



FEBRUARY 2023

THE VISITOR

The Newsletter of St. John United Church of Christ - Reading

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REKINDLING THE FLAME OF MINISTRY

by Reverend Torie Front

On January 23rd and 24th, I drove up to Wakeman, Ohio to an Episcopal Church Camp called "Belwether Farm" and did a 24 hour clergy retreat. There were 24 clergy present, representing UCC churches across the state (mostly from the Cleveland area) along with a few chaplains. Heartland Conference Minister Rev. David Long-Higgins was also present, and spoke warmly of this time with us pre-COVID!

The purpose of the retreat was to 'rekindle the flame of ministry' in ourselves, and when we arrived, those flames were certainly varied from dwindling to nothing to burning bright. (Guess which end of the spectrum I was on!) 24 hours later, after lots of free time for guided journaling, small group discussions, large group discussions, game night, EXCELLENT food (yes, even better than Higher Ground!) and some time spent hiking through the snow in the woods, I think most people's ministry flames were burning more brightly than when they arrived.

One thought that was presented was to take a look at our Call Agreement. Especially for ministers who have served at the same church for several years (this is my 12th year at St. John UCC!), it's a good exercise for all. And so, here is a summary of the Call Agreement between the congregation of St. John UCC and Rev. Victoria Carol Front. *(continued pg. 2)*



REKINDLING (CONT.)

St. John UCC: In extending our Call to you to be our minister, we affirm that in addition to providing for your needs and those of your family, we shall share in the ongoing work of the Church by assuming responsibility for the following:

1. Offering the Community Kitchen
2. Finding volunteers to sit on different boards, committees, and meet the needs of the church
3. Work with the Reading Church Council for Crazy Day's Lunch Program, On-Site Food Pantry, and other projects identified by the Council

Rev. Victoria Front: In accepting your Call I affirm by responsibilities as Minister to be:

1. Worship
2. Visitation
3. Providing Bible Study and other Faith-Enhancing Opportunities
4. Assistance in Outreach to the Community
5. Attending Board Meetings
6. Other Projects Identified by the Council

Perhaps now is a good time to review these responsibilities in our shared ministry work together. As we continue to move forward in the 2nd month of this new year, I look forward to hearing from you with your thoughts on the Call Agreement, both from the church side, and the minister's.



BOARD OF CHRISTIAN NURTURE



On February 5th, after worship, we will be going to LaComedia Dinner Theatre in Springboro, Ohio to see "**Steeple People**". If you haven't yet signed up and would like to join, let Rev. Torie or Haven know ASAP, as tickets are limited!



St. John UCC's Ministry Board of Christian Nurture is offering the **2023 Pizza Path**. 12 different local pizzerias have been selected and we will visit one of them each month. Like The Donut Trail, you will have a 'passport' that you can get initialed at each pizzeria, and in December, after we visit the final stop on The Pizza Path, all completed Pizza Path 2023 Passports

can be exchanged for a free t-shirt! This month, we will be visiting Strong's Pizza on Sunday, February 12th.



We will be having the **M&M Fundraiser** again this year! It will start on February 5th and go until February 26th. Bring your M&M tubes filled with cash, coins or check(s) back to the church by the end of the fundraiser!



Chair Yoga will be held this month on Thursday, February 2nd and February 9th, both at 5:45pm in the Fellowship Hall!



Our monthly **euchre game** will be held on a to be determined Thursday evening

at Bruce and Linda Read's house. If you are going to join us, please call Linda at 513-485-6009 so we know how many tables to set up!



On Sunday, February 26th after the Faith & Fun Series presented by the Men's Group, Christian Nurture will host a **Family Fun Day** with the Men's Group. Please join us after the presentation by Carl Robinson!

