

Congregational Comments



Vol. 31 No. 10, October 2026

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 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 story of Noah and the ark is found in Genesis 6–9.

On a recent Sunday, we sat with the flood narrative and the strange grief of

God — not wrath, but regret. But there's another way the church has read this story for nearly two thousand years, and it's worth knowing, because it's probably hiding in plain sight in your own baptism.

From the earliest centuries, Christians read Noah's story as a picture of the gospel. The ark is the Church — the vessel God provides to carry his people safely through the storm. Notice what that means. The ark wasn't a reward for the strong swimmers. It was a refuge for those who could never have survived the waters on their own. That's what the Church is: not a club for the righteous, but a shelter for the rescued. Inside it we find what no one finds treading water alone — companionship in the storm, provision for the journey, and the sure promise that God himself has sealed the door.

And the animals? Every kind, clean and unclean alike, two by two up the ramp. The old interpreters saw in that menagerie all the nations and peoples of the earth — not one tribe, not

one bloodline, but every sort of creature God ever made, gathered into a single vessel of rescue. If you've ever wondered why the Church is full of such an odd assortment of people, the ark is your answer. It was always going to be a strange boat.

But here is where it all comes together: the ark only floats because of the one righteous man. God saw Noah, who "found favor in the eyes of the Lord," and for his sake a door was opened and many were saved. Noah points us forward to a greater Righteous One. In Jesus Christ, the one truly righteous man, God has built a rescue not for eight souls but for the world. We are not saved by our own goodness any more than the animals were saved by theirs. We are carried — carried in Christ, carried in his Church — because of a righteousness that is not our own.

And the flood itself? The New Testament makes the connection for us. Peter writes that in the days of Noah, eight souls were saved through water, "and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you" (1 Peter 3:20–21). The same water that drowned the old world of violence carried the ark to a new creation. What goes under comes up new. The ark and the font belong to the same conversation as grace.

Notes Continued

So the next time you pass the baptismal font, remember the ark. Remember the whole improbable zoo of humanity God has determined to carry through the waters — including you. The flood story ends with a rainbow and a promise. Baptism ends with a name: child of God. Both are God's way of saying the same thing — the storm does not get the last word.

Pastor Ryan+

A vibrant, colorful illustration depicting a diverse group of people engaged in various community activities. In the background, a city skyline with a prominent church steeple is visible. In the foreground, people are shown working on a wooden structure, gardening in a raised bed, playing with children, and socializing. The overall theme is community and church life.

The logo is circular with a stylized city skyline and a rainbow-like arc. The text "Eastern Association" is on the left and "Illinois Conference UCC" is on the right.

CHURCH LIFE TODAY

Navigating church in a post-pandemic world
EASTERN ASSOCIATION FALL MEETING

Date: Saturday, October 10, 2026 • Exploring New Ways to Connect
Time: 10 AM - 2 PM • Faith & Justice in Action
Location: First Congregational UCC, Decatur, Illinois • Sharing Stories of Modern Ministry

Church Information

Eastern Association Fall Meeting

Hello Friends!

This year's Fall Meeting will take place at **First Congregational UCC in Decatur on Saturday, October 10th**. Registration begins at 9 am and the event will take place from **10:00 am to 2:00 pm**.

The theme for this year's event is **Church Life Today: Navigating Church in a Post-Pandemic World**.

- Exploring New Ways to Connect
- Faith & Justice in Action
- Sharing Stories of Modern Ministry

Cost is \$30 per person, which includes coffee and pastries in the morning and lunch (gluten free and vegetarian options will be provided). Retired Clergy are free. Clergy, Members in Discernment, and Youth Delegates are half price (\$15).

Payment is due at the time of registration. ACH and debit/credit card payments are accepted. There is no option to pay later when registering. Cash and check payments will only be accepted for door registrations.

The deadline to register is Sunday, October 4th.

Voting representation shall consist of one lay delegate from each local congregation and all ordained, licensed and commissioned ministers with standing in the Eastern Association. In addition, each church shall be entitled to representation by one voting youth delegate (a person at least 14 years of age, but not older than 22). And, of course, any church member can attend!

If you need assistance registering or paying, please contact the Conference Office (708-344-4470) and talk to Naomi or Sarah.

We hope you will join us!

