

Congregational Comments



Vol. 25 No. 9: September 2020

Important Contacts in the Church

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Office Hours: Mon. –Thursday, 8:00-4:30

Worship and Sunday School Times

9:00 am - Traditional Worship Service

9:15-10:15 am Sunday School

10:00 am - Fellowship Hour

11:00 am - Contemporary Worship
Service

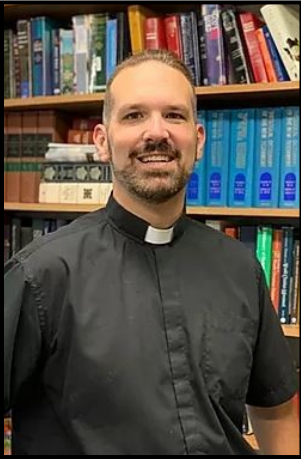
11:15-11:40 am Sunday School

Our Mission is to worship God,
Welcome all who seek God, and
Express our faith in our actions.

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A Note from Pastor Ryan



"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same... But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." – Luke 6:32-33; 25-36 NRSV

I have no doubt that many of you reading this have strong political views. Very few people in the country don't. Democrats and Republicans, conservatives and progressives, moderates and independents – almost everyone feels pro-or-con something (or someone). Gone are the days when people seemed to simply disagree with one another. Anymore, the slightest bit of deviation from the party line seems to result in insults hurled at those who think differently. We used to think of our opponents as just those who had different views. Now we see them as evil, and we go to great lengths to try to silence and shame them.

But is that the way of Jesus?

Increasingly, Americans are pulling back from discourse with other opinions and instead are surrounding themselves only with people who think like they do. We politically segregate our neighborhoods, media, social circles, and – sometimes – our churches. If someone agrees with our positions, we welcome them with open arms and shower them with praise. However, if they disagree, we heap scorn upon them, regarding them either as stupid or wicked.

Hear the words of Jesus: "If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you... Love your enemies." The world works under a formula that says, "You support me, and I'll support you. You agree with me, and I'll be kind to you." Not Jesus. Jesus essentially puts it this way: If someone treats you poorly or disagrees with you strongly, it is even more important for you to be kindhearted toward them. It doesn't mean you have to think they're right. It doesn't mean that you have to give up your values. But it does mean you have to give up your bitterness and self-righteousness. And let's face it, that's what we are dealing with when we are unkind to our adversaries. We are either so arrogant as to think we have the only truth and the other side is completely wrong (making us self-righteous), or we are frightened that those who disagree with us will hold power (that is, we fear people rather than trust God, becoming angry as a result).

It is okay to have strong views. Sometimes, it's even a desirable thing because it demonstrates that you care. What's not okay is to become so convinced you're right that you become cold-hearted, rude, and treat others poorly. Here's your homework assignment between now and Election Day, when divisiveness threatens to reach new heights. I want you to weekly sit down (maybe Saturday night or Sunday afternoon) and think about five people who drive you up the wall. These could be people in your life or people from the broader world of news and entertainment. Then I want you to review Martin Luther's commentary on the Ninth Commandment. (Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.) Luther writes, "We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray them, slander them, or hurt their reputations; But we should defend them, speak well of them and explain everything in the kindest way." After that, I want you to pray – both for yourself (asking for forgiveness and strength might be in order) and for your adversaries (pray that God might meet all their needs). If we try doing this, we just might find we don't want to say negative things about others nearly so often, and we might just be happier to boot.

Pastor Ryan

Fall Bible Study - Romans

Fall Bible Study

Pastor Ryan will be leading a Bible study this fall on Paul's letter to the Romans. The study will take place over Zoom on Tuesday evenings at 6:30 p.m., starting Sept. 1. (Due to uncertainty how the coronavirus will act this fall, Pastor Ryan prefers we start out online rather than interrupt the study if cases increase.)

Pastor Ryan is taking a doctoral-level course on Romans via distance education, and he promises to share with us the latest scholarship and insights on this important book.

