

SEPTEMBER 2025

Volume 40 - Issue 8

The Congregational COLUMNS

Moving into a New Program Year

By Rev. Julie Sheridan-Smith



I hope you have had a summer of some rest and restoration, time away and time here at home. As I look forward to the ways we deepen and reignite our connections here at church with the Rally Sunday worship service and the picnic that follows, I am so very grateful for the fullness of God's Spirit among us during these summer months and the ways we have been able to celebrate that together.

During summer worship we enjoyed the gift of music offered by soloists, duos, and quartets and look forward to the return of the Chancel Choir, lifting their voices and filling the Sanctuary with song. Our Midday Music "experiment" was a wonderful success with a variety of musicians, members, friends, and neighbors enjoying both the music, as well as the lunch prepared by our Fellowship Team. Watch the *Columns* and *What's Happening* for what's next from the Music Committee.

Fellowship's August Tailgate (cooked by John Sgarlata) and Brewer's game on the big screen in the parking lot was a big hit.

On September 21, you will hear and see recaps of the Mission Trip from our Mission Team and the Wisconsin Congregational Camp some of our youth enjoyed. Many of you already experienced a touch of VBS when the children sang a medley of VBS songs on Sunday, August 17. (See the Youth Happenings page).

I could go on about August but let us look forward. Rally Sunday, September 7, draws us together with the commissioning of Sunday school teachers and presentation of Bibles to both our elementary-age children and this year's Covenant Class. We are excited to announce that, over the summer, we added a classroom, updated the Sunday School rooms, and expanded our teaching teams. Deb Hayden has already begun to serve as assistant to Tonia Wallner. Her responsibilities include, among others, communicating with teachers, developing schedules, and prepping rooms each week. Welcome Deb! On September 21, following worship, you are all invited to an "Open House" to see the fabulous new classrooms.

On September 13th, our Covenant class will kick off with a parent orientation and a retreat with the youth. Covenant Class will meet every other Sunday afternoon from 4:00^{pm} to 6:00 pm, allowing us more time to explore together. Our Youth Meet Ups will continue the First Sunday of each month from 4:00^{pm} to 6:00^{pm}. We will also offer a monthly Bible study for teens on Youth Sundays at 8:45^{am}. We will see what grows.

As we move into the new program year, be sure to check out other news from the Women's and Men's ministries, Women's Circle, Discovery Hour, Adult Education, and our new "Good Vibes" group – a time for prayer and meditation each Tuesday from 5:30^{pm} to 6:15 pm. Keep an eye out, also, for this year's Advent Devotional opportunity.

A few September calendar highlights: Rally Sunday and Picnic, September 7. Stewardship "Hands to Serve – Hearts that Give" drive kick off, September 14. Mission and Camp Sunday, Classroom Open House and St. Vincent's Lunch Making, September 21. On September 28 (Program Sunday) you will hear from all the Boards about their intentions and hopes for the year.

Many of you know that Chip Smith has been doing a ministerial internship with us, taking oversight of and managing "Discovery" on Sundays. Please see Chip's article in this issue. I also wish to make you all aware that the Deacons have licensed Chip as a Lay

continued on page 3

THE COLUMNS

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
IN WAUWATOSA

Worship & Discovery

Women's Ministry

*Tuesday, Sept. 2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd, & 30th
from 8-9^{am} in the Library*

Join the group on Tuesday mornings from 8-9^{am} in the Library when you are able, or just obtain the 365-Day Devotion for your at-home quiet time. You do not need be a member to join the discussion. Consider inviting a friend or neighbor to come along and give this morning gathering a try. All are welcome.

Discovery: Experiencing God

*Sundays, September 28th
from 9-10^{am} in the Friendship Lounge*

September 28, we will be starting a new program year of Discovery Hour, which will meet every second, fourth and fifth Sunday at 9 am. During each program we'll explore Experiencing God.

