

Welcome to First Congregational Church United Church of Christ
Fourth Sunday After Epiphany
February 1, 2026

**** Some rise to their feet, some rise in their hearts—please rise as you are able.

GATHERING BELL

At the sound of the bell, please silence yourselves and prepare for worship.

PRELUDE *Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing (Nettleton), arr. John Carter* Martha Jones

ANNOUNCEMENTS Rev. Paul Ashby

INVITATION TO WORSHIP **Whoever you are...and wherever you are on life's journey... you are welcome here!**

OPENING REFLECTION

CALL TO WORSHIP Debra Weller

Too often college students ask the professor, "So is this going to be on the exam?"

Yes, we appreciate knowing what is expected, useful, practical and what will be on the final exam!

Religion is often a maze of ritual, creeds, days of obligation, holy relics, special devotions, and required holy days.

Sometimes we just want to know – what will be on the final exam?

The prophet Micah gave us the answer. What does God require of you?

To act with justice, to love mercy and to walk with humility as a child of God.

****HYMN *There is Room in God's Great Welcome* (tune: *Holy Manna*) All

There is room in God's great welcome; See! The doors are open wide!

Here on earth as in God's heaven, hear the call to come inside!

There is so much room for difference — for all people, gay and straight.

In God's love, the rooms are countless, and there is no room for hate.

There is room in our good nation if we stand on justice-ground.

God has made a good creation; colors, cultures all abound.

Welcome, sister! Welcome, brother! All those yearning to breathe free!

There is room for one another but no room for bigotry.

There is room for understanding, for the outcast and the poor;

For the Christian, Jew and Muslim — there is room for these and more.

For the people on the fringes, for the ones with long career,

There is room for building bridges, but there is no room for fear.

There is room in faithful churches for the wounded and oppressed:

Women who've been told they're worthless, refugees who feel distressed,

Immigrants who fear the future, people scorned and pushed and shoved.

God, may we seek what you treasure: may we all make room for love.

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE Paul

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Respond to each shared prayer request with "Peace, Shalom, Salaam."

PASTORAL PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER

Our Creator, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

INVITATION TO OFFERING

Debra

OFFERTORY

Grace, Joel Raney

Martha

Based on Psalm 23: *Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.*

****DOXOLOGY (tune: *Tallis Canon*)

**Praise God whose mercies never cease;
whose justice raises up the least;
invites all creatures to the feast---
God's mercy is our hope and peace!**

****PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Debra

God of Mercy, may the gifts we share help us to do the work of peace and reconciliation in our divided world. We pray for a harvest of justice and sharing that creates new experiences of love and gratitude. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 5:1-12; Micah 6:6-8

Debra

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he began to speak and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

“With what shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before God on high?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you

but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?

MESSAGE

“Practice is Not Just for Choirs”

Paul

PREPARATION

Invitation to the Table, Mary Kay Beall

Choir

CELEBRATION OF COMMUNION (Gluten free options are available.)

All are welcome who practice the way of compassion.

Paul

****HYMN

Seek Justice (tune: *St. Denio*)

All

Seek justice. Love kindness. Live humbly and know
that God will be with you wherever you go.
Whatever your troubles, whatever your fear,
God's love will surround you and gather you near.

Seek justice. Love kindness. Live humbly. Rejoice.
The world needs your wisdom, your passion, your voice.
So go make a dif-f'rence in all that you do.
God's endless compassion will carry you through.

****BENEDICTION

Paul

**** SUNG BENEDICTION

World Peace Prayer

All

Lead us from death to life, from falsehood to truth,
From despair to hope, from fear to trust.
Lead us from hate to love, from war to peace,
Let peace fill our hearts, let peace fill our world,
Let peace fill our universe!

GREETING ONE ANOTHER IN THE SPIRIT OF LOVE

RECESSIONAL

St. Denio, arr. John Carter

Martha

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Today's Worship Leaders

preacher
liturgist
musician

Rev. Dr. Paul Ashby
Debra Weller
Martha Jones