

The Messenger

The **ANNUAL MEETING** to hear the annual reports of the boards & approve the final budget for 2024 will be held on **SUNDAY, JANUARY 21** in the sanctuary immediately following the worship service.

The monthly newsletter of First Congregational Church UCC of North Ridgeville

January 2024

Bridge Interim Minister
Pastor Patty Humphress
Pastor Chris Nichols

Director, Christian Education
Mary Karlovec

Music Director
Barb Habecker

Moderator
Kris Dornan

Vice-Moderator
Diana Goode

Co-Chairs, Christian Education
Renee Dornan
Kelsey Styr

Chair, Deacons

Chair, Outreach

Chair, Trustees

Treasurer, Secretary
Linda Matis

Dear First Congregational UCC,

What a wonderful time Howard and I have had returning to this church to celebrate Advent and Christmas with you again. It was a great homecoming, and we feel truly blessed.

We will be praying for you as you transition to your new pastor, Kearstin Bailey. You have a great opportunity to learn and to teach as you welcome her to your church. May you be graced by her presence and ministry here, and may your light continue to shine in this community and beyond!

As a closing thought, I wanted to share this prayer, written by Oscar Romero, former Archbishop of El Salvador:

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.

*The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is even beyond our vision.*

*We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction
of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete.*

We plant the seeds that one day will grow.

*We water seeds already planted,
knowing that they hold future promise.*

We lay foundations that will need further development.

We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.

*We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation
in realizing that. This enables us to do something,*

*and to do it very well. It may be incomplete,
but it is a beginning, a step along the way,*

*an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.
We may never see the end results, but that is the difference*

between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own.

Gratefully,
Pastor Patty



ATTN: Board Chairpersons!

Annual reports for 2023 must be in the church office by January 12.

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### **Transformation Time**

*adapted from the Essene Book of Days*

Imagine your life is a series of trapeze swings. You are hanging on to a trapeze bar, swing along, back and forth, back and forth, suspended by your sheer determination.

You are hanging on for dear life to your trapeze-bar-of-the-moment. It carries you along a certain steady rate of swing and you have the feeling you're in control of your life. You know most of the right questions and even **some** of the right answers. But... as you are swinging along, back and forth, back and forth, you look ahead into the distance and see another trapeze bar swinging toward you. It's calling to you, and you KNOW that this new trapeze bar has your name on it. It is your next step, your growth, your aliveness coming to get you. You know in your heart that for you to grow, you must release your grip on the present well-known bar to move to the new one.

You swing, back and forth, back and forth, clutching tightly at your bar.

You pray you won't have to grab the new bar. But in your knowing place, you know you must totally release your grip on your old bar. Your grip tightens. You know you will have to hurtle across space before you can grab onto the new bar. You are filled with fear. It doesn't matter that in all your previous hurtles across the void of unknowing you have always made it. There is a place in you that is afraid you will miss – that you will be crushed on unseen rocks in the unseen chasm between the bars. You know there are no guarantees, no nets, no insurance policies. You must have faith, but faith is sometimes hard to come by. You know hanging onto that old bar is no longer an option for you. Knowing that does not take away your fear. You know that letting go of your accustomed-to trapeze bar will hurl you across the dark void of "the past is gone, the future is not yet here."

You are swinging, swinging. Your old bar is familiar. It may not be the best fit for you, but you

know your old bar well. You don't want change. You don't want that transition time. But... you also know transition is the only place real change occurs. You know transition is the only place where you can be truly transformed.

You clutch tightly to your familiar trapeze bar. It is real. Is the new one coming towards you real? You hope so. You see the void in between. It seems scary, confusing, disorienting. You hope that if you HAVE to let go, this void will be gone quickly and you will not be aware of it.

However, in your heart-of-hearts, you know the transition zone – the void – is the only real thing. The bars are illusions we dream up to avoid the void, where the real change, the real growth occurs for us. Transition zones in our lives are incredibly rich places. They should be honored, even savored. You feel they are places that can be the most expansive moments of your life. You wonder if you have the courage to hang out there, in that void between your secure trapeze bar and the one coming at you. And finally, you realize, hurtling through the void, you just may learn to fly.

You might imagine the whole church on this trapeze bar, as it has been the last few years. You are hurtling through space right now, in a time of transition between a couple of years of interim/bridge pastors and the anticipated arrival of your new settled pastor.

I will be praying for you as you welcome Kearstin Bailey to your church, and as you all work together to keep First Congregational UCC a beacon of light for the community and the world.