Church Information

FFDO

FFDO will meet at the Beach House on Oct 2 at 6:15. Please note the time and let me know if you will be joining us.

FALL PICNIC

The first church fall picnic will be held October 4th at noon in the pavillion. All are welcome. Sogm i[on the bulletin board in the fellowship hall. Bring a side dish to share. Meat and drinks provided.

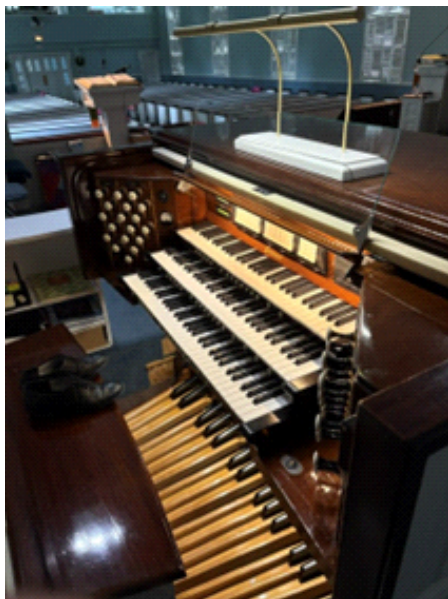


All God's Children Preschool

Well this school year is off to a great start! We have 9 new students and 3 returning from last year. School began on September 8th this year and the students were eager to learn. We've been getting into a routine and learning the rules. They enjoy music with Mr W and chapel with Pastor Ryan. Next week will be our first field trip and we'll be going to Rock Springs for a lesson on Animal Skeletons. We are hoping for nice weather dso we can have a picnic snack and play on the playground.



Bench Notes



Bench Notes

Let's talk about hymn and worship songs.

Like many of us, I love the hymns and songs of the Church that I remember singing (and playing!) growing up. Many of them have survived through the decades because of two significant elements: 1) strong theological content and 2) creative musical structure. Other songs survived for a season and perhaps were appropriate for a special time or event

Many times, hymns and worship songs were born from specific events in the author's life. The text from "O Love That Will Not Let Me Go" which the Choir sang a couple of Sundays ago came from moments of sadness and grief from a love that was not to be fulfilled. Yet the message reminds us that God's love is greater and He supplies all that we need in our lives.

Every now and then someone asks, "What is the difference between a hymn and a Gospel song?" It's really easy to differentiate: hymns focus upon the qualities and characteristics of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Think "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty." Gospel songs tell of my personal relationship with Jesus. Think "He Lives" (I serve a risen Savior...). If the text has a lot of "I" or "me" in it, it is likely a Gospel song.

Now.....what about Praise and Worship Music or CCM? (Contemporary Christian Music) If you listen to WBGL or Moody Bible Radio, you will hear mainly the current tunes that are being sung in churches around the country and the world. I believe that the standard for hymns and Gospel songs applies to them as well. Strong theology and appropriate musical construction. Worship is a corporate experience – it is NOT a spectator sport. We sing together, we pray together, we hear the Word and listen to the Pastor's teaching and gather together around the Table. But we are actively engaged.

The music that we sing must be of the nature that we can actually participate. I've been to Christian concerts, which are wonderful. And I've been to other worship services where the music is all contemporary – but it was more of a concert/performance by those on the "stage." (Pet Peeve Alert – theaters have stages; churches have chancels). I remember standing and trying to sing along songs I never heard in keys pitched too high for the average church member. Looking around, many folks were seated, several were engaged in conversation and others were just standing in the same ignorant bliss I was in.

I'm not trying to be judgmental, but firmly believe that congregations need to sing their praise at every opportunity. One of the things I appreciate about you all is how well you sing the hymns on Sunday mornings. And I am grateful for that. We may not be huge in number, but we are mighty in Spirit! Thanks be to God!

On other notes:

- Thanks to Adley Moore and Quinn Leman and their families as they participated in the choir anthem September 27. They did a wonderful job and make a sacred moment for us all.
- I continue to record our weekly hymns and service music as appropriate on the WatsonMIDI App. Some Sunday we'll try using it for the entire service. We have made connections with a couple of other congregations in our city who have the ability to use that App as well. In doing so, we would be able to share music/organists between our congregations so that no Organ would be silent on a Sunday because of no Organist.
- First Church Choir got off to a great start on September 3 and celebrated with some really great banana cream pie. We are always looking for new members. Please speak to me if you are interested.

