

Tower Chimes



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



Paul's Epistle

Friends,

Many churches miss the basic reality that the Palm Sunday event was a march that Jesus led through the city gates directly to the Temple to protest the exploitation of the poor and the abuse of people of faith. Palm Sunday was so much more than a welcome parade. It was Jesus directly confronting the authority and power

structures of Jerusalem and Rome. Do not forget that during Roman occupation the chief priest of the Temple was not elected by the people or a committee of leading rabbis. No, the chief priest was appointed by Rome based mostly on who offered the largest bribe to “purchase” the position and collect unjust fees from pilgrims seeking to practice their faith.

You have heard the phrase – actions speak louder than words. It was true for Jesus and is more true today than at any time since the Selma march with Dr. King. I appreciate the church members who have shown up for the “No Kings” events and marches in support of the constitution. The actions of Pope Francis inspired me especially on environmental issues. Now we have the witness of Pope Leo in supporting the Biblical teaching of sharing hospitality and mercy with the stranger, the immigrant.

Pope Leo has the unique insight of working in places of poverty and struggle. His heart of empathy and care was born from decades of practice following the way of Christ's compassion. Pope Leo is able to see the full humanity (and value) of people born outside our 50 states. They are not “garbage people” as they have been called. I was emailed an article from The New York Times to share:

The pope continues to oppose and reject JD Vance and his anti-immigrant agenda. Vance, a Catholic convert who thinks he can disregard all the church's teachings, seems to be unable to hear the message clearly, like a creep who keeps pestering a girl who won't go out with him. Vance flew to Rome to ask the US-born pope to come celebrate the fourth of July in this country. Pope Leo XIV probably felt obligated to give the vice president a hearing, but the video shows Vance trying to be chummy and obsequious

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

PAUL'S EPISTLE

while the head of the Catholic Church is politely icy. "JD Vance Humiliated as Pope Snubs Fourth of July 250 to Stand with Immigrants" says one headline.

Christopher Hale, who writes a newsletter that follows what this pope is up to notes, Pope Leo XIV will celebrate this coming July 4 not in the United States for its 250th festivities, but on the tiny Italian island of Lampedusa – a migrant gateway in the Mediterranean, The Vatican announced that on Independence Day the pope will travel to Lampedusa, ground zero of Europe's migration crisis, instead of attending any U.S. 250th Birthday events. Coming just days after Pope Leo publicly rebuffed President Donald Trump's invitation to join his "Board of Peace" initiative for Gaza, the decision reads as pointed counter-programming.

There is so much going on. Administration attacks on an independent news media, on the rights of immigrants and refugees, on science and public health, on the rule of law continues. But not without resistance, sometimes pushing back or stopping it altogether. It matters.

Our faith affirms that God raises up those that the corrupt and powerful try to bury. Faith declares that the Palm Sunday March is not over. Faith dares us to follow a brown-skinned, radical Rabbi named Jesus.

Peace, Shalom, Salaam,
Rev. Paul

TIME AND TALENTS CINDY HAAS

A growing church means there is more opportunity to be involved and more people who want to be involved. According to the survey over 40% of the members have been attending for less than 5 years. If you add the group who have attended less than ten years it is 60% of the congregation.

You may not know how to contribute your time and talent to the church. Beginning March 1, 2026 and for the Sundays after that, each team will give a short presentation on what they do and need. For example, the Fellowship Team doesn't just need volunteers to help with coffee after church, but they need people to bring in cookies or snacks. They will have a table in Fellowship Hall to answer questions and sign up volunteers.

In addition to the established teams, two new teams have been established and volunteers are needed. The two new teams are Adult Education and Social. The survey indicated these were two areas that need to be explored. Since these are new, the team members can establish how many functions and how often.

On April 26, 2026 the church is hosting the Ministry Opportunity Celebration. Each team will have a table where you can sign up or just ask questions about how you can contribute. Perhaps you want to hear all the presentations before you make a decision. This will be that opportunity.

Hopefully, you will find a team that fits your time and talent that will have a positive impact on our congregation.

NOVEMBER COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES MICHAEL PETRI, CLERK

January 18, 2026

The church council of First Congregational Church United Church of Christ met in the chapel for the monthly stated meeting on January 18, 2026. Present were pastor Paul Ashby and council members Karen Caton, Kathy Goe, Julie Krueger, Michael Petri, Connie Pyle, Ron Rucker, Rachel Seiff, Kathy Viglianco, Allan Weinand and Janis Woodley. Cindy Haas was absent. Guest: Terri Wenzlaff.

A quorum was established. The meeting was opened by Julie at 11:27 a.m.

