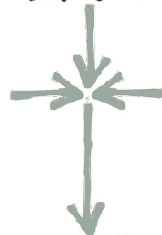




Celebration of Ministry in 2024 and Annual Meeting

January 26, 2025

*First Church
of La Junta
& Life Center*



*meeting Jesus,
meeting friends,
sharing hope with all*



Pastor's Report

by Pastor MJ Romano

Not too long ago, I stumbled upon something called Ignatian indifference. Ignatius was a Spanish priest back in the 1500s who figured out that life doesn't always work out the way we think it will. He created a set of what he called 'spiritual exercises' to help people rise above their circumstances and love Jesus no matter what might be happening around them.

One of these exercises (it's #23, for anyone interested) is what's called a prayer of indifference. Some people call it a prayer of detachment. Whatever you call it, this "means being detached enough from things, people, or experiences to be able either to take them up or to leave them aside, depending on whether they help us to "to praise, reverence, and serve God" (<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-indifference/>).

It's a whole lot like the apostle Paul when he wrote to the Philippians, "I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want" (4:11-12).

Funny thing is, indifference had been a topic of discussion earlier this year when I met one afternoon on Zoom with a spiritual director.

"How are you feeling about your ministry these days?" she asked.

I thought for a moment. And I thought some more. The only word I could come up with was "indifferent."

"Should I be worried?" I asked her.

"Indifference sounds bad."

She leaned into her laptop and smiled.

"Another word for indifference is peace."

Friends, as I look back at 2024, I am completely indifferent—in the best way, in the *Ignatian* way. There have been times of absolute joy: Junction Kids. The lovely recognition of the 20th anniversary of my installation. The ECO Synod Business Meeting (yes, it was fun). All those baptisms. Karl's concert. There have been some hard times too: Fighting with the elevator company. Four funerals in eight days. Families leaving without explanation. Bill Remick's vigil before Christmas.

Yet, I believe wholeheartedly that I am where God put me to do the work to which He has called me. Through it all.

I imagine that another word for 2024 might just be peace. Or, to borrow the apostle Paul's word, I'm content.

Thanks as always for the privilege of serving you.

Every blessing,

MJ



Adult Education Report (No Team Leader)

We're grateful for our ongoing small groups. Dude Club, MOPS, and Don Klinkerman's two Bible studies continue to grow us in faith as we grow in friendship and knowledge of the Bible.

We've kicked off new studies on Sunday mornings that have received some positive feedback. Pastor MJ taught "Signs" on the 7 signs of Jesus in the Gospel of John. Don Klinkerman followed up with a Sunday morning version of "Because of Bethlehem" during Advent. We hope to continue to expand participation in these studies in 2025.

After one final attempt, we are finally closing the book on our Tables ministry. While it was very well received, with over 30 participants before the pandemic, we simply have not been able to regain the momentum. Thank you to everyone who participated, hosted, cooked dinner, and led discussions.

Dr. Don's Monday Bible Study 2023 From Don Klinkerman

Every Monday we have been holding Bible study for anyone interested. We met in person at 10 AM at Casa Del Sol Aspen Center and via Zoom at 7 PM. The same lesson was used for both groups. In 2024 we studied Revelation, Acts and Romans using guide books by N.T. Wright. We did not meet on holidays and took a break over the summer. During Advent we held a 4 week study in preparation for Christ's birth by Max Lucado titled, "Because of Bethlehem". This study was on Sundays at the church along with Casa and Zoom.

There were 26 people in these meetings with an average attendance of 19. We are continuing these Bible studies in 2025 starting with the Book of Genesis. We would certainly welcome anyone to join us! Email me at dandpklink@bresnan.net or call me at 719-469-1080 if you'd like the Zoom link or more information.

Building and Grounds Chad Smith & Neil Fisher

After the major renovation of the Fellowship Hall and floors downstairs in 2023, this past year was relatively calm. A major project was fixing the doors to the handicap parking lot. We also replaced some exit signs and fixed up the playground. We updated some electrical outlets in the sanctuary and education building. A big thanks to electrician Mike Hight, and Brandon Lease who fixed up the sanctuary wall after the installation of new switches. Our HVAC person Charley Henschel fixed some problems with our water pumps downstairs, so we have much better cooling now in the Cranson Room. We hired Agustin Lopez to finally replace the old toilets in the downstairs bathroom.

