

FEBRUARY 2026

Volume 41 - Issue 2

The Congregational COLUMNS

Moving into Our Church Future

"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."

Hebrews 11:1



I believe so many of you step into each day carrying faith and hope - sometimes with strength, sometimes with questions, and yet anchored in the Truth we receive as followers of Jesus.

Soon we will begin a Search and Call process for an Associate Minister. I am very interested to hear any thoughts you, the members, may have about this position. We will keep you all informed with the steps along the way.

It is hard to believe February is upon us with so much to offer. The Fellowship Board invites you to make a pot of chili or a delicious dessert to enjoy (and yes, compete) in the Annual Chili Cook-off and Dessert Bake-off on February 8. On the same day, Our Covenant Class youth will tell us about their experience with a different place of worship. With help from Patty Reddy, they will paint an Adirondak chair which they will later auction off for a benevolence project.

On Ash Wednesday, February 18, the sanctuary will offer a time of beautiful, reflective music (recorder, cello, piano, vocals), along with a cadence of scripture readings, hymns, time to pause, as well as receiving ashes. Beginning at 7:00 pm. Rev. Tesha Kathryn Urban will join me in leading the service, with Rhonda Kwiecien, Anthony Andronczyk, Brett Hanisko, and Tom Smith providing the music. You are encouraged to invite someone to join you as we begin the season of Lent and receive what the Spirit offers.

During the Lenten season, you are also encouraged to read and discuss *The Message of Jesus: Words That Changed The World* by Adam Hamilton. The author leads us in the exploration of six of the most important themes in Jesus' teaching, why they matter, and how they speak to us today. As Hamilton points out, Jesus' message is not only life-changing, but world-changing. Access the book from your favorite bookseller or let Julie know you would like one ordered. Read Chapter 1 before the first gathering please.

Sessions are offered at two different times: Sundays, February 22, March 1, 8, 15 and 22, at 11:15 am and Thursdays, February 26, March 5, 12, 19, 26 at 5:30 pm.

A recent practice for us during Lent has been to "take up" an opportunity to serve. On Saturday, February 21, we will meet in the church Atrium for prayer (and donuts) at 9:00 am and then try out a few of our ministries.

Opportunities are for all ages together: Upstairs in the Social Hall, make bag lunches for St. Vincent de Paul. In the Parlor, make plarn ("yarn" created from recycling plastic bags) and learn how to crochet the plarn into Mercy Mats for some homeless people. You could also head to the kitchen to prepare and assemble freezer breakfast meals for Bridge to Brighter's young men who have aged out of foster care.

There is also an offsite opportunity. Meet at the Congregational Home at 8:00 am to serve residents breakfast, transport them to in-house events, and chat with them. There will be a sign-up sheet on the Gathering Table with information as well.

Our March Columns will offer more about Holy Week and Easter, but please know we have what we hope will be deep, and engaging, experiences for our Lenten Sunday worship.

With Hope,
Julie

THE COLUMNS

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
IN WAUWATOSA



Worship & Discovery

Women's Ministry

*Tuesday, Feb. 3rd, 10th, 17th, & 24th
from 8-9^{am} in the Library*

The Women's Ministry is exploring the gospels, prayer, and some 40-day devotionals. Feel free to join the group any Tuesday, from 8:00^{am} to 9:00^{am} in the Lounge, as we grow in our knowledge and the expression of our faith. For more information about the current book or study in which we are engaged, contact Patty Reddy at Patreddywauwatosa@gmail.com.

Men's Ministry

*Wednesdays, Feb. 4th, 11th, 18th, & 25th
from 9-10^{am} in the Room LL2*

The Men's Ministry at First Church is a vibrant and growing fellowship. We meet at 9^{am} in LL2 on Wednesdays. .

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

Adult Education: The Story

*Sundays, February 1st & 15th
from 9-10^{am} in the Lounge*

We will continue our book/video study of *The Story* at 9:00^{am} in the Lounge, and continue to meet the 1st and 3rd Sunday of each month.

Patty Reddy, facilitator

Lenten Book Study With Pastor Julie

During the Lenten season, you are invited to read and discuss *The Message of Jesus: Words That Changed The World* by Adam Hamilton. The author leads us in the exploration of six of the most important themes in Jesus' teaching, why they matter, and how they speak to us today. As Hamilton points out, Jesus' message is not only life-changing, but world-changing. Access the book from your favorite bookseller or let Reverend Julie know you would like one ordered. Read Chapter 1 before the first gathering please.

