Spring seems to have finally arrived, the dogwood tree in our backyard has sprung into full blossom, and so have the peach and the crabapple tree on the north side of our house. A robin has built a nest and is brooding over four sky-blue eggs in the basket Abby tied to the angle in the downspout on our front porch.

A pair of mourning doves are raising two chicks in the crotch of the locust tree outside our third story window.

The community garden at our church has been largely planted and the old volleyball court, thanks to Roy Pershall and his red and grey Ford 8N tractor, has been transformed into a field where our community gardeners will be planting more vegetables soon. If you would like to help with weeding and watering or with harvest and transport of vegetables to I-Care, please contact Shaun Kelly at 785-379-1898.

Sunday before last, at this writing, we consecrated the new kitchen and completely renovated fellowship hall to the future mission opportunities they will make possible. In celebration, Terry and Paula Harbert invited members of the church to a wonderful meal, prepared and served by Brian Laird and a number of fellow members. Thank you to all of you for a spectacular meal and festive event.

We unveiled the beautiful new plaques, thanking all those who have made this project possible. I will be calling family members of loved ones in whose name memorial gifts have been given to the church, in hopes that we can use some of these gifts to help defray outstanding costs and complete some of the remaining details. The names of those in whose honor gifts were given will be added to the memorial plaque at a later date. Still others have sent in contributions and their names will be added then, as well. There is still time to contribute to this project.
We unveiled a special plaque, honoring Laura Carr, whose husband, Neil, daughter Meredith, and sons Phillip and Alex each gave $10,000.00 without which the renovation of Keys Hall could not have been undertaken. The plaque honors Laura for the founding and guiding leadership role she played in establishing the Parish Life Ministry’s Caring Chefs program. Laura’s family, as well as her two sisters, were all present at the unveiling, and it was a joy to remember and honor their wife, mother, and sister at the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Finally, our Moderator, Larry Parks, honored Nikki Mathes for her outstanding coordination of the whole project and for her constant updates in The Echo, letting us all know where the project stood from beginning to end. She took the plans and input of the members of the kitchen committee, as well as the unexpected hurdles one necessarily encounters when engaging in the upgrade of an aging facility, and guided everything toward a beautiful outcome. Minor issues still need to be resolved, and we are grateful Nikki will be attending to those. Thank you, Nikki, for your outstanding work!

Quite literally, however, without the contributions of saints past and present, this project could never have been realized. It is the result of everyone’s generosity, patience, work, and good will that we can truly celebrate the completion of the kitchen and fellowship hall renovation as an achievement of the whole congregation. Many, many thanks to everyone!

It’s been a beautiful and exciting spring both outside and inside the church. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. - Blessings, Pastor Tobias

TARC

TARC is Shawnee County’s most experienced provider of support for children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Through your donations to April’s special offering, $355 will be sent to TARC. MANY THANKS!

This month’s special offering is for Strengthen the Church. Please give generously.

Moments for Mission

It’s time for #2 of 5! Have you ever wondered why the UCC designates certain days for our collection of our 5 Giving Opportunities?

One of the taglines that we have used and still do is “That We May All Be One”. The UCC is a small family, and we don’t get to see most of that family very often, if ever. When we designate a day to give to a special offering, it is a way to participate together while in our own churches.

This May 20th has been designated the Sunday when we offer our gifts to Strengthen the Church. This offering is to help provide the expansion of ministry and growth of UCC local congregations. This offering supports new ministries and practices that help us fulfill our commitment to working for a Just World. May 20th is also Pentecost Sunday. This is another reason that we chose to give to Strengthen the Church. Pentecost commemorates the Holy Spirit descending on the Apostles and other followers of Jesus. This is considered to be the birthday of the Christian Church in some traditions. It was also a reminder that although Jesus rose from the dead and has joined his father in Heaven, God has not deserted us, but sent the Holy Spirit as a presence and comfort in our lives.

Please prayerfully consider the blessings you receive from the church and give generously to Strengthen the Church on May 20th. Let’s all sow “Seeds of Growth” in the congregations of the UCC! — Anne Dwyer
“Mother, Daughter, Sister, Friend”
Potluck Supper
Wednesday, May 9th At 5:30 p.m.

