

FEBRUARY 2023

Volume 38 - Issue 2

The Congregational COLUMNS

Molding and Shaping the Church

By Rev. Julie Sheridan-Smith

I am finding “being church” with you interesting, thought provoking, energizing... life giving! And that together, in some ways - seen and not yet seen - we are growing and being part of God’s work here.

There is a line from a hymn that sings, “You are the Potter, I am the clay; mold me and make me, this is what I pray” (Change My Heart, O God, #420). And I mention this as it describes a concept that we will lean into together through Lent. Yes, it’s true, Lent is around the corner, with Ash Wednesday which marks the beginning on February 22!

So, let me tell you about opportunities we will offer to help us consider some of the ways God shapes and molds our lives: prayer, outreach and service, worship, communion, and fellowship, through grief, loss, and hope.

I have a request of you. Before February 15, I hope to receive a line or two about something you pray God might mold and shape within you and the church. These thoughts and prayers will fold into Ash Wednesday and Lent (no names will be used, just the ideas). Let me know if you have any questions about this.

God molds us through Prayer

During Ash Wednesday we will offer the prayers that you send rather than ashes.

Take part in a book discussion opportunity (3 sessions each) around Adam Hamilton’s *The Lord’s Prayer: The Meaning and Power of the Prayer Jesus Taught*. Discussions will take place Sundays, February 26, March 5 and 12, from 11:15 am -12:30 pm; during Women’s Ministry, Tuesdays at 8 am, on February 28, March 7 and 14; and at Men’s Ministry/Men’s Bible Study, Wednesdays at 7 am on February 29, March 8 and 15. Join us in person or on Zoom. A link will be sent to participants. Deadline for ordering the book through the Office is February 15. Cost is \$10.50.

Then, on Saturday March 18 come for a morning of prayer practices. Learn about and experience Lectio Divina, prayer through art, prayer in the Psalms, and walk a labyrinth.

God shapes us through Outreach and Service

On March 4 we will gather at the church for coffee, donuts, and prayer. Then small teams will go to local organizations (such as Tosa Cares and Bridge to Brighter) for a couple hours of service/work. Or you could stay on site to make bag lunches for St. Vincent’s. Sign up at the Gathering Table in the Atrium.

God shapes us through Fellowship and Communion

On March 8, 5:30-6:30, come for an intergenerational/interactive “Church and Chow” upstairs in the Social Hall. We will share a simple family-style meal, and experience God shaping us through Communion and Fellowship.

God shapes us through Grief, Loss, and Holy Hope

Saturday morning April 1, Tesha Urban will facilitate a presentation and discussion — *Spiritual Nourishment for Life’s Changes and Challenges*.

In some way, we are all grieving, because we are all living. Some of us might be experiencing personal grief from the loss of loved ones, pets, health, homes, jobs, or families changing as children grow older. Some of us might be experiencing grief from things we hear about in the news. Grief can take on many forms. Join us for an inspiring morning of contemplation, connection, and reflection, as we explore the dimensions of grief and loss and open ourselves to experiential opportunities to encounter grief through our spirituality. This special gathering will be held the day before Holy Week begins as a way to join our individual experiences with that of Christ — and be held together — amid the larger story of Christian Hope. A nourishing and healthy lunch will be served.

THE COLUMNS

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
IN WAUWATOSA

Worship & Discovery

Women's Ministry

*Tuesdays, February 7, 14, 21 & 28
from 8-9^{am}*

Women's Ministry meets in the Friendship Lounge. Study is *The One Year Book of Praying Through the Bible* by Cheri Fuller.

Men's Ministry

*Second and Fourth Wednesdays,
February 8 & 22 at 7:00^{am}*

Meet in the Library for the DVD Series, "The History of Christianity: From the Disciples to the Dawn of the Reformation."

Chancel Flowers for 2023

A floral arrangement for the Chancel is a lovely way to acknowledge a loved one or special occasion. Patty Reddy, Board of Deacons, has been scheduling flowers for the coming year. If you would like to donate flowers in honor or memory of someone special in your life, please refer to the chancel flower board in the Atrium to find what dates remain available and sign up.