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Discovery Hour Resumes with a Thought-Provoking Topic

*Sunday, February 8th & 22nd
from 9-10^{am} in the Lounge*

Discovery Hour launches its post-holiday sessions on Sunday, February 8th at 9:00^{am} in the Lounge with a thought-provoking presentation by speaker Elizabeth Carger — *United in Faith, Shaped by Story: How the Brain Makes Meaning— and Why Christians Misunderstand One Another*.

Elizabeth, who is a member of First Church, will offer a dynamic presentation on storytelling narratives and how we, as individuals, relate with one another in a complex world. How do we transition from a polarized world to healthy dialogue?

Have you ever wondered how we can worship the same Savior, read the same Bible, and yet see the world so differently? There is a reason so many of Jesus' teachings came in the form of stories: this is how the human mind makes meaning in a complex world. Drawing on insights from cognitive neuroscience, Elizabeth explores how the stories that shape us by influencing what we notice, how we interpret information, and how we understand one another affect us. By learning to listen for the stories beneath our differences, we can grow in empathy, communicate with greater depth, and remain rooted in a shared faith... even when we disagree.

Chip Smith, facilitator

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.

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Operating Statement Summary

Year to Date as of December 2025

	2025	2024
Pledge base received	103.0%	100.0%
Pledge Income	\$563,330	\$521,619
Total Income	\$733,004	\$717,749
Total Expense	\$685,451	\$663,379
Net Income	\$47,553	\$54,370

Detailed financials available in the office



Women's Circle Presents: Downsizing: You Can't Take It With You

Speaker, **Gail Rust from AARP**

Tuesday, February 10th ~12:30^{pm} in the Lounge

Learn important tips on decluttering and organizing, while exploring how streamlining your things could help you feel happier, less stressed, and more productive.

Please sign up at the Gathering Table in the Atrium for the program, dessert & coffee.

Comments from Our Moderator by J C Moore, Moderator



As the calendar turns over to a new year, it's hard to believe that my term as Moderator has come to an end. If I had to describe this time in one word, that word would be progress - in terms of church growth, connections to the community, and expanding the size and diversity of our ministry. In a time when many churches are shrinking or even closing, ours has continued to grow. Since 2023, 37 people have joined our congregation, 10 in the last year alone. The composition of our new members is varied including families, couples and individuals. They have not been reluctant to roll up their collective sleeves and get to work in support of the church, community and covenant. Of the 37, 19 have or will be serving on boards. The slate of new board members, which has been submitted for your vote during the Annual Meeting, includes six members who will be serving for the first time.

I believe our growth is directly related to how active and vibrant our church has been. While the leadership, energy and ideas of Reverend Julie and assistance of the office staff is key to our success, our boards and committees really make the magic happen. In his closing comments last year, past Moderator Randy Sitzberger discussed their good work. Following on that, I have tried to emphasize what the boards do and how hard they work doing it in my *Columns* articles. A year-end accounting of their hard work does not disappoint.

Care Board ministered to approximately 125 members who were unable to attend services in person due to physical or distance limitations through calls, visits, cards and prayer shawls. Deacons organized Lenten programs, decorated and organized the Sanctuary and ensured services went smoothly for a growing congregation led by Reverend Julie, and a variety of lay and outside liturgists. Fellowship hosted 10 different events, including meals, culinary competitions, and other special events – in addition to the weekly coffee hours. My waistline can attest to how well received these were. Christian Education – along with Tonia Wallner, Deb Hayden and a group of dedicated teachers, volunteers and lay leaders – organized weekly adult and youth educational activities, including Sunday School, VBS, PF, Faith Finders, book discussions and groups; not to mention special events like the mission trip, summer camp, Covenant class, and holiday events. Trustees managed our historical church building with a budget of over \$147,000, identified and acted on five new projects. They identified the need for after-hours staff to ensure the safety and security of the building and approved its use by 32 outside organizations.

Last but certainly not least, Stewardship and Benevolence distributed \$68,728 to 35 different charities world-wide. Moreover, it successfully ran the 2026 Stewardship Campaign resulting in nearly \$611,000 in pledged revenue, up \$47,000 from 2025. This will allow us to hire a much-needed part-time associate minister in the coming months. The importance of these efforts and the generosity of our congregation cannot be overstated.

