

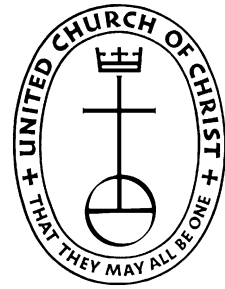
**First Congregational
United Church of Christ
Longmont, Colorado**

**Parent Handbook
Fall – 2009**



Welcome !

to the Children's Program at
First Congregational United Church of Christ!



As parents, you play a vital role in our ministry with your child. This handbook is designed to help you understand our program, its mission, and the guidelines under which we operate. Our church values children and believes in families. We also value cooperation among staff and parents, good communication, and collaboration in planning and problem solving. We encourage you to read this handbook, ask any questions you have, and make any suggestions you think would be helpful. Together we minister to our children and to each other as we follow God's Way.

Statement of Purpose

The Christian Education program of First Congregational United Church of Christ (UCC) exists to promote and enhance the spiritual development and education of our members of all ages and stages, and to *Extend the Reach of Christ* by actively welcoming members and others to participate in Christian Education programs.

For children, we focus on the following interwoven features:

- Sense of belonging and being valued as a person.
- Experience of the presence of the Holy.
- Familiarity with Biblical stories with an emphasis on God's loving ways.
- Safety to explore ideas and ask questions at an appropriate age level.

Sunday Morning Schedule

- 9:00 Classes for all ages
Child care for children under 3
- 10:00 Recess for children 3 years – 7th grade
- 10:15 Worship with Congregation in the Sanctuary
- 10:35 Music in Room 9
- 10:50 Storytelling, conversation, activities
- 11:10 Return to the Sanctuary for the close of worship

Parents are welcome in the classroom. However, several parents at a time can be disruptive, and many children do better if parents are not present. Please use your best judgment for the welfare of all the children. We make an effort to recruit people who do not have children in the classroom. We believe children benefit from being taught and loved by adults other than parents. It takes a village to raise a child.

Each Fall all families are requested to complete a Sunday School Registration Form. This form helps us keep our data base up to date and provides information about allergies and other concerns. Forms are available in the classrooms for families joining us during the school year.

Children who have a contagious illness or exhibit symptoms of potential illness should not attend. If your child becomes ill during a session, he/she will be isolated from the group and you will be called. If an accident occurs and your child is hurt, the teacher will fill out an accident report detailing what happened. You will be asked to sign this report so that the Ministers can verify that you have been notified of the circumstances.

Behavior in the Classroom

At the beginning of each Season, teachers and students work to create a classroom agreement or covenant. We talk about how our behavior can help (or hinder) our relationships with each other, and what it takes to build a healthy community together.

We focus on the idea of respect:

- Respect for other children
- Respect for teachers and leaders
- Respect for God
- Respect for self – stating your own needs.
- Respect for property

Our goal is to assist the children to develop self-discipline. We value inclusiveness and try to model and practice it. We also value an environment that is physically safe and verbally appropriate for teachers and students.

Two features are in place to further these goals: Shepherds and Counting.

Shepherds:

An adult shepherd is always present in the classroom to assist the teacher with behavior and logistics. The shepherd may sit between children, corral a child who leaves the room, whatever is needed. The shepherd also supervises bathroom runs and guides children between classrooms.

Counting:

A simple counting procedure is used to help the children stop negative behavior before it escalates. Based on “123 Magic” by Thomas Phelan, a count (warning) is given when disruptive behavior starts. After 3 counts the child is placed in time-out. The purpose of time out is to give the child time to calm down, take a deep breath and regain control. Shepherds monitor children during time out, which lasts 5 minutes. Our experience is that children usually respond to a warning count.

During counting & time out, no scolding, judging or angry voices are used. Our goal is to stop negative behavior quickly, then focus on positive behavior.

If the behavior involved hitting, biting or throwing an object at someone, time out is immediately employed with no counts. If the child cannot regain control, a parent will be notified.

Further information on this method is available in our church library. Periodic parents’ meetings are held, and personal conversation with the Associate Minister and/or CE Board Chair are always welcome. Several area schools also use this method; many of our children are familiar with it.

