



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
AN OPEN & AFFIRMING CONGREGATION

431 Columbus Avenue
Sandusky, Ohio 44870
firstconguccsandusky.com

February 2019 Newsletter

Including Historical Highlights



From the
MINISTER

I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me...just as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me.

Matthew 25:35,40

During my recent trip to Arizona to attend a conference on border issues I had the awesome opportunity to serve the very least of these. I joined a Water Drop team traveling into the desert to leave water for the migrants crossing the border and trying to make their way through the desert. This is a journey that takes 5-7 days through the waterless desert wilderness. Last year alone 160 people lost their lives trying to do so in the area where I was.

As we drove an hour and a half into the desert, our leader, a member of the Green Valley-Sahuarita Samaritans, told us that there were two other groups that dropped water and food and gave medical assistance when needed. Other than showing the migrants which way is north, that is all they can do. It is illegal to do anything more, and in some nearby areas, even that little bit of humanitarian aid is against the law.

I was appalled to think that living out my Christian faith in this supposedly Christian nation could be considered a crime. How could it possibly be illegal to offer help to someone in distress? I was forced to accept the reality of it all the very next day when four members of the faith-based group No More Deaths, who had done exactly the same thing I had, were convicted and found guilty of "trespassing and leaving personal property" in the desert. Each of the women faces up to six months in federal prison and a \$250 fine.

In the words of No More Death volunteer Catherine Gaffney "This verdict challenges people of conscience throughout the country. If giving water to someone dying of thirst is illegal, what humanity is left in the law of this country?"

Regardless of your political or religious affiliation, it's time to educate yourself about the true humanitarian crisis at the border and our country's role in creating it back in 1854 with the Gadsden Purchase and then compounding the problem in the decades to follow. Once you have done this, I hope you will join me in standing up and speaking out against this injustice and demanding immigration reform.

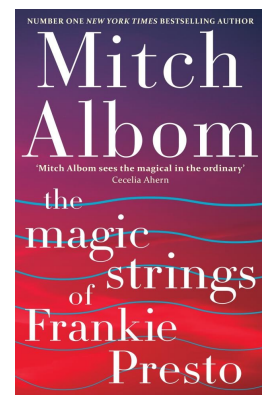
Shalom, Rev. Lenore

BOOK CLUB

At the February 1st meeting of the Book Club the selection for the March 1st meeting, *The Magic Strings of Frankie Presto* by Mitch Albom will be distributed.

Albom, one of the Book Club's favorite authors, presents an epic story of the power of talent to change our lives. The voice of Music narrates this tale of its most beloved disciple, Frankie Presto. A Spanish war orphan raised by a blind music teacher, Frankie was sent to America in the bottom of a boat when he was only nine years old. His only possession was an old guitar and six magical strings.

All are welcome to join the group. Copies of the book are available from the church office. They meet the first Friday of the month at the Parkvue Health Care Center at 2:00 p.m..



SUPPER CLUB

The Supper Club will gather at Cameo Pizza on Tuesday, February 5th at 6:00 p.m.. Please sign up on the bulletin board at the back of the sanctuary or let Robin know you plan to come.



Due to last month's Movie Night being cancelled, the feature schedule for then, *Isn't She Great*, starring Bette Midler will be shown this month. Join us Tuesday, February 26th at 7:00 p.m.. Popcorn provided.

The next installment of Rev. Lenore's **Historical Highlights** (pages 3 & 4) is at the end of this newsletter. If you missed the first one, please ask her for a copy. If all goes well, by the end of the year you should have a 24-page booklet to supplement the book she wrote in 2004 about our then 185 year history.



We received letters of thanks from Ability Works, the Volunteers of America (Crossroads homeless shelter), Care & Share of Erie County and United Church Homes (Parkvue) for our quarterly donations, and from Firelands Habitat for Humanity for our one-time donation.

