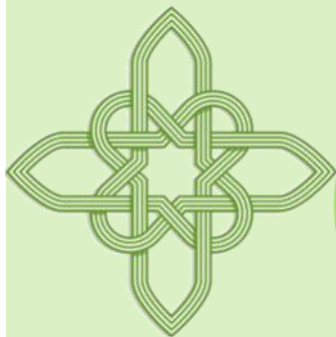


Striving to become living expressions of God's extravagant grace and love.



Connection

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

www.firstreformeducc.org

July
2023

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To First Reformed UCC with Love

I will miss you all. It has been a privilege and a joy sojourning with you for these past 18 months. Thanks for the ways you have co-led, laughed, shared sacred silence and joined in song and Word with me. Thank you for your trust and your grace and your prayers. Thank you to Consistory members (past and present) and staff members Bev, Carol and David – all who have stretched in their ministries to share in my (often) different ways of thinking and doing! **Thanks to each of you** for your love and kindness ... you have been an encouraging presence during this interim period.

There's a wonderful evening prayer that includes words such as these: *Loving God – as this day ends – I entrust to you all the things I have done and left undone.* That is also my prayer as I conclude my time with you. I confess that trying to keep to my 25 hours per week has been challenging. It has meant that I have left some things “undone”. For instance, I wish I could have had coffee and a long conversation with each of you. I am sorry that there are some members I haven't even had a chance to meet in person. There are also some “bigger picture” items I wish we could have moved forward on together. So ...thank you for your grace in what I have indeed “left undone.”

I am also very excited about how God is calling you into a new and blessed chapter. Pastor Grace McMullen has a deep spiritual grounding in Christ as well as a clear sense of God's call to be among you. This is a wonderful opportunity in the months and years to come ... to re- imagine ... to dream anew. I trust you will always keep in mind that it is only **together** that you will deepen and grow as a faith community. While Pastor Grace will serve as an effective leader and partner with you, please remember she is simply one of many. As the Apostle Paul reminded the Corinthian church – all of you and your God-given spiritual gifts are needed. (see 1 Corinthians 12)

I close (as I often do) with a few queries as you begin this new chapter: How is God calling you in 2023 to do both in-reach and outreach? How will you be explicit in letting neighbors and community members know that all are truly welcome at FRUCC? How will you live into that welcome? How has the landscape around FRUCC changed and how might that impact your ministry? How might you increase your social media presence? Are there changes to be made to the current church structure to streamline your ministry? And most importantly: How is the Holy Spirit calling you to courageously and faithfully Be the Church?

May the God of Love bless and enliven your imagination as you journey together into this new and blessed time.

I love you and am grateful to have been your pastor.

In Christ, Deborah Suess

7 Suggestions for Welcoming a New Pastor

By Barry Howard, Center for Healthy Churches

When a congregation welcomes a new pastor, it is an exciting time, a new beginning for both the congregation and the new minister. To maximize this new beginning, it is important to prepare spiritually, cognitively, and emotionally for a new chapter.

Once a call to a new pastor is confirmed, there are a few things you can do to prepare personally and congregationally to follow a new spiritual leader:

- **Pray for your new pastor.** In most of the churches I know, members pray for the Pastor Search Team throughout the search process, and they pray for the pastor even before they know the identity of their new minister. And they pray for their new pastor in the pastor's inaugural days of ministry. However, I suggest making a commitment to pray daily for your pastor throughout the duration of his or her ministry. Once the honeymoon period is over, and the daily grind of ministry begins, praying for your pastor will strengthen your pastor's ministry and will fortify your bond with your pastor.



- **Send your pastor a welcome note or email.** Be careful not to make this correspondence a lengthy epistle and certainly don't make it a diatribe itemizing your personal expectations or agenda. Just offer a brief note, introducing yourself and/or family, and offering a heartfelt welcome. When I moved to my last pastorate, I received over a 100 such notes, and these notes confirmed and intensified my excitement about my new place of service. [Grace's address is 600 S Churton St., Apt 11, Hillsborough NC 27278]
- **Mention your name on your first several encounters with your new pastor.** Once your new pastor arrives, make sure to offer your name in each greeting for the first few weeks. Learning names is important for pastors. And be sure not to embarrass the pastor by quizzing, "Do you remember my name?" Give

your pastor the opportunity to learn your name, and over time, to learn a part of your life story.

