



## From the Administrator,

Welcome to the newsletter for the First of January, 2026. You will find contributions from **Dave Siegfried, Nick Schweitzer, Dan Kapust, Jenni Walsh, Chuck Park, and Dave Eagan**. I think you will find them interesting. Please let me know if I can be of assistance. My Park Hall hours are Tuesday and Friday mornings from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., and by appointment. Park Hall Voicemail: 608.643.3131     **Fritz Parks**

## Upcoming Sunday Programs (10:10 a.m.)

| Date   | Program              | Speaker       | Topic                          |
|--------|----------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|
| Jan 4  | Spiritual Roundtable | All attending | Triggers & Trauma              |
| Jan 11 | U.U. Program         | David Butler  | Learning to Hope in Dark Times |
| Jan 18 | U.U. Program         | Rob Brink     |                                |

We invite you to attend our in-person Sunday programs at our newly restored Park Hall. We have masks available. Childcare is provided each Sunday. Our **Sunday programs are also available live on Zoom**.

## Celebration of the Season Report

The Free Congregation's Celebration of the Season was held on Saturday, December 20. This was the second year for our a family-friendly, non-commercial, multicultural celebration of the holidays and winter. All the activities were free except for lunch and dinner. Events included:

Horse-drawn wagon rides were offered in the morning.

Coffee, hot chocolate, and mulled wine were available outside.

Music, dance, and presentations were held upstairs from 10 to 5.

Lunch items from various cultures were sold downstairs.

Kids' activities were held downstairs and outside all day.

A German-themed dinner was served downstairs to more than 42 guests.

And a German band played polka and other music.

As in 2024, attendance was light but those who attended, as well as all the performers, expressed pleasure with the event, and with donations from numerous local individuals and sponsors, the event basically broke even.

Celebration of the Season, December 20, 2025

Performer List

Peruvian Music – Fabiola Desirée,  
Hanukkah Traditions – Marcy Huffaker  
Ho-chunk Dance & Traditions – Heather Cloud  
Scandinavian Music – Becky Rehl & Susan Wulfsberg  
Introduction to the Free Congregation – John Rigby  
Seasonal Music – Shawndell Marks  
Swiss Music with Alphorns – Monroe Swiss Singers  
Hmong Culture & Traditions – Mai Zong Vue  
Scottish Bagpipe & Dance – Sean M. Dargan, Meghan Pierce & Megan Dunn  
Seasonal harp Music – Jada Jaquish  
Celtic Music – Wrannock  
Solstice Traditions – Selena Fox  
Polka – Griffin James & the Polka Dots

Celebration of the Season Dinner





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Celebration of the Season, December 20, 2025  
Performer Photos



Monroe Swiss Singers  
with Alphorns



Ho-Chunk Singers & Dancers

Celebration of the Season, December 20, 2025

Performer Photos



Marcy Huffaker  
Hanukkah Traditions Desirée



Shawndell Marks  
Seasonal Music



Peruvian Music  
Fabiola Desirée



Scandinavian Music  
Becky Rehl  
Susan Wulfsberg

**Passing of Michael Whaley**

Long-time member Michael Whaley passed away December 24, 2025. Michael served the congregation in many ways. At various times, he was Administrator, Board President and Lead Fund-raiser for the restoration of Park Hall. Richardson-Stafford Funeral Home in Spring Green will publish Michael's online obituary in the coming week. A celebration of life will be planned for this summer.

### **174th Painesfest Holiday Program and Potluck**

We will welcome **Guest Speaker Dan Kapust** for our **174th Painesfest Holiday**, at **10:10 a.m.**, on **Sunday, January 25**, in **Park Hall**. The program topic will be **Common Sense (Paine's invocation of 1 Samuel)**. In his book, **Common Sense**, Thomas Paine argued against monarchy; surprisingly, this argument employed a revolutionary and innovative use of scripture, specifically this verse: [1 Samuel 8](#). Dr. Kapust suggests this article: [Biblical Basis for the Divine Right of Kings](#) for background.



