

Congregational Comments



Vol. 31 No. 3, March 2026

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 Website: www.firstchurchdecatour.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



Welcoming the Stranger: A Pastoral Reflection on a Difficult Subject

Few subjects generate more disagreement in public life than immigration. The debate is often framed in sharp, opposing terms, as though the issue were morally simple and faithful people could only arrive at one obvious conclusion.

Real life is rarely so tidy.

Christians of good faith may hold very different views about borders, enforcement, and policy. What is often missing from public argument is the lived, human reality behind the slogans.

During my time serving as a chaplain at Churchill Downs, our team ministered to a large immigrant community. Many worked long hours in the barns under demanding conditions. Some were legally present. Others were not. Whatever their status, they were not abstractions or political symbols, but neighbors — people with names, families, anxieties, and stories frequently marked by hardship.

Our approach as chaplains was intentionally straightforward. We provided pastoral care, prayer, food, and support to any person within our reach. We did not ask about immigration status, nor did we wish to know. At the same time, we observed a clear boundary: we would never knowingly assist anyone in breaking the law or interfere with the proper responsibilities of civil authorities.

That balance was tested in very concrete ways. On one occasion, we encountered a young Spanish-speaking worker who had crossed the Rio Grande only weeks earlier. During that dangerous journey, he had been shot and wounded. After eventually reaching Kentucky, he began working, but a severe infection developed. Out of fear, he avoided seeking medical care, worried that a hospital visit might expose his situation and lead to deportation.

The need before us was immediate and unmistakably human.

Rather than acting impulsively, the lead chaplain sought guidance from denominational legal counsel. We confirmed that he could safely receive treatment without being reported. With that assurance, the wounded man gave us permission to take him to hospital for the care he needed — addressing suffering without deception, concealment, or disregard for the law.

Experiences like this illuminate an important distinction for Christians. The government is not the church, and the church is not the government. Each bears responsibilities proper to its role. Christians are commanded to show mercy, to act with compassion, and to care for those in need. Governments, by contrast, are charged with maintaining order, administering law, and safeguarding the stability of the broader community.

Notes Continued

These callings are not identical.

Civil authority exists because human societies require structure and enforcement. When laws are routinely ignored or left unenforced, public safety itself is placed at risk. We see this in ordinary ways — highways without speed enforcement would quickly become dangerous for everyone.

This recognition does not diminish the church's calling to mercy. It simply acknowledges that the responsibilities of government differ from the responsibilities of believers. This reality calls for humility and charity, yet for Christians, certain responsibilities remain beautifully clear: We are called to see persons rather than categories, to reject cruelty and contempt, and to respond with kindness where human need stands before us.

Jesus did not appoint the church as the manager of civil systems; he did command us to love our neighbors. We therefore extend mercy where we can, respect the lawful structures that govern society, and entrust the larger complexities of public life to God's providence.

Join Pastor Ryan for a Daily Devotion During Lent

Throughout Lent, Pastor Ryan will post a brief reflection on Facebook each morning, in which he will discuss this year's Lenten devotional - "The Sanctuary" by Amy Sigmon and published by Abingdon Press. Copies have been mailed to our homebound members. If you would like your copy, be sure to pick it up in the narthex today!

Lenten Worship Services

Throughout Lent, we will be offering a midweek worship opportunity at 1:00 p.m. in the Sanctuary. We will gather for about 30 minutes for a few hymns, prayers, and reflection on the Lenten devotional, "The Sanctuary." The first service will be on Feb. 25. We hope to see you there.

Church Information

FFDO

FFDO will meet on March 6 at 6:00 at East End Grill (the airport). As always, let me know if you plan on attending.

Sandy Harrison

March 29, Fifth Sunday Food Drive

Food collections for this Spring are being donated to Northeast Community Fund. Any non-perishable food is most welcome. The food collection tubs are by the west door to Fellowship Hall and outside the west Sanctuary door.