An oil change for the elevator turned into a big expense for the church when a starter went out at the same time. TKE Elevators would not take responsibility, so we had to use some of the money remaining in the Kuebbeler Estate. Chad says, "@#%\$."

Dustin Faus does pest control for us, and Nathan Paolucci is doing a great job with our lawns and snow removal. Nathan also repaired a sprinkler line where a tree root had grown around it. The only project left unfinished into 2025 is replacing the heater/air conditioner in the pastor's office.

Congregational Care by Kristin Bickel

In 2024, we were able to help our members and friends with meals in time of illness and loss. We would like to thank the many households who cooked and delivered these meals. Many were blessed.

When aware of a loss in the extended family, we sent flowers or condolences from the church. We hope you won't hesitate to reach out in times of need or share with us when you become aware of someone in the community who would benefit from prayer and attention.

Children's Ministry by Aricka Hulsey, Children's Minister

It is always a wonderful year in our children's ministry. ARK is small and mighty with an average of 5 kids. God is so good. Prayers we continue to bless the kids we do have coming and pray we add to our children's ministry. Palm Sunday's Carnival was super fun as usual. Although we did not gain members, we had a lot of participants. In addition to our annual egg hunt for Easter in the weeks prior.

VBS was a huge success this year! We had a ton of participation with a total of 53 kids! They dove into friendship with



God!

We had a great group of kids head off to Summer camp in June. Camp is sponsored by Pueblo Presbytery at Ponderosa Camp and

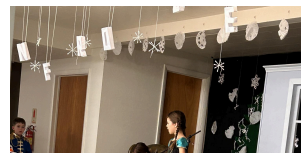


Conference Center in Larkspur.



Junction Kidz continued with 2 8-week sessions in the year 2024 and had a total of 21 kids registered. Pastor MJ leads these weekly meetings with many great volunteers.

We continued "Prayer Bear", this bear goes home with families to pray with. The backpack includes a bear, a shirt for the bear to write names on, a folder to write prayers in and a book to help initiate prayers. The kids have LOVED Prayer Bear and we will continue to share him with each and every family in 2025.



Our annual Christmas pageant was a smashing success this



year. The title was "Unfrozen", we had a participation of around 15 children. We held a holiday dinner in celebration of the pageant and had a huge turn out of families and congregation members.

MomCo has slowed down in the year of 2024. Lots of prayers as we start this ministry up with a big bang in 2025. We did a 5K, Saturday October 5th through MomCo and followed up our walk with brunch. 6 moms participated in our 5k. Parent's Night Out was a ton of fun. Lots of blessings. 20 children were present with addition of youth assisting. We ran through our pageant rehearsal, worked on set, played games and so much more!

Prayers for 2025. Prayers we will bless the kids we have and prayers we have the opportunity to bless more. In total we have added 2 new kids to our morning ARK program and many to Junction Kids. May we continue onward and upward!

Deacon's Fund Annual Report by Kristen Elwood

Beginning Balance \$1184.75
Donations \$3920.00
Total available funds \$5104.75
Expenses \$3954.21
Ending Balance \$1150.54

The Deacons Fund was able to help 17 families during 2024 with utilities, rent, gasoline and rooms for the homeless/stranded.

Compassion And Missions Team by Jeanne Brittain

The Compassion and Missions Team projects were Bereavement, Easter Offering, Church Development, Prayer Tree, Intermediate School Support, Operation Christmas Child, Angel Tree, and Christmas Offering.

An Easter Offering of \$2,000 was sent to "The Place" in Colorado Springs. The Place

is a safe place for young adults 15 to 20 year olds who have been living on the streets for a variety of reasons.

Each year we send \$400 for new Church Development. This year we sent it to the Nova Church to help their church grow.

In March the Bereavement Team served dinner for the family of George Creston Mitchell to celebrate his life.

In October we served coffee in the Aspen Center at Casa Del Sol celebrating the life of Karen S. Fishkin.

The Prayer Tree warriors has been used a lot in 2024. Our prayers warriors have seen answers to many of them and are still waiting for answers to some of our prayers. We thank you Lord.

The Intermediate School teachers used \$417.04 to buy emergency clothing for children in need, supplies the teacher requested. MJ has spent time in the class room helping the teacher by reading to the children or in whatever she needs help with.

