

Search and Call Tools for Congregations

Advancing the Spirit's guidance into God's future

INTRODUCING THE NEW LOCAL CHURCH PROFILE

Who
are
we

Who
is our
neighbor

Who is
God
calling us
to become

?

The new Local Church Profile is not just for Congregations in search of a pastor. *All* Congregations are encouraged to engage in its process of discovery every 3-5 years. The UCC Local Church Profile reflects valuable data, assesses ministry, clarifies change, and helps advance the calling of the Congregation. Not just to be completed by a search committee - the more participation, the better!

MINISTERIAL EXCELLENCE,
SUPPORT & AUTHORIZATION

**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST LOCAL CHURCH PROFILE

First Congregational United Church of Christ
Corvallis, Oregon

Minister of Congregational Care and Leadership

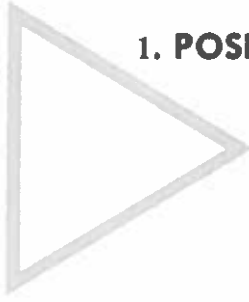
Central Pacific Conference
Association 96

[December 13, 2024]

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*"God is able to provide you with every blessing, so that
having all sufficiency in all things at all times,
you may abound in every good work."
(2 Corinthians 9:8)*



1. POSITION POSTING

- a. LISTING INFORMATION
- b. SCOPE OF WORK
- c. COMPENSATION & SUPPORT
- d. WHO IS GOD CALLING TO MINISTER WITH US?

1 a. LISTING INFORMATION

Church name: First Congregational United Church of Christ
Street address: 4515 SW West Hills Road, Corvallis, Oregon 97333
Supplemental web links: www.corvallisucc.org

Additional ecumenical affiliations: N/A

Conference: Central Pacific Conference

Association: 96

UCC Conference or Association Staff Contact Person: Rev. Tyler Connolley, Conference Minister

Contact info: [REDACTED], tyler@cpcucc.org

Summary Ministry Description:

We are calling a Minister of Congregational Care and Leadership to nurture an environment of robust communal care by building and sustaining intergenerational networks of care and supportive structures - both practical and spiritual. This position will also direct and coordinate the work of our ministry circles, providing support and oversight to circle leadership, ensuring that their work aligns with congregational values and current community touchstones, and that environments of inclusivity, civility, and healthy dialogue are being fostered. This position will work in collaboration with our Senior Minister, and have responsibilities touching into public leadership, spiritual formation, pastoral/ community care, and administration.



What we value about living in our area:

Corvallis is a vibrant community with a highly engaged citizenry. We are situated within driving distance of the coast, mountains, high desert, and two larger cities (Portland

and Eugene). We love the geography and natural beauty of the area as well as our proximity to an abundance of hiking trails. Spending time outdoors is a big part of the culture here, as is a sustainability ethos (we are a bikeable city with a “free” bus system). We have strong public schools for young families, close-knit communities, and an almost year-round farmers market. We love the benefits and diversity that come with living in a university town.

Current size of membership: 217

Languages used in ministry (other than English): N/A

Position Title: Minister of Congregational Care and Leadership

Position Duration: Settled

Compensation Level: Full Time

Does the total support package meet conference compensation guidelines? Yes

1b. SCOPE OF WORK

The Minister of Congregational Care and Leadership will nurture an environment of robust communal care by building and sustaining networks of care – both practical and spiritual. This position also directs and coordinates the work of ministry circles, providing support and

oversight to circle leadership, ensuring that the work of ministry circles aligns with Congregational values and touchstones and that environments of inclusivity, civility, and healthy dialogue are being fostered.

Core Competencies:

Relational, collaborative, authentic. These are all vital pieces of the Congregation's new touchstones; for a fuller discussion of these, see section "d," below.

1c. COMPENSATION AND SUPPORT

Salary Basis: Total compensation is negotiable and will be commensurate with the years of experience, skills, and abilities of the selected candidate (up to \$90,000).

Benefits: Salary plus optional benefits

Comment on the residential/commuting expectations for your next minister:

We expect the selected candidate to live within a reasonable proximity of our church and the Corvallis community.

