

The Messenger

March 2026

At the end of this newsletter is an important letter from Pastor Kearstin about an upcoming mission trip she is taking. Please take the time to read this letter and contact Pastor Kearstin if you have any questions about it.

The monthly newsletter of First Congregational Church UCC of North Ridgeville

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From the Pastor – Pastor Kearstin (she/her)

Welcome to the season of Lent, dear ones — a time in the Christian calendar where we are asked to simplify our lives so that we can connect with God more intentionally. It's typically a somber season, focused on pruning away the dead leaves of our lives so that we can grow stronger with our energy focused on God.

When most folks think of the season of Lent, they often think of fasting from physical food. I, however, want to encourage you to steer clear of that, beloved. Our culture is already steeped in diet culture, eating disorders are on the rise, and medical weight loss is being advertised on all types of media. When God created the world, They said that it was Good. That every piece of creation was pleasing and wonderful — and that includes you and your body. Throughout his ministry, Jesus cared deeply about the physical, embodied experience of the people around him. When folks came out to hear him speak and then got hungry, Jesus made sure everyone was fed with loaves and fishes. When folks were sick, Jesus took their physical ailments seriously. Our faith teaches us that our bodies are inherently good and worthy of good things. You do not need to deny your body nourishment in order to get closer to the Sacred. Instead, during this season of Lent, paying deep attention to your body might be the holiest thing you can do.

So as we continue through this season, know that you can begin a Lenten practice to help you focus on God at any time. You can also change or pivot your practice if that feels helpful for you. There are no set rules here, dear one! You get to make your own.

Personally, my Lenten practice is to mask up again in public spaces like grocery stores, book shops, etc. (Did you know that in Ohio, if there are 10 people in a room, the chance that one of them is Covid infectious is 32%!?) Perhaps you want to drink more water, or eat breakfast every day, or make your meal-prep into a meditative practice.

Whatever you decide to do, or not do, during Lent, I hope it helps you build a stronger foundation of faith. I hope that you care for your body well



"Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me."
Psalm 51:10

and show it gratitude for all it has helped you survive. I hope that you know you are deeply loved by the Creator of All.

Every blessing,
Pastor Kearstin



Tarot Group at FCC: Happening **Friday, March 27 at 7:00 pm** in the fellowship hall. We'll pay special attention to the Cups this month, exploring all 14 cards in the suit. RSVP here so we know how many tables to set up in the fellowship hall: bit.ly/marchtarot



Moderator's Moment – Kris Dornan

Spring is almost upon us, a time of rebirth, and for us as a church family, a time of Lent and a time to prepare for the Easter Resurrection season. For our area in North Ridgeville, it also signifies the coming start to growing season. Seeds will be planted in the earth with the intention of growth.

As a church family, what things would we like to see harvested later in the year? For those things to happen, it may take the right steps now to plant that seed. For some, that may mean taking a class to gain skills for a job change later in the year, or it may mean continuing to support getting our kids to school so that they are equipped to continue to grow and learn into adulthood. For our church to continue to thrive, what seeds can we plant today?

Christian Education Corner – Mary Karlovec

It seems like Advent just finished yet Lent is upon us! As we conclude February, I want to thank everyone for their generous February **clangy change** donations. We collected \$103 for the Lorain County Urban League! For March, our clangy change will support the purchasing of supplies for our



homebound church members' Easter baskets. We typically fill 10 baskets which means lots of supplies. This month, as an incentive for your generous donations, there will be lottery tickets in the clangy change buckets as they come around during our collection. Grab a lottery ticket as you put your clangy change into the bucket. Put your name on your lottery ticket and drop it in the Easter basket on the table at each entrance into the sanctuary at the end of worship. We will draw one ticket and when our Easter baskets are ready to be delivered, the lucky winner will receive the 11th basket to deliver to someone they know who would enjoy receiving an Easter basket!

On Sunday, **March 29** we will be having our annual **EASTER EGG HUNT**. After the conclusion of worship, everyone can join together in fellowship hall for fellowship time.



Bring a bagged lunch/snack for yourself or your family to enjoy. Drinks will be available!

Around fellowship hall Easter crafts will be available for young and young at heart to work on while we set up for the Easter egg hunt. At approximately 12:30, the kiddos aged 5 and under will go out to their designated area for their egg hunt. Once they are done, kids aged 6-12 will go out to hunt eggs. This event is open to anyone in the community so invite your family, friends and neighbors!

