



# The Visitor

St. John United Church of Christ, Reading, OH

February 2025

## From the Pastor

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As we enter the month of February, with its red hearts and lacy patterns, our thoughts naturally turn to love. Valentine's Day, though a decidedly minor holiday in many ways, in this country and many others, you will find cupids and candy conversation hearts everywhere. Americans spend an average of \$2 billion on Halloween candy, \$1.9 billion on Easter candy, \$1.4 billion on Christmas candy and \$1 billion on Valentine's Day candy. That's a lot of candy!

It may be a holiday that is linked to candy and chocolates, but it started out with a religious foundation. From Wikipedia we learn: Valentine's Day, also called Saint Valentine's Day or the Feast of Saint Valentine is celebrated annually on February 14. It originated as a Christian feast day honoring a martyr named Valentine, and through later folk traditions it has also become a significant cultural, religious and commercial celebration of romance and love in many regions of the world.

There are a number of martyrdom stories associated with various Saint Valentines connected to February 14, including an account of the imprisonment of Saint Valentine of Rome for ministering to Christians persecuted under the Ro-

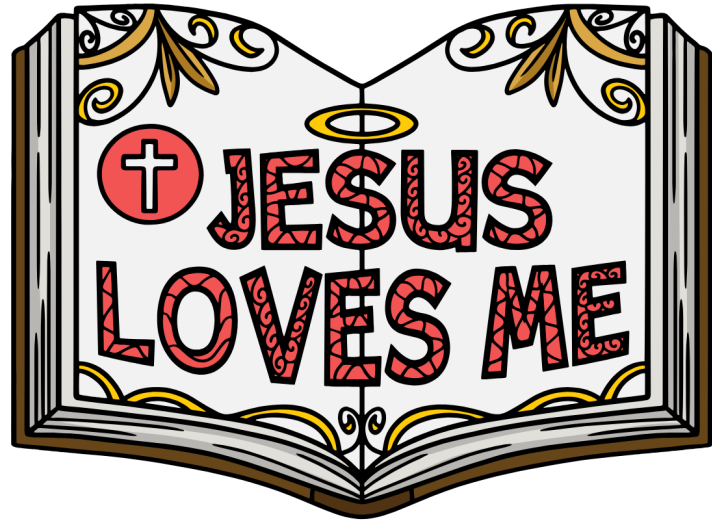
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## From the Pastor

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man Empire in the third century. According to an early tradition, St. Valentine restored sight to the blind daughter of his jailer. Later additions to the legend have better related it to the theme of love: tradition maintains that St. Valentine performed weddings for Christian soldiers who were forbidden to marry by the Roman emperor; an 18th-century embellishment to the legend claims he wrote the jailer's daughter a farewell letter signed "Your Valentine" before his execution.

But as we think about Valentine's Day and love this year, I invite you to think about God's love for you, particularly Jesus' love for you. The hymn "Jesus Loves Me" is one that we all know and are hopefully teaching our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren! "Jesus Loves Me" first appeared as a song in the Golden Shower of S[unday] S[chool] Melodies (1862), edited by Northeastern Baptist church musician William Bradbury (1816–1868). Reynolds claims that the tune name CHINA was the result of reports by missionaries who claimed over time that this was a favorite tune of Chinese children. Bradbury composed a childlike pentatonic melody and added a refrain with text drawn from the first lines. But it originally appeared as part of a story, in Anna



B. Warner's sister's book "Say and Seal" in 1860.

Today, this well-known children's song and great theological hymn of the church has been translated and adapted and modified in most cultures and countries! Why is it so popular? Well, the tune is catchy and repetitive and easy to follow, and the words remind us of that universal truth – God's love for us is certain, and we can know this because we experience it in so many ways, and we hear about it in the Bible.

As we continue to journey through the Bible this year, I invite you to keep your eyes and ears open for God's love for you, for humanity, for all of creation. And remember, even in these cold and dark days of winter, that Jesus loves you. Unconditionally. Unceasingly. Forever. Amen.

## Ministry Board of Christian Nurture

Collect those quarters! Christian Nurture's annual **M&M fundraiser** begins Feb. 2 and ends February 23. Last year we raised \$830.00. Thank you!