2025 Devotional Plan

With an overwhelmingly positive response to last year's Advent Devotional, we are excited to share the plan for a 2025 version, which will be available by Thanksgiving. This year's devotional will span five weeks – Sunday, November 30th through Sunday, January 4th.

Each week will have a theme:

- Week 1: Waiting with Hope
- Week 2: Watching with Peace
- Week 3: Wonder with Joy
- Week 4: Witnessing with Love
- Week 5: What Now.

A scripture will be assigned to each day during Weeks 1 through 4. For Week 5 (What Now), writers have the opportunity to choose a scripture to accompany their piece.

The opportunity to sign up for a particular date will begin in early October. Any questions should be directed to a member of the Advent Devotional Team.

Thanks to all who are willing to consider contributing to this meaningful endeavor. We never know whose life might be impacted by our words.

Advent Devotional Team,

**Hank Collis, Peggy Griffith, Patty Reddy
Rev. Julie Sheridan-Smith**

Men's Ministry

*Wednesdays, Sept. 3rd, 10th, 17th, & 24th
from 9-10^{am} in the Parlor*

Our vision is to help each other along our "Faith Journey." Please join us any Wednesday at 9^{am} in the Library for lively discussions. For information contact Hank Collis via email: CaptainHarry30@outlook.com.



Adult Education: The Story

*Sundays, September 21st
from 9-10^{am} in the Library*

Adult Education, led by Patty Reddy, will resume on Sunday, September 21, at 9:00 am in the Lounge. The group will continue its journey through *The Story*, edited by Randy Frazee.

The study will pick up the narrative with Chapter 19 of the book.

The Story is an accessible recounting of how, in the Bible, God goes to great lengths to rescue lost and hurting people. That is what *The Story* is all about - God's great love affair with humanity. According to Patty, "From where we ended in June with the exiled Israelites in Babylon, we pick up *The Story* with the people of God returning to Jerusalem, and the birth of Jesus, Emmanuel."

You can come any Sundays that work. Didn't do last year? Not a problem...join us now. The book available in the Office. Cost is \$6.

Please contact Patty Reddy with any questions: patreddywauwatosa@gmail.com / 414.254.2638.

Operating Statement Summary

Year to Date as of July 2025

	2025	2024
Pledge Base Received	33.0%	33.0%
Pledge Income	\$179,794	\$168,466
Total Income	\$264,130	\$273,642
Total Expense	\$195,883	\$195,760
Net Income	\$68,247	\$77,882

Detailed financials available in the office

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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Focus on the Boards: Deacons *by J C Moore, Moderator*

Hello again! In this month's edition of "Focus on the Boards," I'm providing an overview of a board which, in the words of its chair Jon Stern, "isn't flashy, but is very important" to worship at First Congregational: Deacons. The Board of Deacons' main role is to make sure Sunday worship goes off without a hitch. It recruits ushers and greeters. Board members work with the office to schedule lay ministers and guest speakers for weeks when Rev. Julie is not available to preach. They organize pulpit supplies, ready the nave for baptisms. They even prepare and hand out the bread and cup during communion services.

The board is particularly busy during Lent and Advent with special services in preparation for the holidays. While Jon admitted summer has traditionally been a quieter time for them, he described some special events scheduled in the coming weeks that Deacons have planned. They are also scheduling another Laity Sunday during which a member of the church will relate their faith

experience within the message. Happily, the church has no shortage of members who have been willing to publicly discuss their personal faith journey.

Deacons also works alone or partnered with the Fellowship Board to host Simple Suppers & Table Talks where members can share a light meal and discuss faith-based topics. Look for more of these events in the fall and, of course, as we near the holidays. Last, but certainly not least, Deacons (like many other boards) has an important role in welcoming new members to the church family. This year we have had several new members who will complete their classes by enjoying the fellowship of a new member dinner hosted by Deacons.

