

JANUARY 2026

Volume 41 - Issue 1

The Congregational COLUMNS

A Message from Julie

Happy Christmas and New Year! Yes, it is still Christmas in my book. I grew up with the tradition of holding on to the Christmas tree and decorations into January, at least until Epiphany, the twelfth day, or January 6 had occurred. It celebrates the Magi or Wisemen bringing gifts to Jesus, the first appearance of the Messiah to gentiles (non-Jewish people).



Matthew's gospel, chapter 2 verses 1-12, records their journey following a star, encounters with King Herod, warnings through dreams that bring us to the final line in this lesson that "they went home by another way."

The first sermon I ever wrote in seminary was on this text and titled "Home by Another Way." It was really short and probably not well done, but that closing line of Matthew's text catches at me as I think of how we enter this New Year together as a community of hope. Will we find ourselves drawn by God into a deeper commitment of some kind? Will we consider where in our lives we are experiencing transitions, with longing, or anticipating something new? Will we meet others and speak more openly about what is meaningful to us? Will we observe the sabbath and set time apart from our normal pace? Will we regularly practice praying, listening, reflecting, and acting? Will we wonder about life enough to be both comforted and surprised by God?

I find myself in the midst of all these things, and grateful for it. I am convinced that God is drawing me, us, to experience the variety of ways that WE are a part of God's incarnational Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love.

As we look into winter there are, as usual, many opportunities written throughout these pages. The weekend of January 10-11 you are invited to take part, be here to enjoy and be informed, as well as engage with others who come into this building for "Kids and Screens" with speaker Erin Walsh on Saturday afternoon, and the Winter Farmers Market and Brunch on Sunday.

Our Annual Meeting, January 25th, is for YOU, presenting "business" of the Church that moves forward with your questions, support, and vote. There will be a lunch following for all incoming, outgoing, and ongoing board members to strengthen information and purpose.

Simply glancing ahead, winter warms up with the February 8th Chili and Dessert Cook-Off. February 21st will be our bi-annual Saturday Serve (choosing a service opportunity on site or elsewhere). March 14th will bring us the Mission Auction and Dinner, and we are building a team to make this happen. Would you like to be part? Perhaps you have something for the Auction? Let Tonia or Julie know of your interest please. For instance, our Covenant class is creating an item for the auction. You may have to compete with me to bid on it.

Currently, fresh off Christmas celebrations, Ash Wednesday, February 18th, begins our season of Lent and there will be much more to come about this in our February Columns.

"Home by Another Way", evokes both familiarity and comfort (home) from which we might try on that question; what's next? Let's go there together.

- Rev. Julie



THE COLUMNS

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
IN WAUWATOSA

Worship & Discovery

Women's Ministry

*Tuesday, Jan. 6th, 13th, 20th, & 27th
from 8-9^{am} in the Library*

The New Year will see Women's Ministry 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.

Adult Education: The Story

*Sundays, January 4th & 18th
from 9-10^{am} in the Lounge*

We will pick up our book/video study of *The Story* again on Sunday, January 4th, at 9:00 am in the Lounge, and continue to meet the 1st and 3rd Sunday of each month. We will be discussing Chapter 4 at our first meeting in January.

Patty Reddy, facilitator

Men's Ministry

*Wednesdays, Jan. 7th, 14th, 21st, & 28th
from 9-10^{am} in the Parlor*

The Men's Ministry at First Church is a vibrant and growing fellowship. We meet at 9 a.m. 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!

There's Still Room at the ChristPond Retreat

It's not too late to join Patty Reddy and members of Women's Ministry 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

Discovery Hour

*Sunday, January 25th
from 9-10^{am} in the Lounge*

In Discovery Hour this past fall we had intimate gatherings every second and fourth Sunday at 9 am where we explored the characteristics of God, our own individual understandings of Jesus and the workings of the Holy Spirit in our own lives and in our communities. For the remainder of our sessions in this program year we will once again be returning to you, our members, to discuss, present and offer to us all, experiences within your worlds. A broad theme that we will be looking at is 'lives in transition'. Many are in transitional modes of life, be it caring for an aging parent, raising young children, the dilemmas of our technological age, retirement and even our own health battles. Please reach out to me if you would have interest in being part of this discussion and exploration, and don't be surprised if you get a phone call from me over the coming months to be a part of this journey.

