

The Messenger

The monthly newsletter of First Congregational Church UCC of North Ridgeville

September 2024

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From the Pastor – Pastor Kearstin (she/her)

Author and theologian Christena Cleveland says that “Imagination is theology.” She clarifies that, “We can only believe what we can imagine. And our cultural landscape hasn’t given us many tools” to imagine a God that exists outside the normative box. So as we head into the fall season together, we’re going to make space for storytelling and **imagination**.

In confirmation class with the youth, Mary, Heather, and I will teach our young people about the foundations of our faith, so that they have a solid grounding to springboard off from. Together we will explore history, nuance tradition, try out rituals, and connect to Christianity in deep and meaningful ways.

During an upcoming Bible study series (more details coming soon!), called “Unearthing Your Story”, we’ll gently and diligently dive into the theology that shaped our formative years. We’ll discuss what we were taught about God as children, how that has impacted us as adults, and where things may have changed or evolved for. As we share our stories, we’ll also grow together as a community — and see opportunities for continued exploration.

Using our new Shine curriculum in Sunday School, our teachers will help our young ones cultivate the inner life of the Spirit through spiritual practices and learning about the love at the core of our scriptures. This curriculum encourages imaginative, interactive biblical storytelling, and I can’t wait for our kids to experience it! (The kick-off is September 8!)

On a practical level, we’re also working with the Lorain County Public Health Department to discern how we can best support our wider community through CPR training, EpiPen and Naloxone training, and becoming a Naloxone distribution site in North Ridgeville. In this work, we are embodying a new way of loving our community — not just through gospel proclamation and wonderful events, but through tangible, non-judgmental, loving care for all.

Do you have other ideas for how we can imagine a better world? How we can live into God’s vision for a world where everyone can thrive and experience healing? If so, let me know! The Spirit moves in sometimes

IMAGINE



unexpected ways, and your next idea might be *just* what God is trying to manifest in our community!

Every blessing,
Pastor Kearstin

Moderator's Moment

Peace to friends as we bring a close to Summer, and welcome what I consider the best season in the area: Fall!!

As I see my own kids return to school, I am reminded of how different life is just in the relatively short time when I was my kids age! I'm sure many of us can't fathom having the internet, a smartphone, and instant access to information when we were going back to school. Technology has made life today different, and it's forcing a change in how our kids learn and the teaching tools available to them.

In my opinion, the pace and duration are the biggest change...faster pace and shorter durations seem to rule the day....the advent of 2 minute or less videos and the ability to stream content at a moment's notice really forces the way that teaching has to happen moving forward. Gone is the patience to fill out packets of work in workbooks, and in its place is the electronic device that manages the interaction, without even the need for strong penmanship (and the ability for us to write cursive).

We are lucky to have such a strong and consistent CE program with fantastic leadership. As we prepare to "teach" our confirmands, our leadership is already planning on how to update our classrooms and our curriculum to be able to provide modern learning abilities to our kiddos.

I also say this to stress to our diverse congregation that a lot of this change impacts worship habits of our young adults/kiddos. I think it will come down to understanding the new ways our young people learn, how we can implement some of that in terms of physical worship, and how we evolve to be a place to

share life and share Christ with each other regardless of our age!

In that Love that binds us,
Kris Dornan

Christian Education Corner – Mary Karlovec

Fall programming begins **September 8** with Sunday School and worship at 10:30 AM! After worship and Sunday School on the 8th, please plan on staying for a **potluck picnic!**



Christian Education will be providing hot dogs, dessert, drinks, and paper products. The congregation is asked to bring a salad, potato, or other side dish to share. Come join us as we gather together to celebrate the end of summer and beginning of fall!

