

The Messenger

The ANNUAL MEETING to hear the annual reports of the boards and approve the final budget for 2025 will be held on SUNDAY, JANUARY 19 in the sanctuary immediately following the worship service.

The monthly newsletter of First Congregational Church UCC of North Ridgeville

January 2025

Minister

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Director, Christian Education

Mary Karlovec

Music Director

Barb Habecker

Moderator

Kris Dornan

Vice-Moderator

Diana Goode

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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)

Welcome to the Gregorian New Year, beloveds! One of the ways we, as a church, prepared for the New Year was by hosting a council retreat to help us prayerfully discern what God is calling us to for 2025. In November, I gathered with our council to pray, discuss, dream, and set goals for the year ahead — and wow, that space was Spirit-filled and magical in all the best ways. In the UCC, we love to say that “God is still speaking” and that we try to “Never place a period where God has placed a comma,” right? Doing yearly retreats and future visioning allows us, as a community of faith, to regularly check-in and listen for that still-speaking voice of God in our midst. It helps us to not get bogged down with routine for routine’s sake, and it ensures that we’re a lively community able to adapt to the needs of North Ridgeville and beyond. At First Congregational Church, we ground ourselves in a long tradition of faithful and justice-oriented people; yearly visioning and prayerful goal-setting allows us to keep our traditions alive and help us evolve them for who God is calling us to be right here, right now.

Ultimately, after hours of prayer, play, laughter, and deep discussion, FCC’s church council discerned that God is calling us to be **a vibrant and diverse community, with a forward-thinking and inclusive approach to Christianity in 2025**. This focused mission statement for the coming year will help us discern what kinds of programming to take on, outreach projects, and how we present ourselves to the wider community. It provides us with four really clear areas to work on: **vibrancy, diversity, forward-thinking-ness, and inclusivity**.

Now, you may be wondering, “That sounds great, Pastor Kearstin — but how are we actually going to walk the walk?” I’m so glad you asked, dear friend! As part of our yearly visioning, the church council also came up with nine goals for 2025. Some of them are large-scale projects, while others are quick to-do’s that will help us embody being a vibrant and diverse community with a forward-thinking and inclusive approach to Christianity. Over the coming months, you’ll hear more about these goals (and you’ll likely see fliers about them posted all over the church!), but I wanted to give you a sneak peek



with the riches of His *Grace*;
with the treasures of His *Love*;
with the comfort of His *Mercies*;
with the strength of His *Presence*;
with the touch of His *Care*.

here about what we're hoping to accomplish as a community of faith in the coming year. Our goals, in no particular order just yet, are:

1. Get comprehensive quotes for upgrades to the sound system and A/V system
2. Implement "5 Minutes of Kindness" on a monthly basis and use it in our communications on Sunday morning and in social media
3. Have an active QR code for online giving
4. Bring a practical lens to continued bible study opportunities
5. Host four creative worship experiences (guest speakers, all songs, other ideas)
6. Have an in-person presence at four community events (setting up a church booth at a festival, etc.)
7. Create and implement a communication strategy and social media policy
8. Host a new non-profit in our space during the week
9. Recruit folks to our music ministry

Nine goals. Twelve months. Over a hundred members. There's no doubt in my mind that we can accomplish these things if we work together as a church community. Like the Apostle Paul said in his letters, we are all part of the body of Christ, and we each have unique gifts from the Spirit that help us make the whole body function and thrive.

As we head into 2025 together, I would love it if you would spend just five or ten minutes in meditation, prayer, or silent journaling about the ways God and Spirit might be calling you to use your gifts in the coming year. Perhaps you used to run tech for the local theatre and you could help us figure out what our sound and A/V system need? Maybe you have a meaningful spiritual practice that could help others, and you could team-teach a workshop on it with someone? Or are you a natural networker, able to connect us with local musicians or cool events around town? No matter what skills you have, we at First

Congregational Church want to help you light up the world with your gifts.

This community has something important to share with North Ridgeville and beyond. We are a chosen family of faith, a hodgepodge group of incredible folks who come together to praise God and work for love and justice in the world — and it's time that we boldly share this good news far and wide with the world. Will you help us do that in 2025, dear one? I hope so!

Every blessing to you and yours in the New Year! ~Pastor Kearstin

Moderator's Moment – Kris Dornan

Another year in the books, and a new year upon us, 2025!! I hope all of you were able to take some time off to recharge your batteries and spend some time with loved ones!

