

AUGUST 2026

Volume 41 - Issue 7

The Congregational COLUMNS

The Spirit of Change

By Rev. Julie Sheridan-Smith



It has always intrigued me that I write these articles several weeks before you will read them, and some things in our lives may shift before you read this article... simple things such as the high heat days we are in, as well as the smell of smoke in the air that stings our eyes. The fact is, we live in such a whirlwind time of news cycles that some of the things that sting at my (or your) heart today, may have changed or, unfortunately been forgotten by the time you read this.

You may or may not have heard that “church people” do not like or want change; that we treasure our history and practices. While those are important treasures, I think we do ourselves a disservice if we accept being people who are entrenched in keeping things the “way they are.” What I see in you, is a people who are flexible, open, and inquiring as to where the Spirit is directing us. I see it in your loving welcome to old friends, new ones, and visitors interested to learn more about who you are because of knowing them and seeking to know God.

I bring all of this up in gratitude to be able to serve with you, as well as what is happening with and for us, through the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches. For being part of the Congregational Way naturally embraces the variety of ways the Spirit inspires and moves through us as individuals, who intentionally gather together to be active in God’s church. This means that we are grown and changed together.

Hank Collis, your delegate at the NACCC Annual Meeting & Conference in Springfield, Massachusetts, is writing a more in-depth article about what we encountered at the meeting, but I will simply add some of my thoughts.

I sit on the Vitality Council, and one of our initiatives has been to offer grants each year to 10 churches to help enable a growth opportunity for them. It was exciting to hear the interesting experiments these churches took on, but also to see how others attending the conference received inspiration from this. The Growth Council reported on the scholarships they gave to a number of churches to enable them to host a VBS. There was standing room only for the workshop, *Is Your “Inherited” Church Getting in the Way of Being a “Relevant” Church*, and I, along with many others, have some take-away ideas to bring to our boards.

We heard a wonderful speaker on *Prophetic Preaching, Now More Than Ever* and another who presented *A Future and a Hope: What the Data Says About Congregations After the Pandemic*. Not only very interesting but inspiring in terms of the analysis and trajectory our churches taking. We heard from a panel of pastors across the country, who met monthly to explore revitalization needs of the local church which led to their presentation of *Revolutionary Models of Church Revitalization* – This just touches on a few things we experienced together and I simply want to say, “Wow, the Congregational Way and First Church are definitely on the move.”

Of course, there are a number of ministries and articles you will read in this Columns; Women’s and Men’s Ministry continuing, the building chock full of Vacation Bible School energy August 10-14 (be here August 16 to hear from some of those children). Good Vibes continues to nurture us every Tuesday evening from 5:30-6:15 in the —do stop in.

Meet me and others for a Labyrinth Walk at Hartung Park at 6:30 pm on August 6 and 27. And don’t forget to mark your calendars for Rally Sunday on September 13, for worship and the picnic after. This year, we are launching an exciting new Sunday School Curriculum that some of our teaching team helped to choose.

Yes, growing and changing feels good with all of you.

With Hope,

Julie

THE COLUMNS

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
IN WAUWATOSA

Worship & Discovery

Women's Ministry

*Tuesdays, August 4th, 11th, 18th & 25th
from 8-9^{am} in the Library*

Feel free to join the group any Tuesday, from 8:00^{am} to 9:00^{am} in the Library, 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. All are welcome! Come when you can.

Quiet the Mind and Listen to the Spirit: Walk the Labyrinth

Take a few hours this summer to transcend the usual chaos and focus on your spiritual self.

Join Rev. Julie Sheridan-Smith in walking the labyrinth at Hartung Park on Thursday, August 6th and August 27th at 6:30^{pm}.

You are encouraged to bring a lawn or camp chair for contemplation and conversation following the walk.

Hartung Park is at the corner of Menomonee River Parkway and Keefe. Follow the short path south to the labyrinth.