With that being said, we need your help! Last year we filled approximately 1500 eggs with candy. So we need 1500 individually wrapped pieces of candy! **Please consider donating 2-3 bags of Easter candy by March 15.** (It takes a lot of manpower/time to fill that many eggs so we have to start filling eggs as soon as the candy rolls in!) We would appreciate **NO** candy that contains **nuts** (due to allergies) and if you purchase Smarties, not the normal size but the small ones so they fit in the eggs! There will be a large tote marked Easter egg hunt right inside my office door to drop your candy donations in. The CE Board thanks you!

If you have been in worship, you will have noticed that the number of our littlest children is growing. We need nursery room volunteers on Sunday mornings. If eight people volunteer, that means you would only have to do it once every two months.



Our CE board cannot cover all of the Sundays as over half the board are also Sunday School teachers. Please consider signing up for this important ministry in our church outside my office.

In the past month, I have had the opportunity to attend a three day **Our Whole Lives** (a comprehensive, lifespan, age-appropriate sexuality education) training in Lakewood with Pastor Kearstin and Heather Smith (more details to come on how we will utilize our training starting with our youth), do a bus trip with Heather sponsored by the Methodist and UCC Ohio denominations to the Charles H. Wright African American Museum (an amazing museum), and spent four hours on a Saturday morning with Diana Goode at a gathering of 175 people from MANY Lorain County churches to learn about policies, procedures, and ideas to keep our churches/ congregations safe. Three very different opportunities but all worthy of my time. Many thanks to the CE Board for helping to provide funds for the Our Whole Lives training. We have talked about doing it for several years and when the opportunity became available in northeastern Ohio, we jumped at the chance to participate.



April 29: Ladies Tea and Craft--more info coming soon!

June 14: Graduating Seniors Recognition Sunday

Outreach Committee News – Karen Farmer

Is anyone else feeling overwhelmed with anxiety and heartbreak as you watch the unrest spreading across our country and many other parts of the world? Sometimes it's a real challenge to keep our faith strong when we're paralyzed by uncertainty and hopelessness. When I start to struggle with feelings of helplessness in the face of so much need in the world, I remind myself that I can't do EVERYthing, but I can do SOMETHing to make a difference in the lives of others with the resources that I have.

As Jesus implored his followers to share and care for those around them, the Outreach Board is doing so by donating \$100 each to Community Care and Neighborhood Alliance, as well as, \$200 each to the Christian Appalachian Project (CAP) to benefit the underserved in Kentucky and the Native American Heritage Association (NAHA) to provide propane vouchers to be used during emergencies.

We wish to thank all of you for your donations of 60 cans of soup, 10 boxes of crackers, and 30 miscellaneous food items for our "Super Bowl" food drive to benefit the Lorain County Office on Aging. Many thanks, as well, for your generous donations of personal hygiene products for Genesis House in February. Throughout March we will be collecting pasta, pasta sauce, and containers of parmesan cheese for Community Care.

One of the ways we can make a significant difference in the world is through donating to the UCC One Great Hour of Sharing campaign, which is highlighted throughout the month of March. The sharing of your financial gifts to OGHS provides immediate and long-term support to people around the world who are experiencing violence, poverty, hunger and homelessness, often as a result of natural disasters.

May you be inspired by the entreaties of Jesus and energized by God's Spirit to give what you can. It's time to share SOMETHing to make a

significant difference in the world and renew our faith in doing so, as well.

Deacons' Desk – Beth Dornan

Hello UCC members and guests! It's been a chilly few months, and I hope all of you are making whatever effort necessary to stay warm and toasty. However, it is still important to watch how much energy we are consuming each day.

In my AP environmental science course this month, we have primarily been focusing on the different types of fuel sources and energy consumption. Did you know that 11,500 kWh of energy is used per year in a medium sized house? Some of it you may not even be aware you're using, which is referred to as phantom load. Phantom load occurs from anything we have plugged in that we don't use all the time, like a desktop computer or charger. In order to combat this, here's a few tips to lower your energy usage during the winter:

- ✓Unplug chargers, computers, and gaming systems when not in use. Even if it's not turned on it requires energy!
- ✓Utilize power strips. By plugging multiple things in on one outlet, it makes it much easier to turn them all off and on at one time.
- ✓Turn off lights in rooms you are not currently using

I hope everyone continues to stay warm. Thank you for your time and attention!