Describe peer and professional supports available for ministers in your association/conference:

Clergy participate in a number of supportive ministries; some examples are the monthly Central Pacific Conference's Clergy Zoom, the annual CPC clergy retreat and communities of practice as well as local ecumenical and interfaith clergy groups.

1d. WHO IS GOD CALLING TO MINISTER WITH US?

Describe the ministry goals you envision your next minister co-collaborating with the Congregation to achieve:

Over the last 18 months, the Congregation has been on a discernment process with a goal of creating purposeful community/organizational culture and moving in two directions: (1) how we are in community with one another (worship, praxis, nature of relationships), and (2) how we locate ourselves and move in the world because of that community.

We looked for meaningful ways to navigate that twofold movement in the following areas:

- Relationships
- Local/global change
- Organizational health

And arrived at these touchstones, which each touch on those three areas:

- Presence: We seek to show up with as much authenticity as possible in a posture of curiosity and deep listening
- Commitment to housing justice and the interlocking issues that keep the poor from equitable access to shelter through the theological framework of radical belonging, hospitality, and resistance.
- Valuing critical connections over critical mass (“In this exquisitely connected world, it’s never a question of “critical mass.” It’s always about critical connections.” -Grace Lee Boggs.

Our Minister of Congregational Care and Leadership will be asked to help us hold these touchstones and engage ministry from these spaces:

Public leadership plays a key role in creating transformational, relational, and communal gospel living.

Spiritual formation is foundational for faith development and understanding how our personal lives/stories interact with God’s story. Spiritual formation is rooted in relational living with God, the church, and the broader community. It fosters personal connections to biblical teachings, spiritual disciplines, and spiritual activism.

Pastoral and communal care often looks like paying close attention and practicing deep listening. Practicing taking good care is a foundational element for building the Beloved Community. It focuses on developing connections, creating communities of practice, celebrating life, being present in suffering, and re-memorizing each other’s *Belovedness*. Through exquisite attention we find deeper connections to God, our faith, our community, and ourselves.

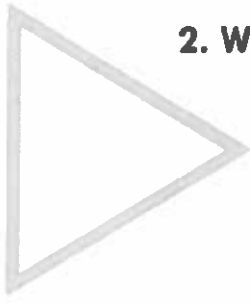
Describe how your vision of the minister you are now seeking will assist the Congregation in making an impact beyond its walls:

Ministering outside of our walls (to the broader community – locally, nationally, and globally) is our primary understanding of the Gospel. Our new minister will collaborate with us in this ministry by becoming familiar with our local landscape – the organizations we partner with, our ministry circles – and by caring deeply for our neighbors.

Specify language requirements or culturally-specific capacities preferred in a next ministerial leader, and why those matter to the Congregation's sense of calling: English is the primary language.

Based on what you have learned about who your church is, who your church's neighbor is, and who God is calling the church to become, describe four areas of excellence from The Marks of Faithful & Effective Authorized Ministry that your next minister will display to further equip the Congregation's ministry in these areas.

- Building transformational leadership skills
- Working together for justice and mercy
- Strengthening inter- and intrapersonal assets
- Caring for all creation



2. WHO IS GOD CALLING US TO BECOME?

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." (Matthew 22:37 NRSV)

Who is God calling you to become as a Congregation?

We don't pretend to be able to predict where the Spirit will lead... and can't imagine pinning her down to a multiyear strategic plan. We believe one of our greatest assets is being nimble and willing to adapt with the changing needs of our Congregation and broader community.

God is calling us to remain faithful to the work of the Church: A Beloved Community of resistance where we co-create the world of what could and should be while being oriented toward mutuality and justice in the present. In every generation, the church must reform itself around speaking truth to power, liberating the oppressed, caring for the poor, and comforting the afflicted.

We believe that each person is unique and valuable: Humans were made to be in community and need to experience spaces where they have a strong sense of being valued and loved.

We believe that each person is on a spiritual journey, and that each of us is at a different stage of that journey.

We believe that the persistent search for God produces an authentic relationship with the Holy, engendering love, strengthening faith, dissolving guilt, and giving life purpose and direction.

We believe that the community of faith exists not primarily for its own sake, but to be located in service to others.

