If an organist needs to record music for a church service, we will need to pay them at the normal rate for it. Rev Cornell will reach out to Karen and Jody to gauge interest. Motion to pursue Karen &

Jody to record music for a second Sunday each month (1st & 3rd Sunday of each month)

- Motion by Brett K ,2nd Jennifer M Passed

g. Lent schedule with RCCC has been established pending consistory approval of the involved churches Motion to accept RCC Lenten Schedule as presented by Rev Cornell by Jennifer M, second by Brett K passed.

Lenten Schedule is as follows:

Ash Wednesday Feb. 18, 2026, at Our Shepherd,
Feb 25, 2026, at St. Johns,
March 4,2026, at Immanuel,
March 11,2026, at Bethel,
March 18, 2026, at Our Shepherd,
March 25, 2026, at St. Johns,
Maundy Thursday April 2 nd , 2026, at Immanuel,
Good Friday, April 3, 2026, at Bethel

Old business--

a. Insurance proposal received from Larry Clinton of Lightwell Insurance Advisors for Brotherhood Mutual Insurance---Thank you to Brett Koenig for securing the proposal and to Rev. Cornell for showing the representative around our property—The proposal will be discussed and final decision will be made—The roof replacement issue will also be determined
Brotherhood Mutual Insurance proposal’s coverage came in same as Acuity but much less expensive
Motion was made to accept the Brotherhood Mutual Insurance proposal.

- Motion by Keri K to accept, Gene M 2nd Motion passed

Motion that we look at canceling Acuity asap and then move to Brotherhood

- motion by Jennifer M., Second by Keri K Motion passed
- b. Vestibule window repair—Nothing new to report
- c. New computer set-up and data transfer progress
- d. Rev. Cornell report on replacement of the printer with possible choices of programs available and associated costs
- Rev Cornell Recommends that we rent the Sharp printer. (\$185 a month) Rep recommended we pay quarterly to offset overage charges.

Motion to get a new Sharp printer with 5-year lease

- motion by Ed P, Second by Keri K Motion passed

New business--

- a. Preview annual meeting to be held January 25, 2026—Anything that needs to be discussed?—Need to nominate an elder and deacon—Deadline for information to be submitted for the printed annual report—Generally the retiring elder and deacon prepare a written report on events of the past year All church groups are to submit financial reports by Jan 4, 2026
- b. Scholarship Committee spoke to Rodney and Pastor Sean on Sunday; forms are in the back of the church and distribution will be on a Sunday following Christmas.
- c. Remove to storage Christmas decorations and outdoor Nativity stuff—Need to set date and time January 11, 2026, after church.
- d. Ed P made the motion to hire Keri K as new church secretary. Second by Gene M 2nd Motion passed (Keri K abstained from the voting)

Need to adjourn to closed session

Next meeting January 12, 2026

Adjourn with The Lord's Prayer--Rev Cornell closed in prayer

Immanuel UCC
Fund Balance Report
November 30, 2025

Fund	October	November	Change	Type of Change
General Operating Fund	40,230.96	40,670.64	439.68	Increase
Improvement Fund	9,883.71	9,985.71	102.00	Increase
Mission Fund	2,846.13	2,846.13	0.00	Same
Sabbatical Fund	0.00	0.00	0.00	Same
Christian Ed Committee Fund	2,430.40	2,430.40	0.00	Same
Youth/Confirmation Fund	4,014.09	4,014.09	0.00	Same
Con't Ed/Out of Box Fund	4,518.52	4,518.52	0.00	Same
Scholarship Fund	2,487.37	2,487.37	0.00	Same
Special Gifts Fund	66,743.11	67,000.29	257.18	Increase
Baird Savings	57,204.01	57,641.36	437.35	Increase
Parking Lot Fund	6,378.65	6,378.65	0.00	same
Woods Project	7,697.41	7,697.41	0.00	Same
Fund Raisers	0.00	0.00	0.00	Same
Rental Income	0.00	0.00	0.00	Same
Youth Fellowship Fund	861.87	861.87	0.00	Same
Food Pantry	2,932.89	2,792.89	(140.00)	Decrease
Benevelence	<u>1,546.00</u>	<u>1,594.00</u>	<u>48.00</u>	Increase
Total Fund Balance	<u>209,775.12</u>	<u>210,919.33</u>		
Total Changes To Funds			<u>1,144.21</u>	

Consistory Minutes – January 2026:

Calling the meeting to order-- Rodney T. 7:00

Opening prayer--Rev. Cornell

Review secretary's minutes from last meeting (December 8, 2025).

