



Newsletter of the First Congregational Church
Rochester, Wisconsin

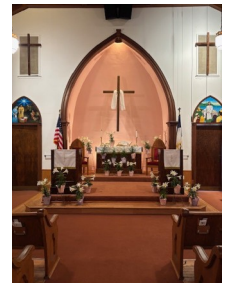
November, 2026

Contents this month:

Calendar, Lectionary

Pastor's Ponderings; Congregationalism (Pilgrims part 2),
Council/Committee Reports; Other News

Devotional: No Fear



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 Sunday Service 10AM Sunday School	2	3 Tai Chi 9AM	4	5 Choir Rehearsal 5:30	6	7
8 Sunday Service 10AM Communion Sunday OCC shoeboxes due in	9	10 Tai Chi 9AM	11	12 Choir Rehearsal 5:30	13	14
15 Sunday Service 10AM Sunday School	16	17 Tai Chi 9AM	18	19 Choir Rehearsal 5:30	20	21
22 Sunday Service 10AM Poinsettia orders due	23 Meal served at Love Inc Book Club 6:30	24 Tai Chi 9AM	25	26 Thanksgiving	27	28
29 Sunday Service 10AM	30 Advent bible study @ Honey Creek 4:30					

Next month's Newsletter deadline: email JoAnne, mrsptts51@hotmail.com, by October 25

November Lectionary

Nov 1: All Saints' Day Rev. 7:(2-8) 9-17 Psalm 149 1 John 3:1-3 Matt. 5:1-12, Nov 8: Amos 5:18-24 Psalm 70 1 Thess. 4:13- 18 Matt. 25:1-13, Nov 15: Zeph. 1:7-16 Psalm 90:1-12 1 Thess. 5:1-11 Matt. 25:14- 30 Nov 22: Ezek. 34:11- 16, 20-24 Psalm 95:1-7a 1 Cor. 15:20-28 Matt. 25:31- 46 Nov 26: Deut. 8:1-10 Psalm 67 Phil. 4:6-20 or 1 Tim. 2:1-4 Luke 17:11-19, Nov 29: Isaiah 64:1-9 Psalm 80:1-7 1 Cor. 1:3-9 Mark 11:1-10 or Mark 13:24-37



Just a Pastor Pondering...

A Season of Gratitude

As November arrives, the world around us begins to slow. The fields are resting, the daylight grows shorter, and our homes prepare for the gatherings of Thanksgiving. This season offers us a welcome invitation: to pause, remember, and give thanks—not only for the blessings we can easily name, but also for the steady presence of God through every season.

Scripture reminds us, “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever” (Psalm 107:1). Our gratitude begins with who God is. Circumstances change, plans unfold differently than we expect, and some days carry more sorrow than celebration. Yet God’s goodness remains. God meets us in joy, walks with us in uncertainty, and holds us close in grief.

This month, I encourage each of us to practice gratitude as an act of faith. Begin or end each day by naming three gifts you have received. Speak a word of appreciation to someone whose kindness often goes unnoticed. Share what you have with a neighbor, a local ministry, or a family in need. Offer a prayer of thanksgiving even before the answer comes. Small acts like these train our hearts to notice grace.

As a church family, we also give thanks for one another. Every prayer offered, meal provided, child taught, visitor welcomed, song sung, and quiet act of service helps reveal Christ’s love among us. No contribution is insignificant in the kingdom of God. Together, we bear witness to a generosity that is deeper than abundance: the generosity of lives entrusted to Christ.

May our Thanksgiving tables make room for stories, laughter, prayer, and welcome. May we remember those who are lonely, grieving, serving far from home, or facing an uncertain season. And may our gratitude move beyond words into compassion, hospitality, and hope.

Gracious God, open our eyes to your gifts, shape our hearts with gratitude, and make our lives a blessing to others. In every season, teach us to trust your goodness and reflect your love. Amen.

Happy Thanksgiving!

