

Tower *chimes*

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



Paul's Epistle

Dear Friends,

When I see the photos of masked thugs of ICE abusing people, I am reminded of how far we are from the Biblical ethic of caring for immigrants. We often forget the ending of the Christmas story. Mary and Joseph save their child's life by escaping an evil king and becoming immigrants to Egypt. They do not return to Israel until the corrupt, power-hungry, fear-filled angry king is dead.

Before we get into a political debate I do affirm, we need a rational, orderly process for immigrants with a 12-year path for citizenship that includes employment and no criminal record. As a follower of Christ's compassion my question is, "How do we treat Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus when they have crossed a border without proper papers?" My first step is family historical honesty. When my family immigrated to Virginia over 350 years ago, they had no papers, no government permission, no Green Card or Immigration Visa. Before Ellis Island and 19th century immigrant processing, people just came to America. We even let in Canadians who just walked across the border and settled in Louisiana. Those French Canadians make some of the best food in America and my favorite fast-food place has those Cajun and Creole roots (Popeye's Chicken which began in New Orleans). So be honest with your family history. Many of our ancestors came to America seeking a better life and had no papers or passports or permission.

Reflect on the Biblical passages that speak to how we should treat foreign immigrants. So not only does God command us to welcome the strangers, God's heart of love does not want us to push them around:

- ◇ "Cursed is anyone who withholds justice from the foreigner, the fatherless, or the widow" (Deuteronomy 27:19).
- ◇ "Do not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether that worker is a fellow Israelite or a foreigner residing in one of your towns" (Deuteronomy 24:14).
- ◇ "Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor" (Zechariah 7:9-10).
- ◇ "So, I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, the deprived the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me" (Malachi 3:5).

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

PAUL'S EPISTLE

- ◇ “Let foreigners live among you wherever they like in whatever town they choose. Do not oppress them” (Deuteronomy 23:16).
- ◇ “You are to allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the foreigners residing among you and who have children. You are to consider them as native-born Israelites; along with you they are to be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel” (Ezekiel 47:22).
- ◇ “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law” (Romans 13:8).
- ◇ “Love does not harm to a neighbor, theretofore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:10).
- ◇ “Do not forget to show hospitality to stranger, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13:1-2).

You can add to this all the teachings of Jesus and his love-in-action toward Samaritians. Do you think Jesus ever forgot his childhood as an immigrant in Egypt? In this month as we celebrate the Christmas story, let us read the entire story of a child of God whose life was saved through a desperate act of immigration without permission.

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

CHRISTMAS MUSICAL MEMORIES CINDY HAAS

After hearing the beautiful music on this Thanksgiving Sunday it reminded me of how music was a huge part of the holidays in my family.

Our Thanksgiving day always had Christmas records playing because of my Dad. He loved music. When he returned from the navy in 1947, he took voice lessons. He had a great voice. He was a member of the choir at this church in the early 1950's until my folks moved to Denver in 1953.

We attended 6th Avenue Congregational Church in Denver when I grew up. I was 8 or 9 and sang in the Pilgrim choir when I was young. My dad did not attend often because he worked odd shifts at the railroad so he couldn't attend.

But one Christmas Sunday he was in the congregation and I was with the Pilgrim choir up in the choir loft. The program had the congregation singing Angels We Have Heard on High. As I sat in the loft, I heard my father's voice above all others singing. It was exceptionally louder during the chorus. To this day it is one of my favorite Christmas songs because I can still hear his voice in my memories.

Please think of a memory in your Christmas past that makes you feel good and keep it in your heart as we go into this season of the birth of Christ.



CHILDREN'S SUNDAY MORNING PROGRAM MARIE KOONTZ



Children's program in December 2025

"It's A Mystery"

In the days before the birth of Jesus, it was a dark time for people. But through faith, they found themselves filled with hope, anticipation, excitement, waiting for an unknown miracle to happen.