JUST FOR YOUTH
February 2023



Sunday School

Sunday, February 5, 12, 19 & 26 for ages 3 - 5th grade

Children will begin in church with their families during 10^{am} worship and dismissed to Sunday School during the service.

Junior Choir

Sunday, February 5, 12, 19 & 26 for Kindergarten - 8th grade Meet at 9:00 in LL4.

Children sing once a month.

Covenant Class

February 5 & 19 Group meets at 8:30^{am} in Conference Room.

Pilgrim Fellowship (PF)

Sunday, February 5, 12, 19 & 26 for grades 6 - 12

Teens will begin in church with their families during 10^{am} worship and dismissed to PF during the service.

Adult Learning Hour

*Sundays, February 5, 12, 19 & 26
at 8:45^{am}*

The group will meet in Room 107. Topic is understanding the liturgical year.

Men's Bible Study

*First & Third Wednesdays,
February 1 & 15 at 7:00^{am}*

Men's Bible Study meets at 7am on Wednesday mornings. Join us in Room 107 for interesting studies and good conversation.

Share Your Love of God with the Little Ones

Our growing congregation here at First Church translates to a growing enrollment in our Sunday School classrooms. The Board of Christian Education would like to increase the number of Sunday School staff.

Please let a member of the church staff or Tori Raddemann (tori.holtz@gmail.com) know if you would be willing and interested in helping with teaching Sunday School or would like more information.

Ideally, we would like to have enough Sunday school staff that they can give one another opportunities to be in Worship Service.

Thank you all for your continued and ongoing support of our church community.

CONGREGATIONAL COLUMNS

A monthly newsletter produced by the First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa to keep members and the community up to date on activities at the church.

www.FirstChurchTosa.org

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Like us on Facebook!

Operating Statement Summary

Year to Date as of December 2022

	Current Year	Prior Year
Pledge base received	101.0%	109.0%
Pledge Income	\$475,472	\$515,035
Total Income	\$662,408	\$664,310
Total Expense	\$590,175	\$598,088
Net Income	\$72,233	\$66,222

Detailed financials available in the office.

Reaching Out with Compassion

The generous support of First Church is felt both locally and internationally through the work of the Board of Stewardship, Benevolence and Church Relations and the generosity of our congregation. The impact of that outreach is made clear in the thank you letters we receive from our beneficiaries. The following is excerpted from those letters. . .

Bridge to Brighter

Your gift directly impacts the lives of the youth we serve. Through your generosity we are transforming the lives of youth who have aged out of foster care.

With appreciation and gratitude,
Nick Sgarlata, *Executive Director*

Great Lakes Dryhooch

Because of the generosity of James Harris and everyone among the team of the First Congregational Church, we are able to serve our community, and more importantly, the veteran demographic.

National Association of Congregational

Your contributions not only help us to sustain programs and projects, but also fulfill dreams in the ministries of our missions:

Congregational Church of Myanmar -- \$4100

One Great Hour of Giving

Flood relief in Kentucky -- \$1,250

Ukraine Humanitarian Relief -- \$1,250

Argentina Association Civil Cristiana Congregational --- \$3645

Ministry & Outreach Ministry Council churches -- \$1,250

Happy Life Mission for Abandoned Children in Kenya -- \$2,414

Panamerican Institute Tijuana -- \$2,414

Tosa Community Food Pantry

We are grateful for your VERY generous donation [\$4,350]. We help needy people in the Wauwatosa area with food and other necessities. And there is a real need. Thank you for your generosity.

Sincerely,
David J. Brand, *Treasurer*

Fisher House Wisconsin

A family's love is good medicine. When a veteran or service member receives care at a VA Medical Center, the last thing their family should have to worry about is how to support their loved one during hospitalization. At the Milwaukee VA Fisher House, all families are welcome to stay at no cost to them, for as long as they have the need to stay. Thanks to donors like you [\$1,000], we are able to provide a "Home Away from Home" for more than 800 military and veterans' families each year. . .

