

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

June
2024

Where will the process of ONA decisions take us?

"Accept one another, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." (Romans 15:7)

Dear Church,

The summer season invites all of us to take things a little bit slower. School is out, temperatures are up, travels are planned, and programming at the church tends to slow down in response. A slower pace can be a gift, giving us the opportunity for deeper reflection, a chance to pause and consider how things are going. Looking back over this year so far, I know that I am blessed to be your pastor, and I want to let my "pastoral" role guide everything I do, whether that is preaching, teaching, visiting, or facilitating new programming.

Lately, I have been praying about how I can be the pastor YOU need as our church continues its Open & Affirming (ONA) process. Since January, the core ONA team has been creating opportunities for dialogue and education, but there are still concerns and anxieties in our church about what it means to be Open & Affirming. That is understandable! You might have questions about how lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people (LGBT) fit into biblical ideas about how God made human beings... or you might be looking at the United Methodist Church and feel some anxiety about potential conflict or division within our community.

All of these are valid questions and concerns! I believe my role as your pastor is to help assuage some of those fears, and *sloooooow* us down so that nobody gets left behind or left out of this process. In order to help address some of the questions you might have, I'm including the FAQ sheet from the UCC Open & Affirming Toolkit (pages 2 and 3). In reading this short handout, I am encouraged by this statement: "Studies show that congregations that haven't hurried through the ONA process experience reduced levels of conflict and a stronger sense of community. A well-planned ONA process will deepen relationships and help members grow in faith." In fact, there is often a "growth curve for new ONA churches."

Friends, "God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7). Jesus came so that we might have "life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10)! If we faithfully engage with this process, we have no reason to fear the outcome, and we have real reasons to expect a more abundant life of faith! I encourage you to faithfully engage with opportunities for study, prayer, and dialogue, so that we can discern where the Spirit is leading, together.

Deep peace,
Grace

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Frequently Asked Questions

1. What does it mean to be an “Open and Affirming” church?

A congregation is Open and Affirming when it affirms a public covenant that “lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people (LGBT)” (or people of all “sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions”) are welcome in the full life and ministry of the congregation (e.g. membership, leadership, employment). Through its covenant, the congregation promises to live out that welcome in meaningful ways in response to Christ’s teaching of radical hospitality.

2. How will our ONA covenant make a difference?

Your ONA covenant will make a difference to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender adults who have personally experienced silence or condemnation in other churches. It will make a difference to LGBT youth who are at higher risk for suicide when they experience bullying or mistreatment because of their sexual orientation or gender expression. It will make a difference to parents of LGBT children whose families need the same affirmation and support congregations offer to other families. It will make a difference to LGBT seniors who are often closeted, isolated or abused in retirement communities and nursing homes. It will make a difference to all Christians who experience a deeper understanding of the Gospel and a stronger commitment to Gospel values when the congregation reaches out in love.

3. Can’t we simply say “all people are welcome?”

No, not if you wish to be listed by the Coalition as an Open and Affirming congregation. LGBT Christians have learned from painful experience that a vague welcome often doesn’t include them and their families. The words are important. Just as a marriage covenant normally centers on an exchange of vows, an ONA covenant shows that the congregation is serious about its commitment to LGBT inclusion.

4. Will our ONA covenant be limited to “sexual orientation and gender identity or expression?”

Most ONA churches expand their welcome to persons of every race, ethnicity, age, economic circumstances, ability, gender, etc. Some congregations also include a welcome to single

parents and their families, to military service members and veterans, and to persons living with mental or physical illness or disability.

5. Won't we become a "gay church?"

Unlikely. There are perhaps six or seven ONA churches with primarily LGBT membership—out of more than 1,200 ONA churches in the United Church of Christ. When ONA churches publicize their welcome effectively, new members include both LGBT seekers and straight allies. Young heterosexual couples who are looking for a church family with the values an ONA covenant represents are typically part of the growth curve for new ONA churches.

6. Will members leave our church if we become ONA?

That depends on whether the congregation has carefully planned its ONA process. An ONA experience that is not hurried, that treats everyone with respect and is a safe space for all members of the church, will usually help a congregation grow in numbers, enthusiasm, generosity and passion for the Gospel. Use the resources the Coalition offers at www.openandaffirming.org/ona/how to develop an ONA process that will unite, rather than divide, your church, and ask us if we can connect you with a trained ONA consultant who can support the congregation through an ONA process.

7. If we're already "LGBT-welcoming," why become "officially" ONA?

Each Open and Affirming congregation is part of a growing *movement* of LGBT-welcoming churches in the United Church of Christ. When your covenant is certified, your congregation will be officially listed on the Coalition and UCC websites as an ONA church, and on other sites often used by LGBT Christians searching for a church family. Moreover, you will be connected with other ONA congregations and with the Coalition's resources on evangelism, worship and advocacy. And by participating in the ONA movement, your congregation will be able to share its wisdom and experience with other congregations that are exploring ONA for the first time, or seeking new ways to live into their ONA covenant.

