

Tower Chimes



Monthly newsletter of First Congregational UCC | Grand Junction, CO | April 2026



Paul's Epistle

Dear Friends,

A recent NBC News poll rated the trust and favorability of major public figures and institutions in the U.S. They wanted to discern who is truly admired and trusted and who is not trusted. You could probably guess the sources that the majority did not trust. The lowest least trusted were Donald Trump, the Republican Party,

Kamala Harris, The Democratic Party, ICE and AI. This is no surprise given the levels of distrust in our society. I would add another layer to this popularity-trust test. I would ask what things have this person/institution/group done that harms people and creates fear, division and distrust. Yes, I believe actions and events are most vital an assessment beyond mere like or dislike subjectivity. There are often painful acts of human brutality that land one on such a list.

The other side was more of a surprise. Only two public figures landed on the majority trust and favorability list. Can you guess who? One is a religious leader. One is a late-night talk show host. Did you guess Pope Leo and Stephen Colbert? If you are keeping score, that is devoted Catholics 2, Protestants zero. But I was delighted because it is a reality check reminder that the majority of people have not lost the capacity to see the goodness in good people.

A central part of the work of the church is to affirm, teach and support goodness and Godness in whatever source it manifests. Pope Leo was at the top with a favorability rating of +34 with 42 percent of votes seeing him as a source of goodness and only 8 percent with negative views, mostly due to his support for human rights and mercy for immigrant families. Colbert came in second at plus 10. The poll notes a sharp contrast between Pope Leo's actions and their opposite in the actions of ICE. It reveals a trust in a Pope who takes risks to support human dignity and Christ-centered compassion in an era of worldwide growth of cruelty with authoritarian populist politicians. CBS is set to cancel Stephen Colbert's Late Show next month. Colbert, a dedicated Catholic, often quotes scripture on his show and has said the one guest he wants to have as a final highlight is Pope Leo, the American pope. He even offered to fly to Rome or buy a big deep-dish pizza for a meeting

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

PAUL'S EPISTLE

in Chicago. Both of these public figures have a moral compass that points towards goodness, truth, compassion, and hope.

One of my concerns is a national loss of moral compass with the ICE executions and the termination of USAID. This month on April 12 at 11:30 after church we begin the Spring – Summer book study on *For Such A Time As This, An Emergency Devotional* by Professor Hanna Reichel at Princeton Seminary. There is no book quite like it in our era. It is about keeping our moral-ethical compass pointed toward compassion in this time of racism, cruelty, violence, bombings and war on the daily news and impacting our consciousness and hearts in addition to our budgets.

Chapters in the book include:

- Test the Spirits
- Faith, Hope, and Love Remain
- Stand Where God Stands
- Protect the Weak
- Obey God More than Humans
- Do Something Brave
- Lean into Joy
- Practice Creative Nonconformity
- Love Your Neighbor, Shatter Loneliness

Join with me for this group study support group on the 2nd Sundays in April, May, June, and July.

Peace, Shalom, Salaam,
Rev. Paul

ANOTHER ADULT SPIRITUAL FORMATION OPPORTUNITY

***The Story of God, Season 3* | Wednesday, April 15 | 1:00 pm** | Votes are in! Pastor Paul will begin *The Story of God* showings and discussion on April 15 and continue every Wednesday through May 20.

HOLY WEEK/EASTER AT FIRST CONGREGATIONAL

Maundy Thursday | April 2 | 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.

Easter | April 5 | 10:00 am

Dust off your Easter Bonnets and Suits for Easter 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?

FEBRUARY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

MICHAEL PETRI, CLERK

February 15, 2026

The church council of First Congregational Church United Church of Christ met in the chapel for the monthly stated meeting on February 15, 2026. Present were pastor Paul Ashby and council members Karen Caton, Kathy Goe, Cindy Haas, Julie Krueger, Michael Petri, Connie Pyle, Ron Rucker, Rachel Seiff, Kathy Vighianco, Allan Weinand and Janis Woodley. Guests: Beth Rakestraw, Bob Underwood

A quorum was established. The meeting was opened with prayer by Paul 11:23 a.m.

On motion, the minutes of the January 18, 2026 Council Meeting were approved as distributed.

Pastor's Report: Paul remarked on these items:

- ◇ Look for visitors to the worship services. Sit with them and/or greet them!
- ◇ There were some ICE agents walking around on the church grounds several weeks ago – probably related to the ceremony at the high school for new citizens.
- ◇ The church will host a concert of a European Jewish folk music group on March 3 which is a fundraiser for the local progressive Jewish community.
- ◇ A reminder to all: Please send announcements to the office for publication in the bulletin. Don't make announcements during the worship services.