Gracious Heavenly Father,

We acknowledge that You have no limitations. Every style of music that focuses upon You can be used by Your Holy Spirit to bless and encourage our hearts. Be with us as we worship – and may we worship You with open heart and mind that we become more of the Church You have created for us to become. We ask this in the name of Jesus, our Savior, amen.

- Rev. Michael Waltenberger
Minister of Music

Happenings

FFDO

August 7
My Pizza Place
6:00 pm

God's Busy Hands

Tuesdays
1:00—3:00 pm



God's Busy Hands

Admin Meeting

Monday,
October 12
6:00 pm

Council of Ministry Teams

Monday
October 19
6:30 pm

Choir

Rehearsal
Thursday at
7:00 pm



Sing With Us

All God's Children Preschool

Director Stephanie
Nihiser



Exploring Christian Faith Study Group

10:45 am
Studying the Book
of Genesis

People Working Sunday Services



LITURGISTS

October 4 Mindy Bunselmeyer
 October 11 Julie Keck
 October 18 Sharon Butler
 October 25 Ellen Starace

October 4 Ted & Darby Mitchell
 October 11 Peggy Ruff
 October 18 Ev & Shirley Kuhn
 October 25 Betty Henry



Coffee

October 4 Kristin Hargrove
 October 11 Gary Weiss
 October 18 Kristin Hargrove
 October 25 Kristin Hargrove

October 4 Bill Huebner, Dave Carpenter
 October 11 Alice Huebner
 October 18 Mary Beck
 October 25 Sharon Butler



Refreshments

USHERS



Thank you all

October 4 Ev Kuhn, Mike Koyak, Jodi Baldwin, TBD
 October 11 Toni Longstreet, Jodi Baldwin, TBD
 October 18 Mike Koyak, Jodi Baldwin, TBD
 October 25 Mindy & Gehrig Bunselmeyer, Jodi Baldwin

Celebrate!

October
Birthdays

- 6. Alfreda Tribout
- 17. Ronald Palmer
- 19. Bobbie Taylor
- 20. Frank Smith
- 21. Marilyn Jordan
- 23. Any Leman
Don Moster
- 24. Robert Ruehrup
- 25. Alex Miller
Erick Hubbard
- 26. Mary Beck
- 28. Tracy Johnson

October
Anniversaries

- 4. Ted & Darby Mitchell
- 10. Joe Moretti & Maureen Ruski
- 11. Mark & Susan Daley
- 12. Everett & Shirley Kuhn
- 20. John & Ashley Lofland
- 21. Don & Debbie Moster

Finance Plus

August 2026 FINANCIAL REPORT

	<u>Aug 26</u>	<u>YTD</u>
Budget Income	\$15,833.26	\$150,667.33
Budget Expense	\$21,272.50	\$170,180.00
Income	\$16,414.72	\$173,111.40
Expenses	24,486.355	\$185,376.98



"Oh, no! Do you mean we *still* have to go to *Church*?!"

October Calendar

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1 7:00 pm Choir	2 8:00 PM AA	3 9:00 AM AA
4 :00 Traditional 10:00 Fellowship 10:45 Bible Study 11:05 Coffee House 7:00 Church Picnic	5	6 1:00 God's Busy Hands 7:00 Al-Anon 8:00 AA	7	8 7:00 pm Choir	9 8:00 PM AA	10 9:00 AM AA 10:00 –2:00 Eastern Association Meeting
11 :00 Traditional 10:00 Fellowship 10:45 Bible Study 11:05 Coffee House	12 6:30 Admin 6:00 Property Meeting	13 1:00 God's Busy Hands 7:00 Al-Anon 8:00 AA	14	15 7:00 pm Choir	16 8:00 PM AA	17 9:00 AM AA
18 :00 Traditional 10:00 Fellowship 10:45 Bible Study 11:05 Coffee House	19 6:30 Church Council	20 1:00 God's Busy Hands 7:00 Al-Anon 8:00 AA	21	22 7:00 pm Choir	23 8:00 PM AA	24 9:00 AM AA
25 :00 Traditional 10:00 Fellowship 10:45 Bible Study 11:05 Coffee House	26	27	28	29 7:00 pm Choir	30 8:00 PM AA	31 9:00 AM AA



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