Pastor Joe and Chris

The Congregationalist Church-Church of the Pilgrims? Really?, part 2

The Pilgrims were English Separatists who believed the Church of England was too corrupt and tainted by Catholicism. Because practicing outside the state church was illegal in England, Members of the Free Church Movement and our forebears pilgrimaged to the New World inspired by the words of Matthew 18:20 in which Jesus says, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (NRSV). They believed this expressed God’s Covenant of Grace in their everyday lives. They believed in the presence of Christ. Pilgrims and Puritans committed themselves to live faithfully as God required. They drew up their own covenants that they each agreed to. People became members of the church by voluntarily “owning” the covenant. They pledged to “walk together in the ways of the Lord, made known or to be made known” to them. The church of Christ was created through acceptance of the church covenant and their belief was that with Christ as the head of the church, they would be blessed. In essence, they came looking for a freedom England did not offer and tried to forge a community of believers that accommodated individual journeys of faith rather than commandment to follow a homogeneous prescription of doctrine. Our modern version of Congregationalism looks a great deal like that. It’s messier than following a single belief en masse, of course, but provides a perfect template for us to come to know God more intimately because we must, as individuals before the Lord, wrestle like Jacob did with the angel and thereby know that we have brought our best to God and that our faith is firmly rooted in the results of the struggle. In the end, it’s much less about the Mayflower and much more about our own journeys toward the divine.



November Birthdays!

Brought to you by your Pastoral Care Commission:

Lissa Jensen	Nov 2
Amanda Busateri	Nov 8

Council Meeting Report

First Congregational Church of Rochester, WI
Council meeting, October 18, 2026

Meeting called to order with prayer at 11:10 AM

Present: Joe Hackett, Bev Jensen, Kelly Ball, Mark Dahms, Steve Dolphin, Ruth Frost, JoAnne Potter,
Lisa Hilgenberg, Sue Beach, Brian Mingus



Minutes from September 14 meeting were read and corrected to read “Derek and Francheska Gorn”. Accepted as corrected.

Pastor’s Report – Joe Hackett

- The congregation welcomed new members Rick and Nancy Koceja last week
- Joe is preparing for Advent, has found a candlelighting program. The Sunday school kids will do one week. Advent starts 11/29.

Education – Joe Hackett

- The adult study about books of wisdom is complete
- Sunday School is ongoing
- Discussing with Pastor Stanton of Burlington United Methodist about a combined confirmation class
- Has chosen a 4 week advent study

Treasurer’s Report – Mark Dahms

- Committee is considering new fundraising activities. Stewardship committee will probably handle them.
- There remains enough cash in our investment account to fund the church for approximately 15 months.

Marketing – Mark Dahms

- Considering using lawn signs in front of the church to publicize Thanksgiving and Christmas services

Worship Committee – Joe Hackett for Rose Seeger

- New communion signup for the end of 2027 is coming
- **Note that attendance at all meetings, including Council meetings, by any member for observation is welcomed but an agenda item is required to be made in advance. Committees are encouraged to publish their meeting time in advance.**

Fellowship Committee – Kelly Ball

- Coffee hours for new member reception on Oct 11 and for the fall meeting on the 25th.
- Thanksgiving pot luck will be held on Nov 22nd and Christmas decorations will be brought down that same day.
- We may host the youth players in March like we did last year

Missions Committee – Sue Beach

- Crafting is over for the year. OCC shoeboxes will be filled on October 30
- Adopt a family will be organized after shoeboxes are done.
- Mark is issuing checks for the rummage sale proceeds.

Building and Grounds – Steve Dolphin

- Parsonage painting will be done in the spring
- Outside tree must be decorated before the tree lighting on December 4
- No special fall cleanup planned. Steve and Jay will handle what needs to be done
- Racine County tested water OK
- Keep an eye out for sidewalk salt. There may be a shortage

New Business

- Tree lighting will include carols, coffee, and hot chocolate, all outside.
- Jay may be Santa and Santa bags need to be assembled.
- Nominating slate complete and submitted. Building and Grounds needs a new council representative. Brian Mingus will do.
- Some other committees need designated council representatives.
- We will work on revising bylaws during the next year.
- Joe got an invitation for a pastor installation in Madison and is going.