**February Lunch Bunch** is Feb. 9 at the Bridge House restaurant in Reading

The Hospitality Team is accepting donations of **birthday or anniversary cards and envelopes**, to be used to send to our members throughout the year.

Our **Chili Cook-off** and "Bingo-like games" fellowship event is Saturday, Feb. 22 at noon. Please sign up if you are going to bring a pot of chili or just coming to sample! All are welcome!

Save the date for the **Rummage Sale!** The sale will be May 29-31, 2025 from 10:00 am-2:00 pm each day.

We will shortly be collecting **Pennies for Pets** again. Please place your loose change in the red dog bowl upstairs near the sanctuary. Joe Clay will collect the donated money and take it to Pets in Need of Lockland.

Pets in Need provides low-cost veterinary care for individuals with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level, including seniors, veterans, the homeless, and people with disabilities. In addition to cash donations, they also accept used medicine bottles!

*Fellowship fun at RJ Cinemas on Jan. 19 for Rev. Torie's birthday!*



## Ministry Board of Deacons

Hello from the Deacons! Feed My Sheep continues to thrive. We are always amazed by the donations we receive.

Thanks to Rev. Torie, we were able to **secure two grants**: one to purchase cloth grocery bags with St. John UCC printed on them, the other to get a new much needed refrigerator!

In January we served a **chili spaghetti meal** to about 60 people. We are planning to do a meal once a month. Thank you to Karen and Savannah for hosting the meal.



*Congrats to Gary Kurtz and Susie Koehler, our 2024 Jay Hicks Service Award recipients!*

Feed My Sheep takes place Thursdays 4:30-5:30. You are always welcome to join us. You can stop by earlier in the day to help us get ready, or just have a cup of coffee/tea and a chat.

**Rev. Torie's birthday food drive** was an overwhelming success! Donations surpassed her goals in every category of food! The final donation totals were:

- 201 mac and cheese
- 67 spaghetti sauce
- 103 canned fruit
- 204 cans of tuna
- 130 jars of peanut butter

Close to \$300 was also donated in cash and gift cards, which will be spent on groceries for this week's Feed My Sheep. Thank you all for your generosity!

# FAT TUESDAY

**FREE Pancake Dinner**  
**March 4th 5 - 6 PM**



**Pancakes, sausage, eggs and all the fixins.**  
**Fellowship Hall**  
**PLUS Mardi Gras Music, Beads & Fun!**

**Sponsored by The St. John Men's Group**

## 'Reminded of our calling'

### National interfaith leaders gathered on MLK Day to herald a hopeful path forward

by Kayla Berkey | Published on Jan 21, 2025 at [ucc.org/reminded-of-our-calling-national-interfaith-leaders-gathered-on-mlk-day-to-herald-a-hopeful-path-forward/](https://ucc.org/reminded-of-our-calling-national-interfaith-leaders-gathered-on-mlk-day-to-herald-a-hopeful-path-forward/)

On Martin Luther King Jr. Day, prominent religious leaders from across the country filled the sanctuary of Healing Cathedral Christian Church in Memphis, Tennessee, with music and united visions of hope.

Many gathered in person, online, and at satellite sites around the country to participate in "For Such a Time as This," a national worship service and mass meeting. The event brought people of faith together at a time of high emotions as the presidential inauguration took place on the day marked for reigniting King's vision.

And reigniting a vision was a clear message of the evening.

Bishop William J. Barber II, president and senior lecturer of Repairers of the Breach, described President Donald Trump's return to the Oval Office as one "symptom" of the kind of "sick society" King referenced in his final speech. "We gather today around the nation to be reminded of our calling and work — not just from MLK, but from God," Barber said. "Our problem

is not just because one person gets the title 'president.' Our calling exists no matter where or when we are in the nation, because the nation is still infected with the diseases of racism, poverty, and militarism. If we make it about one man in the presidency, we miss it."

Gathering to remember King should bring into clarity "who we are and whose we are," he said. "We already have vision — the problem is following it. Maybe it's time to work the vision rather than having to keep writing new ones," he added.

#### *Together and forward*

More than twenty interfaith leaders spoke at the event which was developed from the vision of United Church of Christ General Minister and President Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson.

As she addressed the crowd, Thompson spoke about the crucial need to unite around an inclusive vision and "our ability to come together and say 'no more' to injustice."

