
The Good News

Volume 2024

January 17, 2024

Issue 03

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like us on Facebook at First Congregational United Church of Christ-Great Falls, MT

January 21, 2024 Third Sunday of Epiphany Worship Service 11:00 A.M.



Minister: Rev. Lynne Spencer-Smith
Scripture: Jonah 3:1-5, 10; Mark 1:14-20
Liturgist: Rev. Sara MacGillvra Branom
Ushers: Bruce Cole and Bill Tiskus
Accompanist: Marge Kline
Choir Director: Cindy Stevens
Elementary Sunday School: June Rovero
Youth Sunday School: Cara Dunn
Nursery: CJ Mollohan, Mackenzie Noble
Fellowship: Peggy Floen, Bev Harris
Tellers: Carol Shipley, Noël Walker

The service will be live-streamed and a recording of the livestream service will be available on YouTube later in the day.



On Sunday, January 21 following worship Pastor Lynne will lead a class for new and experienced acolytes. New acolytes will learn the meaning of this candle-lighting ministry while current acolytes will have their memories refreshed about this important part of the worship service. Then all participants will learn how to use the candle lighters and practice using them. **Children 3rd grade and older are invited to join the training and take part in this special ministry. Please join Pastor Lynne in the sanctuary at 12:20 P.M. for a fun and educational session.** Questions? Contact Janet Koostra.

134th Annual Meeting of First Congregational United Church of Christ- Great Falls, MT

First Congregational United Church of Christ-Great Falls Council has announced the 2024 Annual Meeting for Sunday, January 28 following worship. We will conduct the business of the congregation, vote on the 2024 recommended budget, install board members and officers, and discuss other items of interest to the congregation. Lunch provided by the Fellowship Board.

The annual meeting of the Memorial Fund Corporation will follow immediately after. All members and friends of First Congregational United Church of Christ-Great Falls are strongly encouraged to attend and participate, keeping in mind that only members are able to vote.



For those who are out of town or unable to attend in person, we will be offering your participation in the meeting via Zoom. Use the following to log into the meeting:

UCC Tech-person is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: FCUCC Congregational Annual Meeting 2024

Time: Jan 28, 2024 11:45 AM Mountain Time (US and Canada)

To join Zoom Meeting, contact Pastor Lynne for log in information.

West Elementary

Your Christian Service Board received several Thank You letters from students at West Elementary.

Dear First Congregational United Church of Christ,

We at West Elementary thank you for your spare clothes when kids get wet. Our teacher especially appreciates the food you give at conferences. I personally thank you for spare school supplies and thank you for all the other gifts. Sincerely, Luke

Dear First Congregational United Church of Christ,

Thank you guys for all that you have done. You have put so many smiles on kids and teacher's faces. Thank you. Your Dear Friend, Elizabeth

Dear First Congregational United Church of Christ,

Thank you for all you do. Our school appreciates all you do for the school. The clothes that you have given West are amazing. The school supplies that have been given to West, the gifts, the food for teacher conferences, West is very happy for all the things you've given. Thank you for all you do. Your friend, Alana

The Christian Service Board is very grateful for the support of the congregation!



Christian Education News

This week children will begin in worship where Pastor Lynne will share a message with them. Then all children will head to Sunday School classes. **Youth in grades 6-8 will go to the parlor with teacher Cara Dunn. Elementary students, age 5-grade 5, will go to Sunday School room 4 with teacher June Rovero. See you there!**

In Our Thoughts and Prayers

† **Bob and Janet Koostra** as Bob continues to be cared for in the hospital following complications from surgery.

† **Earl Ackerman** remains in transitional care following a fall at home.

† Congratulations to Lori **Rovero** who has begun a new job as principal of her school in Billings.

† **First United Methodist Church** is closed until further notice due to pipes bursting. All of their ministries are being moved off-site.

Merger Talking Points

As we prepare to engage in a congregational conversation regarding the request from Christ United Methodist Church to enter into a deeper relationship (possible merger), we will be presenting four talking points over the course of four weeks. Please consider these talking points and formulate some thoughts and questions about the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats that a deeper relationship with Christ UMC would bring. We will have time for in-depth conversation at a Congregational Hearing on February 11 after worship.

Talking point III: Current and historical Relationship

- The UCC came to this location in 1976, built the sanctuary & offices, etc.;
- In the early 90's we expanded the sanctuary and narthex, added the nursery, choir room, basement, main floor bathrooms and revised the office suite.
- A reciprocal agreement was developed that spelled out the shared use and maintenance of the facility. The Joint Facilities Committee came into being. It is made up of representatives and ministers from both congregations
- There have been several shared ministries over the years, including but not limited to: Family Promise, Mitten Makers, periodic shared events and ministries (VBS, Pageant, diaper drive, etc.) In many ways, we already have a common ministry throughout the year.
- When we have worked together in the past, we're good at it

Upcoming Talking Points to be highlighted next week:

Talking point IV: Congregational Status

Previous Talking Point (see the Jan 3 and 10 newsletters)

Talking point I: History – What's this about and how did we get here?