Alice & Jodi



Easter Egg Hunt

Please join us Sunday, March 29, Palm Sunday, for the annual Children's Easter Egg Hunt. Sunday School will be offered during the 9am service. After the 9am service (approximately 10:15 am) the Easter Egg Hunt will be held outside (inside in case of rain). Hope to see everyone there.



All God's Children Preschool

February came and we began learning about Groundhog's day and what shadows are! We also kicked off the month with a Del's Popcorn fundraiser that we hope will be a success. We've already purchased some new instruments for the class like castanets and maracas as well as new beanbags. We use these items daily during our music time.

To celebrate Valentine's day, we had a party! The students decorated boxes for their cards and we played games, did crafts, danced to music and made our own snack to eat. We enjoyed sharing treats and cards with each other!



Bench Notes



Bench Notes

As we journey through these days of Lent, I hope that you are finding some holy moments – times when you reflect upon God’s love for us expressed in His Son Jesus. While there are many traditions that people follow during this time, for me it is just the opportunity to be more intentional in my relationship with Jesus. Looking at it like a friendship, it is spending time together. Reading Scripture, daily prayers, being reminded throughout the day of God’s blessings and guidance helps us draw closer and mature in that relationship with our Creator.

Many of you have participated in a “read the Bible through in a year” program and I’ll

confess I have done that many times. It’s a joy to read various translations and formats. Shortly after the New Year, I decided to revisit *The Daily Walk Bible* which takes you from Genesis through Revelation in 366 (that’s right! Leap Year is included!) One of the things I love about *The Daily Walk Bible* is the commentaries, foot-notes and daily challenges which make me think and gives me insights to what is happening in the Scriptures.

Another thing is that every seven days, you get a “review” day. A short reading with opportunity to reflect upon the last six days

If you’ve not read the Bible through, or haven’t done it in a while, I would encourage you to get a copy of *The Daily Walk Bible* (David Wilkinson, editor) and just start. Just start. You will be immensely blessed – and it doesn’t matter what day you are on!

On other notes...

Many thanks to Alexis Fankhauser and Doug Blakey for covering rehearsals and worship services in my absence. They did a wonderful job and I’m so grateful for each of them and all they did to continue to the music ministry.

First Church Choir is rehearsing their Easter and Holy Week music now. If you’d like to join us for this season, please let me know and I’ll have music for you on Thursday nights.

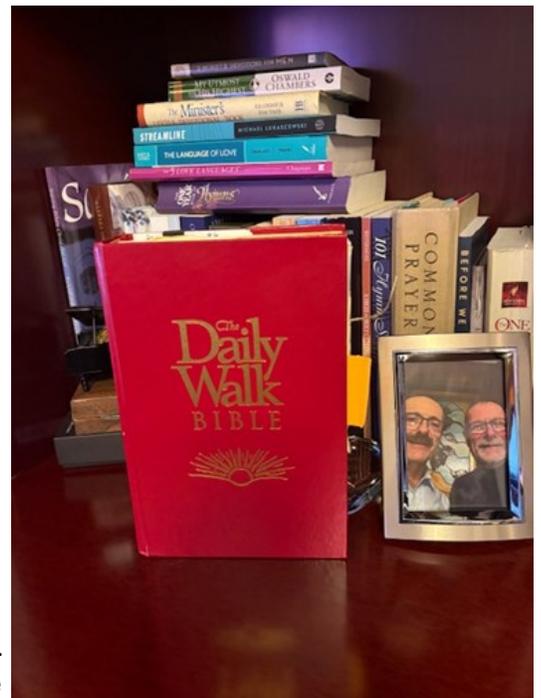
Be sure to join us for the Wednesday Lenten services. They will be a mid-week “pick-up” as we move toward Easter Sunday

And thank you for your continued prayers, cards and thoughts for PJ and me. She is making progress every day and working hard with her therapists. So grateful to have her close to home now!

Loving Heavenly Father,

In this season, Lord, we want to see You. Let us know You better, not only as our Creator and Redeemer, but as our Friend and Brother. Illuminate our hearts and spirit after Yours that we would be everything You have created us to be. Not for our glory, O Lord, but for Yours alone. We pray in Jesus’ name, amen.