With Sincere Gratitude,
Angie Christianson, *President*

Milwaukee Homeless Veterans Initiative

One of our newest initiatives is the Veteran Resource Center we are creating. . . Now, families can come to the Resource Center and access items to meet their basic needs. Instead of us simply giving them items we think they need, they are able to choose the items themselves, all for free.

Please know your generosity [\$1,000] is truly appreciated by all of us. Thank you for helping us make sure our Veterans know they are not alone.

Sincerely,
Debbie Buchanan, *Executive Director*

A Gift of Adoption

Thanks to you, Gift of Adoption is able to step in and provide the final funds to complete adoptions and unite families. The impact you

make [\$1,000] is reflected in stories like Keith's. Keith was adopted early this year. His parents recently shared, "As soon as we learned of Keith, we rushed to begin the process of adopting him. Thanks to our GOA grant, Keith now has the permanency he deserves and the chance to have a full sibling relationship with his brother." You've enabled more children like Keith to be loved, and to thrive.

With appreciation,
Pam Devereux, *Chief Executive Officer*

Running Rebels Community Organization

On behalf of the entire Running Rebels Community Organization, we thank you for your donation of \$1,000. We are humbled by your generosity. Since 1980, Running Rebels has guided Milwaukee youth into adulthood through mentoring, positive programming, and community connection. . . Gifts like yours are vital to our success.

Once again, thank you! We sincerely appreciate you!

Victor Barnett, *Executive Director*

Dawn Barnett, *Co-Executive Director*

Milwaukee SCORES

Your support [\$1,000] is especially meaningful this year as we work to recover from a two-year fundraising gap due to the pandemic. As you can imagine, it is incredibly important that we re-engage with children in Milwaukee who – even before the pandemic – experience stressors and adverse childhood experiences. Opportunities for these children to participate in safe and structured activities during the high-risk afterschool hours and summer months will help them heal.

By supporting SCORES, you are not just allowing youth from low-income neighborhoods the opportunity to be a part of a team, you are also helping them become connected with positive adult role models who will teach valuable life lessons like teamwork, leadership, and commitment.

Sincerely,
Kate Carpenter, *Executive Director*

Milwaukee Academy of Science

These funds [\$1,000] will help us purchase winter gear and Christmas gifts for families who are in need of assistance. We have an overwhelming need for this as over 96% of our families qualify as being economically disadvantaged. Supplies for winter are in demand, especially as the colder weather sets in.

Yours in partnership,
Anthony McHenry, *Chief Executive Officer*

Sojourner Family Peace Center

On behalf of the clients and staff of Sojourner, thank you for your generous donation made by the First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa! Your gift comes at a critical time. Domestic violence rates are at an all-time high. Amid the pandemic, survivors are experiencing increased barriers to their safety and well-being. Survivors need us now more than ever. Thank you for answering the call.

With deepest gratitude,
Carmen M. Pire, *President and CEO*

Milwaukee Rescue Mission

We received your very generous gift of \$4,838, and I am so thankful! Your compassion will help provide meals, shelter, warm clothing and other essential care to men, women and children in our community who are struggling. Through God's grace and thanks to you, many who have fallen on hard times will have hope and a heart full of gratitude this Thanksgiving!

Patrick H. Vanderburgh, D. Min.

Moderator's Report

By Peggy Griffith

The past two years have been extremely challenging, and yet also the most rewarding. We experienced the retirement of both of our ministers. I know that some of us felt hurt, frustrated, and uncertain about the future of First Church. I asked those questions to myself as well, and prayed (like, on my knees by the bed praying) and asked God to bring clarity. At a time when one might have thought the challenges were too great to overcome, GOD SHOWED UP!

It was no coincidence that Pastor Gerry became connected with our congregation. Through his facilitation and guidance, a number of things became clear. Among them:

- Historically, ministerial transitions have presented some of the most challenging moments for First Church.
- Our congregation has a profound passion for children, youth and families in our community and sharing God's love through beautiful music.
- A renewed sense of hope and excitement for the future was bubbling up.

The members of First Church leaned in, discerned what God has been asking of them, and our congregation as a whole. And we all got to work!

