

# Congregational Comments



**Vol. 31 No. 5, May 2026**

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## Church Contact Information:

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 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



### Is There 'One True Church'?

Every now and then, someone will be told—often by a well-meaning friend or family member—that they have found the one true church, and that others are in the wrong one. That can be unsettling. It raises an important question: Is that how the church is meant to be understood?

The answer depends on what we mean by “church.” For centuries, Christians have distinguished between the visible church and the hidden church. The visible church is every congregation, institution, and denomination you can point to on a map. It has buildings, budgets, committees, and bylaws. The hidden church is the true body of Christ: all people, in every time and place, who trust in Jesus. It has no headquarters, issues no membership cards, and cannot be contained by any single institution.

The earliest church was shaped by the synagogue. Jesus and his first followers gathered to hear Scripture, to pray, and to share in community. There were no altars or priests—the temple in Jerusalem held that role. But in 70 AD, the temple was destroyed, and that world came to an end.

By then, the movement had already spread into Gentile cities like Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome. Those converts came from a very different religious world—one of temples, altars, priests, and sacred spaces. Over time, some of those forms found their way into Christian practice.

None of this by itself denotes corruption. It is simply history. The church has always taken root in real cultures. What it means is that the outward forms of the church—its architecture, vestments, and structures—have developed over time and could have developed differently.

What has never changed is the community of people who trust in Jesus. That is the church that cannot be destroyed.

So how do we recognize it? Not by denominational labels or outward forms, but by its marks: the Word of God rightly preached and taught, and the sacraments—baptism and the Lord's Supper—faithfully administered. Where these are present, Christ is present. And where Christ is present, the church is.

That means the church is far larger than any one group can claim. It gathers in storefronts and cathedrals, in homes, hospitals, and prisons. It is not a building or a brand, but the body of those who belong to Christ.

So when someone insists that they alone belong to the “one true church,” we do not need to be shaken. The true church is not confined to a single denomination. It is found wherever Christ is at work through his Word and his sacraments.

We are part of something much older and much wider than ourselves—and we can rest in that with confidence every time we gather.

