The Messenger

September 2025

The monthly newsletter of First Congregational Church UCC of North Ridgeville

Minister

Rev. Kearstin Bailey PastorFCCNR@gmail. com

Director, Christian Education Mary Karlovec

Music Director Barb Habecker

Moderator Kris Dornan

Vice-Moderator Diana Goode

Co-Chairs, Christian Education Renee Dornan Kelsey Styrt

Acting Chair, Deacons Karen Dreger

Acting Chair, Outreach Edie Phillips

Co-Chairs, Trustees Roy Dreger Jack Fitts

Treasurer, Secretary Linda Matis



From the Pastor – Pastor Kearstin (she/her)

Hello, dear ones. For the last eight months, church leadership has been making decisions and thinking about the future through the lens of who we feel God is calling us to be in this community. For 2025, that's *a vibrant and diverse community, with a forward-thinking and inclusive approach to Christianity.* We've embodied this through continued Spirit-led preaching, accessible community events, workshops that explore spirituality, new members joining the deacons, and the creation of a taskforce to help us plan for emergency situations. In so many ways, we are thinking about how to widen the welcome and ensure that FCC is well-resourced for the future.

One of the things that you, as a member or regular visitor, can do to help support the church in this work is to continue communicating clearly and kindly with one another. Part of this is understanding that each individual and family at FCC has a different bandwidth for showing up in our community. Some folks are retired and live away from family, so spending time volunteering at the church is nourishing for their soul. For families with young children, even making it to worship on Sunday mornings is a minor miracle some weeks, and taking on other responsibilities at FCC might actually be incredibly stressful.

Part of being a loving community together is speaking openly about our capacity and supporting each other where we can. Things like RSVPing sooner, rather than later, for events and workshops helps to ensure that the volunteers who put them on can plan things properly. Even being super honest when someone at church asks how you are ("I'm a little stressed — my kiddo needs cupcakes baked for school on Wednesday and I don't know when I'm going to find the time!?") can give other people the opportunity to support you in creative ways.

As we continue to celebrate the vibrance and diversity of our community, remember that part of loving one another well is communicating clearly and kindly.

Every blessing to you, Pastor Kearstin Bible Study and Workshop Feedback: As Pastor Kearstin begins to plan for the end of the year, please let her know if there are things you'd like to learn about. Maybe you've always yearned to know more about how the Bible came to be? Or you'd like to explore some of the weird and wild stories in scripture? Or perhaps you're curious about the lives of the Saints and you'd like to learn more? Whatever your desires or interests are, please feel free to communicate that to Pastor Kearstin (PastorFCCNR@gmail.com) clearly and kindly!

<u>Moderator's Moment</u> - Kris Dornan

As our children end their summer breaks and enjoy their first few days of school, we as a church are excited about the change in seasons and are about to enjoy a new choir season and a new Sunday School season.

We are also entering into our season of stewardship. These last few years have been crucial in our church's life. We've been blessed with an amazing pastoral leader in Pastor Kearstin and have become a beacon of life to North Ridgeville, an area where our church is not only needed, but almost mandatory for many people who feel rejected by historical churches and current theology.

Our work needs to continue; and to continue to be that leading light, we will need to be financially sufficient. The good news is that in our history, when a need surfaces, a need gets met.

<u>Christian Education Corner</u> – Mary Karlovec

September is upon us and fall programming begins again. Sunday School programming begins on Sunday, September 14 with our Round-Up Sunday kickoff. Our preschoolers through 6th graders will enjoy games and snacks. Weather permitting, we will be outside, but we will meet in Fellowship Hall to "round everyone up!" We ask that the kids wear tennis shoes, if possible, for safety reasons.

Speaking of Sunday School...WE NEED

TEACHER VOLUNTEERS! Due to our Safe Church policy, it is important to have two adults in each classroom every Sunday – a lead teacher who prepares the lesson (curriculum is provided) and an assistant.



Currently, in the preschool

through 2nd grade class, I need one more lead teacher and two assistants. In the grades 3-6 class, I need two teachers and two assistants.

