

The Messenger

January 2026

The monthly newsletter of First Congregational Church UCC of North Ridgeville

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Jack Fitts

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Linda Matis



From the Pastor – Pastor Kearstin (she/her)

Welcome to January, dear ones! Though Christmas Day has come and gone, Christmastide (the Christian liturgical season) is here until January 11. It's an entire season of feast days, celebrations, and remembrances that go from Christmas day through the 11th of January. American Benedictine nun, Joan Chittister, explains Christmastide beautifully. She says, *"It is a season that puts a glow on the soul. These are feasts that take us into the mystical insights that characterized the first coming of Jesus and are at least as important to our own faith in the second coming of Jesus. Suddenly, in the outpost of Jerusalem, in an empire given to tax collecting and riot control, in a Hebrew community oppressed by a foreign power but nourished by ancient prophecies of hope and liberation, little by little there stirred the awareness among many that somehow the foundations of heaven and earth had been shaken. The world had changed. The pregnancy of human hope and the conviction of divine possibility were in the air."*

Christmastide takes us from Christmas day (focused on the baby Jesus in a manger, where we are invited into childlike wonder and faith) into the context surrounding the birth of Christ. This wider context highlighted by Christmastide invites us into a level of spiritual maturity where we can look through the dark days of life and still gaze upon the stars beyond them, where we can name the difficult things and still find hope and support and a reason to carry on.

This is not a season of a fairy-tale story — the saga of Jesus and his family is nuanced and multifaceted. Astrologers and wise people from a foreign kingdom come and provide gifts of spices and gold. The Holy Family goes on the run from a murderous ruler, seeking refuge in Egypt (likely funded by the gifts the Magi brought). The murderous ruler (*spoiler alert*) murders many children, trying to get to Jesus. When it's safe, the Holy Family returns to their homeland and must start life anew, again.

If we are open to it, the fullness of this Christmas narrative can guide us into a deeper understanding of God in the midst of dark days. In these stories, we are reminded that God is with us even when things feel hopeless. God travels with us as we seek refuge and safety. Though worldly leaders may

enact policies that literally kill people, God is with Their beloveds, working to build a more just, loving, and liberatory world for all.

Just as this happened thousands of years ago in Palestine, so it is all happening again in our world today. As God worked through Mary, God continues to work through marginalized people to disrupt power. Like God spoke to Joseph in his confusion and disbelief, God is also with us when we are confused, afraid, and not sure what to do next. As the shepherds told everyone the good news of Jesus' birth, God continues to pick unlikely folks to be part of Their holy work.

Christmastide teaches us that God can be trusted and that God draws near to us and cares for us deeply. In this new year, may you know that trust in your soul and feel God's care wrapped around you like a comforting hug.

Every blessing,
Pastor Kearstin

Christmastide Bible Study: Tuesdays in January at 11 am, in person at the church.

Join us for continued scripture exploration for the month of January! Each week we'll color together, share stories, and dive deeper into the characters involved in the Christmas narrative. We'll discuss the **Prophet Isaiah** (a poet of possibility), **Zechariah** (Elizabeth's husband, whose voice is taken away), **Anna** (a temple elder who is there when the Holy Family comes to get Jesus blessed), and **Joseph** (a wonderful example of non-toxic masculinity). The bible study gatherings are stand-alone, so don't worry if you can't make it to one — still come to the rest if you can!

New Members Class: Sunday, January 11 after worship in Pastor Kearstin's office.

Interested in joining FCC? Want to get to know the organization of the church better? Curious and just have lots of questions about life at FCC? Join us for an informal new members class on

January 11 to chat with Pastor Kearstin, as well as representatives from Council and Deacons.

Stationary Swap: Saturday, January 31 from 3-5 pm in the fellowship hall. We'll gather from 3-5 pm to enjoy mocktails, swap stationary supplies, test out pens and markers, make cards or write letters to get a feel for the supplies before you take them home, and have a darn good time together. Interested in being our "bartender"? Send Pastor Kearstin an email and let her know! PastorFCCNR@gmail.com. Please RSVP so we know how many mocktail supplies we need to purchase!

