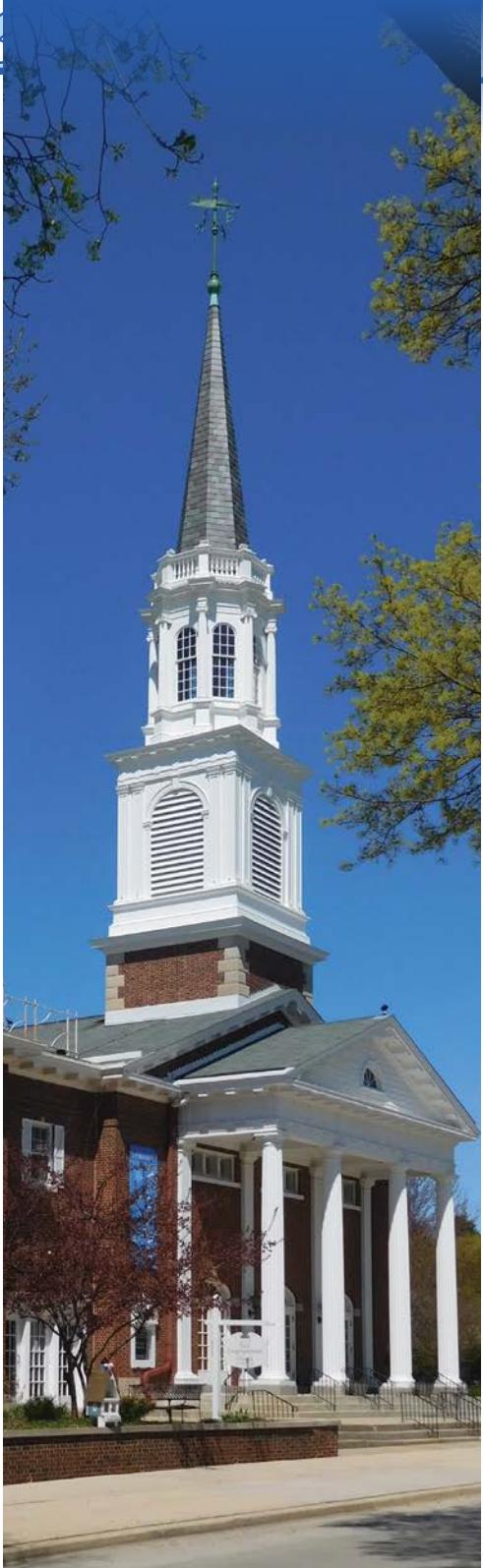


DECEMBER 2025

Volume 40 - Issue 11



THE COLUMNS

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
IN WAUWATOSA

The Congregational COLUMNS

A Message from Julie

By Rev. Julie Sheridan-Smith

The period from Advent through December 28th offers us all so many ways to worship, reflect, join in, reach out, sing, pray...light the Advent candles. You are invited to the Women's Advent Tea, Christmas Workshop afternoon, Children's Pageant (here and at the Congregational Home), special coffee fellowships, and an abundant array of creche scenes, including a live nativity during Breakfast with Baby Jesus. This issue of Columns includes a calendar of events as well as a variety of articles with dates, times and more details. Look for and share daily FCC Facebook postings of our Advent devotional pieces which many of you wrote.



You are reaching out in so many ways, including gifts for the Giving Tree, bag lunches for St. Vincent de Paul, responding to our special Christmas offering letter. We are grateful for your recent response and generosity to both our Thanksgiving special offering and Milwaukee Rescue Mission's Thanksgiving Dinner ministry.

We all will receive many gifts of the season here at First Church. On Sunday, December 21st at the 10:00 am Worship Service, we will receive the gift of amazing music, featuring the Chancel Choir, Junior Choir, Jubilation Ringers, and FCC Brass Ensemble. The brass choir will be in the Atrium to greet us before the 10:00 am Worship Service – Music Sunday.