Trustees' Turn – Roy Dreger

As some of you (if not most) are aware, our church had eggs thrown at it recently. This may have been juveniles doing it for "kicks" or it may have been someone not aligned with our beliefs. While I believe it was the former, the latter cannot be ignored. When Linda reported it to the police and an officer came out to take the report, he strongly urged us to have our Ring security cameras set to record activity. We originally got the cameras as a safety precaution for the purpose of allowing someone alone in

the building to see who was at the door before deciding whether to answer it. We took another look at the recording option and found that for \$100.00 per year we could keep six months of video; so we are now subscribed and are recording 24/7.

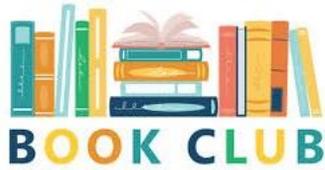
Another topic that was discussed at our last meeting was the request by our neighbor to the rear to purchase some of our unused back land. Our neighbor (Tony) said he would pay for a surveyor and then have it appraised, once we decided how much (if any) land we were willing to sell. I want to stress that any sale would have to be approved by the congregation at a congregational meeting. The trustees do not have the ability to sell property per our constitution. If you have thoughts on the matter, feel free to pass them on. The only thing that we have done on that rear land in recent memory is mow it and have tree maintenance done. On the other hand, once you sell it, you likely won't be able to get it back should you want or need to. Just my personal observations.

We also spent time discussing a proposal that Diana Goode got from Star Builders for an accessible entryway to be located at the front of the church. The issue of how to finance it received the most attention. We decided to meet with the Endowment Committee to discuss the use of those funds. We also talked about not wanting to drain the endowment funds, so perhaps we should try a capital campaign to raise part of the necessary funds. Considering that the budget is operating at a deficit, I wonder about that. By the way, the estimate was \$119,000 and included a lift as opposed to a ramp. A previous estimate from three years ago for the same project came in at about \$84,000, so this seems reasonable considering how much costs have risen since then.

Other topics under discussion were repair of the portable sign, the search for cheaper trash pickup, and the need to get the snowblower up and running. Also discussed were options for reducing wear and tear on the sanctuary carpet

when the piano has to be moved, and we voted to drop the earthquake coverage from our insurance policy in order to save \$2,000 per year.

As always, the trustees thank you for your continued financial support of your church ministry.



Women's Book Club: All gatherings are at the church at 7 p.m. unless noted otherwise.

March 16: The Last Letter of Rachel Ellsworth by Barbara O'Neal

April 20: My Friends: A Novel by Fredrik Backman



- 3/2 Mikey Feigi
- 3/4 Vonnie Packard
- 3/7 Jane Woravka
- 3/8 Amy Eaton
- 3/27 Jim Yost

GREETERS

March	
1	George Beers, Paul Wolanski
8	Millie Gilly, Karen Farmer
15	Diana Goode, Teri Loy
22	Jane Woravka, Paula Dudek
29	Sara Bowman, George Beers



JUST BE KIND[®]

The United States of Kindness Campaign

Renee DeLuca, UCC Public Relations Coordinator

The UCC is partnering with the Values in Action Foundation to encourage individuals to perform 250 acts of kindness this year. It's a wonderful project that will highlight your compassion and love for God's kin-dom.

Q: Tell us more about "The United States of Kindness" campaign, an initiative to celebrate the nation's 250th birthday.

A: The campaign encourages kindness across the country, hoping to inspire Americans to commit **250 acts of kindness in 2026**. Sponsored by the Values in Action Foundation, a partner of the United Church of Christ, this movement celebrates everyday good deeds, creating a wave of positivity that unites and uplifts people. The kindness movement builds on three decades of research-based programs that have reached more than 9,000 schools and 2.6 million students.

Q: Keeping track of 250 acts of kindness is overwhelming. Is there an easy way to log my progress?

A: You can begin your acts of kindness at any time. However, there are 250 days between April 25 and December 31. Consider setting a goal on April 25 to **complete one act of kindness per day** until the end of the year. Register your commitment at: https://secure.lglforms.com/form_engine/s/KoJ6XMGdEpBnHIuUNEtoYQ You'll receive updates on an official launch, resources and ways to participate. Most of us extend kindness without giving it a second thought. This initiative will draw more attention to our love and compassion for our neighbors, both nearby and around the world. Thank you for participating!

