

SEPTEMBER 2023

Volume 37 - Issue 9

The Congregational COLUMNS

Looking Forward to a Wonderful Fall!

By Rev. Julie Sheridan-Smith,
Senior Minister



First Church is receiving an amazing gift! We have the opportunity to have a short film produced about who we are, where God is at work, and in what ways we are thriving and longing to engage with others in the community. This gift is given by filmmaker Dan Hayes (son of Steve and Nancy Hayes), along with his expertise and passion, and some of his team at Freethink and Big Think.

This work is already in process and filming will begin in early September and several other occasions throughout the fall.

We are already listening and have heard some of you respond to question such as, "Why church?" "Why go to church? What is unique about our way of being church?" And many of you celebrate the way our Covenant affirms our desire to "...grow in the knowledge and expression of our faith ... reach out with compassion ... and teach each other with love and understanding." We are not guided by prescribed doctrines but by the variety of ways we come to faith. Some of you have commented that, for you, it is about relationships with God, yourself, and others. We are a people who want to be with others to worship, being lifted by Word, music, prayer, silence, and deep listening. We come together to remember and to move forward. We come together to mark important times in our lives. We come together to rest, replenish, and reach out.

Listening is so important ... to each other and to those we encounter; to both hear and share our stories, to realize what is giving life. And we want to hear more about these things from YOU. Please share your thoughts and stories, what is calling on your heart. So let's have coffee, a meal, a conversation at church or when out for a walk, via email or a call.

The August article noted several ongoing and new things beginning on Rally Sunday, and you will see notes from others that highlight music opportunities (vocal groups and ... Boomwhackers!), new gatherings for spiritual well being through several support groups, and spiritual exploration. Our WeCONNECT with families and children on the second Wednesday of each month begins again in September, adding an invitation to families with children of all ages to share in an all-family meal we provide (freewill offering appreciated) from 5:30-6:00pm and "break out time" for youth and parents to simply connect from 6:00-6:30 pm.

Additionally, we have a wonderful multi-church opportunity. Our choir has been invited to sing in a choral concert with other church choirs in Wauwatosa. The concert will be at 2pm on October 15 at the Underwood Baptist Church, followed by a dinner that the Underwood Church is making! Sign up or contact the Office if you will be there. (Underwood Baptist Church needs to know how much to make for dinner. A free will offering will be appreciated.)

In this whirlwind world that can be complicated, daunting, faith squashing and yet stretching, let us come together again and again to rest, be replenished, and enabled to reach out. Borrowing from Teresa of Avila, mystic and reformer:

Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours.

Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world.

Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good.

Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world.

Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body.

Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

May we be this together.

Blessings and Peace - Julie

THE COLUMNS

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
IN WAUWATOSA

Worship & Discovery

Women's Ministry

Tuesdays, September 5, 12, 19 & 26 from 8-9^{am}

Women's Ministry is meeting on the porch on the west side (Ridge Court) of the church. Please bring a lawn chair. In the event of bad weather, we will meet in the Lounge. Everyone is welcome to join us anytime you are able.

Adult Learning Hour

Sundays, September 17 & 24 at 8:45^{am}

Beginning October 17th and continuing on the 1st and 3rd Sundays, Adult Learning will view the video series, "The Bible for Grownups," by Andy Stanley. We will meet in Room 107.

Men's Ministry is Going Strong

Wednesdays, September 6, 13, 20 & 27 at 9^{am}

Up for some stimulating conversation? Consider Men's Ministry! In September, the group is continuing our reading of *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis – satirical letters between Screwtape (one of the Devil's senior disciples) and his nephew, Wormwood (a devil disciple in training). This acclaimed book provides the launch point for robust discussions on how we think about morality in our world today.

Even if you haven't attended Men's Ministry before you'll be able to jump right into our study group. As of 20 August, we were on Letter Number 7 – regarding patriotism versus pacifism.

The Screwtape Letters and companion study guide are available on Amazon.com.

