



Your March *Wide-Open Door*

For this Pastor's Pen, I am joined by our moderator, Kris Hietpas, for a progress report on the interim curriculum. We

began our interim curriculum with four Listening Sessions throughout January and February along with a Leadership Retreat for Church Council. We've had a wonderful response to all these sessions and want to give you a preliminary report on our progress. With the blessing of Church Council on October 25, and the collaboration of all the pastors and twelve key lay leaders, we offered four all-church Listening Sessions.

**January 8 – What Do You Love About FCUCC and What Keeps You Engaged?*

**January 22 – How Has Our History Shaped Us as A Church?*

**February 5 – What Regrets Do You Have About our Church?*

**February 19 – What Are You Looking for in a New Senior Pastor?*

In addition to the in-person conversations, Pastor Mary Jo led a version of this curriculum for online groups and Pastor Nick led it for our confirmands and their mentors. We also made questions available to families at home and many of you took advantage of the opportunity to answer these questions via e-mail and our Google surveys. In all, we have received almost 300 responses to these questions and our count of how many people participated continues to grow.

The Listening Sessions proved to be a good way to gather data but also to re-connect after the pandemic, or to start conversations with friends new and familiar. In the jumble of ideas, we tried to create respectful spaces where everyone was heard. Some of you said you want to do this more often, so we're working on more forums during the interim period.

Finally, on Saturday, February 25 the Church Council met in retreat to do three things:

1. Evaluate the data from the Listening Sessions;
2. Update our Vision and Mission Statements, in light of this data;
3. Evaluate the Vandersall Report to see the connections between the Listening Sessions and our updated sense of mission.

Our next step will be to have Co-Counselors take these summaries of the Listening Session data and the draft Vision and Mission Statements to their Committees for feedback. This data will also go to the Search Team to support them in the interviews and evaluation of candidates. We feel we made good progress, and, of course, we have more work to do evaluating what you told us in the Listening Sessions and coordinating it with our emerging sense of vision as a Church.

We also know you probably have a lot of questions. You have been patient and we want to provide some answers for you. Here are some questions we can answer now.

1. *Are we selling the building?* We want to be clear that we are **NOT** planning to sell this building or move to a new location. While this may only be a rumor, we want to put it to rest.
2. *Are we waiting any longer to do needed repairs to this building?* **No.** We have decided that, while we cannot predict the future entirely, there is no reason to postpone needed repairs to our building, as we plan to use it for the foreseeable future.
3. *How will we decide which repairs to prioritize?* The Church Council will prioritize improvements that impact health, safety, and functionality of the building now.
4. *How do we plan to upgrade our space or address structural issues?* Going forward, Church Council will continue to reflect on ways to fund essential structural changes to make our buildings a long-term asset as well as make them handicap accessible throughout. Our Church Council will evaluate the reports we have, the costs of various options, the timing, and the fund-raising opportunities as we look to the future.

We are aware that these are big decisions and we will not make them without plenty of input and wise counsel. But we are also aware that some of the rumors about what is being planned have the potential to undermine your faith and trust in this process and we want to put some of these concerns to rest. We hope this helps and we hope you will continue to pray for our church in this interim period.

Please stay after worship in the sanctuary on March 5th for a Q & A, if you want to hear more about any of these topics.

Blessings, *Pastor Susan and Kris Hietpas, Moderator*

Congregational Life

Embracing God, welcoming others, knowing ourselves

Let's Talk: A Resource for Sacred, Transformational Conversations on Race

Six Weeks of Lent

Wednesdays, March 1st -April 5th, 6-8PM, Upper Lounge

This adult curriculum has been designed to invite UCC members and friends to engage in safe, meaningful, substantive and bold conversations on race. It was written by five gifted authors with decades of experience teaching about race and privilege:

Ch. 1: John Paddock, a Canadian Ice Hockey Coach and former player

Ch. 2: Rev. John Dorhauer, General Minister & UCC President

Ch. 3: Da Vita D. McCallister, former CT Conference Minister, now serving a CT Local Church

Ch. 4: Rev. Traci Blackmon, Associate General Minister of UCC Justice & Local Church Ministries

Ch. 5: Stephen G. Ray, Jr., former President of Chicago Theological Seminary

The *Let's Talk* conversations will help people to "see" power and privilege, their manifestations, and their impacts. It aims to illuminate how white people in America, at every economic stratum, and in a myriad of ways, receive privileged consideration simply because they are white.

