

The Messenger

February 2026

The monthly newsletter of First Congregational Church UCC of North Ridgeville

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From the Pastor – Pastor Kearstin (she/her)

Early last year I started a new venture — I joined what's called a Clergy Circle of Trust, led by a UCC pastor in California. Each month, a small group of five clergy and our facilitator gather on Zoom to practice listening to our wise Inner Teachers. The idea behind this cohort is that when we make intentional time for spiritual practices and deep connection, we're able to show up in the world in better alignment with God's calling in our lives.

One of my biggest learnings has been how to ask open, honest questions. When we chat with each other in the cohort, we intentionally do not offer practical solutions or opinions; instead, we wholly listen and allow our Inner Teacher (the sacred spark inside each of us) to guide our back and forth. Open, honest questions provide an opportunity for us all to listen to our inner truth. This way of asking questions has been so transformative for me that I wanted to share a bit more about it with you, and encourage us all, as a delightful chosen family, to ask one another more open, honest questions!

So what on earth is an open, honest question? Well, it's a question that's free of ego, judgment, and opinion. Our culture often teaches us to ask questions that are long and winding, so that we can include our own thoughts and perspectives even as we're being curious with one another. Open, honest questions set all that aside. They are questions that you can't possibly ask while thinking, "I know what you should do here and I hope you see things my way." For example, "Have you ever thought about seeing a therapist?" is not an open question — there's a tinge of judgement in there. However, "What did you learn from that experience you just described?" is a great open, honest question.

Open, honest questions are also brief, to the point, and they don't jump ahead of where the speaker is at. So asking, "What did you mean when you said you felt sad/disappointed/etc?" is wonderful. Asking, "Didn't you also feel angry/taken advantage of/etc?" is more leading and less helpful. These kinds of questions often bubble up in our minds when we're conversing, but many of us have been socialized to not ask them. Our wise Inner Teachers will



sometimes give us a nudge with a question that might feel “off the wall.” Trusting your intuition about when a question might be helpful, even if it feels random, can lead to some delightful and deep sharing. For example, you might ask someone, “What color and texture does that emotion feel like for you?” or “What advice would future you give current you?”

Learning to ask open, honest questions can be challenging. It’s easy to slip into old “fixing” habits, where we make space for our opinions rather than the stories of others. One thing that I am constantly reminding myself of as I practice this new skill is that I don’t need to “prove” myself and show what a good problem solver I am; my work is to simply support the people around me and help them listen to their own Inner Teacher’s wisdom.

Over the course of the next month, I encourage you to try asking some open, honest questions! It might feel difficult or uncomfortable at first; but if you stick with it, I promise that your conversations and relationships will grow deliciously deep. Here are some more example questions you can use to ease yourself into this practice:

- What do you deeply yearn for in your heart?
- What metaphor or imagery describes what you’re feeling or experiencing?
- What advice would the moon give you in this situation?
- Looking back on all this five years from now, what would you like to say about it?

I can’t wait to hear how your relationships are transformed with this small practice!

Every blessing,
Pastor Kearstin



Special Bell Choir Skit: Join us for worship on February 8** to experience a special performance from the handbell choir. They’ll be telling the story of Noah’s Ark with music in a way that’s sure to delight folks of all ages. Come to engage your Sacred Imagination and see what new insights you might gain from this cherished story! ** This means that our **all-church Sunday** worship will happen on the **second Sunday** of the month, rather than the first. Communion will still take place on February 1.

Tarot Group at FCC: Friday February 13 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 Swords 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/VzIkIf3MC2Vo7baSv7oE?c=_oYaOfT3

Sacred Conversation for the Future: We’ll gather on February 15 during fellowship time for our 4th Sacred Conversation together. Together we’ll talk through the next section of questions that Matt Karlovec wrote for us. These questions **focus on our community and congregational needs:**

1. What are the biggest needs of the community we serve in North Ridgeville and Lorain County and how well are we addressing them?

- How well are we connecting with underserved or marginalized populations in our community and could we be a beacon of hope for someone in our community that is not being served?
- Are we hearing from members and the local community that they are invested in a specific cause (e.g., racial justice, Open and Affirming accessibility, food insecurity)?

