

# Tower chimes

Monthly newsletter of First Congregational UCC | Grand Junction, CO | April 2025



## Paul's Epistle

Dear Friends,

This season of Lent and Easter is a time of spiritual awareness. So let me share the spiritual growth questions that over the centuries have helped people have breakthroughs of heart, mind and spirit.

- ◇ What do I need to work on to reach inner peace?
- ◇ What fears or worries come up again and again?
- ◇ What are the distractions that waste hours in my life? Can I set a timer to limit a distraction that is enjoyed, like video games or hobbies that are less than satisfying?
- ◇ How long would a list become if I listed all the things – people-places that inspire my gratitude?
- ◇ What places in my heart and history need to experience forgiveness or the practice of letting go?
- ◇ What acts or places help me sense the presence of the Spirit?
- ◇ What stories from childhood pain or loss are still unhealed or causing stress? A hint would be to consider times when you overreact to normal life problems.
- ◇ Where do I feel judgment toward others that is personal and petty? Note: We as people of compassion need to make judgements about political and social situations that create injustice and harm our neighbors.
- ◇ What do I need to release in order to realize self-acceptance?
- ◇ What is my identity beyond my job, my home, my history, my family?
- ◇ Where or when do you experience transcendence, oneness, goodness, connection to God or grace?
- ◇ How open and free is my compassion, with others and myself?
- ◇ Where are the places where I feel resistance or resentment? This includes the reality of aging or the growth of the autocratic state under Trump.
- ◇ What are the cause or groups where I can be more generous?
- ◇ What is an important goal or dream I hold for the future?

If you wish to talk about any of these questions or others you are wrestling with, we can get together for lunch or a conversation on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

*[Continued on next page]*

*Whoever you are, wherever you are on life's journey, you are welcome here!*

## PAUL'S EPISTLE

This year for Easter, we want to encourage you to celebrate a "Dress Up Easter." Once a year lets have fun and break out hats, bonnets, suits and dress shoes. Easter is a special celebration and holy day. I remember growing up with everyone dressing up in a way unlike any other Sunday. Even as a child I had a bright red blazer given to me to wear for Easter. So, consider leaving the jeans behind for one Sunday.

Peace, Shalom, Salaam,  
Rev. Dr. Paul Ashby

## HOLY WEEK & EASTER AT FCC



**Palm/Passion Sunday, April 13:** Worship begins at 10:00 am with a fabulously celebratory palm processional indoors and out! Bring your drums and other noise makers.

**Maundy/Holy Thursday, April 17, 5:00 pm:** Join us to commemorate Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples before Good Friday.

Dinner afterwards at Subway for those who wish to eat with friends will follow worship.

**Don't forget to share Spring potted plants to decorate the Chancel for Easter!** Easter lilies are fine as long as the stamens are removed, but all God's blooming flowers are certainly welcome and encouraged.



**Easter, April 20:** Wear your festive garments for Sunday morning worship! A beautiful assortment of potted plants on the chancel, joyful music and singing, celebratory prayer and preaching, and perhaps the opportunity to visit with some old friends during a special coffee hour —what's not to love?



**Easter Sunday Happy Hour After Worship:** To help celebrate this special Sunday, there will be a special coffee hour following worship. You are invited to bring your favorite baked goods to share such as sweet breads and rolls, hot-crossed-buns, etc. If possible have your offering plated and ready to serve.

## FCC SPRING CLEANUP IS APRIL 5

We will be working on a variety of projects outdoors and indoors to spruce up the church building, grounds and gardens.

Sign up sheets will be available in Pilgrim Hall Sunday, March 30.

Bring your tools, but don't forget to take them home with you when you are finished! Remember to bring work gloves, hats, sunglasses, sunscreen, and water if you are working outdoors. Fellowship & Hospitality will provide lunch and drinks.

Contact Kelly Gregory 913-226-7143 with any questions.

# CHILDREN'S SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM MARIE KOONTZ

## April Sunday morning children's program

### April 6:

Origami fun  
with Kristen and Rachel Seiff



### April 13: Palm Sunday:

- Sunday school: Finish our fishing person and share the bounty of fish (Jesus' teachings).
- Following worship: Palm Sunday egg hunt.