Christmas Eve is a magical time at First Church. The highlight of our Family Worship Service at 4:00 pm is a play, presented by our youth. The 10:00 pm Candlelight Lessons & Carols service leads us to realize again how truly amazing it is that God chooses to come into the world in the flesh and with the hope that we choose Him.

All these wonderful opportunities are part of the cadence of December here, and it takes my breath away as I think of the amount of involvement so many of you jump into to make these moments happen, offering such a variety of events for all ages. Invite your friends to come and see!

I want to highlight a few additional things newer to us: Sunday, December 7 and 21 at 9:00 am, Adult Education will show the videos "The Shepherd: A Story of the First Christmas" and "The Messengers," a Christmas special of The Chosen television series, respectively.

On the evening of December 4, all ages are invited to a light supper at 5:30pm, followed by a 6:00 pm showing "The Messengers," a family-friendly film. Linger for discussion or head home before 7:00 pm. Please let me know if childcare would be helpful to you.

You also won't want to miss our second annual College/Young Adult Worship Service at 10:00 am December 28. Come hear these young adults as they talk about their journey. You will be moved.

Also, a brief "commercial" looking ahead: On January 10th at 4:00 pm, we are hosting Erin Walsh from Spark and Stitch Institute. Erin will share the latest evidence on topics like mental health, AI and its overuse in relationship to children and youth. This presentation is free and open to the community!

Let us enter into Advent together and see what God brings.

- Julie



Worship & Discovery

Women's Ministry

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

Join the group on Tuesday mornings from 8-9am 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.

Adult Education: The Story

Sundays, Dec. 7th & 21st from 9-10^{am} in the Lounge

Adult education will be offering two short films in December. The first -- "The Shepherd" -- will be shown on December 7th. It is a short film, created by Dallas Jenkins, which became the inspiration for "The Chosen," a television series on Netflix. The second film, "The Messenger," was created two years later as a Christmas special for "The Chosen," and will be shown on December 21st. Both family-friendly films are short (less than 40 minutes) and will start at 9:00 am. All are welcome.

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

Take a Break at the Women's Retreat at ChristPond

Women of First Church are welcome to join Patty Reddy for a retreat at ChristPond, a secluded place for spiritual growth and renewal. The retreat begins at noon on Friday, January 16th, and continues through 4 pm on Saturday, January 17th.

The retreat center offers a quiet, comfortable and relaxing atmosphere in a natural and secluded setting outside Random Lake. It takes about an hour to drive to ChristPond from Milwaukee, so you can stay for the entire event or drive up for a single day. ChristPond is located at N1599 Hwy 57, just north of Random Lake and 3 miles on the east side of Hwy 57, about 12 miles south of Plymouth.

The retreat house accommodates 16 overnight guests, so you're encouraged to let us know as soon

Men's Ministry

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

The Men's Ministry at First Church is a vibrant and growing fellowship. We meet at 9 am in LL2 on Wednesdays. In the past year we have read and discussed several books that have helped us on our faith journeys. The most recent book was *Practicing the Way: Be with Jesus, Become Like Him, Do as He Did* by John Mark Comer. The book concluded with practical ways to create a "Rule of Life" based on the words and actions of Jesus.

We are starting a new way of reading and understanding the Bible through the *IMMERSE Bible Reading Experience*. Heading into Advent and Christmas, we thought it appropriate to start with *MESSIAH*, the first book in the series relating to the New Testament.

Inspired by reading how frequently Jesus shared meals with his disciples and others nourishing their bodies and souls, in early November we continued our fellowship by sharing a meal at Café Hollander in the Wauwatosa Village.

If you are interested in joining our fellowship, please let Hank Collis know by calling the Church Office. Blessings to all!

Discovery is on hiatus during the month of December.

