

Tower chimes

Monthly newsletter of First Congregational UCC | Grand Junction, CO | March 2025



Paul's Epistle

Dear Friends,

During Lent we are going to have a share group-Book study at 1pm on 4 Wednesdays – March 12, 19, 26, and April 2nd. The primary text will be *The Primacy of Love* by Ilia Delio. I enjoy all of her books but this tiny one is pure distilled wisdom. You can order a copy on bookfinder.com. I ordered mine from Blackwells in the U.K. Delio is a Franciscan sister whose books on science and faith have received numerous awards. She teaches theology at Villanova University and is the founder of the Center of Christogenesis an online resource for the integration of science, religion, and culture. Do not let that discourage you, her book on love is very personal and easy to read. It connects our compassion to acts of mercy and social justice.

Our focus over the next years will have to be on love and local acts that support mercy, love and justice. In this time of daily cruelty practiced by the Trump administration we need to focus on love. It is easy to return hate for hate; but a better path is to have enough love to support the weak, the poor and those targeted by cruel actions of DOGE.

A few people asked for copies of a recent Sunday prayer and other wanted the text of a recent Children's talk. So here they are:

God of Love,

We acknowledge that we are who we are because of those who have loved us and those who were unable to love us.

Love shapes our hearts, minds, souls, conscience and consciousness. We are warped by those who withheld their love from us.

We are molded in beautiful ways by those who shared their love with generous hearts.

Let the church be a light of love not simply for members and their families- let us be a light of love for our community, particularly those who are

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

PAUL'S EPISTLE

targets of political hatred and blame.
 Let each of us be a light of love...
 Create in us a consciousness that
 embraces the love of Jesus for all people.
 Let our love be inspired by a hope
 for greater understanding.
 Enable us to be peacemakers.
 Push us to reach out to the lonely
 and depressed.
 Guide us to welcome the gifts of love
 in our life and to see Your love in
 the simple joys of each day.

The Children's Talk

Sometimes our view of Love is too small, too little.
 If I asked you to give me a list of people who love us – most of us could come up with a few names. We could think of a couple friends or family members.
 That is too small a list. Love is about actions – about caring – about compassion.
 Consider making a list of people who would help you if you needed help. Because that is love. And that's a Big, Big List.

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

SHROVE TUESDAY PANCAKES



The pancake supper will be held on Tuesday, March 4 from 5:30 to 7:00 in the social hall. Along with pancakes, bacon and hashbrown potatoes will be served. (Gluten free pancakes will be available.)

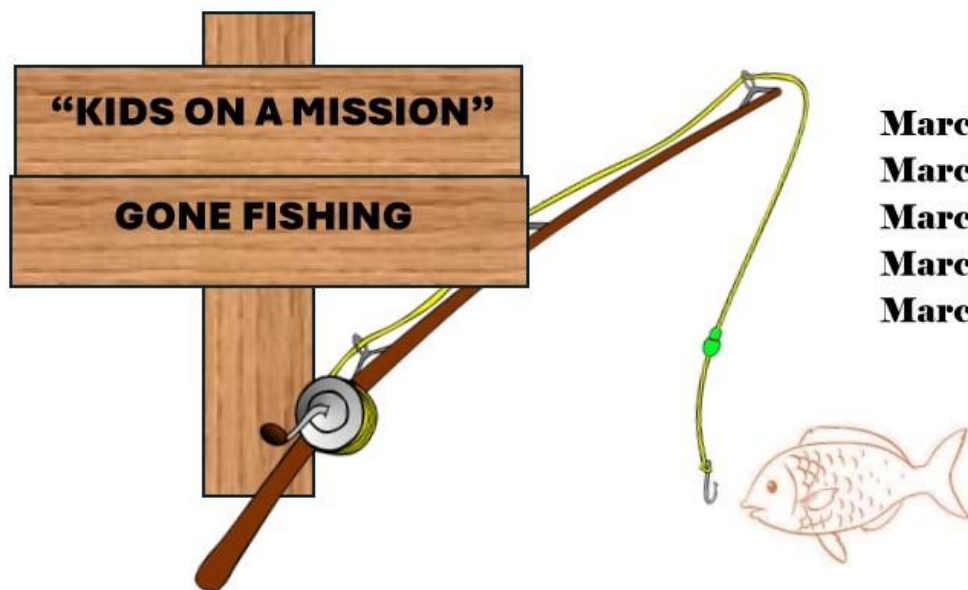
ASH WEDNESDAY | MARCH 5



Worship with the imposition of ashes will take place at 11:00 am in the sanctuary, followed by lunch at Grand International Buffet for those who want to eat with friends.