Remember: these questions might feel big and unwieldy, but when we come together as a community and trust our sacred inner voices to speak, we can do incredible things. We'll continue to foster an open and honest dialogue about the future of our community, and will spend intentional time discussing our vision and mission alignment. Childcare will be provided!

Ash Wednesday Service: Our yearly soup supper and Ash Wednesday service will take place on Wednesday, February 18 in fellowship hall. We'll gather for a simple meal of soup and bread; following the meal, we'll have a brief Ash Wednesday service that will include the ritual of wearing ashes on our foreheads. This service marks the start of the Lenten season leading up to Easter.



Moderator's Moment – Kris Dornan

Warm greetings, church family. I always seem to consider two things as we approach February--one is Groundhog Day, and the other is Black History Month. Each has some interesting things to consider.

I personally love the movie Groundhog Day. It's a funny comedy, its basis is Punxsutawney Phil, and Punxsy borders my hometown of DuBois, PA. The premise of the movie is repeating the same day over and over.

Sometimes it would be easy if we got a do-over for a day...we'd have the opportunity to right wrongs and perhaps make different decisions. Since we don't have that luxury, I implore us as much as possible to carefully choose how we deal with our daily tasks, how we deal with our relationships...because we don't get a do-over.

Secondly, this month celebrates Black History. Even though we have made progress as a country in racial relations, let's not forget that we still have much work to do to make equality amongst races a reality. Let's love our neighbors and treat them as we would have them treat us.

Christian Education Corner – Mary Karlovec

The Board of Christian Education would like to thank everyone who gave to the January clangy change collection. We raised \$101 to send to the Lorain County Public Health. On February 1 clangy change collected will be to support the Lorain County Urban League in support of Black History month. As 2025 showed us, change can make a huge difference! We were able to support 12 programs/projects that are not budgeted for but are desperately in need of support. Looking ahead, March clangy change will support Easter baskets for our shut-ins. If you have any medium or large Easter baskets not being used that you would like to donate, we need 10 baskets! Drop them off to me by March 1.

As you read this in the February Messenger, Pastor Kearstin, Heather Smith and I will have just completed the Our Whole Lives (Lifespan Sexuality Education) facilitator 3-day training at Lakewood UCC. Funds for this training were approved by the CE Board. This training is something that we have wanted to do for the last five years. An opportunity came up locally which made it more financially feasible so we jumped on the chance to take the training. More information will be forthcoming about the Our Whole Lives (OWL) program and our goal for 2026.

On February 8, Heather Smith and I will be travelling on a bus to Detroit with a group from the Ohio Conference of Methodist Churches and the Living Water Association of the UCC to visit the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History. We hope to use it as a destination this summer with our youth.

Finally, please note the February change for all-church Sunday. **There will be Sunday School on February 1** (clergy change will still be collected) and ALL-CHURCH SUNDAY WILL BE FEBRUARY 8 so that our kids can be in church for the handbell choir presentation of the Noah's Ark story. There will be a special coffee hour afterwards with a Noah's Ark theme.

Outreach Committee News – Karen Farmer

As I write this (mid-January), we are in the midst of a winter snowstorm covering the world in a quiet blanket of snow that reminds me of the quiet nature of God's love. God is everywhere in its silence, reassuring us that His love is constant. During the month of February, dedicated to expressions of love, the Outreach Committee continues to find ways to share God's love with our community.

We are excited to welcome Megan O'Neill to the board and are thrilled to have her aboard!

At our January meeting we voted to continue our \$100 monthly donations to Community Care and Neighborhood Alliance this year. We are looking into possible fundraisers for our church, such as hosting a rummage sale, a junk-in-the-junk event, as well as a restaurant dine-to-donate outing. If you have other ideas for fundraisers, please share your ideas with a member of the committee. We'd love to hear them!

We're contacting the One World Shop about bringing its mobile store to church for some Mother's Day shopping opportunities once again in April.

We wish to thank all of you for your donations of soup and crackers for our January

"Souper Bowl" in-gathering drive to benefit the Lorain County Office on Aging. Throughout February we will be collecting personal hygiene products (toothbrushes, toothpaste, floss, deodorant, shampoo, hair conditioner, soap, body wash, lotion, disposable razors, feminine hygiene products, etc.) for Genesis House, which provides services for victims of domestic violence in Lorain County. We invite you to help with this important mission.