Teachers/assistants teach every other week so in any given month, you would only be in the classroom no more than two times. The first Sunday of the month will continue to be Family Sunday in worship. We encourage families to be a part of these Sundays as it's time for our children to learn the rituals of worship and communion.

Most of our current high school youth are confirmed members of our congregation and most have indicated that they would like to be a part of the worship service on Sunday mornings. Heather Smith will be available with lessons for the youth who would rather gather in the youth room for conversation than attend worship each week.

Finally, we need volunteers for the



nursery! This requires no preplanning on your part. I am looking for eight volunteers who are willing to be in the nursery once every eight weeks. If there are no children in the nursery on

your Sunday, you are more than welcome to go to church.

Christian Education is a vital component of our church. The Christian Education Board cannot do it alone. We need your help! Please prayerfully consider in what capacity you can help. Please talk to me if you are willing to help as soon as possible.

Our clangy change for August was utilized by purchasing school supplies for

Community Care. We also had several donations of supplies from church members. With these funds and donations, we were able to supply Community Care with 35 boxes of crayons, 12 pairs of scissors, 30 folders, 15 packs of markers, 27 packs of colored pencils, 60 glue sticks, 34 bottles of glue, 15 spiral notebooks, 25 composition notebooks, 7 pkgs. notebook paper, 25 pkgs. pencils, 4 pkgs. highlighters, and 3 pkgs. erasers!! Clangy change truly makes a difference! Thank You!

Clangy change collected in September will be used to buy paperback Scholastic books as September is National Literacy Month. If you are a teacher who would also like to use some of your Scholastic bonus points to purchase books, we are targeting preschool through 6th graders. Our books will go to the Lotts Creek Community School library. As you may recall, our youth spent many hours this summer organizing their library. We noticed that they do not have many of the current, well-liked and read authors the youth grew up reading. We want to put current authors as well as beloved books in their hands. A group of adults are making a trip there this fall and is willing to deliver the books for us!

Outreach Committee News – Karen Farmer

Wasn't it just yesterday that school let out? We thought we wouldn't survive the chaos of summer, but we did! Now it's time to switch from jaunts to the pool or beach, backyard barbecues and family vacations to back-to-school shopping and scheduling time to attend school events. Where did the time go?! With all of the approaching activities and commitments that can seem overwhelming in the coming months, we can benefit from remembering the prophetic line from the children's book The Little Engine That Could, "I think I can."

The Outreach Committee was active in helping finance the Lotts Creek Community School this summer by providing over \$500 towards our youth mission trip there. We received a letter of introduction from the son of

the recently deceased director of the school, Alice Worley, who is taking over as director of the school. Mr. Worley expressed his sincere thanks for all of our help in the past and hoped that we would continue to support the school.

The Outreach Committee is gearing up for a busy fall season as well. We have designated \$100 each for the Community Care and Neighborhood Alliance programs this month. We approved the purchase of a \$50 Visa gift card for Bob Franks to use at his discretion in the wake of Nancy's death. We also made a \$150 donation to the Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine in support of its research on Creutzfeldt-Jacob Disease (CJD) and other prion diseases in memory of our dear Nancy, who suffered from CJD. We provided \$25 for the purchase of birthday party supplies and a gift for one of our Community Care family members who is turning 5 years old.

As we continue to consider other possible worthy mission projects, we researched Bread for the World and learned that its main mission is funding lobbyists to fight world hunger through legal channels. It is a highly rated charity. We will look into Love, Inc. and its mission as well. We are looking at a fun ingathering idea for November that the congregation can participate in.

We will all be inundated with many responsibilities and changes as we begin the fall season, but we can survive them remembering always: "I can do all things through Christ which strengthened me." (Philippians 4:13)

<u>Trustees' Turn</u> – Roy Dreger

Karen and I contribute to a number of charities outside of the church. I found myself getting a little cranky because when I would send a donation, I would soon afterward receive another request from that organization. I was thinking about this the other day and it occurred to me that they do that because they need the donations all through the year, not just at the holidays. It also occurred to me that the church

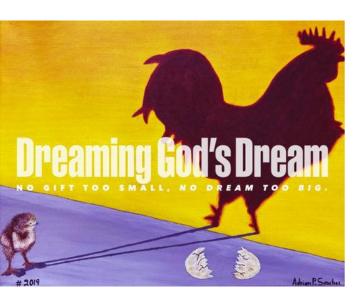
needs to request pledge money all year as well. So, this article is about that need: the need for funding throughout the year.

