



The Visitor

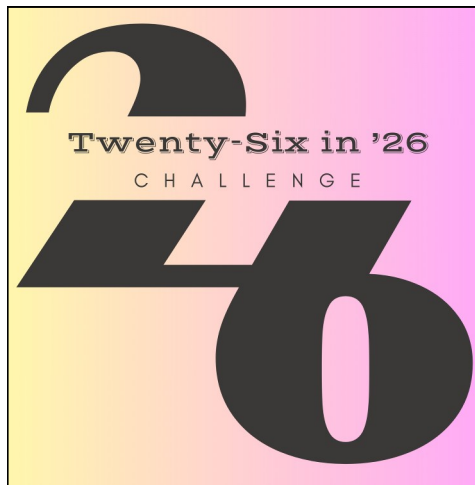
St. John United Church of Christ, Reading, OH

February 2026

From the Pastor: A Lenten Challenge!

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Lent, the 6 week time period before Easter that starts on Ash Wednesday, is traditionally a time to reflect, to repent, and to ready (to keep all the verbs



starting with the letter 'R'!) Oftentimes, people will 'give up' something, or perhaps add something (like prayer or fasting) in an effort to grow closer to God. The act of God's Son sacrificing himself on the cross to pay the cost of all the sins of the world, is indeed worthy of a 6 week time period that includes reflection, repenting, and readying!

This year, I am putting forth a challenge to the whole congregation, to do something slightly different this Lenten season,

which starts on February 18. For the 6 Sundays between Ash Wednesday and Easter, 7 if you count Easter, which we will, I challenge the congregation to

invite 26 people in 2026 to worship. This could be a member who hasn't been to worship recently, or a neighbor looking for a church, or a family member that doesn't have a church home. If they haven't been to St. John UCC for worship yet in 2026, then their presence during this time period will count towards our goal of "26 in 26."

Why? Because we as a church are noticing that our Sunday morning worship numbers are

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From the Pastor: A Lenten Challenge!

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down. Yes, we are aging. Yes, we've had some deaths in the church family. Yes, it's winter. Regardless, we as a church are committed to our vision of a fellowship of believers, joyfully serving and feeding all in body and spirit. And one of the best ways that we offer to feed people spiritually is through our worship. And in talking with members of the congregation, there is a unified desire to see more people in our sanctuary for Sunday morning. Not for the numbers, but for the benefit of providing support for our friends and family in their own faith journeys. Coming together to worship, experiencing the Holy Spirit while singing a hymn or having God's Word speak directly to your heart, these are things that can so easily be experienced in a time of Sunday morning worship.

So this Lent, as you think about giving up chocolate or adding 5 minutes a day to pray for the world, please also pray about

who you will invite to come to worship. There will be a check-list posted in the Cozy Corner, and we'll be able to track throughout the Lenten season as to how we are doing with meeting our goal of '26 in 26!' Challenges and goals are fun to do, countdowns are exciting and grab our attention, but the real winners will be those who come to worship and find their faith strengthened, their hearts warmed, and the gift of the Holy Spirit rekindled through that special hour that YOU invited them to on Sunday morning.

Are you up for the challenge?!

-Rev. Torie

One more pastoral note:

Rev. Torie is taking a UCC-sponsored course on 'retirement' on Tuesday evenings through April. This is not because she is planning on retiring, but because Vince has retired, and she is taking this class to support him.



Heartland Conference UCC Info

Scan the code at right with your phone camera to see online resources from the Heartland Conference, including event registration, newsletters & social media, and prayers/devotions.

PORTAL TO MINISTRY RESOURCES!



SCAN ME

Ministry Board of Christian Nurture

The Ministry Board of Christian Nurture exists to encourage and nurture our members' faith by providing education and fellowship opportunities for all ages.

Next meeting: Tuesday, Feb. 3 at 3:45 pm.

February **Lunch Bunch** will be immediately after worship on Feb. 8, at Chili's @ Harper's Point on Montgomery Road.

