Congregational Comments



Vol. 31 No. 11, November 2026

Important Contacts in the Church

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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

Church Contact Information:

3465 N. MacArthur Rd.
Decatur, IL 62526
Telephone: 217-877-2216
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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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Congregational Comments is a publication of 1st Congregational UCC, 3465 N. MacArthur Rd., Decatur, IL. 62526-1450. Published monthly, it is used to keep its members informed .about programs of the church and to report news about First Church's people

A Note from Pastor Ryan

Pastor's Column



Have you thought about your own mortality?

We have had several funerals in our congregation recently, and each one reminds us that our time here is precious. None of us is getting any younger. Since crossing the threshold of fifty, I have become increasingly aware that I probably have more life behind me than ahead of me.

And I'll level with you: the thought of dying doesn't particularly appeal to me. There is some fear there. I'm not so much afraid of going to hell, although if God judged me according to my sins, I would have no grounds to argue. I trust the redemption offered to me in Jesus Christ. But I do fear the possibility of suffering on the way out, and there is the general fear of the unknown. Trusting Christ's promise of heaven does not mean that everything about dying feels easy.

Over the years, I have accompanied people who were ready to die. Some had endured considerable suffering. Others had lived so long that nearly everyone they once shared life with had already died. They were ready to go home. I have also accompanied people who wanted to hold on to every remaining breath. We do not all approach death with the same feelings, and faith does not require us to pretend otherwise.

I sometimes wonder how much our longer lives have changed the way we hear—and proclaim—the Christian message. At the time of the Reformation, death was an immediate presence in everyday life. Epidemics, war, childbirth, and infections that we can now treat could bring life to an abrupt end. Some people certainly lived to old age, but no family could count on being spared an early death. Questions about heaven, hell, judgment, and salvation carried an urgency that is harder for many of us to appreciate today.

Medical advances, sanitation, and better living conditions have given many of us years our ancestors could scarcely have expected. That is a tremendous blessing. But it may also make it easier to put off thinking about death. We assume we have plenty of time.

We hear less about hellfire and damnation in most churches today, and that's overall a good thing. Past excesses produced crippling anxiety and too often emphasized the power of evil more than the saving power of Jesus Christ. But, as with so many things, we tend to overcorrect. Very often, we don't talk about death, judgment, and eternal life at all. Yet avoiding these subjects does not make them go away. When we think about taking our last breath, many of us feel a little trepidation, don't we?

Scripture reminds us that each of us will stand before God and give an account of ourselves (Romans 14:10–12). That is a sobering thought. If my hope depended on presenting God with a sufficiently impressive record, I would have good reason to be afraid.

But the gospel gives us somewhere else to place our trust: in Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us and rose again.

Notes Continued

That brings me to a question worth considering at any age: Are you at peace with God? And upon what do you base that peace?

My peace cannot rest on having been a good enough person, serving as a pastor, or knowing the right religious vocabulary. It rests on who Jesus Christ is, what he has done for us, and what he has promised. As Paul writes, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1).

Sometimes salvation gets treated like fire insurance: say a prayer, recite a creed, and you are guaranteed to escape hell and go to heaven. But salvation means far more than securing a favorable destination when we die. Christ saves us from sin and death, reconciles us to God, and promises us eternal life.

That life begins here and now. Through Christ, we are brought into a relationship with God in which we can confess our sins, receive forgiveness, bring our fears, and learn to love our neighbors. In the modern Church, we often say, “Jesus has saved us, so let’s focus on what we can do to bless other people and make the world around us a better place.” There is truth in that. The Christian life is not meant to become merely individualistic, as though faith were only about what will happen to us in the future. Christ’s salvation sends us outward in love and service.

But faith is also personal. Each of us lives under the shadow of death, and we cannot lose sight of our own need for grace simply because we are eager to help others. The God who will receive us at death is already with us today. We do not have to wait until we reach heaven to know God’s loving care.

Being at peace with God does not mean we will feel peaceful every moment. Grief still hurts. The prospect of suffering can still frighten us. We may find ourselves praying, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.” We can bring that prayer to God, too. Our hope rests in the faithfulness of the Savior who holds us, even when our own faith feels weak.

As we grieve those who have died, and as we think about our own remaining years, I hope we can speak honestly with one another about these things. If you are afraid, if you have questions, or if you would simply like someone to listen and pray with you, please call me. You do not have to wait until a crisis.

We do not know how many years we have ahead of us. But in Jesus Christ, we have been given a promise on which to rest today—and when our final day comes: nothing, not even death, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38–39).

Pastor Ryan+

Church Information

FFDO

FFDO will meet at Everyone's East End Grill on Nov 6 at 6:00. RSVP in the bulletin, email sharmison2002@yahoo.com, or Text to 217-358-6295 if you are planning on attending.

GROWING PROJECT UPDATE!