As it is resolution season, I'd love to challenge us as a church family to set some goals and mindsets as we enter into 2025! As a church council, we have already brainstormed on a few goals we'd like to accomplish in 2025, which you see in Pastor Kearstin's article, but I'd also like to share a few personal goals I'm setting for myself, in case I can be a template for some things you'd like to work on!

I'd like to be slower to anger, and quicker to care. A lot of that can be the result of a better, or wise, mindset...I know I'm comfortable in my emotional mind where I can let strong emotions dictate behavior, which is sometimes necessary, but more often needs a moment of reflection or pause to ensure that emotions do not lead to quick or hasty responses.

What would you like to work on in 2025? Remember, no matter where you are in life's journey, you are loved, and you are welcome in our church community!



Christian Education Corner – Mary Karlovec

Happy 2025! As we start the new year, I would like to encourage everyone to focus on the word “**gratitude**”. According to the dictionary gratitude is the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for and to return **kindness**. For Christmas, I gave many people gratitude journals and challenged them to think of ONE thing every day that showed their **thankfulness or gratitude**. I encourage you to get a notebook or journal and give it a try. For the month of January the bulletin board in the church school wing will become a “gratitude wall.” There will be index cards available next to the bulletin board and on the tables in the narthex and near the door from the Sunday School wing for you to share your gratuities. Leave them in the gratitude baskets next to the index cards and I will put them on the “gratitude wall.” Let’s start 2025 with gratitude!

The first Sunday of January, the 5th, is clanging change Sunday. It is also “Wear your PJs to church Sunday!” Our clanging change for January will support children in Lorain County in need of pajamas through organizations such as Blessing House. You can help in two ways: first, contribute to the clanging change offering; second, bring a new pair of pajamas to donate on the 5th or 12th. Although we are targeting children's pajamas, women's pajamas are also needed. We will be collecting pajamas through January 15. Your donations will be appreciated!

Finally, a huge thank you to everyone who delivered the Christmas stockings to some of our church members. We were able to deliver 10 stockings with the donations from the December clanging change collection. Delivery of the stockings by our church members is always well received and appreciated.

Outreach Committee News – Karen Farmer

We praise God for the beauty and glory that was Christmas, for the loveliness of the

world around us, and for another new year – a chance to try again to serve Him. There is much to do. Already Christmas seems but a memory (except for the tinsel on the carpet, the drooping Christmas tree and the decorations that need to be re-boxed and stored away). As we try to navigate the snowdrifts we must climb in the winter of this New Year, we must trust Him to give us the faith and strength to begin each day in the service of others.

The Outreach Committee is serving our community this month by providing \$100 each to Community Care, Neighborhood Alliance, and the Native American Heritage Association. The committee is exploring some fundraising events for church programs as well. If you have any suggestions, please share them with us.

We would like to thank the congregation for its support of the Giving Tree by purchasing the items that children requested through Community Care. No doubt there were many delighted and excited faces on Christmas morning due to your generosity! The committee also provided holiday gifts for the children of our adopted family and a \$100 Walmart gift card for their parents.

As we ponder the unforeseeable future of this new year that God has blessed us with, let us live so that when this year is finished, we may say, “It is good to be a child of God; it is good to serve the Lord.”

Deacons’ Desk – Paula Dudek

The Board of Deacons consists of Karen Dreger, Linda Matis, Kurt Dornan, Paula Dudek, Ben Dornan, and Beth Dornan. The Deacons prepare the sanctuary for services, i.e. the lights and sound system are on, the correct color of altar cloths is on the altar, etc. We collect prayer request cards and the offering during the services and prepare and serve communion. The Deacons plan any special services and many other things throughout the year.

Each of us does things just a little differently but the outcome is the same. Pastor Kearstin's teachings are helping me realize things don't have to be perfect or done the same every time by everyone. God still loves us.

If you notice anything in the service that could be improved upon, please let a Deacon know, or become a Deacon and show us.

Have a blessed 2025!

Trustees' Turn – Roy Dreger

This is being written prior to Christmas and you may not be reading this until after the holiday, but on behalf of the Trustees we want to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and an even better New Year! We also want to thank everyone for your continued support of your church; we could not do anything without it.

The Trustees looked at insurance quotes that use higher deductibles as a way to lower costs, but it appears that there is no real benefit in doing this. The yearly savings would only be a few hundred dollars, but the deductible, should we have a claim, would drain the budget for that year.

For the safety of our staff, Council decided it would be appropriate to provide security cameras at the side and rear doors. The search parameters were low cost, no monthly monitoring fee, wireless, and accessible by both Apple and Android phones. Jon Eaton has done a lot of research in order to find the best and most economical package for our church and believes he has found what we need. Thank you, Jon, for your work on this project!

