

News from the Vine

January 2026



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Lincoln, NE 68506

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SUNDAY

10:30 am Worship
11:30 am Fellowship Hour

SUNDAY SCHOOL

9:30 am (Adult)
10:30 am (Children's)
(September – May)

OFFICE HOURS

Monday – Friday
10:00 am – 2:00 pm

MISSION STATEMENT

To Love and Serve Each Other
and All Creation

NEWS FROM THE VINE

A monthly publication of Vine Congregational UCC. Article deadline is the third Friday of each month. Please send news items to the church office.

A Word from the Pastor

“Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”
Isaiah 43:9a

Every New Year represents an opportunity for renewal. The optimism that comes with turning the calendar page inspires us to set new goals and envision brighter futures. Last December I attended one of my granddaughter's graduation from Kansas State University. This coming May, her younger brother will be graduating from high school. Later this month I will have the opportunity to see the great-grandson who lives in Florida. I have received news of new great-grandchildren arriving at various times this coming year!

As I look at these young people, I am filled with optimism and hope for their future. I see them continue to grow, learn, and begin making their own paths in life. As senior advisor in this rather large extended family of mine, I think about what role I can play in their developing lives. From a practical aspect, I am separated by many miles, so being physically present isn't much of an option. How do I continue to make an impact in their future? How can I best support their hopes and dreams and help to ensure their success in life?

I am sure the Prophet Isaiah had the same questions about those he was charged with helping guide. God assured Isaiah that *“a new thing is happening;*

do you not perceive it?” The key to navigating much of life is in *“perceiving”*, in understanding the road signs. As we come into this new year with a renewed optimism for the future, how do we *“perceive”* the new? How will we *“perceive”* the road signs? Bishop Spong has one solid suggestion about our ability to perceive and it comes through prayer.

Jesus told his disciple, to *‘pray always’*, and the Apostle Paul says we are to *‘pray unceasingly.’* Prayer then lies at the heart of our theological and spiritual identity. But what is prayer? How should we approach it? Is it just our listing our shopping list of needs to God, or taking quiet time to do meditation? Neither of these address the idea of being constantly in prayer. So, as a person of faith, how do we *“pray always”* and not make it sound like a wish list to God? How do we do prayer that changes things and motivates?

Rev. Dr. Matthew Fox defines prayer as a *“radical (or deep) response to Life.”* He goes on to name two of our deepest responses to living: *“our YES (our mysticism, our falling in love with life); and our NO (our resistance, our standing up for justice and against injustice.”* Fox believes to stand up for justice is to *“pray always”*, and listening deeply to the beauty and awe that life offers us daily is also to *“pray always.”* If, like mystics throughout the ages, we understand God as life, then our deep response to life is prayer.

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Mark Your Calendar

➤ Month at a Glance

Jan 1	Church Office Closed
Jan 4	Installation of Council & Officers
Jan 4	Birthday Reception
Jan 6	Taking Down the Greens
Jan 11	Kamp Kaleo Parent Meeting
Jan 11	Anniversary Reception
Jan 12	Church Council Meeting
Jan 18	Annual Reports Due
Jan 18	Lunch after Church
Jan 20	Men's Breakfast
Jan 25	Treats & Topics

➤ A Brief Look Ahead

Feb 8	Youth Super Bowl Soup Fundraiser
Feb 15	Congregational Meeting
Feb 18	Ash Wednesday – Joint Service
Feb 22	First Sunday in Lent



Ongoing Events

- **Men's Breakfast** meets on the third Tuesday of each month at 8:00 am at Village Inn (48th & Van Dorn).
- **Ladies Coffee Talk** meets every Thursday morning at 9:30 am. Join us for coffee and conversation.
- **Lunch After Church** is the third Sunday of each month in the fellowship hall.
- **Treat & Topics** is the last Sunday of each month in the fellowship hall.
- **The Church Council** meets on the second Monday of every month at 7:00 pm at the church and via Zoom.

Music Ministry

- **The Joyful Noise Bell Choir** practices every Wednesday evening at 6:30 pm in the fellowship hall.
- **The Youth Melody Ringers** (grades 6 - 12) practice every Sunday morning from 9:30-10:15 am in the youth room on the lower level.
- **The Chancel Choir** practices every Sunday morning at 9:15 am in the sanctuary.

Give Online



Scan to learn more about us!



