



THE COMMUNICATOR

NOVEMBER | DECEMBER 2024



An Action of Just Peace

by **Rich Law**, Church Council Moderator
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Dear Friends,

Recently, our beloved friend and Just Peace advocate **Sky Foerster** wrote a letter, on behalf of our church, First Congregational Church of Colorado Springs, recognizing and

commemorating the anniversary of the horrific attack on Israelis on October 7, 2023.

The Church Council and our ministers reviewed Sky's letter and it was approved. The letter was sent to local synagogues expressing our heart-felt care for them.

But, the letter is not an endorsement of Israel's politics, its current self-defense strategies, or support of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

In our public Just Peace work, we can stand up for victims and those suffering even when we do not endorse their government or those who say they are defending best interests of the people.

Within our church, our hope is to always stand up for peace-building and for those who are suffering. We hope to always do our best to be balanced and fair in our approach to any public expression.

In regards to the on-going tragedy in Israel, Gaza, and now Lebanon, we pray for peace. As you weigh all of this, also keep in mind our church's recent public support of

- **Catherine Malek's work on the West Bank, December, 2023.**
- **Support of a Palestinian Women's program, March 2024.**
- **Our on-going expressions of lament and wishes for peace from the pulpit.**

If the work of Just Peace interests you and how our church might speak up publicly, consider joining with some of us in this important work.

In the very near future, as the Advent "Season of Peace" approaches, those of us connected directly with Just Peace will likely have more to say about a cessation of all aggression, immediate care for humanitarian support, and long-term peace-building strategies.

In regards to the letter of solidarity and care that we sent to Jewish synagogues, I am personally grateful for Sky's continued attention and contributions to our Just Peace work. He is also responsible for getting us started on our Land Acknowledgement work. Thank you, Sky!

Keep going!

In Christ,
Rich Law, Moderator

The letter, written by Sky Foerster, on behalf of our church, can be found on Page 2.



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The following is the letter, written by **Sky Foerster**, on behalf of First Congregational Church.

*First Congregational Church Council
October 12, 2024*

A public proclamation to the leaders and congregations of the Jewish community in Colorado Springs, from the leaders and people of First Congregational United Church of Christ in Colorado Springs, a Just Peace congregation.

We acknowledge the anniversary of the October 7, 2023 terrorist attacks, in which more than 1,200 men, women and children were slaughtered by Hamas and 254 people were taken hostage.

We express our grief over the loss of innocent lives and the hostages who are still being held by Hamas.

We extend our condolences to all in your communities who have been and continue to be affected by these tragedies.

Similarly, we express our deep distress that the war has expanded to multiple fronts, as well our grief for the innocent civilians on all sides who have been killed or are in continuing danger as a result.

We express our support for the consistent call by the Biden-Harris administration for an immediate cease fire and release of hostages on all sides and a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Finally, we condemn the recent rise in antisemitism in U.S. public life and confirm that we will stand with you in solidarity as we have done before.

As we approach the holy holiday of Yom Kippur, we extend greetings of peace and love, G'mar Chatima Tova.

*Have an easy fast,
First Congregational United Church of Christ*



The Season of Giving

by **Charles Kiskiras**, Church Council Treasurer
chaskiskiras@icloud.com



What a wonderful year we are having with inspirational guidance from **Rev. Lee Ann Bryce** and **Rev. Josh Rumble** and the 150th Anniversary Celebrations. We are at a turning point with this Anniversary and will continue to grow as a church during 2025 and beyond. Please let friends know about remaining Celebration events to introduce them to our church community.

As we wrap up October and begin November, the change of months also brings fashioning a budget and the kickoff of the **Annual Appeal**. The Appeal seeks to raise the funds needed for 2025 church operations. These include salaries, ministry areas, MG&O budgets, facility needs, and administration expenses. The Church Council received input from the staff and all the various teams and has created a budget for next year. The proposed budget will be around 5% higher because of increased premiums for medical insurance and the church property/liability insurance, a full audit expense, cost of living raises for staff, and an increase requested for local community support. Please participate in the Annual Appeal with a healthy pledge to help us realize the ministry, outreach, and operational goals we hope to achieve as we move onwards from our Celebratory year.

During the Congregational Meeting in January 2024, I reported that we were short of pledges for 2024, and we voted for a budget deficit. That deficit was funded by using some Mission Giving reserves and an unexpected pledge surplus in 2023. We've done well this year overall as Pledged Income is on budget, and we received a final payout for the Ecumenical Social Ministries (ESM) building sale. Also, a bequest from **Nance McCullough's** estate was received.