For a variety of reasons we will not be having a Harvest Celebration on the farm this year. When the plot is harvested, we will provide number data and dollars. We will celebrate the harvest at church at a later date and will gather to determine the overseas program this year's crop will support. Thank you for your understanding and your continued support of Growing Hope Globally.



Church Information

Christianity at a Crossroads

"PBS Documentary "Christianity At A Crossroads" will be shown in the Fellowship Hall on 4 consecutive Wednesdays. Episodes are approximately 55 minutes each.

Wed., Nov 4th Episode 1 "Reading the Signs", 1:00 p.m. and again at 6:00 p.m.

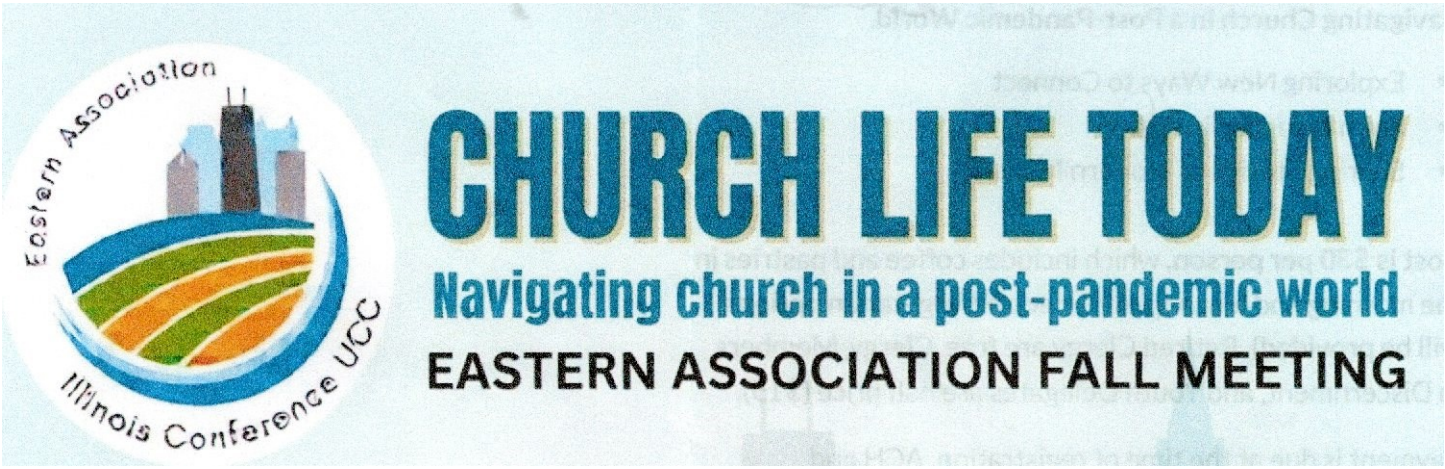
Wed., Nov. 11th Episode 2 "A Divided Highway", 1:00 p.m. and again at 6:00 p.m.

Wed., Nov. 18th Episode 3 "The Road to America", 1:00 p.m. and again at 6:00 p.m.

Wed., Nov. 25th Episode 4 "The Road Ahead, 1:00 p.m. and again at 6:00 p.m.

CHRISTIANITY AT A CROSS-ROADS

Wider Church Information



2026 Eastern Association Fall Meeting

This year's Fall Meeting took place at our church in Decatur on Saturday, October 10th. I was privileged to attend as a Lay Leader on the Eastern Association Council. "*What Has Emerged in Church Life and the Church Setting Since 2021*" was the theme, which included a presentation and discussion of the **New Manual on Church** and a session on Key ideas and next steps in church life.

Attending the conference from our church were Paula Carmichael, Darla Weltmer, Steve Morrison Don Carter and Al Gerhold. Those who helped with the programming were Mitch Daley, Pastor Ryan, Mike Waltenberger, Alice Huebner and Alexis Fankhauser. Many others brought food and helped serve it.

I was fortunate to meet and greet members face-to-face on the EA Council that I had been "ZOOMING" with for 2—3 years. Moderator, Shawn Hillman, came a day early to help prepare the site and make sure we had the technology needed. Also on EA Council included Kathy Lawes, Illinois Association Conference Minister, 708-701-4962, KathyLawes@illucc.org, who our church will work with in pastoral search planning. I have a copy of the New Manual on Church, which we were advised NOT TO COMPLETE ALL AT ONE TIME. To connect with the Conference Office, contact Naomi or Sarah, 708-344-4479 or conferenceadmin@illucc.org.

Grateful for the opportunity,

Alice Huebner

Life of Our First Church Building

The first church service in the new church was in March of 1903





The church building in 2019



The church building in 2026 as it was being torn down

All God's Children Preschool

Fall is definitely here! We took class pictures at the end of September and we are awaiting their arrival. We began having show n tell that week as well and the students are doing a great job choosing things to share that begin with the letter of the week. We had our teddy bear picnic and the students tried different food that started with B. We completed our caramel apple sales and earned $723 in donations and profit. Thanks in part to church members who bought apples or gave donations. We appreciate you!