Ever hear someone say, "the church is always asking for money"? Whenever I have heard that, it is not unusual to also hear, "and that's why I don't go to church!". Well, I believe that person is looking at the issue the wrong way, much as I did with regards to the outside charities.

I really don't like asking for money all the time, but the needs of the church don't stop between Christmas and Easter, and sometimes it is necessary to remind people of that fact. Payroll, utilities and repairs don't take summer vacation and the church depends on the congregation to help it through the entire year. That's why you will hear me talk about the need for pledges to be up to date (giving ahead is welcome, also!).

Speaking of pledges, the stewardship campaign is going to begin soon so this may be a good time to consider your giving level. Remember, we are not going to be getting any more grant money from the Living Water Association after this year and the difference needs to be made up from our weekly giving in order to continue the ministry of this church.

I think it is also important to thank you for your continuing contributions to this ministry; it's truly a blessing!



<u>Deacons' Desk</u> - Linda Matis

Our daughter Stephanie (also our custodian) is all about sunflowers this summer.

She planted the seeds that we gave out for Mother's Day and has been nurturing her "babies" all summer long.
Some have grown to about 10' with flower heads 12" across. It has been fun watching her care for them and get so excited as we watched them grow. (In this picture she is on an 6' ladder!)



Sunflowers are important for several reasons, including their benefit to the environment, their role in supporting pollinators and wildlife, and their economic value.

Sunflowers in Christianity often symbolize devotion, faithfulness, and turning towards God's light, mirroring the flower's heliotropic nature of following the sun. They represent seeking spiritual nourishment and guidance, as well as the beauty and simplicity of faith. The sunflower's growth, from a small seed to a towering plant, can also symbolize the potential for spiritual growth and the importance of a solid foundation in faith.

We should all pattern our lives after sunflowers, turning to God, the "light of the world" (the sun), for guidance and spiritual nourishment and giving back the "fruits of the spirit" (sunflower seeds) of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control – which benefit not only us but also those around us. In essence, the symbolism of sunflowers in a Christian context emphasizes that by turning towards God (following the sun), nurturing one's spiritual life (preparing the soil), and living according to Jesus' teachings (bearing fruit), we will naturally be inspired to generously share God's love and blessings with others (giving back), becoming sources of hope and positivity in the world.



The Sunflower Prayer ~by Jamie Trunnel ©2020, ascripturedlife.com

Plant me like a sunflower, Lord, deep in the fold of your will. Forge my faith in soil's darkness, sprout hope up as I wait still.

Grow me like a sunflower, Lord, leaning close toward your light. Extend bright rays of direction, keep me warm in your sight.

Adorn me like a sunflower, Lord, humbly wearing a righteous crown. Stack petals of mercy and grace, golden forgiveness in Christ I've found.

Use me like a sunflower, Lord, to offer nourishment and cheer. Harvest the Spirit's fruits within me, encourage others you are drawing near.

Surround me like a sunflower, Lord, in a field of believers ripe with faith. Bring us together for a troubled world, display your love through our bouquet.

Thank you, Lord, for creating endearing reminders of your Word.
Looking up, away from the earth's concerns, my gaze meets yours, and joy like a mighty sunflower stirs.



