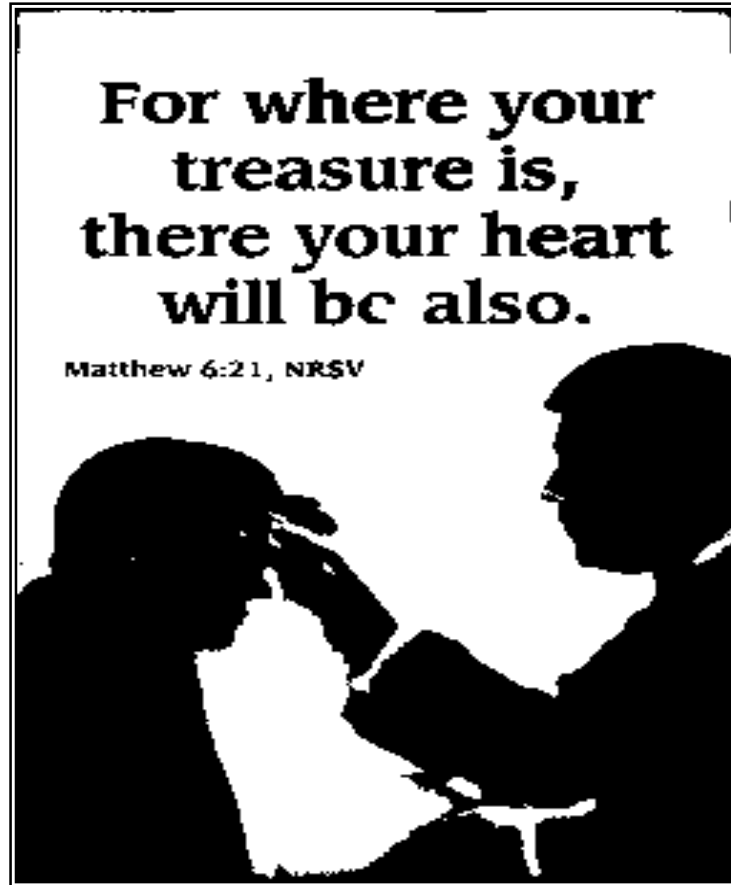




FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS

WELCOME TO OUR ASH WEDNESDAY SERVICE



First Congregational United Church of Christ
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“WELCOME TO FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UCC”

The members of the First Congregational United Church of Christ, in Springfield, Illinois, gather in a common purpose to serve God and the community where its members live in the love that was taught by Jesus Christ to his first disciples.

Just as Christ accepted as followers all who came to Him believing in his divine message of salvation, we bind ourselves to accept openly all persons who wish to join this congregation of believers based solely on their professions of faith in God.

This church and its members welcome every person who seeks to share in study, worship and service to God in the Springfield community regardless of race, gender, ethnic origins, sexual orientation, or any other condition or status. We believe that it is not God's will that we judge others, but that we gather in common purpose to serve God and the community where we live without precondition. We acknowledge that it is the common expression of faith that calls us together in unity and mutual support.

The opportunity to worship and participate in the mission and programs of the First Congregational United Church of Christ shall be open to all who seek to join this Christian community. All persons are welcomed in membership solely upon the affirmation of faith shared by all Christian believers.

We covenant together to support all members and to honor and respect the individual right of conscience to explore the Word of God. We encourage each member to personally seek to know God's will. We further welcome and support all who share in the salvation given by God to the full, unqualified benefits and blessings of membership.

The First Congregational United Church of Christ offers to the Springfield community its dedication to serve those in need, to promote justice, and to eliminate the barriers that separate people from each other. We strive to develop a sense of community with all people for the greater good of humankind.

Please come and join us downstairs after our service for refreshments and fellowship.

✠ (Please stand, if you are able) *Words in **boldface**:
congregation recites*

ALL TO WORSHIP

One: Friends and neighbors, in the middle of our busy week, we pause to observe Ash Wednesday together as a faith community.

All: We come to remember that God made us from fragile, blessed dust and breathes through us the breath of life and love.

