

The Messenger

December 2025

The monthly newsletter of First Congregational Church UCC of North Ridgeville

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From the Pastor – Pastor Kearstin (she/her)

In our world today, it can feel like trust is fragile, truth contested, and spaces between us feel harder to cross. Divisions stretch far and wide. The constant churn of political tension leaves many feeling anxious and uncertain. Community feels strained, and connection is harder to come by. Hearts are weary, and souls unsettled, and people of all perspectives are searching – not just for answers, but for understanding, healing, and hope. This ache is not weakness; it is a **holy longing** – a sacred desire for a world made whole. From this longing comes *the will to dream* – a persistent courage to imagine, resist, and rebuild a better world.

Our stewardship season in early fall was focused on the Dreams of God, and we will continue that focus on defiant dreaming through the Christian Liturgical seasons of Advent and Epiphany. In these days, we will lift up The Will to Dream. This focus is based on the incredible work of the late theologian and biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann. For the next six weeks, we will work as a community to see beyond what is and move towards what could be. Through stories like the prophet Isaiah's vision for the world to Mary's song when she learns that she will co-create a child with God, we will claim hope as a radical act. We will dream together not to escape the current world, but as a form of spiritual resistance to embody a better world today. With this focus in mind, we will also continue sticker voting and talking about the kind of future we feel God is calling FCC into. In this time of transformation for our community, we will lean on the wisdom of the prophets from our faith tradition and gather for meaningful conversations. Throughout the month of December, you can expect thoughtful sermons, continued conversations about FCC's future, bible study opportunities to dig deeper into our sacred stories, and gorgeous imagery and reflection questions shared on social media.

Advent is the beginning of the Christian New Year – and we are starting the year strong by defiantly dreaming and planning for a more just, loving, and merciful world. I encourage you to dive into this sacred season as



much as is helpful for you. Lean into this community so that we can support and love one another well through the longest nights of the year, dear ones.

Every blessing,
Pastor Kearstin

Special Worship Opportunities in December

•December 14 at 7 pm is the **Christmas Music**



Festival. Join us to worship God together through the joy of music from a wide variety of talented folks in our community and beyond!

•December 20 at 7 pm is the **Blue Christmas**

Service. This is a tender worship meant specifically to hold space for those who have experienced loss and struggle during the holiday season. The atmosphere in the sanctuary will be quieter, contemplative, and more intimate than a typical Sunday morning. Whatever you are mourning, you and your grief are more than welcome at FCC.



•December 24 at 7 pm is the **Christmas Eve**



worship service happening in-person at the church. At 11 pm there will be a Christmas Eve worship service on Facebook Live.

Advent Bible Study: Through December and early January, we'll gather for weekly bible study conversations focused on the theme of *The Will to Dream*. **Bible study will occur on Tuesdays at 11 am in-person at the church, and at 7 pm on Google Meet** for folks who would rather gather online. December 2 will focus on the prophet **Isaiah**, who shows us how "holy dreams shape real futures, and how sacred vision becomes an invitation to walk a new path." December 9 will center on **John the Baptist**, who teaches that "true peace is not found in hiding from conflict, but in confronting it with clarity, love, and the will to change." December 16 will dive into **Elizabeth's** story, she who is,

"the first prophetic voice to affirm the sacredness of Mary's calling." Each week we will learn about our ancestors in faith and then share our own stories that relate to what we find in scripture. Join us to deepen your understanding of the bible and to witness the sacred sharing of others in the community!

Moderator's Moment – Kris Dornan

Happy Holidays, Church Family! As we look to conclude one year and welcome in another one, I would like us to keep in mind one of the goals we accomplished this year, and that is institution of 5 minutes of kindness. The Christmas season may be one of the most important times for us to show kindness to others. While we may have the blessings of our own families and friends to cherish, there are many others where the holiday season brings the harsh reality of loss, loneliness closer to their hearts. Let us try and love our neighbor even more deeply in this holiday season.

Pastor Parish – Matt Karlovec

Church family! I hope you're having a good start to Advent. As the facilitator leading the discussions this past Sunday (November 23) on the future of our church, I think it was very productive and positive in getting it all out on the table about where we are, where we want to be and some of the options on how to get there as a church. As we continue through this process, some of our conversations will feel very personal and pointed and sometimes there might be hurt feelings. Some may feel frustration and/or anger over differences of opinions and decisions that may be made as we continue to move forward towards the future. Our hope is that each person has the opportunity to process, express and share their feelings in a caring, calming way with each other.