Next meeting: Nov 15 after church

Financial Report – September 30, 2026

First Congregational Church of Rochester, Wisconsin
Finance Commission Report for the period ended September 30, 2026

In September, income got a boost from Day in the Country that resulted in an \$1,548 surplus for the month. The surplus was about \$2,300 less than expected because poor weather limited Day in the Country activities and attendance. From January through September, total income is \$56,031 (about the same as last year), while expenses are \$60,493 (about \$6,000 more than last year), resulting in a year-to-date loss of \$4,463. Unrestricted cash remains healthy at \$22,210. Painting projects for the parsonage and pastor's office had not started as of the end of September. Additional details can be found on the reverse page.

Attendance averaged 31 in September, 9 less than last September and the lowest month since September 2024. The year-to-date average is 38, which is 1 less than the same time as last year.

Deposits for the month included:

- regular offerings of \$6,390 including \$385 of In-Kind Donations for Day in the Country
- \$1,349 from Day in the Country for church from food and bake sale
- \$1,573 from Day in the Country for missions
- \$500 from Judy Schaefer split between the bake sale and OCC shipping costs (missions)

Disbursements for the month included:

There were only routine disbursements in September.

Day in the Country – this year's event raised a total of \$2,572. That's \$3,578 less than last year due to forecasted bad weather that limited attendance and caused food sales to be canceled (except for selling bulk items that could not be returned). Due to vendor cancellations, there was no space rental income.

	<u>This Year</u>	<u>Last Year</u>
Food	\$231	\$2,081
Bake Sale	768	1,224
Space Rental	0	300
For the Church	\$999	\$3,605
Missions Rummage	\$1,573	\$2,545
Grand Total	\$2,572	\$6,150

Fundraising Income – fundraising events raised a total of \$2,837 this year: the Memorial Day lunch raised \$1,019; the Music in the Park Ice Cream Social raised \$820, and Day in the Country raised \$999 excluding the rummage sale that is for missions. The total is \$2,113 below budget and \$2,355 less than last year. Lower income is mainly due to Day in the Country that was impacted by forecasts for bad weather that caused vendors to pullout and cancellation of food sales.

COMMUNION SCHEDULE

DATE	TABLE SETUP	TABLE SETUP	BREAD/ JUICE
8-Nov	Anne Gorski	Cher Fritchen	JoAnne Potter
13-Dec	Lisa Hilgenberg	Greta Frost	Chris Hackett
10-Jan	Brian Mingus	Kim Mingus	Melanie Mingus
14-Feb	Sue Pope	Lisa Hilgenberg	Greta Frost
March 25 Maundy Thursday	Sue Beach	Tom Beach	Ruth Frost
11-Apr	Christine Gall	Joyce Gerard	JoAnne Potter
May 16 Pentecost Sunday	Sue Beach	Tom Beach	Ruth Frost

Welcome, Rick and Nancy Kocejaj!

We are so happy to welcome our newest members, Nancy and Rick Kocejaj, to our church family! May you find friendship, joy, and a place where your gifts and faith can grow among us. We look forward to sharing many special moments, worshiping, serving, and making wonderful memories together!



And a thank you....

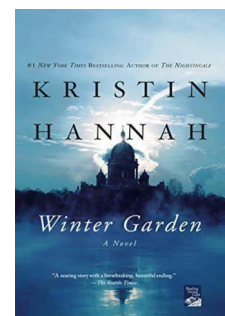
Our heartfelt thanks to the Rochester congregation and Pastor Joe for welcoming us as new church members. We appreciate your warm, open arms and look forward to our Christian journey with your continual support.

Thanks, Rick and Nancy Kocejaj



Community Book Club

Winter Garden by Kristin Hannah is a powerful historical fiction novel published in 2010 that explores the complex bond between mothers and daughters, intergenerational trauma, and survival. Join us Monday, November 23 at 6:30 pm in the parlor to explore its nuances.