- **Embrace the uniqueness of your pastor.** Your pastor has a distinct personality, a unique set of spiritual gifts, and a diverse set of experiences. When the Spirit leads a church to a new pastor, the Spirit seldom leads a church or committee to a person just like the previous pastor or the beloved pastor from the church's history. To compare your new pastor to any other is to disrespect the Spirit's role in guiding you to your new pastor in the first place.
 - **Be prepared to join.** A pastor who is worth his or her salt must lead in both optimal and challenging situations. And the kingdom of God is enriched when we as a congregation join with our pastor and embrace our mission with enthusiasm. Don't be a backseat driver. Serve with your best gifts.
 - **Give your pastor permission to fail.** The best pastors don't succeed 100% of the time. A few weeks into one of my pastoral assignments, a sincere church member said to me, "I am glad you're here. Every pastor I have had has disappointed me. I hope you never disappoint me." I quickly countered, "Let me just disappoint you right now and get it out of the way. Like you I am an imperfect human being who will make mistakes. But if we forgive one another as God has forgiven us, we will get along just fine." I must admit, I think my response disappointed this well-intentioned member. Don't hold your pastor to a standard of perfection that is impossible to maintain. Allow your minister room to make mistakes.
- **Speak positively about your pastor publicly and privately.** One of the ways we bring out the best in our ministers is to speak well of them publicly and privately. With most pastors, it is easy to find something to criticize, because every minister has weaknesses. "He is too loud." "She is too soft-spoken." "He uses big words I don't under-

continued on page 3

7 Suggestions for Welcoming a New Pastor

By Barry Howard, Center for Healthy Churches (continued from page 2)

stand.” “She is not a people person.” However, every pastor has more strengths than weaknesses. A healthy pastoral tenure is nurtured when we magnify around our pastor’s strengths, and then minimize and compensate for our pastor’s weaknesses.

There are many other ways to welcome your new pastor and to launch your pastor into an effective and healthy tenure. If you compare them to your favorite football coach and expect them to “win every game,” not only will you be disappointed, you will make your minister miserable and ultimately ineffective.

But if you receive your new pastor as a spiritual leader sent to encourage your faithfulness, chal-

lenge your presuppositions, and to bring out God’s best in you, the relationship between your pastor and your congregation will be vibrant and effective.

A few years ago, one of my colleagues and mentors, Hardy Clemons, reminded a group of us of the peculiar role of serving as a pastor:

“Our goal is to minister: it is not to show a profit, amass a larger financial corpus or grow bigger for our own security. The ultimate goals are to accept God’s grace, share the good news, invite and equip disciples, and foster liberty and justice for all.”

And as church members, we are privileged to co-labor with our pastor in this transformative work of demonstrating grace, sharing the good news, and equipping disciples.

July brings special musician

On Sunday, July 23, we will have a special musician, Carrie Morgan. Carrie lives in Greensboro with her husband Justin and her young son Leo, and is a member of Deep River Friends Meeting. To preview the musical beauty that we will receive, her website is <https://www.carriemorganmusic.com/>



Prayer for July 4th

The following lines are from a long prayer, “That America Fulfil the Promise of Its Founding,” by Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan. Though written in 1945, it rings true yet today. (Full text at <https://tinyurl.com/nhc8747x>.)

O God, who is Liberator and Redeemer, Lawgiver and Judge, ...

May America remain loyal to the principles of the Declaration of Independence, and extend their application to ever-widening areas of life.

Keep out of our life all manner of oppression, persecution, and unjust discrimination; save us from religious, racial and class conflicts; may our country be a haven of refuge to the victims of injustice and misrule.

Instruct us in the art of living together, of reconciling differences of opinion and averting clashes of interest, of helping one another to achieve a harmonious and abundant life ...

That the Star-Spangled Banner, the symbol of our American democracy, may ever wave o’er the land of the free and the home of the brave. Amen.



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

Thanks!

Greetings,

And many thanks to First Reformed United Church of Christ and especially to those who prepared and delivered the Memorial Day lunch plates.

As a resident of The Willows, I am ever conscious of the physical presence and the spiritual presence of the church and its ministry.

Sincerely, Kay Andrews

Consistory Notes

The Consistory of FRUCC, Wednesday June 12, 2023. In addition to Deborah Suess there were seven members in attendance.

Approval of Reports

The May minutes were approved.

Ministry Team Reports

Fellowship Teresa Ibarra, Susan Hayes

- July 30th Celebration of Deborah's final day at FRUCC in Fellowship Hall immediately following worship. FRUCC will provide meats (ham and fried chicken) and congregation will be asked to provide covered dish side items and desserts.
- August 6, Grace's first Sunday at FRUCC. Fellowship time will be located in Fellowship hall before worship that morning with bagels, donuts, fruit tray, coffee and juice.
- Mid September Grace's Welcome. Catered meal in fellowship hall. Will consult with Grace about her ideas and her final thoughts about the date and who to invite in addition to FRUCC congregation. Possible date September 10.

Mission and Outreach

Beverly Pugh, Tom Burgess, Teresa Ibarra

- Hometown Mission Trip wrap up
 - 3 event held, April 29, May 20, and June 10
 - 20 sites were completed
 - Front Street Methodist assisted
 - Possible Fall event leaf rake
- Memorial Day Lunch
 - 97 Meals were served between the Willows and the community
- Habitat for Humanity - Unity Build
 - Month of July (Wednesdays and Saturdays)
 - Build dates July 22 and July 26
 - Church has been given a stud to decorate and bless that will be included in the home.
- Labor Day September 4 -- Hot dog lunch

Worship Claudette Fitzgerald, Jeannie Artley

- Music ministry Choir and Chime choir will not take the month of July off.