In our readings and discussions, we are realizing that, to gain understanding of the novel, you must read it, not as if it were written from God's and Jesus's viewpoint, but from Satan's viewpoint. How does Satan distract you from true faith and belief? C.S. Lewis' approach points to all the pitfalls we, as humans, encounter daily in our quest to understand God and embrace His goals for us.

Men's Ministry meets every Wednesday at 9am in the Lounge. If that date and/or time aren't convenient for you, please contact Hank Collis (hcollis@twc.com) to suggest another date and/or time.

- Hank Collis

Healing Together: New Support Groups at FCC

Two support groups will begin this fall which are available to members of our congregation, as well as friends and neighbors.

Grief and Healing Journeying Group

Begins Wednesday, September 20

5:30 - 6:30 pm in the Parlor

Open to anyone


Breast Cancer Support Group

Begins Thursday, September 14

11:30 am - 1 pm in the Parlor

Open to anyone

Please contact Tesha (tesha@firstchurchtosa.org) with any questions.



Breast cancer patients, caregivers and survivors are welcome to support one another on their journey.

JOIN US

2nd Thursday of the month,
beginning September 14
11:30 am – 1:00 pm in the Parlor

PLEASE REGISTER

Contact *Healing Hearts*
262.751.0874 / info.hhwc@gmail.com
Or visit www.healingheartswisconsin.org
to submit an inquiry.

Save the Date Mark your calendars for the
Women's Advent Tea
December 2, 2023 • in the Social Hall

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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Operating Statement Summary

Year to Date as of July 2023

	2023	2022
Pledge Base Rec'd	55.0%	55.0%
Pledge Income	\$271,623	\$260,184
Total Income	\$397,699	\$382,324
Total Expense	\$346,369	\$272,323
Net Income	\$51,330	\$110,037

Detailed financials available in the office

The Journey of Grief

What soap is for the body, tears are for the soul. —Jewish proverb

By Tesha Urban,
Associate Minister



Some of you know that I serve as a hospital chaplain, and in this ministry, I find my patients' whole "life story" can coalesce in a hospital room. These stories present themselves during times of challenge, for example, when they are waiting for test results or preparing for a major surgery or learning that no other treatments will help.

Lately, I've been reflecting on a common theme from these "life stories," and it has been present for most of my visits. I'll highlight a few encounters to preserve the anonymity of my patients and give you an opportunity to recognize the theme too.

In one visit, I encountered a woman who was waiting to have major surgery. She said that being in the hospital gives her "too much time to think," and she doesn't like to "think." When she's home, she goes to the bar to distract herself. I wondered with her about the "thinking," and it opened a conversation about her experience of losing a child to suicide.

In another visit, I met with a baby boomer-aged couple who used to attend church regularly, and now they no longer go. The husband spoke about how his church has changed, and how the world is changing for the worse, and he reminisced about his days as a youth. He had his cell phone in his hand and admitted that he was using it too much.

And then in another visit, I encountered an elderly woman who spoke about her health challenges. She mentioned, in passing, that her husband died a few years ago. When I asked her about her loss, she said she "can't go there," because if she does, "it's a dark, dark place." Instead, she wanted to speak about her travel excursions.

In each of these visits, I encountered people experiencing grief and loss. Through our conversations, they shared ways they were avoiding their grief and feeling disconnected from their spirituality. Their hearts were hurting.

When it comes to grief, we can decide to enter into the experience, or we can try to avoid it. Eventually, though, we will have to deal with grief, or it will deal with us. Each time we experience a new grief, memories of the old grief will surface.

One author wrote that "grief has a way of undoing us at a molecular level."* Our bodies "talk" to us. Grief affects us in body, mind, and spirit. Our losses can surface all kinds of emotions that we typically spend a lifetime trying not to feel, and this "dark, dark place" can feel scary—and vulnerable.

And yet, feelings are normal, natural, and necessary. There is power in naming grief. When we name it, we can feel it, and when we feel what is going on inside of us, we honor the grief. We honor the loss. We honor ourselves. When we open ourselves to feeling, we open ourselves to healing.