To participate, go to the link below a few minutes before Bible study begins and enter the meeting ID and passcode.

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/9860755589?pwd=S2dKeWpKaG5qK0czZVljbHVwbIAzQT09>

Meeting ID: 986 075 5589

Passcode: N5uRKu

This meeting link will be emailed out with weekly announcements, so you simply can click it. A telephone number with passcode will also be established and emailed out, once that service becomes active on the church's Zoom account.

Our September Bible study schedule is as follows:

Sept. 1 – Overview of Romans, Paul's theology, and how Romans influenced the Protestant Reformation.

Sept. 8 – Romans 1:1-17

Sept. 15 – Romans 1:18-2:16

Sept. 22 – Romans 2:17-3:20

Sept. 29 – Romans 3:21-4:24

Pastor's Roundtable – Two Opportunities

Pastor Ryan has pledged to hold monthly roundtables with congregants to discuss issues important to them. All members are invited to attend. In light of COVID-19 protocols, Pastor Ryan is offering two opportunities this month – one virtual, and the other in-person. You are asked to attend only one of the two sessions to allow all people an opportunity to take part.

These roundtables are meant foster open communication and build relationships. The pastor also thinks, on balance, that they'll be fun. We can talk about anything from church business and the sermon to our families and events in our lives.

IN-PERSON: Sunday, Sept. 27, from 10:15-11:15 a.m. outdoors in the pavilion after traditional worship. Masks and social distancing will be enforced. Please bring your own seat if possible. If unable, chairs will be provided.

ZOOM: Tuesday, Sept. 29, from 5:30-6:30 p.m. prior to Bible study. The Zoom link will be the same one as the Bible study's and will published in the weekly announcements. Pastor Ryan plans to eat on this call, and he invites you to have "virtual dinner" with him.

Information on Worship Service

COMMUNION DATES SET

Council has voted to observe Communion on the following holy days: **World Communion** (Oct. 4 - traditional service, Oct. 7 - contemporary service); **Christmas Eve** (Dec. 23 - contemporary, Dec. 24 - traditional); **East-er** (April 4 - traditional, April 7 - contemporary); and **Pentecost** (May 23 - traditional, May 26 - contemporary). Communion on the first Sunday of the month will be suspended until we emerge from pandemic mode.

IN-PERSON TRADITIONAL WORSHIP RETURNS

The 9:00 a.m. Traditional Service will begin meeting in-person on Sunday, Sept. 6, as we welcome Pastor Ryan back to the pulpit.

Please note there has been a slight change in our pandemic protocol: **All persons will be required to wear a mask for the duration of the worship service. It should not be removed.**

These are the guidelines we will follow to do our part in keeping everyone safe:

Check-in

- Please call or email the office by noon Thursday to register your attendance each week. This will help us gauge how many attendees to expect so we can properly set up the sanctuary.
 - Arrive no earlier than 15 minutes before worship starts.
 - The only doors that will be open are those under the columns facing MacArthur Road.
 - At a check-in table, a volunteer will sign you in and sanitize your hands.
 - Your temperature will be taken with a touchless thermometer.
- You will be given a mask if you don't have one with you. **Your mask must be worn at all times.**

In Worship

- Every other pew will be roped off. Please adhere to the 6-foot social distance guideline, except when seated with people who live under the same roof.
- There will be no congregational singing, though music will be part of the service.
- We will not use a printed bulletin or pass the peace.
- At the end of service, persons will be dismissed row-by-row.

All other protocols will be announced at the service. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation. As Christians, we seek to "Love thy neighbor." By wearing a mask and adhering to these guidelines, you are helping to prevent the spread of illness and are demonstrating care and concern for those around you.