Talking point II: Why doesn't Christ UMC close and join UCC?

Other points to remember:

- Both leadership teams have a commitment to engaging in a good process to explore the possibilities.
 - You will have multiple opportunities to be involved and receive information.
 - No major decisions will be made without congregational input and agreement.
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Shhhhhhh, It's a Secret

Our Choir Director, Cindy Stevens, has announced it's time for her to retire from church choir directing. She will be with us through the end of April. We'd like to present her with a gift of our appreciation. If you would like to contribute to that gift (which is yet to be determined) **donations can be made to the church designating it "Cindy's retirement."** And keep it quiet. We want to have a great surprise for Cindy on her last Sunday with us.

With Much Gratitude

The BUSINESS AFFAIRS BOARD is most grateful for the response from our congregation in making pledges for the 2024 budget year. Initially, we were facing some hard decisions in formulating the proposed budget. As pledges continued to come forth in December, the board was able to go back and make some positive adjustments to the proposed budget at their January meeting. We have received positive comments regarding the budget hearing that was held in December in that members have the opportunity to give input prior to the budget preparation. Our concerns were heard, and you responded. THANK YOU for pledging support to the mission and vision of our church!

The proposed budget for 2024 was approved at Monday's Council meeting. It is being emailed with this week's Good News so that there is time for everyone to take a closer look at it prior to the congregational annual meeting on January 28th. Also, there is a budget fact sheet document that gives some further details on the process and information used in preparing the proposed budget. Hard copies will also be available on the table in the narthex.

Coming Up

Sunday, January 21

12:15 P.M. Acolyte Training, Sanctuary

3:00 P.M. Stewardship Board, Zoom

Tuesday, January 23

10:00 A.M. Sewing Group, FH

12:45 P.M. Reading, West Elementary

Wednesday, January 24

1:30 P.M. Pinochle, FH

6:00 P.M. Youth Group, SS Wing

6:00 P.M. Handbells, Choir Room

7:15 P.M. Chancel Choir, Sanctuary

Sunday, January 28

134th Congregational Annual Meeting
following worship. Lunch provided.

“Because”

The first thirteen verses of Psalm 86 uses the word “because” nine times.

LORD, listen closely to me and answer me, ***because*** I am poor and in need. (vs. 1)

Guard my life ***because*** I am faithful. (vs. 2)

Have mercy on me, Lord, ***because*** I cry out to you all day long. (vs. 3)

Make your servant's life happy again ***because***, my Lord, I offer my life to you, ***because***, my Lord, you are good and forgiving. (vs. 4 & 5)

Whenever I am in trouble, I cry out to you, ***because*** you will answer me. (vs. 7)

All the nations that you've made will come and bow down before you, Lord; they will glorify your name, ***because*** you are awesome and a wonder-worker. You are God. Just you. (vs. 9 & 10)

I give thanks to you, my Lord, my God, with all my heart, and I will glorify your name forever, ***because*** your faithful love toward me is awesome and ***because*** you've rescued my life from the lowest part of hell. (vs. 12 & 13)

Because is all about cause and reason. I do something ***because*** of something else. Something in particular happens ***because*** the conditions are right for it. In the Psalmist's mind, God responds



because there is a need. The Psalmist is thankful **because** of what God has done.

In the world of grammar, “because” is a “subordinating conjunction.” It connects cause and reason. It gives value to a relationship between two ideas. We help those in need **because** all people have value. We tend to our gardens **because** it gives us joy. We cry out to God **because** God will listen. There’s a relationship between who we are, who we understand God to be, and how we and God behave. It’s all about relationship. The cause and reason of faith gives shape and design to our relationship with God and God’s relationship with us.

The “because” of our faith could be said to be the answer to all the “why” questions of faith.

Why follow Jesus?

Why believe in God?

Why belong to a church?

Why give money and time to the church?

Hopefully you can identify a because to go to any of these and other “why” questions of faith. Here’s a few of mine:

I follow Jesus **because** in Jesus I see and experience God’s ways of love and compassion more than anyone else.

I believe in God **because** Jesus points to a divine presence that expresses a will for creation that is sustainable and just.

I belong to a church **because** I value a community of people who seek and offer inspiration for me and the world around me. (And because some of my favorite people can be found at church!)

I give money and time to the church **because** I believe in the church’s mission and that the world desperately needs a holy presence of peace, love and justice.

I hope you’ll take some time to explore some of your “because” and let them shape your life. Have a blessed week. Stay warm and safe. Check on your neighbors.

Rev. Lynne