

Congregational Comments



Vol. 31 No. 9, September 2026

Important Contacts in the Church

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 Email: office@firstchurchdecaturn.org
 Website: www.firstchurchdecaturn.org
 Office Hours: Mon. –Thursday, 8:00-2:00

Worship Times

Sunday
 9:00 am - Traditional Worship Service
 9:15-10:15 am Sunday School
 10:00 am Fellowship Hour
 10:45 am Bible Study
 11:05 am Coffeehouse Church

Mission Statement

First Congregational United Church of Christ is a family of faith who seeks to support one another and our neighbors, grow in spiritual maturity and knowledge, and teach others about Jesus Christ so that all people might know god's love, forgiveness and promise of new life.

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A Note from Pastor Ryan

Pastor's Column



The Hand on the Plow

Jesus once said something that sounds harsh until you understand what a plow is: "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

Anyone who has ever plowed a field knows why. A plow only cuts a straight furrow if you keep your eyes fixed on a point ahead of you. The moment you turn to look over your shoulder — at the ground you've already covered, at what you left behind — the furrow wanders. You cannot plow forward while looking backward. Jesus wasn't being unkind. He was describing physics.

He was also describing the life of a church.

Looking forward matters because that's the only direction the kingdom moves. God's promises always run ahead of us — toward the new thing, the next season, the harvest not yet planted. A church that spends its energy looking back isn't a bad church; it's usually a church that loved something deeply and finds it hard to let go. But love for

what was can quietly crowd out room for what could be. And here is the thing about hands: they can only hold so much. If your hands are full, you cannot pick up anything new. Every hour, every dollar, and every ounce of volunteer energy devoted to maintaining what has already run its course is an hour, a dollar, and an ounce that cannot go toward whatever God is trying to hand us next.

Here I'll share one of my firm convictions about church life: I believe every ministry we start should come with what's known as a "sunset clause" — an expiration date built in from the beginning, requiring the ministry to be renewed intentionally if it's succeeding, while leaving a no-guilt exit when it doesn't succeed or no longer bears fruit. Not because we expect ministries to fail, but because a sunset clause serves everyone. A thriving ministry sails through renewal, and the process keeps it alive to its purpose. And a ministry whose season has ended gets to conclude with dignity — thanked, celebrated, and released — instead of lingering on, with no one willing to be the person who finally says it's over. The sunset clause takes that burden off of people and builds the ending into the plan from the start. Nobody has to feel like a failure. The season simply comes, as seasons do.

So I want to ask you to do something with me. Not to decide anything — just to stop for a moment and honestly wonder.

Notes Continued

What ministries in our own church are more about looking back than looking forward?

What are we holding onto mostly because we remember what it once was, rather than because of what it is now?

What is quietly distracting us — taking up space, budget, and energy — from trying new things and moving into the future God has for us?

And what might we be free to begin, if we trusted God enough to let some things go?

I'm not answering those questions in this article. I'm asking you to sit with them — in the pew, over coffee, on the drive home. Ask them about the ministries you love most, because those are the hardest and most important ones to ask about. And ask them without guilt: everything we might name was started in faith, by faithful people, and did good work in its season. Giving thanks for a season and releasing it are not opposites. They're the same act of trust.

And then — move on ahead. Because that's the promise hidden in all of this: once we can let go of what's in the past, we are free to move forward with new energy and fresh perspectives. Hands that have released something old are hands ready to receive something new.

The furrow behind us is finished, and it was good work. The plow, though, only goes one direction. Let's fix our eyes on the point ahead — and see what God wants to grow next.

Rev. Ryan D. Travis, Pastor
First Congregational United Church of Christ in Decatur, Illinois
office: (217) 877-2216
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Save The Date

Eastern Association Fall Meeting

October 10, 2026 10 am—2 pm

First Congregational Church

See Pastor Ryan, Rev Michael or Alice for FREE Registration

Church Information

FFDO

First Friday Dinner Out will be at CANCUN Bar and Grill on September 4 at 6:00. Come join us.