And we practice paying exquisite attention to one another and nurturing resilient inner lives because we know that our effectiveness – in creating justice, ending violence, feeding the hungry, loving the stranger – is entirely dependent on who we are to each other.

Describe how God is calling you to reach out to address the emerging challenges and opportunities of your community and Congregation.

- In 2019, our Congregation provided safe shelter to more than 30 individuals experiencing homelessness on the grounds of our property. Over a two-year period, we agitated and activated through local government to make managed camping legal and crafted a city and county ordinance that enabled other organizations to offer safe shelter, too. In 2022, we officially partnered with Unity Shelter (the local nonprofit organization that provides emergency and transitional housing in our community) to operate the program we created (SafePlace).

Today, more than 40 microshelters provide shelter to individuals and families throughout our community. We remain deeply committed to organizing around the crisis of housing and extreme poverty in our own neighborhood and beyond, and that includes continued agitation and activation with local government.

- In the past year, we have begun to experiment with purposefully populating our building with organizations that share our sense of mission and purpose in the world. This means our facility is busy seven days a week with everything from a youth basketball academy to a soup kitchen.



3. WHO ARE WE NOW?

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:39 NRSV)

- CONGREGATIONAL REFLECTIONS
- 11-YEAR REPORT
- CONGREGATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS
- PARTICIPATION AND STAFFING
- CHURCH FINANCES
- HISTORICAL INFORMATION

3a. CONGREGATIONAL REFLECTIONS

Describe your Congregation's life of faith:

We believe that all humanity is Beloved of God. No matter who, no matter what, no matter where we are on life's journey – notwithstanding race, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, class, or creed – we all belong to God and to one worldwide community of faith. All persons baptized – past, present, and future – are connected to each other and to God through the sacrament of baptism. We baptize during worship when the community is present because baptism includes the community's promise of "love, support and care" for the baptized—and we promise that we won't take it back – no matter where your journey leads you.

We believe that all people are invited to the Table for the sacrament of Communion. Just as many grains of wheat are gathered to make one loaf of bread and many grapes are gathered to make one cup of wine, we, the many people of God, are made one in the body of Christ, the church. The breaking of bread reminds us that it is in the breaking that we are made whole. The pouring of wine reminds us that our lives are best lived in the pouring out of love – in service to others. In receiving the sacrament, you are seen, blessed, and called beloved in a world where too often we are hard-pressed to take the time to see and bless one another, and too unfamiliar with the language of *Belovedness* to remember our identity.

We believe the Bible is a way for Christians to know and interpret the love of God and the call of Jesus in our lives. We are called to take the Bible seriously, but not literally, using it along with the tools of community, experience, scholarship, prayer, and the leading of the Holy Spirit to find the place where our gifts meet the needs of the world.

We believe the UCC is called to be a united and uniting church. "That they may all be one." (John 17:21) "In essentials – unity, in nonessentials – diversity, in all things – charity." These UCC mottos survive because they touch core values deep within us. The UCC has no rigid formulation of doctrine or attachment to creeds or structures. Its overarching creed is love. UCC pastors and teachers are known for their commitment to excellence in theological preparation, interpretation of the scripture, and justice advocacy. Even so, love and unity in the midst of our diversity are our greatest assets.

We believe that God calls us to be servants in the service of others and to be good stewards of the Earth's resources.

We believe that the UCC is called to be a prophetic church. As in the tradition of the prophets and apostles, God calls the church to speak truth to power, liberate the oppressed, care for the poor and comfort the afflicted.

We believe in the power of peace and work for nonviolent solutions to local, national, and international problems.

We are a people of possibility. In the UCC, members, Congregations and structures have the breathing room to explore and to hear...for after all, God is still speaking...

Describe several strengths or positive qualities of your Congregation:

We are a social justice-minded community, engaged and active in our local community beyond the church walls. We center tolerance and acceptance, joy, caring, outreach, and hopefulness. Our Congregation is intergenerational, with a committed and financially supportive membership with a depth of history (some members have been with the Congregation for more than 40 years) as well as a newer growing presence of young families.

Describe what worship is like when your Congregation gathers:



We worship with tradition and innovation, weaving our liturgies and stories together every Sunday morning. We tell stories from the Bible and our lives, knowing that every story is a holy one.

