



August

NEWSLETTER 2026

Devotion

A recent discussion with some of our Deacons led me to believe that I should explain to the congregation more about my thoughts on Communion. Frankly, there isn't room enough to cover that comprehensively in this space, but I can share some thoughts.

1. What are we actually doing during Communion? (What is the purpose?) As Jesus commanded to his friends and followers, whenever we do this, we “do this in remembrance of (Jesus).” At its core, Communion is remembering. The fancy theological term is anamnesis, which suggests more than just a casual recall. Anamnesis is, quite literally, an-amnesia, or “against amnesia.” We experience Communion so that we can never let the memory of Jesus and who he was die!
2. Who is Communion for? (Who should be allowed to participate?) Lots of ink, and blood for that matter, has been spilled on this question. Some churches insist that only members may partake, some say that only Christians may participate, and others (like FCUCC) hold that all who desire Communion may participate. This latter position is referred to as “Open Table.” I am convinced that I am not a qualified gatekeeper to determine who can or can't have access to an encounter with Jesus.
3. Is Communion a sacrament or a symbol? (What does it mean?) If you were to ask my Baptist forebears, Communion, or “The Lord's Supper,” would be described as merely symbolic. While I might argue that no symbol is “mere”, I would go farther and suggest that Communion goes beyond a symbolic re-enactment and is a sacrament. The textbook definition of sacrament is that it is an outward, visible sign that signifies an inward, spiritual reality or grace. So Communion is a sign of grace manifesting within our lives.

Devotion

4. What is the nature of Communion? (Is it personal or corporate?) My answer is, “Yes.” The experience of Communion is multi-faceted. We can experience Communion as an intensely personal encounter, as a devotional experience between the self and the Divine. Communion is also intensely corporate. We experience Communion as a community. The two words derive from the same word which emphasizes the mutual nature of the sacrament. We commune with each other and the whole Body of Christ throughout space and time.

5. What is the proper frequency? (How often should we observe Communion?) Here opinion and doctrine are greatly divided. FCUCC itself has had differing practices throughout our history, from quarterly observances to monthly. Many Protestant denominations join the Catholic Church in communing every week, even every time they meet! As a congregational church, we don’t have a rule that tells us how often we can or can’t have communion. I am personally convinced that, if given proper reverence Communion never loses any of its specialness with frequency. I (mostly) jokingly told the Pastor Search Committee that interviewed me here that I would be happy to observe Communion every day, if I had any takers!

These are just a few of the considerations around Communion. This is a worthy discussion to have around our common worship. If you would like to talk more about it with me, hit me up any time (just not before a worship service, please — I don’t have the brain bandwidth to hold them both in my head at once!)

Devotion

Reflection on Communion

I will never forget the occasion of sitting in the back of the worship space on a Sunday in December, wondering why I was so utterly depressed. I barely recognized the service going on around me. I had rarely felt so alone. It dawned on me that this was the exact date that my first child had been predicted to be born, before the miscarriage that my former wife and I had suffered in April. These kind of grief anniversaries can come out of nowhere and plunge you into a sense of complete isolation.

About this time, the communion plate with the tiny cracker-type bread pieces began making its way down the pew toward me. I reflexively took a piece and held it between my fingers as I waited for everyone to be served. I felt the slightly dusty texture and, for once, dreaded the dry, dusty taste of the bread in my mouth. On autopilot, in concert with everyone else, I placed the bread in my mouth, bracing for the ashy taste of death on my tongue.

I experienced instead one of the greatest instances of grace I have ever had. Where I had expected dry religious bookstore communion pieces I experienced something wondrous. Time stopped for a moment, the room brightened, and I tasted, silly as it might sound, my favorite shortbread cookie. I felt known, seen, loved. I was not alone. I wasn't instantly delivered from my grief, but I was not alone and that was enough.