As the chair of the Pastor Parish Committee, I have been doing research, which I

encourage you to do as well. I have spoken with ministers and friends in UCC churches across the Heartland Conference and the United States, and they have shared with me an overall theme about what has emerged in the churches that are new or are renewing UCC congregations. They have the most reach for vitality and growth potential. The churches that go bold and have a specific mission of one area that they focus on are making their identity known.

So let's look at our identity. We are already an Open and Affirming (ONA) church. So let's look at what this could look like if we went bold and have a specific mission. For example, let's say that our specific focus would be on LGBTQIA as part of our church's main focus of being ONA. We would boldly reach out into the community by having speakers, mailers, press, activities, youth groups, workshops, and community outreach that cater to all as part of an ONA church. The emphasis is on ONA but our focus is on supporting the sub-groupings that branch off—such as community outreach, youth/children, mission, and community programs—utilizing our church to benefit the community. Our focus would be different but different can be a good thing. Churches who embrace this option tend to thrive because they combine radical inclusivity, strong commitments to justice, and deep engagement with local needs. These are all things we somewhat do now but the problem is we currently are focused on too many areas. This can cause burnout for people that actively take on volunteer roles in the church as well as staff.

Some examples of churches that are doing this now are:

- Christian Worship Center UCC in Anchorage is expanding rapidly by welcoming people from many backgrounds and focusing on youth ministry, food distribution to youth, and community healing especially with a youth focus in their native community.

- Liberation UCC in Seattle grows through lively, spirit-filled worship and its identity as a refuge for marginalized people, emphasizing ONA LGBTQ+ affirmation, racial justice, and creative community events.
- Mosaic Community Church in Oklahoma City draws people through extensive outreach to unhoused neighbors, free health screenings, food ministries, and a strong message that everyone belongs.
- Keystone UCC in Seattle is known for economic and labor justice work, partnering with unions, and encouraging activism as part of Christian discipleship.

Overall, the fastest-growing UCC churches are those that offer bold welcome, passionate justice work, creative worship, and hands-on care for their communities. Several Ohio UCC congregations exemplify the kind of singular-focused, justice-driven mission seen in the fastest-growing UCC churches nationwide.

- South Euclid UCC centers its identity on social justice as a spiritual calling, by engaging in systemic work around racial equity, LGBTQ+ inclusion, voting rights, and economic justice.
- Orchard Hill UCC emphasizes radical welcome and reconciliation, celebrating diverse backgrounds and pursuing a mission "to change the world" through inclusive discipleship.
- Lakeview UCC advances its mission through interfaith social justice partnerships and local advocacy.

Together, all these churches illustrate how Ohio congregations grow when they commit to one clear faith mission rooted in bold welcome, justice, and community transformation. This can be done by our church as well.

I have made a list of pros and cons in thinking about the above churches and our church diving off the deep end and being bold with one focus. An example is below:
Focus on One Ministry Priority (e.g., open and affirming, racial justice, food insecurity)

Pros

- Clear mission focus: A targeted approach can sharpen our community's identity and make a tangible impact.
- Bold visibility: Increased marketing, like press releases and open houses, would likely raise awareness and attract people passionate about the cause.
- Possible external funding: A strong, focused mission could attract grants or additional support from the broader church association.

Cons

- Resource intensive: It requires significant financial investment for marketing, outreach, and organizational shifts.
- Narrower focus: While focused, it may alienate some members who do not align with the specific ministry priority.
- Uncertain long-term impact: Even with a bold move, it's unclear if this will sustainably grow the congregation or extend the church's life significantly.

Again, this is just an example but hopefully by working together and giving each other grace to make a positive impact, we can move forward to become a faith community that will make a difference in not only our faith community but the community of North Ridgeville.

With pivoting toward our future, I hope you come with open hearts and open minds to our next meeting during fellowship time on December 21. Please consider reading through the questions that will be coming in your email, think about how you would answer them, take notes, and write down questions that come from your answers to the questions. Finally, pray for the journey that is ahead of us and where God is leading us.



Christian Education Corner – Mary Karlovec

Happy Advent! Our first Sunday of Advent is right after Thanksgiving so it is upon us! I love the beautiful decorations in the sanctuary and all the wonderful, familiar songs of the season! What is your favorite part of the Advent season?