EASTER  
April 20



**No class. Childcare is available for toddlers and infants.  
Special packets available for children in worship**

### April 27

#### Welcome Spring

**Class: We will be painting birdhouses**

**Matthew 6:26-30**

**New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition**

**<sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than them? <sup>27</sup> And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life?<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>28</sup> And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?**



nor

## THE ABC CLUB!!! BETH RAKESTRAW

April's ABC Club meets at the Avery Residence, 655 Janece Dr, Grand Junction on April 19, from 6:00 to 8:00 pm. As usual, bring an appetizer, a beverage and conversation to share for an Eggstra Special social event [even if no eggs are featured —sorry, couldn't resist the pun.] Watch Church Chat and bulletins for more details as they might be forthcoming.



## MODERATOR'S MINUTE KEN PUHLER

In April of 2022, I wrote about media literacy for The Tower Chimes, our church newsletter. I reminded folks that everything we do online is being monitored and tracked. Our digital data is being sold to companies, and we are targeted with messages according to our digital fingerprints. Media messaging is tailored to motivate us into buying products, supporting causes and to provoke emotions.

Fear is a big motivator.

There are so many political media messages that are fear-based; these half-truths or blatant lies currently being promoted evoke fear. I am frustrated that so many people believe and repeat them. I am glad that our church exposes them and offers opportunities to actively resist.

I keep seeing messages about tariffs being used to make our neighbors to the north and south do more to stop the flow of drugs into our country. The fear is those countries promote drug use in the United States. Those of us that have driven over these borders know that when you enter Canada or Mexico from the United States, you are stopped by those countries border agents to get a Visa, have your identity checked and an inspection of your vehicle. When you return, it is United States border agents that verify your identity, collect taxes on items purchased and inspect your vehicle. Increased border security would have happened with the bipartisan bill that got torpedoed before the election. If you are in Canada or Mexico—you are not stopped and inspected before you cross back into the United States. I have known several Mexican cartel members who were arrested for repeated drug trafficking offenses. The odds of them being stopped for a thorough inspection at the border are low. The rewards are high.

The blatant lies about Greenland wanting to be a part of the United States are infuriating. I used to think this was a distraction technique, but I heard the current president's eldest son talk about his trip there. He said that "Ninety percent of the people are excited about it." He was being interviewed by a Fox reporter. Interviews with people from Greenland, aired by both CNN and MSNBC, were exactly the opposite. Now, the Vice-president's wife is going to Greenland after the President told Mark Rutte, the head of NATO, that it might need to get involved when we annex it for "national security." Fear of an invasion.

He also bragged to the NATO leader that he used transgender issues to win the election. He said that his advice to "all Republican candidates is to bring up transgenders a week before the election." Fear is powerful. They are being told to fear transgender people. There are lies about schools concerning children and transgender issues. They don't understand how they are being manipulated by these lies that promote irrational fear. School board meetings are packed with people demanding the firing of a teacher for displaying a sign stating, "ALL ARE WELCOME HERE" fearing it grooms children to become LGBTQ. Fear of something you don't understand. These same people will fight against a law limiting the magazine size on guns that are used in school shootings. Fear--because they are told it will result in ALL guns being taken away.

Fear is a powerful motivator.

## MODERATOR'S MINUTE KEN PUHLER

I have fears right now. I fear we are losing our sense of community; that we are all people deserving of love, respect and safety. I fear our country is becoming isolated –America First - is actually -America Alone-. Our leaders are afraid to speak up against the administration's actions because of the money and power backing it.

We must resist the fears. March in peaceful protest and in loving support. Boycott companies and write letters to let them know why—I use the “Contact Us” email option on their websites. Thank the leaders who are doing a good job and ask for better from those that aren't. Speak truth to the lies.

RESIST FEAR.

