

Tower *chimes*

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



Paul's Epistle

Dear Friends,

This month brings one of my favorite services. I find Ash Wednesday a day of wisdom and great meaning. The spiritual lessons are life enriching. Some view Ash Wednesday as only facing the reality of death and loss. But consider the challenge of Ash Wednesday in the following areas of life's evolution:

- ◇ Practice letting go of baggage. What will really matter in 3 years, 5 years, a decade? Most of the stuff we carry with us can be dropped. And not just magazine subscriptions. What things can you release to gain greater health?
- ◇ Realize the truth of humility that we are all renters. Most of us live in houses that we did not build and others will live there after we are gone. We are not the center of the cosmos but rather tourists on this earth.
- ◇ Cherish the people in your life. The shock of grief is a spiritual lesson of great value. Our life is made meaningful by others – cherish their presence in your life. This June I have now three (one was very late to inform the family) nieces who are having babies. Two of them for the first time! Pam and I are planning a June trip to celebrate in advance, during or after the new arrivals.
- ◇ Ash Wednesday reminds us to Enjoy Life Today. That means more than having dessert. Consider the things you enjoy and put them on the calendar even if you have to cross them out later. I often encourage people to start saving for a "trip of a lifetime" over a few years. I have done that for a trip to Spain and the European Pilgrimage trip. If it takes 3-4 years start this year. Some of our church members followed the way of enjoying life by purchasing tickets to the first year of the Broadway Series at the Asteria theatre. From the magnificent response it will not be the last year. Every few months, The Avalon has a \$30 ticket sale and I ask Pam "do you want to give it a shot?" I discovered I actually like the hits of a band called "The Guess Who" that I had not heard since childhood.
- ◇ Ash Wednesday helps us to ask the Big Question "How do you wish to be remembered?" Life is measured in decades – what is our legacy? What do we hope to leave behind? The future, brief or long is in our hands and our hearts. What missions do we want to support? What organizations help us to live a meaningful life? Can I do something to help neighbors in need in Grand Junction, El Salvador, Kenya or Mexico? We are remembered for our acts of kindness, generosity and compassion. Another Ash Wednesday lesson.

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

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

BIG HEARTED CONGREGATION CINDY HAAS

Valentine's Day is just a half a month away as you read this article. It reminds me of the big hearted members of this congregation. I count the offering once a month and have been doing this for several years. It came to no surprise when I counted last week and more than \$2000 had been collected for the cows in Africa.

This is after the congregation stepped up to match the money for the food bank. You more than tripled the match goal. In December there were the gifts to LaPlaza. If anyone went to the women's Christmas luncheon, there were over 75 gifts to the foster family Janet Spomer advocates for through CASA. The table was overflowing.

Thank you for the time, talent and money for these things to happen.

One more thing. I am asking for volunteers for two new committees.

One is adult education. If you have passion for learning and would like to entertain bringing in speakers or piggyback on zoom calls pertaining to either religious or justice subjects, please let me know. This committee will have the funds from the Holmgren Lectureship to pursue these projects.

The other committee would facilitate social activities outside of the Fellowship group. According to the survey this was an area people wanted leadership to pursue. Out of the box thinking would be great. The objective is to get people together either in small or large groups with fun as the final objective.

Enjoy the last full month of winter this year.

3RD ANNUAL GRAND JUNCTION JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL

February 21 & 22 2026
SMU University Center Ballroom



Three films will be shown over the two days -- *One Big Happy Family*, *Dead Sea Guardians*, and *Elie Wiesel Soul on Fire*. A Q&A session with Lisa Brenner, writer and star of *One Big Happy Family*, will follow the showing on Saturday. Limited seating, so get your tickets today. Early bird prices through January 31st.

Visit <https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/the-2025-grand-junction-jewish-film-festival-copy> to learn more and purchase tickets.

MISSION & OUTREACH NEWS

HELPING HANDBAGS

We are repeating this successful project from 2023. Mutual Aid Partners will distribute the handbags. We hope to collect 100 and, as of this writing, are a third of the way toward our goal. Things needed for the project include:

- ◇ Gently used hand bags and small backpacks.
- ◇ Personal Care Products; Dental products, Feminine hygiene products, Lotions, Deodorant, Combs/small hair brushes, Lip Balm, Cosmetics. Not shampoo or soap (usually available in public restrooms, soap can be used for shampoo). No large bottles. Nothing really smelly, especially since it could “invade” the food/candy.
- ◇ Health products – Band-aids, Wipes, Tissues
- ◇ Accessories: Gloves, Socks, Scarves, Hats, Hand warmers.
- ◇ Candy and Snacks: Jerky, Breakfast bars, chocolate, mints, raisins, snack cups. No sticky or crumbly foods that are hard on the teeth.
- ◇ Anything else you think would bring a smile to the recipient!