Men's Ministry

*Wednesdays, August 5th, 12th, 19th & 26th
from 9-10^{am} in Friendship Lounge*

This summer we are continuing our faith journey with some in-depth reading of the Bible. We meet every Wednesday at 9^{am} in LL2. Please join us for lively discussions and fellowship. Contact me through the Church Office if you have any questions. We'd love to have you join us.

Blessings to all!

Hank Collis

Discovery Hour & Adult Education

Discovery Hour and Adult Education are on hiatus for the summer and return in September.

Operating Statement Summary

Year to Date as of June 2026

	2026	2025
Pledge base received	44.0%	46.0%
Pledge Income	\$269,426	\$252,836
Total Income	\$382,500	\$360,600
Total Expense	\$330,733	\$351,768
Net Income	\$52,608	\$49,758

Detailed financials available in the office

Music Notes

Our music ministry team has an opening for an assistant keyboard artist! We are looking for someone to join our vibrant ministry to assist with two 8am services and one 10am service each month, September through May.

This individual would also accompany the choir rehearsal Thursday evening prior to their 10am Sunday service.

If you know of a qualified individual who would enjoy being a part of our music ministry team or if you would like additional information about the position, please contact me at rhonda@firstchurchtosa.org or call/text me at 262-544-4552.

Rhonda Kwiecien, *Director of Music and Keyboard Artist*

Music & Lunch Wednesday

*Music at 12 in the Sanctuary
\$5 Lunch at 12:45^{pm} available
for eating in or taking out*

August 19 ~ **Anthony Andronczyk**, *vocalist*



Anthony is tenor section leader and soloist at First Church. He's a member of Milwaukee Symphony Chorus, Bel Canto Chorus, and Aperi Animam. He earned his BFA in Versatile Voice from UW-Milwaukee and sings in multiple styles-from opera and musical theatre to funk, Motown and jazz.

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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Benevolence in Action



The Board of Stewardship & Benevolence has been busy exploring new ways to ensure that our church's benevolence and outreach efforts continue to reflect God's call to serve others. As part of that commitment, we will be inviting the congregation to participate in a Benevolence and Outreach Priorities Survey this fall. The survey is designed to help us understand which areas of ministry and community support you feel are most important for First Congregational Church to focus on in the years ahead.

Rather than asking members to rank specific organizations, the survey will focus on broader areas of impact, including food security and basic needs assistance, housing stability and homelessness prevention, support for children, youth, and families, senior care, veterans and military families, education and mentoring opportunities, and recovery second-chance programs. Through this process, we hope to prayerfully discern where God is calling our congregation to make the greatest difference.

Electronic copies of the ranking form will be distributed in early September, and paper copies will be available beginning on Rally Sunday, September 13. The survey will remain available for several weeks, so that all members have an opportunity to participate. We

encourage everyone to take a few moments to share their thoughts and perspectives as we seek to align our outreach efforts with the passions and values of our church family.

In other benevolence news, the Board recently approved support for several organizations, including Wauwatosa Elementary School Community Food Pantries, Forward Scholars, ChildVoice, and Fishers of Men Mission in Mexico. The Board also provided supplies for the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches's Intergenerational Mission Project, helping to fill "ditty bags" for Seafarer's Friend. Additionally, members continue to explore opportunities to support local storm recovery efforts, community ministries, and volunteer-based outreach initiatives.

As we continue planning for the upcoming stewardship season, we remain grateful for the generosity, compassion, and servant-hearted spirit of this congregation. Together, through prayerful discernment and faithful action, we can continue to share Christ's love with our neighbors near and far.

Thanks,

Tori Raddemann, Chair

Board of Stewardship and Benevolence

On the Road to Lay Ministry *By Hank Collis*

I just finished my second year of studies for the Lay Ministry Training Program. The focus this year was on the "nuts and bolts" of being a pastor of a church. We took our basic knowledge of the Bible and theology and learned how they influence interpretations of the Bible. This was followed by study of the Congregational Way, which included a study of early Congregational leaders such as Horace Bushnell (1802 – 1876). This course gave me a better understanding of why we are, and have remained, Congregationalists.

Part of my course work included digging into the archives of First Church. This fascinating study had a wealth of information about FCC's founding, how we developed our first creeds and covenants, and how they changed over the years while staying true to the Congregational Way.