I get a little internal jolt whenever I hear someone describe Communion as “merely symbolic.” There was nothing “mere” about the grace that yanked me up in my seat and fed me with the love of God that tasted like a cookie!

Pastor Stephen

OUR CHURCH FAMILY

Birthdays

Matt Terrell 8/7
Carolyn Holland 8/13

Heather Williams 8/23
Terry Barnwell 8/25

Anniversaries

Rev. Stephen & Trish Ball 8/1
Mack & Beth Painter 8/23

Those Remaining in Our Prayers

Buster Freeman
Nell Allred
Amber Massey
Joe Strickland
Ross Strange Sr.
Trisha Shelly
Ray Palyok
Lewis Fowler
Carolyn Wolley / Family
Dave Smudski / Family
The Family of Susan Horne

Brenda Grogan
Rodney Paul Sr.
Holly Bent
Nanci Isley
Curtis Foster
Jon & Judy Kipp
Betty & Roger King
Troy Marquardt
Blake Jones
June Sellars
Nancy Hughs
Patty Howey

Prayers

If you need prayers or know someone that does please let us know.
You can call the office or call your Deacon.
We are here to assist in anyway that's helpful.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

- **Sunday, August 2nd**
 - *Worship with Communion*
- **Monday, August 3rd**
 - *Women's Circle Super Salad Supper Bar & Allied Ministries Guest Speaker*
 - *At 5:30 pm in Bray Fellowship Hall*
 - *All are welcome to attend*
 - *Please RSVP to Carol Fonville*
- **Wednesday, August 5th**
 - *Finance Meeting at 11:00 am*
- **Monday, August 10th**
 - *Official Board Meeting at 6:00 pm*
- **Tuesday, August 25th**
 - *Deacons Meeting at 6:00 pm*

Community Engagement

Blessed Sacrament Food Distribution will be moving their location to their building on our block. We have agreed to allow them to use our parking lot for their distribution lines.

2nd Mondays from 10:30 - 1:30 pm

4th Mondays from 1:30 - 3:30 pm

(Exceptions are May and December)

THEMES & LITURGISTS

Communion

Mary Newsome & Judy Hodges

Greeter

David Hodges

Ushers

Benji Terrell (head)

Julie Miller, Eleanor Lovgren, Charlie Vitou

Liturgists

August 2nd - Dotti Davis

August 9th - Brooke Manning

August 16th - Tena Barnwell

August 23rd - Cindy Sharpe

August 30th - Nancey Simmons

Receptions

Please join us in the parlor for fellowship and light refreshments after
Worship on Sundays.

CHURCH INFORMATION

Mission Statement

(Revised 2/4/24)

First Christian United Church of Christ in Burlington, North Carolina opens wide its doors to all who hunger for God and God's righteousness. It seeks to provide rest for weary spirits, comfort for troubled hearts, and to inspire all to follow Jesus Christ in unselfish service to humankind. We, in the spirit of Jesus' great commandments, commit to love God and our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:28-34) and follow Paul's teaching of acceptance of one another (Romans 14:1-15: 13).

We believe that all people are created in God's image and are blessed and loved equally by God. We welcome with respect, and nurture with intention, the gifts of all who come to us on the journey of faith and seek eternal salvation under the New Covenant of Jesus Christ. We welcome everyone to join us in the life and leadership of our family of faith, and in our ongoing commitment as an Open and Affirming Congregation. The people of First Christian United Church of Christ are dedicated to always being a welcoming and loving church; a "House of Christian Fellowship for ALL people."

Office Hours

Monday - Thursday 9 am - 12 pm

Church Officers

President: Jamie Fonville

Vice President: Cindy Sharpe

Treasurer: Judy Kipp

Assistant Treasurer: Julie Miller

Secretary: Matt Rice

Church Staff

Pastor: Rev. Stephen Ball, OSL

Organist / Choir Director: Matt Rice

Custodian: Rodney Paul Sr.

Office Administrator: Debbie Norris