The Annual Appeal seeks to achieve a balanced budget for 2025, and we want to maintain our positive momentum. Also, I encourage all members and non-members who do not wish to make a *formal pledge* but want to donate to the Appeal, to do so by contacting

Rachel Rumble (rachel@fcucc.org) with your intentions to give some amount for 2025. A balanced budget will avert cuts to ministries and programs.

*Ask
questions about
the budget!*

As was done in recent years, **Rich Law** and I will be holding **three online-discussions** (via Zoom) to go over our new budget. These gatherings will give you the opportunity to see what has changed since last year and the growth needed from increased pledges and contributions. At these meetings, you will also learn what budget line items increased, what decreased, and why. It will be your opportunity to ask questions about the budget. The first budget meeting will be held on November 12 and the second is scheduled for December 9.

We will hold an online meeting via Zoom on January 14, 2025, which will present the Church Council's decisions on the new budget, and it will address any significant budget funding shortfalls, if needed, and the proposed Budget by Council for approval at the Annual Meeting. These meetings are held to ensure you, the Congregation, knows what the budget is in detail before decisions and votes are made. I sincerely hope you make time to attend one of the meetings this year, along with the January 14 meeting.

Thanks to all of you who support First Congregational Church with your time, and your talents, and your much-needed pledges, donations, and gifts. As we aspire forwards from our 150th Anniversary, please gratefully consider what you can contribute.

Attention, All Congregants!

by **Ani Rose Whaleswan**, FCUCC Sexton
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To celebrate our community and our planet, the Creation Justice Team is sponsoring the "Creation Creativity Fair" coming March 14-15, 2025.

We invite you to participate in the fair first by considering your response to the following two questions:

(1) How does the earth speak to me?

(2) Who am I called to be at this complex time on the planet?

Everyone is invited to submit a response using the medium of your choice.

All art forms are welcomed (as we can accommodate) including:

- GRAPHIC
- PHOTOGRAPHIC
- MIXED MEDIA
- VOCAL
- INSTRUMENTAL
- DANCE
- THEATER
- WRITTEN WORD
- CULINARY
- ... AND BEYOND...

The Creativity Fair Team asks that those who *sell* their work, contribute a donation to the Creation Justice Ministry project, The Murray Grove (see page 11 for further details).

Made in the image of *creator* and *creation*, this festival/fair is a chance to embody what we know and believe, and to celebrate together.

We have a core team working on the plans. If you have questions or ideas or want to participate, you are welcome to contact **Ani Rose Whaleswan** (livingstonesunlimited@gmail.com) or find her on a Sunday at church! We are starting a list of artisans and creators.

Stay tuned for more specifics in the next issue of *The Communicator*.



BE-Coming - Our Personal Timelines

by **Del Hokanson**, Adult Faith Formation Leader
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Did You Know?

We have set up MASSIVE national and global maps in the Gregg Library at First Congregational Church!

So far, more than thirty-five people have added a pin on the town of their birth, and added the year of their birth on our giant timeline. **These represent our starting points.**

During the fall session of BE-Coming, we have focused on a different aspect each week that may have influenced our inner journeys from our starting points.

**What were some pivotal events?
What was happening in the world
and culture around us?
Who are significant people who
have shaped us?**

From all the diversity of our starting points, we somehow have all landed in the Gregg Library at First Congregational Church. How did we all get there?

In these "BE-Coming" sessions, we have devoted time for personal reflections and meditations, and time together for group discussions and sharings. Ultimately we have been responding to what we are all creating together, to discover what we are BE-Coming. Our ultimate goal is getting to know ourselves and each other, and thereby form relationships and build community.

All are welcome to join the flow – here is some feedback from participants:

"Wonderful sessions – thanks for the lead into new ideas"

"As a first timer, no expectations. Very pleased with my experiences"

"Hadn't thought about this issue in decades"

"Thank you for the warm welcome"



whole group discussion; small group discussion



The Forum in November/December

by **Rob Lund**, *The Forum Chair*
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As part of our 150th Anniversary, The Forum has been very engaged in historical themes this season. If you missed them, please check out the recordings for October 20 & 27, when we had wonderfully historic reviews from **Rev. Dr. Jim White**, **Chris Steenbergen**, and **Jim Matson** panels: "FCC in Cultural Context." The latter Sunday, also included **Rev. Dr. Jerry Jordan**, **Rev. Dr. Benjamin Broadbent**, and **Rev. Dr. Jacque Franklin**.

The remaining schedule will be just as engaging:

NOVEMBER 17	Leadership Cultivation Committee: "LCC presents... Former Moderators Panel"
NOVEMBER 24	Charles Barber and Dr. Trajn Boughan: "Construction Principles in our Sanctuary"
DECEMBER 1	Rich Law: "Return to Nature: Complicated Grief"
DECEMBER 8	Chris Steenbergen & Nancy Forgy: "A History of The Mystery"
DECEMBER 15	Mindy Lavender: "FCC's Feminist Theologians"
DECEMBER 22	Panel of Authors: "FCUCC's Authors"



I love to hear your feedback! I can be reached in the church directory and would love to talk with you more if you'd like to come speak in The Forum or have ideas for me.

