

SEPTEMBER 2026

Volume 41 - Issue 8

The Congregational

COLUMNS

Committed in Hope, Growing Our Faith, Giving Together

By Rev. Julie Sheridan-Smith



Ah September! It has been a wonderful and vibrant summer, and some of the most beautiful Midwest weather wraps around us as we begin again with the patterns of Fall: Children, youth, and adults are moving into new classrooms and adventures, including here at church. On Rally Sunday, September 13, we are excited to re-engage worship with the full choir and start to work with a new curriculum chosen by our Board of Christian Education. We are so grateful for the team of people who commit to leading these sessions and loving our children. We do need a few more adult volunteers to provide a second adult in each classroom about once a month. Please contact Tonia Wallner or Deb Hayden if that is you. Our Covenant Class will begin with an afternoon retreat August 12, and then our twice-monthly sessions from 4:00 to 6:00 pm on Sunday afternoons kick in. Plan to stay after worship on Rally Sunday for lots of good food and conversation on Ridge Court.

September 20th, the Stewardship drive begins and throughout the fall you will hear about what it means for this church to be strong, stable, and growing in faith place, and how you help make this so. This is also the day our 8th Chapel Servicereturns with renewed energy to invite others into a brief, intimate, spiritual yet, informal experience.

At the end of the month listen in as each board tells us about their intentions for the coming year on Congregational/Program Sunday. This past June we all met together continuing our process of listening through scripture and what we heard through each other. We considered areas of growth or waning together and how this will guide ways we respond to what we are hearing.

Your Moderator, Ann Harris offers a wonderful summary below. May we all be committed in hope to growing and giving together.

With Hope, Julie

Benevolence & Stewardship gives 10% of our church's budget (based on your pledges) to over 25 organizations locally and internationally. You've heard from some of them during our Sunday services. Spoiler Alert: to focus our giving on the types of needs most important to the congregation (e.g. homeless, hunger, vets, families/children, rehab, elderly, education, etc.), you will be asked for feedback in September. Look for the survey in church or online. Benevolence & Stewardship is listening for where God's spirit is leading and returning to God a portion of God's gifts.



Christian Education (CE) activities are vibrant and growing. There is always something new going on – from Sunday School Teacher Teams to VBS to starting a new format for Covenant Class. CE is not just for our youth, but includes Women's and Men's Ministry, Discovery Hour and book group discussions. Spoiler Alert: They will start using a new Sunday School Curriculum this fall! All that they do helps us grow in the knowledge and expression of our faith.

Congregational Care reaches out with compassion to those in need. This translates into cards, visits, flowers and calls to members of our congregation. The Staying Connected Lunch invites members who can't readily attend services to gather in fellowship. On the third Wednesday of the month, Care Board and Reverend Julie provide "Communion and Chat" at Harwood Place. They invite you to join them. Spoiler Alert: In addition to sending gift cards to our high school grads, Care Board soon will be sending birthday cards to our Sunday School youth. Their care covers all ages!!

Deacons support our Covenant in all areas of our worship experience every Sunday, as well as all special Lenten and Advent services. Spoiler Alert: They are looking for ways to reinvent

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THE COLUMNS

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
IN WAUWATOSA

Worship & Discovery

Women's Ministry

*Tuesdays, September 1st, 8th, 15th, 22nd & 29th
from 8-9^{am} in the Library*

Come join us 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 Patreddyauwatosa@gmail.com. All are welcome! Come when you can.

Adult Education

Adult Education will begin Sunday, October 4th, in the Lounge from 9^{am} to 9:45^{am}. We will meet the first and third Sunday of each month and prepare ourselves for worship, as we read the scriptures of that day and reflect on what we hear, and how we might be called to apply these sacred words. All are welcome. All you need is a Bible and open ears to hear the Spirit's voice. Feel free to contact Patty Reddy with any questions.

Men's Ministry

*Wednesdays, September 2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd & 30th
from 9-10^{am} in LL2*

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

Discovery Hour is on hiatus and return later this fall.

Operating Statement Summary

Year to Date as of July 2026

	2026	2025
Pledge Base Received	50.0%	47.0%
Pledge Income	\$309,058	\$279,237
Total Income	\$425,405	\$388,548
Total Expense	\$391,483	\$364,916
Net Income	\$33,923	\$23,632

Detailed financials available in the office

Join Us for Enlightening Programs & Good Fellowship

All are welcome to Women's Circle on Tuesday, September 8th, at 12 noon. The featured speaker is Carol Bannen from The Wauwatosa Historical Society. Lunch will be served. Cost is \$5. Please sign up at the Gathering Table in the Atrium.

Women's Circle meets monthly, September through April, with the exception of December, when we pack and deliver Christmas cookies to homebound members. Each meeting offers a guest speaker representing a variety of interests and topics.