We hope that we may make a difference in the lives of many through these missions. May you know that, even with no footprints yet in the pristine landscape of this new fallen snow today, God has walked this way and asks that we follow by sharing His message of love.

Deacons' Desk – Ben Dornan

This past weekend my family and I traveled to Indianapolis for my sister Charlotte's cheerleading competition. And while I was on this trip, I was thinking about how much time it takes to prepare for a five-minute cheer routine. That's all you do. No matter how much money you spend or how much time you put into your craft, five minutes is all that matters in each competition. And I can compare that to how we live our lives as Christians. We read our Bibles for a great amount of time, we honor God by coming to church each week, we live every hour of our lives just at the end to be judged by Our Lord and Savior. Therefore, we have to be cognizant of how we live our lives. Because living is just the first step to living forever in Heaven. We have to practice and we have to prepare correctly, in order to do our routine correctly.

If you're interested in getting involved in our church community, we still need some more members of the board of deacons. If you would like to join our community, please let any one of our deacons know.

Trustees' Turn – Roy Dreger

At the January trustees meeting we discussed some new issues, and some older, continuing issues. Among the newer issues was the need for a new computer for Linda. Her current computer has Windows 10 as an operating platform, but the newer updates that are coming for a church specific program require Windows 11. The program will not work with Windows 10, and Windows 10 cannot be updated as it is being phased out. Linda has purchased a newer computer but needs help migrating the programs from the old computer into the new one. I would try to help, but I'm still working on trying to program our VCR.

A proposal to remove a dead tree near the property line with our back neighbor was approved and it will be dealt with in February. Along with the dead tree, two arborvitae bushes (that have become trees) will be taken down. One is on the north side of the elevator entrance and the other is next to the double doors by the Winckles room and nursery. Due to the location of the second one and its proximity to the Mary Martha window, it was decided to have a tree service (with insurance) deal with removing it instead of doing it in house.

Our neighbor to the south (rear) of the church expressed interest in purchasing some of the lawn area adjacent to his property. I met with him recently to ascertain how much land he has an interest in. He has indicated interest in between 50 and 75 feet. The walk between his property line and the rear of the parking lot is approximately 155 feet long, just to give you an idea of what might be involved. The land will have to be surveyed and an assessment done to determine its value if a decision is made to sell the land. It is not a lawn area that we have used recently so it may be to our benefit to sell.

The slate roof repair has yet to be done although the estimate has been accepted. We have been told by the roofing company that it is in the process of scheduling the work. I hope

that the work can be done soon so that any damage is kept to a minimum.

The portable sign was blown into the neighbor's yard to the east during a period of strong winds we had recently. Linda retrieved it in spite of the sign attacking her (resulting in a painful, but not broken, nose). It will be evaluated and repaired if possible. If it is repaired, we need to invest in more letters as some of the current ones have become brittle. Being in the sun and freezing weather have contributed to the damage to the letters.

The budget is a continuing issue. This is being written prior to the annual meeting and the acceptance of the final budget and I anticipate that it will continue to be an issue in the coming year. It is always important, and helpful, when trying to plan for some work to have pledges up to date; your efforts in this area are greatly appreciated. Thank you for your financial support and Happy New Year.



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

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

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

April 20: My Friends: A Novel by Fredrik Backman

May 18: The Fox Wife by Yangsze Choo

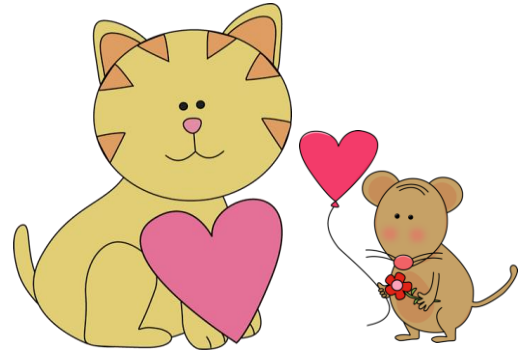
GREETERS

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



2/9 Mary Karlovec
 2/11 Karen Farmer
 2/12 Renee Dornan
 2/15 Harry Berg
 2/18 Abby Anderson
 2/19 Claire Wolanski
 2/24 Eliana Styrt
 2/26 Henry Schutz