Alyce Estrem, Jeanne Gilbert, Gio Grout, Vesta Guss, Judy Harris, Rebecca Howell, Debbi Keller, Mary Ann Monday, Kathie Simon, Evalyn Vroman, Russ Weagraff, Bill Roche, Kay Wagner & Kathy Thompson, Brian Mitchell, Mark Pifer and his VOSH mission team, the Mesenburg, Mitchell and Shea Families, and our homebound members and friends: Ruth Baker, Anne Johnstone, Dot Malinovsky, Dorothy Moore, Elmeda Schwartz, and Christine Vroman



Barbara Petersen	2/3
Jerry Boros	2/8
Robert Baker	2/11
Joy Berquist, Michael McGookey	2/12
Marnay Schrock, Jacki Warren	2/15
Gary & Scarlet Berry	2/16
Kathy (Harris) Collins	2/25
Elmeda Schwartz	2/27



REPORTS FROM OUR BOARDS

Christian Education

Jacki Warren-Chairperson

The board is planning to purchase new furniture for the Sunday School room to accommodate our growing children.

The board decided to return to one of our most successful curriculum, Living the Questions to complete the 2018-19 program. This seems to be appropriate at this time due to adding new members to the congregation. Books are available in the office.

Parkvue Book Club is reading Dark Tide Rising by Anne Perry, for the February 1 meeting. The club continues to add new members.

Board of Elders

Chris Michaels-Chairperson

Happy New Year friends and family of First Congregational United Church of Christ. Hope everyone is having a good new year so far. I just want to start off by thanking everyone who stepped up to help read scripture in December and January. I also want to thank everyone who stepped up and helped with the Longest Night service and Christmas Eve service. So let's enjoy our journey through the season of Epiphany as we make our way to Ash Wednesday and the season of Easter.

Sincerely, Chris Michaels

Board of Mission & Outreach

Barb Petersen-Chairperson

At the January 13, 2019 meeting donations were approved for the Human Rights Campaign (\$100) and Heifer International for livestock (up to \$300).

A special collection for the CROP hunger campaign was scheduled to take place in August.
February meeting date is TBA.



Don't miss this traveling exhibit

February 1-28 at the Sandusky Library

Anne Frank: A History for Today

The Center for Peace Through Understanding, along with the Lange Trust of the Sandusky Library and the Mylander Foundation have partnered to bring this amazing exhibit to Sandusky. Sponsored by the Anne Frank Center for Mutual Respect, through photographs, letters and her diary, the exhibit encourages its audience to think about the evils Anne faced, as well as the positive story of resistance to these evils.

There will be several related events throughout the month, including *Letters from Anne & Martin* at the State Theater on February 12th. This compelling production evokes the timeless message of hope and peace and a more united world through excerpts from the *Diary of Anne Frank* and Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letters From a Birmingham Jail*. For details on this and other events, visit the Sandusky Library website at http://www.sandusky.lib.oh.us/adult_programs/programs.php.

A big thanks goes to Rev. Bob Bottoms for making the suggestion over a year ago that The Center for Peace Through Understanding partner with the Library to bring the exhibit to Sandusky. He then secured the first of several grants to make it possible.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Over the past 15 years

I was recently asked by a media person what I considered to be the theme of our ministry over the past 200 years. That was easy, without a doubt it's social justice.

Since writing the history of the church 15 years ago it seems our social justice activities have rapidly increased. Back then much of our activity involved being an inclusive church, "embracing all God's children," including homosexuals. Standing up for gay rights whenever possible, it wasn't long before we became known in the community as "the gay church."

Earning our denomination's Open & Affirming designation eventually became our goal. This involved an 18-month process of study and discussion and the creation of an Open and Affirming statement approved by the national office. On April 3, 2011 we voted and approved the following: *As a community of faith, we, the First Congregational United Church of Christ in Sandusky, Ohio declare ourselves to be an Open and Affirming church. We extend the hand of fellowship to all people regardless of age, race, ethnicity, physical/mental ability, socioeconomic level, gender identity, and all sexual orientations. We invite all to share in the life, worship, membership, sacrament, responsibility and blessing of participation in our congregation. We declare this in the name of the Still Speaking God, Whose Son, Jesus Christ, welcomed all people into God's circle of grace.*

Proud to be the first church in the Northwest Ohio Association of the UCC to earn the ONA distinction, we have now helped several other congregations go through the process. When the Supreme Court approved same-sex marriage in 2015 I officiated at first one in Erie County.