Rhonda Kwiecien raised her hand and expanded her role to serve as our Music Director. We also welcomed Ellen Shuler to the First Church family as Choir Director. Thank you to Roxanne Trump-Miles for her continued dedication to the children's music initiatives. We are so blessed to have such amazing talent leading our music program.

Bill Edens and Kayla Bruss have continued to improve our live streaming of worship. Sharing the gospel message by meeting the people where they are is an important ministry for this church, and we are grateful for their time and talent!

We opened the new elevator, making our facility fully accessible to everyone; and planning is in progress for the Chancel renovation to move forward this year. Thank you, Board of Trustees, and planning committees!

Tonia Wallner, her mighty Board of Christian Education, and volunteers have continued to shine through our Confirmation Class of 2022, VBS (with the fabulous Mobile Media Van), WCA Camp and Sunday School. Most recently however, we had fantastic participation in the youth holiday activities and Christmas workshop. Thank you to all who made these events so special.

Board of Fellowship brought the energy by coordinating a day of baseball at a Milwaukee Milkmen game (sure to become a summer tradition), hosted some of the most beautiful (and tasty) coffee hours and celebrations, and brought cheer to everyone with their Halloween costumes.

Board of Deacons played an active role in arranging for pulpit supply this year, as we navigated our ministerial transition. Mychale Thomas and the entire board were also instrumental in facilitating some of those restorative moments back to Worship, such as serving communion, the return of greeters and ushers, and the greeting of peace. Thank you, Deacons!

Our Care Board has played an instrumental role during this year of transition by proactively reaching out to members in need of encouragement, a meal, a friendly conversation, or a prayer. They brought back the Purls of Wisdom where members knit prayer shawls. Thank you for being such a blessing to those in need.

Our Board of Stewardship and Benevolence distributed contributions to several worthy organizations this year and awarded scholarships to college-bound students. They also launched Stewardship Campaign 2023: Moving Forward Together, which is vital to our ability to effectively budget and plan for the upcoming year. Thank you for all your hard work.

All members of First Church stepped up in a big way -- from your generous contributions of time, talent and treasure through offerings and pledging, to your overwhelming response to the Christmas Giving Tree this year. Adult Education and Circle events have opened our minds and hearts to grow in our faith.

Oh, and we did a thing this year... a very big thing! The congregation voted to call Reverend Julie Sheridan-Smith as our Senior Minister. Reverend Julie is very engaged with our boards and committees, and we are so blessed for her shepherding guidance as we look to a new year full of promise. Thank you to the Long-Range Planning/Pastoral Search Committee for your commitment and dedication to our search process.

And the lifeblood that keeps the heart of this church beating, our fabulous office and maintenance staff, continue to keep us on track, informed, solvent, and keep our building beautiful and in good repair. Jim, Marianne, Jill, Cindy, and Mark, you are such a blessing for all you do!

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to incoming Moderator Mike Huitink for his support and leadership this past year. As Past Moderator, I look forward to supporting Mike, along with Vice-Moderator Randy Sitzberger and the Council throughout the coming year.

So, while this reflection is a bit longer than usual, I know this list is not exhaustive of all the great things our congregation has accomplished this year, but I wanted to articulate just how much progress we have made together. There is more to be done, and I am more confident than ever that First Church will continue to shine the light of Jesus Christ and bless our members and the Wauwatosa community for years to come!

Blessings,

Peggy

Be a Secret Buddy!

Nine years ago, we started the Secret Buddy program with the intent to connect the generations of our church. It has been an incredible success! During the upcoming Lenten season, our children in 1st-5th grades will again be 'pen pals' with our interested adult members. Then, they will meet their Secret Buddy after worship in April.

More details will follow, but we are seeking adult volunteers to be a Buddy to one of our First Church children as soon as possible. This way, we can get our children and adults paired up and ready to start the program in early March. We know that, as in past years, this will be a rewarding experience for the children and adults alike.

Please let Tonia know if you are interested in participating, either in person, via e-mail (tonia@firstchurchtosa.org), or via phone (414-258-7375, ext.230).



Italian Dinner & Auction is Back!