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

Ministry Team Reports/Minutes:

- ◇ Fellowship & Hospitality Meetings: February 2026
- ◇ Mission & Outreach Meetings: February 2026
- ◇ Worship and Celebration: February 2026
- ◇ Property Team: February 2026 and a memo on the status of the church roofs. A proposal from Kruger Roofing to replace the aging, hail damaged roof on the north side of the CE building was presented. The cost to the church will be just the \$5,000 insurance deductible except for any non-hail damage that needs to be repaired (such as rotten sheathing). The council approved the proposal, on motion. There was also discussion of the condition of the other roofs on the buildings, especially to the fiber cement roofs on the sanctuary and Pilgrim Hall. Work is in-progress to determine if there is hail damage, etc.
- ◇ Gardens and Grounds: Nothing to report.
- ◇ Finance and Stewardship: No meeting.

Finance Reports: Year-end financial reports are not yet ready. They are expected to be presented at the March meeting.

Other Business/New Business:

- ◇ **Membership review:** The annual review of the church membership rolls, following the guidelines in the church bylaws, was conducted. A recommended list of changes

FEBRUARY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES MICHAEL PETRI, CLERK

was prepared by a team composed of the clerk, treasurer, church administrator and pastor. After some discussion of the recommendations, the membership changes were approved, on motion. The changes are retroactive to December 31, 2025

- ◇ **Membership attendance:** The membership review prompted questions about what, if anything, the church does to reach out to members who stop attending for whatever reasons. Short term attendance monitoring has been only sporadic. As such, Janis agreed to start reviewing attendance weekly, looking at member attendance over the previous 4 weeks. Attendance information is gathered from the sign-in pads.
- ◇ **Committee Recruitment:** It was agreed to have a Recruitment Sunday on April 26 to encourage the congregation to sign up for the various church committees. Prior to this, bulletin inserts and short talks in the worship services will be provided about each committee's work.

There being no other business, the meeting was closed at 12:06 p.m.

Michael Petri, clerk

SPRING HAS SPRUNG CINDY HAAS

The temperatures have risen much earlier than in the past, and the landscapes in yards through town are colorful as the daffodils, crocus, the flowering trees and other flowers are beginning to bloom. For me it is when my one tulip is emerging through my mulch that we are truly in springtime mode. That tulip reminds me of my mother. Her favorite flower was the tulip. She had over a hundred bulbs in her small yard in Durango. They were all in the backyard because the deer would eat the tulips in the front yard.

It is a struggle to grow vegetables in Durango. She would put up the Walls of Water each year in mid-April and plant her tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers. The walls were not brought down until the second week of June hoping the last freeze had occurred. Sometimes there was frost in the third week of June. Her cucumbers and peppers would ripen in early August, but the tomatoes were rarely harvested until the third or fourth week of August. Then she had to watch news every night to see when the first frost of the season would happen. Out she would go with sheets to protect her tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers so they would live another day. She usually would do this until the end of September. She knew she had to adapt how she grew her vegetables because of the shorter growing season. I admire her perseverance to achieve what was important to her. It is easy to grow a garden in Denver and Grand Junction, but the limited growing season is a barrier in Durango.

Life always offers challenges, and this year we may need to adapt to growing our gardens not due to a shortened growing season, but to a shortage of water.

MISSION & OUTREACH NEWS

SECOND QUARTER 2026 MISSION FOCUS: THE JOSEPH CENTER

For the second quarter 2026 the Mission and Outreach Committee chose The Joseph Center as our mission partner.

The Joseph Center vision is as follows: “To support people in need of hope by restoring dignity through resources and encouragement to regain a sense of belonging to the greater community.”

They house three programs: Day Shelter, Family Program, and Golden Girls Project.

The Day Shelter is a place for homeless families and individuals with children to attend during the day in a safe and private environment. It provides computer access to apply for jobs, enroll in services and write resumes. Lunch is provided.

The Family Center is a shelter that can provide beds for 16 people. Most clients have jobs. There is a kitchen to prepare meals, laundry, showers, life skills counseling and group recovery counseling. The goal is for the client to save 30% of their money and to be able to move into their own place. They are welcome to stay 6--12 months. It is a safe homey environment.

The Golden Girls Project is a shelter for women over 50 years old. They can accommodate 16 women. They have jobs with the goal to save money to move into their own home. A kitchen, laundry and shower facilities are provided along with classes in life skills, recovery and counseling. They are welcome to stay 6-12 months in this safe and welcoming environment.