We have been involved in other social justice issues as well. In 2013, while participating in the UCC's Mission 4/1 Earth campaign, we became intentional in our efforts for environmental concerns. We began conserving energy whenever possible and stopped using plastic communion cups and disposable tableware. Members were encouraged to bring mugs from home to use during fellowship time.

With our 200th anniversary three years away, in 2016 we began to talk about our legacy. From these conversations, within the context of increasing political tension around the country, we recognized the need for peace in our personal lives, in our community, the nation and the world.

We hosted a retreat with peace as the focus. Members of the community were invited to join us in learning about the Charter for Compassion and helping us begin to transform our old choir room into a meditation area and peace resource library. The following week I preached on the Charter for Compassion and we voted as a congregation to sign it, vowing to do all we could to make our community more compassionate. From all this our Center for Peace Through Understanding was born and we have been peacefully active in the community ever since.

Last year we helped local students organize a March for Our Lives event following the mass murder of 17 students and teachers in Parkland, Florida. Almost 400 people attended the rally downtown and most marched to the church afterwards where we had refreshments and an abundance of anti-gun violence information to distribute.

We offered an educational series "Loving Our Muslim Neighbors" to the community and



received such a positive response we offered it a second time. Another series, this time on racism and white privilege inspired several members of our Study Group to travel to Washington D.C. for an anti-racism rally sponsored by the National Council of Churches. Most recently, the Center has been instrumental in bringing an Anne Frank exhibit to the Sandusky Library and in the City of Sandusky adopting a Welcoming City resolution to welcome and connect international newcomers to the social and economic opportunities in our community.

Since 1819

Most of us are familiar with the story of how the slavery issue divided our congregation back in 1852. Those in favor of slavery left and founded First Presbyterian Church. Those who remained continued their abolitionist activities. It's a fascinating tale detailed in my book.

Over the years the congregation was involved in several other social justice issues. Rev. Leveritt Hull, pastor from 1844-1847 had a strong interest in the public school system and felt churches like ours should work hand in hand with the school board and other school authorities to promote and improve education. He and several church members helped organize the first Teacher's Institute in 1847. That turned out to be the charter meeting of d in an article in the *Sandusky Daily Register* headlined "The Crusade." Apparently, after attending a Women's Temperance League meeting at the Episcopal church they decided to take their cause into the streets. They "visited" several of the local saloons asking the proprietors if they could pray. Their intention was "to beseech God to soften the hearts of the saloon keepers and induce them to give up their business." Their intention soon became known around town and before they even entered the first saloon "the crusaders had a motley crowd in their wake, watching this, the first manifestation of the women's war against whiskey in this city. No one granted them permission to pray so they ended up going home feeling very disheartened.

As we all know, the 1960's were a radical time in our country. The stand the newly formed United Church of Christ took on many social issues at the national level quickly earned its members in the local churches the label of "social activist." While some of our members were proud of that title, others were not. This caused enough tension that more than once it looked like our congregation might leave the denomination. A case in point occurred late in 1970, and I have two different perspectives on that story. First comes the tale as told a few years ago by Gerry Garrett, former Consultant to Sandusky's Human Relations Commission. I heard it in a speech he gave about diversity in Sandusky.

It seems that he was involved with a student organization at Sandusky High School in 1970 called BANG (Black Action Now Group). They were involved in a protest at the school bus garage that ended with 23 people being arrested. Gerry wasn't able to find anyone willing to bail them out, not even his pastor. Someone then put him in touch with Rev. Kauffman, our pastor at the time, who went down to the jail, and one by one, paid the money to get all of them freed. Gerry gave me a shout out for our church supporting the protesters when most of the community was against them.

Some members of the congregation did not share his perspective on the event, especially when a member of the national UCC's Commission on Racial Justice came to town for a BANG meeting. The local paper quoted his "divisive words of racial hatred." Members were outraged and some wanted us to leave the denomination. Tension in the congregation was high, but thanks to the hard work of members, who wrote letters on behalf of the congregation to national, state and association leaders of the UCC, the storm eventually blew over without us leaving the denomination, or anyone leaving the church.