Next Meeting: Wed., February 8th 5pm

BOARD OF DEACONS



The Deacons would like to thank everyone for their continued support of the **pantry**. It could not happen without your donations of groceries, dollars and time. A special thanks to those who shop and those that go weekly to pick up food donations from others. A huge thank you to the amazing crew that comes every Thursday to make sandwiches, pack bags and hand it all out no matter the weather. Every Thursday is full of blessings and God moments!

BOARD OF ELDERS



The Board of Elders at St. John United Church of Christ invite you to free meals and informative discussions during three **Lenten Lunches** in March. Save the date for 12:00 noon on Thursday, March 2nd, noon on Thursday, March 16th, and noon on Thursday, March 30th.

Elders and others will prepare lunches to enjoy during Bible Study lessons led by Rev. Torie. The lessons are from "Bread & Broth: A Lenten Bible Study".

The Elders will also help Susie Koehler serve a ritual St. John UCC seder meal at 6:00pm on Thursday, April 6th. That is the date of Maundy Thursday, which Christians observe just before Easter Sunday in commemoration of the Last Supper.



Great news! Our **Boy Scout Troop** will be helping us lead worship on Sunday, February 19th!



This Lenten season, which runs from Ash Wednesday on February 22nd, to Easter on April 9th, we'll be looking at the well-known hymn "The Old Rugged Cross". Each week we'll dig into a different verse and hope to uncover some Lenten treasures. To help set the stage, here is an article on the history of the hymn, published in 2017 in "Discipleship Ministries", an on-line publication of the United Methodist Church.

The Old Rugged Cross

George Bennard

The United Methodist Hymnal, No. 504

On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,
the emblem of suffering and shame;
and I love that old cross where the
dearest and best
for a world of lost sinners was slain.

Refrain:

So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,
till my trophies at last I lay down;
I will cling to the old rugged cross,
and exchange it some day for a crown.



History of Hymns: "The Old Rugged Cross"

C. Michael Hawn

What do the gospel hymns "The Old Rugged Cross" and "I Come to the Garden Alone" have in common? Both compositions were completed virtually at the same time (1913) by American Methodists. Each reflects on key symbols of Holy Week – the cross of Good Friday and the garden of the Resurrection. Both songs speak from a first-person perspective, composed in a ballad style (6/8 meter) with refrains.

Both songs place the singer in the biblical scene, one at the foot of the cross where Jesus hung, and the other in the garden walking with the risen Christ following the Resurrection. The composers composed both the words and the music. Perhaps most of all, both George Bennard and C. Austin Miles wrote songs that many parishioners

deeply love, and others love to hate.

George Bennard (1873-1958) was born in Ohio, but raised in Iowa. Converted at a Salvation Army meeting, he later became a Methodist evangelist. The composition of the song began in Albion, Michigan, late in 1912 and was finished during a revival in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, where Bennard and his revival partner, Chicagoan Ed E. Mieras, premiered it as a duet on the last evening of the meeting, January 12, 1913. The famous gospel song composer Charles H. Gabriel (1856-1932) assisted Bennard with the harmony and, as is often said, the rest is history.

The completed song was first published in *Heart and Life Songs for the Church, Sunday School, Home, and Campmeeting* (1915), edited by Bennard and two other colleagues. From this point, it became a staple of Billy Sunday's evangelistic crusades, promoted by his chief musician Homer Rodeheaver (1880-1955), who eventually bought the rights to the song.

The composer employs the poetic device of hypotyposis – painting a scene

– in his text. In stanza one, he describes the cross “on a hill far away,” though one may still picture the scene as if kneeling at the foot of the cross. Stanzas two and three refer to Christ on the cross. In stanza two, Christ is called the “dear Lamb of God” (John 1:29). The reference to Jesus is more direct in stanza three. Furthermore, he adds to the hypotyposis by noting that the cross is “stained with blood.”

Another poetic technique employed effectively by the composer is that of paradox. In stanza one, though the cross is an “emblem of suffering and shame,” the singer still “loves that old cross.” In stanza two, though the cross is “despised by the world,” it still “has a wondrous attraction to me.” In stanza three, though the cross is “stained with blood,” for the singer, it still has a “wondrous beauty.”