Creating a Sanctuary space to listen and slow us down allows us to see and hear in new ways – recognizing our own presence in the holiness of the sacred story and the spiritual journey. This practice changes the way we live. Sometimes, it even saves our lives.

We like to tell people “You can come as you are.” That means you can wear what you want, think what you want and be what you want. You will be welcomed here.

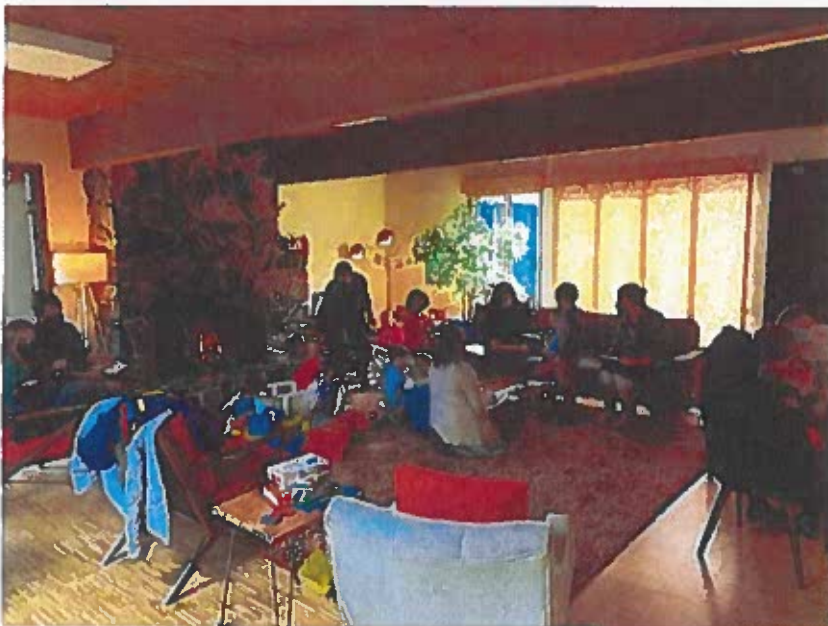
We're a little unorthodox at times and occasionally a little irreverent. We like to experiment as we look for new ways to explore the teachings of Jesus. We're also authentic. We care more about being honest than offering polished performances.

Our Sanctuary is a safe place to tell the truth, to see and be seen.

Describe the educational program/faith formation vision of your church:

At First Congregational, our aim is to create spaces of spiritual connection, to nurture spiritually engaged people who have the capacity and framework to explore the transcendent other and ask the important questions: what does it mean to be human and how should we live?

On Sunday mornings during our 10:30 a.m. worship service, you will find us worshipping all together – as a community. We value proximity during our time together...staying within sight and sound of the other.



Our church is a place of extravagant welcome, where you are invited to show up as you are: crying baby, squirmy toddler, grumpy preteen, exhausted parent, questioning senior.

The most critical value we can cultivate together on Sunday morning is presence. You belong here. You are seen, blessed, and beloved.

We care that our children experience this faith community as a place that reaffirms their identities, that practices love, that is part of their weekly rhythm, that creates space for their emerging, spiritual selves. And actually, that's what we hope for everyone – cradle to grave.

On Sunday mornings during worship, we invite you to think of our time together as a ministry of presence. Our most important work is to be present – to one another, and to the Holy.

***Attached, please read Pastor Jen's letter to the Congregation that further reflects our practice and commitment to spiritual formation.**

Describe how your Congregation is organized for ministry and mission:

We share the work of ministry and mission across staff and lay spaces. We currently have seven ministry circles that are lay-led. Throughout the year, we cultivate pop-up working groups as needed (Budget Team, Stewardship Team, etc.) Church Council is the leadership body of the congregation.

For example, how are decisions communicated in your church? How are teams or committees organized? Where does your church struggle for vision?

Our organizational structure has shifted from a strictly hierarchical system to a framework of leadership across the Congregation.

Church Council is the formal decision-making body of the Congregation and is connected to seven standing ministry circles and several ad hoc teams that form as needed.

When it comes to decision-making, how many hours are spent in meetings per month?

