



# The Church Bell

Volume 81, Issue 2

Next Issue: March 3, 2026

Submission Deadline for Next Issue: February 25, 2026

Submit articles using the announcement request form at  
[firstconggreeley.org/announcements](http://firstconggreeley.org/announcements)

## Life in Holy Light at First Congregational

### Moving Towards Ordination at FCC!

Our congregation is blessed to have two staff members who are on the verge of ordination! In the United Church of Christ, the final step in the ordination process is known as an "ecclesiastical council." At an ecclesiastical council, representatives from the wider church conference gather to vote on approving a person (known in the UCC as a member-in-discernment) for ordination who has successfully completed the member-in-discernment process. A member-in-discernment who receives an affirmative vote at their ecclesiastical council earns the status of "authorized-pending-call." This means that the person will be ordained once they have received a called ministry position from a church.

We are delighted that Tammi VanDrunen, our Children's Minister, received a unanimous vote of affirmation at her ecclesiastical council last month and Brooklyn McBride, our Youth, Young Adult, and Communications Minister also received a unanimous vote of affirmation at her ecclesiastical council held last February. Many people have been curious (and a bit anxious!) about what is next for Tammi and Brooklyn now that they are just a called position away from ordination.

We hope that it will be possible for both Tammi and Brooklyn to become Rev. Tammi and Rev. Brooklyn without having to leave FCC! To that end, Rev. Tamara is leading a task force assembled by the Church Cabinet this is charged with developing an ordainable Associate Minister for Children and Families position and an ordainable Associate Minister for Youth, Young Adult, and Communications position. Once these positions have been developed, an affirmative vote by the Cabinet followed by an affirmative vote of the Congregation will be required to extend ordainable calls to Tammi and Brooklyn. We will keep you posted as progress is made in this process.

*Rev. Ben*



# illuminating Life

Rooted in God's Love

## New 50 Year Member Plaque

One of the milestones we look forward to celebrating at our Annual Meeting each year are those who have held 50+ years of continuous membership in the church. Historically, we'd also produced plaques recognizing all of those in our history who had reached the milestone, but our last plaque ended with those who joined the church in 1953.



Thanks to the incredible efforts of Dorothy Elder and Colette Pitcher, we now have a plaque recognizing those who joined the church between 1954 and 1975! Dorothy painstakingly combed through old annual reports to ensure that all who have been members for 50 or more years were included. Colette created the beautiful tributes to honor the saints of our congregation. Be sure to stop by our history wall and check it out!

## Would You Prefer Worshipping Online with a Printed Bulletin?

If you watch online and would like to worship with a physical bulletin in hand, please let us know! We are happy to send one to you in the mail each week!

## Way to Go Tammi!

Tammi had her Ecclesiastical Council last month and was unanimously approved for ordination pending a call. Please join us congratulating Tammi on this major accomplishment!



## Church Library Book Review

*Stopping* by Dr. David Kundtz

The overall theme of this book is "How to be still when you have to keep going." Dr. Kundtz shows the reader how to find the serenity and stillness by offering us tools to help us cope with our busy lives. It uses many contemplative and mystical traditions alongside insight and awareness of contemporary psychology to encourage us to remember what is important.

You can find this book in the church adult library. Come browse all book offerings are on our shelves.

## Lost & Found

Our lost and found is getting full! If any of these items look familiar, please pick them up from the lost and found by February 22, after which all remaining items will be donated. The lost and found bins can be found at the center entrance to the sanctuary on the bottom shelf of the welcome center.



## In Loving Memory

Please hold the families of the following people in your prayers as they grieve the loss of their loved ones:

### Betty Drew

March 12, 1931 - December 10, 2025  
Services will be held Saturday, February 21 at 10:30 a.m. in the sanctuary.

### Betty Ottesen

July 17, 1931 - December 18, 2025  
Services will be announced at a later date.  
You can find her obituary [here](#).

### Patsy Zick

February 24, 1932 - January 5, 2026  
Services will be held Sunday, February 22 at 3pm.  
A livestream will be available [here](#).

### Kathryn "Sally" Meyer

July 25, 1937 - January 5, 2026  
Private family services will be held.  
You can find her obituary [here](#).

### Rosemary Bond

April 12, 1946 - January 21, 2026  
Services were held January 29, 2026.  
View the recording [here](#).

## Financial Update

What do numbers on a page mean? Every month the Trustees study the numbers on the financial statements and analyze how the church's financial performance compares to the planned budget. We celebrate when the comparison is positive. However, analysis beyond the numbers is also important. Are the program outcomes that are supported by those numbers meeting expectations? Not only are we concerned about meeting expectations, but we ask ourselves every year if they are the right programs: Are we doing the right things to meet our mission in Greeley and beyond?