In many ways, this hymn stands in a long line of devotional poetry that venerates the cross in some way. The refrain begins, “So I'll cherish the old rugged cross.” One finds some similar sentiments in “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” by Isaac Watts (1674-

1748) and “Beneath the Cross of Jesus” by Elizabeth Clephane (1830-1869). Let us look even further back in time for a similar theme.

The famous Latin hymn “Pange lingua gloriosi corporis mysterium” (“Sing, my tongue, the Savior’s glory,/Of his flesh, the mystery sing;”) by Venantius Honorius Clementianus Fortunatus (b. c. 530–d. c. 609) is a traditional Good Friday hymn. A stanza displaying veneration for the cross was included in the translation by John Mason Neale (1818-1866), the English translator of many Latin and Greek hymns:

*Faithful cross, true sign of triumph,
be for all the noblest tree;
none in foliage, none in blossom,
none in fruit your equal be;
Symbol of the world’s redemption,
for your burden makes us free.*

Both hymns, though 1500 years apart, emphasize that the cross stands for something deeper: for Bennard, it was an “emblem of suffering and shame”; for Neale’s translation, the cross was a “symbol of the world’s redemption.” While on the surface the theology may appear similar, actually there are

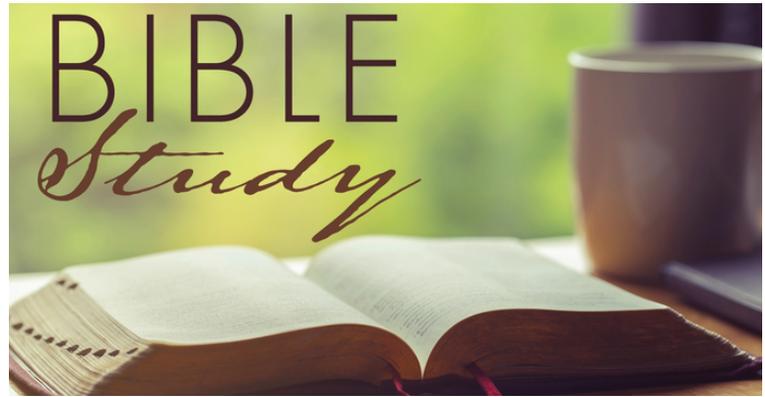
significant differences. In Fortunatus’s hymn, the context points toward the mystery of the sacrament. Furthermore, the tradition of this era would have placed extreme value on the mysterious power of actually having in one’s possession a holy relic, a piece, even a sliver, of Christ’s actual cross. Bennard, on the other hand, venerated the cross as a devotional object that one may eventually “exchange it some day for a crown.” Both are a means of redemption, but viewed through very different forms of piety.

“The Old Rugged Cross” has proven to be extremely popular as a country gospel solo recorded by numerous artists: Ernest Tubb, Andy Griffith, Jim Reeves, Johnny Cash and June Carter, Patsy Cline, Merle Haggard, Loretta Lynn, Tennessee Ernie Ford, Willie Nelson, and many more. Mahalia Jackson made a notable recording of the song on her album, *Mahalia Jackson Sings the Best-Loved Hymns of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* (1968). It was also a staple of George Beverly Shea’s repertoire during the Billy Graham evangelistic campaigns.

To borrow a variation of a word from the hymn, one knows that a song becomes emblematic of a genre or era when it is used in a movie. “The Old Rugged Cross” has this distinction in several films, including *Pennies from Heaven* (1978) and *Gridlock* (2007). It even appears in an episode of the popular and long-running sci-fi series *Doctor Who*.