One: From dust we are created in God's image and to God's good dust we shall return.

All: With dust and oil we claim the mark of God's beloved creature.

One: Today we begin our 40-day Lenten journey to discover who we are created to be as God's beloved.

All: In daily practices of prayer and service we will embark upon this Lenten journey.

One: We follow Jesus, God's Beloved Child, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh in whom we see God's image most clearly.

All: So come, let us pray for strength and imagination to follow Jesus wherever he will lead us this Lent.

HYMN #342 "Rock of Ages"

LETTING GO

Tonight begins our journey through Lent, Holy Week, and Easter. And like any well-prepared traveler, we confess that we want to pack our bags to make sure we are comfortable for our 6-week journey. But Ash Wednesday is about leaving baggage behind and braving

the unknown carrying nothing but the mark of God's beloved.

In this vulnerable place, we confess that we want to be surrounded by all of the things that make us feel better about ourselves, including things we think that God needs in order to love us.

And yet God whispers to us that we are made in the divine image and that faithfulness to that knowledge is all we need for the journey of life. So let us ponder what it is that we may let go of this Lent, in order to help us hear more clearly the stories of Jesus' extravagant love for all, and to follow him more bravely and confidently.

FRAILITY AND FORGIVENESS

Traditionally Ash Wednesday is a time to consider the reality of sin in our lives, our failures to live up to the promise of the image of God. Psalm 51 is known as the classic "Penitential Psalm" used to give voice to our sorrow for sin and to our hope for forgiveness.

PSALM 51

Leader: Have mercy, tender God, forget that I defied you. Wash away my sin, cleanse me from my guilt.

People I know my evil well, it stares me in the face, evil done to you alone before your very eyes.

Leader: How right your condemnation! Your verdict is clearly just. You see me for what I am: frail, a sinner.

People: You love those centered in truth; teach me your hidden wisdom. Wash me with fresh water, wash me bright and clean.

Leader: Fill me with happy songs! Let the bones you bruised now dance, shut your eyes to my sin, and make my guilt disappear.

People: Creator, reshape my heart, God, steady my spirit. Do not cast me aside stripped of your holy spirit.

Leader: Save me, bring back my joy, support me, and strengthen my will, then I will teach your way and sinners will turn to you.

People: Help me, stop my tears, and I will sing your goodness. Lord, give me words and I will shout your praise.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE OF BLESSING:

Know that God loves you, forgives you, welcomes you and rejoices in you. Let the coolness of this water refresh remind and reassure you of God's transforming love.

HYMN #343 "Amazing Grace"

SCRIPTURES

Joel 2:1-18

2 Corinthians 5:20-6:10

Matthew 6:1-21

HOMILY

MARKING WITH ASHES

All are invited to come forward to receive ashes on their foreheads, or anointing, or receive a blessing.

Pastor: Remember that you are God's beloved dust, and to God's beloved dust you shall return.

OFFERING

May we give of ourselves as a symbol of our appreciation for receiving the mark of God's love in such beautiful and meaningful ways. As you have been given the mark of God's love, may you give in return.

DEDICATION

**Creator God, may the gifts we offer today be used to share your love with all – in our church, our community, and your world.
Amen.**

BENEDICTION

Blessings, like God's love, are not one-way experiences. As you have been blessed with the mark of God's love you are now called to go out from this place and bless others. May the God who created you create opportunities of serving others. May the Christ who teaches you teach you during Lent how to love all. And may the Spirit of Gentleness be your companion along this Lenten journey. Amen.



“FILL THE SILLS” DURING LENT.

Our First Congregational United Church of Christ continues to step up and give back to the community and why would the Lenten season be any different.

During the Lenten season, we are going to be collecting food for an Easter feast for those in need. Anything, nonperishable, you'd like to donate that would typically be in an Easter meal such as: instant mashed potatoes, canned yams, biscuit mix, corn, and more.

If you'd like to give a cash donation, we will use that money to buy hams to give to the food pantry.

We will start filling the back window sanctuary sills first, with the goal of filling all of them to the hilt by Palm Sunday.

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