The annual **Fat Tuesday Pancake Dinner** will be Tuesday, Feb. 17 from 5-6 pm. Pancakes, sausage, eggs, all the fixins. Plus Mardi Gras music, beads and fun!

Movie Night on Feb. 20 at 6 pm – *Chocolat*. Enjoy this feel-good romance starring Juliette Binoche, Judi Dench, and a lot of delicious candies.

The **German Heritage Dinner**, raising funds for the Bob Christophel scholarship fund, will be Saturday, March 7 from 5-7 pm. Traditional sauerkraut dinner with German sausage, mashed potatoes, green beans, German rye, rolls, drinks, and dessert. All included for one low price! Tickets are limited - please purchase in advance!

Save the date for another **dance party** with Line Dancing with Teresa in March! Join them at church on Saturday, March 14, from, 7:00-10:30 pm, for only \$10 per person.

The “**Joy in the Journey**” **Women's Retreat** will be Saturday, March 21 with an optional overnight Friday, March 20 at the Drury Inn and Suites, Sharonville. Please sign up now so we know how many to buy for.

Notes from the Hospitality Team:

Extra paper products are located downstairs in the pantry room next to the walk in fridge. If you need anything that is not available in the Cozy Corner or Fellowship Hall, please look there. If you are donating paper products for use at church, please put them downstairs in the pantry.

If anyone is interested in **visiting our Saints at Home** once a month, please contact me @ osbornethree@gmail.com. I thought this would be a great opportunity to show our most vulnerable members that we haven't forgotten about them Just a simple “hello, and we are thinking about you” will make a big difference in their lives. I was thinking about visiting one or two people each month, until every member has been reached, and then repeat. Maybe a small treat to provide them during our visit as well. We can discuss further details once volunteers are on board. Thank you and looking forward to hearing from you. –Delores Osborne

The Visitor

Ministry Board of Deacons

The Ministry Board of Deacons exists to serve our community in Christian love.



Workshop Mission Day:

February 28 will be a Workshop Mission Day. What is that, you may ask. It's a day of church building chores, food and fun. Property and Finance will have

a list of things we can work on and the Deacons will provide breakfast, lunch and fun! Please plan to join us, you can spend the day or an hour or two. See you there!

Ministry Board of Elders

The Ministry Board of Elders exists to spiritually support the body of the church by creating meaningful worship.



There will be two opportunities for Ash Wednesday worship on Wednesday, Feb. 18. The service here at St. John will be at 12:30 pm. At 4:30 pm, the bus leaves from St. John for the Soup Supper and SONKA Ash Wednesday worship at St. John's Westminster Union Church on Neeb Road.

Next meeting: Thursday, Feb. 5 at 2 pm.

Lenten devotionals will be available on Sunday, Feb. 15.

Ash Wednesday: The 12:30 pm worship service here at St. John will include the traditional imposition of ashes, fire, and the walking of the Stations of the Cross (see next page for more info!).

The SONKA service at 7 pm is in need of volunteers for various functions: food service, greeters, ushers, communion assistants, and more. There is a SignUpGenius for those interested—register online at bit.ly/4qehPKX to assist with communion, ushering etc.

In our last few Ministry Board of Elders' meetings, we've been talking about Lent,

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Ministry Board of Elders

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and what we want to offer the congregation in terms of worship this year. It seems that adding extra worship services during Lent on a weekly basis just doesn't seem to work anymore – perhaps you remember in years past going to church every Wednesday night in Lent for a Soup Supper and worship service. More recently (in the last 16 years!) we offered similar opportunities on Thursday nights, or every other Thursday night, or Thursday at lunch. But attendance just isn't there, so other than Ash Wednesday (one of Rev. Torie's favorite services!) and the special services during Holy Week – Maundy Thursday and Good Friday – we decided not to offer additional worship services.

What we are offering is the opportunity to walk the Via Dolorosa, the Way of the Cross, as Jesus did. Often called 'Stations of the Cross' in the Catholic Church, we will set up 12 'stations' in our sanctuary. At each station there will be some artwork, a prayer, and a description that prompts reflection. You can spend as much time at each station as you wish, as you contemplate the magnitude of Jesus' sacrifice for our sin. We'll walk this path together on Ash Wednesday and then again on Thursday, March 26, just before Holy Week. But the Way of the Cross will

be available to everyone, every day, throughout the 40 days of Lent.