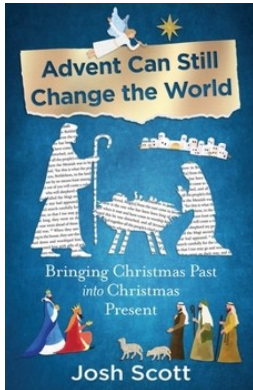
Love Inc News

Our next meal for the Love Inc. homeless is November 23 and all the food has been donated by members already. We should be there at 4:00PM and even if you don't have food to bring; please come. It is a mission of our church. The people are thankful for the food. We are thankful for the help and fellowship. We make extra food because the people can take it home with them. They told us how much it is appreciated.

Please come and help, all are welcome. "Many hands make light work."

- Sue Pope

New Bible Study - Discover the meaning of Christmas in its own time and place.



Christmas is a global celebration wrapped in nostalgia and tradition. The movies we return to each year, the carols we know by heart, and the rituals we repeat connect us to Christmases past and to one another. Yet beneath these familiar layers lies a story rooted in real life, unfolding in a specific time and place. To experience the enduring power of the Christmas story today, we must first understand what it meant then before we can discern what this sacred story offers our own moment.

Join us for this Advent Seasons Study

We will meet for 4 weeks and use this book and accompanying video to guide us on this journey.

You will have two times to participate again this year. Once at Honey Creek and First Congregational.

Monday from 4:30-5:30pm on November 30, December 7,14,21 at Community Baptist Church Honey Creek

Tuesdays from 11am-Noon on December 1,8,15,22 at First Congregational Church of Rochester

Book Cost, if you want one is \$22.00

If you have any questions, contact Pastor Joe



Poinsettia Order Form 2026

Poinsettias are only available in red this year. Poinsettias are \$12.00 per plant.
Please use this form to order the number of Poinsettias you would like.

This form and payment is due on or before Sunday November 22nd.

Total number of Poinsettias _____ X \$12.00 Total amount \$ _____

We are planning on having the poinsettias in the front for all the services during Advent and Christmas eve service on Thursday December 27 at 7pm. You may take home your poinsettia after the Christmas Eve service.

Thank you for helping make our church look beautiful during the Christmas season.

Name: _____

Donor notes: Please indicate who you are honoring with your poinsettia

In Memory of _____

In Honor of: _____

Wisdom Bible Study Wrapup

Thanks to all the stalwart explorers willing to dig into the sometimes difficult, always revealing books of biblical wisdom: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job. As confusing as they can sometimes be, we found that they are consistent in their desire to lead us to God through an understanding of the nature of the Fear of the Lord the way God wants us to understand it – not the drama of fright, not even the passivity of respect, but of acceptance that God is God and we are not. That God's idea of justice and fairness are not ours and we have to trust that He knows what He's doing and that He is, as He promised, working out our lives for our benefit even when it looks like He is not. A tough recipe, but in the end, the one that keeps us safe.

After Pastor Joe's Advent Bible study, we will be beginning something new and it will likely be in a new format. As of now, it looks like we will be putting it together around the parables of Jesus, but as we've done in the past, looking at them in a new way and hopefully, applying them to modern day problems. More later.

There's No Squashing LeMutt

And the dead leaves lie huddled and still,
No longer blown hither and thither;
the last lone aster gone;
The flowers of the witch hazel wither.

Robert Frost (1874-1963)

Yup folks that's November! Hi folks it's me Le Mutt again, hope you got your long John's out ready to go! Is it just me or is 2026 zooming by?? Well today we talk about November, Believe it or not there's a lot that goes on this month! Many people think of this as the start of the holiday season. Don't be surprised if you see a Christmas tree in your neighborhood one of these days or Santa on your neighbor's front lawn! Here's some of the special days in November:

Nov.4 Will Roger's Day

Nov.7 Sadie Hawkins Day (remember when a girl asked you to go to the Sadie Hawkins dance in high school)

Nov.8 Diwali, the Indian Festival of Lights

Nov.11 Veterans Day

Nov.26 THANKSGIVING DAY

Nov.28 Black Friday (get your credit cards out)

Nov.29 First Sunday of Advent

AND DON'T FORGET NOV 3 ELECTION DAY

And if you thought I was done! Not so fast

There's a National Scrapple day, National cook for your dog day, National Button Day, National no tasking day, and my favorite WORLD HELLO DAY!