Up until Reverend Julie's tenure, our church had a long history of two or even three ministers. While the congregation may be smaller than in years past, we are no less active. In some areas, like outreach, we have even stepped things up by hosting community events such as summer concerts, the Winter Farmers Market, outside speakers and others. We're doing a lot, and with the anticipated additional ministerial staff, I think we can do even more. Progress doesn't just happen. It's your dedication, volunteerism and generosity that make it happen.

That said, even with the new Associate Minister, we can't back off now. We've seen the boards take the initiative to cover areas and do things that staff could not. While we currently enjoy the leadership of Reverend Julie, and a robust staff, we must be wary of over-reliance on these scarce resources. We may not always have this level of staffing in the future. I encourage the boards to use the staff as a resource, but continue their own good work that has brought us this far. After all, the essence of Congregationalism is a church that is governed and run by the congregation.

I apologize for the length of this article, but there's a lot to talk about. Frankly it would be unfortunate if it were smaller. Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your Moderator. I look forward to the vision and direction that Reverend Julie and Moderator Ann Steinmetz Harris will provide us and the continued progress for our congregation in the coming year.

Celebrating an Incredible Pledge Campaign!

The Board of Stewardship and Benevolence is thrilled to share some amazing news with our congregation. Thanks to your overwhelming generosity and support, we have not only met our pledge campaign goal – we have exceeded it! This incredible achievement means we can begin the exciting process of finding an Associate Minister to join our church family.

As a board, we are deeply grateful to each and every one of you who participated in this campaign. Thank you to those who turned in your pledge cards, those who increased your pledges, and those who pledged for the very first time. Your commitment and faithfulness make all the difference. This campaign truly highlights our congregation's deep commitment to our church's covenant. The opportunity to bring on an Associate Minister opens the door to so many possibilities for the growth of our church and for providing additional support to Reverend Julie in her ministry. We believe this step will strengthen our community and help us continue to live out our Covenant in meaningful ways.

As we look ahead, we remain excited to focus on hands to serve and hearts to give, trusting in your continued faith and dedication as we work together to shape the future of our church. Your steadfast support is a blessing that allows us to dream boldly and serve faithfully.

Thank you for being part of this journey!

Your Board of Stewardship and Benevolence,

Tori Raddemann and Dylan Thomas, co-chairs, Hank Collis, Lanae Haertel, Deb Hayden, Elizabeth Strasma, Marty Vander Velde



Ladies & Gentlemen, Start Your Crock-Pots!

Whether you're there to compete, or simply to eat, the Chili Cook-off & Dessert Bake-off will add a little heat to your winter. Mark your calendars for Sunday, February 8th at 11:00 am in the Social Hall. You don't want to miss this popular event.

Cooks and bakers of all ages are encouraged to enter. Chilis may be traditional, vegetarian, Texan, Cincinnati-style, white, with or without beans... however you like to make it. The church provides tasting cups and spoons. If you submit a dessert entry, we should be able to cut or prepare your dessert in small, individual servings. It's a popular event, so make enough to go around.

First, second and third place winners are announced in both the chili and baking categories.

Once again, John Sgarlata will make bowls of his own award-winning chili available for those who still aren't full after sampling all the entries.

The sign-up sheet and instructions for entering are on the Gathering Table in the Atrium. Cost is \$5 for adults and \$3 for children ages 6 through 12. Children 5 and under eat free! Those who have provided a competing chili or dessert do not need to pay. The Chili Cook-off and Dessert Bake-off is hosted by the Board of Fellowship.



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JUST FOR YOUTH

February 2026



Sunday School

Feb. 1st, 8th, 15th & 22nd ages 4 – 5th grade

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

Faith Finders

Monday, Feb. 9th 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.

Covenant Class

Feb. 8th & 22nd 9th graders 4-6^{pm} Friendship Lounge

Junior Choir

Feb. 1st, 8th, 15th & 22nd K-8th grades at 9:15^{am} in LL4.
Children will sing on Sunday, February 9th

Pilgrim Fellowship (PF)

Sunday, February 1st, 8th, & 22nd grades 6-12

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

We will be holding monthly Youth gatherings, which will take place the first Sunday of each month from 4-6^{pm}. We will end each gathering with dinner around 5:30.

Secret Buddies Ready for Lent!



Easter is on April 5th and I am pleased to announce that Secret Buddies will be back for the Lenten season! This intergenerational pen pal program matches interested adult members with our 1st-5th grade children, and they share four letters throughout Lent, followed by a reveal the Sunday following Easter. This program has been so meaningful for all involved, so please let me know if you, or your child, would like to participate.