Ham, Dessert & Beverage will be provided.

Please bring a “Side Dish” to share.

There will be...
Entertainment, Prizes & A Drawing for a $50 Gift Certificate

**We also need men to volunteer to serve and clean-up.**

No cooking will be involved! Sign-up in the Narthex please.

For more information, please contact Sharon Shivers

HEIDI HAWKINSON-PENNY
Pastoral Assistant

From the PA’s Corner...

The month of May has always been one of my favorite months of the year. We are blessed with many flowers, generally sunshiny days, and also the end of school. As a teacher and as a student I always enjoyed seeing the daisies bloom because I knew that school was almost out and over with. However, as an undergraduate student in college I had the opposite reaction. The wild daisies blooming always made me a bit sad, because that meant the school year was over. It’s interesting how the same events can cause us to have different reactions and feelings depending on the circumstances and where we are in our lives.

My Seminary class, US Theology and Social Justice, ends this month and I will take the summer off from my Seminary studies, however, I am looking into the possibility of taking some classes locally. I have enrolled in three classes for the Fall semester. I am really looking forward to these classes, especially “Introduction to the Hebrew Bible.” Two of my classes will be online and the other will require me to travel down to Tulsa in August for an intensive course of study that will last three days.

“Serving God by Serving Others” All are welcome on Wednesday evenings! Supper starts at 5:30 p.m. with any program starting at 6:30. If you are interested in cooking for WW, let me know. We have a number of spots available in May, and you can sign up for June as well. I will also have sign-up sheets in the Narthex on Sunday mornings. We are hoping that after supper, like last summer, Welcome Wednesday volunteers will be able to help the garden group with planting, weeding, and eventually harvesting. I know there are some in my family that are looking forward to helping in the garden on Wednesday evenings! In April, we hosted herbalist Joanne Bauman who gave a very successful presentation on “Edible and Medicinal Herbs.” Joanne fielded many questions by those in attendance, and with our garden projects and gardeners here at church, there is a great deal that many can learn from her.

Sunday morning, June 3, from 8:30-10:15 am, our youth are putting on a pancake feed downstairs in Keys Hall. They are using money raised from their calendar sales earlier this year to finance the pancake feed and plan on using the money they raise from pancake sales to help support youth scholarships for summer church camp. Please plan on coming and supporting our youth. It will be a free will offering and you get to enjoy a delicious pancake breakfast before church! Who doesn’t like pancakes before preaching?

May is a busy month with Pentecost, graduations, end of the school year, the beginning of summer vacation for our youth, yard work, and baseball (for some of us lucky ones). I hope that in the business and the events of your life this May, that you are able to pause and look at the daisies; and wherever you are on your journey you are able to enjoy and appreciate their beauty.

Blessings, Heidi

UPCOMING DATES
If you placed an order last month for cinnamon rolls and tamales from Doorstep, they will be ready for pickup at Church on Sunday morning, May 6.

Our Annual Geranium Sale is Saturday, May 12 from 9 am-1 pm. Available colors are red and salmon, and they are $20 each.

Items for the June ECHO are due Wednesday, May 30. ECHO mailing will be Thursday, June 7.

Note: Due to vacations and the Independence Day Holiday, we will not publish a July Echo. Please make sure to submit articles and news items for the June Echo that need to be published before August.
Heart Work—Community Helping Community

A new group, called Heart Work, has formed at First Congregational Church. Heart Work is open to all members of the congregation, as well as to anyone within the community who is interested in hands-on civic engagement. The purpose of this group is to help those at poverty and/or working class levels, for example by transforming their house into a home. But it's about more than just hanging a gutter or cleaning a yard; we hope to engage and integrate people from different backgrounds in making our community a better place to live. We want to help people who often feel helpless or ignored gain a greater sense of control over their lives. We want to help foster a sense of community by our all working together.

It is a well-known fact that when people from different segments of the community work together, they come to realize how much they have in common. But Heart Work hopes to do more. Most service programs do not examine causes of social problems or seek to identify possible solutions. They therefore tend to ignore possible policy implications.

