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Sundays  
10AM

# *The Courier*

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First Congregational Church, Elyria,  
Ohio. February, 2019 [courier@firstcongelyria.org](mailto:courier@firstcongelyria.org)

## *A Month for an Extravagant Welcome and Love*

**February is often seen** as a month in Northeastern Ohio characterized as cold and dreary, filled with gray days of snow and ice. Indeed, the month is usually cold and dreary with sidewalks and driveways to shovel, however let's not forget it is also a month where we celebrate love. February has the wonderful celebration of Valentine's Day. Admittedly, the historical origins of St. Valentine's Day are speculative. One of the legends tells the story of a wealthy Roman.

**Valentine** was a wealthy Roman man who lived in the 2nd century. Valentine was a Christian and would invite people to his home to enjoy his garden. He befriended all those who would come to enjoy his garden and home. One might consider Valentine as one who extended extravagant welcome to all. Valentine would read to those gathered and teach them about Jesus. Keep in mind, Christianity was not permitted at this time in the Roman Empire. Despite the prohibition on Christianity, Valentine still taught his friends and strangers about Jesus. Valentine was loved by all who came to know him. Eventually, Valentine was arrested and from his prison cell would write letters to his friends. He would sign the letters, "From Your Valentine". Unfortunately, Valentine was eventually executed.

**The story of Valentine**, his letters, and willingness to welcome others into his home and garden has become part of the Christian tradition of welcoming strangers and showing love to all. The practice of sending notes or letters on February 14th has become a tradition within some Western cultures and is now part of the practices of Valentine's Day. The practice is usually associated with romantic love, however I do not believe it is keeping with the spirit of Valentine to only reserve the practice to those who are in love with another. I believe the spirit of Valentine is much more inclusive. Perhaps on this Valentine's Day, we could extend a greeting or act of kindness to anyone we encounter on this February 14<sup>th</sup>. Happy Valentine's Day to one and all.

Blessings,  
Pastor Patrick

## Youth Room

**As all of you know**, First Church has a very active and growing youth group known as the **God Squad**. The God Squad is comprised of middle and high school youth. They have been meeting in the lower level Youth Room. The room had never been upgraded in terms of items that hold their interest or activities. The God Squad asked if it was possible to have some new items. I had them put together a list of wants and to rank the items in order of importance. They gave me a list and after reviewing it, I was pleasantly surprised by the small amount of items.

**I invite our members** and friends to take a look at the upgraded Youth Room and become familiar with the activities that hold our youth's attention. If they around, I am positive they would very much enjoy engaging with you and be willing to share a ping pong paddle or game system controller.  
-Pastor Patrick

## Opioids Crisis

**A new group** has formed in Lorain County to assist with the Opioid crisis which is pervasive in our community. The group is calling together faith communities and comprised of faith leaders as well as members of congregations, to provide leadership and education.

**Tracy and I** met with the liaison to the community and believe the endeavor is very much needed and worth while. I asked Tracy to represent First Church and she was excited to take on this new responsibility. We will be hearing about the group as well as their projects and workshops in the near future. This is yet another way in which First Church continues to be involved in the community and meeting the needs of the community.

-Pastor Patrick

## Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday is the beginning of the Lenten season and this year occurs on **Wednesday, March 6th**. We will join our U.C.C. sisters and brothers at **Pilgrim U.C.C.** to begin our Lenten season and journey together.

## Souper Bowl of Caring

The Souper Bowl of Caring will be on **February 10<sup>th</sup> after the 10:00 am worship**. Members of the God Squad, with some assistance, will prepare and serve a variety of incredible soups. All of the donations will assist those in need. Join us for some incredible soups as we help those in need

## The God Squad

The God Squad will meet on  
Thursday, **February 7<sup>th</sup> and February 21st**.

The group gathers beginning at **6:00 pm**  
and finishes around **8:00 pm**.

All youths grades 7 and above are  
welcome.

Come and have some Jesus Time and a  
lot of fun.

## Food Grant Awarded

On behalf of the board and staff of Second Harvest Food Bank of North Central Ohio we want to congratulate you on being awarded **\$3,345.00** in Food Grant funding starting on January 15, 2019 for program number PRL256. **In addition** to the Food Grant funding as detailed above, your program has been awarded a secondary grant in the amount of **\$1,136.00** from an anonymous donor. This secondary grant allocation was based on the amount of seniors served at your food program.