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

September 15: The Devil's Food Cake Murder

by Joanne Fluke

October 20: The Thursday Murder Club by

Richard Osman



9/7	Becky Williams
9/7	Ella Eaton
9/10	Jody Millar
9/14	George Beers
9/17	Linda Matis
9/17	Vi Elrod
9/23	Mary Ireland
9/24	Holly Hengartner
9/24	Rosemary Fletcher
9/26	Kurt Dornan
9/26	Kris Dornan
9/26	Brenda Schutz
9/28	Kearstin Bailey
9/29	Karen Mytnick

GREETERS

September				
7	Paula Dudek, Diana Goode			
14	Jane Woravka, Diana Goode			
21	Millie Gilly, Karen Farmer			
28	Teri Loy, Paul Wolanski			
October				
5	Paula Dudek, Sara Bowman			
12	Jane Woravka, George Beers			
19	Diana Goode, Karen Farmer			
26	Teri Lov. Paul Wolanski			

Remembering Nancy...by Mary Karlovec

"I first met Nancy (Franks) in 1986 when she and Bob started attending First Congregational. At the time, I was on the Christian Education board as a member, and it wasn't long before she asked how she could help with Sunday School and Christian Education. And as they say.... the rest is history. Nancy joined the Christian Education board the following year and got her "feet wet" by serving on the committee and volunteering to help with projects. Then she volunteered to help the CE director at the time with "decorating" for Vacation Bible School. By the mid 1990's she volunteered to teach the 3rd/4th grade Sunday School class which my son Matt was a part of along with 10 other kids. And that's when the Nancy Franks I remember and am in awe of transformed our Sunday School programming in spectacular ways.

That first year she taught Sunday School, her room had a few of her artistic decorations. She even volunteered to help us not, so artistic teachers add a few decorations to our rooms other than the usual posters and maps that came with the curriculum. Nothing to extravagant but it made our classrooms shine a little brighter.

The only way I can describe what transpired next would be to imagine a tornado and a hurricane colliding together and changing the trajectory of what a Sunday School room with an amazing artistic visionary could look like. The following Fall, Nancy was again in the 3rd/4th grade but her room was no longer a room with a few decorations. It was THE most welcoming, colorful room. The walls, things hanging from the ceiling and even things on the floor told a story of what they would be learning about that quarter. And from then on, every quarter or season, her inviting classroom décor changed. It even spread out into the hallways and bulletin boards.

It was a learning environment (that) her Sunday school kids could not wait to get to on Sunday mornings. But her creative decorating was just the beginning of her creative lessons. Music, drama, art and poetry all became integrated into her lessons. Nancy truly had a gift, inspiring and challenging our kids learning about God.

Over time, Nancy became the head of the Christian Education Board. In 1997, I transitioned from Sunday School teacher to the Christian Education Director. I was a teacher by trade but really felt I was not qualified to oversee the religious education of 40+ children and youth. Added to that, I can honestly say I was a little intimidated and overwhelmed by Nancy's creativity and I wasn't sure this would bode well in the long run.

One of most vivid memories I have was of Nancy sitting me down, looking me straight in the eyes and saying (and I am paraphrasing) "Mary, you are one of the most creative people I know. God gives each of us creativity in different ways. Let your creative brain come up with the ideas and I will help you bring it to life!" From that point on, Nancy became my "cardboard queen" and the ideas/creativity went beyond Sunday School.

Working together, "Themed Centers of Learning" became a part of the learning each quarter of Sunday school. This special room targeted something from the curriculum. One of my favorites was Jonah and the Whale. To get into the room, you had to enter through the mouth of the (huge cardboard) whale (that Nancy had created).

One year I wanted to do a drive through Nativity. Not only did Nancy make all the backdrops for each scene around the parking lot, but she gave me a very detailed list of costumes, complete with drawings, that I needed. We still use many of those costumes today. And I need to mention her surprise-real chickens and a goat to "lend a realistic" touch!

No idea I came up with, Nancy wasn't willing to listen to. Advent and Lenten intergenerational workshops/learning centers, Safe Halloween, Mardi Gras, Round Up Sunday, and, of course, her favorite-Vacation Bible School. This is where her creativity was truly on display. She would start with drawings and notes and then turn every classroom, hallway, fellowship hall and sometimes even parts of the back green space into a wonderful VBS experience. The VBS committee learned early on that our job to support Nancy in this endeavor was to wait for her to tell us what to do and not make suggestions or do or put anything in place without her specific instructions. We were always amazed at the final product. Each year on the first night of VBS, the

squeals of excitement from the kids made all of this worthwhile.