Rev. Michael Waltenberger
Minister of Music



GROWING HOPE GLOBALLY



A MESSAGE FROM OUR PROGRAM:

Roque and Yuli live high in the cold hills of Cocas where they work hard to support their family of eight. Last year they experienced the heartbreaking loss of their 14-year-old son Eduardo who had lived with disabilities and fragile health. His passing left a deep void in their home. Yet in their grief, the couple made the choice to keep moving forward for the sake of their other children.

When Roque and Yuli first joined the program, all they had were a few criollo goats, a small patch of land, and a dream of offering their family something more. Yuli made small batches of goat cheese to sell in the village. It was just enough to get by, but never enough to grow.

Through the program, Roque received seeds to plant improved pasture, nutritious legumes, and grasses capable of thriving in the high-altitude soil. Then, Roque and Yuli made the bold decision to use what little savings they had to invest in three pregnant cows. Not long after, calves were born, bringing with them new opportunities. Yuli expanded her cheese production, using both goat and cow milk to create fresh, wholesome products that quickly gained value in the community. Their income began to grow, bringing them a sense of stability for the first time in years.

Roque joined every training session offered by local partner CEDINCO, taking notes, asking questions and practicing each new technique. He learned about improved animal care, pasture management, hygiene, and cheese making. His confidence and leadership skills grew. Today, he serves as president of the local producers' association, helping his neighbors organize and improve their production.

Yuli also embraced every learning opportunity, even while caring for eight children, managing the farm, and processing their dairy products. She adopted new hygiene and food safety practices in her kitchen, ensuring healthier meals and safer cheese for her family and customers. She improved their nutrition by introducing more vegetables and sangrecita, a traditional, nutrient-rich, iron-rich food. Today, none of their children show signs of anemia, a remarkable achievement in rural high-land communities.

"We are moving forward," Roque says "for our children, for our community, and for the future."

Peru Castrovirreyna Program

Led by Lutheran World Relief and local partner Center for Integral Development of Communities (CEDINCO)

Happenings

FFDO

March 6
6:00 pm
East End Grill

God's Busy Hands

Tuesdays
1:00—3:00 pm



God's Busy Hands

Admin Meeting

Monday,
March 9
6:30 pm

Council of Ministry Teams

Monday
March 16
6:30 pm

Choir

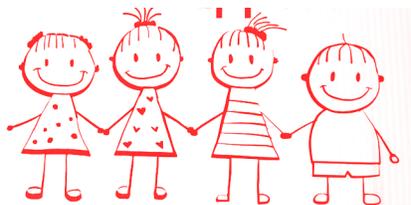
Rehearsal
Thursday at
7:00 pm



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

- March 1 Judi Carpenter
- March 8 Alexis Fankhauser
- March 15 Liz Lynch
- March 22 Julie Keck
- March 29 Ellen Starace

- March 1 Steve and Norma Morrison
- March 8 Roger and Melinda Redman
- March 15 Don and Stacey Carter
- March 22 Ellen Starace
- March 29 Lilies for Palm Sunday



Coffee

- March 1 Kristin Hargrove
- March 8 Kristin Hargrove
- March 15 Gary Weiss
- March 22 Kristin Hargrove
- March 29 Kristin Hargrove

- March 1 Sue Bunselmeyer
- March 8 Women's Fellowship
- March 15 Jodi Baldwin
- March 22 Madeline Mitchell
- March 29 TBA



Refreshments

USHERS



- March 1 Susan Daley, Chuck Zweck, Dave Carpenter, Jodi Baldwin
- March 8 Jodi Baldwin, TBD, TBD
- March 15 Julie Keck, Roberta Shull, Abby Fletcher
- March 22 Liz Lynch, Chuck Zweck, Jodi Baldwin
- March 29 Ted & Darby Mitchell, Jodi Baldwin

Thank you all

Celebrate!