As Jon put it, Deacons "serves the church in many small but important ways." Through their efforts, we as members strive to live the Covenant by sharing in the worship of God and growing in the knowledge and expression of our faith.

Looking Forward *by Michael "Chip" Smith*

At the time of this writing, I will have—hopefully—delivered a message on August 31 revolving around humility. Three-and-a-half years ago I had a spiritual awakening that allowed me the opportunity to submit my life to God's care and direction. I have spent the time since doing my best to daily surrender myself to His will. While I all too often feel as if the mistakes I make outweigh the right actions that I take, I am confident that God is in control. As a former "egomaniac with an inferiority complex," humility has been a wondrous spiritual principle to explore. I am no better than anyone, nor am I any worse than anyone. This is the core of true humility. We are all on equal footing, we are all ministers of the church. I am honored and humbled to presently be a fellow member of First Church, seeking God's direction alongside all of you.

Master of Divinity Studies—I have had a summer packed with counseling classes through Crown College, and I am slated to graduate with a Master of Divinity degree in December. This fall I will be working on my Capstone Project—a supervised ministry experience—in conjunction with my internship here at First Church, culminating in a seminar/retreat to occur later this year. Stay tuned for more details!

Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies (CFTS) – As part of my fellowship with CFTS, I have had the opportunity to experience a wealth of National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (NACC) functions: Minister Convocation in Racine, 2025 Annual Meeting & Conference in St. Louis, and the Boston Seminar in Congregational History and Polity. In addition to being able to attend the Minister's meetings for the Wisconsin Congregational Association, I am also honored to be serving as Secretary for the WCA Executive Committee. All of these have provided me the opportunity to network with other church leaders from our wonderful association and gain knowledge of our traditions, as well as glean visions for our future.

Discovery Hour – On September 28, we will be starting a new

program year of Discovery Hour, which will meet every second, fourth and fifth Sunday at 9 am. During each program we'll explore Experiencing God. God is alive and well in the here and now, talking to us, providing us with divine insights and practical ways to show His love for all through us. I personally invite all of you to come participate.

Covenant Class – I've been working hard behind the scenes on crafting a fun and engaging curriculum, under Julie's guidance, to re-shape this dynamic experience for FCC's youth.

Moving into a New Program Year - *continued from page*

Minister for the year. This is part of the process for Chip as he finishes his seminary work. A Discernment Committee comprised of John Fredrickson, Sarah DeYoung, Cindy Walsh, Richard Raymond, and Vice Moderator Elect Ann Harris will meet several times with Chip for conversation and questions to both challenge and support Chip's sense of call toward ordination. It is a good and holy thing for the church to wrap around this process. I was grateful to have had this in my process of ordination.

Hank Collis is beginning the second of a three-year Lay Ministry Training (LMT) series of courses, taught by professors and ministers of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches. I have been on the LMT team for years and can tell you it is a strong and intense series of classes. Peggy Griffith graduated with this training several years ago, and I know our church, the Wisconsin Congregational Association, as well as a variety of churches where she has filled in preaching, are blessed by Peggy. Now Hank is also taking this on. It is wonderful to see the many ways First Church is supporting and raising up people in ministry. Please reach out to any of them, or to me, to hear more about Lay Ministry.

I am sure I have missed mentioning something, but you'll find more highlights throughout this issue, so enjoy and be blessed.

- Julie

Hands to Serve - Hearts to Give

Dear Members and Friends of First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa,

We hope that this letter is reaching you in grace and peace. As we gather in worship, in service, and in fellowship, we are reminded that our church is both a place of deep tradition and a community with a bold vision for the future. Each of us plays a vital role in sustaining and strengthening that vision.

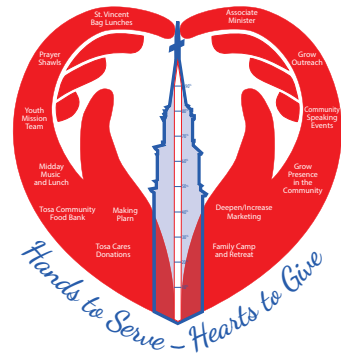
This year, our Stewardship Campaign theme, “Hands to Serve, Hearts to Give,” invites us to reflect not only on the many ways we serve today but also on how we can ensure that our church continues to thrive for generations to come.