Trustees

- Deborah showed us some examples of signs and she also got us an estimate for the work. We are also getting estimates from 1-2 other companies. Damage is going to be an on going issue.

- Church use agreements have been given to YMA, AA, Al-Anon, and Yoga. We should be getting signed copies back shortly.
- We talked a little about having a church wide clean up day. Moving forward we need to set a date and make a plan as to what projects we want to do.
- We voted to move forward with an update to minister's restroom. Chuck Terrell is heading up this project. We did not set a budget for this project however Chuck says that it can get done for between \$1,800-\$2,000 Monies to be reallocated from unused funds from the Search Committee.

Pastor's Report

Written report provided

New business

- Transition team to ask Grace about children attendance and our need to provide Sunday school and nursery.
- A request has been made by Amy Marsh to hold a musical concert December 9th in our facility. The Sanctuary and one other room will be utilized. They will also need the space for 2 practices before the concert date. Beverly Pugh will meet with Amy to discuss in further detail and report back to the consistory before decisions are made to approve.

Old Business

- Cell phone has been acquired for Grace
- We had a personnel meeting 6/7 - Beverly is working on a Job Description for Grace and will meet again 7/5. Staff are documenting their current job responsibilities.
- Safe Church Training needed for YMA
- Request to endowment submitted for CPR class
- Met 6/13 with Mitch Wilds from the Raleigh State Historic Commission about the doors.

Respectfully submitted,
Claudette Fitzgerald
Consistory Secretary

Greeters: Kyle Hayes, Susan Hayes,
Chuck Terrell
Trustee on Call: Chuck Terrell
Song Leader: Arleen Widerman

Looking Ahead

July 9 - Pulpit Exchange on: Rev. Tony Hoshaw will be at FRUCC and Deborah will be at FCUCC.

July 16 - Christmas in July

July 30 - Deborah's final Sunday with us and there will be a lunch to celebrate our time with Deborah and to say goodbye to her and Tim. The lunch will be held immediately following the worship service. Ham and fried chicken will be provided by FRUCC and we are asking the congregation to provide side, dishes, and desserts.

August 6 - Please join in welcoming Pastor Grace McMullen! Fellowship time between Sunday, school and worship service will be held in the fellowship hall where we will have bagels, doughnuts, fruit, coffee, and juice.

September 10 - The fellowship committee plans to host a lunch to welcome Grace and her family to First Reformed. Details about this will follow.

Living as poetry of God

For Christians, the Scriptures are our first source of guidance for how to live, and within them, Jesus is primary. But God speaks through nonbiblical voices too: preachers and teachers not found in the Bible, and even literature that isn't directly Christian. God, who used King Cyrus of Persia to free the exiled Israelites, can use *anyone* to call us to right living. Take, for example, Walt Whitman's description of life as poetry when we live certain ways, and God as "the greatest poet":

"This is what you shall do: Love the earth and sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to every one that asks, stand up for the [vulnerable], devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience and indulgence toward the people, ... and your very flesh shall be a great poem and have the richest fluency. ... The known universe has one complete lover and that is the greatest poet. ... His love above all love has leisure and expanse." (From the preface to *Leaves of Grass*, 1855)



Finding freedom

What does freedom look like to you? In *GraceLaced*, Ruth Chou Simons lists examples such as running unhindered, viewing a mountaintop overlook and enjoying iced tea with lemon. Because our good, creative God made us each different, our descriptions of freedom vary too. I think of deep breaths, an unhurried pace, genuine smiles, lack of regrets and deep belly laughs.

I love to laugh. Recently, during a demanding season of family celebrations, hardships and surprises, I realized I was laughing less. I felt bound to the next task on my long to-do list, but even good efficiency can shackle our spirits.

A good laugh — beyond a quick chuckle — offers many physical and emotional benefits. According to the Mayo Clinic, laughter relieves stress and pain, boosts the immune system and stimulates organs and endorphins. So today I'm determined to laugh loudly and joyfully while remembering my freedom in Christ.

—Janna Firestone

Birthdays

- 1 Melissa Broadnax
- 3 Harold Wayne Clark
- 12 Steve Balog
Catherine Deal
- 15 Peggy Dimont
- 26 Emily Daniels
- 27 Nancy Long
- 30 Jacob Fitzgerald
- 31 Mary Leigh Glenn



JULY BIRTHDAYS

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Organist	David Ratchford
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.	Sunday School
11:00 a.m.	Worship

All are welcome!

Jesus didn't reject people. Neither do we.



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Connection

First Reformed United Church of Christ
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.