CHILDREN'S SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM MARIE KOONTZ

SUNDAY MORNING CHILDREN'S PROGRAM IN MARCH



March 2: Mark 1:16-20

March 9: Matthew 14:13-21

March 16: Matthew 14:22-33

March 23: John 21:1-14

March 30: Jonah:1-2



THE ABC CLUB!!! BETH RAKESTRAW

This month's ABC event happens on March 15, from 6:00 to 8:00 pm at the home of Dennis and Glenna Stark, 2115 Hodesha Way, Grand Junction.

Of course, being so close to St. Paddy's Day, the t'eme [doncha know] —food, drink, attire— is all t'ings Irrrrish!

'Tis a good time to be full of blarney ... even if it isn't your native tongue, like 'tis mine.

And, until we meet again, here's a luvly Irrrish proverb to sustain ye: "May neighbours respect you, trouble neglect you, the angels protect you, and Heaven accept you."



MODERATOR'S MINUTE KEN PUHLER

Be kind. One of my favorite Tee-Shirts bares the message, “In A World Where You Can Be Anything, Be Kind.” Be kind. I like that message and believe it could make a big difference in peoples’ lives. Imagine schools filled with kindness or communities where being kind was cherished and practiced.

Be Kind! I need that reminder. I even ordered personal checks and address labels with a Kindness theme. Every time I pay my water bill, electric bill, HOA fees or a send a card or letter; I am reminded, “Kindness Begins With Me.” I am prompted to “Do All Things With Kindness.” And “Kindness Inspires More Kindness.”

Be KIND??? What does that look like? What does kindness sound like? Who are the kindest people I know? Where do I find kindness? How do I practice kindness.

I must admit that I am having a hard time trying to be kind lately. When I read the responses of some of our neighbors on social media, I struggle to respond in a kind way. An 11-year-old girl in Texas took her life because schoolmates taunted her with threats of calling ICE on her parents. I stated that we failed to teach her classmates to be kind. The comments I read and replies I received were horrific, too bad to even repeat.

Teaching kindness—That was one of the outcomes of the youth retreats I used to be a part of in the 90’s. Rocky Mountain Youth To Youth held school weekend Lock-Ins in schools. Each summer they held a retreat at the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park. The staff would gather for three days of training and then the participants from Colorado, New Mexico and Wyoming would arrive for the program. It was a drug-free event aimed to reduce substance use, prevent drunk driving, prevent suicide and promote acceptance and inclusivity.

We would begin with establishing “Norms”—the standards of behavior that we all agree to practice during our time together. The norms were written on chart paper and posted on a wall. We used that term because “Rules” always resulted in a list of “No _____” and “Don’t _____”. I would encourage them to rewrite things to keep things positive. “Don’t cuss.” became “Speak with purpose.” “No teasing or name-calling.” became “Be kind.” I always asked the groups to share what that looks like and sounds like.

Many of the weekend Lock-In events were designed to create an action plan for the students to create an event. Some were Drunk Driving prevention events like a Ghost Out or a drug-free After Prom Party. The youth were in charge of the process, adults were there for support—some adults had to be reminded of their role.

One event was called the “Culture Walk”—participants would gather at one end of the gym floor. The facilitator would make a statement, if that applied to you, you walked to the middle of the gym floor and stopped. The facilitator would instruct them to turn around, look to see who is a part of your group and who is not. There were 12 to 15 statements to relate to. It would start with things like, “I have been to Disneyland.” Then would progress to things like “English isn’t the only language spoken at my home.” “I attend church regularly.” “I am a member of or have a friend or family member who is Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual or Transgendered.”