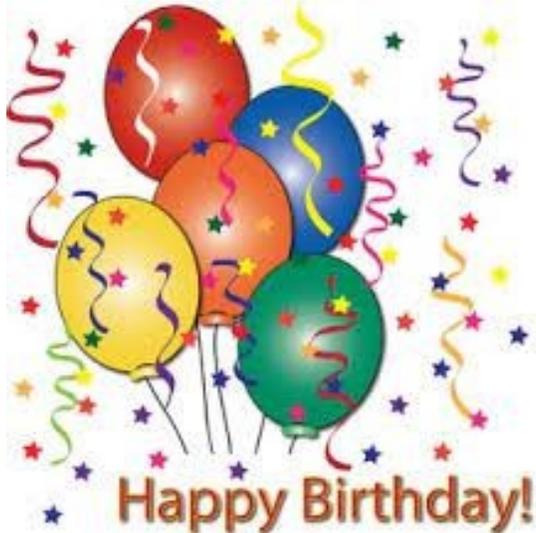
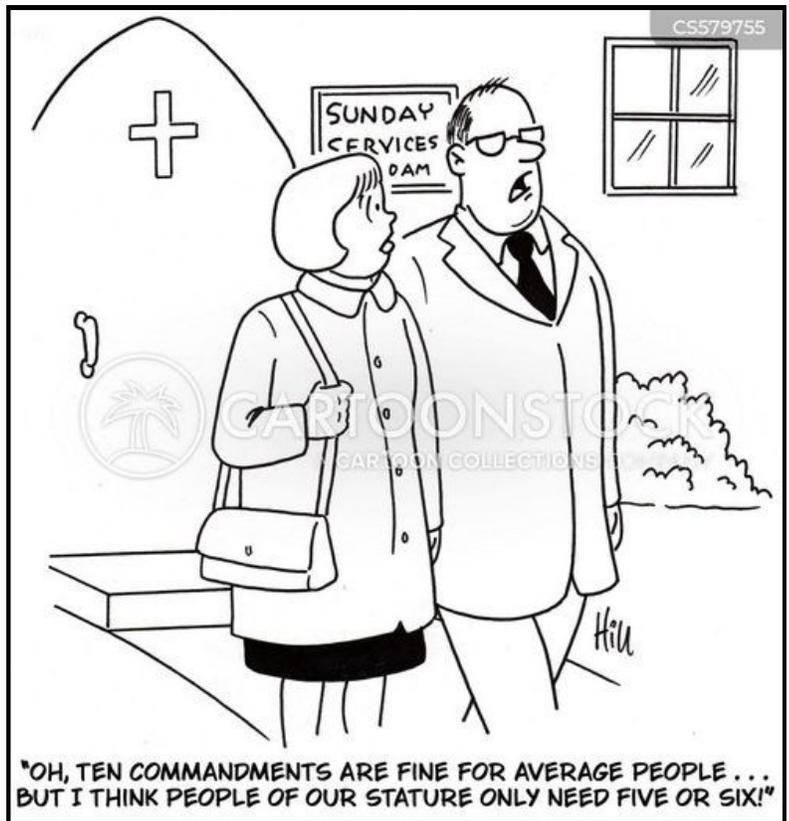
March Birthdays

- 2. Mitchell Daley
- 4. Andy Baldwin
Don Carter
- 12. Erica Moster
- 13. Tucker Clark
- 18 Randal Beck
- 22. Roger Kahila
Clinton Mueller
- 24. Melissa Boldizar
- 25. Jillian Daley
- 28. Penny Butts
- 31. Bette Lynn Fankhauser
Gary Weiss

Finance Plus

JANUARY 2026 FINANCIAL REPORT

	<u>Jan 26</u>	<u>YTD</u>
Budget Income	\$15,833.26	\$18,833.42
Budget Expense	\$21,272.50	\$21,272.50
Income	\$15,282.92	\$15,282.92
Expenses	\$29,213.18	\$29,213.18



March 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 5:30 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	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 7:00 Choir Rehearsal	27 8:00 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	31 1:00 God's Busy Hands 7:00 Al-Anon 8:00 AA				



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