If a parent or other adult sees or hears something of concern they may contact the class leaders or a member of the Christian Education Board. Incident Report Forms may also be used. These are found in the Sunday School mailbox outside the church office – top center. The report form can be used to get the concern registered with staff. In these ways we can work together to provide the best possible atmosphere for our children’s faith development.

Our staff and volunteers provide supervision for the children until the close of worship on Sundays. During coffee fellowship (and week days when no child care is provided) parents are responsible. Safety during coffee fellowship is a concern – adult with hot coffee and people with various disabilities require that running not be allowed. Children are welcome in the Lounge and Fireside Rooms, or in Room 11. The rest of the building is off limits.



Safe Church Policies

First Congregational UCC has a “Policy to Protect Against Sexual Abuse and Harassment” which includes a Youth Protection Policy. Our teachers, shepherds and other adult leaders are provided with boundaries training, and leaders with frequent and unsupervised access to minors are carefully screened. A Response Team is in place to handle concerns or accusations. A copy of this policy is available in the church office or from either of the ministers. Anyone is welcome to attend the Boundaries Training, which is offered several times throughout the year.

Curriculum

Bible Trek (for Kindergarten – 3rd Graders) is using a *Come Join the Circle* curriculum unit called “Jesus, the Good Shepherd.” Jesus is the Shepherd who cares so well for his sheep that they know his voice. He leads them, protects them, is willing to put his life on the line for them. Jesus teaches us to be good shepherds, too. Story, art, cooking, games and other activities will be used to explore the theme.

The Pre-School Class uses simple stories of the Bible, Our goal in this class is primarily to help the children feel at home and welcome at church. The theme this fall is “Sheep and Shepherds.”

The 4th – 7th Grade Class is using “Talking with God” to develop a deeper relationship with God through prayer and to learn how to recognize God at work in their lives. This class also does a variety of projects during the year, e.g. CROP Walk, UNICEF, Souper Bowl, and the Easter egg hunt.

All-Church Events

2009-2010

Integral to our lives as Christians is remembering and reliving the central stories of our faith. Also essential is the fellowship of the Body of Christ – all of us together, in worship, service and learning. We think of ourselves as an extended family, a “village” of Christ’s people. With this in mind we offer the following All-Church events especially designed to include children and youth:

- Sept. 13 Family Breakfast at 9:00
- Oct. 3-4 Family Retreat at La Foret
- Oct. 4 World Communion Sunday
- Oct. 30, 31 Neighborhood UNICEF parties
- Nov. 1 UNICEF Sunday – wear something from a different culture, international treats for coffee fellowship
- Dec. 20 Soup lunch followed by Christmas Caroling.
- Dec. 24 Family Worship at 5:00 pm; Candlelight Service at 10:30 pm.
- Jan. 10 Baptism of Christ Sunday– worship designed to include children.
- Jan. 31 Empty Bowls painting following soup lunch.
- Feb. 16 Shrove Tuesday – pancake supper, carnival fun and Service of Ashes.
- April 1 Maundy Thursday – reenacting Jesus’ last days.
- April 4 Easter – worship includes children.
Our Easter Egg Hunt follows the 10:15 service.
- May 16 All-church picnic in the courtyard.

Plus: picnics in the park in the summer and various family camping outings.
Our Dinner with Friends groups, formed each Fall and Spring, also include children.



What You Can Do To Help

- Provide Snacks for recess
- Supervise recess
- Partner on a teaching team
- Serve as a Shepherd
- Run errands to purchase supplies
- Donate supplies
- Prepare art materials or an art project
- Plan an art project
- Lead singing
- Lead Worship Moments
- Be a substitute teacher or shepherd
- Find/buy/borrow unusual objects

Coming after Christmas: the musical "Moses and the Freedom Fanatics." Both the Sunday School hour and Children's Worship will be part of this project. The musical will be presented on Sunday, March 14.

For the musical we'll need – choreographers, stage helpers, set builders, costume makers, etc. Plan ahead. What can you contribute to this project?