## PROTEST SAFETY DO'S AND DON'TS 101

### PROTEST DO'S AND DON'TS

#### DOS:

Travel in Groups (Buddy System)  
Be Loud, Bring Drums and Noise Makers  
Bring Water and Snacks  
Be Peaceful & Keep A Level Head  
Be Sober

#### DON'TS:

Antagonize Hecklers  
Antagonize the Police  
Don't Destroy or Vandalize Property  
Arrive or Leave Alone  
Take Photos of people without Consent  
Bring Weapons

As a seasoned activist, and as someone who has recently attended marches and protests with some of you, I wanted to share this information. I have borrowed and adapted this graphic from the Mesa County DSA because it is a good start to some basic rules of thumb.

I want especially to underscore the importance of not arriving or leaving alone. In the current climate when people who practice uncivil or unlawful behavior have become emboldened to act out, your being with companions is a deterrent, and the more of you the merrier --and the safer. If you get separated, be sure to have a pre-arranged meet up space somewhere on the grounds of the venue or as close as possible.

To this list, I would add, make sure you have your cell phone with you and that it is fully charged. Wear good shoes that you can move quickly in. Be appropriately dressed for the weather conditions --this time of year hats and sunscreen are a must. I add that last little bit because ... guess who usually forgets a hat and sunscreen? ~~Beth



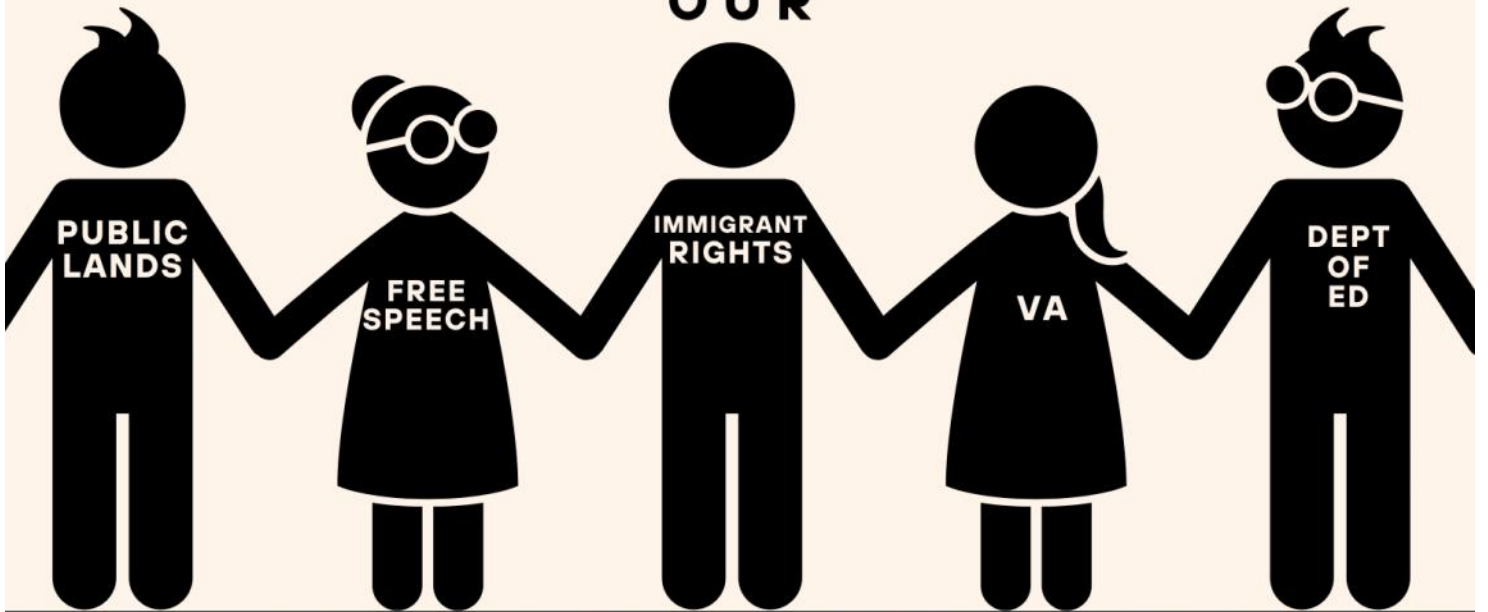
HANDS OFF RALLY INDIVISIBLE GRAND JUNCTION