Save the Date: Annual POPS Christmas Party

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 14, 6 PM
Home of Jane & Eric Ridings

Details by Evite 2-3 weeks in advance

POPS (Parents Out Partying Somewhere) is a group of parents (and a few grandparents) which meets every other month to share a meal and fellowship. While we do frequently discuss our children (after all, parenting rarely ever ends), the interests and conversation topics in this group are broad. We are always welcoming new individuals or couples seeking to grow connections with others at FCUCC.

For more information or to be added to the distribution list, please contact **Jane Ridings** (janeridings@hotmail.com).

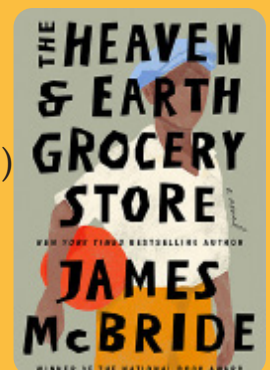
THE NEXT BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP

This group is available to all who are interested!

On this Sunday afternoon, we will share in interesting conversation and discussion, surrounding the current book. Pick up a copy and start reading!

JANUARY 12, 2025:
Gregg Library (3:00 p.m.)

*The Heaven and Earth
Grocery Store*
by James McBride;
facilitated by Barbara Bunn



CPE and Me

by **Ani Rose Whaleswan**, FCUCC Sexton
livingstonesunlimited@gmail.com



What is CPE? Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) is a recognized program and process towards becoming a fully accredited/certified chaplain. The MDiv program I am part of requires one unit of CPE for graduation. It is often just one term,



but I have chosen to intern as a student-chaplain for a full school year, here at First Congregational Church.

CPE is a fairly specific form of education, involving internship, group process, verbatims, supervisory and preceptor meetings, and specific classes on diverse issues pertaining to professional spiritual care. In my cohort, members are interning in hospitals, jails, retreat houses, and congregational settings. The group and class work is a bit exhaustive, but coupled with the internship the process is inspiring and rewarding.

At FCUCC this means I am engaging more with our Creation Justice mission and ministry. I'm also helping to plan a Creation Creativity Festival (see page 4 for details), a Lenten Lamentation for the Earth, bringing back the Easter Sunrise Service on the Front Portico (6:00 a.m. on Easter Sunday), offering workaround ecological grief, doing some visiting, and more – still to be discovered and created. My CPE team is watching that I do not do TOO much, as I am still a student and grandmother, and still your Sexton on Sundays.

Much of my focus is around creation justice and being part of an evolving field known as eco-chaplaincy. This can mean serving the spiritual needs of activists re: climate change, getting involved in disaster relief (a growing need), doing ecological grief groups, retreats, spiritual direction, and just bringing earth-connection into any and all other justice and spiritual care situations. In many ways, Creation Justice is the umbrella under which all other justice issues live: racism, diversity, inclusion, war, poverty, and so on. All justice issues are in some way affected by climate change, and visa-versa. I look forward to being even more involved in this field as time goes by.

Please feel free to find me on Sundays or send an email, if you are interested in more, especially around ecological grief. We celebrate Creation, and to do so fully means we honor our feelings of suffering around what is happening globally. It is the only way to build resilience and keep going with integrity and vision.

Always grateful for my time with you here at FCUCC,

Ani Rose Whaleswan



CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP SERVICES

Tuesday, December 24, 2024

4:00 p.m.

(Nursery care available)

7:00 p.m.

(Nursery care available)

11:00 p.m.

The Madrigal 2024

by Patti White, Member of The Madrigal Team

pattigirlwhite@gmail.com



YE OLDE MADRIGAL DINNER,

*An Evening of Supper and Song
Hard on the heels of Turkey Day,
Another feast doth come our way:
A feast not just of food, but song
And dance and mirth, and you belong
Among our welcome, well-fed guests,
At a Grand Elizabethan fest.*

This grand event will be held on December 5, December 6, and December 8. Nursery care will be available on Friday, December 6.

Tickets (\$47 per person) go on sale Sunday, November 10 in the Atrium before and after worship.

Katy Crumpton is our Maestra di Cappella and the Chamberlains of Food are **Patti White** and her crew. Please contact Patti if you have questions about tickets (pattigirlwhite@gmail.com). *Tickets will not be sold through the church office.*



The Annual Christmas Mystery Pageant

by **Lori Goodwin**, *The Mystery Co-Chair*

lgoodwin99@yahoo.com



It has been one hundred and thirteen years since First Congregational Church first held its Annual Christmas Mystery Pageant!

