

Striving to become living expressions of God's extravagant grace and love.

Connection

The newsletter of First Reformed United Church of Christ, Burlington, NC

www.firstreformeducc.org

December 2024

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Trusting the Slow Work of God

As I was preparing for this Advent season (reading the lectionary texts over and over, reading commentaries, scouring my tried-and-true resources on the internet) one word called out to me, over and over: “wait.” Another one: “watch.” And another one: “patience.” Stanley Hauerwas says, “Advent is patience.... Advent is the recovery of how to live in a world of impatience as a patient people.” The month of December is often one of the busiest months of the year, especially for the Church! Even as we have a sense of urgency about “getting it all done” before December 25th, how can we embody an attitude of patience? Christians are called to be intentionally patient as we wait for the arrival of Christ as a child... and we are called to be patient as we wait for Christ’s eternal second-coming. Advent calls us to watch and wait for both arrivals – even if the waiting feels uncomfortable.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was a French Jesuit priest and paleontologist (how’s that for a bi-vocational career?), and because of his vocations, he seems to have a much longer, slower, sense of time. I found some of his words to be very apt for Advent:

“Above all, *trust in the slow work of God.*
We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.
We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.

And yet it is the law of all progress
that [progress] is made by passing through some stages of instability—
and that it may take a very long time.

Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be.
Give Our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
in suspense and incomplete.”

I’d also like to share a “Presence Practice” that I found from The Work of the People (theworkofthepeople.com):

“Advent is a great season to practice waiting, and if we are so daring, patiently waiting. One practice we found suggests using the word WAIT as an acronym:
Watch: What is actually happening?
Accept: Allow what is here to be here.
Investigate: What is the story you are making up?
Tend: Practice patience and compassion for yourself and others.

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Consistory Notes

The Consistory of FRUCC met on Wednesday, November 13, 2024. In addition to Grace McMullen, there were six members in attendance.

Approval of Reports

The October minutes and the September Financial Reports were approved.

Ministry Reports

Faith Formation

- Sunday School (also called Adult Faith Formation) will operate on a rotating leadership schedule again to give Grace more time for worship preparation on Sunday morning. Advent's study will be "Light of the World" by Amy-Jill Levine.
- Gift of Years study/discussion will start Jan 19, facilitated by Art & Kay Hunkins. Meeting in Parlor on Sundays from 9:30-10:30 (with refreshments) to encourage participation from those who might not normally attend Adult Faith Formation class.
- Possible Lenten bible study to take place outside of the Sunday school hour

Fellowship

Next breakfast will be December 22.

Mission & Outreach

- Freedoms Hope's Status of Endowment Request: The Endowment committee approved a request for \$5,000.00. Claudette Fitzgerald motioned that the committee approve the request, seconded by Brenda Sawyer. The motion carried. Thanksgiving Meal-Desserts. 2025 Commitment: three 5th Thursdays: January 30; May 29; July 31. Request to add \$1,500 to the Community Meals budget line item
- New Project: Monthly outreach to support Joe & Chuckie. Possibly assist with monthly visits where needs can be communicated. There are family considerations.

Worship

- Joint Advent worship service with FCUCC planned for December 15. There will be a small reception.

Pastor's Report

- Advent planning is underway! We hope to send Advent info as a "mailer" to the wider community for those looking for a church during Advent/Christmas.
- Heath has volunteered to be our "storyteller" for Godly Play! Working to prepare classroom 207 to hopefully do a trial run one Sunday (or two) during Advent.

Personnel Committee report

- Evaluations have been completed. Signed copies were given to Grace for keeping. A 3.2% COL increase and bonuses have also been added to the budget.

Old Business

- Piano in Fellowship Hall: It has been decided not to proceed with removal for the time being.
- Door refinishing is underway
- Quote for fountain repair obtained. Waiting to get a quote for autofill to move forward.
- Consistory is Considering a building superintendent position for 2025. We will discuss the job description, salary, and hours.
- It was approved to submit the 2025 Proposed Budget to the congregation.