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 2nd Sun. in Lent Outreach 9 am Worship 10:30 am Communion Clangy change Fellowship hour? AA Men 7:30 pm	2	3 CE 7 pm Trustees 7 pm	4 Handbells 6:30 pm Choir 7:30 pm	5	6	7 
Linda & Stephanie vacation						
AA Men 7:30 pm	AA Women 7 pm	AA 1 st Step 8 pm	Three C Club 6-7:30p	AA Women 6 pm Al-Anon 7:30 pm		AA Women 9 am
8 3rd Sun. in Lent Worship 10:30 am Robeson Singers concert & reception 3 pm <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 10px auto;"> Linda & Stephanie vacation </div> AA Men 7:30 pm	9 Council 7 pm	10	11 Handbells 6:30 pm Choir 7:30 pm 4-H 7 pm Three C Club 6-7:30p	12 Girl Scouts 5 pm AA Women 6 pm Al-Anon 7:30 pm	13 Three C Club family fun night 6-8 pm	14 AA Women 9 am
15 4th Sun. in Lent Worship 10:30 am OGHS Deathcare conversation after worship service AA Men 7:30 pm	16 Newsletter article due Women's book club 7 pm	17 	18 Handbells 6:30 pm Choir 7:30 pm Three C Club 6-7:30p	19 AA Women 6 pm Al-Anon 7:30 pm	20 SSD prep 6 pm	21 Swiss Steak Dinner 4:30 pm/6:00 pm 
22 5th Sun. in Lent Worship 10:30 am AA Men 7:30 pm	23 Emergency preparedness task force meeting 6:30 pm	24 AA 1 st Step 8 pm	25 Handbells 6:30 pm Choir 7:30 pm 4-H 7 pm Three C Club 6-7:30p	26 Girl Scouts 5 pm AA Women 6 pm Al-Anon 7:30 pm	27 Tarot 7 pm	28 AA Women 9 am
29 Palm Sunday Worship 10:30 am Deacons 11:30 am Fellowship hour Easter egg hunt 12:30 AA Men 7:30 pm	30 Worship planning meeting 10:30 am	31 AA 1 st Step 8 pm				

Swiss Steak Dinner

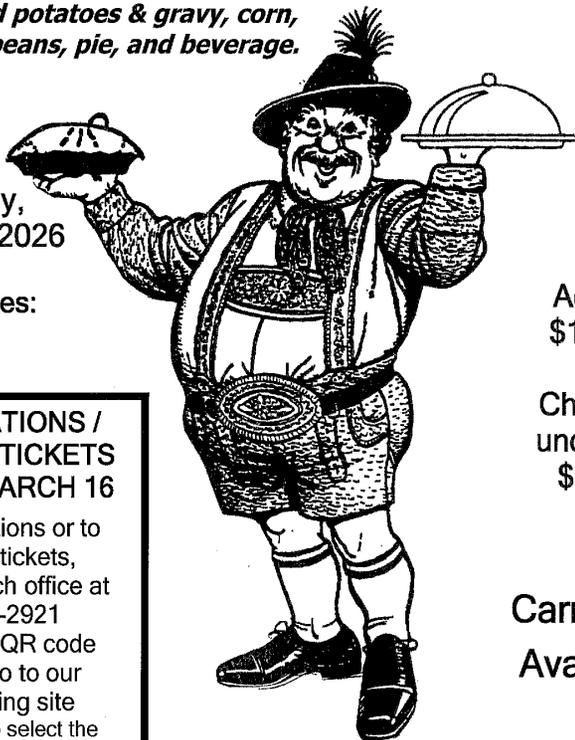
Treat yourself to a home cooked meal...
Dinner includes salad, rolls, Swiss steak,
mashed potatoes & gravy, corn,
green beans, pie, and beverage.

Saturday,
March 21, 2026

Serving Times:
4:30 pm
6:00 pm

**RESERVATIONS /
PRE-SALE TICKETS
ONLY by MARCH 16**

For reservations or to
purchase tickets,
call the church office at
440-327-2921
or scan the QR code
below to go to our
online giving site
(make sure to select the
correct dinner time)



Adults
\$15.00

Children
under 12
\$7.00

**Carry Outs
Available!**



To share faith, hope & love with all
First Congregational Church

United Church of Christ

36363 Center Ridge Rd., North Ridgeville, OH 44039
440-327-2921 ~ www.fcclive.org

Handicap accessible



The Robeson Singers will perform at
First Congregational Church UCC on
March 8th at 3pm - see you there!

Robeson Singers Concert: Join us on Sunday, March 8 at 3 pm to welcome the Robeson Singers for a concert! They are a predominantly Black community gospel choir singing for liberation, working to unite folks from all socioeconomic classes to create a more loving and just world for all. A reception with light refreshments will follow and there will be a free will offering to support the Cleveland Liberation Center.

Hello beloved community.