Our Executive Council Team typically meets for one hour each month, Church Council often meets for 2 to 2.5 hours once a month, and ministry circles meet at various times.

Staff meetings are weekly and average 30-60 minutes.

Think of a time when action had to be taken quickly, for example when a crisis or disaster occurred. How was that accomplished?

Staff and ministry circle members are empowered to make decisions and take action in moments of crisis. Our Senior Minister is head of staff, and we work more efficiently and effectively when our practices do not revolve around micromanagement.

Last winter, an ice storm damaged our building. Our Senior Minister was first on the scene and worked with our Administrator and Trustees ministry circle to begin the process of accessing damage and connecting with insurance. Follow-through details were managed by the Administrator and Trustee ministry circle members.

When the local soup kitchen in our community was suddenly evicted from the faith community that had hosted them for 30 years, our Senior Minister was able to make an executive decision to offer space in our church. This action prevented interruption to this very important organization's service in our community.

Can you provide the next minister with a copy of an organization structure, bylaws, and/or annual report to further explain the patterns of the church's activity and governance?

Yes, upon request.

3b. 11-YEAR REPORT

Attached.

3c. CONGREGATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

Describe those who participate in your church:

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
Number of active members:	217	
Number of active non-members:	148	
Total of church participants (sum of the numbers above):	365	

Percentage of total participants who have been in the church:

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
More than 10 years:	45%	✓
Less than 10, more than 5 years:	19%	✓
Less than 5 years:	36%	✓

Number of total participants by age:

0-11	12-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+	<i>Are these numbers an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
33	18	8	12	48	41	46	71	87	

Percentage of adults in various household types:

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
Single adults under 35:	5%	
Households with minors:	17%	
Single adults age 35-65:	7%	
Joint households with no minors:	60%	
Single adults over 65:	11%	

Education level of adult participants by percentage:

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
High school:	96%	
College:	54%	
Graduate School:	23.5%	is Corvallis average
Specialty Training:		
Other (please specify):		

Percentage of adults in various employment types:

		<i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>
Adults who are employed:	47%	✓
Adults who are retired:	50%	✓
Adults who are not fully employed:	3%	✓

Describe the range of occupations of working adults in the Congregation:

Many of our members are professionals or retired professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, professors, and other academics.

Describe the mix of ethnic heritages in your Congregation, and the overall racial make-up.

Majority white congregation.

Has your Congregation recently had a conversation about welcoming diversity, or do you plan to hold one on the near future (perhaps using, for example, the Welcoming Diversity Inventory)?

This congregation has a long history of being involved in anti-racist work both at the local, conference, and national level. Locally, we are part of the NAACP and SURJ. Our most recent congregational-wide engagement with supremacy occurred over the course of 2020 and into 2021, when we worked with a former member of our congregation (now a diversity and inclusion trainer), Nick Daily, examining supremacy in all its forms. This work happened in small groups involving staff and lay leadership, as well as among the entire congregation in a series of conversations while reading “My Grandmother’s Hands.” During this time, we also worked with a somatic teacher to embody Menakem’s work.

3d. PARTICIPATION AND STAFFING

Complete the following chart. Please leave blank any fields that are not applicable to your Congregation.

Ways of Gathering	Estimated number of people involved in attendance	Who plans each of the listed gatherings? <i>(list any and all worship planners, such as various lay leaders, pastors, musicians, other staff)</i>
Adult Groups or Classes	60= Bible Study	[REDACTED]
Baptisms <i>(number last year)</i>	2	
Children’s Groups or Classes	51	
Christmas Eve and Easter Worship	2 X 200	[REDACTED]
Church-wide Meals	50	
Choirs and Music Groups	45	[REDACTED]
Church-based Bible Study	60 =Adult Groups/Classes	[REDACTED]
Communion <i>(served how often?)</i>	100 1xmonth	[REDACTED]
Community Meals	0	
Confirmation <i>(number confirmed last year)</i>	0	

Title: Minister of Congregational Care and Leadership

Purpose: The Minister of Congregational Care and Leadership will nurture an environment of robust communal care by building and sustaining intergenerational networks of care and supportive structures - both practical and spiritual. This position also directs and coordinates the work of ministry circles, providing support and oversight to circle leadership, ensuring that the work of ministry circles aligns with congregational values and touchstones and that environments of inclusivity, civility, and healthy dialogue are being fostered.

