

FIRST NEWS

Vol. 33 No.6 A Newsletter of First Congregational UCC Concord, NC www.firstchurchucc.org

FEBRUARY 2025



Inspirations

PRAYER FOR BLACK HISTORY MONTH ~BY UNKNOWN

Spirit of Abundance, God of Grace, Mother of Hope,
We pause now to remember those stories that are all around us,
But so often passed over,
Those stories that when told are shared because
Of what someone is, not who they are.
This month in our nation's character
Is Black History month.
Help us to realize that Black history is
All our histories.
May the day come when these stories
Are so widely taught that no month need
Be separately divided.
We know this day will not come until we as a people
Make different choices.
We pray now for those new choices.
May we come to see a day where the prison system
Becomes redemptive, not punitive.
A day where the legal system learns to focus more
squarely on the facts,
And the not colors of our skin.
A day where our schools are as well funded, as the
needs demand.
May our role models be allowed to excel when they
thrive,

And not be taken down for their rich heritage.
We know this will require a shift in power.
And this can be scary for some.
Give those full of fear - hope.
May we come to know grace,
So that our hearts will not be hardened to the pain
around us.
There are so many beautiful stories needing to be
told.
And we need to get the chance to hear them.
Widen our vision so that the history that is shared
this month,
And every month,
Come to be known as our history too.
We are most human when we see the humanity in
others. Amen.



STANDING ON THE PROMISES

God's promises to believers can be found throughout the Bible. Will you claim this promise for the first quarter of 2025?

“ Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Deuteronomy 31: 6 (NIV)



- 9 - Harold Steele, III
- 11 - Dexter Franklin
- 14 - Dawn Witherspoon
- 18 - Paulette Steele
- 19 - Rev. Eric Winchester



SCHOLARSHIP FUND

There will be a special offering collected for the **McCorkle-Polk Scholarship Fund** on **Sunday, February 9, 2025.**

FROM THE HEALTH CABINET...

The Health Cabinet has declared February's Health initiative is:



Attached to this newsletter is a page for you to display on your fridge, message board, etc.

The **Health Cabinet** also wants us all to participate in commemorating Heart Health Month and Valentine's Day by **wearing red** on February 9, 2025. **PLEASE REMEMBER TO WEAR RED !**

ASSOCIATION DUES

Each member is asked to pay dues to the **Western North Carolina Association** of the UCC. Cost is **\$2.50 per member.** Make sure to write the amount on your regular offering envelope. Please pay by February 23, 2025.

A LOOK BACK AT JANUARY

The Youth participated in the **MLK Jr March** in **Kannapolis** on the **20th.**



The following persons are under the weather/confined to their homes/recuperating/just in need of prayer. Please remember them with your prayers, visits, and calls:

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| John Barrett | Michael Milo |
| Viola Barrett | Edith Russell |
| Terry Baxter, Sr. | Vernon Russell |
| Mary Bostick | Congolese Smith |
| Marva Cook | Harold Steele, Jr. |
| Myrtle Edmond | Harold Steele, III |
| Michael Edwards | Letisha Steele |
| Corine Foard | Mazella Steele |
| Dexter Franklin | Michael York |
| Annie Maxwell | |



- Feb 2: Groundhog Day
- Feb 9: Scholarship Sunday
Red Sunday
- Feb 14: Valentine's Day
- Feb 16: Black History Program
- Feb 17: Presidents' Day
- Feb. 23: Heritage Bowl



February Is Black History Month





Maintain a healthy diet.

Drinking plenty of water and eating a diet of lower-calorie, nutrient-rich foods can help you control your weight, cholesterol levels and blood pressure, which helps lower your risk of heart disease. A healthy diet is easily achievable by:

- Drinking at least 64 ounces of water each day and avoiding sugary beverages, like sodas, bottled teas, smoothies, adult beverages and fruit juices.
- Filling your plate with fruits and vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, skinless poultry and fish, nuts and legumes.
- Limiting your intake of foods with saturated fat, trans fats, sodium, sugar and red meat. If you do choose to eat red meat, make sure you're using the leanest cut you can find.

Understand the warning signs and symptoms of heart attacks.