There are a few updates that families should have received in a letter in the past week. First up is a **change in the Sunday School schedule**. The first Sunday of the month – beginning with October 6 – will be designated as Family Sunday. We will worship as a church family for the ENTIRE worship. Our children, 4 years old through high school, will have an integral part in the service. Some will be greeters, some will collect clanging change, others will be lay readers, and our confirmed youth and confirmands will help with communion and other designated activities. Our 4 year olds through 6th grade will have that day's Sunday School worksheets to work on during the service. ***We ask that parents not make this a "pass Sunday,"*** as much thought has gone into how we can make the first Sunday a good experience for our children as well as the adults. We are also looking for ideas to include our kids in the musical part of worship.

The rest of the Sundays of the month also will see a change. As families arrive at church, all of our children/youth will go directly to Sunday and WILL NOT be in worship. We have a new Sunday School curriculum this year and need the

full hour of worship time to implement the lessons each week. The curriculum has many interactive components as well as YouTube videos, etc. to support the curriculum.

Sandy Chalkwater, Jenn Anderson and Diane Feigi will rotate teaching the younger kiddos and Renee Dornan and Kelsey Styrt will rotate teaching the 3rd-6th grade. This team could use **two volunteers to rotate** with the team leader. Heather Smith will be overseeing the middle and high school class.

Our nursery kiddos (those birth through their 4th birthday) will go directly to the nursery before worship begins. The nursery will be staffed from 10:15 until the end of worship. However, as of now, **only ONE person has volunteered to help staff the nursery**. The CE Board has been staffing it the entire summer but CANNOT be responsible for staffing it during the school year as almost everyone is teaching Sunday School! There are 3-4 kids who will be in the nursery on Sunday mornings. **PLEASE! Volunteer to staff the nursery!** Call or text me at 440-897-8979 to volunteer once a month (less if we get more than four people)

We have purchased a curriculum this year called Shine: Living in God's Light! It is a dynamic Sunday school curriculum that engages Christian communities and families in their life together. Shine . . .

- calls children to experience the transforming power of God's love and shine God's light in the world;
- nurtures trust in God and invites children to follow Jesus;
- encourages imaginative, interactive biblical storytelling;
- explores the meaning of the Bible within the gathered community;
- cultivates the inner life of the Spirit through spiritual practices; and



- expresses faith through lives of compassionate peacemaking and service.

The Board of Christian Education is excited to be able to share this curriculum with our preschool through elementary kids. Our middle and high school youth will continue to use Faith Lens, a weekly Bible study that engages youth and young adults in connecting world events with the Bible, faith, and everyday life. Our confirmed youth will also help support our current confirmation students.

Recently Pastor Kearstin, Heather, and I met with the youth and families who are eligible for Confirmation this year. We answered questions and gave an outline of the program that will conclude on Pentecost Sunday, June 8, 2025. Our first gathering will be after worship on Sunday, September 15. The youth will be meeting with Pastor Kearstin for about two hours and the schedule for the year will be discussed. Pizza and drinks will be provided. **Parents are reminded to get their youth's schedules to me by Sunday, September 8 so we can start to plan.**

Upcoming Events:

- September 1: Clangy Change Sunday to help with Community Care's plea for food supplies and buy food staples
- September 8: Welcome Back Sunday
- September 15: Confirmation youth meet with Pastor Kearstin
- October 27: TRUNK OR TREAT - more info in October newsletter

Outreach Committee News – Karen Farmer

The apostle Matthew proclaimed that we are "to let our light so shine" that it brightens the path of others. But how to "so shine"? By words? By deeds? Both, I am sure. Smile at someone and that person perceives him or herself as acceptable or even admired. Say "Hello" to a stranger and that person sees him or herself as a bit more worthy. Perhaps those on

the receiving end of our kindnesses might see a bit of God in us and perceive it in themselves.

The Outreach Committee brightened some paths for others with our recent ongoing monthly donation of \$100 to Community Care. We also donated another \$100 to Lorain County's Neighborhood Alliance organization. We sent \$200 to the Lotts Creek, KY school to provide school supplies for its students, as well.

