



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

March 2024

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Addressing our needs and our neighbor's need

Dear Church,

This year, March is chock-full of Lent, ending very neatly on March 31st with Easter Sunday. As we start our long and winding journey toward the cross of Good Friday, I am reflecting on what it means to take a couple of steps forward on the path, even if they are shaky, or uncertain, or fearful steps.

Recently, at the church, we have had a couple of folks sleeping on our doorsteps or leaving trash around the building. Their presence has been a reminder to me that there are several different systemic issues compounding in our community: dwindling affordable housing, insufficient mental health services, and addiction issues. And here we are, a church, wanting to embody God's extravagant grace and love to people who are struggling, while also wanting to ensure our church is a safe and clean place for everyone who uses our building. Here is where the rubber meets the road! Here is the spiritual path! Here is where we must move our feet forward, and make the most faithful decisions we can, and hope that if we move forward in love, God will be with us on the path.

After much conversation with trustees, neighbors, and community non-profits, we will try to love our neighbors as we love ourselves by putting up signage pointing folks to organizations that can help them while also asking them not to sleep on our property, leave trash, or approach others using the church building. We want to respect the dignity and humanity of each person who turns to the church for sanctuary while also asking for respect in return.

This is the shaky, faithful foot that we are putting forward, in the knowledge that it will not solve everything. Hopefully, these encounters can spur us on to greater involvement in our community, working to create a more lasting, positive change in our neighborhood and our city.

Freedom's Hope, Allied Churches, and Sustainable Alamance are all local non-profits working hard to help others. Our donation partner for Lent, Southern Alamance Family Empowerment (or S.A.F.E.), is also doing amazing work as a food pantry and nurse clinic for the southern part of our county. I continue to be involved in the Alamance Ministers Alliance, working with United Way to create a centralized crisis assistance hotline that can be used by folks who need help with rent or utilities. There are many other ways we might put a faithful foot forward to help our neighbors. May we find the courage to take those shaky, faithful steps!

(continued on page 2)



Addressing our needs...

cont. from page 1)

I'll leave you with a blessing for "not knowing the next step" from Kate Bowler's book *Have a Beautiful, Terrible Day*:

God, here's the thing:
I've done all that I know to do.
I've thought of every possible solution
and it's still not okay.
So let me be blunt:
will it always be this way?

Will I wander around in the unknowing,
where every solution proves temporary
and every problem becomes another?
How will I know if I am making progress
or where to go next?

I need to know what the greatest good is,
and how to live into it.

Maybe, God, it is simply this:
If I desire and love the good
that I know how to do
(however incomplete it is),
the next step will be toward you.

You will meet us where we fall short.
When we fall headlong down
the wrong rabbit holes.
When we need strength for our burdens
and healing for our brokenness.

I may not know the answers,
or the best possible next step,
but I do know the sound of your voice.
I am wandering, Lord, without destination,
except that I know you are always with me.

Love,
Pastor Grace



Evening Circle
Wednesday,
March 20,
at 7 p.m.
in church parlor

Alamance Chorale celebrates 50 this year

Join Alamance Chorale as we begin our celebration of 50 years of bringing music to Alamance County. On Friday, March 8, at 7:30 p.m. and Saturday, March 9, at 2:00 p.m., the Chorale will present the program "**50 Years of Broadway Favorites**" at Front Street United Methodist Church. Memorable Broadway tunes from the last 50 years will be sung as we share the history of Alamance Chorale over the last fifty years.

Birthday treats at this Dessert Theater will be provided by Main Street Cakes and Smitty's Ice Cream along with popcorn, coffee and tea. Tickets to the Birthday Bash will be sold in advance for \$25 per person and are available from Chorale members, at Alamance Arts, or by contacting us at alamancechorale1974@gmail.com. Make plans to join us as the Chorale celebrates our 50th Birthday!

Breakfast on Palm Sunday

The breakfast prepared and served by the men of the church last December was such a success that the congregation asked for it to continue quarterly. The men have agreed and will be providing breakfast on Palm Sunday, March 24. Be on the lookout for more details!

Scholarships available

If you are a high school senior or a current college student seeking scholarship money, First Reformed UCC offers three scholarships. Any active church member currently attending or planning to attend an institution of higher education is eligible to apply. Applications are available in the church office and are due no later than **March 31**.