It is not about guilt or shame. It presented in the hope that those who choose to engage in this conversation can develop a higher degree of awareness of privilege and its consequences. If we are open to it, this curriculum is an invitation to wholeness!

Free childcare is available. Just let us know that you need it ahead of time!

Study guides and materials are in the church office. Pick them up when you register.

Advance Health Care Planning

Benjamin Franklin famously stated, "in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes". For the past decade April 16th (the day after Tax Day) has been dedicated as National Health Care Decisions Day.

Wisconsin is not a "next of kin" state meaning next of kin are not automatically able to make health care decisions for their loved ones 18 or older. That is why designating who is to make these decisions for you if ever YOU ARE UNABLE to make them for yourself is so important.

Join us on Sunday, April 16th immediately after worship in the Chapel to get information on Advance Health Care Planning. Ben Adams retired Elder Care Attorney and church members who are advance health care trained facilitators will be there to answer questions and provide the needed legal forms.

Advance Care Planning is important for adults of all ages. It is a way to help the important people in your life and your doctors make health care decisions for you if you cannot speak for yourself. Don't put off these important decisions. Join us in the chapel on April 16 to get started. (If you have your form completed and need witnesses, we can help with that also.)

If you are unable to attend, you can get more information and help at Fox Valley Advance Care Planning at <http://www.FVACP.org> or 920-997-8412. They offer free assistance to help walk you through this process and to get your form completed.



On Sunday, March 5th

11:00AM -12:15 PM in the Chapel

NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) of the Fox Valley will present Mental Health 101. Would you like to learn how to define mental health vs. mental illness?

Can you recognize warning signs of a mental health condition? Do you know where to find mental health support in our community? This presentation will help us understand the definitions of mental health and mental illness, some warning signs of mental illness and how to find resources in our community. Please join us.

Mental Health Task Force

Our FCUCC Mental Health Task Force began working in January to support people experiencing mental illness and to educate the congregation on ways we can be more welcoming to those around us who struggle with mental health issues. In February there was a presentation about becoming a WISE (Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive and Engaged) community. A WISE designation would show that the congregation has taken the time to be educated about mental illness and has developed a plan showing how our members support people who are struggling with mental health problems. Already we've learned how broad the term mental health conditions can be. Obviously, depression, anxiety and bipolar disorder can be included, but so can traumatic brain injury, autism and addiction. Anything that alters how the brain functions is included.

If you're interested in joining the Mental Health Task Force, we meet on the first Tuesday of the month, at 3:00 - 4:30 in the Upper Lounge. For more information, contact Mary Sullivan msullivan623@yahoo.com or 920-740-9452.

Our Church Library!

Did you know that FCUCC has a library? Have you wondered what books are in there? Have you noticed that there are FREE BOOKS in the Narthex? Our Library Committee has started to reorganize the library and that means we will be removing old, outdated materials. These will be available in the Narthex for a couple of weeks and then will be donated.

In spring, when we have put everything back together, there will be an Open House of the library. People will be able to check books out and see what is available in the library.

For more information, contact Mary Sullivan msullivan623@yahoo.com or 920-740-9452.

2023 Women's Spring Retreat

Friday, April 21 - Sunday, April 23

Our 2023 Women's Spring Retreat will be at Moon Beach Camp near St. Germain, Friday, April 21 - Sunday, April 23. Julie Garner will be our retreat leader. She led our fall 2022 retreat and participants enjoyed her. She is a licensed UCC pastor and a Spiritual Director/Retreat Leader and Registered Nurse as well as a Certified Yoga, Group Exercise and Personal Training Instructor. She is on the board of UCCI, which is Wisconsin UCC's camps.

Julie says, "My present vocation (and my passion) as a Spiritual Director is to help people "Open their Hearts to God", through individual and group spiritual direction sessions and in retreat settings. I believe we are created in God's image to be God's image. Living out that journey is our call."