The next section of the training included the basics of preaching and how to construct (and deliver) a sermon. Our assigned scripture passage was Luke 19:1 - 10, the story of Zacchaeus searching for Jesus and being called down from the tree. The primary emphasis of this course was how to research the lectionary and commentaries so we can apply the message of the scripture texts to our everyday lives.

The next two courses were on "Decision Making the Congregational Way" and "Conflict Management for Churches." There is definitely a relationship between these two topics as decisions that are made can result in conflicts which need to be addressed in a Christian manner.

The next course focused on how to structure an order of worship that included the celebration of Communion. I learned how the eucharist (a celebration for Christ's rising), Lord's Supper (a memorial of his death), and communion (a celebration of unity) relate to each other. They are the same actions but have different concepts of the sacrament. The final course was on "Pastoral Care and Pastoral Ethics". We read case studies about problems that could arise in a church. We were asked how we would handle these problems in a Congregational Christian Way. We learned that the

Congregational Christian approach is not the "business or military way" where actions can be dictatorial. It is a much more open and Christian way to confront issues using Jesus's language and thoughts to resolve issues. One of the key lessons I learned is that the pastor is not a psychologist, but a theologian who guides people toward good Christian thoughts and actions.

I am looking forward to my third and final year in the Lay Ministry Training Program as we dig deeper into the practical applications of becoming a Christian Pastor. My goal is to be able to assist Reverend Julie in her pastoral role at First Congregational Church and to be a part of the Great Commission to spread God's Word to the world.



Care Board Update



In addition to hosting the "Staying Connected" Luncheon in November, Care Board will visit and send cards to some of our members who cannot attend church regularly. We send sympathy cards to those who have lost family members and also send gift cards to our college students twice a year.

Care Board also facilitates a communion service monthly at Harwood Place with several of our members who live there, as well as non-members who like to join us. Reverend Julie provides a short worship service, following which we enjoy a time of fellowship, serving cookies and coffee. Everyone is welcome to join us on the third Wednesday of each month at 10:30 am at Harwood Place. If you have questions, feel free to contact the church Office.

Roxanne Trump-Miles, Chair
Board of Congregational Care

Mission Trip 2026

This year's mission trip was a unique one, as Hosanna Industries was unable to accommodate our group. So instead, early on Monday, June 15th, our mission team gathered at FCC and headed to Mt. Morris Camp for two days of service. With a nice crew of nine youth and three adult chaperones, we loaded up our minivans for the trek to the Wautoma area.

We arrived at 10:00am, settled in, and participated in some icebreakers with the youth from Ozaukee Congregational Church. We took a tour of the grounds to see our projects, had lunch, and then got started. Our crew prepared and painted a handful of firewood boxes and a bunch of picnic tables, weeded the prayer labyrinth, and painted lines in the parking lot. There was time for a dip in the pool late in the afternoon, followed by tacos for dinner, a large group game, and devotions & singing around the campfire.

On Tuesday, we spent the morning rejuvenating the prayer labyrinth with fresh gravel. It was a lot of heavy lifting and raking, but it turned out beautifully. When we finished, our crew walked the labyrinth and had lunch. The rain came in the early afternoon, but after it stopped, our crew split into three groups to put the final touches on the labyrinth, rake a woodsy part of the camp, and clean the hiking trails. It was another productive day, and Mt. Morris showed their appreciation by buying us Cristiano's pizza for dinner.

Wednesday was our last full day together, so after breakfast, we cleaned the Mt. Morris lodge and got on the road back to Wauwatosa. After lunch at Chick-fil-A, we dropped our bags off at First Church and then caravanned down to St. Vincent's for a long afternoon of service. The tasks and projects were varied and all so important - sweeping and mopping the floor, setting up tables and chairs for dinner, preparing silverware, and organizing Father's Day "goodie bags" to be handed out over the weekend. We also had a handful of "sous chefs" slicing and dicing green peppers, broccoli, tomatoes, and potatoes. After learning more about St. Vincent's mission and outreach services, we served dinner, poured drinks, and connected with those who came for a warm, nutritious meal. It was wonderful giving back to our own community, especially to an organization that First Church supports monthly with bagged lunch preparation.