At the end of the exercise, we would process what we learned about ourselves and the group members. We did a “weather report” of what our feelings were. I will never forget the young woman who walked alone to “I am a member of the Jewish faith.” She turned, looked and

MODERATOR'S MINUTE KEN PUHLER

was shaking as she walked backed to the group where several of her friends hugged her. During her weather report, she was in tears when she said that she had kept that secret because she was afraid people would hate her for being Jewish but realized now that her friends still loved her. Her last name was Martinez and everyone assumed she was different from who she really is.

I am proud that the group of students and teachers that would walk in support of LGBT grew every year we did the Culture Walk activity. This was the early 90's and many teachers were afraid of repercussions from parents for even discussing the topic. Nothing ever happened. No one complained.

I am afraid the results might be very different today. Especially for our transgender community. Executive orders that result in passports that don't reflect the truth are being issued. Teachers and counselors in Durango are being threatened because they are displaying the Black Lives Matter and Pride flags. Their school board is supporting them, thankfully.

I try to be kind. I post in support of LGBTQ+ teachers and students. I am told I am not a Christian. I voice my support a woman's right to choose. I am told I am not a Christian. I post support of parents seeking gender-affirming health care for their children. I am told I am not a Christian. I post my opposition to ICE raids in schools and churches. I am told I am not a Christian.



“I am trying to be like Jesus, not like a Christian.” is my kindest reply.

“Kindness inspires more kindness.”

SHARE THE LIGHT: ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING

One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) is a special mission offering of the United Church of Christ which serves disaster, refugee/immigration, and development ministries throughout the world. Because the UCC relates in mutual partnership to churches and organizations through Global Ministries and worldwide response and recovery networks, your contributions to One Great Hour of Sharing puts you in the right place at the right time for the relief and recovery of the most vulnerable. We will receive donations for this offering during the entire month of March. Envelopes will be provided on Sundays. As always, you can also opt to make your donation online, using the dropdown menu on the church's website. This year where disaster conditions exist in Gaza as well as continuing needs in Ukraine, this is a chance to help make a difference in these troubled parts of the world as well as countless other places where the need is great.

Thank you.

Mission & Outreach Team

JANUARY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES MICHAEL PETRI, CLERK

January 19, 2025

The church council of First Congregational Church United Church of Christ met in the chapel for the monthly stated meeting on January 19, 2025. Present were council members Karen Caton, Kathy Goe, Cindy Haas, Martha Jones, Julie Krueger, Michael Petri, Ken Puhler (moderator), Connie Pyle, Ron Rucker, Rachel Seiff, Janis Woodley and pastor Paul Ashby (ex officio). Church administrator Beth Rakestraw was present as a guest.

A quorum was established. The meeting was opened with prayer by Paul around 11:22 a.m. The November 17 and December 1 Council Meeting minutes and December 15 Congregational Meeting minutes (all year 2024) were approved as distributed.

Pastor's Report:

- ◇ Paul noted that the Property Team spending in 2024 was \$9,000 over budget, but we were able to cover those expenses without a deficit for the year.
- ◇ Reported that Sharyl Peterson offered to lead a Lenten book study.
- ◇ Asked for volunteers to help guide the five new members around the church.
- ◇ Asked that all reach out to visitors to invite them to coffee hour following the worship services.
- ◇ Noted that while he is away on Jan 26th, Bishop Alan will be preaching.

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

- ◇ Mission and Outreach/JAM, December 2024, January 2025
- ◇ Fellowship & Hospitality Meeting, December 2024, January 2025. There was discussion about replacing the kitchen stove. It was agreed that Ken should talk with Duane Palubicki of the Property team about this.
- ◇ Worship and Celebration, next meeting February 2
- ◇ Property Team, January 2025
- ◇ Finance and Stewardship, January 2025. Kam Macar has joined the Finance team.