Grief is a universal human experience, and it invites us to be compassionate with ourselves as we encounter it. In one of my recent spiritual care visits, I met with an elderly man who lost his beloved wife a few years ago, during Covid. I asked him what her name was, and I noticed he began tearing up. He said he felt embarrassed by his tears and that every time he talks about his wife, his voice cracks and he "turns into a mess." As a hunter and fisherman, he told me that he has been "a man's man" his entire life. He said he feels "tiny" and "stupid" when he cries, and because

of this, he has withdrawn from all his relationships. He hasn't visited with friends since his wife's death, because he is afraid, he will "fall apart."

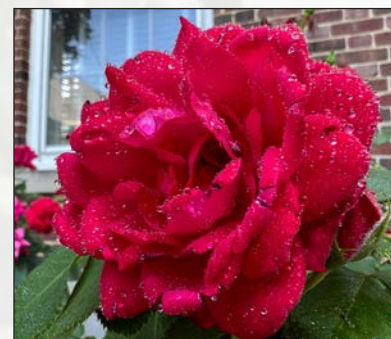
I visited with him for some time, and we encountered his experience together. We explored his long-held beliefs (e.g. "Can a man cry, and still be a man?") and his interpersonal experiences (e.g. "When you've shared your tears, before, what did you encounter?"). We spoke of society and its "plow ahead" culture. We also wondered, together, how he might re-connect with his long-time friends and "name" his experience at the onset of his conversations, to feel safe and connected. We talked about the possibility for him to see a grief counselor and to explore a grief group as well.

This visit reminded me that when we take the risk of being vulnerable in a self-compassionate way, it can open us to deeper connections and deeper healing—not only for the one sharing, but also for the one receiving. We hear our own life experiences through another. And we also experience a greater depth of compassion as we live into our spiritual beliefs: *"If one member suffers, all suffer together"* (1 Corinthians 12:26)."

Grief is a journey and one we share together. Our losses matter, and they are worth crying over. As you reflect on your own grief, what surfaces for you? Are there ways you tend to avoid it, or ways you encounter it? Do you allow yourself to feel your emotions, and share them? Opening to our grief with vulnerability and compassion helps us honor our grief and experience healing together.

And for further thought: I'll be facilitating a grief journeying group that begins Wednesday, September 20 from 5:30 - 6:30 pm. My hope for the group is to provide a safe, sacred, confidential, and meaningful time of togetherness. We will explore the process of grief and mourning and support one another as we share our experiences. The group will meet in our church building, and it is open to anyone who would like to join (whether familiar with our church community or not). If you or someone you know might be interested, consider joining us. You're welcome to contact me with questions or a connection (tesha@firstchurchtosa.org or 262-443-8955).

Additionally, a new breast cancer support group is forming. We have been asked to host the group at our church as a collaboration with Healing Hearts of Southeast Wisconsin and Froedtert and the Medical College. The group will meet every second Thursday of the month from 11:30am - 1p.m., beginning September 14. I will be facilitating the group, and if you know of someone who might benefit, please contact me, or invite them to attend.



Roses bloom with hope in the back entryway of First Church.

*Reference to Jan Richardson's online retreat, *In the Light of a New Constellation* (2023)

Chancel Renovation Update

As of August 23rd, the Chancel Renovation Project was moving along, right on schedule. We are planning on holding our Worship Service in the Sanctuary beginning October 8th.

It is exciting to watch the progress being made. The sub flooring and choir modesty walls have been installed, the new acoustic fabric for the organ pipes is up, and the corrals for the pulpit and lectern are in place. Plaster repair, trim work, and painting have been going forward. Installation of the new wood flooring begins on Monday, August 28th.

For video updates on the Chancel Renovation, please go online to www.firstchurchtosa.org.

On the Home Page, click on Streaming Services. You will find the latest renovation video among the Worship Service videos.

Our thanks to Bill Edens, Kayla Bruss, and Scott Mason for keeping our Sunday streaming services going while we hold services in the Social Hall and Chapel.