Your annual pledge is more than a financial commitment—it is a statement of faith in the future of First Congregational Church. Weekly offerings are essential, but pledges allow us to plan responsibly and dream boldly. Through your pledges, we can take deliberate steps forward in three key areas.

First, we are committed to welcoming an associate minister who will deepen pastoral care, strengthen worship, and provide leadership for new and existing ministries. This is not simply a wish—it is a faithful goal that can only be realized through your pledges.

Second, we must care for our historic building, a cherished gift that requires ongoing attention. One of the missions of First Church is for the building to be available to community organizations as a “meeting house in the Heart of Tosa.” Planned improvements will allow us to maintain a safe, welcoming, and accessible space for all who enter our doors.

Third, we are called to expand our outreach and growth efforts. Continued investment in this work will enable us to extend Christ’s love more widely throughout Wauwatosa and beyond, inviting new generations to experience a living faith.



We give in a variety of ways. Some give by pledging generously to sustain and grow our ministries as well as by teaching, singing, serving, and leading. As our Covenant says we, “reach out with compassion to those in need, to treat each other with love and understanding, and to return to God a portion of God’s gifts.”

As you prayerfully consider your stewardship commitment for the coming year, we ask that you reflect on how your pledge can help us move forward in faith—calling new leadership, caring for our facilities, and reaching ever wider with God’s love.

First Congregational Church has always been a place where faith takes root and where community flourishes. With hands ready to serve and hearts open to give, our collective efforts will ensure that our church remains the heart of Wauwatosa—and in the hearts of those we serve—for years to come.

With gratitude and hope,

Your Stewardship and Benevolence Board,

Dylan Thomas

Lanae Haertel

Debbie Hayden

Tori Raddemann

Hank Collis

Marty Vandervelde

Elizabeth Strasma

Women’s Circle Plans a Visit to the Conservancy for Healing & Heritage

Women’s Circle invites you to caravan to the Conservancy for Healing and Heritage on Tuesday, September 9th. All who seek a time of peace in a beautiful setting are welcome.

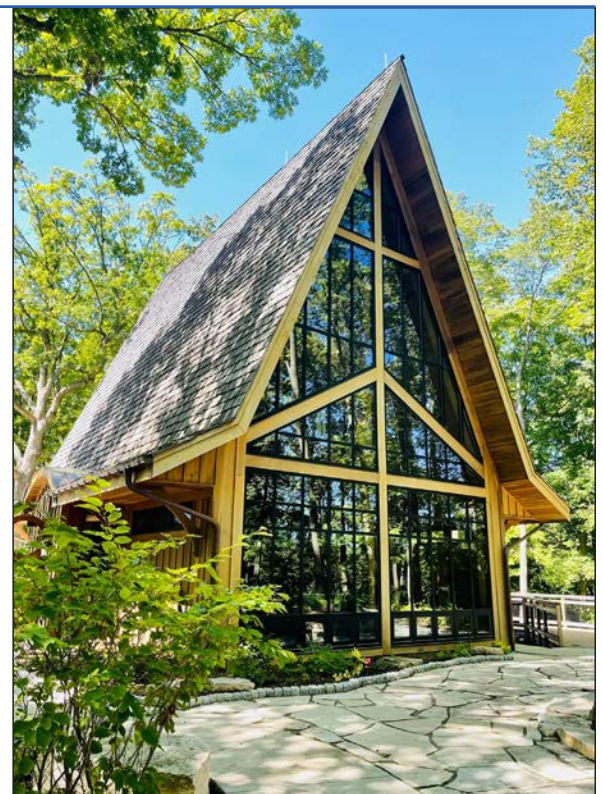
Located at 74th and Rawson Avenue in Franklin, the Conservancy is part of a 36-acre natural habitat created to promote healing and wellness. It is home to WE Energies Foundation Healing Garden, Reiman Healing Chapel, walking trails, and Kopmeier Lake, among other features.

