FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
31 W. MILWAUKEE AVE., FORT ATKINSON, WI 53538

July 2026
First Congregational UCC Broadcaster

The summer sky is a marvel. The longest day of the year is now behind us and our lives tick on. Sometimes we need to view our lives, and our faith, and our world with a periscope view. A periscope can see things that are otherwise out of sight. When we are submerged in hostility, fear, and anxiety, we cannot see. The periscope offers a glance at the horizon. It takes the whole picture to offer a perspective with a panoramic view. We can see where we have been, AND where we are going. We have a broad angle lens.

Do you see? The prophet Isaiah says, Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is an everlasting God, the creator to the ends of the earth. Thomas at Jesus side says, unless I see the mark in his side and his hands, I will not believe. Do you not see?

We need the Microscope and the Periscope the minute and the broad, to live a faithful life. God sees it all. God is the one nurturing the process of forming life as each and every hair on the eyebrow is placed as a fetus is growing in the mother's womb. By the 32nd week the baby is growing eyelashes and eye brows. All this was already set in place to happen. Yet, Astronomers using NASA's Hubble Space Telescope have discovered that the universe is expanding 5 percent to 9 percent faster than expected.

And earth, in this expansive universe,

One small dot. One significant life.

Summer Blessings

Pastor Sara

Council Highlights – June 2026

Fort Atkinson Preschool and Childcare: We honored and thanked the director, Heidi Yngsdal and staff members at our worship service on June 7th. We will miss them and the children running through the halls and playing in the playground!

The transition has gone well, and all remaining items will be sold at an online auction by Staude Auctions beginning August 12, 2026, through August 26, 2026. There will be the final open house on August 25 to see what items are still available. There will be some additional volunteers needed to organize all the items. A sign-up sheet will be available in the Narthex.

Future Childcare Area Rentals: Future requests for rental space must be approved by the Council.

TDS Telephone System: The Council has approved to upgrade our telephone system from Spectrum to TDS. Our annual fee for the upgrade will be approximately $900 LESS than our current charges.

Outdoor Prairie Service: Almost 50 people attended the recent Prairie Service held at Glendon's! They were wonderful hosts…and of course we had treats after the service! Thank you Linda & Jeff!

Church Relations reported that the Barrie Park Concert ice cream/pie social was a success! The weather was great and they raised $560 that will go to the Fort Atkinson Food Pantry. Thank you to all the bakers and volunteers who made this event another success!

Church Access Changes: Church building access during business hours will change soon. Stay tuned for updates!

Next meeting is August 18, 2026. No meeting in July.

Complete Council Minutes are available in the church office.

Fort Atkinson Preschool and Childcare

Following the June 5th closing of Fort Atkinson Preschool and Childcare after 57 years, volunteers began organizing the tremendous amount of toys, books, furnishings, appliances and art supplies in First Congregational UCC's lower level. Members were invited to peruse the items and take them away for a donation. Now, several more "weeding out" days are planned to prepare lots for an online auction later this summer. Pictured here are some volunteer organizers, shoppers and outgoing preschool director Heidi Yngsdal on her last day on the job.

She stated. “As many of you have noticed, enrollments have drastically decreased over the years, and each classroom has small class sizes. This has been wonderful to allow teachers to provide one-on-one care for students, as well as really get to know each student and the families. However, these decreasing enrollments has taken a huge toll on the financial situation of the church and childcare center.”

She noted that the Church Council made the closure decision “with great regret,” adding, “Quality childcare provision has long been a part of First Congregation's mission, and thanks to the families, the staff and all our community partners, that mission has been realized. But it is time for this chapter for the church to conclude.”

During the congregation’s annual meeting Sunday, childcare center liaison Loren Gray explained that dropping enrollment and operational deficits led the council to make this difficult decision.

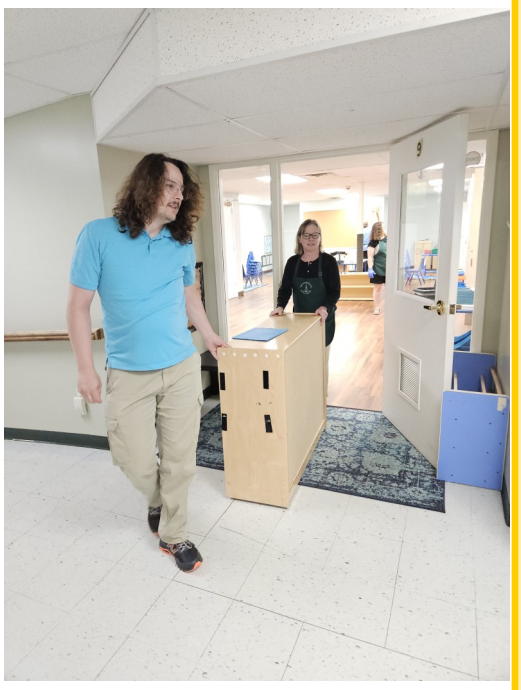
“Much effort and thought on the part of the staff have gone into turning this around, but outside factors continue to erode the number of children that are available to our center,” Gray said. “Your council has been on top of this situation and has now been forced to make the decision to close the center. Recognizing

the years of quality childcare that our center has provided to parents makes this a truly sad decision. Financially for the church, the decision is imperative."

Gray pointed out that the childcare center is licensed to serve 75 children, but has only 33 currently enrolled, roughly half of whom are after-school attendees. Since COVID-19, the center's 4-year-old kindergarten (4K) headcount has dropped from 54 to 12. The 3-year-old program currently has only four children, with just one attending all five days of the week. Staffing could accommodate 12 pupils.

According to the state Public School Review, the School District of Fort Atkinson's overall 4K student population of 68 students has declined by 41 percent during the past five school years.