*We the People*

STAND TOGETHER  
TO SAY

**HANDS ~~OFF~~**

OUR



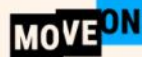
USPS • SOCIAL SECURITY • BODIES • PERSONAL DATA • LGBTQ+ RIGHTS • LOCAL FARMS

...AND MORE

**SATURDAY, APRIL 5**

1-3 PM

HISTORIC LOWELL SCHOOL LAWN  
310 N. 7TH, GRAND JUNCTION





# FEBRUARY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES CINDY HAAS, SCRIBE

**February 16, 2025**

The church council of First Congregational Church United Church of Christ met in the chapel for the monthly stated meeting on February 16, 2025. Present were council members Karen Caton, Kathy Goe, Cindy Haas, Martha Jones, Julie Krueger, Ken Puhler (moderator), Janis Woodley and pastor Paul Ashby. Guests were Kathy Viglianco, Beth Rakestraw, Rob and Celia Elberfeld.

A quorum was established. The meeting was opened with prayer by Paul around 11:22 a.m. The January 19, 2025 Council Meeting minutes were approved as distributed.

## **Pastor's Report:**

- ◇ Paul proposed the council support a contract be presented to Peter Emmerich to barter his landscaping and security skills for a room in the CE building for his landscaping business for a period of 90 days. Julie moved to support this idea, it was seconded and it passed.
- ◇ Another good year with WeShelter.
- ◇ There is fraud issue about gift cards. There has been some phishing to buy cards and send them to the sender. Beth warned the congregation earlier in the week.
- ◇ Paul is working with congregations to advocate for undocumented immigrants.

**Ministry Team Reports/Minutes:** Available reports were distributed prior to the meeting, as noted:

- ◇ Mission and Outreach/JAM, February 2025
- ◇ Fellowship & Hospitality Meeting, February 2025
- ◇ Worship and Celebration, February 2025
- ◇ Property Team, February meeting cancelled
- ◇ Finance and Stewardship, Next meeting April 30.

**Finance Reports 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter reports presented May meeting.**

## **Other Business:**

- ◇ It was moved and seconded to have the April meeting April 27, 2025 because the third week is Easter. The motion carried.
- ◇ Beth read a letter of thanks from BAM. They appreciate our safe space.
- ◇ Martha looking at getting KIND buttons.

There being no other business, the meeting was closed at 12:15 pm.

Cindera Haas, substitute clerk.

## MISSION & OUTREACH NEWS

# IT'S BACK! TASTE OF AFRICA! FUNDRAISER FOR A SOLAR POWERED IRRIGATION SYSTEM FOR A MAASAI VILLAGE IN KENYA APRIL 26 6-8 PM



DELICIOUS  
FOOD,  
MAASAI  
CRAFTS,  
DANCING

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

1425 N 5TH ST 242-0298



DONATE TO THE CAUSE EVEN IF YOU DON'T ATTEND  
[HTTPS://WWW.UCCGJ.ORG/DONATE](https://www.uccgj.org/donate)

HELP THEM OVERCOME  
DROUGHTS IN EAST AFRICA



# KINDFEST 2025 KATHY VIGLIANCO

This spring, Mission & Outreach will organize a KINDFEST event that will provide acts of kindness for members of our congregation. Our main focus is helping older or physically challenged members with simple yard or home projects. Examples of what the volunteer team can do include: raking, garden prep, small yard cleanup, window washing, planting and light pruning. KINDFEST project request forms will be available for submission during the month of March. Once submitted and approved, the volunteer team will contact you to schedule a date and time to complete the request starting in April.

## MORE MISSION & OUTREACH NEWS

### SECOND QUARTER MISSION & OUTREACH FOCUS:

#### FOUNDATION FOR CULTURAL EXCHANGE AND OLTOME VILLAGE SCHOOL TEACHERS



On the left is Guadalupe, the student in El Salvador our congregation is sponsoring this quarter by contributing to her scholarship so that she is able to attend school.