ANNUAL REPORT YEAR-END SUMMARY

It's time to look back at the work God has done in and through our church family in 2025. Our annual report summarizes our achievements, activities, stewardship of the church's budget, and ministry impact, but it's not just about statistics, it also celebrates the accomplishments, milestones, and growth of the church.

Church officers and ministry team leaders should submit their annual summaries to the church office by Sunday, January 18. This is the perfect opportunity for you to communicate and highlight what your ministry team has been doing and how God has been working through your team. If you need a copy of last year's report for reference, please contact the church office.

A Word from the Pastor - Continued

Bishop Spong suggests that in order for us to fully embrace this depth of prayer, we must come to terms to a deeper meaning of what it means to be like Jesus. Spong understands Jesus' returning to earth – God doing a new thing - continues through us embracing the possibility that we ourselves might be the second coming of Christ. "If we are other Christs - which is what we are called to be - then the second coming is our coming alive and real, deep and committed both to a radical love of life and to a deep defending of life, thus to both our deepest mystical and prophetic selves. As we undergo this deepening on a daily, a yearly, a seasonal basis, we are changed, and history might be change through us." Rev. Dr. Matthew Fox, article "But What About Prayer?"

As we begin this new year, may we grow into the possibility of being the "other Christs" and experience life in its fullest with a radical love of life and a deep sense of defending life in the ways that Jesus has shown us and as God speaks to us. Amen

Pastor Steven

Installation Sunday

The newly elected and returning Council members and officers will be officially installed during the worship service on Sunday, January 4. Please plan to attend this special service and hold our leaders in your prayers. We are pleased to announce the 2026 Council members and officers.

OFFICERS

Moderator	Joan Humphrey
Moderator-Elect	<i>Vacant</i>
Church Clerk	Cathy Anderson
Treasurer	Jim King

COUNCIL MEMBERS

Jim King	Diane Robie
Gertrud Finkbeiner	Bruce Baker
Alex Gross	Karen Hemmerling
Phyllis Schuessler	Jeff Schultz Cummins
Rick Heiliger	

We extend our gratitude to Jennie Ress and Pat Criger who have completed their terms. We are thankful for their support and guidance in being part of the Council these past years.

USHER NEWS

Following years of faithful service, Ivan Lichty has decided to step down from his role as head usher, effective January 4, 2026. We are grateful for his dedication to supporting the smooth organization of worship services. Thank you, Ivan!

Zion Pearson has volunteered to assume the role of head usher in January. Please support Zion as he takes on this responsibility. Thank you, Zion!



Please join us as we take down the Christmas decorations! Many hands make the task go much quicker! All help is appreciated! Coffee and doughnuts will be provided.



Join us for Treats and Topics on Sunday, January 25 after worship in the fellowship hall. Faith Allyance will share information about promoting a safe place to explore and nurture spirituality. Come for the information, stay for the conversation - and, of course, the treats!



During December, we collected \$385 for the Christmas Fund special mission offering! Thank you to everyone who contributed!

E n d o f Y e a r GIVING STATEMENTS

The year-end giving statements will be emailed the week of January 15. Please take a minute to review and report any discrepancies to the church office. If you prefer to receive a hard copy, please let the church office know.

BORROWING CHURCH EQUIPMENT

Members may borrow at no charge some church equipment for their personal use, such as folding tables (rectangular tables with laminated tops), folding steel chairs, roaster pans, large 100-cup coffee makers, etc. If you are interested in borrowing equipment, please contact the church office and complete the borrowing equipment form. The borrowing agreement helps us be good stewards of our resources and allows us to continue our scheduled events without interruption.



All parents and students are invited to attend a short informational meeting on January 11 after worship in the New Hope Chapel.

We have scholarship assistance available for students K – grade 12 to help cover the cost of the camp. Any extra items such as tanking, camp shop, etc. are not included in the registration and are the responsibility of the parents. Kamp Kaleo is offering a \$100 discount if registration is completed by February 1. Please DO NOT pay while registering.

When all the scholarship funds are determined, Vine will generate one check to Kamp Kaleo for all of our campers. Please submit your portion of the registration cost to the church office. Please make checks payable to Vine with "Kamp Kaleo" in the memo line.

After you have registered, please let the church office know the following: child name, the camp selected, and dates of the camp.

On a budget? Don't let your budget keep you from going to camp. Contact the church office and we'll make sure you're on your way to camp!

Check out their website to find out more about each camp at <https://kampkaleo.com/>. If you have questions, please contact Pam Cuttlers, Jennie Ress, or Anica Brown.