## *First Church and the Worldwide Web*

In this age of technology, we are able to participate in relationships from our computers, tablets and cell phones. One way that First Church relates to people literally all over the world, is through Facebook. Facebook is one of the most popular social media platforms available at this time, and First Church is there.

In the world of Facebook, people, businesses, groups, organizations including churches, have a page on which they post information. People are encouraged to “like” the page which means that they follow what is posted by that person, business, group or organization. The things that are posted vary greatly depending on who or what organization is posting the information.

If you are not a Facebook user this might sound confusing, but the bottom line is that many people engage in a relationship with us via Facebook. As I write this, we have 223 people that “like” our page and regularly follow us and our post. In case you're wondering what exactly we post, it varies. For the most part, we typically post about upcoming events, worship opportunities, promoting church and outreach activities. One of our most successful posts of 2018 was about our Stuff the Van event. The post was seen by more than 2000 people, in large part due to people sharing the post on their page. This particular post also led to coverage in the Chronicle-Telegram and the social media sites of other local organizations. All of this, in turn, led to a record number of donations and community support. Another important element of this event and the attention it received, was the new relationships formed with some local businesses leaders and members of the community.

So who is following us? Of the 223 people, 71% identified themselves as female and 27% as male. The two age categories with the highest percentage that follow us, are folks 25-34 and folks 55-64. Our followers engage with us the most between 9:00 am – 9:00 pm (we actually peak around 8:45 pm). Our American followers reside all over the state of Ohio, with 50.67% living in the city of Elyria. Our followers span 19 states and 5 countries.

Through our Facebook page, our followers are also able to follow a link to our website where they can learn even more about our church and hear Pastor Patrick's latest sermon.

We need your help. If you are a Facebook user and aren't already following us, then please “like” our page at First Cong UCC Elyria. When you see a new post, it's essential that we get people hitting the like button immediately. Facebook operates using algorithms that note how much interaction takes place in the first hours of posts, and then makes the post more prominent if it is popular. This is important to us because there are approximately 61,000 Facebook users within a 2-mile radius of the church.

Please consider sharing our status updates on your own page. Sharing our status is a great way to invite your friends and family to participate in church. If you are no longer in the area, then following us helps you to connect or reconnect, build and sustain a relationship with us. It also helps us by drawing people to our page, website and First Church.

In the weeks to come, you will also see some big changes to our website. The website is being updated to make it more visitor-friendly, with content that better reflects who we are and what we're all about. These changes will allow us to offer people a “next step” in connecting with us when they find our website through social media or by searching us out on the web.

If you are not someone who uses Facebook or the web but would like to see how it works, I would be happy to meet with you and show you. If you would like additional information or have questions about anything that you've read here, I would be happy to connect with you and help in any way that I can. You can reach me by phone at 323-5454 ext. 15 or by email at [tbelcher@firstcongeleryria.org](mailto:tbelcher@firstcongeleryria.org).

## MAYFLOWER GUILD MEETS

**On February 19**

**Anne Michael** will premier her portrayal of "Katharine Wright: Teacher, Suffragette, Loving Sister".

She will be at the Mayflower Guild meeting **in the church parlor at 1:00**. Come and learn about this very influential lady, sister of Wilbur and Orville Wright, as our country celebrates the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment, giving women the right to vote. Refreshments will be served after the meeting. **Guests are welcome.**

## Quilting and Crafting Group

We will meet on

**February 13th.** and on **February 27th**

Feel free to join us at noon at The Foundry for lunch and social time

Our work meeting begins at 1:00PM.

We need people who can press, cut, or sew. You can work on a machine, by hand, or take work home.

**We are making quilts for Genesis House and Blessing House.**

## Bunco-Bunco-Bunco!

Join us Saturday Feb. 23 at 6pm for a Chili Potluck supper. Followed by a fun dice game: Bunco-Bunco-Bunco.

**No experience necessary!** Brenda Smithers Yost will show us how to play. Currently we are looking for chili chefs to provide a red chili, a white chili, or a vegan chili. If you want to bring chili, email Ken Smith: [y2kensit@gmail.com](mailto:y2kensit@gmail.com)

Participants are asked to bring corn bread to share or another side that pairs well with chili. There are sign-up sheets outside the Sanctuary and the Great Hall. If you are unable to sign up in person, you may call the Church office to register.

## The All Church UCC Picnic

This year it is our turn to organize and host the picnic. This task will likely need help from outside of the Fellowship Team. We are in the planning stage, so if you have experience, recommendations, or tips to make this a successful event, please email Ken at the address above. The date and location haven't been established yet.