After dinner, devotions, and a sleepover on Wednesday night, we had breakfast on Thursday and caravanned to Glendale and Just One More Ministry, a food bank that "rescues" food from going into landfills. JOMM partners with over 75 churches, restaurants, and non-profit organizations to get food to the homeless, veterans, elderly, and battered women and children. Their warehouse is HUGE and absolutely full of food to be distributed. We spent time sorting large crates (known as gaylords) of frozen and refrigerated food for more efficient distribution. We were also able to connect with the JOMM staff to learn more about their mission and philosophy, which is quite inspiring.

We know that it is helpful to learn about the service projects from the week, however hearing directly from our volunteers is more meaningful:



"This trip was filled with new experiences and friends. It was a privilege to grow in my faith and share with other believers!"

Charlie Wills

"For my first mission trip it was a load of fun! It was awesome cleaning up the camp that I love going to in the summer. It was a great time."

Tanner Wakefield

"The mission trip is a great experience to learn to do many new things, like adding siding to a house, painting things like picnic tables and wood boxes, and adding gravel to a prayer labyrinth. The mission trip is also an amazing chance to grow in your faith as you are serving God and being called to live like Him."

Sophie Zempel

On behalf of the 2026 Mission Team, we want to share our love and appreciation to our First Congregational Church members who bought coffee and peppermint bark at Christmas time, donated to our mini auction, and supported the team with prayers and well wishes....it meant the world to us!

Vacation Bible School (VBS)

Join Our Buddies



Tango



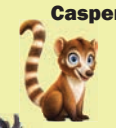
Dottie



Seymour



Howie



Casper



Tia



August 10th-14th • 9-12^{NOON}

Beneath a canopy of chattering birds and howling monkeys, kids plunge into a lifelong adventure of discovering the nature of God. They'll explore what it means to be rooted in relationship with God, their creator, a safe place in life's storms.

Registration form on page 7

WCA Camp 2026- The Best Week of the Year



We had another incredible year at WCA Summer Camp! It was an amazing experience for the 43 youth and 13 staff in attendance. We had a strong Wauwatosa presence, sending 14 youth (who invited 3 additional friends and family members) and 4 adults as representatives from First Church. I was honored to be Camp Administrator, Molly Rowbottom directed Mini Kamp with her friend Dennis as her Assistant, and Sandy Huitink served as Camp Nurse. The theme was JESUS THE DIRECTOR (Lights! Camera! Action!), and our activities were held at Mt. Morris Camp and Conference Center in Wautoma from July 12th-18th. The weather was hot, and yet, the campers and staff found ways to make it a beautiful week to be at camp!

FCC high schoolers Elena Foat, Caleb Wakefield, his cousin Landon Jaycox, and Sophie Zempel all enjoyed the time with their Senior High crew throughout the week, and Elijah Jones “moved up” to participate with this group as well. Abby Durham, Maia Foat, Peter Jones, Robin Thomas, her friend Ava Ardellini, Tanner Wakefield, and his cousin Oliver Jaycox all had fun with the Junior High team. Grace Durham, Rachel Jones, Warren Kroner, Kellen Marquardt, and Alessio Ramirez had a blast with Molly, Dennis, and their new friends in Mini Kamp.

While we worshiped together twice a day, the large and small group programming was done by age levels. The Scripture lessons for program were mostly parables, including the Parable of the Sower, the Good Samaritan, the Lost Sheep, the Prodigal Son, and the Workers in the Vineyard, along with Jesus Calling His First Disciples, The Greatest Commandment, and The Last Supper. The campers were able to see how these “stories” from the Bible can be relevant in our world today.

There was also a cool all-camp activity each day called BLOCKBUSTER JAMBOREE. There were fun team competitions that had our campers running, jumping, and splashing to reach their goals, and other days that had the teams playing trivia. Each team had a mix of boys and girls from the Mini Kamp, Junior High, and Senior High levels to encourage connections across the camp. It was fun watching the campers of all ages working together and having fun!