<https://partiful.com/e/bryW6JERxpSp67qvKR0b>

Tarot Group at FCC: Happening Friday, January 16 at 7:00 pm in the fellowship hall. This monthly gathering is for anybody who has ever been curious about tarot, folks who might be interested but hesitant, as well as those who have been reading for years! For this gathering, we're going to dive into the Minor Arcana (aka the suits of the tarot deck). We'll pay special attention to the Pentacles this month, exploring all 14 cards in the suit. Worksheets and support will be provided, and all knowledge levels are welcome! RSVP here so we know how many tables to set up in the fellowship hall!

<https://partiful.com/e/NnPZD7iP24LQ8TYxuJIR>

Christian Education Corner – Mary Karlovec

New Year's greetings to everyone!
I would like to say thank you: 
• To the Sunday School teachers -- Heather Smith, Kelsey Styrt, Renee Dornan, Jenn Anderson, Sandy Chalkwater and Susan Dornan who filled in when needed -- thank you for giving of your time and talents to support our kids.

- To everyone who volunteered in the nursery on Sunday mornings, thank you for being there for our precious little ones.
- To the Board of Christian Education -- Heather Smith, Holly Hengartner, Sandy Chalkwater,

Renee Dornan, Susan Dornan, Nancy Findlay, and Kelsey Styrt -- thank you for keeping me on track, supporting our Christian Education programming, and giving so much of your time to make our Christian Education programming come to fruition. It takes a village to make Christian programming work! YOU ARE ALL ROCK STARS!

•To the congregation at First Congregational Church, THANK YOU for supporting the Christian Education programming from clangy change (we raised over \$1,200 this year to support 12 different projects) and for donations for other projects that were not covered in our budget. Not only has this made a difference in our programming but outreach projects in our community and beyond.

For January 2026, our clangy change recipient will be Lorain County Public Health. Bring all your change on January 4 and just maybe you will have "special visitors" collecting it on this special Epiphany Sunday!

Blessings for 2026!

Outreach Committee News – Karen Farmer

These are the busy after-the-holidays weeks – weeks that can leave us drained, empty and in need of a refill of faith. It is a perfect time to pause and think about how we can use God's gift of this new year to serve Him and better the lives of those around us.

In December the Outreach Committee donated \$100 each to Community Care, Neighborhood Alliance, and the Native American Heritage Association, as well as \$200 to Blessing House. We provided \$200 to long-time member Dreama Stamper's son, Robert, towards the purchase of a motorized scooter that he needs due to his many serious medical issues. We also spent almost \$200 to provide games, puzzles, and a gift card to our adopted Community Care family for Christmas.

The committee would like to thank all of you who contributed to the chicken-in-a-bag dinners. We collected and delivered 24 dinners

to Community Care. We would also like to thank those of you who purchased children's gifts for our Christmas Giving Tree. We deeply appreciate your generosity. You made the lives of many in our community a little happier during the holidays.

Leading up to Super Bowl Sunday (February 8), the committee will lead a "Souper Bowl Ingathering" collection of soup and crackers throughout the month of January to benefit the Lorain County Office of Aging. Your donations of soup and crackers are examples of ways to be in service to others. Let us live so that when this year comes to an end, we may know that we have made a positive difference in the lives of others.

Deacons' Desk – Dr. Kurt Dornan

Staying Healthy This Winter

As cold weather keeps us indoors, it's important to care for both our bodies and our spirits. Remember to wash hands often, eat nourishing foods, stay active when possible, and get plenty of rest. Checking in on one another, especially seniors and those who may feel isolated, can make a meaningful difference. Let us continue to support one another in health, kindness, and prayer throughout the winter season.

Trustees' Turn – Roy Dreger

The Trustees didn't meet in December, but there are still items to talk about. The first is the carpeting that Ron Short has graciously donated. Even though it has been down for a while, I still find the difference amazing. It makes entering the church so much more welcoming and continues to be noticed by visitors and members alike. Your church family can't thank you enough, Ron!