Chip Smith

Operating Statement Summary

Year to Date as of November 2025

	2025	2024
Pledge base received	68.0%	68.0%
Pledge Income	\$483,612	\$437,042
Total Income	\$635,147	\$601,838
Total Expense	\$597,868	\$570,204
Net Income	\$37,279	\$31,633

Detailed financials available in the office

CONGREGATIONAL COLUMNS

A monthly newsletter produced by the First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa to keep members and the community up to date on activities at the church.

www.FirstChurchTosa.org

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!

Officers, Boards, Committees & Nominations for 2026

Church Officers

- *Moderator:** Ann Steinmetz Harris
- *Vice Moderator:** John Griffith
- *Past Moderator:** JC Moore
- *Treasurer:** Cindy Walsh
- *Assist. Treasurer:** Rick Nowacki
- *FCC Clerk:** Diane Collis
- *NACCC Delegate:** Hank Collis

Church Council At-Large – Members 6

1. **OPEN**
2. Mike Elwing, 1st year*
3. Andy Forsaith, 1st year*
4. Michelle Russ, 2nd year
5. Mary Kay Olston, 3rd year
6. Fred Kingsley, 3rd year

Board of Congregational Care – Minimum 6

1. Sue Falsetti Bree, 1st year*
2. Patty Reddy, 1st year*
3. Margie Idzikowski, 1st year*
4. Pam McDonald, 2nd year
5. Kristin Stern, 2nd year
6. Ann Campbell, 3rd year
7. Roxanne Trump-Miles, 3rd year

Bd. of Stewardship/Benevolences – Minimum 6

1. Mellissa Coppage, 1st year*
2. Ryan Foat, 1st year*
3. Hank Collis, 2nd year
4. Lanae Haertel, 2nd year
5. Tori Raddemann, 2nd year
6. Elizabeth Strasma, 2nd year
7. Debbie Hayden, 3rd year

Board of Christian Education – Minimum 6

1. **OPEN**
2. Sarah Blake, 1st year*
3. Caitlin Marquardt, 1st year*
4. Laura Foat, 1st year*
5. Maddie Sgarlata, 2nd year
6. Barb Dunham, 2nd year
7. Charisse Kroner, 2nd year
8. Jaclyn Durham, 2nd year
9. Ardith Moore, 4th year

Board of Fellowship – Minimum 7

1. **OPEN**
2. Tom Smith, 1st year*
3. JC Moore, 1st year*
34. Bill Gaertner, 1st year*
5. Janet Schalmo, 1st year*
6. Kurt Thompson, 2nd year
7. Cindy Abraham, 2nd year
8. Nolan Straza, 2nd year
9. Jane Boyd, 2nd year

Board of Trustees – Minimum 9

1. Carol Hudson, 1st year*
2. Dick Berger, 1st year*
3. Charlie Wakefield, 1st year*
4. Butch Boyd, 1st year*
5. Bobby Russ, 2nd year
6. Nikki Kroner, 2nd year
7. Joe Berte, 3rd year
8. Jeff Saeger, 3rd year
9. Kelly Bartley, 3rd year
10. George Meyer, 4th year



Board of Deacons – Minimum 8

1. Tesha Urban, 1st year*
2. Steve Russ, 1st year*
3. Jan Lawrence, 1st year*
4. Diane Saeger, 1st year*
5. Genesee Hornung, 1st year*
6. Elizabeth Carger, 2nd year
7. Mychale Thomas, 2nd year
8. Michael “Chip” Smith, 2nd year
9. Jennifer Wakefield, 3rd year

Personnel Committee – Members 7

1. Moderator
2. Vice Moderator
3. Cindy Davis (1st year of 1st term) *
4. Mike Huitink (2nd year of 1st term)
5. Nick Sgarlata (2nd year of 1st term)
6. Pierre Payne (1st year of 2nd term)
7. Emily Hayes (2nd year of 2nd term)

Nominating Committee – Members 5

1. Steve Hayes*
2. Randy Sitzberger*
3. Kurt Raddemann*
4. Council at Large (appointed by moderator)
5. Council at Large (appointed by moderator)

Kids & Screens: Why the shift from control to connection is key to mental health

Saturday, January 10, at 4:00PM

Every year, our relationship with screens deepens as more aspects of our lives move online. At the same time, parents are bombarded with conflicting advice about how technology impacts children's development and well-being. How much screentime is too much? What is the impact of AI on our kids?

On January 10, Erin Walsh, co-founder of Spark & Stitch Institute, will present an interactive presentation that uses brain science, stories, and humor to cut through the noise. Her goal is to provide parents and educators the clarity and practical tools to support their child's digital well-being. The session begins at 4:00 pm in the Sanctuary.