Returning to the initial comment that many love this gospel song, and many love to hate it, this may be the result of the hymn’s emblematic nature. For some, this hymn stands for an era in American religious life that represents a personal faith at the exclusion of social holiness and an unredeemable sentimentalism. British hymnologist Erik Routley (1917-1982) offered his opinion of this hymn in a text published in 1967. In true Routley style, he was candid and somewhat acerbic. He felt that it is a hymn of “unspeakable vulgarity,” though allowing that “it has said something authentic to somebody” (Routley, 1967, 96). United Methodist Hymnal editor Carlton Young, a jazz lover (and player) and close friend of Routley’s who was with him in Nashville at the time of

Routley’s death, notes that he appreciated its attraction as a “compelling witness for the gospel in this hymn, despite its perceived theological and musical shortcomings” (Young, 1993, 643).



St. John UCC continues to offer two **Bible Studies** each week. The first, every Tuesday at 1:00pm, at St. John. The second, every Tuesday at 6:30pm, in the Mount View Terrace Common Room. Please consider joining us at Bible Study this month!

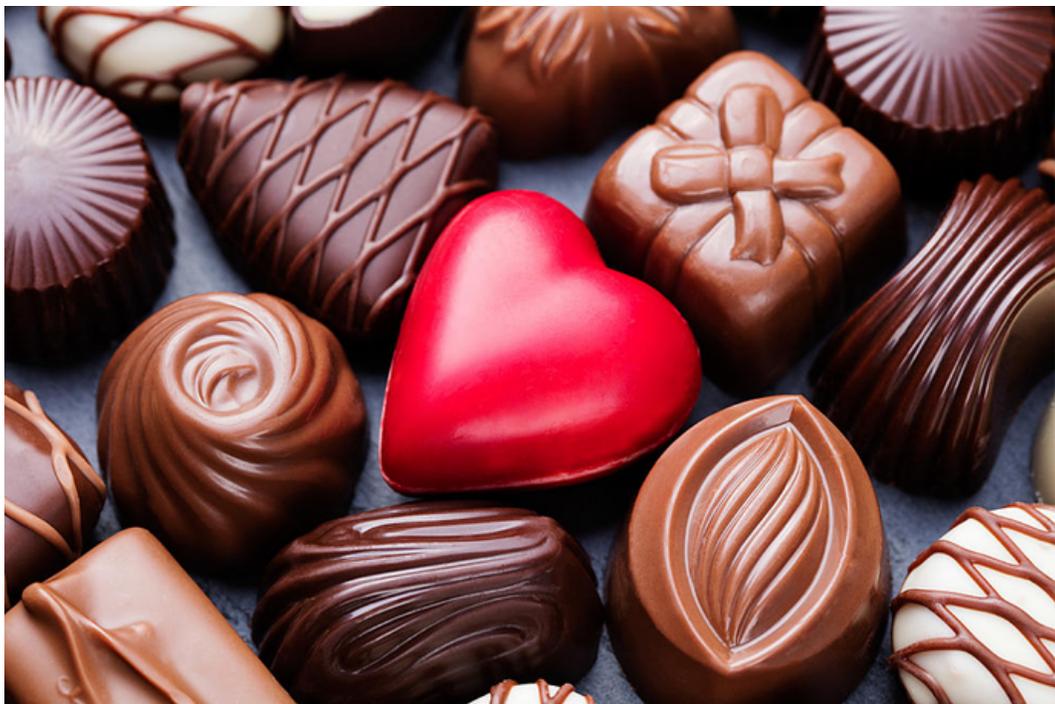


In 2023, we continue to search for **Worship Volunteers** for each worship. Starting this year, we will trial the option to sign-up to be the *Liturgist* on a weekly basis, rather than monthly.

Rev. Torie will send you your words each week! Greeters and Ushers will sign-up on a monthly basis. If you don't mind arriving at church at 9:30am, consider greeting people at the front doors of church, or handing out bulletins to our congregation as an usher. Training is provided for all roles! If you'd prefer to help out financially, sign-up to donate Altar Flowers! Each month, we need \$50 to cover the cost of our beautiful sanctuary flowers. Sign-up to cover half, or all of the cost!