During our Lenten worship services, we will be looking at the 7 last words of Christ. At each service, starting with Ash Wednesday, we will take one of these words (phrases, set of scriptures) that describe a moment on the cross with Jesus. A member of the congregation will portray someone who was at Golgotha that day, observing Jesus on the cross. And we will see this act of salvation through a new perspective, learning a basic truth of God's love for us, and how we can use that truth to live out each day of this blessed life that has been given to us.

We look forward to worshipping with you during the upcoming Lenten season.

Music Ministry Highlights:

The Chancel Choir will be riding the bus and singing on Ash Wednesday (Feb.18) at the Westminster United Church of Christ SONKA service. Our choir will combine with the other churches to sing "Most Holy Lamb."

The Handbell Choir will ring in worship on February 15, 2026.

Scripture Readings

1 pm Bible study will meet every Tuesday at church.

6:30 pm Bible study at Mt. View Terrace will meet on alternate Tuesdays: Jan. 27, Feb. 10, Feb. 24.

Scripture	Bible Study	Sermon Date
Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27:1, 4-9; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-23	January 27	February 1
Isaiah 58:1-9a (9b-12); Psalm 112:1-9 (10); 1 Corinthians 2:1-12 (13-16); Matthew 5:13-20	February 3	February 8
Exodus 24:12-18; Psalm 2; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9	February 10	February 15
Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11	February 17	February 22
Genesis 12:1-4a; Psalm 121; Romans 4:1-5, 13-17; John 3:1-17	February 24	March 1



Congrats to our "Through the Bible in a Year" group for reading the entire Bible during 2025! (Not pictured: Mt. View Terrace participants.)

Popcorn Committee Update

Nine of the members of the Popcorn Committee met January 6th to discuss the progress we've made on the suggestions given by those of you that attended and responded to the Popcorn questionnaire last June. We are pleased that the boards and council have made some changes and are continuing to take on future improvements to our ministry.

We are meeting again in April to see what new growth opportunities are being worked out through the boards and council. We decided that one of the most im-

portant items to address is increasing the attendance at our worship service on Sunday. We are open to suggestions and will be putting a suggestion box on the table in front of the video ministry equipment. Please feel free to drop us a note.

I asked if we should change the name of the committee and it was decided to keep it the "Popcorn Committee," because there will be new growth possibilities popping up from time to time.

In Christian Love,
Charlotte Bell, Chair

Invitation to SONKA Ministry Roundtable Feb. 20

You are invited to a roundtable small group discussion regarding the future of the UCC in our area. The conversation will be led by consultant Lisa Withrow.

Our purpose is to hear as many voices as possible so that we can discern future ministries, financial and volunteer capacities, and the partnerships that can make a difference in our world!

The Heartland Conference and the Indiana-Kentucky Conference have been listening carefully to clergy, laity, and regional leaders about how God is calling us to share life and ministry in our region.

The date for SONKA listening session is Friday, February 20, 11:30 am to 1:00 pm at First United Church of Christ, 5808 Glenview Ave. Light lunch included.

Register online at bit.ly/49O19F8

Steve Prater presents Bruce Koehler with the inaugural Commodore Koehler Community Kindness Award, in honor of Bruce's work to restore Mill Creek and help to steward the environment in the communities around it.

"Hands Dirty, Feet Wet"



The Visitor

Ministry Board of Property and Finance



Once we are sure there is no more moisture, we will repair and paint the inside walls that are damaged.

I hope that you enjoyed the poetry in last month's report. It reflected, in an attempted artistic way, the challenges and blessings of keeping the church running and fulfilling the mission to which we are prayerfully and faithfully committed.

And now we are already into the second month of the New Year and addressing all that we are hoping to accomplish.