BUT... what is it?! The Mystery is a musical drama complete with angels, shepherds, a seraph, three wise men, and of course, Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus.

Based on biblical accounts, church legends, and cherished Christmas carols, The Mystery began in 1912 with a script by **Helen Street Ranney**, the wife of the **Reverend William Watson Ranney**, the fifth minister of First Congregational Church. It is performed each Advent, on the Sunday before Christmas. The Angel Choir is composed of our young people (high school through college) and the Seraph (lead angel) is sung by one of FCUCC's female vocalists. The Shepherds' roles are sung by members (high school and above), and the Wise Men solo parts are performed by baritone voices.



One of the greatest mysteries surrounding this tradition is the identity of those who portray Mary and Joseph. It is a closely guarded secret of the Mystery Team until the actual presentation, as a way of honoring two people for distinguished service to First Congregational Church in the previous year.

Cherub children (preschool through eight years old) of the congregation are invited up to the manger during the pageant to present a gift of song.

The ceramic figure of the "Bambino" (Christ Child) and the censer carried

by one of the Wise Men were acquired in Italy by **Dr. Alfred A. Blackman's** family around 1900 and lent to FCUCC for use in The Mystery. In 2009, the Haney family gifted the family heirlooms to the church. The cruse for myrrh is like those from biblical times.

The entire event is mysterious! With candles, darkness, singing, and the close gathering of many people, it is a beautiful and timeless process of portraying what the 'mystery' of Christmas is all about. The Mystery Team, comprised of past years' Marys and Josephs, is devoted to maintaining The Mystery just as it always has been. It's a wonderful family tradition, appropriate for all ages.

The Mystery will be held this year on Sunday, December 22, beginning at 4:00 p.m. with a short organ recital provided by Director of Music Ministry, David Acton. All are invited to bring home-baked (nut-free) cookies for the Cookie & Wassail Reception which will follow in the Founders' Room. All are welcome!



Christmas Pageant 2024

by Sarah Lund, Director of Children's & Family Ministry

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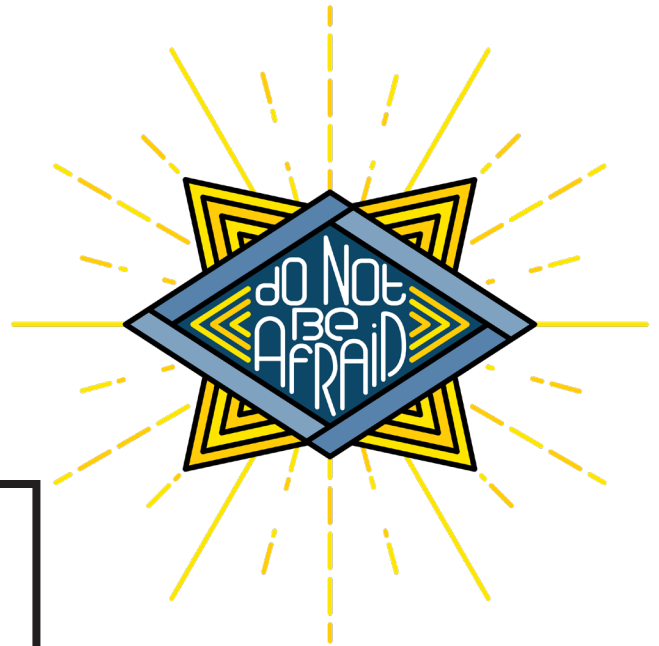


Dear Friends,

I am so excited that we are in the beginning stages of planning for our 2024 Christmas Pageant at First Congregational Church. We will be holding this pageant on December 24 at 4:00 p.m. in the Sanctuary. All ages are welcome to play roles; in fact, we *must* have all ages for this to come together!

My goal this year is to have at least thirty participants acting in the Pageant (last year we had twenty!). If you or your family are interested in being a part of the Christmas Pageant this year, we can cast you in a scene together (which is much easier to rehearse than showing up every Sunday!). There are no singing parts this year; instead, the congregation will sing carols during the scene changes.

During Faith Formation Hour in December, I plan to have Advent-themed activities for children in Kindergarten through Fifth Grade. So, please know that there will be fun things to do every Sunday, even if your child is not participating in the pageant!



Open to any child, youth, or adult
Do Not Be Afraid invites the audience to explore Peace in the face of Fear and to Embrace Hope when Life feels uncertain. This multigenerational pageant is based on the gospels of Luke and Matthew.

Our performance will be on
Christmas Eve, December 24 at 4:00 p.m.
(cast and helpers will arrive at 2:30 p.m.).