All sign-up sheets are located on the bulletin board outside the Cozy Corner, sign-up today!

Next Meeting: Thurs., February 9th 2:30pm



LECTIONARY PAGE

Scripture	Bible Study	Sermon
Isaiah 58:1-9a Psalm 112:1-9 1 Corinthians 2:1-12 Matthew 5:13-20	January 31st	February 5th ~Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany~ *Communion*
Deuteronomy 30:15-20 Psalm 119:1-8 1 Corinthians 3:1-9 Matthew 5:21-37	February 7th	February 12th ~Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany~
Exodus 24:12-18 Psalm 2 2 Peter 1:16-21 Matthew 17:1-9	February 14th	February 19th ~Transfiguration Sunday~
Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7 Psalm 32 Romans 5:12-19 Matthew 4:1-11	February 21st	February 26th ~First Sunday in Lent~
Genesis 12:1-4a Psalm 121 Romans 4:1-5, 13-17 John 3:1-17	February 28th	March 5th ~Second Sunday in Lent~

BOARD OF PROPERTY AND FINANCE



The work on our **roof** is progressing rather smoothly. Most of the clay tiles have been lifted, underlayment has been laid, and the tiles have been re-installed. New flashings out of shiny copper are being fabricated, trimmed and installed. We did experience a major mishap during the work...the roof on the southwest tower collapsed when it failed under the weight of some tile and a couple workers. Luckily no one was seriously hurt. The collapsed roof fell onto the stairwell ceiling below, causing substantial damage and littering the floor with pieces and debris. It will also need to be replaced. It was obvious that the wood roof structure had substantial rot and deterioration that apparently had been occurring for many years and it could no longer support itself or any load. This is what is called an "unforeseen circumstance" according to our contract with the roofing company, and it will be

an additional cost to get it repaired. The roofing company has been in constant contact with us throughout the project and has been very quick to react to the collapse. They have secured the area and made it watertight until it can be fully repaired.



Since work is progressing on the roof we can now concentrate again on getting the **sanctuary painted**. We will revisit the proposed designs and paint choices that were developed by our interior designer/architects. A small group of members and Rev. Torie visited Our Lady of the Valley Catholic Church and viewed the recently painted sanctuary, and it was quite impressive. We will secure updated proposals and get this work underway as quickly as possible.



The 2023 budget, now known as our **Ministry Spending Plan**, was prepared and approved by Church Council and was presented to the congregation for

review and approval at our Annual Meeting. Since this report is being written before the meeting, we can only hope and pray that all was approved.

We continue to think about the ways our church building can **better serve our seniors**, both our church members and senior residents in the local community. Let us know what programs and activities you think would benefit that group and how the church building and facilities can provide for these.



We have updated our **Master Project List** and expect to complete projects this year: grab bars for toilet seats, roof repairs, solve heating problems in offices, sanctuary painting, parsonage repairs and sell/not sell, new office location for Rev. Torie, expand choir room, repair peeling walls in other pipe chamber, replace ceiling over the steps to the Fellowship Hall, better lighting over the bulletin boards, and LED lighting in the Sanctuary. Let us know if you have other thoughts.



Our **church building is turning 100** years old this year. We will celebrate this birthday sometime this year in some memorable fashion yet to be determined. In the meantime, keep praying and serving.

Next Meeting: Tues., February 14th, 5pm

MEN'S GROUP



On Fat Tuesday, February 21st from 5:00pm-6:00pm the Men's Group will be hosting a **Pancake Dinner** in the Fellowship Hall. Please join us at St. John for some free food and fellowship!



Our new **Faith & Fun Series** will be held on Sunday, February 26th from 11:00am to 3:00pm. Rev. Carl Robinson will be presenting on the four gospels. Stick around after worship for some food, fun and games!



Mark your calendars for Saturday, March 11th! The **Annual German Heritage Dinner** is back this year to support the Bob Christophel Memorial Scholarship. Come to the Fellowship Hall from 5:00pm-7:00pm for great food and German dancers!