Finance Reports: Review of 2024, Budget Report, Balance Sheet. Julie noted that even with the over spending on the property, we came in about \$4,000 under budget for 2024. Pledges were over the budgeted amount. Payroll has been changed from every two weeks to every month, saving about \$1,000/yr in bookkeeping costs.

Other Business:

- ◇ The annual congregational meeting was scheduled for May 18th immediately following the worship service.
- ◇ It was agreed that part of the storage room in Pilgrim Hall be set aside for Christmas decorations so there's no need to carry the stuff up to the 2nd floor of the CE building. This may also help keep the process of decorating/undecorating more organized.
- ◇ There was discussion about increasing adult spiritual education opportunities. This has generally been led by the Holmgren Lectureship and Paul. Paul commented that we focus on Sundays and Wednesdays in the daytime since people don't seem interested in coming out at night, but this precludes people who are working. It was agreed that we're open to all ideas – if someone wants to propose and lead the activity. It was also agreed that this could be in coordination with other groups outside of our church.
- ◇ There was a suggestion to rebrand the Fellowship of the Grape (FOG) group since it's generally not focused on wine-tasting anymore. A change of focus may have broader

JANUARY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES MICHAEL PETRI, CLERK

appeal since the meetings have mainly been social get-togethers with food and beverages. After discussion, it was agreed to rebrand it to Appetizers, Beverages and Conversation (ABC).

- ◇ Membership Review: The clerk and staff reviewed the membership rolls, and the staff submitted a list of recommended changes prior to the meeting. On motion, the list of changes was approved. A number of members who have been on the Inactive roll for years were dropped in accordance with the bylaws, and a number of other adjustments to the inactive roll were made for deaths and life situation. Five new members joined the church on January 12, 2025, all by reaffirmation of faith: Wes & Maria McCleery, Rob & Celia Elberfeld, and Sandra Holloway.

There being no other business, the meeting was closed at 12:22 p.m.

Michael Petri – Council Clerk

TIMELY ADULT SPIRITUAL EDUCATION OPPORTUNITY



Join Richard Rohr and Brian McLaren
Online, March 14, 2025

How do we meet and manage our anger in an age of outrage?
Join us for “What Do I Do with My Anger?” an event hosted by **Richard Rohr**
and **Brian McLaren** and featuring author and activist **Valarie Kaur**.

Date: Friday, March 14, 2025

Time: 10 - 11:30am PT

First Congregational United Church of Christ, Chapel
The church has already registered for this event.

MISSION & OUTREACH NEWS

SECOND QUARTER SNEAK PEEK FOR MISSION & OUTREACH PROJECT

Mission & Outreach has selected two international supporting programs for the second quarter of 2025 support. A portion of the quarterly donation will go to The Foundation For Cultural Exchange to sponsor a student to attend high school for a year. The balance will be used to provide teacher salaries in Oltome Village in Kenya.

The Foundation For Cultural Exchange is a local non-profit that facilitates the sister city relationship between Grand Junction and El Espino, El Salvador, manages a scholarship program for youth in the community and organizes annual delegation trips from Grand Junction to El Salvador.

Our congregation will sponsor one of the new first-year high school students for one year. Our student is Guadalupe del Carmen Miranda Rodriguez. We look forward to developing a supportive and meaningful relationship with her as she works towards her dream of an education.



Guadalupe del Carmen Miranda Rodríguez

Vive con su abuela, no tiene apoyo del padre y su madre fue víctima de la violencia, participará en proyecto de talleres formativos y aún no tiene pensado que estudiará en universidad, ya que no tenía proyectado seguir con el estudio de bachillerato.

Guadalupe has a very inspiring story. She lost her mother to gang violence recently and was abandoned by her father at a young age, so she is being raised alone by her grandmother. When she received the news she was chosen for a scholarship, she said she had never let herself think about what she would study in college because she didn't believe she would even be able to go to high school. Her teachers speak very highly of her as a student, and she has demonstrated remarkable resilience both academically and in life.

Anna Stout, founding member of Foundation For Cultural Exchange, will join us on March 23 for a Mission Moment to tell us about the work of the foundation.