- Speaking parts will require practice at home and attendance at two or more rehearsals (lunch will be provided).
- Full cast rehearsals will be during Faith Formation Hour in Classroom West 2 on Sundays in December.
- We are also in need of volunteers to assist with rehearsing, costumes, props, lunch,

Please contact **Sarah Lund**
(sarah@fcucc.org) to register.

Please let me know as soon as possible if you and your children/youth are interested. (We may be able to include pre-recorded parts for children who want to participate but cannot attend on December 24, depending on interest!)

Thank you for being a part of our vibrant and creative multigenerational community.



Expanding Forest Sanctuaries

by **Siri Everett**, Member of FCUCC

sirieverett@gmail.com



Expanding Forest Sanctuaries:

from Alice Bemis Taylor's La Forêt to FCUCC's Les Forêts!

Coinciding with the celebration of our church's 150th Anniversary is the Creation Justice designation from the United Church of Christ, and our Creation Justice Team proposes to root our congregation in its spiritual commitment to protect Creation by **planting** and **sustaining** our city's urban tree canopy.

The trees on our historic medians were shipped from the East Coast by **William J. Palmer**, who created a "Garden City" on a prairie landscape with the aim of promoting the health of its population. The botany of beauty and the crystalline air would, he envisioned, encourage people to be active in their new environs.

Palmer's trees flourished for over a century, and when they began to fail



William Jackson Palmer

due to age and disease, several people, including two members of our church, **Nancy Ekberg** and **Siri Everett**, founded **North End Woodlands, Inc.**, and formed a private/public partnership with **Colorado Springs Forestry** to restore the canopy. The Woodlanders and the Foresters have collectively planted over 700 trees on the four historic medians from Fillmore Street to the southern edge of our downtown. After eight years of steady work, only three more blocks remain to be planted in the Old North End Neighborhood.

One of those blocks is on Wood Avenue, where the Creation Justice Team intends to plant "**The Murray Grove**" next April in honor of decades-long members, **Bob and Marge Murray**. The word "grove" shares its most ancient linguistic root with the word "love," and this grove will be a place of commemoration that memorializes our dead and celebrates births, graduations, sobriety, weddings, and baptisms—truly anything! One way to participate now is to directly donate to First Congregational Church for the purchase and planting of our first urban, miniature La Forêt. (With your gift, please include the memo "Trees.")

And now, what about justice? Our city's boundaries and population have greatly expanded since our founding, but our tree canopy has not kept pace, an issue known globally as "tree inequity." The simple ratios are these: the lower the income of a community, the fewer the trees. A paucity of trees means less shade, higher temperatures and dirtier air. As we look for solutions to climate change, trees are among our greatest allies, and every living thing deserves their benefits. We're scouting for neighborhoods in our city that need groves of trees to "green up" streetscapes and parks.

The original mission of North End Woodlands, Inc. (northendwoodlands.org) will continue: *to create the Nancy Brooks Ekberg Sustainability Fund, whose purpose is to care for the trees on our historic medians in perpetuity.* Our expanded mission is to now become companions with the verdant FCUCC to branch out, push our roots deeper into the ground of Spirit, and do more for the common good.

Say, "**Trees!**" and join us as FCUCC—rooted in Unity, Community, and Continuity—creates inviting, refreshing, fragrant-smelling, fruit-bearing Les Forêts for our city's inhabitants for centuries to come.



Peek in the Past: Kindness

by **Chris Steenbergen**, Church Historian

chris.steenbergen@yahoo.com

The only immigrant church members of the 1960s through the 1980s, that I've been able to dig up, were Australian **Dr. Douglas Fox** and the Dutch **Steenbergen Family**. **Rev. Dr. Jerry Jordan** alerted me to Dr. Fox, who taught at Colorado College. I remember him, but don't know much else. As an English speaker, he likely blended in rather well at First Congregational Church. The Steenbergens were different and that makes the following a rather personal story.



The Steenbergen Family, 1982.

Rachel, Judith, Chris, Wil(ma), Eva, and Esther.

When in the summer of 1982, Philips Electronics sent me to Colorado Springs for (short term!) assisting in the start of an Optical Disc Technology joined venture, the expatriate people warned us to expect a very different, aggressive and male dominant, society. "Find a church, if you're into that" they said. At our first attempt we hastily left Village Seven Presbyterian and when that fall we mentioned to other parents at a PTA meeting, that we didn't like the atmosphere there, they suggested First Congregational Church. I truly believe, that finding this church was a major reason for us settling so well, as several of the other expatriate families couldn't wait to return home.

Our needs weren't for food or shelter, we needed to belong, and individual church members offered just that. The girls, who initially didn't speak English, were taken in by the various classes and soon got along famously. Active with the youth at that time were **Nancy and Rich Law**, who the next year generously babysat them for four days, allowing **Wil** ("Wilma" is from later) to join me on a work-related trip to Washington D.C.

