

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



Paul's Epistle

Dear Friends,

Be aware that stress and anxiety can visit before and during the holidays. All the family events, shopping, cooking, preparing for visits or guests and even fun events during the season can leave you looking for peace and serenity. I do not like to be rushed but there is a very real "Christmas rush" that oddly seems to come earlier each year. I used to be able to count on the candy and costumes of Halloween to keep Christmas decorations and stocked shelves of Santa stuff out until November 1st. Now I see Christmas and Halloween items out in early September! When I see Christmas items before Labor Day, I have to repress the urge to say "Bah humbug."

Be aware that holidays can generate all types of feelings, positive and negative. A way to add a positive approach is keep your to-do list short and focus on things you look forward to in the season. Consider a holiday show- the most fun and underrated is the Harp Twins at Mesa Theatre. You will laugh and be amazed at the talent. Look forward to seeing family members or connecting with them on Zoom. Catch up on rest if you have a day off from work. Take time to enjoy the lights downtown in Grand Junction. Share your favorite Christmas experience with your children or grandchildren. Pick up a book you have had on your list. As you wrap presents or gift cards remember the person with love and good wishes for their future. It is delightful to energize your inner Santa.

I would add to forgive yourself and others. There is no perfect Thanksgiving or Christmas. Yes, some are "pretty, pretty good" to quote Larry David. Ask yourself what makes the experience pretty good for you? Not perfect, but good enough to enjoy and celebrate. In our land of abundance most of us are fortunate enough to fix the things that ruin a holiday. I once went to a Thanksgiving potluck where no one brought pumpkin pie! My guess is that everyone assumed that someone had already covered that item. When I heard a person lament "It's not Thanksgiving without pumpkin pie," I simply drove to Marie Callendar's and bought two. Yes, we live in a time and land of abundance when you can fix the things that would ruin the day. Things would not have turned out quite the same if I shared the historically accurate observation that the Pilgrims did not

PAUL'S EPISTLE

have pumpkin pie. We can all look for the small things that bring joy to friends and family. Even better, we can afford those small things.

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

Gift card notice from Paul & Pam: Please do not buy Popeye's Gift Cards. They are often not accepted in Colorado or Utah. The last time we found a location that accepted one was a suburb of Lexington, Kentucky! Downtown cards were also refused on a regular basis. If you feel inspired to buy a Gift card, we both like Chipotle.

PLEDGE DEDICATION SUNDAY NOVEMBER 8

THERE OUR HEARTS WILL BE

"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."
- Matthew 6:21

There Our Hearts Will Be invites us into a season of deep spiritual alignment—an honest, hopeful exploration of how our practices, priorities, and resources reveal what truly claims our hearts. Rooted in Jesus' teaching from Matthew 6, this theme reframes giving not as performance or obligation, but as the quiet, courageous work of placing our hearts in God's care. Turning to the breadth of our sacred scripture, we'll examine what we love, whom we trust, and how we live out our faith.

Ultimately, ***There Our Hearts Will Be*** is an invitation to:

- **Re-center our lives** on God's quiet, faithful presence.
- **Let our giving reflect** our deepest values and commitments.
- **Align our actions** with our confession of Christ.
- **Allow God to transform, heal, and renew** our hearts.
- **Practice a generosity** that is not performative, but rooted, joyful, and Spirit-led.

Through this journey, we will discover again that **faithful stewardship is not primarily about money**—it is about placing our hearts in God's hands, trusting that **where our hearts go, our lives, choices, and resources will follow.**

Together, as a community shaped by grace, we will ask: **Where is our treasure? How can our hearts more fully align with God's?**

In this season, we commit to making our answer clear. **There our hearts will be.**

The ministry teams and staff have turned in their budget requests, planning for their work for the coming year.

The Finance Committee has begun drafting the 2027 budget, carefully walking the fine line between responsibility and generosity, knowing that Jesus would have us err on the side of generosity. The Council will review it with the same considerations.

The pledge cards asking about our commitments for 2027 have been distributed –hopefully you have received yours. If not, there's some blank cards available in the office. And you can always pledge online at https://www.uccgj.org/pledge.

Now, the rest is up to us. The congregation. Each of us to prayerfully reflect upon what we "heart" about our congregation and fill out our pledge cards accordingly.



SEPTEMBER COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES RACHEL SEIFF, CLERK

September 20, 2026

The church council of First Congregational Church United Church of Christ met in the chapel for the monthly stated meeting on September 20, 2026 Present were Pastor Paul Ashby and council members: Allan Weinand, Cindy Haas, Janis Woodley, Karen Caton, Kathy Viglianco, Rachel Seiff, and Terri Wenzlaff. Absent were: Celia Eberfield, Connie Pyle, Jean Yale, Julie Krueger, Kathy Goe, and Zoe Brosig.
Guests were Beth Rakestraw and Marie Koontz.