- Jim Harris, *Administrator*



Jim Harris compares paint.

Bylaws Modernization Project

The First Church bylaws have not been formally reviewed and updated for several years. As such, the Long Range Planning Committee is launching a project to review and modernize the church bylaws to ensure they remain relevant to the current times and allow the church to operate as effectively as possible.

The committee has already begun engaging the Council as well as boards and committees for feedback on potential revisions. The committee would also like to extend an invitation to church members to submit, for consideration, any feedback on areas of improvement to our bylaws.

Any revisions to the bylaws require a congregational vote. The committee plans to submit suggested revisions to Council by December, and then to the congregation in early January, so that they may be raised for vote at the Annual Meeting on January 28, 2024.

If you have any feedback or suggestions for improvement, please submit them by October 13th, 2023, to Mike Huitink, Randy Sitzberger, or Peggy Griffith.

Mike Huitink - mhuitink@sbrlaw.us
Randy Sitzberger - randy.sitzberger@gmail.com
Peggy Griffith - pgriffith7602@yahoo.com

Music Notes

Sing, Ring and Experience the Joy!

By Rhonda Kwiecien, Director of Music/Keyboard Artist

As we start our new church year, the church is alive with music as we welcome back our Chancel Choir, Jubilation Ringers (handbells), and Children's Choir! Would you like to join us? We'd love to have you!!

Our handbells rehearse on Thursday evenings from 6:30-7:30. Our Chancel Choir rehearses on Thursday evenings from 7:30-8:30. Our Children's Choir meets on Sunday mornings at 9:15.

Parents who bring their little ones to church for choir are welcome to enjoy a cup of coffee and cookies in the Atrium during rehearsal.

Specific schedules for each group are available. Please talk with Rhonda, Ellen, or Roxanne for more information.

Come sing and ring with us!!

JUST FOR YOUTH

September 2023



Sunday School

Sunday, September 10, 17, and 24
for ages 3 – 5th grade

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

Junior Choir

Sunday, September 10, 17 & 24
for K-8th grades

Meet at 9:00^{am} in LL4
Children usually sing once a month.

Covenant Class

Starting in October for 9th graders
Group meets at 8:30^{am} in Room 107.

Pilgrim Fellowship (PF)

Sunday, September 10, 17 and 24
for grades 6 – 12

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

Ultimate Kick-Off Event

Date TBD.

A STELLAR Week of VBS August 7-11, 2023



Vacation Bible School was back in full force this summer, and the church was filled with excitement and enthusiasm from our young attendees. Their energy was awesome, and the week included food, fellowship, and fun for all! Our VBS experience took place from August 7th-11th, and 37 kids, 14 teen helpers, and 9 adult helpers had a blast with the Stellar theme. Throughout the week, the activities launched the kids on a cosmic quest where they had a blast shining Jesus' light of the world. They were rocketed on an out-of-this-world adventure where they were encouraged to experience God in new and creative ways, and side by side with their peers.

Each day, our 4K – 6th grade VBS attendees moved from station to station with their crews, which allowed them to get to know their fellow Crew Members on a deeper level. Every station was designed to reinforce the Bible message in a hands-on, interactive way, with the goal to keep everyone engaged in the lesson. The 4K and 5K children were grouped together for developmentally appropriate activities, while the 1st through 6th graders were assigned their groups to make the experience as fun as possible.

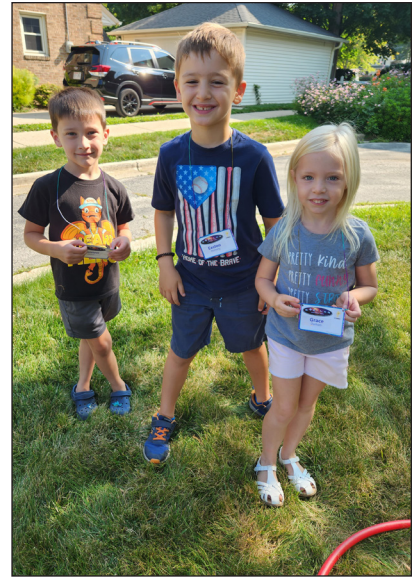
At the Imagination Station, the kids were able to experiment with “Sciency-fun gizmos” that incorporated the daily Bible message, and then took the gizmos home to share the learned lesson with their parents. The children were also active participants in the daily Bible story at Stellar Bible Adventures, which was followed by thought-provoking discussions.