All are welcome to attend individual meetings or become a member. Annual dues are only \$20. Money collected during the year is used to purchase something that will enhance or fill a need at First Church. We recently bought the faux plants for the Atrium!



Update: Associate Minister Search

The Search & Call Committee has been actively communicating our opening for a part-time Associate Minister. We are pleased to have received a number of applications and have started the interview process.

Though we have begun to interview candidates, we are continuing to network within and outside of local religious communities, as well as advertise our opening online and in *The Congregationalist*, the magazine of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (NACCC).

If you are aware of anyone who may be interested, please encourage them to apply. There is a flyer describing the position on the Gathering Table in the Atrium.

John Griffith, *Chairman, Search Committee*

First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa • 1511 Church Street Wauwatosa, WI 53213 • 414-258-7375

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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NACCC Annual Meeting and Conference



The 72nd Annual Meeting & Conference of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches was held in Springfield, Massachusetts, from June 27-30, 2026.

The theme for this year's meeting was "Hope and a Future", and it delivered on that message! Whenever I attend a conference like this one, I want to clone myself so I can experience the totality of all of the workshops and breakout sessions. There was so much going on that it was difficult to choose just one workshop per time slot. There were occasions when a conversation that started over a meal continued beyond the scheduled break time and you forgot you were supposed to be attending a workshop!

The experience that most impressed me was how we came together to help one another. This voluntary Association assembles every year to exchange ideas, hear our issues, and help our fellow churches weather the storms while also celebrating our successes. The workshops were inspirational and full of ideas about how we can fulfill the "Great Commission" and take the Word of Christ to the world. The workshops were not set up as lectures, but as interactive events that enabled open discussion. As a result, we could see how we differed in our approaches to resolution but we had a common goal; to worship God through Christ.

Pastor Carol Taylor from Beloit, WI, led a workshop on "Praying the Psalms" which I found very enlightening. We each were given a random verse of a Psalm when we entered the workshop room. Each person was then encouraged to share how they pray with the Psalms and how the verse we were handed would lead us to prayer. I heard some very moving stories of "witnessing" the Psalms. Even though the verses were randomly distributed, each person who shared a story had a connection to the verse they were given when they entered the workshop.

Jessie Grabill, from Convoy of Hope, led a workshop that outlined how a church can serve a community by planning a year of mission work. She provided a guide that could be used to create the foundation for a church's mission. Convoy of Hope has a website that includes a series of videos and downloadable worksheets to help churches plan a year of mission. Participants at each table worked together to complete the "Mission Resource Kit Starter Guide" which is also downloadable from their website. While FCC does not have a formal planning guide, we do accomplish many of the resource kit's objectives. Participants at my table also shared how their church funded their benevolence annually. I described how FCC's benevolence funds are determined with input from the congregation and based on 10% of our operating budget with planned benevolence distributions made throughout the year. The participants at the table were impressed that we approach our benevolence this way. In contrast, some of the participant's churches wait until the end of the year to determine what they can give based on what funds are remaining. One of the participant's

churches only announces a "need" and lets the congregation provide what they can to satisfy that given "need". I found that an interesting approach to stewardship and benevolence.

Two of the Plenary sessions concentrated on "Prophetic Preaching" which focused on the goal of "not getting something said, but getting something heard." Reverend Douglas Stivison outlined how to craft a sermon that is a "Long, Loving, Look" at reality that addresses the world through scripture. During the balance of the session, he outlined how to bring the Gospel to life in the congregation without "tribal politics" and without taking sides in controversial issues.

The Intergenerational Mission Project was a joint project with the young people of HOPE, who were holding their Annual Meeting at a local college campus. The project this year was an "assembly line" where to fill "ditty bags" for the Seafarers' Friend Mission in Boston. The bags will be distributed to merchant sailors visiting ports on the East Coast from Boston up to Maine. FCC donated many of the items that were stuffed into the bags, including pocket Bibles and hats and scarves knitted by FCC's Purls of Wisdom. The stack of scarves and hats were very colorful and will be appreciated by the seafarers.

The National Association supports a number of missions and it is always inspirational to hear and see their work. One of the new missions of the NA is "Child Voice". This mission is centered in Africa and focuses on children orphaned by war. They presented a video about a young family who is headed by a teenage boy. He accepted responsibility for his siblings and ensures they are fed each morning, and are dressed in clean clothes every day before they head off to school. This young man could not do all of this without help from "Child Voice." This is a very worthy mission that gives real hope to young children affected by the wars in Africa.

