



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH ROCHESTER, WISCONSIN

March 2026 Newsletter

Contents this month:

Calendar
Lectionary



Pastor's Ponderings; Congregationalism, Religious Freedom, and the Bible
Council/Committee Reports; Other News
Devotional: About 40 and the Good of Giving Up

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 Sunday Service 10AM Worship committee meeting	2	3 Tai Chi 9AM	4 Spirit Bible Study 11-1 Lenten: 7PM FCC Mukwonago	5 Choir practice 5:30	6 OCC Crafting 10-2	7
8 Sunday Service 10AM Sunday School Communion	9	10 Tai Chi 9AM	11 Spirit Bible study, 11-1 Lenten: 7PM FCC Rochester,	12 Choir practice 5:30	13	14
15 Sunday Service 10AM Council Meeting	16	17 Tai Chi 9AM	18 Spirit Bible Study, 11-1 Lenten: English Settlement UMC 7PM	19 Choir practice 5:30	20 OCC Crafting 10-2	21
22 Sunday Service 10AM- Youth drama presentation Pizza and ice cream after	23 Love Inc Meal 4pm Book Club 6:30 PM	24 Tai Chi 9AM	25 Spirit Bible Study 11-1 Lenten: Community Baptist Church, Honey Creek PM	26 Choir practice 5:30	27	28
29 Sunday Service 10AM	30	31 Tai Chi 9AM				

Next month's Newsletter deadline: email JoAnne, mrspotts51@hotmail.com, by March 25

March Lectionary

March 1: Genesis 12:1-4a Psalm 121 (1, 2) Romans 4:1-5, 13-17 John 3:1-17

March 8: Exodus 17:1-7 Psalm 95 (1) Romans 5:1-11 John 4:5-42

March 15: 1 Samuel 16:1-13 Psalm 23 (5) Ephesians 5:8-14 John 9:1-41

March 22: Ezekiel 37:1-14 Psalm 130 (5) Romans 8:6-11 John 11:1-45

March 25: Annunciation: Isaiah 7:10-14 Psalm 45 (17) or Psalm 40:5-10 (8) Hebrews 10:4-10 Luke 1:26-38

March 29: Palm Sunday: Isaiah 50:4-9a Psalm 31:9-16 (5) Philippians 2:5-11 Matthew 26:14—27:66 or Matthew 27:11-54



Pastor's Ponderings March 2026

As we welcome the month of March, we are reminded of the gentle transition from winter's chill to the promise of spring. This season brings a renewed sense of hope and possibility, as the days grow longer and the world begins to bloom with new life. It serves as a fitting reminder of God's constant presence and the fresh opportunities He provides for us to grow in faith and deepen our relationships within our church community.

March also marks the beginning of Lent, a time for reflection, prayer, and preparation as we look forward to Easter. I encourage each of you to embrace this season with open hearts—whether through daily devotions, acts of kindness, or simply finding moments of stillness to listen for God's voice. Together, let us support one another as we journey toward the resurrection, celebrating both the challenges and the joys that come with spiritual renewal.

May this month be filled with blessings for you and your loved ones. Let's continue to walk in faith and love, trusting that God is guiding us every step of the way.

Grace and peace,
Pastor Joe

Congregationalism, Religious Freedom, and the Bible

Congregationalism is based on the New Testament. Congregationalism came to America on the Mayflower in the 17th century to reestablish a church in the New Testament pattern – a fellowship of persons who freely choose to be followers to Jesus Christ. The earliest Christians believed that wherever two or three were gathered together in the name and spirit of Jesus Christ, that Christ would be there with them (Matt 18:20). The Mayflower pilgrims also gathered together freely, committing themselves to worship and serve together as the spirit of God moved them. In matters of faith, they accepted full responsibility for their personal relationship with God in Christ and allowed no outside authority to dictate how they should believe, worship, or serve God. Each local church manages its own affairs, selects its own leaders, and holds that individual believers can govern the church without bishops. It emphasizes "voluntary" involvement and is closely linked with the concept of religious freedom. Congregationalists expect each member to have a personal relationship with God as the motivating force in his or her life. The purpose of the church is to help us grow in our relationship with God and the expression of God in our lives.

Open Bible. Congregational Christians stand for an open Bible. It is the inspired Word of God, a guide for life. Through God's word, we learn and experience the power and love of a living God so Christ becomes the primary light in our daily lives.