The retreat will be centered on *Exploring what connects us and sustains us in creation, our relationships, and our faith.*

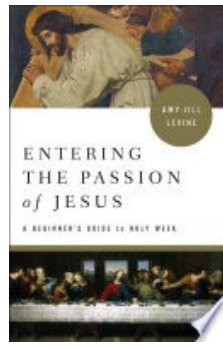
It will be guided by the wisdom of Diana Butler Bass in her book *Grounded*. You are NOT required to read the book, Pastor Mary Jo has 10 used copies of the book available for \$4. (This book was on the 2020-2021 Wine & Word reading list, but I do not remember reading it.)

NEW WAY TO REGISTER Please register and pay in the **Realm Event** [Womens Spring Retreat April 21-23](#). The cost is \$170. You may also send a \$170 check to the church office and they will register you. Scholarship funds are available - contact Pastor Mary Jo or Barb Uehling. Registration closes April 1. Please register early!

Please join us in April! It is "good for your soul" and a great way to meet more FCC women. Contact Barbara Uehling with any questions via email buehling@gmail.com or phone 920-475-2212.



A Lenten Experience Entering the Passion of Jesus: A Beginner's Guide to Holy Week, by Prof. Amy-Jill Levine



Jesus' final days were full of risk. Every move he made was filled with anticipation, danger, and the potential for great loss or great reward. Jesus risked his reputation when he entered Jerusalem in a victory parade. He risked his life when he dared to teach in the Temple. His followers risked everything when they left behind their homes or anointed him with costly perfume. We take risks as we read and re-read these stories, finding new meanings and new challenges.

In *Entering the Passion of Jesus: A Beginner's Guide to Holy Week*, author, professor, and biblical scholar, Amy-Jill Levine explores the biblical texts surrounding the Passion story. She shows us how the text raises ethical and spiritual questions for the reader, and how we all face risk in our Christian experience.

Entering the Passion of Jesus provides a rich and challenging learning experience. Come join us in the Upper Lounge on the following Sundays from 11-12 as Steve Hirby and Pastor Mary Jo Laabs lead the study!

Books are \$9.50 and available in the church office.

March 12 – Ch. 1: Jerusalem: Risking Reputation
Ch. 2: The Temple: Risking Righteous Anger

March 19 – Ch. 3: Teachings: Risking Challenge

March 26 – Ch. 4: The First Dinner: Risking Rejection
Ch. 5: The Last Supper: Risking the Loss of Friends

April 2 – Ch. 6: Gethsemane: Risking Temptation

Worship and Music

*A diverse community practicing faith,
finding spiritual connection and experiencing
the Holy through artful sound*

Music into March and Beyond...

Looking ahead: Our Sanctuary Choir will present a variety of choral settings of the Lord's Prayer, in conjunction with Pastor Susan's upcoming sermon series; additional instrumentalists (violin, guitar, percussion and more) will be joining us in worship; our Scholars have prominent roles in the March 2-5 LU opera production; John Daniel, LU trumpet professor, will join us as featured soloist for Palm Sunday; the LU Faculty Brass Quintet and Timpani will be with us for two services on Easter; our major choral/orchestral work for the spring will be "Five Mystical Songs" of Ralph Vaughan Williams, including two Scholar baritone soloists; some of our singers may participate in One Voice: Gather as One (Ecumenical Church Music Workshop with NEWVoices)

In the words of a familiar hymn: *and from morn to set of sun, through the church THE SONG GOES ON!*

Come Serve in Music Ministry!

Please contact John Albrecht, *Director for Music Ministries*, at jalbrecht@firstcongoappleton.org or 920-851-8097 with questions or to register.

Sanctuary Choir (high school - adults)

Wednesdays, 7:00-8:30 PM

Youth Handbells (grades 7-12)

Wednesdays, 5:45-6:25 PM

Children's Choir (grades 2-6)

Sundays, 10:45-11:30 AM

LU Music Scholars (college)

Sundays, 5:00-6:00 PM

Easy as Pi Concert

The Fox Valley Chorus presents "Easy as Pi" on Sunday, March 12th at 3 PM at First Presbyterian Church, 200 S Church St, Neenah (Fellowship Hall entrance on Doty Ave). Celebrate Pi Day--where math, music and pie meet! Also performing are Fox Sounds, and quartets: It's About Time, Sweet Addiction, and The Bee's Knees. Tickets are \$10. Call 920-420-2192 or pay at the door.