On the right are the two school teachers in Oltome village, Faith and Carol, whose salaries we will support in addition to the fundraiser for Oltome's water project.



### ONGOING COLLECTIONS

**Catholic Outreach Collection** | Bottled Salad Dressings!!!!

**You May Resume Bringing Egg Cartons** | But we are not sure for how long! Watch this space.

**Solidarity Not Charity** | We continue to collect personal size toiletries and other personal hygiene items for SNC. *They have requested we stop collecting plastic jugs for now.*

**Newspaper Bags** | Carolyn Van Matre is collecting newspaper bags to use at Mutual Aid to fill with dog and cat food to give to our unhoused friends for their furry companions. There will be a bin in the collections area outside the main office.

**Catholic Outreach  
March Collection Numbers:  
Soup Cans: 76  
1 5lb Bag of Flour  
2 Boxes Miscellaneous Stuff**

# LIVING LOVE BOLDLY

## The UCC's Call to Justice in a Polarized World, *February 20, 2025*

The Rev. Karen Georgia A. Thompson, general minister and president of the United Church of Christ, is calling on the church to “pause, pray, and prepare to live love boldly.” In a time of political division, rising inequality, and social uncertainty, she emphasizes that the church’s role is not only to speak about justice but to actively embody it. Her call to action aligns with the theme of the upcoming General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches: “Persevere in Your Witness.” In a world facing polarization and growing threats to democracy, the UCC remains steadfast in its commitment to justice, ensuring that faith is not only professed but lived out through action.

As one of our member churches navigates a shifting political landscape, Thompson’s message extends beyond denominational lines, serving as both a challenge and an invitation. It reaffirms the UCC’s dedication to advocating for marginalized communities and speaking truth to power, even in times of uncertainty. By grounding its mission in love and justice, the church strives to be a source of hope and transformation in a divided world.

### **A Consistent Witness for Justice**

“The United Church of Christ has a pretty consistent witness around justice, and we will continue to amplify that,” Thompson said. “We have been consistent in our support for refugee resettlement, for migration as a human right, and for policies that uphold the dignity of all people. Where we can, we will challenge these executive orders through legal means, advocacy, and community support,” she emphasized. Through conference-level initiatives and amicus briefs, the UCC actively participates in lawsuits against unjust policies, ensuring that its call for justice is more than just words—it is action.

### **Navigating Internal Differences in a Divided Nation**

The UCC, known for its diverse membership, faces the challenge of political polarization within its own congregations. “We are not a red church or a blue church; most of our congregations are purple,” Thompson said, acknowledging the wide spectrum of political perspectives within the denomination. In an era where partisan divides seem insurmountable, she emphasized the central Christian tenet of love. “It feels as though we have not been able to transcend the political divide by adhering to Jesus’ commandment to love,” she said. The UCC continues to create spaces for dialogue, education, and engagement that prioritize love and justice over party lines.

### **Speaking Truth to Power While Staying Nonpartisan**

A critical distinction in the UCC’s approach is its unwavering focus on policy rather than political affiliation. “We do not tell people how to vote. We speak to policy,” Thompson said. Historically, the church has critiqued policies under various administrations, from Reaganomics to President Joe Biden’s handling of Gaza and immigration. “Where justice does not prevail, it is incumbent on the church to call truth to power, and that is our commitment in every administration.”

The UCC’s Our Faith, Our Vote campaign encouraged members to vote with justice in mind, ensuring that civic engagement remains a core value of faith practice.

### **The Church’s Role in a Politically Charged Time**

With escalating political tensions, the role of the church is increasingly vital. Thompson sees advocacy as an essential function. “We have seen that when people protest, write letters, and call their representatives, change happens,” she said. The UCC collaborates with multifaith coalitions and legal initiatives to challenge unjust policies, recognizing that collective action is necessary to make an impact. However, the rapid succession of executive orders and policy shifts poses a unique challenge. “The sheer volume of changes makes it difficult to respond effectively. This administration’s strategy seems to overwhelm opponents by keeping them constantly on the defensive,” she said. To counter this, the UCC is strengthening coalitions and mobilizing resources to ensure a sustained, strategic approach to advocacy.