Council Meeting Report

February 15

Pastor's Report – Joe Hackett

- Ash Wednesday: Soup supper at Plymouth UCC
- Wednesday Lenten Service at FCCR March 11
- Maundy Thursday service will be held at 6PM
- Good Friday will be at 1PM and Honey Creek will join us for both.
- Holy Saturday: Joe is considering putting together a St. Peter's Fire bonfire at which the text of Christ's passion is repeatedly read.
- Easter Sunday service will be 10AM and lilies should be ordered by the end of March
- The teen theater presentation will move from March 15 to March 22



- Joe will be in Mundelein at a minsters' convocation from April 13-16
- The May 2 WCA Annual meeting will have check-in at 8am and last until 3 or 3:30 PM. We are responsible for breakfast treats and the afternoon worship service.

Education – Joe Hackett

- The Sunday school students will attend Ash Wednesday services
- Chris Hackett will conduct prayer bead sessions for the Sunday school on April 26 and everyone else on April 25
- The Spirit Bible study is ongoing and will probably extend until after Easter.
- Joe is looking at a possible VBS program called Galaxy.

Treasurer's/Finance Report – Mark Dahms

- Offerings were unusually high for January but due to cold temperatures and building repairs, so were expenses.
- Investment account remains at \$74,467 and checking at \$26,059.
- Credit cards have been obtained for Joe and Mark
- Salaries are now being paid by direct deposit
- Attendance averaged 34 in January, down 7 from last January, probably due to cold temperatures.

The Finance Committee has addressed suggestions posed in the churchwide survey as follows:

1. Re: passing the plate for collections, they felt that the current way we handle collections works better because it avoids awkwardness for those who don't contribute weekly, does not pass germs, and does not require ushers.
2. Re: allowing online giving and electronic payment for fundraisers, they felt that because cash and check is much more common and because electronic payment involves additional fees and hassle, this can be monitored by workers to see how much it costs us in sales and can be considered again later. In the meantime, if someone outside the committee feels strongly about this, they are free to pursue it.

The committee will soon be submitting an article for the newsletter about all the different ways people can contribute to the financial needs of the church

IT – Mark Dahms

- The Lenten service schedule and Bible study syllabus has been added to the website
- May place ad for Easter service on Facebook as well as in the paper.

Worship – Rose Seeger

- Date for Ice Cream Social is changed to August 29
- Special music booked through April
- Will hold a committee meeting the first Sunday in March

Fellowship – Joyce Gerard

- Held a coffee for the Annual meeting and a pot luck the week after.
- There will be coffee and cookies on March 11 after the Wednesday service
- Sue Pope will supply pizza and ice cream for the young people's performance March 22.
- Re prayer before potlucks – attendees will pray downstairs and not wait for Joe

Missions

- Love Inc meal will be served March 23

Building and Grounds – Steve Dolphin/Brian Mingus

- Brian is getting quotes for outsourced jobs that need to be done.
- Water problems have been solved
- Bill Gerard installed lights at the back of the sanctuary
- Still looking at different cooling methods for the summer. Need to check the status of the ceiling insulation. Looks like it was last updated in 2003
- Well pump might have to be prophylactically replaced, ideally when Joe and Chris are gone.

New Business

- Collections made at Lenten service home churches will be designated by each individual church. Joe suggested the local branch of Sleep in Heavenly Peace, which makes beds for children.
- JoAnne said that she will be stepping down from the council at the end of this term and asked the best way to recruit a replacement. She will be talking about it to people she knows, publish the availability in the newsletter, and perhaps later announce it in church.

Post Survey Followup – Finance Committee

The suggestions and questions raised in the November churchwide survey that have not yet been addressed were assigned at the annual meeting to each individual committee concerned. The Finance Committee has considered theirs and submitted the following results:

- Regarding the possibility of resuming the passing of a plate for collections during services: The committee feels the current approach is working well with 3 main benefits: it avoids awkwardness for the majority of members who give less often than weekly (only 21 of 44 gave weekly in 2025), it avoids the passing of germs, and it does not require coordination of ushers. The committee recommends that our collection method remains as it is.
- Regarding allowing online giving and electronic payment for fundraisers: The committee feels the current approach is working and doesn't think it limits giving because cash and check is common for local events and that electronic payments come with fees and hassle. They recommend that our giving methodology remains as it is, but that if someone wants to research, set up, train, and implement them, the Finance Commission welcomes a proposal.