Contemporary Service Returns

Contemporary Service Returns at New Day and Time

The Contemporary Service is returning at a new day and time. The new worship hour for Contemporary Service will be **Wednesday evenings at 6:30 p.m., starting Sept. 9**. This move is being done on a trial basis through Spring 2021 and may become permanent. The reason for this experiment is to offer those who cannot attend on Sunday mornings an opportunity to worship on another day, as well as to broaden our appeal in a society that is increasingly 24/7.

The Contemporary Service will be **IN-PERSON** and held **OUTDOORS** beneath and around the pavilion through November. On cool and dark evenings, we will make use of the fireplace and worship by candlelight and firelight. The service will be informal and last about 30-40 minutes, with Bible reading and worship led by First Praise. Social distancing will be enforced, and masks will be required. Singing is permitted outdoors.

If you plan to attend the Contemporary Service, you will be asked to call the office before noon on Wednesday to register your attendance. This will permit us to make proper seating accommodations. In deference to state guidelines, attendance will initially be limited to 50 participants. If more than 50 people wish to attend, we may look at adding another worship opportunity. You are encouraged to bring your own lawn chair or other seat, but chairs will be made available if you do not have them.

In the event of rain or extreme temperatures, we will retreat indoors, following the established COVID-10 guidelines in place for the traditional service.

Stay tuned for additional announcements about both the traditional and contemporary services.



MEALS ON WHEELS

In view of the new restrictions for volunteers for Meals on Wheels, our church will NOT be delivering meals in September. We hope to be able to continue this outreach mission as a church when our name comes up on the volunteer list in May.

Church Directory

Dear Members,

Jackie and I have been working to update the church directory in preparation of Pastor Ryan's arrival. In a week or so, we will be emailing a revised copy to all people of the church who have an email address on file. Extra copies will be available at the church for those without email. We will make provisions to get a copy to all. We are contemplating creating a directory with members' pictures sometime in the future. After you review your information, if you find any errors please contact either Jackie (FirstChurchDecatur@sbcglobal.net) or myself, Dave Carpenter (217-855-2311 or carpy01@aol.com).

Thank you.

Dave Carpenter

08/18/20.



Women's Fellowship

Womens Fellowship hosted a meeting with Becky Newton of Wren's Gate Garden, a local flower farming operator. We had 10 women attend and each one received a large summer bouquet. Becky brought many, many flowers and put the bouquets together as she talked and answered questions. She talked about how her business in Decatur differs from the florists who may buy their flowers from overseas. Norma Lingenfelter also won the centerpiece that Becky made and which is pictured.

Our group practiced social distancing and wore masks. This was a program all enjoyed.

Our next program is a trip to Lincoln Heritage Museum in Lincoln, Illinois at Lincoln College. Date and time are undecided at this time but will be announced later.

Sheila Witts-Mannweiler, President

Womens Fellowship



A bouquet like we each received



Becky designing the centerpiece that Norma Lingenfelter won



Growing Hope Globally



Growing Project September Update

We continue celebrating our church's 15th Growing Hope Globally Growing Project.

Our corn field has accumulated 2337 growing degree units since planting, which is tracking about 250 heat units ahead of the five-year average. This is a fun time for the corn plant as it progresses through the reproductive growth stages. The corn plant uses all the energy towards packing on kernel weight and dry matter, which translates into bushels. There are no management decisions to make currently, as harvest is the next field activity. The chart below describes how the kernels are growing and drying down for final ear development through the six reproductive stages. Our project is in Stage 3.



R1	Silking	Pollen lands on silk and pollinates or fertilizes so the ovule becomes a kernel.
R2	Blister	Corn achieves maximum ear length and kernels look like a 'blister' (being 85% moisture.)
R3	Reproductive Stage	What is happening with the kernels and the ear?
R4	Dough	Kernels are one-half their mature dry weight and a 'dough' like consistency.
R5	Dent	A hard starch layer surrounds the kernel's soft core. As the core loses moisture, an indentation or 'dent' forms at the top of the kernel.
R6	Mature	The milk line or starch layer has reached the kernel tip and causes a 'black layer' to form. We then wait for adequate moisture to harvest.