The Sunday after Thanksgiving is typically a low attendance Sunday for Sunday school. I highly encourage you to make the effort to have your children there as we are following the same lectionary series from Illustrated Ministry as those in worship and it will be a wonderful learning experience! On that Sunday, our children will gather in the Sunday School classrooms but then we will travel for the first lesson and a special activity in fellowship hall. Also, on that Sunday each of our families will receive a special Advent calendar to open each day during Advent!

Sunday, December 7 is all family Sunday in worship and **clangy change** Sunday! Our change this month will be used to support our stocking project for our friends who may not be able to be with us in worship on Sundays. They will be ready for delivery between the 14th and 21st. I will be looking for ten families/friends to deliver a stocking to one of those receiving a stocking. Sign up outside my office if you are interested in helping with this important delivery!



Finally, on Sunday, December 21 our preschool through 6th graders will be singing a special song in worship! After that, they will be going to fellowship hall for a very special Advent workshop where they will be decorating Christmas trees. If you have any tiny miniature ornaments you would like to get rid of, drop them off by my door and we will put them to good use!

Finally, just a reminder there is no Sunday School on December 28.

Outreach Committee News – Karen Farmer

Mariah Carey has taken over the airwaves once again, belting out her Christmas wish and marking the return of this season of great joy when we celebrate the divine love of Christ, "the light of the world!" It is a love that goes beyond gifts and decorations. Without it, the season is reduced to a sparkle of tinsel, tree lights, and never-ending preparations.

The Outreach Committee attempts to share God's love through its mission work. We approved monetary donations to Community Care (\$100 for its general fund and \$200 toward its holiday needs) as well as \$100 to Neighborhood Alliance. We are immensely grateful to our congregation for its generous donations of the ingredients for the "Chicken Dinner-In-A-Bag" food pantry drive. Your generosity made it possible for many local families to enjoy a blessed Thanksgiving.

We continue to remember our shut-ins by sending cards expressing the love and care of our congregation. Care notes are available on the bookcase in fellowship hall if you would like to send cards as well.

The Giving Tree will be up and decorated very soon with ornaments that have an item from a child's wish list on them. Community Care gives us the information for these children. Please feel free to take an ornament and purchase that item to help make that child's wish come true.

In addition to the Giving Tree, the committee will also provide gifts for the five children of our "adopted" family of seven, as well as a \$100 gift card for the parents. In addition to buying gifts at Christmas, we provide gift bags for their birthdays as well as gifts at Easter.

We encourage you to share the priceless gift of God's love this holiday season. Only in this way (through simple acts and small kindnesses) can the true meaning of Christmas be known and spread.

Trustees' Turn – Roy Dreger

WOW! What a week at the church (2nd week of November)! An awning was put up over the elevator outside entrance and new carpeting was put down in the school wing hallways. The awning was thanks to the family of Marge Baker. Linda Matis said that Marge had advocated for an awning, so they decided funding an awning would be a fitting use of memorial funds donated to the church in honor of Marge.

The carpeting has been purchased through the generosity of Ron Short. Ron told me that he wanted to do something for the church and, boy, did he! I have heard many positive comments about the carpeting. I mentioned in a prior article that Pastor Chris had said the condition of the old carpeting was not a welcoming sight if you were a visitor. Now we are assured that they will have a good first impression.

Next time you come across Diana Goode or Linda (Marge's daughters) or Ron Short, be sure to thank them for their gifts that have made our church a better place.

Now, I would like to address the stewardship drive. It did not end the way I, and others, had hoped. A deficit budget is not a positive situation, nor is it something that can continue indefinitely. We have operated on deficit budgets too many times in the past; and through luck and doing without things, we made it work. Please don't become complacent and think that because we made it work in the past there is no reason to be concerned; there are many reasons for concern. Having said all that, I invite everyone to examine their pledge and consider, if you can, add to it prior to the January annual meeting. Neither I nor the other trustees want you to do more than is reasonable; but if you can possibly do more, it would truly be a blessing. In the meantime, thank you for the contributions you have already given.

Tarot Group at FCC: Happening **Friday December 12 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 work on a large Year Ahead Spread. Pastor Kearstin will walk folks through a 13-card spread to notice themes and energy in 2026. 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/M3IUOICvKuhNGPoV7PQB>



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

December 15: Comfort and Joy by Kristin Hannah

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

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

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

GREETERS

November	
30	Paul Wolanski, Millie Gilly
December	
7	Sara Bowman, Paula Dudek
14	Teri Loy, Jane Woravka
21	George Beers, Diana Goode
24 (7 pm)	
28	Karen Farmer, Paul Wolanski



12/4 Roy Dreger
 12/8 Jack Fitts
 12/12 Kinzer Habecker
 12/13 John Arnold
 12/20 Betty Fitts
 12/23 Sara Bowman
 12/24 Diane Feigi
 12/31 Ki Ki Witter
 12/28 Chris & Kari Dlugosz

REMINDER:

All donations for 2025 MUST be turned in by December 31 to be applied to your 2025 giving statement.