Today, with the advent of Christmas, the air is filled with hope, excitement, and anticipation. To keep that feeling alive, I am not going to disclose what is going to happen in our Sunday school classroom in December. All I will tell you is that it will be a project of love, sharing and caring, and hopefully fun for all who come.



Can you help?

On Saturday, December 27, I would like to see if I can get volunteers to help clean, sanitize and organize the children's classroom. Please let me know if you can help (I am also open for another date.)

MISSION & OUTREACH NEWS



CHRISTMAS ANGEL TREE

Our annual Christmas Angel Tree project began on November 23rd and ended on Friday, December 5th. This year we supported LaPlaza with a toy drive. Angel tags were chosen from the Christmas tree in the Gathering Space. The Hildebrands delivered an amazing number of toys on that Friday so the La Plaza clients could “shop” for toys for their children beginning on Monday 8th. More photos available in Church Chat.

FOURTH QUARTER MISSION FOCUS: MUTUAL AID PARTNERS

The Mission and Outreach Committee has chosen Mutual Aid Partners for the last quarter of the year. In November, due to the unavailability of SNAP and community concerns about food, we collected 275 nonperishable food items like hearty soups, chili, canned meats, canned ravioli, cooking oil, peanut butter, and jelly. In addition, we also collected

Can opener-1	Sweatshirt-2
Sleeping bags-2	Blankets-6
Bar Soap	Scarfs-4
Socks-8	Coats-10
Shoes-8	AA batteries-16
Emergency Poncho-2	

For December, MAP is requesting toiletry items: toothpaste, toothbrushes, shampoo/conditioner, lotion, razors, lip balm. MAP could also use first aids kits, hand warmers, toe warmers and body warmers. The best sources for hand/toe warmers, and body warmers are Amazon and Walmart. Handwritten holiday cards with words of encouragement that MAP could put out at the coffee station are also highly desired!

ONGOING COLLECTIONS

December Catholic Outreach Collection | For December, Catholic Outreach asks for bottled Salad Dressings.

Update: Soles4Souls | For this quarter, everything in the Soles for Souls box will be taken to Homeward Bound, so this is a great opportunity to put in your gently worn winter boots and shoes and get yourself a new pair.

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.

You May Resume Bringing Egg Cartons until the food bank tells us to stop. Remember they want 12-egg cartons only.

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.

FCC ADVENT, CHRISTMAS & EPIPHANY EVENTS

Women's Christmas Luncheon

Saturday, December 13 | Noon

All women and guests invited to enjoy soup, salad, bread and dessert. This year in lieu of our usual gift exchange, we will instead be supporting a foster/Strive home. This home has 4 foster kids, and 4 strive clients living in their home. There will be a "tree" in Pilgrim Hall that you can select gift tags from. Bring your gift with the tag attached to the luncheon on December 13. If you are not attending the Christmas luncheon, you can give your gift to a member of the Fellowship and Hospitality team.

Longest Night/Blue Christmas

Monday, December 22 | 4:30 pm

Christmas time can be a very emotionally challenging time of year for many people. Join us as we remember and ritualize our losses and grief and share other sorrows. If you know of someone that would benefit from this service, please invite them!

ABC Christmas Social

Saturday, December 20 | 6:00 pm

As usual, this event will be held at Julie and Linda's home - 2655 Liberty View Drive. More details to come in subsequent publications.

Christmas Eve Worship

Thursday, December 24 | 5:30 pm

Join us for a traditional service of Lessons, Carols and Candlelight. After worship, enjoy gathering together for quite an array of Christmas Cookies and other treats, traditional wassail and other beverages. Congregants will be invited to share their favorite Christmas cookies; watch church chat for more details.

Christmas Sunday Carol Sing

Sunday, December 28 | 10:00 am

Traditional Christmas Carol sing along!

Epiphany Sunday with Communion

Sunday, January 4 | 10:00 am

Enjoy our festive décor one more time as we celebrate this tradition of light and Magi.

Undecorating the Sanctuary etc.

