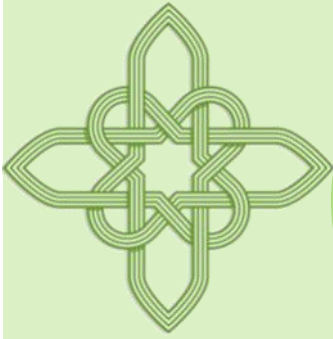


Striving to become living expressions of God's extravagant grace and love.



Connection

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

www.firstreformeducc.org

January 2025

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New Year's Blessing

The eighth day of Christmas,
the eighth day of Creation,
the Next New Day,
New Years Day.

May every day be a new year's day for you:
a chance to forgive and be forgiven,
to start again.

May you take courage to begin anew,
to become who you are becoming,
this and every day.

As you let go of the year past,
may you let go of all the habits and coping tricks
you no longer need or value.

Let go, and in your free fall find yourself held
by an eternal love that has come ages to be with you,
and will carry you all the way to the end.

As the future stretches out before you
on your journey toward God may you always know
you have arrived, and always will have arrived.

Every day may you trust your belovedness,
your freedom from having to prove yourself,
and receive the grace that is given to you.

May this year be a year of grace and hope.

Steve Garnaas-Holmes,
unfoldinglight.net

Sharing the light

Lighting candles in the Advent wreath is one of my favorite ways that we mark time in the slow build-up to Christmas. It is such a joy to finally see the Christ candle lit up on Christmas Eve! We've been patiently waiting and watching to see where God might show up, and at last, the light of Christ has arrived in the world, the embodiment of hope, peace, joy, and love. And what was our response to this light? One small candle received its light from the Christ candle, then passed it to another, and another, and another, until the sanctuary was filled with the light of Christ. The more that it was shared, the light only grew. The light was not dimmed by sharing, as St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) muses through the perspective of Christ:

"Just as the sun cannot be divided, so neither can my wholeness as God and as human be divided.... Nor is the sacrament itself diminished by being divided any more than fire. If you had a burning lamp, and all the world came to you for light, the light of your lamp would not be diminished by the sharing."

The work of Christmas, and the work of our whole lives, is to shine that flickering flame of hope, peace, joy, and love – that light of Christ – and pass it on. We do not need to fear running



out of light, because Christ is our source.

As we enter another year of embodying "God's extravagant grace and love," I wonder how our Christ-light will shine in our community? Our church is already shining a light through our mission activities: working with Meals on Wheels, SAFE (Alamance county's food pantry), Freedom's Hope (community center for unhoused and impoverished), and stocking our new Little Free Food Pantry. We are starting to offer faith formation opportunities for children again, through our Godly Play children's church. Our Friendly Visitors team is sharing the gift of friendship and community with those who need it. And, we are drafting an Open and Affirming covenant that reflects our church's extravagant welcome to all, as we attempt to imitate Christ's extravagant welcome.

These are just a handful of the ways I see our Christ-light shining in our neighborhood. If we keep sharing the light of hope, peace, joy, and love, there's no telling how the Holy Spirit might show up to fan the flames!

Holding all of you in the light, this year and always,

Grace

Open and Affirming update

The ONA Core Team is going to be drafting a potential covenant to be presented to the congregation for review in January. At its core, the covenant should reflect the congregation and our mission to strive, every day, to become outward, physical expressions of God's extravagant grace and love. Every stranger that comes into this church is welcomed by a wall of love, and they don't stay strangers long. There are people in our community who are looking

to be a part of a congregation with as much of God's grace as ours, but unless they hear by word of mouth, they don't know we're here. This has been the experience of a number of our more recent attendees and new members. God is still speaking, telling us how to make sure this congregation continues to thrive and spread God's love. We just have to listen.

- ONA Core Team

Senior Adults

Thursday, January 23

11:30 a.m.

at Cutting Board

Birthdays

11 Jean Lassiter

30 Suzan Evans



Consistory Notes

The Consistory of FRUCC met on Wednesday, December 11, 2024. In addition to Grace McMullen, six members were in attendance: Derek Smith, Susan Hayes, Brenda Sawyer, Arleen Widerman, Claudette Fitzgerald, and Tom Burgess.

Approval of Reports

The November minutes and financial report were approved.

Ministry Reports

Faith Formation

- Godly Play has begun! Heath McFarland, Susan Puckett, and Roxie helped make it a reality. The first session was on Sunday, December 1, with four kids.
- A six-week study/discussion on the book *The Gift of Years* by Joan Chittister, starting Jan 19. It will be held in the Parlor on Sundays, 9:15 am-10:30 am (coffee and snacks included). Kay and Art Hunkins, and Brenda Sawyer facilitating. The parlor will continue general hospitality time at 10:30 am.
- Visitation ministry – 16 members were visited in November. Kenny Septor is interested in the board position with the Willows. Details are being worked out.

Pastor's Report

- Many thanks to all who are making Advent happen! Decorators, musicians, trustees, liturgists, etc.
- Lots of communication this month about the possibility of the church purchasing 211Tarpley. I

met with the CWS Associate Director about potential transitional housing for their clients.

- Alamance Ministers Housing group met with the team from NC 360 & and United Way about using their service to help us more efficiently and collaboratively help people with rent/utility needs.

Old Business


- Door refinishing is almost complete
- Quote for fountain repair and autofill obtained. A brick repair quote is attached but may not be needed. The Autofill quote is in hand.
- Discussion surrounding Superintendent discussion. Grace will reach out to area churches to gather job descriptions they use.
- Derek Smith is working to complete the Cannon Grant for the door and other repairs. They will reimburse part of the expense. The work must be completed before the grant can be submitted. It is looking to be completed and submitted in January.

New business

- January Retreat for incoming consistory members will be January 25 at "The Trees" at 1701 Pleasant Green Rd, Durham. The meeting will be from 9:00 – 12:00, with lunch to follow at Grace's home.
- Derek Smith and David French will start researching a Columbarium for the church.

Respectfully Submitted,
Claudette Fitzgerald

Greeters: Pam Ratchford, Amy Deal, Ray Deal
Trustee on Call: Brad Widerman



Evening Circle

**Thursday,
January 9
at 7 p.m.**


Second Thursdays 7 p.m.

**The Morning
Circle will meet
Wednesday,
January 8,
at 10:00 a.m.
All are welcome!**



Morning Circle
First Wednesdays
10 a.m. in church parlor

OFFICE HOURS 8:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.
Tuesday - Friday



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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!



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513 West Front Street
Burlington, NC 27215

- RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED -

Jesus didn't reject people. Neither do we.



What does it mean to be fully **ALIVE?**

Join us for a new book discussion!

**Starting Sunday, January 19,
9:30-10:30 a.m. in the Parlor**
(Come early for coffee & snacks!)

The Gift of Years: Growing Old Gracefully by Joan Chittister will guide our conversation, helping us feel less alone in the things we all experience as we age. This discussion will be a chance to find common ground in the shared experience of getting older. Copies of the book are available in Grace's office. (Suggested \$5-10 donation.)

