

OCKER BRETHREN CHURCH

Serving Christ, Serving Our Community

SEPTEMBER 2026

A word from the Pastor...

Summer is over! The heat is still here, but the summer has passed us by. Kids have been back in school for a couple of weeks now, football and volleyball practices (and games) have started...Fall is "up to bat."

We had a great summer at Ocker....one of the summer Ocker experiences I enjoyed the most was our monthly church-wide "Hot Topic" Sunday School Discussions. We talked about the Bible and about Progressive Christianity... our goal was simply to learn about other views and Christian theories that are different than our understanding. I hope you gained something positive from those conversations.

One of the comments that was tossed about during those sessions was the need to understand what the Essentials of the Unity are...in other words...what is most important to us, as Church and as a denomination.

To that end, I wrote a sermon outlining the Essential Essence of Ocker and the Unity...as I see it. Afterwards, several asked if I could share the manuscript of that sermon.

Below, I have posted my complete manuscript for your further consideration. I hope it clears up any confusion as to our vision and mission. In short... it is Jesus. Happy reading!

Just Jesus

"Who do you say that I am?" That is the question Jesus asked his close followers and disciples in our Bible passage for this morning...that is the central question in the passage...and it came at a crucial time in the gospel of Matthew.

"Who do you say that I am?"



BOARD OF ELDERS MEETING

Wednesday,
September 9 2026
6:30 pm

Upstairs Conference
Room. Meetings
are open
to all.



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I must admit that I am looking forward to starting Ocker's confirmation class in the fall. I absolutely love teaching Confirmation. I love opening up Scripture and the Catechism to our youth and encouraging them to develop their own beliefs and thoughts and theology.

We didn't have a Confirmation class last year...we have been averaging one good size class every other year. One of the things I love about students in Confirmation is that they are just starting out on their theological and spiritual journey with Christ...and they aren't afraid to ask the wonderfully basic, absolutely essential questions. Maybe it's a question that some of us have long ago asked and thought we answered. Maybe it's a question that we haven't asked in a long time because we've given up on an answer. Students in Confirmation sometimes don't know any better than to just ask it....and when they do...that is where the real theological and spiritual growth happens.

Seven or so years ago...in one of our confirmation classes a student that you all know and love asked me to explain to her the difference between Christianity and Judaism. She had grown up hearing that Jesus was a Jew and she needed some more context to understand the difference. The differences that trouble her are between two related but disparate faiths. Well, we discussed rituals, festivals, beliefs. Then she asked a fundamental question. "When it comes down to it, what is the one thing that makes Christians, Christian?"

The answer, of course, is not potluck dinners, hymns, or pushy preachers. The thing that makes us who we are is who Jesus is. Jesus Christ is Christianity. Other faiths have love, have beliefs about the good and the true. Only Christianity has Jesus.

I told the student...a story I had heard from another preacher about Jesus. He was talking about trying to get his two and a half year old daughter to transition from sleeping in a crib to a "real, big-girl bed." She was having trouble falling asleep and staying in her bed...the only thing they found to get her to go to sleep in her new bed was to read her a story while she was tucked in...a bed-time story. They picked Snow White and Seven Dwarfs. But, each night they would have to read longer and longer for her to actually fall asleep. After about a week of this, the parents were spending $\frac{3}{4}$ of their night reading bedtime stories...so they tried a more efficient approach...which I thought was pretty smart. They recorded them reading a story on their iPhone...So they put her to bed, kissed her, clicked "play" on the iPhone and left the room. They thought they really figured something out...they thought this was perfect...they were re-claiming their evenings. But...after twenty minutes, the daughter wandered into the kitchen asking for mommy or daddy to come read her the story. "But, you heard us reading it from the iPhone" they told their daughter. That wasn't good enough she said.... "I need somebody with skin on to read me the story." Jesus is God, with skin on.

If God had kept aloof from us, if God had only given us a book, then we would have the Bible, but we wouldn't be Christians. We would be another noble philosophy of life, or a system of ethical virtues. But what God did, we believe, is to come to us in the flesh through Jesus....to be precise through, Joshua, meaning God saves.



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We believe that the peculiar way God saves, that God gets to us and gets us, is Jesus. It is our astounding claim that we look at the Jewish carpenter's son-who was born, lived briefly, died violently in his thirties, and rose from the dead unexpectedly-and we see as much of Almighty God as we can. Jesus even said, "I and the Father are one." If you want to know what God believes about something...or how God would act in a certain situation or what God wants from you or your life...look at Jesus...observe how Jesus reacted to things... learn what Jesus believed about things.

Now, we can sympathize with those folks who look at Jesus and see only a noble teacher, or only a great moral example, or even a wild-eyed revolutionary. After all, from the very beginning, who Jesus was, what he was about, was far from self-evident. He didn't shout it from the rooftops...if fact, there were times in the gospel that Jesus instructed his followers to not say that he was the messiah. But, there were people who stood face-to-face with Jesus and said, "This is God incarnate." There appears to be many more who said, "This man is nuts."