Potentially exacerbating the Fort Atkinson Preschool and Childcare Center's future enrollment drop are possible program expansions by the the Badgerland After-School Enhancement Program (BASE) and local school districts considering full-day 4K programs.



Yngsdal told the council earlier this month that she met with Lisa Hollenberger, director of the School District of Fort Atkinson's 4K program, who said there are going to be drastic changes to the structure of 4K in the next few years. A community survey found support for more programing in district buildings and wraparound options, and a consultant strongly suggested that move.

Hollenberger confirmed Monday that for the 2027-28 school year, the district is intending to house all 4K classrooms in the district. It is trying to decide whether it will hold a full-day 4K, part-day 4K with wraparound at the district or traditional 4K as the childcare center is offering now. However, all of

these options will be in the school district buildings, and the community partners will no longer be part of 4K.

In addition, Gray said Sunday that it is expected that BASE — which recently moved into its new 60,000-square-foot Janesville Avenue facility — will start taking 4-year-olds for wraparound when it gets license approval. That also would have a significant impact on 4K programs as the childcare center is one of the few 4Ks that offers wraparound.

In addition, he noted that Fort Atkinson Preschool and Childcare cannot boost its income by offering infant care, as state licensing requires that babies be housed on a main floor and the childcare center is located in the church's lower level.

Gray added that other local centers, including Crown of Life Academy, now are providing childcare. He said it also is likely that since the COVID-19 pandemic, many parents continue to work at home and thus are caring for their children themselves.

At the same time, losses in childcare are funded by the church's endowment, Gray explained. The childcare center experienced a $53,661 deficit in 2025 and was anticipated to be $75,238 in the red for 2026. The significant drop in 4K pupils resulted in a reduction of approximately $30,000 from the School District of Fort Atkinson.

In 2025, grants funded $20,144 of payroll costs and other grants added $14,865 to the bottom line. However, state grants were down about 36 percent from 2024 and it was anticipated that they would cease entirely in 2026.

"I know that this has been something we have been very proud to do in the community. In the 1960s when we started this program, we were perhaps the only provider of institutional childcare operating in the city. The world has changed and unfortunately, we just can't justify doing it in the future," Gray concluded.

Fort Atkinson Preschool and Childcare was a nondenominational, nonprofit self-supporting center founded in 1969.

Ice Cream Social

First Congregational United Church of Christ in Fort Atkinson sponsored the ice cream social at the Fort Atkinson Community Band concert Monday evening, June 15, at Barrie Park.

Pies, cookies, bars and ice cream were for sale, with all proceeds going to the Fort Atkinson Food Pantry. More than $600 was raised.

It was a beautiful evening and the concert was wonderful!

Our Church Relations Ministry extends a big thank you to everyone who baked, volunteered at and bought sweets at the social. See you next year!

Prairie Church Service

On Saturday, June 6, about 50 members and friends of First Congregational United Church of Christ in Fort Atkinson gathered for a "prairie church" service.

Hosting the event at their rural Jefferson home were the congregation's moderator, Linda Glendon, and her husband, Jeff.

The Rev. Dr. Sara Rabe led the service, which focused on enjoying and appreciating nature and letting go of (and burning) burdens as a profound act of spiritual release and healing amidst creation.

This marked the congregation's second service in the form of "wild church," an ecospiritual movement that emphasizes experiencing the divine directly through creation. Last fall, church members gathered beneath the church's landmark bur oak tree for worship.

Of course, First Congregational UCC also worships indoors! Summer services are held at 9 a.m. Sundays through Labor Day. The church is located at 33 West Milwaukee Avenue.

Helper Schedule

Date	Greeters	Ushers	Lay Reader	Tech Support
July 5	John & Jane Wilmet	Zach Finch and Donna Abel	Eunice Ann Slaney	Kevin Becker
July 12	Judy Brown	David & Lynn Klug Stedman	Pastor Sara's Family	Bob Buell
July 19	Bill Wild	Mary Beyerly and Chris Reed	Chris Reed	Kurt Wesemann
July 26	Terry Teipner	Trent Topel & Chad Klauer	Sharyl Beranek	Kevin Becker

The Food Pantry items needed:

Canned Chili
Span
Chili Beans
Hamburger Helper
Soup

July 7th Communion Team	Joe & Eunice Ann Slaney, and Bob & Sue Buell

Summer Worship Hours

Summer worship will be

9 AM

Until Aug. 31st

Attention all members!!

We are celebrating the 25 th anniversary of Pastor Sara's ordination, and her 5 th year as Pastor here, at our Fort Atkinson First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ.

Please save the date of July 12 th for this very special service. We are blessed to have special guests, and refreshments after the service. You won't want to miss it.

SAVE THE DATES

July 12 - Celebration of Pastor Sara's Ordination and 5 years here at Fort!

CONGREGATIONAL PEANUTS 2026!!!

The 2026 Peanut season will begin on Monday, August 24. We really need YOU to fill out our crew of dedicated peelers. If you haven't tried peeling redskins off our wonderful Super Extra Large Virginia peanuts, you are invited to join us for fun and fellowship. Peeling begins around 8:00am and finishes usually around 11:00am. Our rule is: "Come when you can, leave when you must." On-the-job training gleefully given. There's a lot of camaraderie, companionship and chatter that everyone shares! We need you to help make our peanuts season successful, so mark this starting date on your calendar. All profits support our Church and its Ministries.

Coffee Fellowship Sign-Up

A sign-up sheet to host Coffee Fellowship during July or August (following the 9:00 summer worship service) is posted in the narthex. Thank you to the dedicated volunteers who offer their time and talents to our church family in this fun ministry of fellowship!

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UCC

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First Congregational Church United Church of Christ