## Pizza/Pool Party

An annual social event for us, the Congregation! The Yost family has once again generously offered the use of their property and swimming pool to allow us to gather for an enjoyable time. Stay tuned for details.

## Volunteer Appreciation Cookout

Late summer/early fall we will once again recognize and show some love for our wonderful volunteers. We like the Courtyard and wish to stick with a BBQ theme. We are formulating a plan that would allow everyone to eat at the same time and possibly add some live entertainment.

## Ongoing Facilitation of Volunteers

We continue to schedule Head Ushers, Usher/Greeters, and Flower Delivery. We are trying to add a new category: **Designated Donut Wrangler** to pick up the donuts for Coffee Hour. If you are a current volunteer and need to change your schedule or if you

wish to begin volunteering in any of these capacities please email Ken at Ken Smith: [y2kensit@gmail.com](mailto:y2kensit@gmail.com)

## Performance Showcase with ETAS

We are hoping to help make possible a performance event to showcase the talents of **Elyria Teens Achieve Success** to the general public. This would be their program, we would be the hosts and facilitators. It has been discussed, but details are on the far horizon.

Any input on this would be greatly appreciated as well.

## THANKS FOR YOUR FELLOWSHIP!

Ken Smith: [y2kensit@gmail.com](mailto:y2kensit@gmail.com)

## C.Y.A.T.C.

The Young adult group meets each **Wednesday in February (February 6<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and 27<sup>th</sup>)**. The group is open to all Young Adults ages 18 and above.

**All are welcome.**

The group begins each Wednesday at **6:00 p.m. And ends at 9:00 p.m.**

Come and make some new friends reconnect with old ones or just come and have a great discussion and fun.

## Summer Camp

**Registration is open** for UCC Outdoor Ministries Summer Camp! There are a variety of camp experiences available for children of all ages. Learn more about special interest camps, grandparent and grandchild camps, family camping weekends, and more!

If you would like more information about summer camp, please contact Tracy by phone at 323-5454 ext. 15 or by email at

[tbelcher@firstconglyria.org](mailto:tbelcher@firstconglyria.org)

## From The ONA Team

The ONA (Open and Affirming) Team, would like to invite you to participate in an upcoming program.

On **January 27, 2019**, join us in the Great Hall for a special Round Table Discussion following Worship. We will be discussing the book **All The Bright Places** by Jennifer Niven. We are giving you advanced notice so that you have plenty of time to get a copy of the book and read it before the Round Table. This book has been nominated and has won many awards and is being turned into a movie. The movie is being filmed in many locations around Elyria including right here at First Church. This *New York Times* bestseller explores the issue of depression and mental health as it follows two teenagers struggling with their lives. ***Our study of this book begins our journey as a faith community to better understand mental health issues as part of our ongoing commitment to our ONA covenant.***

## First Church Book Club

**Please feel free to join us any time you like.**

We have a brief discussion and snacks in the

**Gathering Room**

**at 7:00 pm** on the

second Wednesday of each month.

**The High Tide Club.** by Mary Kay Andrews

is our book for February.

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## First Church Women February Meeting

**Get out your red, white and blue for the February 6<sup>th</sup> meeting of First Church Women.**

We will be celebrating Presidents' Wives' Day with a wonderful program featuring all of the eight First Ladies from Ohio. We don't want to tell too much ahead of the meeting, but there will be some interesting secrets revealed about their lives and their husbands.

***In addition to a great program, the team of Schillig, Scholle and Scholle will be in the kitchen again, stirring up some tasty soup and baking warm loaves of bread.***

There will probably be some homemade jam and a luscious dessert, too.

**Mark your calendar for February 6<sup>th</sup>**

**and be sure to sign up by noon on February 4<sup>th</sup>.**

We hope to see you at the next First Church Women meeting.

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ELYRIA, OHIO  
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The Courier is published monthly.  
All interested parties are  
encouraged to contribute articles.  
Please send articles and  
announcements via email to:  
courier@firstcongelyria.org  
Deadline for March, 2019 articles is  
February 15, 2018

Change Service Requested  
Dated Material.  
Please deliver by January 31, 2018

**Save the date**  
**BUNCO-BUNCO-BUNCO RETURNS!**  
**Saturday, Feb. 23**

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Manager. Tracy Belcher, Education and Outreach Coordinator. Dylan Sanzenbacher, Organist and Choir Director. Ross  
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