Sandy Harmison

Rummage Sale 2026

It's a wrap, folks! Rummage Sale 2026 is over. How did it go this year, you might ask. I'm pleased to report that our income from the 2026 Rummage Sale stands currently at \$1,079.90.

We continue to get comments from our many regular attendees that our sale is the best in town, that our offerings are high quality and our prices are really good. A number of them purchased on Friday and returned Saturday morning to fill \$3 grocery bags (often overflowing, to which we cast a blind eye and uttered a sigh of relief as more "stuff" left the building).

I want to thank everyone who contributed in any way, from donating all that "stuff" to organizing and pricing and then selling, cleaning up afterwards and delivering the leftovers to Salvation Army this year. I am always amazed at how well the rummage sale volunteers work together. This year, however, was beyond amazing, for which I am grateful. You deserve more than just recognition. I say deserve.... Last year, I promised everyone a raise and this year I made good on that. Every volunteer will receive a HUGE raise, twice what you received last year. I applaud you all for a wonderful job well done! THANK YOU!

Judi Carpenter



Church Information



SACRAMENT OF HOLY BAPTISM

Eli Howard Daniels

The son of Montana and Hayley Daniels

**Eli was baptized on August 16, 2026 during first service in
First Congregational UCC, Decatur, IL**

Church Information



**Second Wind Flute Choir Played for us on August 9
Many thanks to Mary Little, director, Jennifer Morrow, Iris Leahy,
Mitchell Penland and Kaylee Sommer**



The Gospel Choir preformed one Sunday a month during the summer

Church Information



Women's Fellowship enjoyed tea in Springfield on July 24th

All God's Children Preschool

!The new school year is almost here! On September 2nd, students and families will gather for orientation night. It's a chance for parents and students to ask questions, meet the teacher, and make new friends. I look forward to seeing my new class!

School begins September 8th. This year, we have 12 students (3 returning and 9 new ones). There will still be one classroom of mixed ages and I know everyone is getting excited to get back to school!



Bench Notes

Bench Notes



September! The kids are back at school and the “lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer” are coming to a quick conclusion. We have been most blessed this season with those who have provided music during our worship services. Heartfelt thanks to each of them – and a big shout-out to Shirley Kuhn for putting the schedule together.

If you missed it, you might look at our Facebook page and catch the music on August 9 when Second Wind Flute Choir was our guest. Their music that morning was extra special and we are grateful to them for being with us.

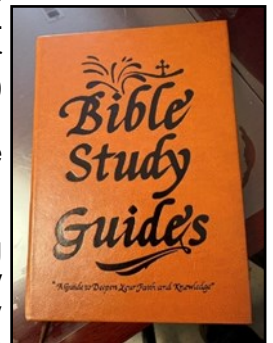
That said: I’m really looking forward to getting back together with First Church Choir! Our first rehearsal will be Thursday, September 3. New music and many of our favorites are already on the schedule and I look forward to us being together each week in ministry again. And it’s our first night – so you know what that means – PIE NIGHT! (At least, we’re planning on that!)

New members are always welcome. Let me know that you’d like to sing with us (no commitment – just give it a try!) and I’ll have a folder and music ready for you.

On other notes:

Kudos to everyone who sang this summer in Gospel Choir. It was great to sing through the beloved hymns that have prevailed through the decades. It was a great blessing to the worship each morning you sang!

I found a neat little book online: “Bible Study Guides.” It is a journal with one page describing each book of the Bible. Authorship, timeline, recipient, purpose, history and much more. There is a page for each book for you to write your own notes. I purchased mine on Amazon for \$10 and it was, IMHO, well worth it. The print is a little small, so you may want to find a larger print version. But there is LOTS of information included and well worth the money.



We are looking forward to getting back with All God’s Children Pre School and sharing songs and musical activities with the children. This is such an important ministry in our community and the foundation for a life of faith that is set with this ministry impacts the students for a lifetime. Other Christian Pre Schools in our city have closed and there are now limited opportunities for this kind of education in our city. Please support All God’s Children in any way you can. We are blessed to have this ministry as part of our congregation!