8. The process is too complicated for our church! Is there a different track to ONA?

Most congregations benefit from an extended period of discernment, prayer, study and dialogue. Studies show that congregations that haven't hurried through the ONA process experience reduced levels of conflict and a stronger sense of community. A well-planned ONA process will deepen relationships and help members grow in faith. But in a few cases, churches that are already Open and Affirming *in practice* may need only an abbreviated

Housewarming for Grace and Heath scheduled

The Fellowship Committee is planning an ice cream social/housewarming for Grace and Heath on July 14, at 4 p.m. We want to “fill their pantry “ with useful items like paper towels, Kleenex, toilet paper, cleaners, etc.



Thank you!

Happy Memorial Day!! Thank you for your special lunch. Your remembrance and thoughtfulness is very much appreciated. You bring special honor to this day.

Larry Wilson
 Army Veteran
 The Willows

We want to thank you for the \$50,000 donation that FRUCC made on April 19, 2024. This instrument donation is imperative to our success and allows us to provide children the opportunity to experience music education without the cost barrier associated with instrument rentals and purchases. You are doing a world of good by helping provide an educational experience that otherwise would be out of reach. You are giving a student a chance to reach their potential. What a powerful gift you have given!

Ekin Cemre Ustunel
 Executive Director
 Young Musicians of Alamance



Meals on Wheels

Delivery Dates

June 3 - 7

UPCOMING EVENTS

BEE TOWN CRAVINGS FUNDRAISER · ONGOING

VISIT BEE TOWN CRAVINGS AT
 125 O'NEAL ST, BURLINGTON NC

30% OF ALL CUPCAKE SALES TO GO TOWARDS YMA SCHOLARSHIPS

SPRING FRUCC CONCERT · JUNE 2, 2024

FIRST REFORMED UCC · 5:00 PM
 513 W FRONT ST, BURLINGTON NC

STUDENT-PAINTED
 UKULELE AND
 DESSERT RAFFLE IN
 CONCERT!

SMALL GROUP SPRING RECITAL · JUNE 5, 2024

MACEDONIA LUTHERAN CHURCH · 6:00 PM
 421 W FRONT ST, BURLINGTON NC

ALAMANCE YOUTH ORCHESTRA SPRING PERFORMANCES

JUNE 4, 2024 · TWIN LAKES · 7:00 PM

JUNE 6, 2024 · MACEDONIA LUTHERAN CHURCH · 7:00 PM

FREE ENTRY WITH
 \$5 SUGGESTED DONATION
YMOFA.ORG



Senior Adults

Thursday, June 27

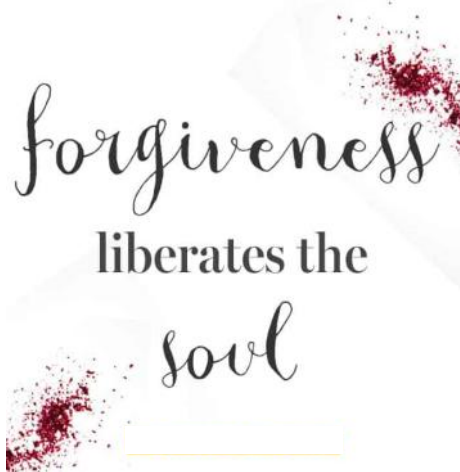
11:30 a.m.

Mosca's

“Patience is the companion of wisdom.”
 —St. Augustine

What forgiveness is — and is not

Forgiveness does not mean ignoring what has been done or putting a false label on an evil act. It means, rather, that the evil act no longer remains as a barrier to the relationship. Forgiveness is a catalyst creating the atmosphere necessary for a fresh start and a new beginning. It is the lifting of a burden or the canceling of a debt. —Martin Luther King Jr.



IT IS WITH GREAT JOY
that the members of
LIFE'S JOURNEY UCC
invite you to attend the installation service

for

REV. FRANK NEWSOME

June 9th, 2024 at 3pm

at

LIFE'S JOURNEY UCC

2121 Edgewood Ave
Burlington, NC

LIGHT REFRESHMENTS TO FOLLOW
RSVP at lifesjourneyucc@gmail.com
by June 1st, 2024

Birthdays

9 Jane McAteer
19 Brad Widerman
23 Leah Merrill



Greeters: Don Doornheim, David French,
Claudette Fitzgerald,

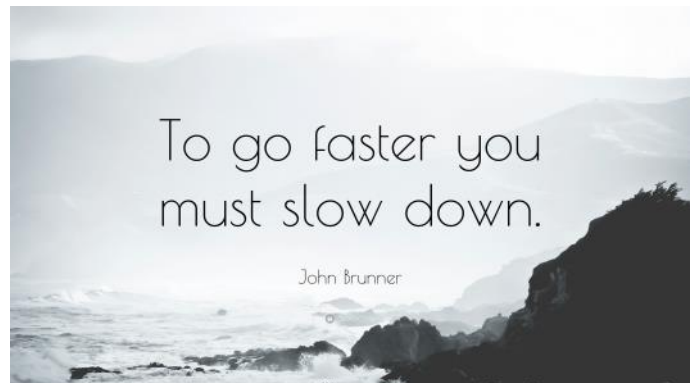
Trustee on Call: Kyle Hayes

Need fast relief? Slow down!