Love Inc. Update

From Sue Pope and Lisa Hilgenburg:

The Love, Inc meal for the homeless is scheduled for Monday, March 23. This month's theme is "Comfort Food". Our menu is meatloaf, au gratin potatoes, vegetables, dinner rolls and dessert. We have the meatloaf, potatoes and the dessert covered.

If you are able to furnish the vegetables or dinner rolls; please let Lisa Hilgenberg at 262-210-4454 or Sue Pope at 414-587-0079 know.

If you can make something, but need it picked up or need a ride; let us also know.

Volunteers are greatly welcomed. The more the merrier. Please come and help. Arrive at 4:00 PM with the meal serving commencing at 4:30 PM.

Drama on Sunday Morning

Wonderful News! On March 22nd during the 10AM service, the Faith Community Church of Franklin will be here with their Children's Christian Theater ministry performing "Tell Me the Truth", groovy game show musical for kids. After the service there will be pizza, ice cream cake and beverages for all. We hope that many of our church family will tell someone they know who might be interested, particularly those with children, about the show and lunch. We've often talked about wanting to welcome in new, young families. This is an opportunity. Spread the word. You can call Sue Pope for more information. 414-587-0079

Council Vacancy 2027

JoAnne Potter has completed more than 2 terms on the council as Clerk and will be rotating off to take up the newsletter and become more involved in Love Inc. This position should have candidates before October so that the new council member can be elected at the Fall Meeting. Council Clerk candidates should fill the following requirements:

- Be an active member of the church
- Commit to attending monthly council meetings and take notes
- Maintain the roll of members and keep track of significant sacramental community celebrations like funerals, weddings, baptisms, and confirmations.
- Have enough digital expertise to generate online minutes and distribute them by email
- The Clerk has a one year term and is eligible for reelection.

Anyone interested should approach JoAnne or any council member.

Thoughts: About 40 and the Good of Giving Up

Last week, one of our parishioners mused out loud that he thought he might give up Lent for Lent. Just Lent. I'm not sure exactly what he meant, but it may be he thought that Lent just doesn't work for many people and, if that's what he meant, I think he might be right. The whole idea of giving up something, or even of doing something extra, for 40 days just doesn't make sense. And it doesn't if we just look on the face of it. It seems kind of silly. Until we do it in earnest, trying to look at it from God's point of view.

First, 40 is important to God. Here are some examples:

- Rain causing the great flood during which Noah waited in his ark lasted 40 days and 40 nights.
- Jonah warned Nineveh that they will be destroyed in 40 days.
- The Israelites were Philistine captives for 40 years.
- Goliath taunted Saul's army for 40 days.
- Moses spent 40 years tending sheep in Midian after he killed the Egyptian.
- Moses spent 40 days on Mount Sinai while he received the ten commandments
- The Israelites wandered for 40 years in the desert on their way to the Promised Land
- The Israelite spies spent 40 days checking out Canaan.
- Jesus fasted 40 days in the desert where he was tempted by Satan.
- Forty days transpired between Jesus' resurrection and ascension.

Forty is the number of probation or trial, testing and judgment, not entirely symbolic. It involves waiting and implies a kind of revelation by the end. And that's the point. Changing the way we do things for 40 days can change us. It really can. Restraint and devotion put us in front of God in the way that neither work nor prayer nor activity in church can. The mechanism for Lent is formalized discipline and doesn't seem particularly holy, but if obedience (Follow Me) and right action (Why do you call to me Lord, Lord, and not do what I say?) are the working out of faith, then we might need to spend time in the spiritual gym. We can give something up or do something extra or some other kind of daily, different practice that leads us to its purpose – more of God. That's why Lent matters. It's not the Lenten practice. It's the God we find in it. Fortunately, God is already waiting there. You don't have as far to go as you think.

There is no journey to God.
You are there.
There is no goal of repentance you must reach for.
It is within you.
For Lent, give up your striving.
Return to the truth of who you are.
Give up the spiritual trek.
Find your home here, in trust and in the grace of God.
Let go of your affair with a god
who judges you, who needs to be pleased.

Stay here with the One who already loves you,
who is already, and eternally, delighted with you.
Don't go off on a journey, go in.
Return to the peace at the center.
There is much to let go of, but nowhere to go.
Broken as you are, you are in God.
That is enough.
Be there.

-Steve Garnaas-Holmes