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

Office Telephone
414-258-7375

On-Call Minister
414-258-7378

Rev. Julie Sheridan-Smith
Senior Minister

Jim Harris
Administrator

Tonia Wallner
Director of Christian Education

Rhonda Kwiecien
Director of Music & Keyboard Artist

Jeremiah Cawley
Director of FCC Choir

Roxanne Trump-Miles
Director of Jr. Choir

Jillian Bruss
Financial Secretary

Marianne King
Office Coordinator

Cindy Walsh
Staff Support

Mark Lund
Facility Manager

Debbie Hayden
CE Assistant

Michael "Chip" Smith
Ministerial Intern

Cathy Denny
Columns Coordinator
sdenny1-cathy@wi.rr.com

First Congregational Church
1511 Church Street
Wauwatosa, WI 53213
(414) 258-7375

Like us on Facebook!

Operating Statement Summary

Year to Date as of October 2025

	2025	2024
PledgeBaseReceived	81.0%	76.0%
Pledge Income	\$445,848	\$397,558
Total Income	\$578,611	\$546,281
Total Expense	\$518,463	\$514,555
Net Income	\$60,148	\$31,726

Detailed financials available in the office

Tips for Year-End Giving

by J C Moore, Moderator



The Board of Stewardship and Benevolence is gratified by the "Estimate of Giving" cards that have been returned for 2026. If you have not returned your card to the Office, we encourage you to do so as soon as possible. Accurate pledge information will help the Budget & Finance Committee develop the 2026 budget.

As 2025 comes to a close, we want to make sure that we apply your pledge payments to the correct year. If you plan to prepay all or a portion of your 2026 pledge during December, please write 2026 on the memo line of your check, so that your contribution is applied to the correct year.

You are welcome to combine your pledge contribution with a donation to the Christmas Special Offering. Be sure to indicate on your check the amounts you want applied to each.

Any contribution to your 2025 pledge must be delivered to the Church Office no later than noon on Wednesday, December 31st to be included in your 2025 year-end statement. For online payment deadlines, please see the Online Giving instruction article. You will receive your 2025 year-end statement in early January.

Please call the Office at 414.258.7375 if you have any questions. Your financial support will make it possible for First Church to meet its operating budget and to support the benevolent needs of our community and the missionary work of the National Association of Congregational Churches in 2025.



Year End Online Giving

First Church offers secure, online giving. If you'd like to set up pledge contributions online, visit the FCC website (firstchurchtosa.org) and click on the Giving icon from the menu at the top of the page. To set up your account, go to the "For Members Online Contributions" box and click on the Login Page. Then click Create Account. If you already have an online account, use the same process, type in your username and password and click on Sign In. Click on the Giving option located in the blue bar at the upper left of the screen for Giving options and your Giving History.

If you plan on making an online contribution for 2025 and want it included on your year-end statement, please make your contribution by Friday, December 26th. There is typically a 3-business day lag between the time you enter your contribution and when the funds are received by our bank.

If you have any questions, please contact the church Office at 414.258.7375.

Benevolence Continues to Lift Up Others

by Tori Raddeemann

It is hard to believe that we are in the final month of 2025. The Board of Stewardship and Benevolence is blessed to extend generosity to organizations that make a meaningful impact in our community and beyond.

At the end of October, the Board voted to donate \$1,500 each to a number of different local food pantries, including Tosa Food Pantry, Tosa Cares, Hunger Task Force, Milwaukee Rescue Mission, and Nourish Community Food Centers. These gifts help ensure that families in need have access to nutritious meals and essential resources during the colder months. In addition, the Board approved an extra donation of \$1,000 to the St. Vincent de Paul Meal Program.

In November, we continued this spirit of giving by donating \$1,000 each to Running Rebels, Dryhootch, and Seafarer's Friend Mission—organizations that support youth development, veterans' well-being, and maritime workers. We also fulfilled our annual commitments to the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (NACCC) and the Wisconsin Congregational Association (WCA), strengthening our ties to the wider Congregational fellowship.

We hope you have had an opportunity to see the Giving Tree located in the Atrium of the church. This year's recipients for the Giving Tree are Bridge to Brighter, Friends of Milwaukee County Treatment Courts, and Milwaukee Homeless Veterans Initiative. If you have already chosen a tag to provide gifts for an individual or family, please return your unwrapped gifts and tag to church by Sunday, December 7th. There are still tags available for those who want to experience the joy of giving and hope to participate in the Giving Tree event.