We are thankful that the Ministry Spending Plan was approved by the congregation at our annual meeting. The overwhelming support of this church by our congregation, friends and neighbors is frankly.... overwhelming! The time, talent and treasure provided by all is such a blessing and critical to our continuing service to our members and the community.

After a few more concerns were answered, new entry doors have finally been ordered and we are expecting them to be installed early this spring. They will be a welcome relief from the current cold and drafty doors, and will provide some

added security from both men and mice.

Our moisture-damaged sanctuary walls seem to be remaining dry, indicating that the sealing, caulking and painting of the outside frames may have solved the problem. We will continue to watch these areas and once we are sure there is no more moisture issues, we will repair and paint the inside walls that are damaged.

Haven has been working with a contractor on the remodeling and updating of the kitchenette outside the sanctuary. Plans, details and costs are being finalized and hopefully we can see this installed in the coming months. This new kitchenette will serve us well for meals and activities in Cozy Corner. It will also serve as a sacristy for preparing the communion elements. We appreciate Haven's management of this project.

We continue to work on getting online-giving established which should be very soon. Ideas for updating the trellis and façade

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Ministry Board of Property and Finance

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at the stained glass window in the sanctuary will be developed once the structural integrity can be confirmed by an engineer. Also, new landscaping will be coming this spring.

A Work-Ship Day is scheduled for Saturday, February 28th. Hopefully you can attend and help with some tasks. Look for an email with more information.

Have a wonderful Groundhog Day, Valentine's Day, Super Bowl Sunday, President's Day, Black History Month, Chocolate Mint Day, and Fat Tuesday. But most importantly, solemnly and prayerfully remember Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the holy season of Lent. Amen.



Rev. Torie presents the 2025 Jay Hicks Service Award to Karen Carey and Delores Osborne. Thank you for your dedication, Karen and Delores!

Celebrations in February

Birthdays:

February 8 - Jean Pabst

February 9 –

McKenna Banaszak

February 11 – Linda Cutter

February 12 - Jennifer Bray

February 21 - Joe Clay

February 23 - Verna Ficke

February 26 – Richard Cutter

February 27 - Rick Caudill

February 27 - Carol Nieman

Are we missing your birthday or anniversary? Please call the office and let Jane know!



St. John UCC Regularly Scheduled Events

Weekly			
Event	Day	Time	Location
Handbell Choir (Sept.-May)	Sunday	9 am	Sanctuary
Fellowship Time	Sunday	9:15 am	Cozy Corner
Worship	Sunday	10 am	Sanctuary
Bible Study (Afternoon)	Tuesday	1 pm	Bible Study Room
Bible Study (Evening)	Tuesday	6:30 pm	Mt. View Terrace
Chancel Choir (Sept-May)	Wednesday	6:15 pm	Choir Room
Feed My Sheep	Thursday	4:30 pm	Fellowship Hall

Monthly			
Event	Day	Time	Location
Communion	1st Sunday	10 am	Sanctuary
Deacons	Last Thursday	2:30 pm	Fellowship Hall
Lunch Bunch	2nd Sunday	After Worship	Various
Men's Group	Various Sundays	11 am	Various
Property & Finance	2nd Tuesday	5 pm	Bible Study Room
Christian Nurture	1st Tuesday	5 pm	Bible Study Room
Elders	1st Thursday	2:00 pm	Bible Study Room
Euchre	3rd Tuesday	2:45 pm	Church
Church Council	3rd Thursday	6 pm	Bible Study Room
Work-ship Day	First Saturday	8 am	Church



BLACK HISTORY MONTH WORD SEARCH



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PROTEST

CIVIL WAR

RIGHTS

SLAVERY

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FREEDOM

AFRICAN

VOICE

HISTORY

DREAM

PREACH

BOYCOTT

UNITY

BLACK

HARMONY

PEACE

HOPE

MARCH

AMERICAN

LEADER

FAT TUESDAY

FREE Pancake Dinner

February 17th 5 - 6 PM



Pancakes, sausage, goetta, eggs and all the fixins.

Fellowship Hall

PLUS Mardi Gras Music, Beads & Fun!

Sponsored by The St. John Men's Group



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