Accountability: This position reports to the Senior Minister as Head of Staff

Qualifications:

1. Deep commitment to a progressive Christian faith
2. Enthusiastic team builder with the ability to teach and delegate
3. Administrative and organizational skills including strong written and oral communications
4. Approaches leadership from a place of vision, creativity, intentionality, authenticity, and spirituality
5. Divinity degree and ordination within the UCC
6. Previous pastoral experience preferred

Primary Responsibilities

Public Leadership plays a key role in creating transformational, relational, and communal gospel living. Often, this manifests in the worship space. This position's **responsibilities for worship and public leadership include:**

1. In collaboration with the Senior Minister and other staff, facilitates liturgical leadership for all services of worship. Preaches during Sunday worship service on average once/quarter.
2. For members, officiates or facilitates leadership at all related services including weddings, funerals and similar services as directed by the Senior Minister.
3. Works with a team of paid staff and volunteers to develop the online worship community.

Spiritual Formation is foundational for faith development and understanding how our personal lives/stories interact with God's story. Spiritual Formation is rooted in relational living with God, the church, and the broader community. It fosters personal connections to biblical teachings, spiritual disciplines, and spiritual activism. This position's **responsibilities for spiritual formation include:**

1. Facilitates some form of group spiritual formation (i.e. 9am hour on Sunday mornings, or another day/time offering).
2. Plans and leads special classes (i.e. Lectionary, confirmation, lenten groups, etc.)

Pastoral and Communal Care often looks like paying close attention and practicing deep listening. Practicing taking good care is a foundational element for building the Beloved Community. It focuses on developing connections, creating communities of practice, celebrating life, being present in suffering, and re-membering each other's Belovedness. Through exquisite attention we find deeper connections to God, our faith, our community, and ourselves. This position's responsibilities for **pastoral care and relational development** include:

1. Directs the training required for and participates in pastoral care, supported by the Parish Nurse and Senior Minister.
2. Provides oversight and develops leadership within the congregational care network
3. Oversees the work of Ministry Circles through the life cycle of each group
4. Facilitate the integration of Ministry circles ideas and objectives into the context of our congregation through worship, activism, and community building
5. Support Ministry circles by providing spiritual care and theological grounding for actions and study
6. Facilitate connections between ministry circles where appropriate
7. Facilitate the mobilization of new groups in the church community based on the expressed interest of congregational members and discernment of leadership (council and staff/clergy)
8. Support circles in clarifying, discerning and communicating their work alongside First Congregational's Touchstones to the broader congregation and community

Administration is one of the foundations for ministry. It helps to establish guidelines, policies and procedures that make wider ministry possible. It also equips and empowers lay leaders to service more fully within the community. This position's **administrative responsibilities** include:

1. Attends regular staff meetings
2. Supervise employed staff and volunteer leadership as directed by the Senior Minister
3. Facilitates staff evaluations as appropriate and directed by Senior Minister
4. Serves as an ex-officio, non-voting member of the Church Council and all Ministry Circles, Committees, and Working Groups. Attendance at Ministry Circle, Committee, and Working Group meetings is invitational, not mandatory.
5. Prepare and submit an annual report to the congregation
6. Oversees budget line items including purchasing, approving and reimbursing purchases as directed by the Senior Minister



First Congregational United Church of Christ
4515 SW West Hills Road • Corvallis, Oregon 97333
541-757-8122 • office@corvallisucc.org
www.corvallisucc.org
Reverend Jennifer L. Butler, Senior Minister



Friends,

Our current theology of Children's Religious Education at First Congo UCC has been growing, somewhat organically, over the last 5-ish years.

I've had the opportunity, over my 12 years in ministry here, to be involved in many different iterations of spiritual formation. And to hear stories about what it "used to be like."

What I've seen and heard and experienced tracks with what congregations around the country (of all denominations) report: whatever we've been doing with children and youth in most Christian congregations has not translated into a flourishing spiritual life or connection to a faith community.