Actor Lily Tomlin reportedly said, “For fast-acting relief, try slowing down.” Summer doesn’t seem to be the “slow season” it once was — if indeed it ever truly was. But perhaps we can use it as incentive to take some “downtime” around the plethora of activities, travel and always-busy work schedules. Pause and accept Jesus’ invitation: “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest” (Mark 6:31, NIV).

It may be a refreshing spot at a lake, a hike in the woods, an early-morning fishing trip. Maybe, around your work schedule, you can reserve time for a few days of church camp, a picnic at the city park, a nap on a blanket in the backyard sun. Help the kids in your life discover what it’s like to *not* be on the go and to take a screen-time sabbath — even to experience boredom and see what creativity blossoms. Do art projects together, ride bikes, paint with water or chalk on the sidewalk, pick berries, bake cookies, solve puzzles, sing songs!

Try slowing down, as Lily Tomlin — and even Jesus — advised. In summer, and any time, it’s good for the soul!



Consistory Notes

The Consistory of FRUCC met on Wednesday, April 10, 2024. In addition to Grace McMullen, seven members were in attendance.

Approval of Reports

The April Minutes and April Financial reports were approved.

Ministry Reports

Faith Formation

- *The Gift of Years* study to start sometime in June

Fellowship

- Ice cream social and housewarming for Grace and Heath on Sunday, July 14, at 4:00 p.m.
- Next Breakfast will be June 23.

Mission & Outreach

- Visitation ministry made 11 visits in March. We are working to plan a quarterly meeting in May.
- Habitat for Humanity Unity Build update: We have responded that FRUCC will participate; work has been delayed until July, with more information to come. Submitted the Endowment request of \$5,000.00
- Made recent food donations to Freedom Hope, including wedding reception food, and signed up to provide lunch on August 29. Details to follow.

Trustees

Written report submitted.

Endowment Committee

- Kyle Hayes and Tom Burgess will serve as co-treasurers to replace Pete Burgess.

Pastor's Report

- First wedding under my belt! I am proud of the church for supporting David and Derek so well.
- I attended an "Elon by Design" session with Alliance Ministers and other United Way stakeholders regarding pooling our resources to help people in crisis with housing. They are compiling data to see where the most energy was spent.
- Lynn Huber's event (The Bible and LGBTQ+ Inclusion) went very well—there was good attendance, fellowship, and learning. I would love to invite more guests like Lynn.
- My Godly Play training in Winston Salem was enriching. I remain excited about this program and enjoyed sharing the Good Shepherd story the following Sunday.
- Summer vacation: approval to take two weeks off in June (June 17-30).

Personnel Committee report

Met and are working on editing job descriptions.

Old Business

- A previous request was to remove the fellowship hall piano, but the site never worked. Bev Pugh is currently working with YMA staff to find a donation site. Church funds were requested to pay for the move.
- Yoga rent was paid, and the key was returned. A new teacher has started with Wednesday classes.
- Outreach regarding the lights and boiler repair has been made since project funding was approved.
- Ray Deal spoke with Lee Syria, CEO of Every-age (formerly UCHS), who manages the Willows. After 40 years, the property will revert to FRUCC from HUD. Research into what will happen once the property is transferred needs to begin.
- Property Insurance costs will increase substantially.

New business

- Eight tablecloths were purchased for church events after a decision was made based on recommendations from Morning and Evening Circles. Reimbursement will come from the Kitchen Supplies line item.
- Permission to donate old hymnbooks and Bibles. Jean Lassiter requested to contact Dave Winstead, Family Care Pastor, Harvest Baptist Church. Mr. Winstead has created an organization that makes local and international donations. Hymnbook numbers are to be determined by Bev Pugh and David Ratchford in consultation with Pastor Grace
- A possible concert by the Hawfield Jammers was discussed based on when the group led worship in the Spring of 2023. Recent communication determined the date for the whole group to participate. Request: Friday, September 13 at 7:00 in the Sanctuary

Respectfully Submitted,

Claudette Fitzgerald

Connection is published monthly by
First Reformed United Church of Christ.
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Organist	David Ratchford
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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.	Sunday School
11:00 a.m.	Worship

All are welcome!

Jesus didn't reject people. Neither do we.



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Burlington, NC 27215

- RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED -



HAPPY

**Father's
Day**