Psychology Today wrote of Erin, " ...she has worked with communities across the United States and Canada who want to better understand child and adolescent development and cut through conflicting information about kids and technology. Her signature

down-to-earth approach and sense of humor help families and educators engage in complicated topics and leave feeling capable and motivated."

Before creating Spark & Stitch Institute, Erin taught undergraduate students for nine years with the Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs and was a lead program facilitator for Youth Frontiers. Her work has been featured in local publications across the country as well as Minnesota Public Radio, Washington Post, Parents.com, and Yahoo. Erin has served several community organizations, including as a professional mentor for NextGen Connect at Fairplay, an intergenerational mentoring program for youth digital wellness leaders, and as board chair of YMCA Camp Widjiwagan, a wilderness-based youth development program. She has worked with schools, school districts, parent groups, and other youth-serving organizations throughout North America on issues related to digital media, children, and youth.



A Message from Chip

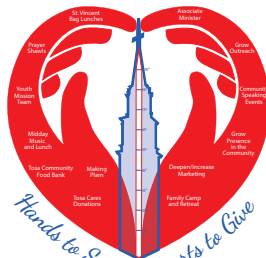
As of the time of this writing, I have officially completed my coursework for obtaining my Master of Divinity degree through Crown College. It has been a long journey with a substantial hiatus that proved to be overwhelmingly vital to my own spiritual growth. Over the past year, I have been taken “In Care” by the Deacons and in August, Licensed as a Lay Minister for FCC Tosa. Additionally, I have been supported by the creation of a Discernment Committee consisting of Sarah DeYoung, Ann Steinmetz Harris, Cindy Walsh, Rich Raymond and John Frederickson with the guidance of Rev. Julie. This committee met over the course of this past fall to help prod and push me as I completed my studies and began looking forward to the ‘what next?’ phase of my journey.

Through this experience, as well as my continued work with Covenant Class and Discovery Hour, participation in the NACCC’s Companion’s Table and fellowship and counsel with other Ministers in our National Association, I have been able to discern that the call towards ministry is real and profound for me. Many have asked about ordination and what my future plans might be. A formal request has been submitted to the Deacons for ordination. This church has raised so many ministers in the Congregational tradition over the years and I hope to be one among them, standing on the shoulders of the giants who have gone before me. As far as where I might land, I discover myself in a vast liminal space; a space the Rev. Ian Macdonald recently and aptly describes as “the threshold where we can’t go back, but we’re not yet where we’re going... a time where God is quietly knitting the next chapter together.” While it is often difficult to stand in a transitional space uncertain of where the next movement of God might be, it is with wondrous anticipation that I wake each day to see how this story is unfolding. I am grateful for the love and support the fellowship of First Church has provided me in this adventure!

Blessings,
Chip Smith

Open Hearts to Give, Willing Hands to Serve

The annual pledge drive at First Church is key to our future. It’s important for our members to understand why we encourage you to pledge and how the money is to be used. For an overview and goals of the 2026 pledge drive, use your cell phone to capture the QR code. (Open your cell’s camera, hold it up to the code, and click on the link when it appears on your screen.) It will take you to Open Hearts to Give, Willing Hands to Serve, a wonderful video about the pledge drive and our hopes for the future.



Women’s Circle Addresses Consumer Protection

Shopping online can save you time and money, while allowing you to browse a variety of products without leaving the comfort of your house. Unfortunately, online shopping also poses security risks and privacy risks. What’s a shopper to do?

Women’s Circle presents Safe Online Shopping, with speaker Ben Merens, on Tuesday, January 13, at 12:30 pm in the Lounge. Merens is an outreach specialist with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. He joined the department after spending most of the pandemic working as a case manager for the Milwaukee Health Department. Prior that, Ben spent 21 years as a talk show host on Wisconsin Public Radio. After working in healthcare communications, he’s returned to state service as a professional storyteller and as a storytelling coach.

All are welcome to attend January’s Women’s Circle meeting for coffee, dessert and an enlightening program that will help you stay safe online. Please sign up at the Gathering Table in the Atrium if you plan to attend.

Make Your Voice Known: FCC Annual Meeting

Unlike most denominational churches, FCC is Congregational—independent, self-supporting, and governed by the membership. All members are encouraged to attend our Annual Meeting on **Sunday, January 25, at 11:00am**, following the worship service.