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At KidVid Cinema, our attendees “met” five real kids who have shared Jesus’ light and love in everyday life. Next, our attendees were able to run, jump, and play through fun games that reinforced the daily Bible verse at All-Star Games. One of the favorite stations each year is Sing & Play Blast Off, and this year was no exception! The kids sang and danced to a mix of classic worship and more contemporary songs, and there are so many smiles and so much energy in the room! Finally, at Galactic Snacks, one crew prepared and served delicious treats that connected to the day’s theme, and all of the crews enjoyed the snack time together in the Social Hall.

The “STELLAR” theme was extremely relevant to all who attended and participated, from the awesome decorations in the Social Hall, stairwell, and Stellar Bible Adventures room to the questions posed at the Imagination Station. Each daily mascot was based on items found in our Solar System. On Monday, Cosmo the star was our mascot and we learned that “When life feels dark, shine Jesus’ light”. On Tuesday, the children heard the story of Zacchaeus, the tax collector who found a way to see Jesus by climbing a tree. Jesus went to his house and changed Zacchaeus’ heart and life for the better. Wednesday’s mascot was Luna the moon, and the children heard the story of Jesus’ ride into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey... a triumphant entry by a king! On Thursday, Sol the sun shared important Scripture from John 14, saying, “Don’t let your heart be troubled. Trust in God.” Friday’s mascot, Halley the comet, shared the theme of “When people need



help, shine Jesus’ light” through the story of Philip helping the Ethiopian by sharing the love of Jesus and baptizing the man. What an interesting Bible story to wrap up this wonderful week together. Vacation Bible School was an incredible blessing... for the kids, teens, and adults alike!

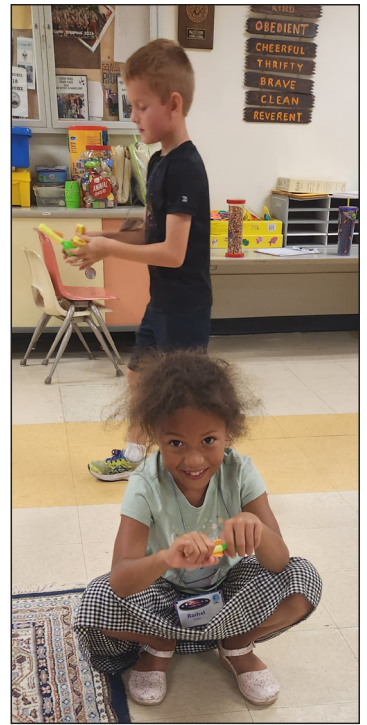


The memories that were made mean so much more coming from those involved, so I wanted to share a handful of testimonials

"My favorite thing about VBS is singing. I can't wait to go again because it's fun, fun, fun."

- Daisy Thomas

"I had so much fun at Imagination Station, singing every day, and being with friends and really nice teachers!" – Mabel Raddemann



"My favorite part of VBS this year was learning all the songs and then getting to perform them for our families on the last day. Also, the hot dog lunch."

- Easton Hornung

"What I loved about VBS was the games, Imagination Station, singing, and getting to spend time with old friends and make new ones!"

- Jude Raddemann

"I liked spending time with my group all week and building bonds with each of them. It is so fun and enjoyable, while we also help raise money at the same time."

- Sienna Hornung



"The school aged children were so good, attentive, and engaged, and yes, always cute! A big shout out, though, comes from this "non school teacher" volunteer to the teen helpers who were without exception AWESOME! What a great week it was."

- Pat Reddy



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