Julie led a discussion on moving forward with ideas from the congregational survey. It was agreed to have two Christian Education focus group meetings for interested parties on February 22 to develop more Christian Education opportunities for children and adults. Another focus is congregational activities which are beyond the scope of the Fellowship & Hospitality Committee.

On motion, the minutes of the November 16, 2025 Council Meeting and December 14, 2025 Congregational Meeting were approved as distributed.

Martha Jones will be moderating an Ecumenical Council of the Rocky Mountain Conference today and is thus unable to act as a delegate from our church at the Council. Beth Rakestraw volunteered to act as delegate. The following motion was approved: That Beth Rakestraw is welcome to represent us in ecumenical councils for the rest of the year.

Pastor's Report: Paul remarked on these items:

- ◇ Remember to notice visitors and greet them.
- ◇ Suggested getting to know new members Cynthia Weeden and Georgia Ray. Both joined on January 11. Michael commented that we should be collecting birth year information on members since that is used for the annual statistical report.
- ◇ Thanked those helping prepare the memorial service and luncheon for Carolyn Holmgren.
- ◇ Thanked those who helped in the office while Beth was recovering from surgery.
- ◇ Thanked Michael for investigating the heat problem in the CE building last week.

Ministry Team Reports/Minutes: Available reports were distributed prior to the meeting, as noted. There was discussion about the need for additional members on all the committees, so it was suggested that we highlight each committee briefly in a “minute for mission” over upcoming worship services.

Ministry Team Reports/Minutes

- ◇ Fellowship & Hospitality Meetings: December 2025 and January 2026
- ◇ Mission & Outreach Meetings: December 2025 and January 2026
- ◇ Worship and Celebration: No meeting
- ◇ Property Team: January 2026. Michael highlighted that the hail damage claim on the CE building roof has been accepted. Claims are still pending on the other roofs.
- ◇ Gardens and Grounds: Allan noted that Peter has been a great help with the gardens

NOVEMBER COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

MICHAEL PETRI, CLERK

- ◇ Finance and Stewardship: No meeting

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

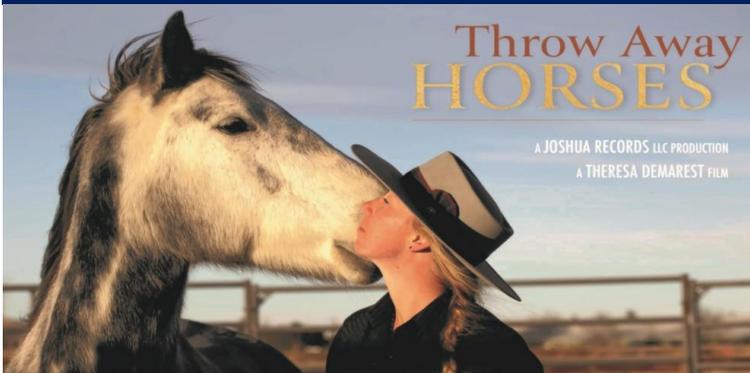
Other Business/New Business

- ◇ The 2026 Budget proposal was e-mailed to the council on November 23 for review. The council approved, via e-mail, the distribution of the budget proposal to the congregation prior to the annual congregational budget meeting.
- ◇ Similarly, Christmas bonuses of \$100 were proposed and approved by the council via e-mail.
- ◇ At the suggestion of the bookkeeper, the following budget-neutral resolution to modify the church budget was approved:
 - *RESOLVED that the employee share of the FAMILI tax be shifted from the church paying this tax on the employees' behalf to withholding the tax from each employee's paycheck. This will be effective with the first payroll in January. To offset the cost, the Council approves increasing each employee's pay by .44% from the amount in the approved budget.*
- ◇ Annual review of membership rolls: Michael noted that it's time for our annual review of the rolls. He will work with Paul, Beth and Martha to prepare a list of suggested changes. Member Carolyn Holmgren died on 12/23/25. Member Betty Patton died on January 5, 2026.

There being no other business, the meeting was closed at 12:05 p.m.

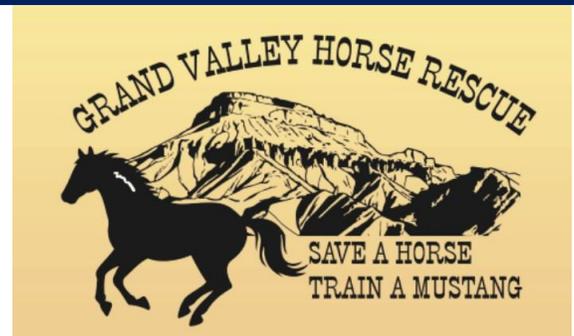
Michael Petri, clerk

THROW AWAY HORSES



GET TICKETS OR LEARN MORE

www.GVHR.org



Friday, March 13, 6:30 pm
First Congregational
United Church of Christ
Pilgrim Hall
Tickets:

\$15 Adults, \$10 Children, Students, Seniors

MISSION & OUTREACH NEWS

WHAT ARE OUR CONGREGATION'S FIVE FOR FIVE OFFERINGS?