If you missed our family game day BINGO! in November, keep watch for the next date. Those who were there had a lot of fun and won lots of great prizes!!





**Christmas Poinsettias
for our Sanctuary--
A Living Tribute to Celebrate
the Birth of Jesus Christ**

We hope to fill our sanctuary with lovely poinsettia plants beginning on Sunday, December 21 and remaining through Christmas.

The cost is \$8.50 each. Please include your payment with your order. Checks should be made payable to First Congregational UCC. **ALL ORDERS AND MONEY ARE DUE BY DECEMBER 14.** Orders may be placed in the offering plate or turned in to the office.

You may pick up your plants after the worship service on Christmas Eve. Any plants not picked up by January 4 will be discarded.

_____ white _____ marble _____ red _____ pink
(indicate quantity)

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY

In memory of _____

In honor of _____

Given by _____

**Christmas
MUSIC
Festival**

Choir / Handbells / Carols

DECEMBER 14
7:00 PM

Reception with light
refreshments to follow.

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.fccalive.org

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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.fccalive.org

Blue Christmas Service

Saturday,
December 20
7:00 pm

A tender worship service
meant specifically to hold
space for those who have
experienced loss or struggle
during the holiday season.

Whatever you are
mourning, you and your
grief are more than
welcome here.



holidaycraft fair

DECEMBER
6
9 AM - 4 PM



First Congregational
Church
36363 Center Ridge Rd.
North Ridgeville





HOMEMADE GIFTS • JEWELRY • ORNAMENTS • HOME DECOR & MORE!



Stop in
our Cafe'
for lunch!



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Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1 Girl Scouts 5 pm AA Women 7 pm	2 Bible study 11 am / 7 pm Google Meet Trustees 7 pm AA 1 st Step 8 pm	3 Handbells 6:30 pm Choir 7:30 pm	4 Girl Scouts 5 pm AA Women 6 pm Al Anon 7:30 pm	5 Craft Show set up 6 pm	6 Craft Show 9 am-4pm  AA Women 9 am Couples Recovery 6 pm
7 2nd Sunday of Advent Worship 10:30 am Communion Clangy change collection Fellowship hour? Independence Village svc. 2 pm AA Men 7:30 pm	8 Council 7 pm AA Women 7 pm	9 Bible study 11 am / 7 pm Google Meet AA 1 st Step 8 pm	10 Handbells 6:30 pm Choir 7:30 pm	11 AA Women 6 pm Al Anon 7:30 pm	12 Tarot 7 pm	13 Hall rental (Palco) 1-5 pm AA Women 9 am Couples Recovery 6 pm
14 3rd Sunday of Advent Worship 10:30 am Fellowship hour? Holiday Music Festival 7 pm Poinsettia orders due  AA Men 7:30 pm	15 Women's book club 7 pm AA Women 7 pm	16 Bible study 11 am / 7 pm Google Meet Handbells 6:30 pm Choir 7:30 pm Newsletter articles due AA 1 st Step 8 pm	17 CPR AED certification training 6-8:30 pm	18 Girl Scouts 5 pm AA Women 6 pm Al Anon 7:30 pm	19	20 Blue Christmas svc. 7 pm  AA Women 9 am Couples Recovery 6 pm
21 4th Sunday of Advent Worship 10:30 am Fellowship hour – Sacred Conversation about Future AA Men 7:30 pm	22 AA Women 7 pm	23 Choir 7 pm AA 1 st Step 8 pm	24 Christmas Eve Services 7 pm in person / 11 pm Facebook Live 	25 Christmas OFFICE CLOSED AA Women 6 pm Al Anon 7:30 pm	26 OFFICE CLOSED	27 AA Women 9 am Couples Recovery 6 pm
28 Worship 10:30 am Fellowship hour? Deacons 11:30 am AA Men 7:30 pm	29 Worship planning meeting 11 am AA Women 7 pm	30 Handbells 6:30 pm Choir 7:30 pm AA 1 st Step 8 pm	31 New Year's Eve OFFICE CLOSED			