At the Joseph Center there is a food bank, along with parent advocacy programs, and financial services; they collaborate with other local agencies.

They have requested we collect paper towels, toilet paper and laundry detergent for April.

ONGOING COLLECTIONS

April Catholic Outreach Item | Canned vegetables! By the way, when Pastor Paul delivered items on March 11, there were 63 canned fruit, 6 cans tuna, 1 large rolled oats, 2 peanut butter, and 1 Popeye’s Spicy Blackened Ranch Dipping Sauce (not to be used with canned fruit!) There’s lots of salad dressing in the bins right now!

Soles4Souls | FCC has a collection box for good quality gently used shoes. When the box gets full, Mission & Outreach ships them to Soles4Souls, who distributes them to various programs around the world.

Egg Cartons for the food bank. Remember that the food bank can only use 12-count, cardboard-based cartons.

MISSION & OUTREACH NEWS

MORE ONGOING COLLECTIONS

Stop Bringing Jugs for Solidarity Not Charity | SNC is requesting blankets –used is fine. We continue to collect personal size toiletries and other personal hygiene items for SNC.

Newspaper Bags for Mutual Aid | The church is collecting plastic newspaper bags to fill with dog and cat food to give to our unhoused friends for their furry companions. Right now there is need of dry cat food to fill the bags. Just put it in the bin with the bags in the collections area outside the main office. Contact Carolyn VanMatre with questions.

IT'S BACK! TASTE OF AFRICA!
FUNDRAISER FOR A SOLAR POWERED
IRRIGATION SYSTEM FOR A MAASAI
VILLAGE IN KENYA
APRIL 18 6-8 PM



DELICIOUS
FOOD,
MAASAI
CRAFTS,
DANCING



A TASTE OF AFRICA

Saturday, April 18 | 6:00 – 8:00 pm

Enjoy authentic African foods prepared by Ken Puhler and friends to raise funds for a solar powered irrigation system for Oltome Village.

Tickets are general admission, which means that seats are first come, first seated. There will be 12 tables of 8 persons at each table, 96 people in all. Tickets are \$25 each. A limited number of tickets have been set aside for congregants only to purchase in advance of the event using check or cash.

Please contact Beth Rakestraw in the church office to make arrangements. Otherwise you may purchase tickets through Eventbrite beginning March 30. Eventbrite will charge a fee of \$3.52.

NEWS FROM THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN CONFERENCE

The Conference Board is still looking for a lay representative from the Western Association to serve on the Conference Minister Search Committee for the Rocky Mountain Conference. This commitment will last approximately one year (from Annual Celebration June 2026 until Annual Celebration 2027. That's the hope!) We expect the majority of the meetings will happen via Zoom. If you are a church member and are interested in the position, or would like more information, please contact Karen Caton.

SUNDAY MORNING CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMING

Children's Program in April:

April 5: Easter

- ❖ There will be no program for the classroom. Special bags will be available for the children to use during the worship service.
- ❖ The classroom will be available for toddlers, or there will be special bags for them in worship.
- ❖ Sundays of April 12, 19 & 26
- ❖ We will learn, create, and play in the wonderful world we live in.

Thank you to the following people for covering the classroom during the month of March.

Allan Weinand, Dana and Zoe Brosig,

Nancy Palubicki, Laura and Jacob Brady

Marie

LOOKING AHEAD TO CHILDREN/YOUTH SUMMER CAMPS AT LAFORET

Explorer Camp, July 5 – July 11

Explorer Camp provides an incredible community experience for children entering grades 3-6! Supported by trained counselors and staff, campers will engage with nature, form friendships, and explore their personal beliefs, all with an emphasis on fun! The week will include activities like campfires, swimming, arts and crafts, outdoor games, free time, a ropes course, and worship.

Voyager Faith & Science Camp, July 12 – July 18

At Voyager Camp, youth in grades 6-8 are given the opportunity to be their truest selves and build a community of authenticity and support. Albert Einstein said that the more he studied the universe the more he believed in a higher power. Trained counselors and staff will set the stage and hold space for a memorable week filled with laughter, music, reflection, self-exploration, and don't forget the ropes course! Youth will form memories and friendships they'll hold dear for the rest of their lives.