For a number of years we have been a 5 for 5 Church—meaning that our church is a leader in providing support to Our Church's Wider Mission [OCWM], and four Special Mission Offerings: One Great Hour of Sharing, Strengthen The Church, Neighbors In Need and The Christmas Fund. Our congregation contributes to OCWM through our yearly budget, but the other 4 offerings are made available directly to congregants for direct contribution. You have been very generous in your contributions through the years.

ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING

This is the first of the four Special Mission Offerings, to which we will begin contributing March 8. Watch Church Chat for more information about the purpose of this offering and how you may contribute.

FIRST QUARTER 2026 MISSION FOCUS: INTERNATIONAL MISSION PARTNERSHIPS

We continue to sponsor our student Guadalupe's scholarship for her second year of high school through The Foundation for Cultural Exchange and we continue to contribute to Oltome Village teacher salaries.

ONGOING COLLECTIONS

March Catholic Outreach Item | As of this writing, we don't yet know what food item Catholic Outreach would like us to share. But I am sure they will tell us soon. Meanwhile, the last time Paul delivered items, there were 34 canned fruit, 3 orange jello, 4 cream soup, 91 boxes of pasta, 1 cranberry sauce, 1 sliced beets, 10 boxes of minute rice.

New Collection for Mutual Aid Partners | Mutual Aid Partners will be distributing handbags we provide. Items needed: gently used handbags or small backpacks; personal care products in small sizes; health products such as wipes, tissues, bandaids; accessories – hats, gloves, handwarmers; candy and snacks – anything else you can think of that would bring a smile to the recipient.

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

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 | Carolyn Van Matre is collecting plastic 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. **Carolyn is need of dry cat food to fill the bags.** Just put it in the bin with the bags.

75 years old and taking a break.

I am not going to be teaching in the classroom on the Sundays of March 8, 15, 22, & 29. Volunteers will lead the Sunday morning programs.

Marie Koontz

ABC: APPETIZERS, BEVERAGES, CONVERSATION

This month's ABC social meets from 5:00 to 7:00 [note the time change] Saturday, March 21 at the home of Doug and Karen Hildebrand, 3167 Saddle Gulch Drive, Grand Junction, 81504. Of course, do bring appetizers and beverages to share. Theme: One of your favorite foods growing up.

Save the dates for ABC - April 25 (moved to 4th Saturday due to Oltome Village Fundraiser) - Janis Woodley, May 16 - Julie Krueger and Linda Randolph.

THE STORY OF GOD, SEASON 3

Now that he is ready to show season 3 of *The Story of God*, Paul is running a poll on the best time for Continuing Education events. He has been showing the previous seasons on Wednesday at 1 pm. Does that time slot work for you? Would Wednesdays at noon or 6:00 pm or Friday at 6:30 pm be better for your attendance? Share your vote and schedule with Paul, revpaulashby@yahoo.com.

MARCH BIRTHDAYS

3/4 Sam Ragsdale	3/20 Ron Rucker
3/7 Donna Hochmuth	3/25 Beth Rakestraw
3/16 Heidi Hess	3/26 Ed Orlosky
3/16 Joan Levy	3/27 Ken Puhler
3/16 Mark Long	3/29 Karen Caton
3/20 Caroline Ely	3/30 Maria McCleery



MARCH 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8:45 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour		10:00 Women's/ Men's Coffee 7:00 Zoe Aqua Concert	2:00 Mission & Outreach 3:30 Handbells	2:00 Fellowship & Hospitality		<i>Spring Forward --Set Clocks Ahead 1 Hour</i>
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
8:45 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour 11:15 Spirituality Group	1:00 Property Team	10:00 Women's/ Mens' Coffees	3:30 Handbells		6:30 "Throw Away Horses" Event	
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
8:45 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:05 Happy Hour 11:15 Council Meeting		10:00 Women's/ Men's Coffee	3:30 Handbells	11:30 Berna B's		ABC Social 5:00 — 7:00 [Note time change]
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
8:45 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour		10:00 Women's/ Mens' Coffee	3:30 Handbells			<i>No Kings Rally</i>
29	30	31	April 1	April 2	April 3	April 4
8:45 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour			2:00 Mission & Outreach 3:30 Handbells	2:00 Fellowship & Hospitality		

LOOKING AHEAD

April 5 | Easter
 April 18 | Oltome Village Fundraiser
 April 26 | Ministry Opportunity Celebration
 June 11 -13 | RMC Annual Celebration, Provo, UT



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