Lunch plans made easy! We invite you to join us for Lunch after Church on Sunday, January 18 after worship in the fellowship hall. We will be serving up tastee sandwiches (loose meat sandwich), potato salad, chips, veggies, and pies for dessert. See you there!



Ken & Etta Kokes invite you to join them in celebrating their 60th wedding anniversary on Sunday, January 11 in the fellowship hall after worship. No cards or gifts please.



Join us on Sunday, January 4 after worship in the fellowship hall for a reception celebrating Laura William's 80th birthday! No gifts please.

Ring in the New Year and Bring in Earnings

Use SCRIP on everything you need for your New Year's Eve celebration and earn funds for Vine on appetizer ingredients, noise-makers, new ensembles, and more.



Stop by the SCRIP sales table any Sunday morning to continue your support for this program!



BRANCHING OUT

Branching Out for January - Connection Point is in need of new or very gently worn socks and **new** underwear for women, children, and especially men. Help fill the collection basket in the narthex with those items. Mitten Tree donations were delivered Monday, December 22 in time for their Christmas festivities that day. Any donations after that will be delivered in January. Thank you for your generosity to others every month in 2025 and before.

Scripture Reader

A Scripture reader is needed for January 25. Please consider sharing the word of God with the congregation. The signup sheet is in the fellowship hall on the volunteer opportunities board.

The 2026 signup sheets are in the fellowship hall on the volunteer opportunities bulletin board. Please consider serving and sign up today – a little time goes a LONG way!

Adult Sunday School

Ten Commandments Study | New Hope Chapel

9:30-10:20 am

Are the Ten Commandments a set of rules, or a way of life? How does each one call us to reflect and to act? What does it mean to love God and neighbor in a world of violence and fear that threatens our lives and souls? Join Barb Smisek on Sunday mornings at 9:30 for a 10-week discussion of the Ten Commandments based on a video series written by Sister Joan Chittister, American Benedictine nun, theologian, best-selling author, and international speaker known for her bold advocacy for women, social justice, peace, and contemporary spirituality within the Catholic Church and the wider world. Each session is a stand-alone lesson so you can attend on any Sunday.



Justice In Action works in collaboration with The Mediation Center to provide a Pre-Filing Eviction Mediation program!

On Tuesday, December 9, Justice In Action held a ribbon cutting at The Mediation Center at 610 J Street in Lincoln. Justice In Action has been working with The Mediation Center to train individuals to become mediators to work with landlords and tenants to help both sides work through to possible solutions, so tenants are not going through court to be evicted. Those involved in the ribbon cutting ceremony, that signals the mediation process is ready to serve the public, included Rev. Steven Mitchell of Vine Congregational UCC, Rev. Thomas Dummermuth of Eastridge Presbyterian, Casey Karges, Director of The Mediation Center, Dan Stefan of Rental Real Estate, Kyle Kelley with The Mediation Center, and Rev. Mandy Barkhaus of Horizons Community Church.

Through this program:

- money is saved by avoiding legal fees, court costs and lengthy eviction timelines;
- it minimizes costly turnover and maintains steady rental income;
- there are flexible solutions to find agreements between tenants and landlords;
- the Mediation Center is a trusted, impartial resource for Lancaster County;
- there is never a cost for mediation for landlords or tenants.

If you are interested in learning more about the mediation program, or want to share this information with a landlord or tenant, contact by email at olivia@justice-in-action.org or call The Mediation Center at 402-441-5740.



Choir Dedications

Would you love to hear a special song sung by the choir—perhaps in honor or memory of someone dear to you? Now's your chance to make that moment happen!

Starting in January, the choir will be offering song dedications during service. Whether it's a meaningful hymn, a favorite worship song, or something new, we'd love to help bring your vision to life.

If the choir doesn't already have the song, you can work with Jacob to purchase it, and we'll make sure it's ready to be performed. Jacob will also assist in finding music that's suitable for the choir and service. The average cost for a new song is around \$60-\$80, including shipping.

Each dedication will be lovingly acknowledged in the bulletin the week it's performed, making it a beautiful way to celebrate, remember, or honor someone special.

If you're interested, please complete the Choir Dedication Request Form that will be available in the narthex at the usher stand for the month of January and then it will be available on our website, from the choir director, or at the church office. If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to Jacob. We can't wait to sing your song!



The church office will be closed on
Thursday, January 1.