There will be a brief program provided by the Conservancy, followed by the opportunity to explore, bird watch, or simply sit and drink in the beauty and peace of nature.

You are welcome to meet at the church and join Women’s Circle for lunch at 11:30^{am} in the Lounge. Cost is \$5. We will carpool to the Conservancy at 12:30^{pm} and return to First Church between 3:00 and 3:30^{pm}. You’re welcome to drive on your own, meet us at the Center, and extend your visit, if you prefer.

Please sign up at the Gathering Table in the Atrium.

For more information contact Sally Boyle, famboylesal@gmail.com, or Carmen Berte, cmberte01@gmail.com.



JUST FOR YOUTH

September 2025



Sunday School

September 7th, 14th & 28th for ages 4 – 5th grade

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

Faith Finders

Monday, September 8th for 1st - 5th graders

We meet on the second Monday of the month for fellowship, games, and program time. We begin with an optional dinner at 5^{pm}, followed by activities from 5:30 - 6:30^{pm}. Friends are welcome! No cost, but donations for the meal are appreciated.

Junior Choir

September 14th, 21st & 28th for K-8th grades Meet at 9:30^{am} in LL4. Children usually sing once a month.

Covenant Class Starting on September 14th for 9th graders

We will meet the 2nd & 4th Sunday of each month from 4:00-6:00^{pm}.

Pilgrim Fellowship (PF)

September 7th, 14th, & 28th grades 6-12

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

More Youth Programing

Youth gatherings the first Sunday of each month from 4:00-6:00^{pm}, with dinner at 5:30. The first meeting will be September 7th.

Youth Bible Study will be the third Sunday of each month from 8:45-9:45^{am}. The first meeting will be on September 21st.

TRUE NORTH VBS – A Week of Wild Adventures!



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 11th-15th, and 44 kids, 15 teen helpers, and 12 adult helpers had a blast with the TRUE NORTH theme. The activities helped the kids trust Jesus in a wild world. The kids explored what it means to have a friendship with a real, loving, trustworthy God – a friendship that lasts forever. We had a week filled with faith discoveries, memorable music, and epic adventures that helped the kids grow in faith!

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 amazed with the scientific experiments that incorporated the daily Bible message. The children were also active participants in the daily Bible story at Wild Bible Adventures, which was followed by thought-provoking discussions. At Sticky Scripture, our attendees watched videos



continued on page 6

continued from page 5

that encouraged them to memorize verses from the Gospel of Matthew, and in an active way. Next, our attendees were able to run, jump, and play through fun games that reinforced the daily Bible verse at Glacier Games. One of the favorite stations each year is Sing & Play Peak, 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 Tundra Treats, 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 "TRUE NORTH" theme was extremely relevant to all who attended and participated, from the awesome decorations in the Social Hall, stairwell, and hallway to the questions posed at the Imagination Station. Each daily mascot was based on animals found in our vast forests. On Monday, Ponder the river otter was our mascot of choice, who reminded us that when we wonder, we can trust Jesus. On Tuesday, Claudia the crab's message was that Jesus teaches about God's deep love for us... such an important reminder for each and every one of us!! Wednesday's mascot was Kody the bear, and the children heard the story of a Roman officer trusting Jesus. On Thursday, Earnest the bald eagle shared our key verse from Matthew 12, verse 21, which states, "And his name will be the hope of all the world." Friday's mascot, Bruce the moose, shared the theme of "When we need help, we can trust Jesus" through the story of the Great Commission and the Holy Spirit. What an interesting story to end our 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....

