

Living Waters Association NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

of the Nebraska Conference of the United Church of Christ.

March 2025

A Legacy of Faith & Service: Neligh First Congregational UCC's 150th Anniversary Celebration Postponed



Excitement has been building as we prepare to commemorate 150 years of faith, service, and community at Neligh First Congregational United Church of Christ! However, due to unforeseen circumstances, we must announce that our highly anticipated celebration, originally scheduled for **March 23, 2025**, has been **postponed**. While this may come as disappointing news, we assure you that a **new date will be announced soon**, and we look forward to celebrating this historic milestone together at a later time.

Since our founding on March 22, 1875, in the Neligh School House, our church has been a steadfast pillar of faith and fellowship. From the construction of our first building in 1886 to our deep-rooted connections with Gates College and Gates Academy, our journey has been shaped by a commitment to education, worship,

and service. In 1957, we joined the wider United Church of Christ family, uniting with others in faith and mission.

This postponement gives us an even greater opportunity to make our sesquicentennial celebration truly spectacular—one that honors our rich history and embraces the promise of the future. Whether you've been part of our congregation for decades or are loosely connected to our story, we can't wait to celebrate with you when the time comes!



(Gates College, Circa 1915)

Gates College: The Rise, Struggles, and Legacy of Neligh's Historic College

Education and opportunity were at the heart of Congregationalist efforts in the late 1800s, leading to the establishment of numerous colleges across the Midwest. Among them stood Gates College, a beacon of learning and ambition in Neligh, Nebraska.

A Fierce Bidding War and an Ambitious Start

The Columbus Association of Congregational Churches convened in Oakdale, Nebraska, in 1881 to deliberate on establishing a college in the area. The communities of Oakdale, Norfolk, Albion, and Neligh eagerly competed for the honor. After a heated bidding war, Neligh emerged victorious, securing the institution with a pledge of between \$500 and \$7,000 in cash and 40 acres of land.

Named after Reverend H.N. Gates, the State Superintendent of Home Missions for the Congregational Church, Gates College was officially incorporated on September 29, 1881. At its inception, it stood as the only institution of higher education north of the Platte River in Nebraska. Yet, despite its promising start, Gates was not initially a full-fledged college. Instead, it operated as a college preparatory academy for its first four years.

Controversy and Opposition from Doane College

The introduction of college-level courses in 1886 sparked controversy. Doane College supporters feared that two Congregationalist colleges would compete for limited church resources and students, jeopardizing both institutions. This debate escalated until 1891, when the General Association ultimately rejected Gates' recognition as a college by a narrow vote of 124 to 107—despite a pledged \$30,000 endowment if it were endorsed.

The controversy catapulted Neligh into national headlines, with newspapers as far away as Boston covering the debate. The battle for Gates' future was far from over.

Expansion, Financial Struggles, and Attempts to Relocate

Despite opposition, Gates College continued to grow. By 1889, its campus featured four buildings and a library with over 5,000 volumes. Under President H.K. Warren's leadership, student enrollment doubled, and programs expanded to include music, business, and teacher training.

However, financial troubles loomed large. A \$10,000 debt and dwindling support led to Warren's resignation

in 1895. That same year, trustees attempted to relocate the college to Norfolk, which had grown to nearly four times Neligh's population. Neligh citizens fought back, filing a court injunction to block the move. In a bold maneuver, the trustees resigned en masse and established Norfolk College. However, after a rigorous investigation, a third-party committee ruled in favor of Gates, leading to Norfolk College's closure in 1898.

The Inevitable Decline and Final Closure

Although Gates College survived the Norfolk controversy, its struggles persisted. It reverted to an academy by the turn of the century, a clear sign of its fading prospects. With the Congregational Church consolidating its resources to support Doane College, Gates finally succumbed to financial pressures and closed its doors for good in 1914.

A Legacy Preserved in a Historic Gymnasium

As time passed, the buildings that once made up Gates College disappeared, leaving little evidence of the school that had once driven Neligh's population boom.



Today, only one structure remains: the former gymnasium, built in 1892. This two-story facility once served as a space for physical education, with separate floors for men and women.

When Gates College closed, the gymnasium was repurposed into the Antelope County Jail. Three jail cells were moved in from the courthouse, and the second floor housed the county sheriff's office. The building served as the county jail until 1964, when the Antelope County Historical Society took ownership, transforming it into a museum. In 2016, it was revitalized as Jailhouse Junkees, preserving its historical significance in a unique way. Though Gates College exists only in historical markers and memories, its influence on Neligh remains strong. The institution fostered education, growth, and prominence, helping shape Neligh into the center of Antelope County.

The Yearbook/ DataHub is Now Open for Reporting!

The United Church of Christ (UCC) DataHub is now available for 2024 data submissions! This secure, web-based database is designed to keep our church community connected and serves as the primary repository for all UCC congregations and authorized ministers.



Why is the Yearbook/DataHub Important?

Your participation ensures that our denomination has an accurate and comprehensive record of:

- Membership numbers - Association Dues are based on the number entered.
- Clergy information
- Other essential church-related records

These contributions are used to create valuable resources such as:

- **The Printed Yearbook**
- **Access UCC Directory**
- **Find A Church Tool**

By submitting your church's data, you help maintain a clear picture of our denomination's needs.

Important Deadlines

The DataHub is now accepting data submissions through **March 20, 2025**. To avoid last-minute delays, we encourage you to submit your data as early as possible. If you need assistance, support is available to guide you through the process.