It is easy to share positive feedback about this transformative week as a discerning adult, however sharing testimonials from the minds and hearts of our FCC youth seems more appropriate....

“My experience at WCA Camp was amazing, and I can see why kids say it is the best week of the summer. I made a lot of new friends and deepened my faith. My favorite parts of camp were skit night, worship, and the deck party. It was lit, and I can’t wait to go again next year!”

Elena Foat

“I have so much fun at camp every year. I love seeing my friends and I feel so close to God the whole week. Thank you for this camp.”

Warren Kroner

“Camp meant so much to me because I met new people and created new friendships. Being in Senior High was great because I was with Caleb and he’s like a brother to me, and building a brotherhood with all my other friends there meant a lot. We can all grow in our faith and connect as one. Camp is such a great place and I feel so loved and appreciated there.”

Elijah Jones

“Camp is one of the best weeks of the summer. It allows you to reconnect with friends you only see once a year, participate in activities you normally don’t do, and most importantly, helps you grow your relationship with God. Singing in worship has to be the best part of camp, as everyone comes together as one and sings praises to God.”

Sophie Zempel

“My week at church camp is always one I look forward to. Camp is filled with fun activities, worship, campfires, laughter, and songs. At camp, I learn more about my faith and my relationship with God. I am so excited to go back next summer and many summers to come.”

Abby Durham

“Camp meant a lot to me because it has brought me closer to God and made me feel welcomed and loved. And I met so many new and amazing people that I look forward to getting to know more. It also taught me the importance of the fruits of the spirit.”

Peter Jones

“Camp was a very fun experience as a first timer. I loved singing my heart out and showing my talents!”

Alessio Ramirez

“Church camp has always been my favorite week of the year, and this year didn’t disappoint. It was full of fun times and memorable moments. From the way that the leaders made worship and organized activities fun to the deep conversations I had in small group and cabin devotions made for a great week. I couldn’t recommend this camp more.”

Caleb Wakefield

“Camp made me feel closer to God, and it helped me understand more of the Bible during the teachings and worship. I liked how all the people were really nice and kind. My favorite activity was the pool. Camp was my favorite part of the year!”

Rachel Jones

The welcoming nature of camp, where faith, fellowship, and fun are central to every activity, have a lasting impact on friendships and strengthening relationships with God. This continues to be one of my favorite weeks of the year, and I’m blessed to learn, grow, and connect with wonderful youth and adults. I hope to have even more First Church campers join us next year!

Blessings, Tonia

Behind the Scenes: Recognizing Our Sunday School Volunteers

By Anne Steinmetz Harris, Moderator

Our Sunday School staff isn't only dedicated, it is hesitant to talk about themselves. Still, I was able to coax a few more of our staff to help us get to know them better.

Sarah Blake

I'm Sarah Blake, and I started volunteering with Youth Ministry this year in the K4, K5 and 1st grade room. I also serve on the Board of Christian Education. I grew up here and was very involved in Sunday School and PF. Now that I have a son growing up, I felt it was important to continue my involvement. I've been on many Boards at First Church, but am really enjoying experiencing the volunteer side of youth ministry.

Tori Raddemann

My name is Tori Raddemann and my husband, Kurt, four children, (Addison, Maura, Jude, Mabel) and I love being part of the First Church family. First Church has been a huge part of my entire life. I was raised in the church and have very fond memories of events and friends that I have from growing up here.

It has always been important for me to have faith as a cornerstone when raising my own family. I feel so lucky that my daughters are getting to experience all the amazing youth programs as well.

I have been teaching Sunday School for the past five years and have loved getting to know all the kids and watching them grow up. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to spend time with these wonderful little people!

Sarah DeYoung

I'm Sarah DeYoung and am currently filling in when needed in the Nursery and Sunday School. After about 15 years of teaching Sunday School and leading Children's Discovery Hour, I get a bit of a withdrawal from those little ones. And though our 25- and 28-year-old sons are still our "kids," they just don't like the kid songs and nursery rhymes I love to sing as much as they once did. My 2 cents: each parent should spend one Sunday each year being a helper in their child's Sunday School classroom. It's a gift to your child and yourself.