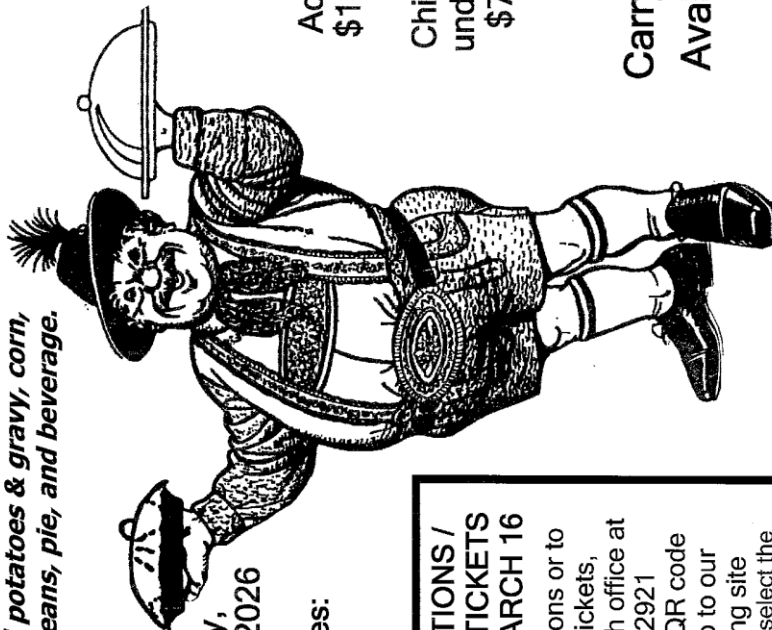
Happy Valentine's Day!



We have such a wonderful and caring church and I want to thank Pastor Kearstin for the services that she has been having every couple of months here at Independence Village. It helps me to feel a part of our church. I also appreciate the calls and visits from members that come to the service. You are an awesome church! God bless you all. – Linda Spayd (I also loved my gluten free stocking!)

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

Adults
 \$15.00

Children
 under 12
 \$7.00

Carry Outs
 Available!

**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)



To share faith, hope & love with all

First Congregational Church


United Church of Christ

36363 Center Ridge Rd., North Ridgeville, OH 44039
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Handicap accessible



February

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 Outreach 9 am Worship 10:30 am Communion Clangy change Fellowship hour? AA Men 7:30 pm	2 AA Women 7 pm	3 CE 7 pm Trustees 7 pm AA 1 st Step 8 pm	4 Handbells 6:30 pm Choir 7:30 pm Three C Club 6-7:30p	5 AA Women 6 pm Al-Anon 7:30 pm	6 	7 AA Women 9 am
8 Worship 10:30 am No Sunday school Handbell skit Fellowship hour AA Men 7:30 pm	9 Council 7 pm AA Women 7 pm	10 AA 1 st Step 8 pm	11 Handbells 6:30 pm Choir 7:30 pm Three C Club 6-7:30p	12 Girl Scouts 5 pm AA Women 6 pm Al-Anon 7:30 pm	13 Tarot 7 pm 	14 AA Women anniversary 8-11 am
15 Worship 10:30 am New members service New members reception/sacred conversation AA Men 7:30 pm	16 OFFICE CLOSED Newsletter articles due Women's book club 7 pm AA Women 7 pm	17 AA 1 st Step 8 pm	18 Ash Wednesday meal & service 6 pm  Three C Club 6-7:30p	19 AA Women 6 pm (up) Al-Anon anniversary 5-7:30 pm	20 	21 AA Women 9 am
22 1 st Sunday in Lent Worship 10:30 am Deacons 11:30 am Fellowship hour? Chili cook off? AA Men 7:30 pm	23 AA Women 7 pm	24 AA 1 st Step 8 pm	25 Handbells 6:30 pm Choir 7:30 pm Three C Club 6-7:30p	26 Girl Scouts 5 pm AA Women 6 pm Al-Anon 7:30 pm	27 	28 Hall rental (Davidson) 12:30-4:30 pm AA Women 9 am