Save the Date: Saturday, February 25th, 2023

The Fellowship Committee is helping bring back this wonderful evening of fellowship and fantastic food by chef John Sgarlata!

Share an evening of conversation with fellow FCC members, invited friends, and family while feasting on a multi-course menu prepared by John and his crew. The evening will begin with refreshments and the opportunity to place your bids for the Silent Auction. Continue your conversations as you take your seat to be treated to a menu of Italian bread, roasted garlic & red peppers, green olive salad, Italian stuffed mushrooms, antipasto salad, highlighted by lasagna Bolognese and topped off with tiramisu!



In recent years, our FCC Youth Mission Team has teamed up with The Hosanna Project, a religious-based organization whose work involves a variety of charitable initiatives aimed at helping our impoverished neighbors. By the grace of God and through the mechanical and aesthetic arts, mission workers at Hosanna Industries build and repair homes for needy households; mobilize relief workers to areas of disaster; teach and lead workshops in art and spirituality; train young people in construction skills; and lead volunteers of all ages. Donations fund the building supplies and other materials needed throughout the year. Through their experience with Hosanna, our FCC Missions Teams develop their work skills, build friendships, and grow in faith.

Individual and Corporate Contributions to the Auction

Would you, your place of work, or someone you know have something to contribute to the auction? Now is a great time to start planning or coordinating for donation items. No donation is too small! Put together a themed basket, donate an item or event tickets, and we'll pair them, or make a monetary donation and complete a "basket." Please fill out a donation sheet from the Gathering Table and turn it in to the office as soon as possible so we can plan for its place on the auction table. Drop off donations to the office by Friday, February 17th. If you would like to help, make the event a success, please sign up for volunteering opportunities on the Gathering Table. If you have a question, please call the church office at 414-258-7375 or email firstchurchtosa@firstchurchtosa.org.

Tickets are \$25 for a single, \$20 for 2 or more and \$120 for a table of six. Requests for other table configurations may be made. Please purchase tickets through the Office.

Beneficiaries

During dinner, there will be a brief program and auction bidding wrap up. Your auction contributions will go to support One Hope 27 and Hosanna Industries' mission program. One Hope 27's mission is to bring hope to kids and families involved in foster care in Milwaukee County through support and connection with the church and the community around them. With over 2,000 kids in care on any given day in Milwaukee County and the number steadily rising, there are kids and families left feeling hopeless, without support and caught in a destructive cycle they don't know how to break. We at FCC and the community can work together to build connection and support around the kids and families involved in foster care, creating stronger families and, as a result, strengthening our city. Not everyone can be a foster family, but this is an opportunity to do something to impact kids and families involved in foster care.



The First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa
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In This Issue

- 1 _____
Molding and Shaping the Church
- 2 _____
Worship & Discovery
Chancel Flowers for 2023
Share Your Love of God
with the Little Ones
Just for Youth
- 3 _____
Reaching Out with Compassion
- 4 _____
Moderators Report
Be a Secret Buddy
- 5 _____
The Italian Dinner & Auction
is Back

Something For Everyone



Nothing beats a bowl of chili on a cold winter day! On Sunday, March 19th, you can eat chili until you radiate more heat than asphalt in August. Once again, Fellowship will host the ever-popular Chili Cook-off / Dessert Bake-off in the Social Hall immediately following the 10^{am} worship service. The top three winners in both the chili and dessert categories will be chosen by the diners. In addition to taste-testing the competing chilis, you are invited to enjoy a bowl of chili and all the fixings provided by The Fellowship Board.

Watch for the sign-up sheet on the Gathering Table in the Atrium. Whether you eat or compete, you won't want to miss this tasty event!

Contest Procedures - March 19th

- Bring entries to the Social Hall between 7:45^{am} - 10:00^{am}
- Provide a name or description for your entry, and it will be assigned a number for voting.

Chili entries - you provide a crockpot to keep it warm.

Dessert entries - should be cut into small 1" x 1" pieces.

- After finishing taste-testing, each individual may cast one vote for best chili and one vote for best dessert.
- At the end of the meal, the chilis and desserts with the most votes will be announced and first, second, and third place prizes will be awarded.