Gracious Heavenly Father,

You have guided and blessed us throughout these summer months and we give You thanks for moments of rest, re-creation and renewal. As we move into this new season, please continue to guide our steps, encourage our hearts and let us become all that You have ordained for us to be. Use us in Your work as You see fit and may we be found faithful in our service to You. We pray in Jesus’ name, amen.

Rev. Michael Waltenberger
Minister of Music

Happenings

FFDO

**September
CANCUN Bar
and Grill
6:00 pm**

God's Busy Hands

Tuesdays

1:00—3:00 pm



Admin Meeting

**Monday,
September 14
6:00 pm**

Council of Ministry Teams

**Monday
September 21
6:30 pm**

Choir

**Rehearsal
Thursday at
7:00 pm**



Sing With Us

All God's Children Preschool

**Director Stephanie
Nihiser**

Register for Fall 2026



Exploring Christian Faith Study Group

**10:45 am
Studying the Book
of Genesis**

People Working Sunday Services



LITURGISTS

September 6
September 13
September 20
September 27

Julie Keck
Melinda Redman
Chuck Zweck
Alexis Fankhauser

September 6 Steve & Norma Morrison
September 13 Valerie Janvrin
September 20 TBD
September 27 TBD



Coffee

September 6
/September 13
September 20
September 27

Jodi Baldwin
Darby Mitchell
Kristin Hargrove
Ellen Starace

September 6 Alice Huebner
September 13 Tim & Carrie Young
September 20 Gary Weiss
September 27 Chuck Zweck



Refreshments

USHERS



September 6
September 13
September 20
September 27

Gary Weiss, Jodi Baldwin, TBD
Susan Daley, Darby Mitchell,
Chuck Zweck, Jodi Baldwin
Julie Keck, Roberta Shull, Abby
Fletcher
Susan Daley, Ellen Starace,
Jodi Baldwin

Thank you all

Celebrate!

September Birthdays

1. Janice Kahila
Pam Mueller
3. Patty Stemple
5. Helen Johnson
Everett Kuhn
9. Rikki Brady
10. Gehrig Bunselmeyer
12. James Huckle
13. Patrick Malone
Malone Moretti
14. Ronald Brownfield
Nicholas Lauer
19. Kyle Brownfield
20. Shelly Smith
21. Sherry Palmer
Brandon Janvrin
24. Olivia Dees
Angie Miller
27. Ashley Lofland

September Anniversaries

1. Charles & Alfreda Tribout
7. Homer & Nancy Leoucis
22. David & Pat Mahr

Finance Plus

JULY 2026 FINANCIAL REPORT

	<u>July 26</u>	<u>YTD</u>
Budget Income	\$15,833.26	\$131,833.92
Budget Expense	\$21,272.50	\$148,907.50
Income	\$20,850.83	\$156,696.68
Expenses	\$20,806.94	\$160,890.63



September Calendar

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1 1:00 God's Busy Hands 7:00 Al-Anon 8:00 AA	2	3 7:00 Choir Rehearsal	4 8:00 PM AA	5 9:00 AM AA
6 9:00 Traditional 10:00 Fellow ship Hour 10:40 Bible Study 11:05 Coffee House	7	8 1:00 God's Busy Hands 7:00 Al-Anon 8:00 AA	9	10 7:00 Choir Rehearsal	11 8:00 PM AA	12 9:00 AM AA
13 9:00 Traditional 10:00 Fellow ship Hour 10:40 Bible Study 11:05 Coffee House	14 6:30 Admin 6:00 Property Meeting	15 1:00 God's Busy Hands 7:00 Al-Anon 8:00 AA	16	17 7:00 Choir Rehearsal	18 8:00 PM AA	19 9:00 AM AA
20 9:00 Traditional 10:00 Fellow ship Hour 10:40 Bible Study 11:05 Coffee House	21 6:30 Council	22 1:00 God's Busy Hands 7:00 Al-Anon 8:00 AA	23	24 7:00 Choir Rehearsal	25 8:00 PM AA	26 9:00 AM AA
27 9:00 Traditional 10:00 Fellow ship Hour 10:40 Bible Study 11:05 Coffee House	28	29 1:00 God's Busy Hands 7:00 Al-Anon 8:00 AA 7:00 Choir	30			



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