In the interim, we are asking you to write a letter or card of support to Guadalupe. Letters and cards will be translated by FCE volunteers and delivered by Anna the week of March 16. Plan to turn in letters by Sunday, March 9th. A collection bin will be placed on the M&O shelves by the office.

MISSION & OUTREACH NEWS

FIRST QUARTER MISSION & OUTREACH MARCH COLLECTION: SLEEP IN HEAVENLY PEACE

For the month of March, we will continue to collect items for Sleep in Heavenly Peace (SHP), a local non-profit organization that provides beds for children in our community who would otherwise be sleeping on the floor.

This month, we invite congregants to choose a donation from the following list of needs: Twin-sized comforters, Bed in a Bag (comforter set), or throw blankets. The best prices for these items can be found at Wal Mart in the children's section. For example, there are currently throws on sale for \$3.44. There are also bedding products on sale in a lot of stores in our area at this time of year. You may also continue to bring in mattress pads.

SHP does not accept used items. By the way --in January, we donated 12 mattress pads, 7 comforters, 1 sheet set and 14 throw blankets. Thank you so much for your generosity!

MARCH CATHOLIC OUTREACH COLLECTION

Watch other publications for an update about the March collection items.

PLEASE STOP BRINGING EGG CARTONS

The food bank is currently not receiving fresh eggs. M & O will let us know when they are needed again.

SOLIDARITY NOT CHARITY

We continue to collect personal size toiletries and other personal hygiene items for SNC. Hold off on the plastic jugs for the time being. Thank you.

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.



**Catholic Outreach
February Collection Numbers:
Soup Cans: 171
Boxes of Cereal: 2**

SOME IMAGES FROM THE FEBRUARY 22 TOWN HALL



MARCH BIRTHDAYS

3/4 Sam Ragsdale
 3/7 Donna Hochmuth
 3/16 Heidi Hess
 3/16 Joan Levy
 3/16 Mark Long
 3/20 Caroline Ely

3/20 Ron Rucker
 3/25 Beth Rakestraw
 3/26 Ed Orlosky
 3/27 Ken Puhler
 3/29 Karen Caton
 3/30 Maria McCleery

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!

MARCH 2025

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Feb 23	Feb 24	Feb 25	Feb 26	Feb 27	Feb 28	1
10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour 11:30 Sermon Talk		10:00 Women's/ Mens' Coffee 3:30 Handbells				
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9:00 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour 11:30 Sermon Talk	5:00 Make Mondays Fun Again	10:00 Women's/ Mens' Coffees 3:30 Handbells 5:30 Shrove Tuesday Pancakes	11:00 Ash Wednesday 2:00 Mission & Outreach	2:00 Fellowship & Hospitality		<i>Daylight Savings Time Begins</i> 
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
9:00 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour 11:15 Spirituality Group 11:30 Sermon Talk	1:00 Property Team	10:00 Women's/ Men's Coffee 3:30 Handbells	1:00 Lenten Share Group/ Book Study		<i>10:00 What Do I Do With My Anger</i>	6:00 <i>The ABC Club</i>
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
9:00 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour 11:15 Council Meeting 11:30 Sermon Talk	5:00 Make Mondays Fun Again	10:00 Women's/ Mens' Coffee 3:30 Handbells	1:00 Lenten Share Group/ Book Study	11:30 Berna B's		
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
9:00 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour 11:30 Sermon Talk		10:00 Women's/ Mens' Coffee 3:30 Handbells	1:00 Lenten Share Group/ Book Study			
30	31	Apr 1	Apr 2	Apr 3	Apr 4	Apr 5
9:00 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour 11:30 Sermon Talk		10:00 Women's/ Mens' Coffee 3:30 Handbells	1:00 Lenten Share Group/ Book Study 2:00 Mission & Outreach	2:00 Fellowship & Hospitality		



**LOOKING
AHEAD**

April 13 | Palm Sunday
April 17 | Maundy Thursday
April 20 | Easter
May 18 | Annual Congregational Meeting



First Congregational UCC
 1425 N 5th Street
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CONTACT US!

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Pianist/Music Coordinator:

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