"We are here to say we are going to work together for the people whose lives will be disrupted by the policies of this government. We are here to say that the love of God by many names brings us together

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**'Reminded of our calling'**

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and moves us forward for such a time as this," she said.

Comments from many of the evening's speakers drew up brighter possibilities for the future.

"Love is the answer we keep hearing over and over," said the Rev. Terri Hord-Owens, general minister and president of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). "My friends, I call us to imagine a new world. A world where all of us are working together to make real the vision of the holy, each in our own way. It can happen."

Rev. Shane Claiborne, co-director of Red Letter Christians, offered a message by video describing the "counterfeit peace and obnoxious unity" that King criticized, which comes from ignoring the injustice and oppression of other people.

"Our silence means complicity," Claiborne said. "Let's pray against the counterfeit peace, the obnoxious unity, the façade that everything is okay when things are not okay. We pray for our country to be revived, to be moved by love rather than fear."

*'The movement is alive'*

Local pastor of Freedom's Chapel Christian Church and founding member of

Memphis Interfaith Coalition for Action and Hope, the Rev. Rosalyn Nichols encouraged people to "not forsake the assembly of yourself. Find ways to continue believing that we will receive power. We must gather and believe that right now Pentecost will come."

Leaders from differing religions highlighted messages of justice and compassion shared across their traditions.

Between speakers, the sanctuary was filled with the lively music led by Yara Allen, director of theomusicology and cultural arts for Repairers of the Breach, with the North Carolina Freedom Singers. The in-person crowd swayed, clapped, sang, and offered exultations along to the songs and the speeches.

The events of "For Such a Time as This" offered a model for emphasizing connection between people at the outset of Trump's presidency, because, as the Rev. Dr. Soni Cantrell-Smith, president of Centers for Spiritual Living, said, "We got a hell of a lot of work to do today."

"Beloved," she added, "the work we have ahead is not easy, but it is holy."

The full recording of "For Such a Time as This" is available for viewing, and video highlights from the event will be coming soon.

**Ministry Board of Elders**



**Ash Wednesday** is March 5.

St. John UCC will offer an Ash Wednesday service at noon on March 5, with lunch provided by the Elders.

At 6:30 pm we will participate with other UCC churches in “SONKA 513” in a joint Ash Wednesday service, at Sts. Peter and Paul UCC (3001 Queen City Avenue, Westwood, 45238). There will be a soup supper before the evening service at 5:30

pm. Phil Hogan will drive us there in style, so we hope that you will consider joining us for the evening service – in fact, why not do both?!

In addition to Ash Wednesday worship, **Taizé services** will be held at noon on two Wednesdays in Lent: March 20 and April 4. Please join us for a brief, meditative worship service and a “bring your own” lunch.

The **Handbell Choir** will ring during worship on February 9 and February 23. Come and enjoy this joyful addition to our praise of God!

**Scripture Readings in February** (*Through the Bible in a Year*)

Scripture	Bible Study	Sermon Date
<i>The Daily Bible</i> – Jan. 21-27 entries (p. 91-121)	January 28	February 2
<i>The Daily Bible</i> – Jan. 28 - Feb. 3 entries (p. 121-151)	February 4	February 9
<i>The Daily Bible</i> – Feb. 4-10 entries (p. 152-184)	February 11	February 16
<i>The Daily Bible</i> – Feb. 11-17 entries (p. 184-218)	February 18	February 23

## Ministry Board of Property and Finance



*Many thanks to Rick Caudill for readying all the snow equipment, and to both Rick and Steve Culver for clearing the snow.*

January has come and gone and it has been snowy and bitter cold. We have not seen snow like this for many years....and it is exciting...and frustrating. Many thanks to Rick Caudill for readying all the snow equipment, and to both Rick and Steve Culver for clearing the snow from around the church and for several homes of our church members. There were many exhausting hours spent shoveling and salting to make sure that we were all safe and able to travel.

At our first P&F meeting of the year, we always take account of the projects that have been completed in the past year and projects that we intend to complete in the coming year. The list is always quite extensive and sometimes overwhelming. If you have any thoughts on what we should be addressing, please let us know.