Consistory Notes

The Consistory of FRUCC met on Wednesday, February 21, 2024. In addition to Grace McMullen, seven members were in attendance: Teresa Ibarra, Chuck Terrell, Tom Burgess, Brenda Sawyer, Susan Hayes, and Claudette Fitzgerald. Derek Smith joined via Skype.

Ministry Reports

Faith Formation

- The greeter schedule for 2024 has been submitted to Carol Burnett.
- Divided up responsibilities for Adult Bible/book studies, lecture series, and potential Sunday School curriculum
- Stella found a potential Bible study curriculum to correspond with/ Open and Affirming Education. A follow-up meeting will be scheduled.
- Visitation Team update: In January, there were 23 in-person visits and numerous phone calls to or on behalf of members. Have added David French and Jeannie Artley as members.

Fellowship

- Breakfast is planned for March 24, which is Palm Sunday.

Mission & Outreach

- Hometown mission trip 2024 update: A tentative date is set for Saturday, May 18, and we will meet with the Meals on Wheels staff the first week of March. Also, working to recruit assistance from other churches.

- Community Meal for Memorial Day (sub-committee chairs: Susan and Steve Balog). We met with Johnny Bakatsisas, and he agreed to buy and cook a meal of meatballs, rice, and sides, charging only his costs.

Pastor's Report

- The Jubilee service was received enthusiastically, and some variation will continue. It was proposed that the next one be held on April 7 (Sunday after Easter). Potentially, we will combine it with brunch to do a "dinner church" trial run.
- Our Communion schedule will be every third Sunday of the month (except months with special holidays, i.e. Easter).
- Planning to be away on April 14 for continuing ed (Godly Play training in Winston-Salem).

Old Business

- Door update: Cardinal Joinery in Winston Salem has all of their requested information and will schedule a visit within the next two weeks

New business

- The Willows has sent a request for support. The consistory suggests reaching out for a more detailed request of current needs.

Executive Session

Respectfully Submitted,
Claudette Fitzgerald



Meals on Wheels

Delivery Dates

March 11 - 15

Greeters: Steve Balog, Susan Balog,
Kenny Septor

Trustee on Call: Kenny Septor

Sympathy

The first week of February was a time of loss for the congregation of FRUCC.

Ernie Harviel died on Monday, February 5. His funeral was held at the church on Thursday, February 8. Please keep Nancy and Caroline in your prayers, as well as Ernie's children.

We received word that **Cathy Chappell, Josh Chappell's mother** and former member of FRUCC, died on Tuesday, February 6. Her service was held at St. Mark's. Please keep the Chappell family in your thoughts.

Wednesday, February 7, **Margaret Porterfield** passed after a short illness. The funeral was held at the church on Sunday, February 11. Please keep all of her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren in your prayers.



Birthdays

- 5 Amy Deal
Jim Euliss
- 11 Linda Kelley
- 17 Bill Hindman
Pete Burgess
- 18 Kyle Hayes
- 24 Claudette Fitzgerald



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

The Morning Circle will meet Wednesday, March 6, at 10:00 a.m. in the church parlor.



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

Senior Adults
 Thursday, March 28
 Prego's

Paddling through Lent — and life



Lent is a time for restoring balance to our lives. The Eskimos practice balance as they venture into freezing Arctic waters in little boats. If you've ever paddled a kayak, you know how easy they are to tip. Thankfully, kayaks are just as easy to turn back upright.

That isn't a bad image for Lent — or for life as a whole. Whatever spiritual disciplines we adopt, if we suc-

cumb to temptation, it's no biggie. One of the lessons of Lent is that, as long as we're traveling light, it takes only a quick twist of the paddle to right us. That paddle twist might take the form of a quick but heartfelt prayer: "Jesus, set me straight again!" Or it might mean some extra time set aside for quiet meditation with God. Don't get worried if your spiritual discipline fails now and then. Just let Jesus help you get upright once more, and keep paddling!

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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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- RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED -



**IT'S TIME TO
SHARE THE
LIGHT**

**One Great
HOUR
OF SHARING**



**OFFERING DATE
MARCH 10, 2024**