As we look ahead to a new year, the Board warmly invites members to share ideas for future benevolence giving. A suggestion box and forms are available near the Benevolence Bulletin Board outside the Friendship Lounge. You are invited to submit recommendations and view a full list of organizations we have prayerfully supported. Your input helps us continue to live out our mission of service and compassion.

We are deeply grateful for the trust and generosity of our congregation, which makes this outreach possible. Together, we are supporting local, national, and global missions that reflect the values and Covenant of our church, serving as the hearts and hands that give with compassion to those in need.

Mother's Story: Battling Polio

Speaker: Mary Lopez

Tuesday, December 9
12:30 pm
in the Lounge
With coffee & dessert

Sign up at the Gathering Table in the Atrium.

Women's Circle

Consider the Christmas Special Offering

The Board of Stewardship and Benevolence has chosen to support the Milwaukee Rescue Mission, Happy Life Children's Home, and Panamerican Institute as beneficiaries of this season's Christmas Special Offering. Christmas is always a special time for children, and all three organizations help lift up children who are living in difficult circumstances.



Milwaukee Rescue Mission

Most of us are aware of the mission's work to support homeless and struggling individuals through nutritious meals, safe shelter, and clean clothing, along with job training, education, counseling, and treatment for addiction.

Fewer are aware of the mission's Joy House for women and single mothers with children, often victims of domestic violence. Joy House provides safe shelter, nutritious meals and life-changing help in a Christian-based environment. Some of the children at Joy House also attend Milwaukee Rescue Mission's Cross Training Academy, which offers at-risk kids a good education through academics and life lessons about morals and character through Christian teaching.

Happy Life Children's Home

Located in Nairobi, Kenya, Happy Life is a charity dedicated to providing a safe future to children that who have been abandoned. Nairobi's extreme poverty, health issues, family dysfunction and despair often make raising children a challenge. Babies are left on the roadside, in bushes, pit latrines, or on doorsteps with the hope someone will find them.



Little students at Happy Life.

Staff find these children and bring them to Happy Life, where they find home, education, healthcare and hope for adoption. Children who do not find a forever family remain at Happy Life until they are old enough and have the training to create a life for themselves.

Panamerican Institute

Edgar W. Welty founded Panamerican Institute in the early 1960s to provide high quality education to kids from low-income families in Tijuana. Without some kind of intervention, most will hang out on the streets, often learning behaviors that eventually land them in jail. The institute's goal is to prepare these young people for meaningful careers that will change the trajectory of their lives and help build a better community. Panamerican Institute is 100 percent funded by donations.



Panamerican students showcase the dance troupe.

We can help further the important work of all three organizations through our Christmas Special Offering. Please put your check in the Offering Plate or bring it to the Office.

Thanks!

Make a Joyful Noise Christmas Music Sunday

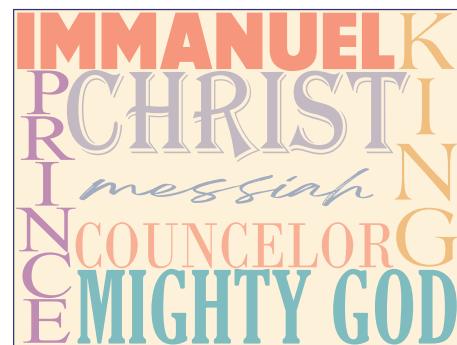
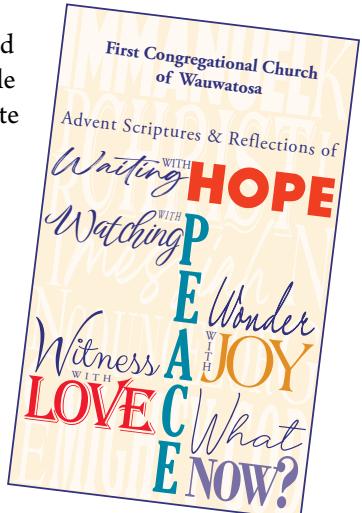
The FCC Music Ministry team is excited to present our annual Christmas Music Sunday on December 21st.