A **quorum** was established. The meeting was opened with prayer by Pastor Paul at 11:25 am.

Review of Agenda

Approval of August 2026 Council minutes was conducted via email

Ongoing Business

- ◊ Pastor's September 2026 Report
  - Committees should get their 2027 budget proposals in, if they haven't already.
  - How did things go during Paul's absence?
  - While gone, he and Pam visited 2 UCC churches, including the Omaha, NE mega-style church. Both of these churches are increasing their support for local food banks. Also, both said a main struggle in their church is finding people for choirs and committees. Mega churches, like the one in Omaha, have a hard time on memberships after Covid, especially with in-person worship attendance.
  - Potential Roof Fundraiser. What time and what kind? We will be looking to raise about $100k. In 2027, an early Easter means Lent is also early. This means our timing is important. We could have a "New Year: New Roof' January kick-off event. Council could take lead on planning that event. Since the last time we had a capital campaign (for the Sanctuary renovation and constructing the Gathering Space) we now have tenants that might be interested in contributing to the roof. We will postpone the congregational meeting until we have more information, including the third company's estimate.
  - On the 2nd Sundays after worship, book discussion of *For Such a Time as This* will continue with the 40 pages of discussion questions.
- ◊ Ministry Team Reports/Minutes
- ◊ Fellowship & Hospitality- Verbal Report
  - Budget will be the same as last year.
  - Ladies Christmas Luncheon will be in December.
- ◊ Mission & Outreach Meeting- Verbal Report
  - Finishing up this quarter with La Plaza.
  - Next quarter will be Mutual Aid Partners.

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- Connie updated us on the new solar water pump in Oltolme. It's working! This deserves a celebration!
- Started working on next year's budget
- Christmas will have the giving tree for coats and toys again.

◊ Finance- meeting in the upcoming weeks
◊ Worship and Celebration Meeting, no meeting
◊ Property Team Meeting, no report
◊ Gardens and Grounds, no report

New Business

◊ Paul's sabbatical- 1 candidate so far to fill in for Paul.
◊ Adult Education focus group- 2 people interested in committee to work on Holmgren Lectureship.
◊ Questions from Marie Koontz- any progress on filling the children and youth position? Is there a Christian Education committee to recruit volunteers? There wasn't anyone for Sunday School again today. While we try to fill this, let's get volunteers for 1 week a month- we have the curriculum. Need two adult volunteers besides Sawyer (who is still under 18. The Indeed posting currently has around 4-5 applicants. One congregant is interested in the position, but only wants to focus on working with older youth. We do have curriculum available from Progressive Christianity, so there is no need to come up with lessons or activities on their own.
◊ Rachel will be gone for most of October. Janis has volunteered to take minutes for the October council meeting.

Next Meeting: October 18
Adjourn 11:56
Minutes submitted by Rachel Seiff, clerk

Editor's note: remember that the council meeting minutes as published are two months behind the council's current work to allow for corrections to the minutes and council approval. ~~Beth

ABC: APPETIZERS, BEVERAGES, CONVERSATION

This month's ABC social takes place on Saturday, November 21, 5:00 – 7:00 pm, [NOTE the time change] at the home of Michael Petri, 477 Escondido Cir, in the lovely Redlands area of Grand Junction. Bring a beverage and appetizer to share!

NEW: CREATE AND CONVERSE

Starting Tuesday, November 3 after the Coffee Hours from 11 am to 2 pm, we're gathering for a time to play! The session would be available to anyone working on any type of art project which is portable and promotes lively conversation while creating.

MISSION & OUTREACH NEWS

SECOND FOURTH QUARTER 2026 MISSION PARTNER: FOSTER ALUMNI MENTORS [FAM]

Foster Alumni Mentors (FAM) has been selected by the Mission & Outreach Committee as our 4th quarter recipient for support. While we will be supporting this agency with a check, we do not anticipate doing any collections for them at this time.

Family Alumni Mentors (FAM) creates a community of belonging and a network of support for those who have experienced foster care.

CONNECT

We connect with foster alumni to "normalize" life, showing them that they are not alone, and that they have an entire community of support.

INSPIRE

We inspire foster alumni to believe in themselves, introducing them to other alumni who are following their dreams and achieving their goals.

EMPOWER

We empower foster alumni by providing tools that will support them in reaching their full potential and creating their unique path to success.

Nationwide, over 20,000 youth are emancipated from the foster care system each year.

Imagine being 17 years old with little to no connections to family or people who care about you. Who supports you with securing a safe place to live, applying for a job, preparing meals, managing your money, or finding a doctor? Who comes to your aid when your car won't start or stops by when you've had a tough day? Who do you turn to with questions of how to become an "adult"?