Wil spoke rudimentary English at the time and was helped with lessons by **Rose Enyeart**. **Gayle Jordan** introduced her to the "Night Owls" circle for more social contacts and the **Christine and Dick Hall** became trusted friends to fall back on. At church we familiarized ourselves with many aspects of American culture and religious themes in The (then-just-started) Forum under **Dave Seyfert**.

They hauled me into the choir, where between songs, fellow bases **Wilber Fulker**, **Georg Gehrung**, and **Wes Burnett** explained the intricacies of American and church society. I was also tricked into the 1983 Mystery, for which I had to memorize those unfamiliar English hymn texts. Even when the use of live Bronco scores in his sermon was a bit too much for my still somewhat Dutch Reformed sensibilities, **Rev. Dr. Jerry Jordan** didn't laugh me off, but very patiently gave a, still contrived-sounding, theological justification.

In all, First Congregational Church, which at the time didn't have any specific committee for immigration, found simple kind ways to make an immigrant family feel at home.



Dr. Douglas Fox

Budget Season: The Small Things

by **Rachel Rumble**, Director of Finance & Technology

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The Church Council, Staff, and Team Chairs have been working on the 2025 budget. Allow me to peel back the curtain on some of the everyday, small things that happen here at the church related to money and the budget.

As I type this, I just hung up the phone with Republic Services, our trash and recycling provider. Despite having a signed agreement that our monthly cost would be \$102/month for these services from December

2023-December 2024, they randomly increased our cost in September 2024 to \$125/month. After a phone call and assurances that they would refund the \$23 increase and return our monthly payment to \$102, our October 2024 invoice still arrived with the increased \$125 cost. After the call I just hung up on, I signed an agreement for our monthly cost to be lowered to \$99/month.

Why do I share this boring minutia? I'm sure you have experienced this as well – companies are constantly increasing their prices, and often without notice or explicit agreement. Well, it happens at the church, too. Though an additional \$23/month is not going to break the bank or bust the budget, it is an unexpected 22% increase. Republic is just one service of many the churches must use, and if every service-provider increased 22% whenever they felt like it, we would certainly feel the impact.

One of the things I do in my position as Director of Finance is spend time calling these companies and disputing increases. I work hard to pay attention to our regular expenses and keep costs from creeping up as much as possible. I've recently disputed similar increased charges from Comcast and All Copy (who leases and services our copier).

I hear the congregation every year express concern over rising costs and a rising budget and this is my way to take action on those concerns. The reality is that we need trash and recycling services in order to support the fun and important community building and faith work we do together as a congregation, but it also needs to come at a fair and reasonable cost.

Allow me to end with a little plug for the Treasurer position on Church Council, which opens next year. If the minutia appeals to you, please apply! Bonus: you and I will get to have many, many conversations!



**REPUBLIC
SERVICES**



COMCAST



We were thrilled to gather most of our members of The Seven Pillars Fellowship this fall.

What is The Seven Pillars?

The Seven Pillars Fellowship was created to honor our legacy donors at First Congregational Church of Colorado Springs. We are pleased to acknowledge these special benefactors who make their philanthropy a perpetual legacy and an example of generosity for others to follow. It also creates lasting support that makes our church stronger, sustainable and better prepared to reach future generations. Interested in becoming a member? Please contact Rachel Rumble (rachel@fcucc.org).

500TH Anniversary

by **Debra Buenting**, FCUCC Member
doctordeb55@gmail.com



Birthdays and anniversaries are kind of a big deal in most cultures. They offer a chance to reflect, memorialize, honor and, I dare to suggest, to look to the future. On November 1, we celebrate All Saint's Day.

Just seven years ago (in 2017) we marked the the 500th anniversary of a stunt performed by a little-known monk and theology teacher, **Martin Luther**, who decided to shake things up by outing the sleaze that dominated the church of his day. On the eve of All Saints Day (when churches would be full), Luther posted a list of ninety-five grievances he had with the church; these included wacky theology and practices that defined doctrine and practices prominent at the time (like the selling of indulgences that included guaranteed forgiveness). These ninety-five theses, nailed to the door of a church in what is now Wittenberg, Germany, is generally considered to be the dawn of the Reformation. No matter what you think of Luther or the religious movement that followed, you must admit that it brought about huge theological, political and cultural shifts.

Luther translated the Bible into the language of the people, making it accessible to the masses. Coinciding with the development of the moveable type printing press in the West, printed sermons and Bible portions began to flood Europe, promoting literacy, education scientific discovery and individual rights (to name a few).