Begin your morning at 9:50 am in the Atrium enjoying some festive carols played by our own FCC Brass Ensemble! Then we'll gather for worship at 10:00 am in the Sanctuary, opening with the Jubilation Ringers. Our worship will be interspersed with music by the Junior Choir, Chancel Choir, and Jubilation Ringers, as well as scripture readings and a message by Reverend Julie.

Roxanne Trump-Miles, Jeremiah Cawley, and Rhonda Kwiecien invite you to this special service of music to celebrate the coming of the Christ Child.

The Greatest Gift of All

Amid the chaos of Christmas – the shopping and baking, parties and performances – it's easy to feel a little empty. Something is missing. Create space for the true meaning of Christmas. Pick up a copy of *Advent Scriptures and Reflections*. This beautiful Advent devotional was written by members of the First Church family and compiled by Patty Reddy. It offers a moment of grace each day through Advent, Christmas and beyond. Copies are available on the Gathering Table in the Atrium.



Celebrate the Joy of Advent

Our church community, friends, family and neighbors are welcome to join us for the Advent Tea on Saturday, December 6th at 2:00 pm in the Social Hall.

The gathering is a time to embrace the coming of Christmas through the reading of Scripture and the singing beloved carols with the fellowship of friends old and new.

Consider hosting a table for the tea. To learn more about hosting, contact Patty Reddy at patreddywauwatosa@gmail.com.

If you plan to attend, please sign up at the Gathering Table in the Atrium or call the First Church Office at 414.258.7375.

JUST FOR YOUTH

December 2025



Sunday School

December 7th, 14th, & 21st for ages 4 – 5th grade

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

Faith Finders

Monday, December 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

December 7th, 14th, & 21st for K-8th grades

Meet at 9:30^{am} in LL4. Children usually sing once a month.

Covenant Class

December 14th for 9th graders

We meet from 4:00-6:00^{pm} in the Friendship Lounge.

Pilgrim Fellowship (PF)

December 7th & 14th grades 6-12

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

Additional Youth Programming

For December, we will hold our youth gathering on November 30th.

We will meet from 4-6pm and end the gathering around 5:30.

December 7th in the Social Hall

Christmas Workshop - 3pm

followed by

Pizza Supper - 5pm

Workshop cost: \$5 per child for all crafts

Supper cost: \$5 for adults, \$2 for children

December 14th in the Social Hall

Breakfast with Baby Jesus - 9am

Join this First Church tradition of celebrating our children. Our families with young children are invited to this event, and they can wear their pajamas, bring their favorite stuffed animal, and enjoy a light breakfast and Christmas cheer.

Support our *Stop by our table*

Nov. 30th, Dec. 7th, 14th & 21st

Youth Mission Team

Collectivo
COFFEE



TAKE HOME
TODAY

Great
Hostess, Teacher
& Neighbor Gifts

Homemade
Peppermint Bark



Peppermint Bark \$10 Coffee \$17
Cocoa \$10

Bake a Gift for the Homebound

Christmas is an especially important time for First Church to reach out to members with obstacles that prevent them from attending in person. Care Board and Women's Circle will join forces, once again, to create packages of cookies for members who are homebound or in senior facilities. You are invited to help with this important ministry:

Thursday, December 11th – deliver home-baked (or purchased) cookies to the Catering Kitchen any time between 9:00^{am} and 3:00^{pm}.

Saturday, December 13th – Meet at 9:00 am in the Lounge to package the cookies.

Sunday, December 14th -- Following 10:00^{am} Worship Service, take a look at the cookies on a table in the Atrium. Consider delivering a package or two.

The cookies are a sweet, Christmas greeting to members of our church family and let them know that they are in our hearts.