I wanted to share some exciting (and slightly nerve-wracking) news with you all — I will be going to Palestine in May. I will travel with a group of UCC and Disciples of Christ (DOC) leaders to visit our Global Ministries partners in the region, folks that our church denominations have been working with for many decades. Together, we will visit with Christian, Muslim, and Jewish partners who are caring for a variety of people in the midst of an ongoing genocide.

At this moment, there are still quite a few unknowns about the trip, including where and who we'll actually be visiting. A lot of that will be decided closer to our departure date and will depend on the current political situation and how safe things are on the ground. As I have more details about this, I will absolutely share them with y'all.

For now, though, I wanted to explain a bit about why I feel so called to visit Palestine, and why I have advocated for a ceasefire and just peace process in Israel/Palestine publicly since I came to FCC. When I worked abroad doing refugee resettlement with Global Ministries partners in Hungary and Greece, many of the folks I worked with were Palestinian. I was invited into the homes of Palestinian families to visit, play with the children, and try seasonal foods. I would hang out with Palestinian kiddos while their parents took language lessons, and they would draw me pictures of their homeland. "This is Palestine," they would tell me proudly. "This is where our family's house is. These are the olive trees. I've never been there, but dad says that maybe someday we can go home."

Learning in college that generations of Palestinians have been kicked out of their homeland, forced to live in refugee camps in diaspora for decades, was already heart wrenching. Then watching the Palestinian teens that I loved so much draw the key to their family's ancestral home, that they have never been to, broke me open in new ways in my mid-twenties.

It is my deepest hope that this trip in May will break me open even further, so that I can witness the faithfulness and dedication of a people in an impossible situation. I hope that I can share far and wide about my trip while I'm there, and when I come home, so that the stories and messages of our interfaith partners can be magnified. I especially hope that this visit will remind our partners in Israel and Palestine that there are people around the world who love them, support them, and pray daily for a peaceful resolution to all the violence.

As a local church leader I know that wading into politics can put a bad taste in some folks' mouths, but I heartily believe that there is a difference between politics and partisan politics. The former is inevitable — everything is political. FCC hiring the first out LGBTQ+ pastor in North Ridgeville was political! Us having an elevator so our space is accessible is political! But know that my faith is not partisan and I will not bring partisan politics into this space.

Since I began my education into the state of Israel and Palestine a decade ago, I have stood firm in my Christian belief that no country can kill their way into the creation of a holy land; that includes the state of Israel as well as our own nation, who committed genocide against indigenous folks in the name of a "manifest destiny." My faith calls me to hold ALL of our leaders accountable to caring for ALL of

God's good creation, regardless of political party or country of origin. This is why the founders of our country called for the separation of church and state, after all — they wanted pastors to be a prophetic presence and voice of the sacred conscience rather than political puppets.

Know that for this trip, I am firmly grounded and rooted in my Christian faith. I will travel to Palestine as a form of embodied prayer. While there, I will be a loving presence for all of God's beloved creations, supporting them with words and tangible shows of support. When I return, I will continue to amplify the voices of church partners and keep their wisdom front and center, acknowledging that diversity is what helps us encounter new and vital facets of God.

I could go on and on about all this, but I trust that this is enough for today. More conversations will come and we will continue to dialogue with tenderness and care.

I'm sure that many of you will also have questions, so please send them to me at PastorFCCNR@gmail.com. I will collect your questions and answer them in writing for everyone. Perhaps you want to know how you can help? (There will be fundraising opportunities to support my trip expenses and to help fund our partners' incredible work.) Maybe you're curious about how I'm going to care for myself upon re-entry into the United States? (I'm already working on a plan!) Or you might just want to know who else is going? (Lots of big church leaders from the UCC and DOC!) Whatever you're curious about, please ask! I assure you that if you're wondering about something, at least six other folks are wondering about the same thing :)

Every blessing,
Pastor Kearstin

Global Ministries is the common witness of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ. Our two denominations have a formal partnership through which Disciples Overseas Ministries and the UCC's Wider Church Ministries share common staff, budget, programs/projects, and governance in our presence and witness with international partners throughout the global community.



Global Ministries works with approximately 250 partners in close to 90 countries. We join hands with international partners and walk together in mutual love and respect with our siblings around the world.

With partner churches, nonprofit organizations, and ecumenical bodies throughout the world, we share life, resources, support, and faith. This often includes advocacy work, opportunities for mutual exchange and learning, sharing of mission personnel, sharing of financial and material resources, and being in prayer for and with international partners. Join us in realizing our vision that all of God's people and creation share in God's abundant life.