Individuals and societies--most of whom had been oppressed in the feudal system--began to see themselves differently as they accessed scriptures that gave a very different narrative—one of human value and dignity and free choice. And, not only was Protestantism born, but the Catholic Church was forced to clean up its act.

So here we are 500 years later. So, what? Is this just a time to look back and remember? Or could this be the beginning of a new season?

It seems about every 500-years, a significant housecleaning is necessary in the church. So, suggested former Bethlehem, Pennsylvania Episcopal Bishop, **Mark Dyer** (1930-2014). He pointed out the significant religious and cultural shifts that took place in the past:

0-33 AD Jesus the Christ lived on the earth and started a movement that came to be known as

Christianity. He was a Jew who stood up to the religious power brokers of his time; he modeled something radically different from what Judaism had become. He fought the politics and power structures with radical love and a return to early Jewish values.

500 AD (+/- a few years) there were several ecumenical councils held that helped define Christian theology. (These included: the First Council of Nicaea (325), the First Council of Constantinople (381), the First Council of Ephesus (431), the Council of Chalcedon (451), and the Second Council of Constantinople (553). Powerful forces made decisions about which historical documents would be part of the Christian canon.

1054 was the Great Schism which separated the Church into Orthodox (East) and Catholicism (West). Coming from different theological perspectives, the East and West had developed different ways of defining doctrine and determining who was to lead. As with the first councils, politics and power were key factors.

1517 is when Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the Wittenberg church door, setting off the Reformation, a schism between the Catholic Church and Protestantism. This led to a massive redistribution of power that completely altered the landscape of Europe and everywhere Europeans traveled. It was a complete cultural upheaval. 2017 and beyond What is to follow?



Phyllis Tickle

Founding religion editor of *Publishers Weekly* and celebrated author, **Phyllis Tickle** (1934-2015) suggested that we are poised for another massive upheaval. In her book *The Great Emergence*, Tickle articulated the 500-year religious rummage sale idea of **Mark Dyer** (mentioned above).

"About every 500 years the empowered structures of institutionalized Christianity, whatever they may be at the time, become an intolerable carapace [like a turtle shell] that must be shattered in order that renewal and growth may occur. When that mighty upheaval happens, history

shows us, there are always at least three consistent results or corollary events.

“First, a new, more vital [RELEVANT] form of Christianity does indeed emerge. Second, the organized expression of Christianity which up until then had been the dominant one is reconstituted into a purer and less ossified [LESS RIGID] expression of its former self ... The third result is that every time the incrustations of an overly established Christianity have been broken up, the faith has spread...” (pp. 16-17). “As a result of this usually energetic but rarely benign process, the church actually ends up with two new creatures where once there had been only one. That is, in the course of birthing a brand-new expression of its faith and praxis, the church also gains a grand refurbishment of the older one.” (Tickle, 2008).

You could argue that Christianity is fine. Converts are being made all over the world. Congregations are more alive than ever (a shift from mainline to denominational and mega-churches). Christians are influencing politics. Yada, yada.

You might also argue the state of the Church is dire. There are now close to 40,000 denominations. Theological differences, “us” and “them” mentality (tribalism), theological distortions, continued schizophrenia between faith and the (whole) rest of life, overemphasis on sexual morality over social justice, political power struggles, misuse of funds and the seeming irrelevancy of faith in society are all issues.

Christians are increasingly stereotyped as closed-minded, irrelevant, and corrupt. As one person asked me, “Are you a Christian or a hypoChristian? (a reference to the term, “hypocrite.”) For this and other reasons, more and more Americans labels themselves as “nones” when asked to the faith with which they identify.

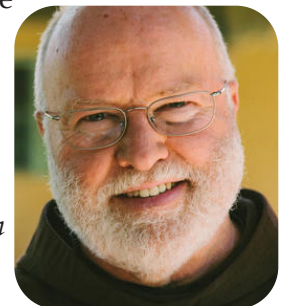
Evangelist and author **Winkie Pratney** (www.winkiepratney.net) is someone who has profoundly influenced how I view God. A few years ago, I heard him say something that stuck with me. He used reason by analogy to describe what has happened to Christianity over the years. He said the church is like a building that is shrouded in scaffolding, and that so much scaffolding has surrounded the building, it has become increasingly difficult to make out what is the actual building and what has been tacked on! I couldn’t agree more.



Winkie Pratney

I think the Bible has been elevated beyond a collection of stories with valuable lessons to something that trumps love and common sense. From it, particular sins have been singled out as the “bad” ones while others are completely ignored. “Being right” has become more important than “being loving.”