This past week I looked back through many of the picture albums (yes, she photographed everything) that Nancy had made. I smiled remembering some favorites from VBS:

- Outback Expedition completed with a life size hut and jeep
- Polar Expedition with a life size polar bear, melting iceberg and igloo
- •Scuba: an actual size canoe to sit in and a life size whale
- •Treasure Hunt-a slave ship complete with oars that went the length of the wall in fellowship hall plus a life size crocodile!

These are just a few of the hundreds of handmade decorations Nancy made and, of course, mostly out of cardboard appliance boxes for about 20 years of VBS!

And her creativity did not stop with Sunday School and VBS. Whenever there was a church dinner or fundraiser, Nancy was the decorator for the tables and theme. She would decorate the craft fair café to look like a beautiful Christmas café. My favorite was her candy cane themed café. (Look at) the wall hangings in the sanctuary. Most of them that hang in the sanctuary at some point of the year were inspired and either made by Nancy or she led a group to make them.

The other committee at First Congregational that Nancy had a passion for was the Outreach Committee. Giving back to our community and globally was who Nancy was. The Outreach Committee today is a thriving group of members in part due to Nancy and her commitment and passion for its work. She instilled this in her Sunday school kids and many of our food drives and outreach projects were a continuous part of their learning.

We have a wonderful group of young people aged 25-40 whose lives have been impacted by Nancy from the time they were in her Sunday School classes until today. Recently I asked several of them what were the three most important things they would want me to share about Nancy.

- 1. Their memories of amazing Sunday School lessons.
- 2. VBS-first as participants and then as high school helpers

3. And, most importantly, how much Nancy impacted their lives not only as children and youth but who they are today.

What a blessing for them to have had Nancy in their lives.

First Congregational UCC was not the only community outreach she was a part of. She was devoted to the North Ridgeville Arts Council, including two terms as president and she also belonged to the North Ridgeville Historical Society. Her community service was recognized in 1996 when she was awarded the Corn Festival "Golden Kernel Award" for her outstanding community service and making North Ridgeville a better place to live. Nancy also received the Lions Club highest award, the Melvin Jones Award, for her community service.

These awards and accolades from the community, her commitment to our church, and being dubbed the cardboard queen, were not Nancy's greatest accomplishments, honor and love. Wife to Bob for 60 years, mother to Ross and Wendy, and grandmother to Bradley, Geoffrey and Wesley were her greatest blessings in life. We are forever grateful that you all shared this truly amazing lady with her church family and the community. May the memories your family made with Nancy give you comfort in the days to come.

We do not say good-bye to Nancy but "until we meet again." Rest in peace Nancy knowing you will always be with us. Thanks be to God for giving us this special lady. We have been truly blessed."

Remembering Mrs. Franks-by Matt Karlovec

"If you came up the stairs on our church's side entrance today you came by what is our minister's office. That was Mrs. Franks' 4-6th grade room (where) she taught me and countless others in Sunday school. Any time I come by that room I always think of her and what she taught me there. Now that wasn't her only room she taught in but for my generation and after me that's the room (where) our memories with her were made.

Her art is everywhere here and not just her art, but more importantly, the imprint she left on us which was her faith. She shared that with us each week while telling us stories about the bible in kid form, listening to many hours of church kid friendly songs out of a tape player and would have word for word giant poster board lyrics, and then us singing along with her each week until we learned them enough to recite without the (words) on our own. She would teach us a lesson and answer our questions as to why certain events happened that way in the bible or why people couldn't or wouldn't just get along. And in doing so, she always led with a gentle touch of kindness and compassion, while loving us like we were her own children. She created a safe space where failing was okay, even when we may have not followed the directions of what weekly craft we would be doing exactly right. She would still pat you on the back and say good job. Each spring you (would) look forward to the Seder meal she made up by herself as she retold the story of the Israelites' exodus from slavery in Egypt. Looking back, getting us kids to at least try each of these items must have been a very trying hour, but she always patiently encouraged us because it was important for new experiences in our journey of faith.

It's not hard to find of her amazing artistic ability that would be displayed in our church today for Christmas, Easter, or Palm Sunday. Many will attest to how Mrs. Franks could turn a regular cardboard box into Jesus' tomb with a giant paper boulder. Or the amazing costumes she might have made depending on a specific holiday.