We sent 93 shoeboxes to be distributed to Operation Christmas Child. This year La Junta gathered 1,334 boxes. These boxes were collected along with boxes from Fowler to Springfield for a grand total of 4,015. Becci Lease thanks you for your support.

Kristen Elwood set up the Angel Tree (a ministry program of Prison Fellowship) with 18 children gift requests, 2 families from Las Animas, 1 family from Rocky Ford and 2 from La Junta. Each child received 3 gifts. Kristen and Steve Elwood delivered the gifts before Christmas. A big thanks to all who brought the gifts and delivered them.

Our Christmas Offering received \$2168 to build cisterns with the help of Todd and Maria Luke in Mexico.

We are grateful for the generosity of our congregation in supporting all of the projects that our church family takes on.

Worship by Marilyn Chambers

Worshipping by the Numbers:

7 Sermon Series: Our congregation deepened our faith with the following sermon series: Breaking the Huddle, Seven Respectable Sins, Roadmap to a Life in Christ, Summer on the Mount, Fear Not, Cultivating Generosity, and A Weary World Rejoices

8 Guest Preachers: We welcomed several people to the pulpit this past year: Dave Freehling, Hollis Goodwin, Jerry Chambers, Joey Gacnik, Sarah Petramala, Sarah Hardwick, David Mackey, and Monica Johnson.

10 Volunteers: On a normal Sunday, there are over ten people participating in the worship besides MJ. One lay reader, three ushers, an AV technician (thank you, Jake Gacnik!), our organist Dean Rees, our praise band director Chris Ludwig, our praise band Steve Elwood and Emma Gacnik, vocalists Sarah Petramala, Erica Fishkin, Bethany Bender, and Terry Miller, and countless people volunteering for special music. We are so grateful that so many people are willing to share their gifts and time with us.

7 Baptisms and 5 Reaffirmation of Faith: With great joy, we baptized Abigail Hill, Aimee Hill, Michael Walkinshaw and Stella Anderson, along with Axel Saucedo, Colter Klempan, and Lucee Fishkin. Bethany Bender, Karen Fishkin, Aaron Saucedo, Liz Saucedo, Lexi Klempan also reaffirmed their faith. We are always grateful to welcome new members to the kingdom of God.

20 Years of Service: This past June, we celebrated MJ's 20th pastoral anniversary here. That's over a thousand sermons and hundreds of communions. There's no way to fully count all the visits and prayers MJ has given in those 20 years, and we are still sincerely grateful!

68 Guests: On July 1, we hosted 68 youth from Oklahoma and all their sponsors as they prepared for the Group Mission Trip to Las Animas. We fed them breakfast Sunday morning, and they doubled our attendance that Sunday morning!

2 Concerts: In keeping with our mission statement to be a gathering place, we offered our community two concerts this fall. In October, our very own, home-grown Karl Ludwig gave a concert as part of the chili supper fundraiser for summer camp tuition and helped raise over \$1,200. Later in November, Tanya Perkins filled our sanctuary with her beautiful voice for a full house.

3 Prayers for 2025

We ask prayers that our pulpit is a source of the Holy Spirit filling the congregation regardless of who preaches.

We ask prayers that our congregation continues to welcome new people to worship with us.

We ask prayers for the people providing Sunday morning worship.

Fellowship Committee Annual Report by Denise Root

Meals of all kinds were provided by the committee, volunteers from the congregation and potluck meals. We had breakfasts, brunches, lunches, picnics and suppers throughout the year. We tried a few new formats this year. For the Good Friday supper we provided a soup, sandwich and dessert buffet that was available from 6:00 to 7:00 for people to come as they could after work. We asked for volunteers to bring specific dishes for a meal. For example we asked 5

congregation members; 5 of the Fellowship Committee members to bring breakfast casseroles for Easter breakfast. We also had a few traditional potlucks such as the Summer Swim Party and Picnic. Monthly Fellowship times were provided after worship with goodies and drinks, some were specific to events such as honoring graduates, fall ministry kickoff for Sunday School, Youth Groups etc. Approximately half of the Fellowship Times were hosted by volunteers and the remainder were hosted by the Fellowship Committee.

Meals were also provided for the conclusion celebrations of the Junction Kids Midweek ministry for the fall and spring. The VBS families were invited and several attended the summer Swim Party and Picnic on July 28.