The next item isn't as upbeat. I recently called a local company to set up an appointment to meet for an estimate. The secretary, or receptionist, at the business had no idea who we were. She asked where on Center Ridge Road

we were located! I told her we were next to Liston Funeral Home and across from the cemetery, and it was then that she recognized the area, but not necessarily the church. This business is maybe a mile and a half away; and while I have no idea the route she takes to and from work, the fact is she knew Liston's by **name** but didn't recognize the church name. Our "curb appeal" needs work. This is an important piece of being known in the city and we need to improve it.

As the year winds down, on behalf of the Trustees, I would like to thank everyone for their financial support and wish everyone a blessed New Year!

Craft Show -- Lynne Petroff & Linda Matis

Thank you to everyone who worked on the Craft Show and made it a success again. It's a very long day and many of you were there from beginning to end. We can't thank you enough. It truly takes the whole church coming together to pull it off every year and your help is much appreciated.

- ✓ As always, Mary Karlovec did a great job in the kitchen. There were many compliments on the food and people say they look forward to eating here every year.
- ✓ Thank you to Krista O'Neill for again handling the bake sale so that we didn't have to worry about it.
- ✓ Kinzer and Barb Habecker were put to work Friday morning along with Ki Ki Witter decorating and setting up tables for the crafters and in the café. It amazes me how that old dingy undercroft transforms into a festive café.
- ✓ Again, thank you to all that volunteered and helped. From moving all that furniture out of the Sunday school rooms, to helping the crafters unload, chopping veggies for the café to putting all the rooms back together again. Then there were all those that helped working the different stations that day –

servers, admissions, cashiers, runners...the list goes on and on.

But, it's over for another year and it was a success because of you, so...thank you from the bottom of our hearts! (And thank you to Lynne for co-chairing the craft show for the past **18** years. It has been a joy and pleasure to work this event with you!!)



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

January 19: The President is Missing by Bill Clinton and James Patterson

February 16: Don't Let Him In by Lisa Jewell

GREETERS

January	
4	Millie Gilly, Sara Bowman
11	Paula Dudek, Teri Loy
18	Jane Woravka, George Beers
25	Diana Goode, Karen Farmer



Birthdays & Anniversaries

1/3	Charis Meehan
1/5	Nancy Findlay
1/7	Dale Williams
1/8	Karen Dreger
1/12	Karen Veliconia
1/25	Beth Dornan
1/27	Charlotte Moyseenko



We would like to thank you all for the generous Christmas gifts that we received. You are all very kind! -- FCC Staff

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				 1 New Year's Day OFFICE CLOSED AA Women 6 pm Al-Anon 7:30 pm	2	3 AA Women 9 am Couples Recovery 6 pm
4 Epiphany Outreach 9 am Worship 10:30 am Communion Clangy change Remove Christmas decorations AA Men 7:30 pm	5 AA Women 7 pm	6 Bible study 11 am CE 7 pm Trustees 7 pm AA 1 st Step 8 pm	7 Handbells 6:30 pm Choir 7:30 pm	8 AA Women 6 pm Al-Anon 7:30 pm	9 Annual Reports due	10 AA Women 9 am Couples Recovery 6 pm
11 Worship 10:30 am Fellowship hour? New members class AA Men 7:30 pm	12 Council 7 pm AA Women 7 pm	13 Bible study 11 am AA 1 st Step 8 pm	14 Handbells 6:30 pm Choir 7:30 pm	15 Girl Scouts 5 pm AA Women 6 pm Al-Anon 7:30 pm	16 Tarot 7 pm	17 AA Women 9 am Couples Recovery 6 pm
18 Worship 10:30 am Annual Meeting AA Men 7:30 pm	19 Women's book club 7 pm AA Women 7 pm	20 Bible study 11 am AA 1 st Step 8 pm	21 Handbells 6:30 pm Choir 7:30 pm	22 AA Women 6 pm Al-Anon 7:30 pm	23	24 AA Women 9 am Couples Recovery 6 pm
25 Worship 10:30 am Fellowship hour/sacred conversation Deacons 11:30 am AA Men 7:30 pm	26 AA Women 7 pm	27 Bible study 11 am AA 1 st Step 8 pm	28 Handbells 6:30 pm Choir 7:30 pm	29 Girl Scouts 5 pm AA Women 6 pm Al-Anon 7:30 pm	30	31 Stationary Swap 3-5p AA Women 9 am Couples Recovery 6 pm