There were two presentations by representative of the Congregational Library: One was a breakfast meeting that gave an overview of the work of the Library. They addressed the importance of maintaining church records and archiving them so the history is not lost. The collection of the Library is quite extensive, going back to the Mid-1800s. The second presentation was on the research of early Congregational Pastors and their sermons and how they were involved in the lead-up to the Revolutionary War. FCC also received recognition and accolades for being the primary mover in the founding National Association 72 years ago.

Next year's Meeting and Conference will be in Lansing, Michigan. I encourage FCC members to consider attending the Conference and Meeting. The relationships, networking, and "idea sharing" is well worth the time and the "short" drive to Lansing.

Hank Collis,

Delegate to the Annual Meeting and Conference

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our 8:00^{am} service to reach out to others who may be looking for a smaller, alternative worship experience. So yes, you see them ushering and serving Communion, but Deacons are always listening for how the Spirit is leading our worship experience.

Fellowship is all about bringing our church community together to share, not just food (think Coffee Hour, Pie Fest, Chili Cook-Off, Quiche & Cookies, Comfort-Culture Potluck, Ice Cream Social, Easter Pancake Brunch), but our lives and our stories in a family of faith. The work of this Board provides a way for us to express our love and grow in our understanding of each other. Spoiler Alert: They are listening to all of us for ways to connect us as followers of Jesus Christ. Their work is about the tie that binds.

Trustees not only are busy keeping an 184-year-old building in good

repair they are proactively looking to the future. This includes planning for HVAC systems and reviewing security needs of the church. Spoiler Alert: the biggest project in their multi-year plan is refurbishing the organ. Actually, it's the organ leathers that are coming to the end of their useful life after 50 years of service. Simplistically, organ leathers are what open and close the organ pipes to make the sound that allows Rhonda to create music every Sunday. You will hear more about this project in coming months.

This is just a mid-year snapshot of each Board, what they are planning for the coming year and how each supports our Covenant. Did you catch the Spoiler Alerts? The Boards will share more on Program Sunday, September 27th. To close, let me add that the Boards will be looking for new members to join them in 2027. Might that be you?

Ann Steinmetz Harris, Moderator

JUST FOR YOUTH

September 2026



Sunday School

September 13th, 20th & 27th 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 14th 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 20th & 27th for K-8th grades Meet at 9:30^{am} in LL4. Children usually sing once a month.

Covenant Class Starting on September 13th for 9th graders

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

Pilgrim Fellowship (PF)

September 13th & 27th grades 6-12

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

Youth Gatherings

Meet the first Sunday of each month from 4:00-6:00^{pm}, with dinner at 5:30^{pm}. Watch for date information.

RAINFOREST FALLS VBS – A Week of Wild Exploration!



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 10th-14th, and 57 kids, 13 teen helpers, and 14 adult helpers had a blast with the RAINFOREST FALLS theme. The activities helped the kids explore the nature of God. The kids were rooted in the fertile truth of meaningful, life-changing characteristics of God – their loving Creator who knows them and will love them 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 Rooted Bible Adventures, which was followed by thought-provoking discussions. At Sticky Scripture, our attendees watched videos 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 Wild Games. One of the favorite stations each year is Sing & Play Tune Lagoon, 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 Treetop 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 "RAINFOREST FALLS" 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 rainforests. On Monday, Tango the quetzal was our mascot of choice, who reminded us that God is our Creator. On Tuesday, the children learned that God knows everything about us, including what is in their hearts. Wednesday's mascot was Dottie the ocelot, and the children heard the story of David hiding from Saul. On Thursday, Tia the anteater shared our key verse from Psalm 136, verse 1, which states, "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever." Friday's mascot, Howie the howler monkey shared the theme of "God is forever" through the story of God giving John a vision of heaven. What an interesting story to end our week together! Vacation Bible School was an incredible blessing ... for the kids, teens, and adults alike!

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Rainforest Falls

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

"I like that we can raise money to help kids that have less than we do. This year I really liked the Imagination Station when we made bubbles inside of bubbles! I also really liked that I got to be in a group with my cousin, Logan, and having Tanner and Grace as my leaders."

– **Easton Hornung**

"I really had a great time with all the kids there and Wild Games is always a great touch. They supply us with a good time every year and that's why I always come back. Can't wait for next year!"