So, from the first, that God came to us as Jesus meant lots of people didn't get it. Jesus frustrated people's expectations about how a Messiah ought to act. Jesus didn't directly say who he was. He didn't walk around with a sign on his back saying, "Son of God." Messiahs were supposed to have power, were supposed to take charge, set things right, fix all of our problems. But, Jesus refused to stiff-arm anybody into following him. He refused to dominate or to take up arms. Looking at his life work, many people would say that Jesus was one of history's most noble failures. So it wasn't just that God came as Jesus, it was that God came as Jesus and Jesus acted in very un-Godly ways. He just didn't seem like we thought God ought to act. Eventually, Jesus was executed for doing the things he did and saying the things he said. He wasn't killed for walking around bragging, "By the way, I'm God." Jesus was killed for saying, "This is God's way: the poor are precious, the rich are in big trouble, Caesar isn't God despite what his spin doctors claim, not everybody who cries 'Lord, Lord' is going into God's kingdom. In fact, prostitutes and tax collectors get in before you." You just don't say things like that to people and get accepted into religious society. You know? And Christianity, being a Christian, is about following Jesus' life after his. I have a lot of friends in my life...I don't follow those friends...I am not a disciple of my friends. I don't model my life around the beliefs and sayings of my friends....

We love God because, we believe, God first loved us in Jesus. So Christianity is not first adherence to a set of great ideals (ethics), nor is it the comprehension of a set of great ideas (philosophy), it is a way of life, a way of walking with Jesus, a relationship wherein Jesus is the leader and we are the follower. Christians believe in the "person in a hole theory." A person falls in a hole and can't get out...a doctor comes by and offers some pills so the person can get used to being in the hole...but the pills wear off...a counselor comes along and pulls up a chair and gets the person to talk about their feelings about being in the hole. A business man comes along and builds all sorts of stuff in the hole to distract the person from being in the hole. But then Jesus comes along, jumps in the hole and tells the person to follow him because he knows the way out. That is what Jesus did on the cross and the resurrection.

Most of his teaching was unoriginal, his inheritance from the faith of Israel. He was not particularly effective in getting his program across to his followers. But when he came back to us, even from the dead, we then say that Jesus-who he was, what he taught, what he did- had been vindicated by God.



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That's what those early Christians meant when they exploded out into the world shouting, "God has raised Jesus from the dead!" Easter was like God saying to us, "In case you have ever wondered whether or not Jesus was truly, truthfully revealing my will for the world-with all his talk of forgiving enemies, and loving the unlovable, and finding the lost-then be assured, this is exactly the way to see it. When he speaks, I'm speaking. When you look at Jesus, you're looking at me, the one who hung the stars and flung the planets into their courses."

I know this seems an astounding assertion to those who have not experienced it, but Christians believe that Jesus is present with us, walks with us, is closer to us than we are even to ourselves.

That's the presence I'm talking about that Christians learn to name as the risen Christ. Say a prayer, tear open a loaf of bread, have a sip of wine, we believe Jesus is with us. When just two or three of us show up on Sunday, Jesus has promised, "I'll be there." So that's what makes Christians who we are - Jesus.

We're here, not because we were searching for more meaning in our lives and found Jesus. Rather, most of us were minding our own business and from out of nowhere Jesus found us. Or we were just biding our time trying to make it through a Sunday service without dozing off and he grabbed us. We stood to sing a hymn only to sit down after the last note saying, "I believe."

It's about Jesus.

That is why I love confirmation so much...when she graduated from confirmation, that sweet girl knew what it was like to have Jesus jump into the hole that was her life and show her the way out. So...who do you say that Jesus is?

I will see you on Sunday...September is shaping up to be a big month in the life of our church...God is moving here at Ocker...come and see!

Brad

--CHRISTIAN SISTERS--

Janet Hoelscher will be guest speaker at our meeting on September 15 at 11:30 am. She will provide a program on "Silver and Distracted" All ladies are invited. Brink a potluck dish to share.

Crochet Class

Come Crochet with Maggie! September 10th and September 24th @ 4:30 pm. Maggie can teach those who want to learn or assist with any ongoing projects. Maggie has hooks & yarn to practice with. Open to all ages. Come with a smile and be ready to make something beautiful

Men's Fellowship Breakfast Saturday - September 12 - 8 am

Ocker is starting something new for the men - a Men's Fellowship Breakfast!



This will be a time to connect with like-minded friends, enjoy a good cup of coffee and breakfast, and build meaningful relationships. Our hope is for this to become a regular monthly or quarterly gathering, with the possibility of reaching out to help some of our homebound members with household repairs and other needs. For more information, please see John Shank.

--- ROGERS COMMUNITY FOOD & CLOTHING PANTRY ---

Thank you for your donations this past month and the beginning of the new school year. It is so appreciated by the Pantry. We had a great variety of items that were delivered. Now, we will work towards this month as we deliver these items once per month to the Pantry.



As a reminder, pancake mix, syrup, jelly, jam, pop tarts, oatmeal packets, mac-n-cheese, instant mashed potatoes, spaghetti's, ravioli, sugar, flour, corn meal, cornbread mix, dried beans, spaghetti noodles and sauce, canned meat and soups - just to give you ideas.