Mrs. Franks will live eternally in our hearts and minds. Mrs. Franks, you will always be loved and never be forgotten."



Marguerite J. Baker (nee Wessel), 89, a longtime resident of North Ridgeville, passed away unexpectedly surrounded by her family on Monday, August 25, 2025, at UH St. John Medical Center, in Westlake. She was born January 19, 1936, in

Cleveland. Marguerite graduated from Fairview Park High School in 1954. She was very active in the North Ridgeville community, Marguerite and her husband Don were Golden Kernels in the 1995 Corn Festival, and she remained active in

the band and athletic boosters. Marguerite was also affiliated with the Girl Scouts for over 25 years. She enjoyed spending time with her family, reading, attending church at First Congregational United Church of Christ in North Ridgeville, and taking care of her dogs. Marguerite is survived by her four daughters, Diana Goode (Tim Creamer), Gail Kula (Gary), Grace Johnson (Chuck), and Linda Matis (Bob); 11 grandchildren, Megan Kyser (Andy), Sarah Staffiero (Michael), Gordon Goode (Melissa), Tim Goode, Dave Baker (Lora), Jessica Armstrong, Chase Johnson, Steven Matis, Stephanie Matis, Jeffrey Kula, and Kevin Kula (Kelsey); 11 great grandchildren, Elijah Kyser, Rhys Kyser, Cadence Kyser, Ian Kyser, James Webb, Alexys Webb, Daylan Baker, Duke Baker, Peyton Baker, Dylan Kula, and Elyse Kula; and many nieces and nephews. She was preceded in death by her loving husband of 50 years, Don Baker; her son, Jeff Baker; her parents, Herbert and Mildred Wessel; her brother and sister-in-law, Herb and Barb Wessel; and her son-in-law, Paul. The family welcomes friends to join them on Thursday, August 28, 2025, from 4pm to 7pm, at the Liston Funeral Home, 36403 Center Ridge Road, North Ridgeville. The service will be held on Friday, August 29, 2025, at 3pm at First Congregational United Church of Christ, 36363 Center Ridge Rd., North Ridgeville. Pastor Kearstin Bailey will officiate the service. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to First

Congregational United Church of Christ.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Labor Day OFFICE CLOSED	CE 7 pm Trustees 7 pm	Handbells 6:30 pm Choir 7:30 pm		Pastor Kearstin off	
				AA Women 6 pm		AA Women 9 am
	AA Women 7 pm	AA 1 st Step 8 pm		Al Anon 7:30 pm		Couples Recovery 6p
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Outreach 9 am Worship 10:30 am	Council 7 pm	Sunday school teacher meeting	Handbells 6:30 pm Choir 7:30 pm			
Communion Clangy change collection Fellowship hour(?)		6:30 pm				
-				AA Women 6 pm		AA Women 9 am
AA Men 7:30 pm	AA Women 7 pm	AA 1 st Step 8 pm	4-H 7 pm (rain loc.)	Al Anon 7:30 pm		Couples Recovery 6p
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Worship 10:30 am	Women's book club	Emergency	Linda off			
Round Up Sunday	7 pm	preparedness task	Handbells 6:30 pm			
Fellowship hour		force 6:30 pm Newsletter articles	Choir 7:30 pm			
		due				
		due		AA Women 6 pm		AA Women 9 am
AA Men 7:30 pm	AA Women 7 pm	AA 1 st Step 8 pm		Al Anon 7:30 pm		Couples Recovery 6p
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
Worship 10:30 am			Handbells 6:30 pm			
Sunday school begins			Choir 7:30 pm			
Fellowship hour(?)						
				AA Women 6 pm		AA Women 9 am
AA Men 7:30 pm	AA Women 7 pm	AA 1 st Step 8 pm		Al Anon 7:30 pm		Couples Recovery 6p
28	29	30				

Worship 10:30 am Fellowship hour(?) Deacons 11:30 am

AA Men 7:30 pm

AA Women 7 pm

AA 1st Step 8 pm