Franciscan spiritual father, **Richard Rohr**, said, “To take the Scriptures seriously is not to take them literally. Literalism is invariably the lowest and least level of meaning. Most biblical authors understood this, which is why they were free to take so many liberties with what Westerners would call ‘facts.’ In many ways, we have moved backward in our ability to read spiritual and transformative texts. I am afraid we have for too long used the Bible merely to prove various church positions, which narrows its range and depth. Instead of transforming people, the Bible has become merely utilitarian and handy ammunition against others.”



Richard Rohr

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What Do We Do With Those Attendance Pads?

by **Rachel Rumble**, *Director of Finance and Technology*
rachel@fcucc.org



You see and likely sign the attendance pad every Sunday morning. Do you ever wonder what we do with that information? It sounds mundane, but it actually helps inform a lot of church life.

Every Tuesday morning, the wonderful **Phyllis White** volunteers in the Front Office. In addition to answering the phone and the door, she spends much of the morning manually inputting the attendance from the pads into our church software. As she goes through the records, she notes the new visitors, those who marked they would like a pastoral call, and (because she is a 30+ year member) she typically notices when previous or inactive members have come back for a visit.

From there, we are able to do the following:

- Send welcome emails or letters from **Rev. Lee Ann** to new visitors; this also allows us to follow up with those visitors a few weeks later
- Pass on pastoral needs to **Rev. Josh**
- Give notes to staff members if anyone mentioned they would like to join an ensemble or to volunteer
- Send “welcome back” notes or calls to people who hadn’t been at church in a while
- Create attendance reports from which the data can help inform different aspects of service-planning and church life



If you sign the attendance pad, you also have a personal record of your attendance that you can look at in your church portal in Elvanto. The portal also contains a digital church directory, which is the most up-to-date version available at any given moment. Lastly, it contains your personal giving history, your groups, and your volunteer schedule (all as applicable). If you have never logged into your church portal before, please email me! As an added layer of security, you cannot sign up for this independently. I verify all requests to gain access to the portal since the directory contains contact information for all Members and Associate Members.

As you pass the pad each week, remember to GREET your pew-neighbors and maybe to LEARN the names of any new faces sitting near you. Know that signing your name each week has a purpose and

that we are so grateful to worship with you each Sunday that you attend. If you’re someone who watches online – say “HELLO” in the comments! I do add the names of those online to the weekly attendance as well.

With all that said, I hope your biggest takeaway from this article is that you’ll thank **Phyllis White** for her quiet, behind-the-scenes support of the church, and I’ll be the first!

On behalf of the Staff, Phyllis, I give you our whole-hearted thank you and appreciation for your time and effort every Tuesday morning!



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Rev. Josh Rumble
- Associate Minister
David Acton
- Director of Music Ministry
Emily Bond
- Director of Administration & Communications
Rachel Rumble
- Director of Finance & Technology
Sarah Lund
- Director of Children's & Family Ministry

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- Outreach
Minette Church
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- Receptions Coordinator

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(1973-1988)
Rev. Dr. James White
(1989-2005)

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Chris Steenbergen
- Historian

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- Chair
Tom Healy
Rebecca Hibbard
Pauli Hubbard
Jill Robinson

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- Congregational Nurse
Marsha Garrett
- Liturgist Coordinator
Tom Healy, Judy Cunningham
- Head Ushers
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- Flute Choir Director
Chris Cunningham, Judy Cunningham, Curt Daniel, Agnes Kehoe, Dave Montgomery, Sue Prendinger, Phyllis White
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OPEN
- Flowers Coordinator

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- 4-Way Covenant

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Ani Rose Whaleswan
- Members in Discernment

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- Book Discussion Group
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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

First Congregational UCC is an Open and Affirming Congregation. We invite people of every age, race, marital status, sexual orientation, gender expression, means, ability and spiritual tradition to join us in the love of God and neighbor through Christian worship, dedication to education and commitment to service.



THE COMMUNICATOR is usually published bi-monthly, and takes a break during the summer. The next issue will be January / February, 2025.

The Communicator includes information about the life of First Congregational Church and the people of the church. Instead, The FCC Weekly (our weekly eblast) will be more of an informational notice of upcoming events and worship. You can sign-up to receive this weekly notice via our website: www.fcucc.org.

If you have something you would like to contribute to The Communicator, please make a note of the deadline to submit an article. Articles should be 500 words or less. We invite you to submit articles relevant to the life of our congregation. Accepted submissions may be edited for length, clarity, and correctness. Opinions expressed by writers do not necessarily reflect official FCC policy.

**The DEADLINE for the next issue
(January / February issue) is December 15.**

Please send your materials to **Emily Bond** - emily@fcucc.org.

- REQUIREMENTS:**
- Include author's name, church role, contact email, and contact telephone number.
 - Include a title suggestion and, if desired, photos, etc.
 - If articles include photos or graphics, please submit a shorter article.