Sarah Blake (left) and Molly Rowbottom lead story time.



Tonia Wallner, Director of Christian Education, and helpers Robin Thomas and Sophie Zempel.



Sunday School teacher Lanae Haertl with husband Josh and children, Logan (8), Jovie (5), and Riley (2)

Thanks once again to ALL the volunteers who support our Youth Ministry:

Sarah Blake, Patty Bartholf, Judy Conner, Cindy Davis, Sarah DeYoung, Barb Dunham, Lanae Haertel, Dylan Hayden, Genesse Hornung, Charisse Kroner, Les Lafernier, Roxanne Trump Miles, Kurt Raddeman, Tori Raddeman, Patty Reddy, Molly Rowbottom, Diane Saeger, Bella Sanders, Gunner Sgarlatta, Maddie Sgarlatta, Randy Sitzberger, Mychale Thomas, DdG Wakefield, and Jennifer Wakefiel

And lots of kudos to Tonia Wallner and Deb Hayden for coordinating them all!



Maddie Sgarlatta and Gunner Sgarlatta lead the class in a coloring project.



Tori Raddeman (left) and Genesse Hornung (middle) lead a discussion.

Join Our Buddies...

Beneath a canopy of chattering birds and howling monkeys, kids plunge into a lifelong adventure of discovering the nature of God. They'll explore what it means to be rooted in relationship with God, their creator, a safe place in life's storms.



A fun-filled week!

August 10th-14th • 9-12^{NOON}



Name of child(ren) _____ Grade _____ Entering in Fall _____

_____ Grade _____ Entering in Fall _____

_____ Grade _____ Entering in Fall _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____

Zip _____

Email _____

Allergies/Health _____

Parent Name (s) _____ Home Phone(s) (_____) _____

Cell Phone(s) _____ Work Phone(s) (_____) _____

Emergency Contact _____ Emergency Phone (_____) _____

Cost: \$10.00/first child; \$5.00/each additional child; \$20/maximum per family

☐ Yes, I am interested in helping out during VBS. *Please check all areas of interest.*

☐ teaching ☐ science/imagination ☐ games ☐ where needed

☐ While volunteering, I will need childcare for my children not yet old enough to participate in VBS.

How did you hear about our Vacation Bible School Program?

☐ I belong to the church ☐ I am a guest of _____

☐ Other _____

Photographic Release

I, (print) _____
give consent for any photograph(s) of my child(ren) to be used for promotional purposes.

Signed: _____

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Welcome to Lynn!

Lynn Strong joined First Congregational Church on May 31st during the 8am Worship Service.

Lynn came upon First Church through a book group with Z Schaefer, and then the relationship extended to other areas and book groups.

Lynn has been married to Bob Linscott for 33 years. Bob grew up here in Wauwatosa. Lynn was raised in Wisconsin and lived in Colorado from 1973-2013. She moved back here in 2013 to be with family.

Retired since 2015, Lynn and Bob now spend time training their new puppy Corky. She enjoys swimming, walking, and reading. She does note that she had a stroke in 2014 and has some left side challenges, which she works on daily.

Lynn looks forward to participating in the church, obtaining more knowledge, participating in book groups or other organizations that help others.



Game Night and Picnic!



The Board of Fellowship invites you to an evening of fun and food on Tuesday, August 18th, at 6:30^{pm} in the FCC Parking Lot.

Once again, John Sgarlata will prepare grilled sausages and his delicious 5-Cheese Tortellini Salad. Please bring a salad, side dish or dessert to pass. Lemonade and water will be provided. Games will include pickleball (Bill Gaernter will provide some paddles and balls) and Cornhole.

Cost is \$8 per person or a maximum cost of \$20 per family. Please sign up at the Gathering Table in the Atrium. You are welcome to put your payment in one of the provided envelopes and drop it in the church Office mail slot.

We look forward to seeing you!