How to Access Yearbook/DataHub Reporting

To make the reporting process as easy as possible, the Living Waters Association has provided a printed copy of the 17-page instruction guide to every church in January. This guide offers step-by-step instructions for accessing the DataHub and includes a helpful checklist to ensure you have all necessary information ready before starting.

No Internet Access?

If your church lacks internet access, or if you do not know someone who does, don't worry! Simply gather all the required information based on the form provided and reach out to the conference office to schedule an appointment for assistance.

Conference Support Contact:

Jane Estrada: **(605) 338-8738**

We are committed to making sure every church can complete their reporting successfully. If you have any further questions or need additional support, please contact Adam at (402) 910-8111.

In case you were unaware:

- **Your church's 501(c)3 status is dependent on a current updated listing in the UCC Yearbook.**
- **When your church is searching for a Pastor you need current and updated data which comes from the UCC Yearbook.**



How your congregation can prepare for the 2025 Small Church Grant Applications!

We're excited to announce that applications for the 2025 Small Church Grant program will open this spring. This grant is a meaningful opportunity for smaller congregations, less than 250 members to receive financial support, empowering their ministries and their work in our communities.

Requirements to Apply for the 2025 Small Church Grant:

1. **Update Your Yearbook/DataHub Information**
Ensuring your church's details are up-to-date is a crucial first step.- Information has been included in this newsletter on how to do this.
2. **Attend the Association Annual Fall Meeting**
A representative from your congregation must participate in the fall gathering to remain eligible.
3. **Keep Your Association Dues Current**
This simple step reflects your commitment to the shared goals of our association and ensures continued support for all congregations.

Stay Tuned!

Attention Ordained Clergy: Time to Schedule Your Periodic Vocational Support Conversation!

As we prepare for the 2025 ministerial review process, we want to highlight an important opportunity:

Periodic Vocational Support Conversations. These conversations provide a chance to check in, reflect on your ministry, and engage in dialogue with members of the Committee on Ministry. According to the *Manual on Ministry, Section 2:6, "Accountability and Support,"* these conversations are intended to support ongoing vocational development and discernment, strengthen our covenantal relationships, and clarify the Association's expectations for ministerial standing.

A Friendly but Firm Reminder: Participation in this process is a required step to maintain your standing as a UCC minister. And before you ask—no, "retired" is not an ecclesiastical status in the United Church of Christ. While "retirement" is a great financial planning tool, within the UCC, the only official standings are **Active, Exempt, or Leave of Absence.**

Ministerial Standing Options:

- **Active Standing:** You are actively engaged in ministry and fulfilling all requirements, including boundary training and continuing education.
- **Exempt Standing:** This applies if you have stepped back from public ministry but still wish to honor your covenant with the UCC. Exempt Standing does not mean disengagement; you are still expected to uphold the UCC Ministerial Code and engage with the Committee on Ministry through an Exempt Standing covenant. **Choosing this status means refraining from public ministry, including pulpit supply, sacraments, weddings, funerals, and leading worship. Yes, this means even that "one last wedding for your friend or family member!"**
- **Leave of Absence:** This is for those taking a temporary break with the intention of returning to active ministry generally with defined time frames.

Thinking about moving to **Exempt Standing**?

Remember, ordination is for life—but public ministry doesn't have to be forever. Exempt Standing allows for flexibility while maintaining accountability and connection with the church.

We know these conversations may not be your favorite thing—kind of like going to the dentist. Necessary? Yes. Fun? Not exactly. But they provide vital support, help you grow, and keep us all connected in meaningful ways. Think of it as a spiritual tune-up—nobody likes them,

Schedule Your Conversation:

The Church and Ministry Committee has scheduled three face-to-face meeting dates, each lasting approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes. Please select the date and location that best fits your schedule:

- **April 25 or 26** at Arlington United Church of Christ
- **May 2** at Norfolk United Church of Christ

Congregational Members:

If you're reading this, please check with your pastor to ensure they have scheduled their conversation. Your support in encouraging them is greatly appreciated!

Schedule Your Conversation Today:

Visit the Living Waters Association website at livingwatersassociation.org, scroll to the bottom of the page, and click on the scheduler to book your appointment. No, we didn't hide it—promise!

Thank you for your dedication and commitment to ministry. We look forward to these conversations and the opportunity to support you in your ongoing vocational journey.

The Nebraska Conference of the United Church of Christ will hold its Annual Meeting on May 16-17, 2025, at Kamp Kaleo in Burwell, Nebraska. Kamp Kaleo, located at 46872 Willow Springs Rd., Burwell, NE 68823. More details to follow be watching for a mailing from the Conference.



IMPORTANT UPDATED DATA HUB/YEARBOOK INFORMATION

UCC National Ministries has shared information regarding Yearbook Reporting Update -

As always, our goal for Yearbook reporting is to get as many churches as possible to report their data. We are well aware that there have been some challenges with the new data hub. This is true whenever there is something “new”. As a result, we have made some changes to our timeline and the instructions that we have for Yearbook data collection.

We are also launching a new option for churches to enter their data without needing to access the UCC Database and Directories (the new data hub). We have created a survey monkey option that will collect all of the data that we normally collect from churches, available here:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/UCC_Backup_YB_Data_Entry_2025

Note: This link can also be found on the Living Waters Association Website.

Closing of the Data Hub has been extended to **April 11th, 2025**

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