Bench Notes



Bench Notes

It's mid-October as I write and it's a cool and crisp 87 degrees outside today. Totally beautiful – but just doesn't quite feel like October as I recall my days growing up in New England. But no matter the season nor the weather, we can be grateful for all the blessings that God provides for us. He loves nothing more than a grateful heart when His children remember the One who provides expressively for them.

Certainly, we have been blessed in recent days. I'm grateful for the music that First Church Choir provides every Sunday morning. Their faithfulness to the ministry is reflected in all the good things they are able to do. There is something spiritual – something holy – when people gather to sing. Our Creator gave us voices – not only for speech and communication, but for music and for praise. Think about it – the only musical instrument made by God is the voice. And it's not just humans! I think He finds pleasure in the singing of birds, in the howling of coyotes and in the trumpeting of elephants. He is present with us as we lift our voices – and all creation as well - in worship to Him.

On other notes:

Thanks to Alexis Fankhauser who sang at our Regional Meeting on October 10. As always, she sang beautifully and added so much to our worship time that morning.

Many thanks to you all for remembering me on Pastor Appreciation Sunday. Your card and gift are greatly appreciated!

If you'd like to join in the Choir during the holiday months, we have begun rehearsals on our Thanksgiving and Christmas music. I'd be thrilled to make up a folder for you! Let me know ahead of time and I'll have everything ready.



With a sad heart I share with you that Organist Rodney Barbour, who played the concert here after our Organ project was completed, passed away unexpectedly on Oct. 11. He had just finished playing Sunday morning service, got off the bench and entered into eternity. Our prayers are with his wife, Cheri, and his family, friends and church who will miss him deeply.

Gracious Heavenly Father,

In every season, You are our God. Unchanging, ever-present, patient, loving and merciful. As we go through these days of celebration and remembrances, let us be ever mindful of Your care and provision. In all our ways, we make our Thanksgiving to You, our Creator and Redeemer. Guide us now and always, and to Your glory. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

Rev. Michael Waltenberger

Happenings

FFDO

November 6

Everyone's East End Grill

6:00 pm

God's Busy Hands

Tuesdays

1:00—3:00 pm



Admin Meeting

Monday,

November 9

6:00 pm

Council of Ministry Teams

Monday

November 16

6:30 pm

Choir

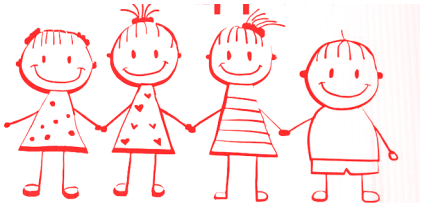
Rehearsal

Thursday at 7:00 pm



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

November 7	Judi Carpenter
November 8	Julie Keck
November 15	Don Carter
November 22	Alexis Fankhauser
November 29	Don Carter

November 1	Mike Koyak
November 8	Sharon Butler
November 15	Roberta Shull
November 22	
November 19	Peggy Ruff





Coffee

November 1	Kristin Hargrove
November 8	Kristin Hargrove
November 15	Kristin Hargrove
November 22	Marlene Gant
November 29	Chuck Zweck

November 1	Bill Huebner, Dave Carpenter
November 8	Keck and Shu II
November 15	Thanksgiving/Honor Veterans
November 22	Stacey Carter
November 29	Robert Ruehrup



Refreshments



Thank you all

November 1	Dave Carpenter, Susan Daiey, Jodi Baldwin, YBD
November 8	Gary Weiss, Chuck Zweck, Jodi Baldwin
November 15	Julie Keck, Abby Fletcher, Roberta Shull
November 22	Ellen Starace, Susan Daley, Jodi Baldwin
November 29	Jodi Baldwin, TBD, TBD

Celebrate!

November Birthdays

4. Miranda Miller
5. Tyler Wernecke
   John Lofland
   Katie Wright
9. Linda Connelly
10. Peggy Ruff
    Bradley Malone
12. Maureen Ruski
    Brian Traughber
13. Peggy Druessel
14. David Mahr
19 Ron Ruecker
20. Debbie Moster
22. David Carpenter
    Robby Moore
25. Patrick Carter
26. Jodi Baldwin
28. Chase Leman
30. Valerie Janvrin

November Anniversaries

8 Craig & Pam Mueller

24. Joe & Carol Robertson

Finance Plus

SEPEMBER 2026 FINANCIAL REPORT

	Sept 26	YTD
Budget Income	**$18,833.26**	**$159,500.75**
Budget Expense	**$21,272.50**	**$191,452.50**
Income	**$28,634.60**	**$201,746.00**
Expenses	**$20,520.62**	**$205,897.60**



The famous question is asked for the first time.

November Calendar

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

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Our Mission

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