– **Tanner Wakefield, teen helper**

"I loved singing music and eating hot dogs with friends and family at the picnic." – **Will Sitzberger**

"We had so much fun at Vacation Bible School! Logan's favorite part was playing all the games, and Jovie especially loved the snacks – both making them and, of course, eating them! We both loved Imagination Station and couldn't stop talking about all the fun things we got to do there. And we've been singing the VBS songs all week long! We had such a great time and can't wait for VBS next year!" – **Logan and Jovie Haertel**

"There is a reason I come back every year for VBS. I always end up having the best time, whether it's playing games, learning about a Bible story, or getting to connect with the kids who are there, VBS never ceases to disappoint." – **Caleb Wakefield, teen helper**

"I loved Wild Games and Imagination Station because I got to learn new things and help my team. The snacks are yummy! I can't wait for next year!" – **Warren Kroner**

"Vacation Bible School was an awesome experience that I loved to be a part of. Even though I've grown up at this church, I have never done VBS before surprisingly. I was so happy that I decided to volunteer this year because I got to meet a lot of new friends that don't even go to First Church. Plus, I'm really good with kids so that worked out well. My favorite activity was singing with the "littles" as I used to do Junior Choir as a kid, and it brought back a lot of memories. It was nice to see every kid participating in everything and having a great group of kids that I got to get to know. I was also proud that we won the Operation Kid-2-Kid challenge, raising the most money to plant fruit trees in Central America! It really felt good to do something in my community and meet people that I probably wouldn't have met otherwise. I loved helping out and being a leader! I totally recommend taking your kid to VBS or being a helper yourself!"

– **Grace Burns, teen helper**

"It was really fun and competitive! The activities, snacks, singing, and games were very fun! I want to come back next year!" – **Alessio Ramirez**

"It was so special, and we enjoyed every ounce of watching Kentlee make these beautiful connections at church. I recall one comment from Kentlee: 'Mommy, I wish every week was Vacation Bible School.' She also asked if we were coming back next week as we were leaving the picnic on Friday."

– **Melanie Petersen, Kentlee's mom**

Welcome Katie & Laura

From Katie:

We moved to Tosa this Fall from Madison, Wisconsin. My husband got a great job opportunity (pediatric psychiatry) at Children's Hospital of Wisconsin, which is what prompted our move. Having a church community has always been important to me, and I spent time visiting some different churches in the area. I started coming to First Church in February and got involved in some small groups right away and felt at home and very welcomed here.

My husband and I are new empty nesters! We have two college-aged children, one in Vermont and one in Eau Claire. We also have a 10-year-old golden retriever, who is now getting even more love and attention since the kids have left. We bought a 100-year-old house in Tosa, so that has been keeping us busy with house projects.

I have been a women's health Nurse Practitioner for over 20 years. I have not been working since our move, and I may now be retired. (To be determined! 😊) I have been enjoying volunteering my time with Tosa Cares and the WI Humane Society, as well as just exploring the area and meeting new people.

I love playing tennis and have met a ton of wonderful people in the tennis community here! I also enjoy going for walks or getting coffee with friends. I love to cook – primarily vegetarian dishes. My husband and I enjoy traveling and love hiking and exploring the outdoors.

I look forward to being involved in more small groups, as this was a great way to get to know others on a deeper level. I also have an interest in helping with fellowship and bringing people together and making people feel welcome and comfortable.

I am happy to be here and joining this community and I look forward to meeting you all!

Katie was welcomed as a new member during the worship service on August 9th.

About Laura:

Laura Merkt came to FCC after her former church, Underwood Memorial Baptist, closed.

Her brother, Daniel, was married here by Norm Ream, and she has a sister, Kate, and son Jesus (or Jesse). Laura has been a member of this community for many years.

Laura was a clerical worker in a corporate setting related to health Care. She likes to knit – especially scarves, which she donates out in the winter season. She also enjoys collecting hygiene items, which she donates to different pantries, including Tosa Cares and this summer's collection for the local schools. Laura notes that she is a very good pool player with many trophies!

Laura looks forward to joining the Women's Circle and comments that she is a friendly person who loves to talk. (Laura says she sometimes talks too much.) She believes in helping others.

Laura adds that some members made her transition from Underwood to First Church much smoother, and expressed her appreciation for Jane Boyd, Diane Miller, Patty Reddy and many others.

Be sure to greet Katie Herringa and Laura Merkt when you see them.



The First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa
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Welcome Katie and Laura

Music Notes

After a summer filled with a beautiful variety of music, we are excited to welcome back our Junior Choir, Chancel Choir, and Jubilation Ringers!!

First rehearsals are as follows:

Chancel Choir – Thursday, September 3rd from 7:30-8:30^{pm}

Jubilation Ringers – Thursday, September 10th from 6:30-7:15^{pm}

Junior Choir: Sunday, September 13th at 9:30^{am}

If you or a family member is interested in joining one or more of our ensembles, please reach out to us for more information.

Rhonda Kwiecien, *Director of Music*: rhonda@firstchurchtosa.org

Jeremiah Cawley, *Choir and Handbell Director*: jeremiah.cawley@gmail.com

Roxanne Trump-Miles, *Junior Choir Director*: roxanne.trump.miles@gmail.com

We're looking forward to another great year of enhancing our worship through music!

Rhonda Kwiecien,
Director of Music and Keyboard Artist
First Congregational Church
Wauwatosa, WI