CHRISTMAS MARKET

The Vine Christmas Market 2025 was a resounding success, with an estimated 570 people attending.

Many thanks to all the Vine helpers who staffed the kitchen, created the greenery arrangements and hand-crafted items, and managed the church booths. Thank you to the musicians and singers, and all who helped set up and tear down the booths. Thanks to Troop 8 members and parents who moved the booth facades from the lower level to the event space, and then back again. Thanks to the bakers and sweets makers and the people who helped package all those items. This was truly a church-wide effort which resulted in visits from many members of the Lincoln community, all of which help to increase public awareness of our church.

The Market netted about \$7,300, with the exact figure still to be determined. The planning committee will again be sending 10% of the net proceeds from the Vine booths to the Food Bank of Lincoln, which will be at least \$650 this year. Thank you so much for your support!

The Christmas Market Committee

Note of Thanks

Dear Vine Congregational
United Church of Christ,



Thank you so much for your generous donation of stuffed animals to BraveBe Child Advocacy Center. You have made a direct and meaningful impact on the children and families we serve, helping make their experience here more comforting and hopeful. Thank you for standing with us and supporting our mission.

Sincerely, The BraveBe Team

LOST & FOUND

Gertrud is missing a star shaped basket. It was last seen on the Sunday after the Christmas Market. It's shaped like a star and made of reed, about 20 inches in diameter. If you have seen or know where this star basket is, please let the church office know. Thanks.

Scripture Keys to a Joyful New Year

Hold fast to your faith (Hebrews 4:14)

Assemble with the saints (Hebrews 10:25)

Pray earnestly every day (1 Thessalonians 5:17, 18)

Pray for great blessings (Malachi 3:10)

Yield not to temptation (1 Thessalonians 5:22)

Neglect not your talents and opportunities (Galatians 6:10)

Examine yourself daily (2 Corinthians 13:5)

Work diligently for the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58)

Yield your members to righteousness (Romans 6:11, 16)

Exercise yourself in godliness (1 Timothy 4:7)

Aim at sinless perfection (Hebrews 6:1)

Redeem the time (Ephesians 5:15, 16)

- by Gus Nichols

O Lord, let my
New Year's resolution
be to 
follow you
more closely
and to
trust in your
loving guidance.

Christmas Isn't Christmas

Christmas Program

On Sunday, December 14, Vine's children's Sunday school and confirmation group presented the annual Christmas program, "Christmas Isn't Christmas," as part of the morning service. Many thanks go out to those who participated in the program and to those who helped with decorations, costumes, and in other ways that were needed.



UCC Daily Devotional

Wondering, by Quinn G. Caldwell

The sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. - Malachi 4:2 (NRSV)

I'd be willing to wager quite a bit that: (1) you haven't read much of Malachi before, and (2) you've sung chunks of it a million times. In many Christian Bibles, it's the last book before the Christian part begins, and that's no accident. If you were reading straight through from Genesis to Revelation, you'd read about the arrival of the Sun of Righteousness, turn the page, and there would be Matthew saying, "An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham..."

It's clear who the people that stitched the Bible together think the healing-winged Sun of Righteousness is. Which is, of course, the reason that third verse of "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" goes the way it does. (I just know you've been wondering.)

There's a reason to appreciate Malachi besides understanding where some carol got its words, though. Pretty much the whole book is an argument between God and the people, in which they accuse one another of all manner of neglect. There's no fulfillment in the book itself of God's promise; it would be hundreds of years before Jesus showed up to convince Matthew and others that he was the answer.

Which is to say: if you're currently fighting with God, if you're still waiting for the dawn, if you're still wondering where righteousness is, if healing is still in the future for you this Advent, if you're wobbling instead of leaping, Malachi feels you. If you're wondering whether God's promises are ever going to come really true, then you are in the good company of millions upon millions of God's followers who have wondered the same thing. Perhaps like Matthew you're bone-deep-convinced that everything's taken care of. But if you're not, you're not alone.

Prayer: God, I'm not sure the Sun of Righteousness has come over the horizon yet, but I'm going to sing like it's true anyway. Amen.



At the start of a new year, we remember that God continually gives us new chances. What does Jesus say to a woman caught in adultery?

- A. "Go, and from now on sin no more."
- B. "Not even in Israel have I found such great faith."
- C. "Peace be with you."
- D. "Tell no one what I have done for you."

Answer: A (See John 8:11.)