After Worship January 4

What Goes Up Must Come Down: help take down, organize and put away our Christmas Décor. Many hands make work's burden light.

CHRISTMAS EVE COOKIES & WASSAIL

It's that time of year again when we get to prepare our favorite family recipes for delicious, gorgeous Christmas cookies [and other treats] and share them for a fun fellowship time after evening worship on Christmas Eve. Please bring your goodies plated and ready to be served before noon December 24 so that the Fellowship and Hospitality team can set them out in the Gathering Space.

2025 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL: A MASON JAR ADVENT



Be sure to pick up your Mason Jar Advent Devotional –one per household please–if you haven't already done so! Pull a tag each day to get praying, get connected, get moving, and get social. White tags are available for those of you who got your jars last week. For a very short, fun video to see what this is all about, look on the first page of the church website, uccgj.org.



***“...WHEN THEY SAW THE STAR,
THEY WERE FILLED WITH JOY...”***

MATTHEW 2:10

Be the Light

Dear Church Family,

For over one hundred years, The Christmas Fund has provided direct financial assistance to the healers in all our lives: retired and active UCC ministers, church workers, and their families. You are part of the community of The Christmas Fund, whether you donate at Christmastime, benefit directly from our grant or leadership programs, or simply believe in our mission to help secure the financial foundation of those engaged in the life of the church.

Please consider donating on any Sunday in December to ensure more healers receive the loving support of the Church in their moment of deepest need. The Christmas Fund was here for them. And regardless of who you are or what brought you to the United Church of Christ, The Christmas Fund is here for you.

Your gift is more than just a testament to your belief in the values of the United Church of Christ, it is a critical lifeline for those who depend on our grant programs for care and support. Thank you again for your generosity and I offer a closing prayer for your continued safety and peace.

Blessings,
Mike Avery on behalf of the Mission and Outreach Team

OCTOBER COUNCIL MINUTES

MICHAEL PETRI, CLERK

October 19, 2025

The church council of First Congregational Church United Church of Christ met in the chapel for the monthly stated meeting on October 19, 2025. Present were council members Karen Caton, Kathy Goe, Cindy Haas (moderator), Julie Krueger, Michael Petri, Connie Pyle, Ron Rucker, Rachel Seiff, Kathy Viglianco and Allan Weinand. Guests: Beth Rakestraw (church administrator). Others from the congregation were present for discussion of the church survey results.

The church survey discussion part of the meeting was opened with prayer by Julie at 11:33 a.m. Following this discussion, visitors left (except Beth). The council meeting business started at 12:18. A quorum was established.

On motion, the minutes of the September 21, 2025 Council Meeting were approved as distributed.

Pastor's Report:

- ◇ Paul thanks those who filled the pulpit during his vacation.
- ◇ God & Country movie is scheduled for Wednesday in the chapel. He encouraged all to attend.
- ◇ Asked for volunteers to deliver stewardship messages over the next few weeks during the worship services.
- ◇ Noted that the planned Halloween Party on Oct 31 will be relocated to the church building.
- ◇ Noted that he's offered the use of our building for use in forums on democracy by Indivisible Grand Junction.

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

- ◇ Fellowship & Hospitality Meeting, October 2025 meeting
- ◇ Mission & Outreach Meeting, October 2025 meeting
- ◇ Worship and Celebration, no meeting
- ◇ Property Team, Verbal Summary Report – There is a significant leak in the CE building roof. The problem is being investigated but a new roof may be required on the north side of the building (the south side roof was replaced in 2017). The council agreed that this would be a good time to evaluate our costs of maintaining the building compared to the rent it brings in annually (currently about \$22k) since the building is not used for any church-specific programs. Michael volunteers to organize this effort.
- ◇ Gardens and Grounds, no report
- ◇ Finance and Stewardship, Next meeting October 29

Other Business:

- ◇ Pew Cushions - Michael noted that the foam padding in the sanctuary pew cushions has significantly deteriorated and suggested we look into replacing them. The council agreed for Michael to get some estimates.
- ◇ Annual Budget Meeting Date – The council voted to set the annual congregational meeting to review and approve the budget for December 14, following the worship service.
- ◇ There being no other business, the meeting was closed at 12:46 p.m.