"VBS was so fun! I learned that Jesus is my True North and He helps me know where to go. I loved the snacks because they were yummy, and Imagination Station was cool because we got to make stuff. Story time was my favorite too because I got to hear about Jesus. I want to go again!"

- Jovie Haertel

"I love Imagination Station because I love creating things. I also love singing songs all week. My group got second place in the coin wars this year and that's so fun to raise money and have it be a competition!"

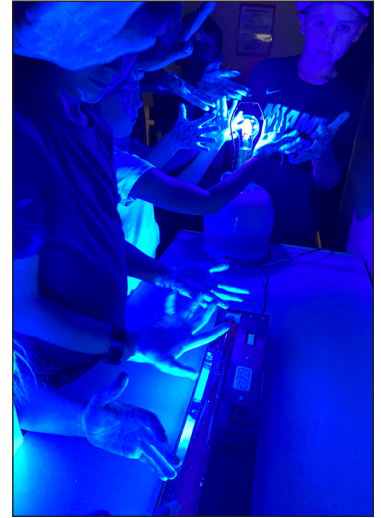
- Easton Hornung

"At VBS I learned that when we hope, we can trust Jesus. My favorite part was the games, especially playing Sharks & Minnows with the parachute! I also liked helping raise money for other kids. I made some new friends this year, and I can't wait to go back next time!"

- Logan Haertel

"VBS is always a fun week! I love seeing who is in my group on Monday and making bonds with the kids throughout the week! Seeing them so excited and having fun is my favorite thing because I remember how much I loved VBS."

- Sienna Hornung, teen helper





"Who says kids today have no imagination and prefer screen time to interacting with peers? Who says science is boring? Who says 5 mornings in a week is way too much time to spend at Church? If you answered "yes" to any or all of those statements, then you're never been to Vacation Bible School at First Church! Each year our VBS program is a big hit with our kids as well as non-church families. From the decorations in the Social Hall, to the music, games, snacks, and scripture lessons, we got our cute short people moving, praying, singing, and thinking of others. Leadership skills are cultivated, also for the teen crew leaders, and everyone is encouraged to bring coins that will be added up each day and donated to help kiddos in other places.

For the past eleven years, I've been blessed to be part of our VBS team, working with Jane Boyd at the Imagination Station. Each day always has a fun way to warm up our brains, make choices with a Talk Starter question, and time to give reasons to support our answers. Some days a group challenge was proposed where the crew had to work together to complete the task – without talking or whispering to each other!

The best part of the Imagination Station was actually making something science related and watching it happen before our very eyes. This year, we made our own

Northern Lights using the tips of highlighter markers and hydrogen peroxide in water bottles. Then we put flashlights underneath each bottle and projected the color on the ceiling, turned off the regular lights, and turned on a black light! Voila! Talk about a cool special effect!

The kids' enthusiasm and energy are contagious. Smiles and laughter are everywhere as kids make daily connections to Jesus and His Word. As the week ended, Matthew 19:14 meant so much more to me: "Jesus said, let the little children come unto me. For the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

– Diane Saeger, adult volunteer

Music Notes

By Rhonda Kwiecien,
Director of Music and Keyboard Artist

All who were able to join us for worship on August 10th were blessed to hear Jessi Kolberg play on her final Sunday as Assistant Keyboard Artist. Jessi has faithfully and joyfully served our congregation as the assistant keyboard artist for the past seven years. We are so grateful for her dedication and musicianship and will miss her presence with us.

Jessi is stepping into a more expansive role at her home church. We wish Jessi and her home congregation God's blessing.

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In This Issue

- 1
Message from Rev. Julie
- 2
Worship & Discovery
- 3
Focus on the Boards: Deacons
Looking Forward
- 4
Hands to Serve - Hearts to Give
Women's Circle Plans a Visit to the
Conservancy for Healing & Heritage
- 5
Just for Youth (pages 5-7)
- 7
Music Notes



Children sang VBS songs in church on Sunday, August 17th