Pastor Ryan+

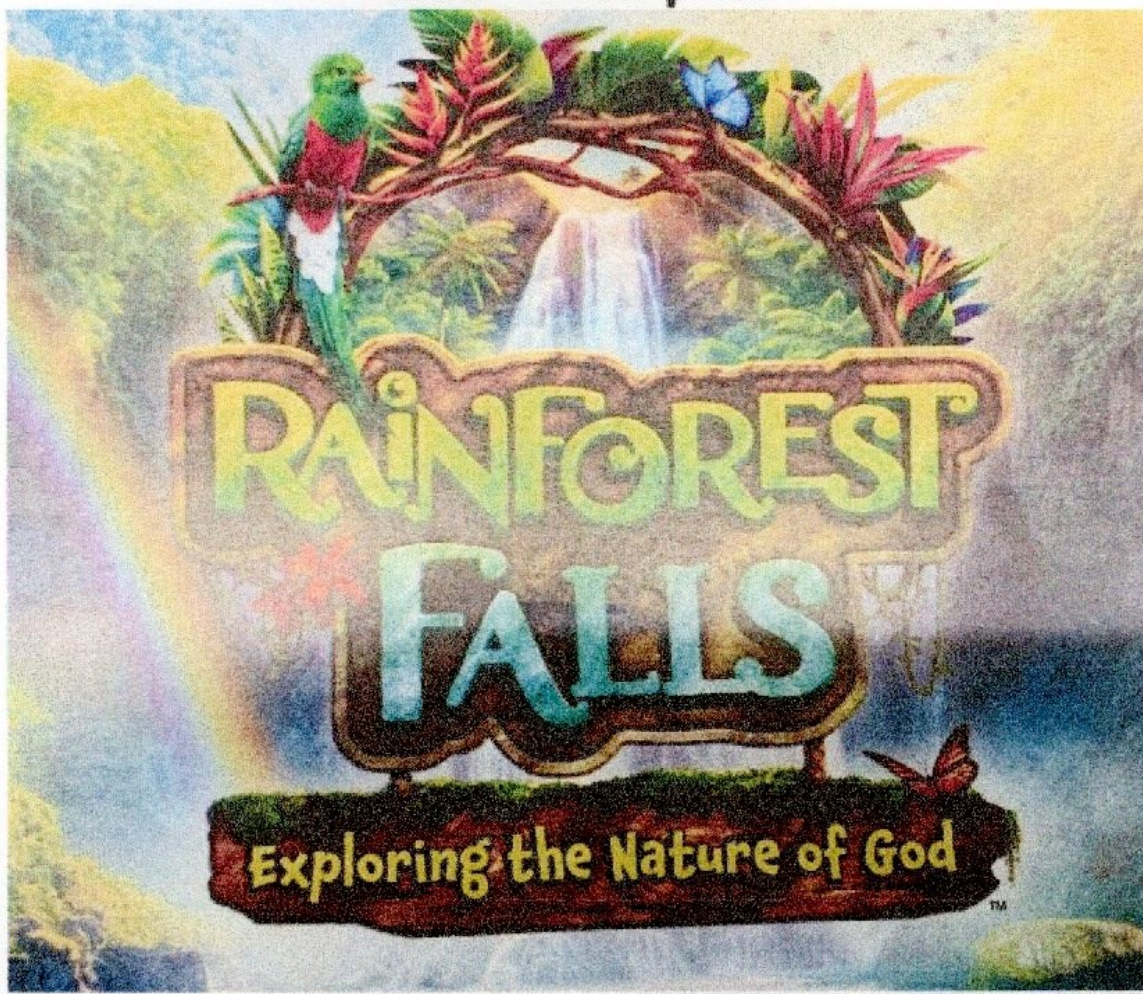
# Notes Continued

## Follow Pastor Ryan's Study on James

Pastor Ryan has launched a new Bible study through the book of James, with daily reflections posted on the church's Facebook page. Each day offers a short, five- to six-minute message as we work our way through this powerful letter written by Jesus's half-brother.

Grab your Bible, pour a cup of coffee, and tune in as we walk through James together

**COMING SOON!!! VBS July 20-23 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.**



# Church Information

## FFDO

First Friday dinner out will be at the Royal International Buffet on May 1 at 6:00.

Sandy Harmison

## Card Making

Pastoral Care Ministry will be hosting a cardmaking day on Saturday Morning, May 16, in the Choir room starting at 10:30 am. All are welcome.

## Mother, Daughter, Friends Spring Banquet

Women's Fellowship will hold our Mother, Daughter, Friends Spring Banquet on Saturday May 9, 2026 at 12:30 pm.

We have a very exciting program this year! Connie Martin is a retired middle school Language Arts teacher and has been accepted on the Roster of the Illinois Humanities Road Scholar Speakers Council 2021 2027. She finds joy in the telling of the secret codes and hidden messages in the family quilts her ancestors shared on the Underground Railroad. Connie is a sixth-generation descendant of captured enslaved Africans forced into slavery in America. Her family quilts will be displayed.

A plate lunch will be served at 12:30 p.m. in Fellowship Hall. The program will be held in the Sanctuary at 1:30 p.m. Tickets are \$20 and must be purchased in advance from Darby Mitchell or Sheila Witts Mannweiler. Hope to see you there!



# All God's Children Preschool

With the warmer Spring temperatures, we got to enjoy the playground more! We celebrated Easter with an egg hunt, making our own snack and decorating eggs with a spinner. We made lots of Easter art and learned about E, Q, U, O, Z and R. For our field trip, we enjoyed the free day at the zoo! There were some new displays like the pumas and we loved the rope bridge. Afterwards we had a picnic lunch. Now we are preparing for graduation. It's only a few weeks away!



# Easter Breakfast



**Thank you to Linda Goeken and her crew for the great Easter Breakfast**



**Bob and Grandson filling up for Breakfast—Sue is having a little Breakfast too.**



# Bench Notes

## Bench Notes



May is a seemingly most busy month – and it feels that way at First Congregational United Church of Christ. Lots of good things and ministries going on in these weeks and we look forward to each of them.

One of the things we experience in May is graduations and our All God's Children Pre-School will be celebrating their graduation exercises later this month. Your Minister of Music is happily working with the children as they prepare the musical portion of that program. The children are a delight and so much fun to work with each week. Ms. Nihiser does such a marvelous job with them, preparing them for their school experience and their cognitive and social development.

Pentecost Sunday is celebrated this month and First Church Choir is busy with some special music for that Sunday. On May 31, we will mark the end of the Choir season with Music Sunday (OK....I think EVERY Sunday is a Music Sunday!) and the Choir will be sharing during the sermon time. One special thing we're doing again this year is "Choir's Choice." This is the anthem chosen by the group to be their favorite anthem of all the ones we have sung throughout the year. We have one anthem on the list, "Jesus, Joy of the Highest Heaven" that we tried to sing THREE times...and had no Church services that day due to the weather. Perhaps that will be the favorite. I had emailed the composer, Lloyd Larson, who is a Decatur native and graduated from MacArthur High School, and he is hoping that we will continue to sing his anthems in spite of our failed attempts due to weather.

Another thing that keeps us busy is the new WatsonMIDI App for the pipe organ. We have purchased an iPad for the Organ and thanks to Mitchell Daley for his help, have installed the program. Your Minister of Music has been recording the hymns and service music literature on the iPad, building a library of resources that will be easily used in the absence of a Living, Breathing Organ Player. This is state-of-the-art technology and I have been able to share it with several of my colleagues. Finding an Organist to serve on Sundays is not always an easy task: the WatsonMIDI App is a great solution for that problem. And even Pastor Ryan could control the App from the pulpit should he desire to do so!