Join us on September 15 as the committee hosts coffee hour after our worship service to give you an opportunity to nurture the feeling of community with our fellow congregants and offer glory to God. How will you "let your light so shine" that you glorify Him today?



Deacons' Desk – Karen Dreger

This Little Light of Mine

The storm left us with no electricity. Even as I went from room to room with a battery powered lantern, my hand went for the light switch over and over. So much of our lives is on autopilot. Often, we take God for granted. We reach out when in distress; but God is with us always, in good times and bad. And, he has put a little light in us to share and some of that light may come back to you.

On August 5 a group of us from church went to the new veteran's memorial site in North Ridgeville's South Central Park to pull weeds. Sounds exciting, right? We got to know each other and had a chance to shine our light. I was so glad that we went. There are so many opportunities for us to shine our light in order to make the world better. Let it shine!



Trustees' Turn – Roy Dreger

"The best-laid plans of mice and men oft go awry" - Robert Burns. The trustees meeting for August was to be held on Tuesday, August 6. If you remember the date, it is because a storm blew through the area causing widespread damage. As a consequence, the meeting was cancelled. But that does not mean that nothing happened church-wise.

As of this date the painters have completed painting the wooden areas on the outside of the church, but not without a "hiccup" or two. First was the weather, which turned rainy for several days after they started. Then there was the issue of reaching the peak in order to paint it. The ladders they had would have taken them that high **IF** the ground in front of the church was level. But because of the slope, the ladders, allowing for the degree of leaning necessary to have a stable, safe platform to work from, would not reach the peak. This left us with two choices: leave the peak unpainted or pay extra for a lift. Actually, only one of those was a real choice, so renting a lift was approved. This also caused a delay since it came during a stretch of days that were forecast to be rainy, and it made no sense to pay for a lift to just sit around as if it were a lawn ornament.

The repair of the ceiling above the organ did go smoothly, however. Now when you look at the window in the front (which I do on a somewhat regular basis), you are not distracted by the black hole where the ceiling needed repair. As a side note, you really should look at the window occasionally as it is really beautiful.

Also the roof replacement over the Sunday school wing has been completed. You may remember that this was from storm damage that was turned over to our insurance company. The roofer (West Side Roofing) and the adjuster from the insurance company both agreed as to the need and the replacement cost, leaving the actual cost to the church that of the deductible of \$1,000.00. I don't know what, if any, impact this claim will have on our insurance

premiums, but it is truly a blessing not to have to find the entire \$26,000.00.

I thought I would let you know in advance that our **stewardship drive is going to start in October. Your pledges are the biggest part of the income of this church**, and we depend on them to keep the bills paid. With that in mind, perhaps this would be a good time to start thinking about your pledge for 2025 as well as checking to make sure your current pledge is up to date.

The trustees thank you for your continued financial support. Without it, there would not be a First Congregational Church.



Greeters

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

September	
1	Millie Gilly, Karen Farmer
8	Paul Wolanski, Vonnie Packard
15	Paula Dudek, Jane Woravka
22	Lynne Petroff, Diana Goode
29	Millie Gilly, Linda Matis



Birthdays & Anniversaries



- 9/6 Deb Sebastian
- 9/7 Ella Eaton
- 9/7 Becky Williams
- 9/10 Jody Millar
- 9/14 George Beers
- 9/17 Linda Matis
- 9/17 Vi Elrod
- 9/23 Mary Ireland
- 9/24 Holly Hengartner
- 9/26 Kris Dornan
- 9/26 Kurt Dornan
- 9/26 Brenda Schutz
- 9/28 Pastor Kearstin
- 9/29 Karen Mytnick
- 9/28 Daryl & Barb vonBenken



Thanks to all of you that were able to join us at Independent Village for the worship service in July. It was wonderful to feel the presence of such faithful followers.