Targeted Efforts to meet Ministry Goals:
Meeting Jesus: Stay tuned for possible new activities in 2025 specific to this goal
Meeting Friends: Specific efforts to target this goal were: becoming involved in more church ministry activities such as meals for Junction Kids celebrations, attempting to provide food options for individuals with specific food needs, like making sure there are gluten free options at each event, labeling foods with common allergies such as nuts and providing sugar free options. Trying new formats for meals that support people's schedules so that they can attend ministry activities and services example: buffet meal prior to Good Friday Service. Outcome: The average attendance at the monthly Fellowship Times increased from 50 in 2023 to 55 2024. New individuals and families volunteered to host or assist with Fellowship Activities. Sharing Hope: Stay tuned for possible new activities in 2025 specific to this goal

Big THANK You to each member of the Fellowship Committee for sharing your time and talents as we ministered to our church and community! Also big THANK YOU's to all of the congregation volunteers who hosted Fellowship Times, provided and cooked turkeys, made a crockpot of soup or breakfast

casseroles! We love you!

Youth Team (No Team Leader)

The brave chaperone team of Jerry Chambers, Katy Jones, Chris Ludwig and Pastor MJ have been leading the Sunday night youth fellowships since late 2023 and through 2024. Our discussions are based on materials called "Year with Jesus." The conversations have been great, and we've had a lot of fun.

We had some special events too, including Winter Camp in February at Ponderosa. Thanks to Jerry Chambers and Aimee Hill for chaperoning that event.

On the Friday before Easter, we "egged" the Otero College campus. Otero students reported having a lot of fun finding the eggs, though a few late night partyers collected more than their share of the candy.

The youth who helped as crew leaders for Vacation Bible School in July got to take SCUBA diving lessons in Colorado Springs. It was a hoot.



Members of the chaperone team could use some relief. If you have any interest in leading or assisting with the youth groups, please speak with Pastor MJ.

Finally, it was our real joy to confirm Abigail Hill and Aaron Saucedo in September. Welcome to the family of faith!



Statistical Report for Calendar Year 2024

Gloria Thomas, Clerk of Session

(previous year's statistics in parentheses)

Covenant Partners as of 01/01/2024		83
Deaths	Karen Fishkin	-1
Adult & Youth Baptisms	Aimee Hill Abigail Hill Michael Walkinshaw Stella Anderson	+4
Reaffirmations of Faith	Bethany Bender Karen Fishkin Aaron Saucedo Liz Saucedo Lexi Klempan	+5
Removed by Session upon Request or Due to Inactivity	Hayden Bickel Kamryn Fisher Josh Harris Erin Harris Audrey Leitner Dale Leitner Veronica Leitner Dawn Pollmiller John Pollmiller	-9
Covenant Partners as of 12/31/2023		82

Worshippers (attend at least 4-6 times annually)		59 (49)
Total Covenant Partners & Worshipers		141 (132)
Infant/Child Baptisms	Lucee Fishkin Axel Saucedo Colter Klempan	3
Called Session Meetings	1/14/24 4/7/24 9/15/24 10/13/24	4
Stated Session Meetings	2/7/24 4/11/24 6/6/24 8/8/24 10/16/24 12/12/24	6
Congregational Meetings	1/7/24 1/28/24 12/1/24	3
Average Worship Attendance		64 (62)



First Church of La Junta & Life Center
111 E. 20th Street
La Junta, CO 81050



Church Leaders & Staff



Elders

Kristin Bickel, Jerry Chambers, Joey Gacnik
Hollis Goodwin, and Sarah Petramala

Staff

Rev. Dr. MJ Romano, Pastor
Dean Rees, Organist/Accompanist
Makayla Salas, Secretary
Aricka Hulsey, Children's Minister
Steve Elwood, Janitorial Engineer
Jake Gacnik, AV Tech
Jansen Ediger, Nursery Helper

Volunteer Ministry Staff

Jeanne Brittain, Missions Coordinator
Kristin Bickel, Cong. Care Coordinator
Patti Aldea, Personnel Director
Kathy Parker, Treasurer
Dottie Burnett, Bookkeeper
Marilyn Chambers, Worship Arts Director
Chris Ludwig, Praise Band Leader
Chad Smith & Neil Fisher,
Building & Grounds
Denise Root, Fellowship Team

Learn more
about our national
church at
www.eco-pres.org