Part of the reason the Christian project has failed our children in recent years involves the consumer mindset that arises from neoliberal values ... in other words, church has become a commodity to consume. Our children and youth programming has reflected those values, too: we try to entertain kids to keep them engaged, make church a social space they can have fun in, rely on volunteers to walk through milquetoast Sunday school curriculum, and cross our fingers that this will translate into some kind of spiritual life. And it doesn't work.

Even if we had the most exciting programming on the block, the most committed volunteers and the best donuts - we wouldn't get the results we hope for.

At First Congo, our aim is to create spaces of spiritual connection, to nurture spiritually engaged people who have the capacity and framework to explore the transcendent other and ask the important questions: *what does it mean to be human and how should we live?*

Can we get to these places through curriculum and youth groups and mission trips?
Maybe.

But the evidence doesn't really bear that out - especially when such large numbers of young people exit the church in their early adulthood, reject religion entirely, or struggle with isolation, anxiety, loneliness and shame in percentages even greater than children who grew up without a religious context.

This is why we are not providing childcare or entertaining our kids with Sunday school during worship. This is why we keep families and community within proximity to each other in the sanctuary. We're starting at the beginning....

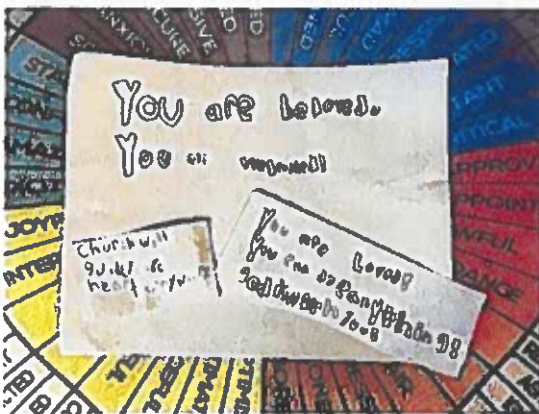
Our church is a place of extravagant welcome, where you are invited to show up as you are: crying baby, squirmy toddler, grumpy preteen, exhausted parent.

The most critical value we can cultivate together on Sunday morning is presence. You belong here. You are seen, blessed, and beloved.

And in this space, we develop common language and ritual together that can (must) be carried out of the sanctuary and woven through the tapestry of our ordinary lives. The church can be a container for gaining tools and language to explore the inner world, but home is the space of practice - parents and grandparents and chosen family members are the spiritual companions of our children's day-to-day lives.

As a pastor and a parent, here's what I believe is true: We can't outsource our children's spiritual lives to the church - and you don't have to be a spiritual expert to be spiritually engaged.

One Sunday morning, just a few weeks ago, a young congregant shared what she had been working on during worship:



There's no better proof than this for me... that the children are listening and absorbing exactly what we hope they will learn in this space. Can they recount the Creation story or recite the 23rd Psalm? Frankly, that's not important to me. If it is to you, I encourage you to create space at home to practice those spiritual disciplines.

What I care about is that our children experience this faith community as a place that reaffirms their identities, that practices love, that is part of their weekly rhythm, that creates space for their emerging, spiritual selves.

And, actually, that's what I hope for all of us.

Humans are hardwired for spiritual connection. But our culture doesn't do a good job of cultivating spaces or tools for experiencing growth in this area. Because of this lack of resourcing and support, most adults are underdeveloped in understanding our own capacity for spiritual life. Feeling inadequate as practitioners, we don't feel qualified to model spirituality for our children. We often assume that if our kids are interested in a life of faith, they will opt in on their own, when they're ready. But that is akin to letting our toddler decide if they are interested in napping on a particular day or choosing to exist on a steady diet of goldfish crackers and apple juice. We don't cross our fingers and *hope* our children will develop cognitive, physical, social and emotional capabilities - we support them in learning and growing. Sometimes, this looks like interactions with "professionals" (physicians, educators, clinicians, etc.), but mostly these capabilities are developed and shaped by the

primary community - parents, family, and peers. Spirituality is a capacity that develops (or erodes) alongside every other developmental process. Sometimes, support for learning to “know” spiritually will come from a religious professional. But mostly, it will be shaped by you - the interactions you have at home, the language you practice, the rituals you embrace.