Advent & Christmas 2025

Sunday, November 30 / First Sunday of Advent

Worship Service at 8:00 am.....Chapel
Worship Service at 10:00 am.....Sanctuary

Thursday, December 4

Supper and Viewing of The Messenger Christmas Special at 5:30 pmLounge

Saturday, December 6

The Names of Advent – Advent Tea.....Social Hall

Sunday, December 7 / Second Sunday of Advent

Worship & Communion Service at 8:00 am.....Chapel
Worship & Communion Service at 10:00 am.....Sanctuary
Deadline for Giving Tree Gifts – Deliver to the FCC Office by noon
Children's Christmas Workshop at 3:00 pm.....Social Hall
Children's Pizza Supper at 5:00 pm.....Social Hall

Thursday, December 11

Deliver cookies for the Care Board project from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm.....Catering Kitchen

Saturday, December 13

Package Cookies for the Homebound at 9:00 am.....Lounge
Children's Christmas Pageant at 10:30 am.....Congregational Home

Sunday, December 14 / Third Sunday of Advent

Worship Service at 8:00 am.....Chapel
Breakfast with Baby Jesus at 9:00 amSocial Hall
Worship Service and Christmas Pageant at 10:00 am.....Sanctuary
Kringle Koffee Fellowship at 11 amSocial Hall
Pick up Packaged Cookies for delivery to homebound.....Atrium

Music Sunday, December 21 /Fourth Sunday of Advent

FCC Brass Choir Plays Christmas Favorites at 9:45 am.....Atrium
Worship Service at 10:00 am.....Sanctuary
Cookies, Coffee & Creches at 11:00 am.....Social Hall

Wednesday, December 24 / Christmas Eve

Christmas Eve Family Service at 4:00 pm.....Sanctuary
Candlelight Lessons and Carols at 10:00 pm.....Sanctuary

The Nativity: From a Different Point of View

Experience the birth of Christ through the eyes of Mary and Joseph. On Thursday, December 4, Rev. Julie Sheridan-Smith will host a showing of "Christmas with THE CHOSEN: The Messengers." The video was a Christmas episode presented during The Chosen, a television series that dramatizes the life of Christ and is now an international phenomenon. Join us at 5:30 pm in the Lounge for a light supper. "The Messengers" will begin at 6:00 pm, followed by conversation. All ages are welcome. Come comfy, and feel free to invite friends.



Nolan Straza admires November 23rd's Pie Feast.

Two Christmas Coffee Hours



Let's Jingle with a Kringle

You know Christmas is on its way when the Board of Fellowship hosts its special Kringle Koffee Fellowship. Sunday, December 14th, Fellowship will offer several flavors of kringle during coffee hour. Join us at 11:00 am in the Social Hall for a slice of kringle and a hot cup of coffee. Yum!

Creches, Cookies and Coffee

On Sunday, December 21st, DdG Wakefield will help us celebrate the season with an amazing display of creches from the U.S. and other corners of the world. Enjoy home baked holiday treats while you browse creches that range from charming to a work of art.

Both Coffee Fellowships bring Christmas cheer to children young and old.



Great food and fellowship was enjoyed at the Stay Connected Luncheon on November 9th.



The First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa
1511 Church Street
Wauwatosa, WI 53213-2593

Dated Material - Please deliver immediately.

PRSR STD
AUTO
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
MILWAUKEE, WI
PERMIT NO. 5276

In This Issue

1 _____
A Message from Julie

2 _____
Worship & Discovery

3 _____
Tips for Year-End Giving
Benevolence Continues to Lift Up Others
Year End Online Giving
Mother's Story: Battling Polio

4 _____
Consider the Christmas Special Offering
Make a Joyful Noise
Christmas Music Sunday
The Greatest Gift of All
Celebrate the Joy of Advent

5 _____
Just for Youth
Bake a Gift for the Homebound

6 _____
Advent and Christmas 2025

7 _____
The Nativity: From a Different
Point of View
Two Christmas Coffee Hours