Guests are welcome at rehearsals (same location) every Tuesday, 7-9:30 PM. Women singers can join members on the risers to enjoy and learn the skill of 4-part harmony. Visit www.foxvalleychorus.org

Mission and Service

Building relationships, serving others, pursuing justice

1st Woman Theology Student Receives Kathryn Kuhn Memorial Scholarship

Beatrice Kaino of Kasui village, Kerio Valley, Kenya, has been chosen as the first student to receive Kathryn's scholarship. She is pursuing a diploma in pastoral and theological studies, a three-year program, at Kapsowar School of theology in Kapsowar, Kenya. She was recommended by her church pastor, principal of the school of theology and Rev Samuel Chepkonga (one of the founding leaders of our Kenya partnership). The scholarship will pay for her tuition and board for three years.

Beatrice (36 yrs old) is married to Mark Kemboi, mother of Meschack (grade 4) and Joy (pre-K), aunt and caregiver for nieces and nephews. She participates in many activities of her local church and as a member of the praise and worship team.

From Beatrice's statement of faith: " My hope is to see that the word of God reaches various places and turns people to God. Also to uplift the vulnerable to their standard of living after the course of this ministry, the way I have been lifted up and meet my call."

From Rev Chepkonga: "Beatrice is excited to become a church minister, inclined to working with women, youth and children. I saw in her a hardworking team worker at church and in the community. I shared about Kathryn's legacy and that any recipient needs to maintain a high legacy."

Our hearts are filled with joy as we begin to know Beatrice. Her love and kindness are already apparent as is her enthusiasm to pursue her calling as a woman of faith.



104 Blessings!



Bawana Asifiwi! In Swahili, Bawana Asifiwi means Praise God. First Congregational is currently providing scholarships to 104 Kenya high school students from the Kerio Valley of Kenya! Our church family has been in partnership with Kenya Africa Inland Churches for over 20 years. What started with only 2 sponsored Kenya secondary students has now grown to a record number of 104 Kenya Students! Many Blessing to you and to our students in Kenya. Bawana Asifiwi!



Summer Camp Info is Here!

Have extra time this summer?

Know a college student looking to make money?

Click below to read about great opportunities to support UCCi camps this summer!

[SUMMER JOB Opportunities at Our Camps](#)

[Camp Awesum Volunteer Opportunities](#)

They NEED amazing, loving, volunteers like you at their incredible camps for children on the autism spectrum and their families on June 11-17, June 18-24 and August 6-12!

Youth and Families

Faith, fun, and service

A Note from Your Director

Start the week out right with some positivity from our youngest church goers!

Children's Ministry gathers in the theater with a quick whole-group time. A few Sundays ago, I started by telling the children that we had a job to do.

"Our church leaders want to know your favorite parts about our church. Think about the group of people that make up our church *and* think about our church building."

The kids were eager to share and had responses that moved our volunteer teachers and me. Here they are:

Our projects and crafts

The moms that are teachers

The cool murals on the walls

Everyone is so nice all the time

Yeah! People are smiling

Getting a cool Bible

The awesome bridge

(-lots of agreement for this one 😊)

The songs that someone with a beautiful voice sings so pretty

Cooking during Sunday school

(-each group cooks once per month)

The theater

The pastors being funny

Our PRAYground

Coming here every week

The whole building

The adults here say, "Hi," to kids, too.

They don't just talk to other adults.

Interactive children's messages with the pastors

(These were a 5th grader's exact words!)

If you've ever chatted with me, even just a little, you know that kids are 'kinda my thing'. They amaze me. I would love to listen to their thoughts and wisdom all day because they are so authentic.

One thing in particular popped out to me when I heard the above answers last week. More than one child commented about the adults here being kind or smiling or "actually speaking" to them. It's the only answer in the above list that I did not anticipate hearing, *yet multiple kids said it*. Why? I believe it is a reminder that **no matter the age, humans just want to feel noticed and loved**. How amazing that the adults in our church show our children that God truly is still speaking - through them. Thank you for practicing what you preach. Their influential minds notice! ~Sarah



Please Join Us for Our
Easter Morning Egg Hunt
Between Services at 9:45AM

"Big Kid" Search
Throughout Other Rooms
Infants & Toddlers Only
Search in the Childcare Room

Thank our church members
for filling THOUSANDS of eggs!

Meet on the Bridge

Bring a Basket if You Can
(We'll have extras.)

Worship with us at 8:45AM or 10:30AM
Easter Morning, April 9, 2023. 🌈