Next Meeting: Sun., February 5th 11am



German Heritage Dinner

Traditional sauerkraut dinner with German sausage, mashed potatoes, green beans, German rye, rolls, drinks & dessert.
All included for one low price!

Saturday, March 11th, 2023
5:00 – 7:00 PM



Featuring the
Enzian German Dancers

St. John United Church of Christ
729 Jefferson Ave.
Reading, Ohio 45215
(513) 821-1740
www.stjohnunitedchurchofchrist.com
Check us out on Facebook

**Great Food and
Entertainment!**

Tickets are Limited – Purchase in Advance:
Adults: \$12
Children age 12 and under: \$9

Win raffle prizes and Split-the-Pot !!!

**Tickets are limited, so please contact
the church office at 513-821-1740 to purchase tickets in advance.**

Hosted by the St. John UCC Men's Club with proceeds going to the
Bob Christophel Memorial Scholarship Fund supporting a Reading High School student.

St. John United Church of Christ Regular Events

Weekly Events:

Event	Day	Time	Location
Handbell Choir Practice	Sunday	9:00am	Sanctuary
Worship	Sunday	10:00am	Sanctuary
Bible Study Afternoon	Tuesday	1:00pm	Bible Study Room
Bible Study Evening	Tuesday	6:30pm	Mt. View Terrace
Chancel Choir Practice	Wednesday	6:15pm	Choir Room
Feed My Sheep	Thursday	4:30pm	Outside

Monthly Events:

Event	Day	Time	Location
Communion	1st Sunday	10:00am	Sanctuary
Board of Deacons	1st Sunday	11:00am	Cozy Corner
Pizza Path	2nd Sunday	After Worship	Various Locations
Men's Group	Various Sundays	6:00pm	Various Locations
Missionary Sewing	1st Wednesday	10:00am	Fellowship Hall
Board of Property & Finance	2nd Tuesday	5:00pm	Fellowship Hall
Board of Christian Nurture	2nd Wednesday	5:00pm	Fellowship Hall
Board of Elders	2nd Thursday	2:30pm	Bible Study Room
Euchre	3rd Thursday	2:00pm	The Read's
Church Council	3rd Thursday	5:45pm	Fellowship Hall
Work-ship Day	Last Saturday	8:00am	Church

February Birthdays

Birthdays:

February 8 - Jean Pabst

February 12 - Jennifer Bray

February 15 - Mary Lou Davis

February 21 - Joe Clay

February 21 - John Lower

February 27 - Rick Caudill

February 27 - Carol Nieman

February 28 - Jim Bunning



A Blessing for the Seekers

From A Sanctified Art LLC

Blessed are you who turn your face up to the sky,
who open your arms to feel the wind,
who notice all the things that we should notice.

Blessed are you who are fluent in wonder
and familiar with awe.

Bless are you who, even now,
dream dreams,
who have not lost hope,
who swear the glass is still half-full.

Blessed are you who plant trees
and sing the harmony,
who tell the children how this world can be magic.

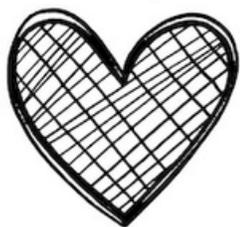
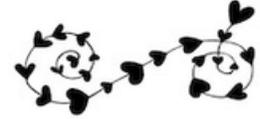
Blessed are you who walk and seek
and turn over every stone,
pointing out all the corners and colors
that God lives in.

Blessed are you.

Amen.



Valentine's Day



CANDY

HOLIDAY

BE MINE

RED

LOVE

PINK

HEART

SWEETS

FOURTEENTH

FRIENDSHIP

CHOCOLATE

GREETING

ENVELOPE

BOUQUET

FEBRUARY

GIFT

BALLOONS

VALENTINE

FLOWERS

CARDS