On a personal note, the cards that are sent are like a hug through the mail. God bless you all as you live your faith. – Linda Spayd

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Dear Parents, Families, Caretakers, and Active Community Members,

I'm praying for each of you as we begin another school year! As you prepare for the start of the academic year, I want to take a moment to address an important issue regarding our children's education.

You may have heard about LifeWise Academy, an organization that takes children off-campus to do Bible-based education during the school day. While it is not operating in North Ridgeville schools just yet, LifeWise is already present in many surrounding school districts and other pastors in the area are



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

**September 16:** Don't Forget to Write by Sarah Goodman Confino

**October 21:** The Maid of Fairbourne Hall by Julie Klassen

working diligently to bring it to North Ridgeville. While I love religious education (and the work that Mary and the whole CE team do is INCREDIBLE!), it's critical to understand that the theological framework of LifeWise and their practice of removing children from important school activities do not align with the traditions and values of First Congregational.

At FCC, we strive to interpret scripture and embody God's love in a way that helps create a world where all of God's Beloveds can thrive. While LifeWise Academy declares that it does not have a denominational slant, much of their leadership and curriculum have connections to conservative evangelical traditions, including the Southern Baptist denomination. This means that their approach to Bible-based education is markedly different than what Mary, Heather, and others teach our children. LifeWise encourages the kids in their programs to learn very specific (and limited) interpretations of scripture, and they lean heavily on doctrinal teachings.

Let's explore some of the theological and practical differences between LifeWise and First Congregational UCC:

**Interpretation of Scripture:** LifeWise teaches that Christian scriptures are the literal, inerrant Word of God and they are the "final authority" on all matters. In the United Church of Christ, we value a more nuanced approach of scripture that considers historical context, reason, personal experience, and the traditions of our ancestors in faith.

**Complementarianism:** LifeWise curriculum and teachers insinuate that there is a rigid gender binary and God created men and women with distinct but complementary roles in church and family life. In contrast, First Congregational takes seriously God's created world and we understand that most of creation does not adhere to a rigid gender binary; we, like Jesus, support egalitarian principles and advocate for equal roles for folks of all genders in leadership and family life.

**Human Nature:** LifeWise teaches that "Man's nature is corrupted, and he is thus totally unable to please God." This is in direct opposition to the UCC understanding of the inherent goodness of humanity as created in the image of God.

**Lack of Inclusivity:** Concerns have been raised by parents and clergy across the country about LifeWise's lack of inclusivity and tendency to present

narrow views on complex social/ethical issues. These practices often do not align with the nuanced and thoughtful approach that we at FCC strive for.

**Christian Nationalism:** Christian nationalists assert that the United States is, and must remain, a "Christian nation;" to this end, they seek to blend religious and national identity. LifeWise often posts Christian nationalist talking points to their social media. Like many other mainline Protestant denominations, the UCC, and First Congregational, believe in the importance of the separation of church and state. We do not believe that a narrow view of Christianity should dominate public life and governance; instead, we focus on justice, compassion, and responsible community care.

**Child Safety Concerns:** Recent news reports have raised the issue of child safety in the LifeWise program. Just this summer, LifeWise fired a program director after it came to light that she was fired from a school in 2018 due to explicitly and inappropriately messaging with students. Concerns around sufficient background checks as well as the safety of drivers who are taking kids off campus have also been raised. At FCC, ensuring that our children are safe, in supportive and respectful learning environments is a top priority.

Understanding these theological differences and safety concerns is important to ensure that the safety and well-being of our children is prioritized. Our children should be provided with a spiritual environment that fosters inclusivity, encourages curiosity, and ensures emotional safety. I encourage you to explore these points further in the coming weeks and discuss them within our church community. Our Christian Education team is an incredible resource and we have many current and former educators in our community!

Know that as you learn more about LifeWise and discern your own path forward, I am always available to chat. I support each family in making their own decisions regarding LifeWise, and I also feel compelled to share what I (and other clergy) have genuine concerns about. If you would like to set up a one-on-one meeting, you can send me an email at [PastorFCCNR@gmail.com](mailto:PastorFCCNR@gmail.com).