Now imagine being in your 20s, 30s, 40s or older, navigating parenthood without support or trying to figure out what you want to do or what your life goals are. Who provides guidance and encouragement for raising your kids or seeking your dreams? Who do you process your foster care experiences with and their impact on you today? Who is there to help quiet the doubts, believe in your gifts, and cheer you on no matter what?

For many of those who have experienced foster care, a "who" is hard to come by and would make all the difference. At Foster Alumni Mentors (FAM), we help with "who" through providing a range of peer-to-peer activities and individualized, staff-guided support.

We believe that with dedicated access to resources for connection, inspiration and empowerment, foster care alumni can create wildly fruitful futures and be some of the greatest contributors to our community, near and far.

More Mission & Outreach News

ONGOING COLLECTION ITEMS

- ◊ **November Catholic Outreach Item |** This month, CO wants us to share canned vegetables with them.
- ◊ **Our Soles for Souls box has gone local!** FCC is now collecting good quality gently used shoes for the Catholic Outreach clothes closet and other local organizations as needed.
- ◊ **Egg Cartons for the food bank.** Remember that the food bank can only use 12-count, cardboard-based cartons.
- ◊ **SNC (Solidarity Not Charity) is requesting blankets --used is fine.** We continue to collect personal size toiletries and other personal hygiene items for SNC. Milk jugs are no longer needed.
- ◊ **Newspaper Bags.** 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. *Carolyn told me last week that there was plenty of dog and cat food for now so hold off collecting that*. Contact Carolyn VanMatre with questions.

Budget News Update

The church Finance Committee is faced with the rising costs we all face. There are increased costs for utilities, repairs, taxes, building insurance, lawn care, all paper products, paint, cooler maintenance. You may face these same increases in your home or apartment. The news each day speaks of the affordability crisis.

Considering the stress on households the Budget committee will submit a deficit budget with no staff increase for 2027. If we have people who can afford to raise their pledge then staff increase will be added in January.

In addition to normal inflation increases the committee affirmed the need to raise Outreach giving for the hungry in Mesa County by $2,500 because food banks and support organizations are dealing with thousands of new families in need as the result of drastic SNAP and Medicaid cuts. This is our ongoing mission as we affirm “We Love, We Listen, We Help.”

Peace,
Paul

Annual Thanksgiving Day Potluck

The annual Thanksgiving Potluck takes place Thursday, November 26 beginning at 2 pm. Turkeys will be provided, but soon sign up sheets will be available in Pilgrim Hall for people to sign up to bring side dishes and desserts, and/or help with clean up [a very important part of this meal!] This year, the Unitarian Universalists are hosting the meal, but are utilizing our facilities. We are also expecting 14 additional guests from Foster Alumni Mentors. Your guests are also welcome!

NOVEMBER 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		***Election Day*** 10:00 Women's/ Mens' Coffees 11:00 Create and Converse	2:00 Mission & Outreach			***9:00 Fall Clean Up***
8	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**
Pledge Dedication Sunday 10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour 11:15 Book Study & Trump Era Support Group	1:00 Property Team	10:00 Women's/ Men's Coffee 11:00 Create and Converse				
15	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**	**20**	**21**
8:45 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour 11:15 Church Council		10:00 Women's/ Mens' Coffee 11:00 Create and Converse		11:30 Berna B's		***ABC Social 6:00 — 8:00***
22	**23**	**24**	**25**	**26**	**27**	**28**
8:45 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour		10:00 Women's/ Mens' Coffee 11:00 Create and Converse		***2:00 Thanks-giving Dinner*** ***Church Office Closed***		
29	**30**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
8:45 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour		10:00 Women's/ Mens' Coffee 11:00 Create and Converse				

LOOKING AHEAD

December 12 | Women's Christmas Luncheon
December 13 | Annual Congregational Budget Meeting

NOVEMBER BIRTHDAYS

11/2 Mike Avery
11/4 Kathy Viglianco
11/5 Beverly Fernsemer
11/9 Marie Koontz
11/11 Jane Wethington
11/12 Quincy Braz
11/12 Gail Gordon
11/19 Nancy Ford
11/21 Anna Dethmers
11/27 Marjorie Wilson
11/30 Jo Kissinger

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

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

First Congregational UCC
1425 N 5th Street
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Church Office Hours
Monday through Thursday
9 am—3 pm
Reach us at:
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CONTACT US!

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Pianist/Music Coordinator
Martha Jones
She, her, hers

Children's Ed:
Hiring for this position continues

Organist/Pianist:
Ellen Bradley
She, hers, her

Part Time Custodian:
Matu Hedwall
He, his, him

Volunteer Financial Clerk:
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