On other notes:

- Welcome to new choir member, Liz Lynch! We are delighted to have you as part of the group and know you will be a great blessing!
- Summer Gospel Choir is scheduled for June, July and August. We will meet at 8:15 a.m. in the Sanctuary on the LAST Sunday of each month. No robes. No extra rehearsals. Everyone is invited – youth and children, too – to be a part. We'll sing some of the beloved songs and hymns that bring great memories for many of us. Plan to join us!

*Thank You, Heavenly Father, for Your Presence with us, even when we are busy and may not acknowledge that You are there. Open our eyes and our hearts that we might always sense Your leading and grace as we live – even in the times when we are extra busy. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.*

Rev. Michael Waltenberger  
Minister of Music

# Happenings

## FFDO

May 1  
6:00 pm  
Royal  
International  
Buffet

## God's Busy Hands

Tuesdays  
1:00—3:00 pm



God's Busy Hands

## Admin Meeting

Monday,  
May 11  
6:30 pm

## Council of Ministry Teams

Monday  
May 18  
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

May 4 Alice Huebner  
 May 10 Alexis Fankhauser  
 May 17 Ellen Starace  
 May 24 Julie Keck  
 May 31 Chuck Zweck

May 3 Madeline Mitchell  
 May 10 Linda Goeken  
 May 17 Peggy Ruff  
 May 24 Mindy Bunselmeyer  
 May 31 TBD



## Coffee

May 3 Kristin Hargrove  
 May 10 Gary Weiss  
 May 17 Kristin Hargrove  
 May 24 Kristin Hargrove  
 May 31 Ted & Darby Mitchell

May 3 Marlene Gant  
 May 10 Linda Goeken  
 May 17 Julie Keck, Bert Shull, Abby Fletcher  
 May 24 TBD  
 May 31 Darby Mitchell



## Refreshments

## USHERS



Thank you all

May 3 Gary Weiss, Jodi Baldwin, Ev Kuhn, Gehrig Bunselmeyer  
 May 10 Julie Keck, Roberta Shull, Abby Fletcher  
 May 17 Sheila Witts-Mannweiler, Bill & Alice Huebner  
 May 24 Chuck Zweck, Gary Weiss, Jodi Baldwin  
 May 31 Darby Mitchell, Jodi Baldwin, TBD

# Celebrate!

## May Birthdays

- 3. Carol Robertson
- 7. Andrew Butts  
Bert Shull
- 12. Jessica Robertson  
Wegman
- 17. Martha Crookshank
- 20. Todd Wernecke
- 21. Melinda Bunselmeyer
- 22. Emily Carter Folger  
Emma Cordts
- 23. Matthew Cordts
- 25. Jill Hubbard
- 27. Cameron Malone

## May Anniversaries

- 2. Todd & Jennie Wernecke
- 25. Skip & Marsha Mower
- 26. Ronald & Janet Brownfield
- 29. Richard & Vicky Williams



# Finance Plus

## MARCH 2026 FINANCIAL REPORT

	<u>Mar 26</u>	<u>YTD</u>
Budget Income	\$15,833.26	\$56,500.25
Budget Expense	\$21,272.50	\$63,817.50
Income	\$16,278.33	\$57,689.92
Expenses	\$23,643.09	\$76,379.74



# May Calendar

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					<b>1</b> 8:00 PM AA	<b>2</b> 9:00 AM AA
<b>3</b> 9:00 Traditional 10:00 Fellow ship Hour 10:40 Bible Study 11:05 Coffee House	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b> 1:00 God's Busy Hands 7:00 Al-Anon 8:00 AA	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b> 7:00 Choir Rehearsal	<b>8</b> 8:00 PM AA	<b>9</b> 9:00 AM AA 12:30 pm Mother, Daughter Banquet
<b>10</b> 9:00 Traditional 10:00 Fellow ship Hour 10:40 Bible Study 11:05 Coffee House	<b>11</b> 6:30 Admin 6:00 Property Meeting	<b>12</b> 1:00 God's Busy Hands 7:00 Al-Anon 8:00 AA	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b> 7:00 Choir Rehearsal	<b>15</b> 8:00 PM AA	<b>16</b> 9:00 AM AA 10:30 am Card Making
<b>17</b> 9:00 Traditional 10:00 Fellow ship Hour 10:40 Bible Study 11:05 Coffee House	<b>18</b> 6:30 Council	<b>19</b> 1:00 God's Busy Hands 7:00 Al-Anon 8:00 AA	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b> 7:00 Choir Rehearsal	<b>22</b> 8:00 PM AA	<b>23</b> 9:00 AM AA
<b>24</b> 9:00 Traditional 10:00 Fellow ship Hour 10:40 Bible Study 11:05 Coffee House	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b> 1:00 God's Busy Hands 7:00 Al-Anon 8:00 AA	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b> 7:00 Choir Rehearsal	<b>29</b> 8:00 PM AA	<b>30</b> 9:00 AM AA
<b>31</b> 9:00 Traditional 10:00 Fellow ship Hour 10:40 Bible Study 11:05 Coffee House						



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