Michael Petri, clerk

The next stated council meeting is November 16. Note that a clerk pro-tem will likely be required while I recover from the heel/ankle surgery.

ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL BUDGET MEETING DECEMBER 14

The Annual Budget Meeting for members of the congregation to vote upon the proposed budget for 2026 will take place on Sunday, December 14 in the sanctuary immediately following the conclusion of the worship service. For those of you who have questions about the budget, a Budget Q&A is taking place after worship Sunday, December 7 in the chapel. Council members will be present to answer any questions church members bring regarding the budget as it is currently proposed by council.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROSITY IN 2025!

Some details about end of year giving that you'll want to be aware of for tax purposes. The following contributions will be on your giving statement for the 2025 tax year:

- ◇ Received in the office or in the offering plate by 12/31
- ◇ Post marked by 12/31
- ◇ Online payment initiated by 12/31
- ◇ Check mailed directly from your bank dated on or before 12/31.

If you have made a donation in 2025, you will receive a year-end statement by the end of January. If you plan to itemize deductions, you should not file your taxes until you have this statement in hand. We will distribute statements by email if the church has your email address. Otherwise we will mail you a copy. If you'd like a printed copy, please let us know at finance@uccgj.org or call the church office.

PUT YOUR CONTRIBUTION ON AUTO PILOT!

- ◇ Use your bank's BillPay service to automatically send a check to the church every month. Most banks have this as a free service.
- ◇ Or set up a repeating payment using our online payment system – either a transfer from your bank (ACH) or by credit card. A transfer from your bank results in smaller fees to the church than using your credit card. Go to <https://ucc.org/donate> and click on DONATE.

Persons who have a Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) from their retirement investments should consult with their advisor about making charitable contributions from these distributions. There may be significant tax advantages to doing so.

As usual, please contact Martha Jones, volunteer finance clerk, if you have questions at finance@uccgj.org.

LOOKING AHEAD

January 4 | Undecorating the Church
 January 19 | MLK Day
 January 25 | WE Shelter begins at FCC
 February 18 | Ash Wednesday
 February 22 | WE Shelter ends at FCC
 March 8 | Daylight Savings Time begins
 April 5 | Easter

DECEMBER 2025

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Nov 30	1	2	3	4	5	6
9:00 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour		10:00 Women's/ Men's Coffee	3:30 Handbells 2:00 Mission & Outreach	1:00 Fellowship & Hospitality		
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
9:00 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour 11:15 Budget Forum	1:00 Property Team	10:00 Women's/ Mens' Coffees	3:30 Handbells 6:30 Meaningful Fun Christmas Movie	2:00 Fellowship & Hospitality		<i>Noon, Women's Christmas Luncheon</i>
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
9:00 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Annual Congregational Budget Meeting 11:05 Happy Hour 11:15 Spirituality Group		10:00 Women's/ Men's Coffee	3:30 Handbells	11:30 Berna B's		6:00 ABC Social
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
9:00 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour 11:15 Council Meeting	<i>4:30 Longest Night/Blue Christmas Worship</i>	10:00 Women's/ Mens' Coffee	<i>5:30 Christmas Eve Worship</i>			
28	29	30	31	Jan 1	Jan 2	Jan 3
10:00 Worship 11:00 Happy Hour		10:00 Women's/ Mens' Coffee	3:30 Handbells	<i>Church Office Closed</i>		

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

12/4 Julie Krueger
 12/5 Dannie Bowman
 12/6 Creta Payne
 12/8 Sandi Knudson
 12/13 Kim Sutherland
 12/17 Mary Sealing
 12/18 Nancy Spangler
 12/21 Doug Hildebrand
 12/22 Sheri Schmidt



12/22 Linda Lee
 12/27 Marie Reed

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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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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