- Motion by: Gene M. 2nd by: Brett K, Passed

Change time on December meeting for taking down Christmas decorations

Treasurer's report—Submitted by email and phone by Joya Cox accountant.

- Motion by: Gene M 2nd by: Ed P Passed.

Northeast Wi Dues more than expected Joya will look into it.

In the Church Newsletter copy and paste a summary of expenses for the past 2 months.

a. Review annual financial report for 2025—Make sure proposed spending plans

for 2026 is published in annual report with the proper agreed-on amounts.

All is good

b. Update credit card status with Joya—Continue automatic payments tied to credit

card—Review names on the cards and credit limits. Taken care of.

Pastor's report—Worship planning—Church events

a. Communion for February—Sunday Feb. 1 or Ash Wednesday Feb. 18 or

both—Ash Wednesday service to be held at Our Shepherd

b. Review church service music and hymns using recorded accompaniment—Begin

to add prelude and postlude? Jen M has been looking into other options for music during the month. Karen is

- willing to help on weeks she is not scheduled for by pre-recording hymns into the organ. Karen is also looking into options to help us with music during the service.
- c. Chili making on Jan. 27 with chili supper on Jan. 28, 4:00 to 6:00 pm—All hands on deck
- d. Remove Carl Maeuser from membership due to death
- Motion by: Keith R. 2nd: Brett K. passed
- e. We should look at the Membership list to make it more accurate. Due to the number of inactive members, the consistory will do a review of membership.

Old business--

- a. Final preparation for annual meeting –Review agenda—Any Elder and Deacon nominations? At this time no one has volunteered for either position.
- b. Update insurance transition from Acuity to Brotherhood Mutual Is finalized as of Jan 15. Brotherhood Mutual wants a new water control valve to be put in at a cost of about \$1500 - \$3000 by the end of 2026. Motion made to get a quote for a water control meter as well a wifi thermometer for the church.
Motion by: Brett K Second by: Jen M passed
- c. Schedule for replacing the old printer and getting the new printer up and running
The New printer/copier is being built currently.

d. Progress on making a meal for the Sheboygan Warming Center—Is Tuesday - Feb. 17 a suitable date? --Will there be enough help? Progress is

going well with several volunteers already signed up

e. New computer installment seems to have gone well, thanks to all the work done

by Rev. Cornell—Should a new website be pursued? If so, how do we go about that?

Who do we check with if we do indeed owe “UCC Everywhere” a maintenance fee?

The new computer has been set up.

Office suit is needed at a cost of \$99 a year plus tax.

This is bound to change over time.

New business--

a. Repair needed for the church heating system—Anything the consistory should

know about the situation? The

oilers have been fixed. The

church boiler needs to be oiled every year as part of maintenance.

b. Special Gifts Fund—A history of the fund will be shared as well as it is known and remembered Questions will be asked to address

the distribution of accumulated interest as resolved by the congregation in 1996—Should an explanation or discussion be

brought before the congregation at the annual meeting?

- Motion made that any amount over \$50000, 75% back to the capital improvement fund and then decide where the other 25%

should go. The Mission committee will make a recommendation to the consistory

to decide where it should go.

- Motion by: Brett K. 2nd by: Ed P. passed

c. Does anything need to be addressed concerning the condition of the parsonage? Is the furnace and heating system operating ok? Ada said