New business

- 2025 Ministry team organization. We plan to send notices to leaders to confirm their agreement to continue as the leader of their current team. There will not be the same type of interest meeting that was held last year.
- Laura Brache Field is working on our streaming strategy and has purchased a Canva professional account for church use.

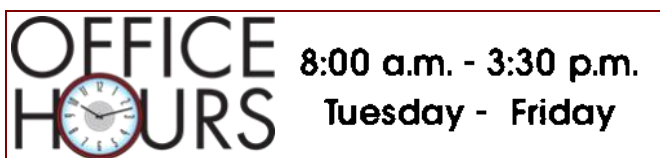
Respectfully Submitted,
Claudette Fitzgerald

Senior Adults

Thursday, December 26

11:30 a.m.

at Red Robin



Service of music and scripture

On Sunday, December 15, 2024, First Reformed UCC and First Christian UCC will worship together as the music ministries of the churches join to present a program of music and scripture entitled “Emmanuel: God with Us.” Written by First Reformed Music Coordinator, Beverly Pugh, for a 2018 worship service, the program has been revised to include music from the files of both churches.

Rev. Grace McMullen and Rev. Deborah Sues will lead the service and provide narration during the musical program.

The joint choir will be conducted by Matt Rice, Music Director at First Christian with accompaniment by First Reformed organist, David Ratchford. Beverly Pugh will conduct the First Reformed Chime Choir.

The worship service begins at 11 a.m. in the First Reformed sanctuary. A hospitality time will be offered prior to the service beginning at 10:15 a.m. in the fellowship hall. The fellowship hall is located at the Tarpley Street entrance. Join us as we celebrate the JOY of the Advent season with music and fellowship!

“So sing! The song of rejoicing softens hard hearts.”
—Hildegard of Bingen (12th century)

Trusting the Slow Work of God

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We can do this while being on hold, while waiting in lines, while waiting for people and things. We are learning to notice, become curious, and to see with different eyes.

How’s our breathing? Are we focusing on the future, the past, or right now?

As we learn to notice, we will be shaping our eyes for the unexpected... training ourselves to see what God is up to in the world.”

This December, may we have the grace to accept that we are in suspense and incomplete. May we watch and pay attention as we wait for Emmanuel, God with us!

Peace and Blessings,
Grace

Birthdays

- 7 Patricia Church
- 17 Grace McMullen
- 25 Mike Young



The Morning Circle will meet Wednesday, December 4, at 11:30 a.m. at Cutting Board.




Fellowship Breakfast set for December 22

The “men” will provide breakfast on December 22, at 9:30 a.m. First Christian UCC has been invited to join in the fellowship.



Meals on Wheels
Delivery Dates
December 16 - 20

Evening Circle

Second Thursdays 7 p.m.

Thursday, December 2 at 7 p.m.
Susan Puckett’s home

Greeters: Kyle Hayes, Susan Hayes, Kenny Septor
Trustee on Call: Kyle Hayes

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Music Coordinator/Chime Choir	Beverly Pugh

Suggestions and contributions for our newsletter
are welcomed and encouraged.
The deadline for each issue is
the 15th of each month.

Sunday Services

9:45 a.m.	Faith Formation
11:00 a.m.	Worship

All are welcome!

Jesus didn't reject people. Neither do we.



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513 West Front Street
Burlington, NC 27215

- RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED -



Mission Statement

At First Reformed UCC, we are:

***Striving to become living expressions
of God's extravagant grace and love.***

We seek to accomplish this by...

1. Welcoming all persons with a warmth and hospitality that will help them realize that God loves them beyond imagination and that they are of extreme value.
2. Gathering in moments of worship and celebration characterized by authenticity, vitality, and creativity – where one may experience and share the life-changing presence of God in a multitude of ways.
3. Offering a variety of opportunities for spiritual growth, faith development, and supportive fellowship.
4. Helping persons to explore and develop their own individual gifts for ministry and inviting them to share generously of their time, talents and resources.
5. Engaging in acts of service and love that will express the compassion, mercy, and justice of Christ in the world.