During the meeting, the Budget and Finance Committee will propose the 2026 budget for the congregation’s approval. You’ll also have the opportunity to vote on the slate of nominees for board and committee positions. In addition, you’ll hear about church projects planned for the coming year.

This is your chance to be a part of Congregational polity in action.



Warm conversation, cookies, and creches accompanied lessons and carols at the Advent Tea on Saturday, December 4th.

JUST FOR YOUTH

January 2026



Sunday School

Sunday, January 4th, 11th, 18th & 25th 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, January 12th 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.

Covenant Class

January 11th & 25th for 9th graders 4-6^{pm} in the Friendship Lounge.

Junior Choir

Sunday, January 4th, 11th, 18th & 25th for K-8th grades at 9:15^{am} in LL4
Children usually sing once a month.

Pilgrim Fellowship (PF)

Sunday, January 4th, 11th, 18th & 25th grades 6-12

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



Creative youth at the Christmas Workshop on Sunday, December 7th.



Saturday, March 14th, 2026

Fundraising Event to benefit the FCC Youth Mission Team

Come enjoy this wonderful evening of fellowship and fantastic food!

It's not too early to mark your calendar and start planning for the beloved Dinner & Silent Auction on Saturday, February 14th. The Social Hall will be glowing with excitement as people browse the tables loaded with exciting items for the Silent Auction. Members of our own Chancel Choir will provide a musical interlude.

Would you, your place of work, or someone you know have something to contribute to the Auction? No donation is too small! Put together a themed basket or donate an item and we'll add it to complete a basket. You can also make a monetary donation and we'll do the shopping for additional auction items.

If you're interested in donating an item or themed basket to the auction, please pick up a donation form in the Atrium.

All proceeds benefit the First Church Youth Mission project with Hosanna Industries.



FCC Youth visited the Trump Family in the manger at Breakfast with Baby Jesus on Sunday, December 14th.



The Christmas Pageant on Sunday, December 14th.

Spend a Cozy January Morning at the Winter Farmers Market

A First Church favorite, the Winter Farmers Market, will return on Sunday, January 11, from 9:00 am until 12:00 pm in the Social Hall.



Area farmers will offer a wonderful selection of their winter products: sweet breads, sourdough breads, eggs, winter vegetables, meats, soaps and body care items, preserves, syrups and so much more! There are also some gluten-free and vegan options.

While you're there, enjoy a delicious brunch made from locally sourced ingredients and prepared by members of First Church. The bill of fare includes vegetarian egg strata, sausage, baked apples, oatmeal, cider and beverages... while supplies last. Cost is \$10 per person, with a maximum cost of \$25 per family.

The Winter Farmer's Market is presented in association with the Food, Faith and Farming Network. It helps area farmers generate income during the winter, while providing healthy, sustainable, locally sourced and high-quality products to congregations.

Food, Faith and Farming promotes awareness of nutrition and health, environmental stewardship and sustainability, food security, and economic justice for farmers. It also encourages a positive relationship between urban and rural communities.

Proceeds from the brunch, along with some of the money earned by the vendors, go to the Harvest of Hope Fund, which supports small farmers during difficult times.

Bring your family, friends, and neighbors and enjoy a delicious brunch and a unique shopping opportunity in a warm and inviting environment.

See you there!

Welcome New Members!



Melanie & John-Paul Petersen



Alex and Karla Ramirez



Sue Falsetti-Bree



Winter

All Are Welcome

FARMERS MARKET

Sunday, January 11th 9:00 - 12^{noon}

First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa 1511 Church Street, Wauwatosa

Come Shop a Variety of Locally Grown & Artisan Crafted Products

Sweet Breads
Gluten-free, Vegan Breads
Eggs
Mushrooms
Meats
Soaps
Natural Body Care

Preserves
Salsa
Apples & Cider
Syrups
Oats
Granola
Wool Products

Stay and Enjoy while supplies last **

Brunch & Fellowship

Locally-Sourced Meal Served Featuring:

*Vegetarian Egg Strata, Sausage,
Baked Apples, Oatmeal, Cider & Beverages*

Suggested Brunch Donation:

\$10 per person · \$25 per family



**Food, Faith and
Farming Network**
Connecting Community, Land, and People

This Winter Farmers Market, co-hosted by
First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa,
is a project sponsored by **Food, Faith and Farming Network**
- a non-profit organization connecting land and people,
and promoting earth stewardship and community since the 1980s.

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

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