Every blessing,  
Pastor Kearstin Bailey, M.Div.

| Sun                                                                                                                                                          | Mon                                                                                               | Tues                                               | Weds                                                                                                                                               | Thurs                                             | Fri                                                          | Sat                                                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1</b><br><b>Worship 10:30 am</b><br><b>Communion</b><br><b>Clangy change</b><br><b>Fellowship hour</b><br><br>AA Men 7:30 pm                              | <b>2</b><br><b>Labor Day</b><br><b>OFFICE CLOSED</b>                                              | <b>3</b><br><b>CE 7 pm</b><br><b>Trustees 7 pm</b> | <b>4</b><br><del>Bell choir 6:30 pm</del><br><del>Choir 7:30 pm</del>                                                                              | <b>5</b>                                          | <b>6</b>                                                     | <b>7</b><br><br>AA Women 9 am<br>Couples Recovery 6 pm  |
|                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                   | Linda on vacation 9/2-9/9                          | Barb on vacation 9/2-9/7                                                                                                                           | AA Women 6 pm<br>Al-Anon 7:30 pm                  |                                                              |                                                         |
| <b>8</b><br><b>Outreach 9:30 am</b><br><b>Worship 10:30 am</b><br><b>Sunday school begins</b><br><b>Potluck luncheon after service</b><br><br>AA Men 7:30 pm | <b>9</b>                                                                                          | <b>10</b><br><b>Council 7 pm</b>                   | <b>11</b><br><b>Bell choir 6:30 pm</b><br><b>Choir 7:30 pm</b>  | <b>12</b>                                         | <b>13</b>                                                    | <b>14</b><br><br>AA Women 9 am<br>Couples Recovery 6 pm |
|                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                   | Bruce on vacation 9/8-9/14                         | AA 1 <sup>st</sup> Step 8:30 pm                                                                                                                    | 4-H 7 pm (rain loca.)                             | AA Women 6 pm<br>Al-Anon 7:30 pm                             |                                                         |
| <b>15</b><br><b>Worship 10:30 am</b><br><b>Fellowship hour</b><br><b>Confirmation kick-off after svc.</b><br><br>AA Men 7:30 pm                              | <b>16</b><br><b>Newsletter articles due</b><br><b>Women's book club 7 pm</b><br><br>AA Women 7 pm | <b>17</b><br><br>AA 1 <sup>st</sup> Step 8:30 pm   | <b>18</b><br><b>Bell choir 6:30 pm</b><br><b>Choir 7:30 pm</b>                                                                                     | <b>19</b><br><br>AA Women 6 pm<br>Al-Anon 7:30 pm | <b>20</b>                                                    | <b>21</b><br><br>AA Women 9 am<br>Couples Recovery 6 pm |
| <b>22</b><br><b>Worship 10:30 am</b><br><b>Lotts Creek Recap</b><br><b>Fellowship hour</b><br><br>AA Men 7:30 pm                                             | <b>23</b><br>Pr. Kearstin conference Texas                                                        | <b>24</b><br><br>AA 1 <sup>st</sup> Step 8:30 pm   | <b>25</b><br><b>Bell choir 6:30 pm</b><br><b>Choir 7:30 pm</b>                                                                                     | <b>26</b><br><br>AA Women 6 pm<br>Al-Anon 7:30 pm | <b>27</b><br>Pr. Kearstin Heartland Conference meeting Cols. | <b>28</b><br><br>AA Women 9 am<br>Couples Recovery 6 pm |
| <b>29</b><br><b>Worship 10:30 am</b><br><b>Fellowship hour</b><br><b>Deacons 11:30 am</b><br><br>AA Men 7:30 pm                                              | <b>30</b><br><br>AA Women 7 pm                                                                    |                                                    |                                                                                                                                                    |                                                   |                                                              |                                                         |