As of November 30, five months into the fiscal year, the numbers on the page indicate that the current financial position is positive compared to budget. Income is slightly above projections and expenses are slightly below budget. Those numbers would look more positive if the budget did not include a \$100,000 deficit. That means, even if our projections are accurate, the church will have a significant deficit at the end of the fiscal year on June 30, 2026. Fortunately, as of now, the earnings from investments will help offset that deficit.

The congregation is invited to attend our next Dollars and Donuts information session on February 22, at 9:15 a.m. or 11:30 a.m. in Chadwick Hall. At that time we will share the six month financial report including a summary of the sources of revenue and expenses. Come and ask your curiosity questions. The Trustees are planning for the stewardship campaign which begins with the evaluation of program outcomes and discussion of which programs remain most relevant. Those present at the February information session will have a chance to participate in that discussion. The Trustees will welcome your comments.

**Lola Fehr**

Church Treasurer

# Illuminating Love

## Nourished on Our Spiritual Journeys

### February 12th & 28th: Weld Food Bank!

Join us on February 12th from 5 to 7 p.m. and on Saturday February 28th from 8:30 to 10:30 a.m. The 28th is the first time we will be volunteering as a group on a Saturday and we hope choir members and youth who have not been able to attend on Thursdays will take this opportunity to share in this ministry. It is especially important that those who sign up for the Saturday volunteer session find another person to fill their spot if for some reason they are unable to attend on the 28th. There is a huge volume of food insecure families who pick up food on Saturdays and we don't want to leave the other volunteers shorthanded. Registration is required. Please sign up at [gqr.sh/5a3a](http://gqr.sh/5a3a).

### February 13th & 14th: Virtual Dementia Tour

In collaboration with Centennial Area Health Education Center, UHealth Aspen Club, and Greeley Interfaith association, we will be hosting a Virtual Dementia Tour on February 13 and 14. Virtual Dementia Tour is an evidence-based immersive experience that quickly builds empathy and understanding of what it may feel like to be living with dementia. We invite you to take part in a guided sensory experience followed by expert led debriefing and discussion. You'll also gain insights on successful care approaches and connection to local resources. Sessions will be held Friday, February 13 from 10 a.m. to noon or 2 to 4 p.m. and Saturday, February 14 from 10 a.m. to noon at the church. This is a free community event and registration is required. Find the [registration link here](#) (be sure to type "dementia" into the search box). Questions? Please reach out to Wendy Abbott ([wendy@cahec.org](mailto:wendy@cahec.org)) or Lynda McCullough ([lynda.mccullough@uhealth.org](mailto:lynda.mccullough@uhealth.org)).

### February 18: Ash Wednesday

Join us for a potluck pancake dinner on Ash Wednesday (February 18) from 5:15-6pm in Chadwick Hall! The church will provide pancakes, butter, syrup, and drinks and we invite you to potluck other breakfast-ish items (fruit, casseroles, yogurt, etc).

Ash Wednesday worship is an interactive, all-ages worship service and will begin at 6pm. Ash Wednesday leads us into the season of Lent, a season that helps us to prepare for the mystery of Easter through fasting, prayer and repentance.

### February 21: De-Stress Your Stress

In this workshop on Saturday, February 21 from 9 to 11:30 a.m., we'll dive into the mindfulness basics of well-being from a Christian perspective. Contemplative Christianity has always helped us reconnect with the source of all being, leading to inner peace and spiritual strength. We'll learn how the basics of reconnecting to the Sacred can help us let go of expectations and release anxious thoughts. By practicing non-attachment, accepting things as they are, having clear intentions, and being compassionate towards ourselves and others, we can create inner calm and boost our spiritual vitality. Register now at [livingwatersoulcare.net/public-events](http://livingwatersoulcare.net/public-events). Cost: \$25 - \$75 (sliding scale). Contact Sandy ([svarley@comcast.net](mailto:svarley@comcast.net)) with any questions.

### February 25th: "One Breath at a Time" Centering Circle

Overwhelmed by the chaos and uncertainty around us? Join us for a 40-day journey into Christian centering meditation practices on Wednesdays from 6 to 7:15 p.m. beginning February 25. Guided by Dana Trent's book *One Breath at a Time: A Skeptic's Guide to Christian Meditation*, each meeting will be focused on journeying together. Register now at [livingwatersoulcare.net/public-events](http://livingwatersoulcare.net/public-events). Contact Sandy ([svarley@comcast.net](mailto:svarley@comcast.net)) with any questions.



A snapshot of worship during last month's Youth Retreat

# Illuminated by God

Growing as an Inclusive Presence in Northern Colorado & Beyond

## Captional Won an Award!



Earlier this month, Captional, the tool we use for real-time closed captioning and translation that was built by FCC member Phil VanDrunen, was awarded first place at the Amazon Web Services (AWS) AI Pitch Competition, receiving \$50,000 in AWS Partner professional services funding! Captional was recognized for its practical and human-centered approach to accessibility, bringing real-time captions and multilingual translation directly to attendees' personal devices during live events. Help us congratulate Phil on this huge milestone for Captional - and if you haven't tried it yet, please grab a tablet or scan the QR code and follow along on a Sunday to check it out!