Two of our current projects are a new outdoor sign and new entry doors. We have a proposal for a new digital display sign to replace the old internally

lit sign that requires tedious manual labor to change the message. This new programmable sign will need to be permitted and must go through a zoning appeal process with the city. If approved we can expect it to be installed around late spring. We also have a proposal for new aluminum entry doors. New 3-foot-wide doors and new glass will be installed to replace the worn and damaged doors and glass. We expect this work may be completed sometime this summer. The etched glass in our existing doors will be saved, and we're working on a creative way to incorporate that part of history and art into our ministry.

Another Work-Ship Day is scheduled for Saturday, February 1, from 8 am till around noon. A breakfast will be available for all to enjoy, followed by working on many tasks that can be performed by all interest and skill levels. Interspersed throughout the morning will be rests, coffee breaks, and may-



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## Ministry Board of Property and Finance

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be some games and fellowship times. After a full morning of labor, a lunch of build-your-own tacos will be served. Afterwards, you could work some more, sit and chat, and/or participate in more games and fellowship activities. We expect to be complete by early afternoon. Please feel free to come and go at any time.

Donnie Wetterer, one of the past leaders of the Boy Scouts,

will soon assist us with updating our network and Wi-Fi access. New equipment and a reworking of all the network wiring will be a huge improvement to our current system.

We are thrilled to welcome Carol Nieman and Ron Bauer to our board.

Keep watching out for each other and know that spring is right around the corner.

Peace and blessings from P&F.



## Celebrations in February

### Birthdays

Feb. 1 - Linda Read

Feb. 21 - Joe Clay

Feb. 8 - Jean Pabst

Feb. 23 - Verna Ficke

Feb. 9 – McKenna Banaszak

Feb. 26 – Richard Cutter

Feb. 11 – Linda Cutter

Feb. 27 - Rick Caudill

Feb. 12 - Jennifer Bray

Feb. 27 - Carol Nieman

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

THE HEARTLAND CONFERENCE'S  
PORTAL TO MINISTRY RESOURCES!



SCAN ME

### ***Want an easy way to connect with The Heartland Conference?***

Scan this QR Code with your phone camera to access our website, newsletter, email our staff, register for camp, and more! Or visit

[linktr.ee/HeartlandUCC](https://linktr.ee/HeartlandUCC)



## St. John UCC Regularly Scheduled Events

Weekly			
Event	Day	Time	Location
Handbell Choir	Sunday	9 am	Sanctuary
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	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	Cozy Corner
Lunch Bunch	2nd Sunday	After Worship	Various
Men's Group	Various Sundays	11 am	Various
Missionary Sewing	1st Wednesday	10 am	Fellowship Hall
Property & Finance	2nd Tuesday	5 pm	Fellowship Hall
Christian Nurture	1st Tuesday	5 pm	Bible Study Room
Elders	2nd Thursday	2:30 pm	Bible Study Room
Euchre	Last Thursday	6 pm	Reads' home
Church Council	3rd Thursday	6 pm	Fellowship Hall
Work-ship Day	Last Saturday	8 am	Church

# Love One another

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. John 15:12 (NIV)

Based on John 15:9-17 (NIV)



G Q R J N I L D R Z G F U R G  
C O M M A N D D I M Y T E Z I  
G F S Y J F W J O K H N Y O J  
Q W F L F R U I T W S C P M I  
C H M E R B W Q J F N R U P O  
T L D R I K O B U S I N E S S  
Q X S X E J U O E R N L A Y R  
O A P R N E N B A I F L I S R  
M J L B D I O E D K R V T E T  
L A F O S A B Y M Z N N T V F  
M D S A V V Y K N R A A U E E  
Z H T T T E P W L V E L S F F  
Y M N P E H H A R R P O I V Q  
F F G P B R E E G Z H L H R I  
R E M A I N S R V C E C D S A

FRIENDS  
DOWN  
LAY  
SERVANTS

OBEY  
BUSINESS  
FATHER  
GREATER

LOVE  
BEAR  
LIFE  
COMMAND

FRUIT  
MASTER  
REMAIN  
CHOSE



## St. John United Church of Christ

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# 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 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025**  
**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](http://www.stjohnunitedchurchofchrist.com)

Check us out on Facebook

**Great Food and  
Entertainment!**

**Tickets are Limited – Purchase in Advance:**

Adults: \$15

Children age 12 and under: \$10

**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 Group with proceeds going to the  
Bob Christophel Memorial Scholarship Fund supporting a Reading High School student.