Blessings,  
Pastor Patty

### **Moderator's Moment – Kris Dornan**

As I start my second year as Moderator at our wonderful church, I reflect on 2023 and continue to be amazed at how fast each year goes, and how much faster these years go as I get older, something my own parents warned me about!

We navigated another year of bridge ministry through the amazing gifts of Pastor Chris and Pastor Patty while the Pastoral

Search Committee discerned a candidate who I feel is an answer to prayer, and truly represents a future where all things can be possible.

We lost a significant number of our church membership who now watch over us from above. But First Congregational Church still continued to be a spiritual home for so many of us, and a good number of visitors as well!

We managed a budget that provided for us and allowed us to navigate through some heating/cooling and elevator issues.

We continue to be staffed by gifted and wonderful people who excel at what they do and have been that critical rock necessary for us to navigate these past few years.

We continue to walk with a church family that truly reflects that when there is a need, God provides.

I look forward to experiencing what God has in store for First Congregational United Church of Christ – North Ridgeville in 2024!

Love, blessings, and good tidings for a healthy and wholesome 2024!

**We all get the exact same 365 days. The only difference is what we do with them.**

### **Christian Education Corner – Mary Karlovec**

Happy 2024! It is hard to believe that 2023 is over. There were many highlights from the Board of Christian Education in 2023. Most of these projects could not have been done without the support of this congregation, and for that I am truly grateful. The clanging change collection, which is collected the first Sunday of each



month, has supported 12 very important causes. We were able to fill 45 birthday bags for Community Care, support the youth on their mission trip, provide funds to make nine Christmas stockings for church members, purchase school supplies for Community Care, send 10 filled Easter baskets to homebound members, provide funds for the Colors+ LGBTQ youth center as well as winter hats, mittens, and scarfs for Lorain County residents in need, just to name a few. Collecting this change each month has made a HUGE impact on so many people near and far. THANK YOU for your support!

As we enter the early days of January, it is hard to believe that I am already looking ahead to **Lent**. It begins early this year so we will be celebrating **Mardi Gras on Sunday, February 11** after worship with our **annual Chili Cook Off!**



Last year we had 10 entries, and all were very delicious! John Petroff went home with the Golden Ladle. Who will be this year's winner? Start tweaking your entry now! There is a sign-up sheet outside my office to add your entry information. Also, we will be putting away the Alleluias! Who will be this year's Keeper of the Alleluias? Maybe it will be you! Remember that your support of this event helps our youth earn funds for their summer mission trip!

Look for an update on an Adult Bible Study coming soon!

Blessings for 2024!

### **Outreach Committee News – Karen Farmer**

The new year is still in its infancy. There remains time for those resolutions we

all dread so much! Have you made yours yet? It's important to pause and count our blessings at every birthday, including the birth of a new year that opens new possibilities for more life experiences and ways to improve and enrich our world and those around us. Blessings pile up with the years and grateful attitudes are essential to our growth. "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7).

The Outreach Committee was blessed to be able to provide \$100 to Community Care for its programs, as well as to provide monetary gifts to our adoptive family for Christmas. Thanks to many of you in the congregation, we were able to provide gifts for a number of children in the community through the Giving Tree, as well. We thank you for your generous hearts. We voted to send \$200 to World Central Kitchen to support the tireless, and often dangerous, work it does to provide food to those in desperate situations due to devastating circumstances. Early in the new year, we will be considering other means of sharing our blessings, with possible donations to such groups as the Wounded Warriors Project, RIP Medical Debt, Holy Joe's Cafe and others that will enable us to better the lives of those in need. God has work for us here and each milestone shows that He chose to have us remain to give Him a hand in this new year. Resolve this year to count your blessings and to share what you have to bless those around you.

### **Deacons' Desk – Paula Dudek**

Epiphany is traditionally January 6, Twelfth Night, the day the Christmas tree is taken down. Epiphany is when the wise men arrived at the stable in Bethlehem.

Epiphany means manifestation or disclosure, to have your hopes and beliefs become reality after a period of searching and waiting.

As a congregation we have been hoping and waiting for a new settled pastor and we believed we would get one. After waiting, hoping, and praying, we have our epiphany with Pastor Kearstin Bailey. Let us embrace our epiphany and pray for discipline and wisdom to grow with Pastor Kearstin...



### **Trustees' Turn – Paul Wolanski**

From all the members of the Board of Trustees to you: Have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

**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.





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

January 15: Midnight at the Christmas Bookshop by Jenny Colgan

February 19: Whistling Season by Ivan Doig

March 18: Someone Else's Shoes by Jojo Moyes



- 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



**Greeters**

- 1/7 Paula Dudek, Vonnie Packard
- 1/14 Karen Farmer, Paul Wolanski
- 1/21 Lynne Petroff, Paula Dudek
- 1/28 Regenia Comerford, Diana Goode

If you would like to be added to the greeter rotation, please contact a Deacon or the church office.