## Kristi Helzer Awarded as One of UNC's 2026 Honored Alumni Honorees



Kristi Helzer, '77, is a community builder and entrepreneur whose work is rooted in connection, positivity and service. After earning her bachelor's degree in Mass Media from UNC, her career included supporting organizations such as United Way of Weld County, Greeley-Evans School District 6, Greeley Philharmonic Orchestra and West Greeley Conservation District, as well as founding her own marketing company Kristi's Kreations. In 2009, Kristi launched Northern Colorado Women in Business, a powerful network that supports women entrepreneurs through meaningful relationships, collaboration and opportunities for professional growth. Join us in congratulating Kristi as UNC recognizes her incredible work in our community!

## Building our Faith Muscles

By: Tammi VanDrunen

For the past few years, I've been taking a circuit training class. It's a return to the workouts I did before I had children. If we are doing bicep work that day, there is always something that also works our triceps, which are smaller muscles on the back of our arms. Why? Back in the day, my trainer said that muscles on both sides have to work in order for the whole body part to work. I can't just have strong biceps; I also have to have strong triceps, or my upper arms will fail. The same for abs and back: both need to be strong in order to have a strong core that will support the body. I recently used this analogy to talk about spiritual practices with one of my kids. One of my children has a strong sense of justice and sees *all the things* wrong in the world. Not just the big things, but the little things at school and home. When one thing gets resolved, they are on to the next "wrong" to fix. (I apologized, as this is also how I tend to be: fix all the things!!) This *justice muscle* is really strong for them.

What happens when the justice muscle is really strong, but the other muscles that need to surround it are missing? We fail to have a healthy spiritual life. Wanting the world to be good and right is important, but if we can only see what needs to be fixed, we end up cynical and bitter. I suggested that the "tricep" muscles to their "bicep" justice muscles were *grace* and *gratitude*. Grace allows us to let change happen at the pace of humans, with room to make mistakes and learn and grow from them. Gratitude allows us to see what is already good in the world and celebrate it. Together, these muscles balance the justice muscles. They allow us to move forward with courage and resolve.

We've also talked about this with *love of others* and *love of self* (you'll burn out if you always care for others but never care for yourself). Other pairings could be *courage* and *patience*, *work* and *rest*, *service* and *play*: muscles that work in tandem to bring us healthy and whole spiritual lives. I wonder: what other pairings can you think of? Are any of these ones you feel invited to work on?

## Tammi & the UCC's Love of Children Cohort

In 2025, I had the honor of being a part of the UCC's inaugural "Love of Children" cohort, a group of lay leaders and ministers who wanted to learn how to best serve and love the children in our congregations. This cohort was (and is!) a place of great support and community for me.

As we ended, the Love of Children leadership team contacted me and asked me to be the peer leader for the incoming 2026 cohort. Of course, I joyfully accepted. This all-new cohort of leaders met in January at the UCC's National headquarters in Cleveland, Ohio. I will lead their monthly online gatherings this year while continuing to learn from another talented group of children's ministry practitioners. I'm honored to be invited into this role!



## Brooklyn & the RMC's Youth Leadership Cohort

This year, I have been leading a Youth Leadership Cohort for the Rocky Mountain Conference. Last summer, students were nominated by their pastors to participate in this leadership program. In the fall, I got to meet with each of them and hear about how they each want to serve their local church. This past month, I spent a weekend with them at La Foret, where we spent the whole time brainstorming project ideas, creating a project timeline, and writing out pitches to bring back to their church leadership. They came up with an incredible range of projects – clothing drives, choral workshops, community events, and more!

The students will be working throughout this spring semester on completing their projects, and I will be checking in with them once a month for support and encouragement. In June, I will be taking this group to the Rocky Mountain Conference Annual Celebration, where they will present their projects to the Conference and lead the closing worship service for the whole RMC!

## Rosebud Trip

This summer, we are going back to the Rosebud Reservation, and adults are invited, too! Youth will be going down for the whole week to work with our partners on the reservation, led by Brooklyn, Mike, and Hutton with direction from Rev. Mother Lauren. Adults are coming down for an extended weekend led by Rev. Tamara and Laura. Find more details and get registered today at [firstconggreeley.org/rosebud](https://firstconggreeley.org/rosebud).

Youth: June 2-8

- Early bird pricing: \$325. Ends March 31.
- Pricing after April 1: \$400.

Adults: June 5-8

- Early bird pricing: \$200. Ends March 31.
- Pricing after April 1: \$250

Cost covers lodging, meals, and cultural experiences. Lock in your early bird price & your registration with a \$50 deposit by March 31st! Scholarships are available. Contact Rev. Tamara, Laura, or Brooklyn with any questions.