For more information contact: Beth Avery

WESHELTER WINTER EMERGENCY SHELTER 2026

FCUCC and LDS volunteers will host WESHELTER from Sunday, Jan 25 to Sunday, Feb 22, We will be providing warm, safe shelter, and light meals for up to 16 men who cannot be accommodated at local shelters. Our congregation will cover Feb 12-Feb 22. While meals have been covered, there are still slots to be filled for volunteers to stay overnight; see the posters located in the Gathering Space. There is a bin marked “WESHELTER” on the M&O shelves for other donations. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Kathy Viglianco at 970-201-9122 or kviglianco@yahoo.com.

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

February Catholic Outreach Item | This month, Catholic Outreach wants **canned fruit!**

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 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.

NOVEMBER COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES RACHEL SEIFF, SCRIBE

November 16, 2025

The church council of First Congregational Church United Church of Christ met in the chapel for the monthly stated meeting on November 16, 2025. Present were council members Karen Caton, Kathy Goe, Cindy Haas (moderator), Janis Woodley, Connie Pyle, Kathy Viglianco, Ron Rucker, Rachel Seiff, Allan Weinand and pastor Paul Ashby. Guests: Beth Rakestraw (church administrator). Absent were: Michael Petri and Julie Krueger. The council meeting business started at 11:28. A quorum was established.

On motion, the minutes of the October 19, 2025 Council Meeting were approved as distributed.

Pastor's Report:

- ◇ Paul wants to thank everyone for their generosity. It was a good year for stewardship. Final numbers aren't in place yet, but it looks like a good year.
- ◇ On the other hand, need looks higher for next year. Catholic Outreach is reporting longer lunch lines. Some of this might be due to SNAP benefits not coming out this month.
- ◇ All the rehab that Carolyn Holmgren went through hasn't worked. She would benefit from calls and cards, but let's wait on visitors.
- ◇ Other churches in the area are also trying to find solutions for after Homeward Bound closes. Paul mentioned that previous churches have purchased bus tickets to Salt Lake City, as they have established a 'Housing First' policy towards assisting unhoused people.
- ◇ Lots of people coming for Thanksgiving dinner! (both from our congregation, and the UU congregation)
- ◇ ICE has shot multiple people in head with pepper balls, including a UCC Pastor. One victim shot was in the middle of prayers.

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

- ◇ Fellowship & Hospitality Meeting, November 2025. No 5th Sunday potluck, as it is right after Thanksgiving.
- ◇ Mission & Outreach Meeting, November 2025 meeting
- ◇ Worship and Celebration, November 2025
- ◇ Property Team, Verbal Summary Report
- ◇ Gardens and Grounds, verbal report. Allan mentioned that yesterday during fall cleanup, a member of Ohr Shalom wanted to thank the church for their messages on our sign, the letters to the editor, and Paul's speeches at rallies.
- ◇ Finance and Stewardship, November 2025. This year, when we send the congregation the budget for review, rather than sending out the whole thing, we will just send the changes (what is going up and what is going down).
- ◇ Finance Reports: 3rd Qtr. Budget to actual Balance sheet.

Other Business:

- ◇ Also during the cleanup, Jean McArthur made contact with a neighbor (Lindsay and one other) on the other side of the street. They offered to let us put our leaves from cleanup in front of the house. There was a proposal for the Church to sponsor a block party in the spring, renting the block party trailer from Parks and Rec.
- ◇ Request from United Church Funds resolution: Full text of Resolution as follows: 'Be it resolved that First Congregational Church, UCC, Grand Junction, Colorado hereby authorizes its Moderator Cindy Haas, its Treasurer Julie Krueger, and/or its Finance

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Clerk Martha Jones, to establish one or more investment accounts with United Church Funds, in any of its Common Investment Funds presently in existence or established at a future date. Any future transactions related to the organization's investments with United Church Funds may be authorized by the current officer in whatever form required by United Church Funds. The Council authorized the resolution.

- ◇ Kitchen Thefts. After many items and church food has gone missing from the kitchen, there was a proposal for combination locks on pantry. If that doesn't deter the thefts, then after 6 months we will look into locking the kitchen fully.
- ◇ Roof updates. Kelly has gotten 2/3 estimates. He is contacting the insurance company, as there is evidence of hail damage. We will also get estimates on the other roof as well, just to have the baseline.
- ◇ Beth's surgery will December 31. She will be out for at least a week, maybe 2.
- ◇ HomewardBound solved the problem of their broken water heater!

There being no other business, the meeting was closed at 12:00 p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Rachel Seiff, in Michael's absence

ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL BUDGET MEETING MICHAEL PETRI, CLERK

December 14, 2025

The Congregation of First Congregational Church United Church of Christ met in the sanctuary following the worship service on December 14, 2025 for the annual budget meeting. The meeting was called to order at 11:04 a.m. by the moderator, Cindy Haas. Clerk Michael Petri determined that a quorum was present.