**CELEBRATE!**

**Pastor Kearstin's Ordination Service  
Sunday, January 28, 2024**

**3:00 pm**

**Reception immediately after!**

Please join in this blessed day in Pastor Kearstin's life and our church's future as she starts her journey with the Church! February 4th will be the first Sunday of Pastor Kearstin's service to our church! Please be there to welcome her!




Christmas Eve 7 pm service

(Left to right) Howard Humphress, Roy Dreger, Pat Kyle, Ki Ki Witter, Karen Dreger, Pastor Patty Humphress / Barb Habecker at piano

*thank you*

From the staff of First Congregational Church: We would like to thank you all for the generous Christmas gifts that we received. You are all very kind and working here is a blessing!

| Sun                                                                                                                                                                                            | Mon                                                                            | Tues                                                                                         | Weds                                                           | Thurs                                                                                 | Fri                                              | Sat                                                        |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                | <b>1</b><br><b>New Year's Day</b><br><b>OFFICE CLOSED</b><br><br>AA Women 7 pm | <b>2</b><br><br>AA 1 <sup>st</sup> Step 8:30 pm                                              | <b>3</b><br><b>Bell choir 6:30 pm</b><br><b>Choir 7:30 pm</b>  | <b>4</b><br><br>AA Women 6 pm<br>Al-Anon 7:30 pm                                      | <b>5</b>                                         | <b>6</b><br><br>AA Women 9 am<br>Couples Recovery<br>6 pm  |
| <b>7</b><br><b>Outreach 9 am</b><br><b>Worship 10:30 am</b><br><b>Communion / Epiphany</b><br><b>Fellowship hour</b><br><b>Take down Christmas</b><br><b>decorations</b><br><br>AA Men 7:30 pm | <b>8</b><br><b>Council 7 pm</b><br><br>AA Women 7 pm                           | <b>9</b><br><b>CE 7 pm</b><br><b>Trustees 7 pm</b><br><br>AA 1 <sup>st</sup> Step 8:30 pm    | <b>10</b><br><b>Bell choir 6:30 pm</b><br><b>Choir 7:30 pm</b> | <b>11</b><br><br>AA Women 6 pm<br>Al-Anon 7:30 pm                                     | <b>12</b><br><b>Annual reports</b><br><b>due</b> | <b>13</b><br><br>AA Women 9 am<br>Couples Recovery<br>6 pm |
| <b>14</b><br><b>Worship 10:30 am</b><br><b>Fellowship hour</b><br><br>AA Men 7:30 pm                                                                                                           | <b>15</b><br><b>Women's book club</b><br><b>7 pm</b><br><br>AA Women 7 pm      | <b>16</b><br><b>Newsletter articles</b><br><b>due</b><br><br>AA 1 <sup>st</sup> Step 8:30 pm | <b>17</b><br><b>Bell choir 6:30 pm</b><br><b>Choir 7:30 pm</b> | <b>18</b><br><br>AA Women 6 pm<br>Al-Anon 7:30 pm                                     | <b>19</b>                                        | <b>20</b><br><br>AA Women 9 am<br>Couples Recovery<br>6 pm |
| <b>21</b><br><b>Worship 10:30 am</b><br><b>Annual Meeting</b><br><br>AA Men 7:30 pm                                                                                                            | <b>22</b><br><br>AA Women 7 pm                                                 | <b>23</b><br><br>AA 1 <sup>st</sup> Step 8:30 pm                                             | <b>24</b><br><b>Bell choir 6:30 pm</b><br><b>Choir 7:30 pm</b> | <b>25</b><br><br>AA Women 6 pm<br>Al-Anon 7:30 pm                                     | <b>26</b>                                        | <b>27</b><br><br>AA Women 9 am<br>Couples Recovery<br>6 pm |
| <b>28</b><br><b>Worship 10:30 am</b><br><b>Fellowship hour</b><br><b>Deacons 11:30 am</b><br><b>Pastor Kearstin</b><br><b>ordination svc. 3 pm</b><br><br>AA Men 7:30 pm                       | <b>29</b><br><br>AA Women 7 pm                                                 | <b>30</b><br><br>AA 1 <sup>st</sup> Step 8:30 pm                                             | <b>31</b><br><b>Bell choir 6:30 pm</b><br><b>Choir 7:30 pm</b> |  |                                                  |                                                            |