Dr. Daniel Kapust is the **Judith Hicks Stiehm Professor of Political Theory** in the Department of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. He is also the Director of the College of Letters & Science Honors Program. This is his 3rd presentation at Painesfest, our celebration of the birth of Thomas Paine, an American revolutionary whose writings on liberty, democracy, and the separation of church and state were especially influential among German Free Thought groups. Author of **Common Sense**, Paine is considered an American Founding Father. First celebrated in January 1853, we commemorate Paine's life each January.

A potluck meal will follow the program. You may find instructions on joining the program on Zoom, on the last page of this newsletter.

### **Passing of Michael Irwin**

Long-time member Michael Irwin passed away December 8, 2025. His **Celebration of Life** will be held **January 8, 2026**, at **1:00 pm**, at the Free Congregation's **Park Hall**, in **Sauk City**. **Visitation** will be held at **noon and afterwards until 3:00 p.m.** Please visit [Hooverson Funeral Homes](#) to read Mike's impressive obituary.

#### **Tribute to Mike Irwin from Chuck Park**

Some thoughts for a good friend Mike Irwin:

Mike Irwin won the game of life at an early age. He slammed the home-run score in the local baseball league championship and was doused with champagne in the celebration parade. It doesn't get any better than that!

But his life was not downhill. He continued to grow as a talented member of the community, active in social events, knowledgeable about issues, and ever eager to be of help to others. I was honored to be his friend.

We would often meet to ponder issues of life and consume a glass of bubbly as we solved problems confronting the world. He introduced me to the Greek philosopher Lucretius, thoughts about Buddhism, issues about weather and farming and growing special seeds for international distribution. He did his homework. It was easy to see the magnetic energy he could instill in others as a teacher, investigative reporter, actor, and poet. He interviewed the Dalai Lama, Travelled the Orient express, taught young folks from Sauk County a thing or two about presenting themselves before audiences. But the essence of his actions centered on his ability to think and feel about issues relating to the improvement of the human condition.



## Next Meeting of the Board

The **Board of Directors** of the Free Congregation will meet on **Sunday, January 11 at Park Hall at 11:30 a.m.** If you have an issue for us to address, please email Dave Siegfried, President of the Board at [Dave Siegfried](#) so that it may be added to the agenda.

## What I Believe Now

The adult discussion group, **What I Believe Now**, will meet on **January 29**, with a topic to be determined. Please email **Nick Schweitzer**, [jnschweitzer@gmail.com](mailto:jnschweitzer@gmail.com), if you'd like to receive a meeting invitation and list of questions in preparation for the gathering.

### Mystery Musician

Who was that talented and masked woman at the piano on December 28? Why, it was our newest musician, **Caleigh Judd**. Caleigh will play for 5 Sundays this winter. She'll be back on January 18. We are lucky to have her and ask that you make her feel welcome.



### How to join our Zoom Sunday Programs.

1. Go to the Sunday Programs tab of our website:  
<http://www.freecongregation.org/sunday-programs.aspx>
2. Refresh the browser page.
3. Click the “**Join Our Zoom Meeting**” link in RED TEXT.

The “**Join Our Zoom Meeting**” link will not be visible until 15 minutes before our meeting; typically this is 9:55 a.m. for a 10:10 a.m. meeting. Early birds will see the option to “**Join a Practice Zoom Meeting**”. Refreshing the page after 9:55 a.m. should reveal the active meeting link.

We publish twice a month to our website. We email announcements to our list as each issue appears online. If you no longer desire email reminders, feel free to tidy up our email list with an unsubscribe message. Keep our website bookmarked for future use.

[FreeCongregation.org](http://FreeCongregation.org) our website homepage

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I welcome your submissions to this newsletter. Send your events, announcements, photos, and recipes to me. [Newsletter Submissions](#) use the Contact Us form at bottom.