I have heard that some of the congregation are questioning the renovation of Fellowship Hall given the condition of the budget. Once again, this project is being financed by a generous donation from Pat Kyle that was given expressly for this work. This is not being done with money from the budget. When you have questions about the budget,

please ask me or one of the other trustees for an explanation.

I have heard that a little wine can be good for you, so here is my whine. A few weeks ago there was an advertising supplement in the paper that was for Christmas gift giving. There were two full page ads for guns, up to and including flamethrowers. I have, and do, own guns and I recognize that some are given as gifts; however, this advertising just did not strike me as being in the spirit of a season of peace and love. That is my whine for today, and I thank you for letting me vent.

Financial Review: Volunteers are needed to conduct the annual review of the church's



financial records. A team of 2-3 people would gather and review all of the bank statements, checks, deposits, etc. to ensure everything is accounted for. If you are

interested, please contact a member of the Board of Trustees or Linda Matis. The review needs to begin by the end of January per the Constitution.

ATTN: Board Chairpersons!
Annual reports for 2024 must be in the church office by January 10.
The annual meeting will be held on Sunday, January 19, 2025 in the sanctuary immediately after the worship service.



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

January 20: The Brighter the Light by Mary Ellen Taylor

Greeters



January	
5	Lynne Petroff, Jane Woravka
12	George Beers, Karen Farmer
19	Teri Loy, Diana Goode
26	Paul Wolanski, Millie Gilly
February	
2	Paula Dudek, Sara Bowman
9	Lynne Petroff, Jane Woravka
16	George Beers, Karen Farmer
23	Teri Loy, Diana Goode
March	
2	Paul Wolanski, Millie Gilly
9	Paula Dudek, Sara Bowman
16	Lynne Petroff, Jane Woravka
23	George Beers, Diana Goode
30	Karen Farmer, Teri Loy



1/3 Charis Meehan
 1/5 Nancy Findlay
 1/7 Dale Williams
 1/8 Karen Dreger
 1/12 Karen Veliconia
 1/19 Marge Baker
 1/25 Beth Dornan

Advent Bible Study Rescheduled! Due to illness, Pastor Kearstin had to cancel the second class of her Advent bible study, "On Earth as it is in Heaven". Class is now scheduled for Tuesday, January 14, 2025. There will be two cohorts for class: an in-person group who will meet at the church at 11 am, and an online group who will gather on Google Meet at 7 pm. Together, we will explore the cosmos and the advent story, focusing in particular on the overlapping themes and myths of the Christian liturgical calendar and the zodiacal calendar. Our time together will provide a cosmic perspective of the Advent story for those who are interested.



Unfortunately it's not that easy...which is why we could use your help on **Saturday, January 11** beginning at 9 a.m. The more people we have helping, the quicker it will go!
 Hope to see you there!

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1 New Year's Day OFFICE CLOSED 	2 Bell choir 6:30 pm Choir 7:30 pm AA Women 6 pm Al-Anon 7:30 pm	3 	4 AA Women 9 am Couples Recovery 6pm
5 Epiphany Worship 10:30 am Communion Clangy change collection Fellowship hour AA Men 7:30 pm	6 AA Women 7 pm	7 CE 7 pm Trustees 7 pm AA 1 st Step 8:30 pm	8 Bell choir 6:30 pm Choir 7:30 pm 	9 AA Women 6 pm Al-Anon 7:30 pm	10 Annual reports due 	11 Take down decorations 9 am AA Women 9 am Couples Recovery 6pm
12 Outreach 9 am Worship 10:30 am Fellowship hour Independence Village svc. 2 pm AA Men 7:30 pm	13 Council 7 pm AA Women 7 pm	14 AA 1 st Step 8:30 pm	15 Bell choir 6:30 pm Choir 7:30 pm 	16 Newsletter articles due AA Women 6 pm Al-Anon 7:30 pm	17 	18 AA Women 9 am Couples Recovery 6pm
19 Worship 10:30 am Annual Meeting AA Men 7:30 pm	20 Women's book club 7 pm AA Women 7 pm	21 AA 1 st Step 8:30 pm	22 Bell choir 6:30 pm Choir 7:30 pm 	23 AA Women 6 pm Al-Anon 7:30 pm	24 	25 AA Women 9 am Couples Recovery 6pm
26 Worship 10:30 am Fellowship hour Deacons 11:30 am AA Men 7:30 pm	27 AA Women 7 pm	28 AA 1 st Step 8:30 pm	29 Bell choir 6:30 pm Choir 7:30 pm 	30 AA Women 6 pm Al-Anon 7:30 pm	31 	