In a world that increasingly prioritizes the individual over community, perpetuates “us” vs. “them” division, values humans for their ability to produce, and equates résumé with identity, developing an alternate way of “knowing” (or, in the language of spirituality - the inner life) is critical for survival of the soul. Without intentional nurture, this part of the self becomes lost in our narrow material culture.

Research scholar Dr. Lisa Miller writes, “a parent’s decision about how to approach their child’s spiritual life is a high stakes proposition with lifelong implications.”

Our job as ministers and companions in the spiritual journey is to resource you with the technologies to engage your inner world: companionship, stories, ritual, language, a space to practice within community, and modeling. But we cannot do the work of spiritual formation for you, or for your family.

We love having your family in our community. We know the work of raising minds and hearts is hard and relentless. We want to support you in this space while affirming your own *expert-ness*. You are your own expert - you can trust your inner teacher, AND the inner voice of your child.

On Sunday mornings, we invite you to think of our worship space as a ministry of presence. Our most important work is to be present - to one another, and to the Holy.

Here are some suggestions for how to engage worship on Sunday, how to create family culture around faith and spirituality, and a few reminders about resources within our community:

Sunday Mornings:

- Consider sitting in the sanctuary proper for the beginning of the service, through the first hymn. By doing this, kids will hear and participate in some of the oldest movements of the faith community: liturgy and song.
- Sit in a space with easy access to the Fireplace Room (FPR) and make sure your kids know how to get back to you if they are dividing time between the sanctuary and FPR.
- Establish a pattern of sitting together as a family during Prayers of the People. Write a prayer as a family and hear the community bear witness to YOUR desolation or consolation. Light a prayer candle together.
- Bring a sacred item from home to place on our community altar (near the prayer candles).
- Move to the space you need to be in - and remember, Jaqui and team are not childcare. They are a support system to create flexible, intergenerational worship space.
- Bring what you need with you. Does your kiddo need snacks? A water bottle? Their own coloring book? Fidgets? Maybe you need some of those things, too. Does your child need to run a lap or two in the gym before you head into worship? That’s available to you. Set your family up for success in the best way you know how. We’ll do the same.

Here are suggestions for how to create a family culture of spirituality:

- Pray before a meal together. Here's a suggestion for a table blessing you can memorize if that's your thing:

*For the dark earth that cradles the sea,
For the rain that brings forth the green leaves,
For the stars that give form to the flowers,
For the warm sun that ripens the fruit,
For all this goodness and beauty,
O, heavenly Spirit, we thank you.
Bon appétit! You may eat!*

- Create a ritual time for contemplative space. Adults call this the *Examen*: the spiritual practice of remembering the day: both desolations and consolations. In my house, we call this: Rose, Thistle, Bud. Every night, we each answer the questions: What was your rose today? What was thorny - or, the thistle? And, what are you looking forward to - what will blossom tomorrow?
- Create a prayer space or altar at home. Look for special things to gather in the space: a prayer candle, a religious icon, something beautiful that speaks to the first witness (nature - not the Bible).
- Read together at night - something that sparks the moral imagination or asks compelling questions, such as the Mindfulness prompt cards that were included in your child's Easter Box or Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*.
- Volunteer somewhere together and talk about what it means to pray with our feet - *Christ has no body on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion for the world is to look out; yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good; and yours are the hands with which He is to bless us now.* {Saint Teresa of Avila}

Resources and Support from the First Congo Community:

- Weekly lesson in the children's section of the This Week
- Archived videos on our YouTube channel
- Monthly snail-mailed newsletters
- Schedule a family meeting with Jaqui to connect in a smaller, relational space
- Pick up our resource offerings for the season, available at the church office - for parents and caregivers: *The Spiritual Child* by Lisa Miller and for kids (from the Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso): *I am God's Paintbrush*, *In God's Name* or *Who is My Neighbor?*
- Consider signing up for the UCC summer camp at Camp Adams in Molalla, Oregon. The UCC covers more than half of the camp fee.

And finally, here's our best advice. Take the opportunity to be your children's teacher as an invitation to your own spiritual formation. The best teachers are still learning.

In partnership and wonder,
Pastor Jen