Finance Notes

JULY 2020 FINANCIAL REPORT

	<u>July 20</u>	<u>YTD</u>
Budget Income	\$18,051.25	\$126,358.75
Budget Expense	\$18,515.41	\$129,607.87
Income	\$118,385.96	\$110,605.74
Expenses	\$15,599.96	\$105,706.14



Happenings

FFDO

No Dinner In
September



God's Busy Hands

Tuesdays

1:00 - 3:00 pm



God's Busy Hands

Admin Meeting

Monday,
September 21

5:30 pm

Council of Ministry Teams

Monday,
September 21

6:30 pm

Choir

Off For
Summer



Sing With Us

Exploring Christian Faith Study Group

Off for Summer

Choir Room

September Birthdays and Anniversaries

God bless you on your birthday and each day the whole year through. May all His blessings bring you joy in everything you do.

- 1 Janice Kahila
Pam Mueller
3. Patty Stemple
5. Helen Johnson
Everett Kuhn
9. Rikki Brady
10. Gehrig Bunselmeyer
12. James Huckile
13. Thomas Cordts
Patrick Malone
Malone Moretti
14. Ronald Brownfield
Nicholas Lauer
17. Carolyn Jones
18. Kathy Moore
19. Kyle Brownfield
20. Shelly Smith
21. Sherry Palmer
Brandon Janvrin
24. Olivia Wernecke
Angie Miller
25. Susan Schleeter
27. Ashley Lofland
30. Beverly Capshaw

And may the many blessings that have come from God above fill your hearts with all the joy of His enduring love. Happy Anniversary.

1. Charles & Alfreda Tribout
7. Homer & Nancy Leoucis
8. Jerry & Patty Stemple
22. David & Pat Mahr



First Church Sunday Morning

	Date	9:00 AM Service	6:30 PM Service
 LITURGISTS	September 6	Penny Butts	September 9
	September 13	Alice Huebner	September 16
	September 20	Judi Carpenter	September 23
	September 27	Ellen Starace	September 30
	September 6	Tom & Paula Cordts	
	September 13	Pat & Margie Malone	
	September 20	Peggy Druessel	
	September 27	Tom & Paula Cordts	
	September 6		
	September 13		
	September 20	No Fellowship Hour	
	September 27		
 USHERS	September 6	Tom & Paula Cordts	
	September 13	Bill & Alice Huebner	
	September 20	Dave & Judi Carpenter	
	September 27	Ev & Shirley Kuhn	

Thank you to all who participate in these very important activities!

September Calendar

S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
		1 1:00 God's Busy Hands 6:30 Bible Study 7:00 Al-Anon 8:00 AA	2	3	4	5
6 9:00 Sunday Service	7	8 1:00 God's Busy Hands 6:30 Bible Study 7:00 Al-Anon 8:00 AA	9 6:30 Contempo- rary Worship	10	11	12
13 9:00 Sunday Service	14 7:00 Property Meeting	15 1:00 God's Busy Hands 6:30 Bible Study 7:00 Al-Anon 8:00 AA	16 6:30 Contempo- rary Worship	17	18	19
20 9:00 Sunday Service	21 5:30 Admin 6:30 Council	22 1:00 God's Busy Hands 6:30 Bible Study 7:00 Al-Anon 8:00 AA	23 6:30 Contempo- rary Worship	24	25	26
27 9:00 Sunday Service 10:15 Pastor's Roundtable	28	29 1:00 God's Busy Hands 5:30 Pastor's Roundtable 7:00 Al-Anon 8:00 AA	30 6:30 Contempo- rary Worship			

First Congregational UCC

3465 N. MacArthur Rd.

Decatur, IL 62526-1450



2020 Church Goals

Your Council of Ministry Teams has approved the following 2 goals for 2020

2020 Church Goals

- **Goal No. 1**— Hire a new pastor for the church.
- **Goal No. 2**—Instituting new fellowship programs for working women, men and young families