the church passed a fire inspection. All is good

d. Revisit church rental cost in Feb

Next meeting February 9, 2026

Adjourn with The Lord's Prayer

- Adjourn motion by: Brett K 2nd by: Gene M passed

Immanuel UCC Fund Balance Report December 31, 2025				
Fund	November	December	Change	Type of Change
General Operating Fund	40,670.64	43,748.87	3,078.23	Increase
Improvement Fund	9,985.71	9,859.31	(126.40)	Decrease
Mission Fund	2,846.13	2,846.13	0.00	Same
Sabbatical Fund	0.00	0.00	0.00	Same
Christian Ed Committee Fund	2,430.40	2,430.40	0.00	Same
Youth/Confirmation Fund	4,014.09	4,014.09	0.00	Same
Con't Ed/Out of Box Fund	4,518.52	4,518.52	0.00	Same
Scholarship Fund	2,487.37	2,188.37	(299.00)	Decrease
Special Gifts Fund	67,000.29	67,172.73	172.44	Increase
Baird Savings	57,641.36	57,860.65	219.29	Increase
Parking Lot Fund	6,378.65	6,378.65	0.00	same
Woods Project	7,697.41	7,697.41	0.00	Same
Fund Raisers	0.00	0.00	0.00	Same
Rental Income	0.00	0.00	0.00	Same
Youth Fellowship Fund	861.87	861.87	0.00	Same
Food Pantry	2,792.89	7,259.35	4,466.46	Increase
Benevelence	<u>1,594.00</u>	<u>2,289.00</u>	<u>695.00</u>	Increase
Total Fund Balance	<u>210,919.33</u>	<u>219,125.35</u>		
Total Changes To Funds			<u>8,206.02</u>	

Congregational President: --Special Gifts:

Special Gifts Fund Distribution

Over the years, Immanuel has been blessed by the generosity of both past and present members. Through gifts from Arno Stoelting and others, we are grateful to have a Special Gifts Fund. The fund's principal remains untouched, and we follow clear guidelines for distributing its earnings. Each year, one-fourth of the annual dividends is designated for outreach in our community, supporting social service agencies, partner organizations, and programs serving individuals in Northeast Wisconsin who are experiencing spiritual and/or economic hardship.

Because our Mission Committee has a strong understanding of local needs, Consistory requested their recommendations for this year's distribution, and based on that, this year's Special Gifts will be divided among three organizations in Sheboygan County:

- **Sheboygan County Warming Center** – Provides a safe, warm, low-barrier overnight shelter for single adults without secure housing and partners with community resources to promote permanent housing and self-sufficiency.
- **Safe Harbor** – Offers services and advocacy for individuals affected by sexual assault and domestic abuse, along with crisis support.
- **Mental Health America – Lakeshore** – A trusted nonprofit organization providing mental health support and resources within our community.

We are grateful for the opportunity to extend Christ's love beyond our walls through these donations.

Congregation President: THANK YOU, Rodney!

Thank You for a Decade of Faithful Leadership

In January, Rodney Thieleke finished his tenth year as our Congregation President (his second time serving in this role). We want to take a moment to express our sincere gratitude for the steady leadership he has provided during an especially significant chapter in the life of our church.

During this decade, he guided our church through two major capital projects (the organ and the steeple), the challenges of COVID, the launch of our food pantry ministry, a pastoral departure, a season of congregational strain, and three years of search committee work with an interim pastor and then pulpit supply. His steady leadership helped provide stability during uncertain times and ultimately led to the calling of our new pastor.

Serving as congregational president requires time, discernment, resilience, and a willingness to listen. It often happens quietly and behind the scenes. We are grateful for the countless meetings, conversations, and prayers that marked Rodney's tenure.

On behalf of the congregation, we extend our heartfelt thanks for ten years of faithful service. We are thankful for the steady presence, thoughtful leadership, and deep care shown to this church community.

We wish him continued blessings in the years ahead.

March 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 9:00 AM - Adult Sunday School 10:00 AM - Worship	2	3	4 6 PM - 3rd Midweek Service @ Immanuel	5	6	7
8 9:00 AM - Adult Sunday School 10:00 AM - Worship	9	10	11 6 PM - 4th Midweek Service @ Bethel	12	13	14
15 9:00 AM - Adult Sunday School 10:00 AM - Worship	16	17	18 6 PM - 5th Midweek Service @ Our Shepherd	19	20	21
22 9:00 AM - Adult Sunday School 10:00 AM - Worship	23	24	25 6 PM - 6th Midweek Service @ St. John's	26	27	28
29 9:00 AM - Donkey Walk - Palm Sunday Worship	30	31				

April 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2 6 PM - Maundy Thursday Service @ Immanuel	3 6 PM - Good Friday Service @ Bethel	4 9 -11:00 AM - Laura's Food Pantry
5 10 AM - Easter Sunday Service @ Immanuel	6	7	8	9	10	11 9 -11:00 AM - Laura's Food Pantry
12 9 AM - Adult Sunday School 10 AM - Worship	13 7 PM - Consistory Meeting	14	15	16	17	18 9 -11:00 AM - Laura's Food Pantry
19 9 AM - Adult Sunday School 10 AM - Worship	20	21	22	23	24	25 9 -11:00 AM - Laura's Food Pantry
26 9 AM - Adult Sunday School 10 AM - Worship	27	28	29	30		