On November 24th there will be a Beaver moon. Why is it called that? Well in the colonial era this was the night traps were set out before the swamps froze and the Beavers went into their lodges for the Winter.

Enough trivia, time for jokes to be shared around the dinner table on Thanksgiving (you probably won't be invited back next year but that's a chance you have to take)!

Here we go 🤪

What do you call a baker who only makes pies? The Pie -oneer Woman

What did the mash potatoes say to the sweet potatoes? I yam what I yam!

Did you hear about the turkey prom? It was a Butterball

What kind of music did the Pilgrims like? Plymouth 🎸 Rock

Why do the Pilgrims pants keep falling down? Because they wear their buckles on their 🎩 hats

Knock knock! Who's there? Norma Lee ! Norma Lee who? Norma Lee I don't eat this much.

And how about a couple of puns to throw out during dessert?

I only have pies 🥧 for you. My family told me to stop telling Thanksgiving jokes, but I said I couldn't quit cold turkey!, 🦃



Thought for the month (actually two)

"Thanksgiving is not just a day. Its a way we live our lives everyday " - Katrina Meyer

"What if today we were grateful for everything?" - Charlie Brown

Have a blessed November everyone! 🙏

Thoughts – No Fear – The Biblical Books of Wisdom

I want to say that I don't know what ever possessed me to teach the books of Wisdom - Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job - but I'd be lying. I'm teaching them because they are unconventional, contrary, and packed with existential angst. Perfect.

As I write this, we've gotten through the first two already, and are poised to begin Job tonight and only now do I begin to understand where this is all going. There's Proverbs with its neat, confident little phrases that don't always work out in real living. After all, the wise do not always have good fortune, do they? Nor do the diligent always enjoy wealth. Then there's Ecclesiastes, who, contrary to some translations, does not say that everything is meaningless, but that everything is the Hebrew *hevel*, meaning that they shift and fade like smoke. Gone the Proverbial confidence. Replace it with cynical reality, a world we know all too well in which we try to grab on to something only to see it fade away and disappear, leaving us feel a kind of betrayal. And of course, there's our friend Job, who suffers beyond imagination by God's specific proclamation just to see whether he will be able to remain loyal and faithful to God. He doesn't.

At the end of all this, all we really want is something that makes sense in the way we understand sense. We want God to be just. We want, actually, what Proverbs lays out. We want the world to give health and good fortune to the faithful and to punish everybody else. But it doesn't happen that way. We think that by the end of Job, God will explain how and why the world works as it does, but He explains nothing. God, when He finally gets involved openly in the whole Job affair, just sits back and dares anyone to be Him. Can you create a universe?, he asks. And, of course, we can't.

All we're left with is the idea that we need to live with the fear of the Lord.

Really? Fear of the Lord, as I was taught, is a healthy respect for God - for who He is, for what He does, and what He gives. And that's all fine if there is some assurance that He will let me in on at least some of His reasoning. Come on, God. Give me a break. I keep asking Why and get no answer.

And God just smiles.

And I've come to understand that this lack of explanation is where the fear part comes in. It's a kind of respect we're not used to. It's the kind that just asks us to remember who God is and who we are. He loves us but owes us nothing. We love Him and He tells us to trust and expect nothing but be grateful for everything.

OK. Well, then, fear the Lord but fear nothing else. The road is wide open. It will need to be. I'm going to have to do more U-ey's than I thought.

Image: Reddit

Source:

<https://joannempotter.blogspot.com/2026/10/no-fear-biblical-books-of-wisdom.html>