The proposed 2026 budget was made available to the congregation electronically prior to the meeting and printed copies were available at the meeting. Cindy made a motion to approve the budget as presented. Discussion followed.

Martha Jones noted that the budget has a significant increase (over \$25,000) with the biggest increase to our mission spending.

The floor was opened for questions. There was a question about our membership numbers for the year. The clerk did not have the membership figures handy but a single-digit increase was estimated.

There was also a question about whether the budget adequately covers expenses for the Fellowship and Hospitality Committee. The budget includes an increase for that committee and expenses are should be covered.

With no additional questions, the moderator proceeded to the vote on the motion to approve the 2026 budget. The motion passed unanimously. There being no other business, the meeting was closed at 11:14 a.m.

Michael Petri, Council Clerk

Note – as of 12/21/25, it appears (from our Breeze database) that we have 119 active members. That includes 6 new members and one death in 2025. It does not include any adjustments we may make after the annual review of the membership rolls. We usually do this early the next year and make any changes retroactive to the end of the current year.

CHILDREN'S SUNDAY MORNING PROGRAM MARIE KOONTZ

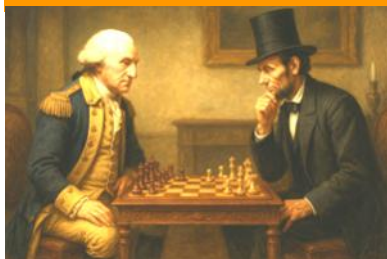
"Do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased." – Hebrews 13:16

February 8: We will be assembling individual snack trays, regular and gluten-free, for Super Bowl LX to sell after worship. Each tray will include crackers, (Schar entertainment crackers for gluten free tray) a cheeseball, white chocolate popcorn with M & M's, and pringles, (The Good Crisp Company potato crisps for gluten free tray).
Price: Minimum price \$6.50 or if feeling generous we will sell it to you for a higher price. All money received will be donated to the fundraiser for the Oltome Village in Kenya.

February 14, 21,& 28: "The Sermon on the Mount"

We will imagine ourselves on the mountainside listening to what was said by Jesus.

PRESIDENTS' DAY GAMES



We will be meeting in the chapel at 1:00 pm for a fun afternoon of games. Bring your snacks to share and bring your own drinks.

ABC: APPETIZERS, BEVERAGES, CONVERSATIONS

This month's ABC social meets from **5:00 to 7:00** [note the time change] Saturday, February 21 at the home of Kathy and David Goe, 644 East Pagosa Drive, Grand Junction, 81506. The theme is 50s/60s. Of course, do bring appetizers and beverages to share.



2025 GIVING STATEMENTS

Giving statements have been distributed by email and, where no email, by hard copy. If you need a printed copy, please request one from Martha or call the office and leave a message for her.

LOOKING AHEAD

March 8 | Daylight Savings Time begins

April 5 | Easter

April 18 | Oltome Fundraiser

FEBRUARY 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
		LDS hosts	WEShelter	At FCC		
9:00 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour		10:00 Women's/ Men's Coffee	2:00 Mission & Outreach 3:30 Handbells	2:00 Fellowship & Hospitality		
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
LDS hosts	WEShelter	At FCC		FCC	Hosts	WEShelter
9:00 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			
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
		FCC	Hosts	WE	Shelter	
9:00 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:05 Happy Hour 11:15 Council Meeting	<i>Church Ofc Closed for Presidents' Day</i> 1:00 Games Day	10:00 Women's/ Men's Coffee <i>5:30 Shrove Tuesday Pancakes</i>	3:30 Handbells <i>Ash Wednesday</i>	11:30 Berna B's		ABC Social 5:00 — 7:00 [Note time change}
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
9:00 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour 11:15 Education Focus Groups <i>WEShelter Ends</i>		10:00 Women's/ Mens' Coffee	3:30 Handbells			

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

2/1 Kathy Goe
 2/4 Annie Albrethsen
 2/4 Scarlett Montgomery-Anderson
 2/9 Kay Ragsdale
 2/18 Milo Brosig
 2/18 Dan Wilkie
 2/19 Jon Ragsdale
 2/19 Pam Gregory
 2/25 Gwen Kelly
 2/26 Shelly Braz
 2/29 Jonathan Ely

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!





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CONTACT US!

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Church Office Hours

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Reach us at :
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www.uccgj.org

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[Monday through Thursday]

Organist/Pianist:

Ellen Bradley
She, hers, her

Part Time Custodian:

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Director of Choirs

Karen Caton
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Pianist/Music Coordinator:

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