We appreciate your willingness to help support this local mission.
For more information, please see Lisa Sebek.

SUNDAY SCHOOL / C.E.C. NEWS

Sunday School classes are growing and off and running in our new Sunday School year. If you have not joined us yet, or explored a class, please ask a friend and come on. Sunday School begins at 9am each Sunday and at 8:30 am on the first Sunday of the month for breakfast and fellowship.

Breakfast for September 6 will be sponsored by the Standard Bible Class (Roseanne).
We hope to see you there.

Mark your calendars - the Children & Youth Sunday School Christmas Program will be Sunday, December 13 during the worship hour, that is the day for our special visitor and some last minute Christmas wishes."

For More information or volunteering opportunities,
please see Tracie Malovets, Sunday School Superintendent.

www.ockerbrethrenchurch.org

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SEPTEMBER BIRTHDAYS



- 1 - Dianne Psencik
Ashlyn Zdroik
Micah Wilfert
- 6 - Foster Koslovsky
Hagen Tucker
- 7 - Larry Pechal
- 13 - Sandra McAdams
- 15 - Asher Weathersbee
- 16 - Cash Hoelscher
- 18 - Gene Sosa
Kayla Fojtasek
- 19 - Taylor Brikley
- 20 - Leland Jungmann
Connor Sebek
- 21 - Ely Stork
- 22 - Lucy Herridge
- 24 - Creed Pierce
Jason Bedrich
Cristi Jungmann
- 26 - Deanna Naivar
- 27 - Brody Malovets
Jennifer Chervenka
Kathy Harrison
- 28 - Tammy Pierce
Blayne Hoelscher

August Anniversaries



- 4 - Donald & Wynona Williams
- 7 - Robert & Kelly Stephens
- 10 - Wayne & Celestia Hoelscher
- 22 - Ralph & Marcia Snyder
- 26 - Stanley & Shelly Stanolis
- 27 - Micheal & Frances Harper

LOOKING AHEAD:

October 14, 2026
Harvest Supper

October 18, 2026
Annual
Congregational
Meeting

December 13, 2026
Sunday School
Christmas Program &
Gift Exchange

December 20, 2026
Choir Cantata.



**Sanctuary
Choir News**

The Sanctuary Choir will start
rehearsals for Christmas
Wednesday, September 9
at 6:15 PM.

We will also sing during the
worship service on the
4th Sunday of each month.

If you enjoy singing and making
a joyful noise unto the Lord,
please join us at 6:15 PM on the
above date. Questions may be
addressed to Kim Dillard,
Sanctuary Choir Director.



NATIONAL COLLECTION WEEK NOVEMBER 16 – 23, 2026

OCKER PACKING PARTY ***NOVEMBER 14 @ 10 am***

Ocker will be a Drop-Off Hub again this year! We have committed to 2 hours per day Monday, November 16th through Monday November 23rd. Sign-up sheets will be posted in October for volunteering. We would like 4 people per day.

We didn't have a formal Packing Party last year and we know it was missed, so... we ARE this year!

YAY!! It will be Saturday, November 14th. We are accepting donations for our shoe boxes and will have pamphlets and boxes soon. Take a box and fill it! Or, take a pamphlet and purchase multiples of any item.

Here is a great list of much needed items:

Pencil Packs
12 count color pencils
Coloring books
Sharpeners
Markers
Pens
Scissors
Glue Sticks
6" rulers
Wash cloths
Hair Picks
Wide tooth combs
Hair ties/Head bands
Undergarments

Don't forget those "WOW" items:

Soccer Ball and Pump
Musical Instruments (harmonica, recorder)
Small baby dolls
Barbies
Trucks and cars
Fishing Kits
Sewing Kits
Lego boxes

Please remember - while we would love a large number of filled boxes, we also want them to be good quality. New items, or not used items are preferred.

Youth Retreat
At
Hus Encampment

Saturday, September 12, 10:10am-
Sunday, September 13, 2:00pm
6th grade and up

Registration deadline: September 1

BYF pays half of the registration fee for any youth who would like to attend and registers by the deadline.

T-shirts may also be purchased, but orders must be received by the deadline.

The bus will transport to/from the retreat. It will leave at 9am on Saturday morning and return around 3:30pm on Sunday.

Registration forms are available at www.unityofthebrethrenyouth.org. Please see Jennifer if you have any questions.

Thank You Ocker Church
Family for your love and
support for the youth during
our youth-led worship and
spaghetti meal!



Youth Bible Study for 6th grade and up will meet every Wednesday in September from 6-8pm.

Dinner is provided.

Bring Your Friend and come fellowship and grow with us.



Hey student athletes,

We are praying for you! Our hope is that you will “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”

— Proverbs 3:5-6

Trusting God requires more than just acknowledging His power; it means fully depending on Him rather than your own abilities and skill. God sees everything and knows exactly what you need. God has a purpose for us in every moment, and His plan is greater than our own, no matter the result of the game.

Release your worries. Trust that God is already at work. Surrender your game plan to Him, knowing that He will direct your path. Step out in faith, confident that God will guide your every move, even when the score isn't what you wanted.