Professor Joseph E. Kahn, a professor of Education at Mills College did a survey on service programs in 2010. He identified three types of citizens: personally responsible – those who help people they know and do something, like donate blood; participatory citizens – those who are active in community projects, like cleaning up a local park or volunteering at a food bank; and justice oriented citizens – those who examine causes and possible solutions for the underlying causes of social problems. Dr. Kahn found that all three kinds of citizenship are important and that each type addresses a different level of need. But he also found that most programs do not address all three levels and generally pay the least attention to the last.

Volunteerism is a time-honored tradition in the history of our nation. From barn raising to helping victims of natural and unnatural disasters and feeding and clothing those who are in need, volunteering traditions are fundamental to what makes us human and must be cultivated. An idealist without a healthy dose of reality tends to become a naive romantic; a realist without ideals tends to become a cynic.

In his book, Bowling Alone, Robert Putnam writes that churches provide an important incubator for civic skills, civic norms, community interests, and civic recruitment. Religiously active men and women learn to give speeches, run meetings, manage disagreements, and bear administrative responsibility. They also befriend others who in turn are likely to join them in communal activities. For these reasons, churchgoers are substantially more likely to be involved in secular community organizations, as well, and to vote and participate in shaping public policy.

The goal of Heart Work is to get volunteers into the community, helping at whatever level is comfortable to them, and working to lift up our neighbors. There is a home in East Topeka that Christmas in Action has offered to us. Steps need to be built, the yard needs a major clean out, plus some additional tasks await our attention as well.

If you are interested in volunteering your time and abilities for this project, please let me know. Please let me know if you have questions or would like to sign up. I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you, Shaun Kelly
Nancy’s Book Group will meet on Monday, May 7 in the church library to discuss News of the World by Paulette Jiles, a post civil war story of an itinerant news reader agreeing to return a young captive of the Kiowa back to relatives. Future readings include:

- Idaho by Emily Ruskovich (June)
- Making friends Among the Taliban by Jonathan P Larson (July)
- Someone by Alice McDermott (August)
- September is undecided
- Manhattan Beach by Jennifer Eagan (October)

Guests, visitors and new members are always welcome. For more information, please contact Jean Dimmitt or Ann Nelson.

Drivers Needed! We would like several individuals to take turns driving the bus on Sunday mornings to help others come to church who cannot drive, then take them home afterwards. Please contact Larry Parks at 785-249-1046 if you would like to be part of this dedicated group. Thank you!

DOORSTEP NEWS FOR MAY

Topeka Gives 2018 is Tuesday, June 5th

at Fairlawn Plaza Mall from 7:00 am-6:00 pm.

Doorstep will be there again this year with a table. Please come by and see us and make a donation for Doorstep! Donations must be made in person.

You can donate $25 - $1,000 to Doorstep on this day at Fairlawn Plaza, and the Topeka Community Foundation will match it proportionately. This year there is $65,600 available for the match. Last year Doorstep made $17,404 from our donors to help with agency needs!

Donations were down in 2017, and we have had to make some hard decisions this year. Please plan to attend Topeka Gives on June 5th and Give to Doorstep! Save the date and come out on June 5th!

Topeka Gives – a fun day of giving is sponsored by the Topeka Community Foundation.

ONLINE GIVING AND DIRECTORY AVAILABLE THROUGH ACCESS ACS

Want the convenience of online giving to First Congregational Church? It’s now here, and you can make a single gift, schedule recurring donations, or view your giving history online. It’s quick, easy, and secure. You can give by using your checking account, debit or credit card (that you pay off each month!), whichever is most convenient. This safe and flexible option is one of the easiest ways to give to First Congregational Church.

To make a contribution, simply go to the Church’s website, www.embracethequestions.com, and click on ‘Give’. You will be directed to a page where you can choose to make a one-time donation as a guest, or members can login or create an account to make a gift, set up recurring donations, or view your giving history. You’ll have an option to give to the Budget Fund or to a Special Fund. If you want to give to a Special Fund, please include a note in the “optional description” box so that we know how to apply your gift.