Music, Art, Drama, and Dance (MADD) Camp, July 12 – July 18

We believe that the arts and creative expression are incredible tools for experiencing and growing in our spirituality. ALL artistic skill-levels (really!) are present and

LOOKING AHEAD TO CHILDREN/YOUTH SUMMER CAMPS AT LAFORET

welcome at MADD Camp. Along with engaging youth in grades 9-12 in intellectual faith conversations, we attempt to get youth “out of their heads” and into experiencing God (or the Holy, Divine, or transcendent) through creativity, nature, friendships, self-discovery, games, activities, and LOTS of fun. Trained staff help guide youth in engaging with their spirituality on their terms. The Refuge camps and retreats create a safe, brave space where youth can ask questions, explore their faith, and connect more deeply to themselves, each other, the earth, and the Holy- whatever that means to them.

Campership moneys for children and youth attending camps for both fees and travel are available through both our church, the Western Association, and the Rocky Mountain Conference.

NEWS ABOUT SOME OF OUR MUSICIAN FRIENDS

Max Reilly | April 8 | 12:15 | First United Methodist Church | Max will be playing for “A Little Noon Music,” First UMC’s free Second Wednesday concert series.

Rainy Graves | April 30 | 5:30 | CMU Love Recital Hall | Hear Rainy’s lovely voice one more time (and give them love and support) as they perform their senior recital for their degree.

ABC: APPETIZERS, BEVERAGES, CONVERSATION



This month’s ABC social meets from 5:00 to 7:00, Saturday, April 25 [note it’s the fourth Saturday] at the home of Janis Woodley, 227 S Mulberry, Fruita. The theme is Cinco de Mayo. Janis will offer a taco bar and invites attendees to bring appropriate side dishes and desserts. Of course, do bring beverages to share.

Save the date for ABC - May 16 - Julie Krueger and Linda Randolph.

APRIL BIRTHDAYS

4/2 Michael Petri	4/16 Jean McArthur
4/6 Tobin Braz	4/17 Abigail Hildebrand
4/12 Maris Braz	4/20 Carl Jones
4/12 Lynn Simpson	4/22 Lexi Taddeo
4/14 Jessie Ragsdale	4/24 Marty Arnold
4/15 Zoe Brosig	



**If you would like to share your birthdate with the congregation, please let the church office know! Thank you.

APRIL 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
March 29	March 30	March 31	1	2	3	4
Palm Sunday 8:45 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 5 th Sunday Potluck		10:00 Women's/ Men's Coffee	2:00 Mission & Outreach 3:30 Handbells	2:00 Fellowship & Hospitality 5:00 Maundy Thursday Worship		
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Easter 8:45 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour		10:00 Women's/ Mens' Coffees	12:15 Max Reilly Plays, First UMC 3:30 Handbells			
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
8:45 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour 11:15 <i>For Such a Time as This</i>	1:00 Property Team	10:00 Women's/ Men's Coffee	1:00 <i>The Story of God</i> 3:30 Handbells	11:30 Berna B's		<i>A Taste of Africa</i>
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
8:45 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour 11:15 Council Meeting		10:00 Women's/ Mens' Coffee	1:00 <i>The Story of God</i> 3:30 Handbells			ABC Social 6:00 — 8:00
26	27	28	29	30	May 1	May 2
8:45 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour	8:00 CE Building north side roof repair to begin		11:00 Finance Team 1:00 <i>The Story of God</i> 3:30 Handbells	5:30 Rainy Graves Recital, CMU		

LOOKING AHEAD

May 17 | Annual Congregational Meeting

June 11 -13 | RMC Annual Celebration, Provo, UT

July 5-11 | Explorer Camp | Grades 3-6

July 12-18 | Voyager Faith and Science Camp | Grades 6-8

July 12-18 | Music, Art, Drama, Dance [MADD] Camp | Grades 9-12



First Congregational UCC
1425 N 5th Street
Grand Junction, CO 81501

Church Office Hours
Monday through Thursday
9 am—3 pm
Reach us at:
(970)-242-0298
www.uccgj.org

CONTACT US!

Pastor

Rev. Dr. Paul Ashby
He, his, him
revpaulashby@yahoo.com
X104

Church Administrator

Beth Rakestraw
They, theirs, them
office@uccgj.org | X 105
[Monday through Thursday]

Director of Choirs

Karen Caton
topcatkc@aol.com

Pianist/Music Coordinator

Martha Jones
She, her, hers

Children's Ed:

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

Organist/Pianist:

Ellen Bradley
She, hers, her

Part Time Custodian:

Matu Hedwall
He, his, him

Volunteer Financial Clerk:

Martha Jones
She, hers, her
finance@uccgj.org