### **Fostering Civil Discourse and Reconciliation**

As political discourse grows more hostile, the UCC is committed to fostering conversations that bridge divides. “We must equip people with tools for civil discourse,” Thompson said, pointing to books like *I Never Thought of It That Way* by Mónica Guzmán as resources for constructive dialogue. The global church also has a role to play. “The World Communion of Reformed Churches must step up in its support of U.S. churches,” she said. The WCRC has historically been vocal on issues of justice, but Thompson believes it must take an even stronger stance against Christian nationalism and authoritarianism.

### **A Leader Shaped by Experience**

As the first Black woman and first immigrant to lead the UCC, Thompson’s personal journey deeply informs her leadership. “It’s not just about being the first African descendant woman. It’s also about being the first leader who was not born in this country,” she said. Her experiences as a Jamaican immigrant provide her with a unique perspective on issues of justice, inclusion, and faith-based advocacy. Her leadership is rooted in a firm belief that the church must be both a sanctuary and a force for change. “We cannot do this alone,” she said. “It will take all of us—across denominations, across faiths, and across borders—to push back against the forces that threaten justice and democracy.” In this post-election moment, as the country recalibrates and churches discern their role, Thompson’s message serves as a reminder that faith is not just about belief—it is about bold, compassionate action.

# APRIL 2025

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
<b>March 30</b>	<b>March 31</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
9:00 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 5th Sunday Potluck 11:30 Sermon Talk		10:00 Women's/ Mens' Coffee 3:30 Handbells	1:00 Lenten Share Group/ Book Study 2:00 Mission & Outreach	2:00 Fellowship & Hospitality		
<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>
9:00 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour 11:30 Sermon Talk	5:00 Make Mondays Fun Again	<b>Election Day</b> 10:00 Women's/ Mens' Coffees 3:30 Handbells				
<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Palm Sunday</b> 9:00 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour 11:30 Sermon Talk	1:00 Property Team	10:00 Women's/ Men's Coffee 3:30 Handbells		11:30 Berna B's <b>Mauudy Thursday</b>		<b>6:00 The ABC Club</b>
<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Easter</b> 9:00 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour 11:30 Sermon Talk	5:00 Make Mondays Fun Again	10:00 Women's/ Mens' Coffee 3:30 Handbells				<b>Oltome Fundraiser</b>
<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>May 1</b>	<b>May 2</b>	<b>May 3</b>
9:00 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour 11:15 Council Meeting 11:30 Sermon Talk		10:00 Women's/ Mens' Coffee 3:30 Handbells				

## LOOKING AHEAD

May 18 | Annual Congregational Meeting  
June 19 – 21 | RMC Annual Celebration  
July 11 – 15 | UCC General Synod 35

## APRIL BIRTHDAYS

4/2 Michael Petri  
4/6 Tobin Braz  
4/12 Maris Braz  
4/12 Lynn Simpson  
4/14 Jessie Ragsdale  
4/15 Zoe Brosig

4/16 Jean McArthur  
4/17 Abigail Hildebrand  
4/20 Carl Jones  
4/22 Lexi Taddeo  
4/24 Marty Arnold

If we are missing a birthday from our lists, or our list is incorrect, please call the church office at 970-242-0298 or email office@uccgj.org. Thanks!





First Congregational UCC  
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## CONTACT US!

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### **Children's Ed:**

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 She, hers, her  
 charley.koontz2009@gmail.com

### **Church Office Hours**

Monday through Thursday  
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 Reach us at :  
 (970)-242-0298  
[www.uccgj.org](http://www.uccgj.org)

### **Church Administrator:**

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### **Part Time Custodian:**

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### **Director of Choirs**

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### **Volunteer Financial Clerk:**

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 She, hers, her  
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### **Pianist/Music Coordinator:**

Martha Jones  
 She, her, hers