You may always make a gift as a guest, but if you want to view your giving history or a Church directory, you must register. Further, your email address MUST be on file with the Church in order to register. (Note: If we don’t already have your email address, please contact the Church office so it can be added to your profile.) Be aware that recent gifting activity will not be immediately viewable in your giving history and that it may take a few days until our Financial Recorder posts new gifts to your record.

Registered users (members only) may also update their individual profiles and view a church member directory. If you want to update your profile, login to Access ACS, go to Home/My Profile and submit your changes. Changes will be reviewed by the Church office. If you want to limit what directory information about you can be viewed by Church members, login to Access ACS, go to Home/Account/Personal Preferences, and uncheck the appropriate boxes (e.g. address, phone number or email address).

Want to go mobile instead? Take a look at the free Church Life app for iPhone or Android devices. With Church Life, you’ll have a mobile directory and an option to give on the go.

Questions about Access ACS? Call the Church office or contact Dwight Parman.
**Welcome**

On Sunday, April 22, we welcomed the following new members into our church—Bill Kraus and Margie Pirtle.

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**Conversations on Race in Topeka**—Join us on May 12 at 8:30 am for the 2nd installment of our four-part community conversation on race. At this session, we will explore the intersection of race and place with an eye toward getting to a shared understanding how in policy and practice we segregate ourselves.

A growing number of Topeka residents understand that racism is still a big problem in our country and city. Injustices exist in employment, housing, education, the criminal justice system, the voting process, and more. The effects of past discrimination and segregation have not disappeared. There are large racial disparities in wealth, neighborhood safety, and life expectancy—a direct result of slavery and Jim Crow.

Join us for the conversation on Saturday, May 12, 2018, 8:30 am, First Methodist Church, Topeka (600 SW Topeka Blvd, Topeka). Breakfast provided. Please arrive at 8:30 am for breakfast. The program begins at 9:00 am.

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**Kansas Interfaith Action Annual Event**

Wednesday, May 9
6:30 pm
First Christian Church
Topeka

Featuring Keynote Speaker Rev. Kristin Stoneking

For tickets, go to their website at www.kansasinterfaithaction.org/calendar.

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**Peace Camp 2018** will be held July 23-27 from 8 am-1 pm here at First Congregational Church. In order to attend, you can download an application from the Topeka Center for Peace and Justice’s website: topekacpj.org.

Volunteers are needed to help with Peace Camp. First Congregational is hosting this event. Please call Jim McCullough at the Topeka Center for Peace and Justice at 232-4388 if you can help with teaching, recreation, music, or meal preparation.

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We're in the process of cleaning up our database. If you know of a member who has not been receiving the Echo or other mailings, please call the church office to update their address. Also, let the office know if telephone numbers, email addresses, or any other information has changed.

If you know of a birthday that has been omitted or is not correct on this list, please call the church office to let us know.

Thank you!

FCC Office: 233-1786

Facebook.com/EmbraceTheQuestions
“In the spring I have counted one hundred and thirty-six kinds of weather inside of four and twenty hours.” ~ Mark Twain. Spring is easing its way in, and the community garden needs volunteers. If you are interested, please contact Betsy Rohleder.

Dear FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,

The Kroger Family of Stores is committed to bringing hope and help to local communities. We do this through a variety of activities, including charitable giving, sponsorships, and the unique Community Rewards Program of Dillons. We are also committed to carefully protecting our customers’ personal information. In order to meet their expectation of privacy, we have adopted a simple policy to never share a customer’s personal information. Our privacy policy applies to Community Rewards participation as well. As your neighborhood food retailer, we deeply value our ability to support local organizations like yours.

Your supporters (44 households) who shopped at Dillons between 12-31-2017 and 3-30-2018 have contributed to your $297.98 total donation. Your organization will be receiving a Kroger check in this amount within 30 days from 4-24-2018. Thank you for your continued support of your local Dillons store.

Thank you,
Community Rewards Staff

“Thank You” to all who have registered their Dillon’s Plus Cards with the Community Rewards Program. If you haven’t signed up, please go to Dillons.com/communityrewards to sign up on your Plus Card.
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