Some heart attacks are very sudden and intense, leaving little time to respond to signs or symptoms. Other heart attacks, however, start slowly with mild pain or discomfort. Pay close attention to your body and don't hesitate to call 9-1-1 if you or someone you're with experiences any of the following:

- Discomfort in the center of your chest that comes and goes or lasts more than a few minutes. It can feel like uncomfor pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain.



FEBRUARY 2025

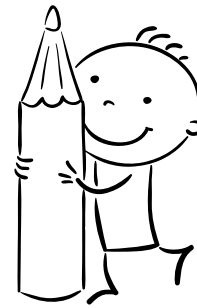
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1
2  Groundhog Day	3	4	5	6	7	8
9  Scholarship Fund	10	11	12	13	14 	15
16  Black History Program	17  PRESIDENT'S DAY	18	19	20	21	22
23  Heritage Bowl	24	25	26	27	28	
		January 2025 S M T W Th F Sa 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31		March 2025 S M T W Th F Sa 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31		
						2025 Calendars 2026 Calendars

Name: _____

Date: _____

Black History Month

Word Search





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

- Harriet Tubman
- Frederick Douglass
- Rosa Parks
- Nelson Mandela
- Maya Angelou
- Louis Armstrong
- Billie Holiday
- Duke Ellington
- James Baldwin
- Toni Morrison
- Langston Hughes
- Jesse Owens
- Jackie Robinson
- Muhammad Ali
- Thurgood Marshall

Sunday, February 2, 2025

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Love cures people — both the ones who give it and the ones who receive it.
—Karl A. Menninger

———————

Sir Winston Churchill, who led Britain through its darkest hours, was a man of many notable accomplishments. He is recognized as one of the great leaders in world history. But of his life's work, he said: "My most brilliant achievement was my ability to be able to persuade my wife to marry me." He and his beloved Clementine were married in 1908, and remained married until his death 56 years later.

Of course, many couples have been married longer than the esteemed prime minister. According to *Guinness World Records*, the record is 86 years, 9 months, and 16 days, and it belongs to Herbert and Zelmyra Fisher. They were married in 1924, 18 and 16 years old at the time, and their marriage held up through the Great Depression, World War 2, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, and 15 presidential administrations.

Both Herbert and Zelmyra are gone now, both dying at the age of 105. Before they died, they talked about their marriage and some keys to its longevity. They felt it was important for them to respect, support and communicate with each other. Being faithful, honest and true to each other was critical. And, of course, loving each other with all their hearts. They always remembered that marriage is not a contest and it did no good to keep score.

1 Corinthians 13 is often called the "love" chapter of the Bible. What this passage says about love is certainly pertinent to a marriage. No question. But the apostle Paul is primarily writing about what it takes for any relationship to work, whether it is an intimate connection like a spousal or family relationship, a church or neighborly connection or the person who lives in the room or apartment next to you.

"Love is patient," Paul writes. "Love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (vv. 4-7).

Put this advice to work, and any relationship will work!

—Timothy Merrill

Prayer: God of love, may I strive to embody the qualities of 1 Corinthians 13 in all my relationships, remembering that love never fails. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Daily Bible Readings

- Sunday: Job 21-24
- Monday: Job 25-27
- Tuesday: Job 28-31
- Wednesday: Job 32-34
- Thursday: Job 35-37
- Friday: Job 38-42
- Saturday: Psalms 10-12

Verse to Remember

I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. —Job 42:2

MISQUOTED!

DIRECTIONS: Rearrange the words to complete the quotation from the book of Proverbs.

KEEP TONGUE OVER TROUBLE OUT
WATCH MOUTH

“ To _____ and _____
is to _____ of _____ . ”

Before and After Words

Directions: Add a word to the end of the word on the left and the beginning of the word on the right to form two compound words or phrases. The dashes indicate the number of letters in the linking word. For example, if the words were PEANUT _____ FLY, the linking word would be BUTTER (peanut butter, butterfly).

1. SALAD _____ STOOL
2. ICED _____ SET
3. SEA _____ TAMER
4. CAR _____ PARTY
5. NEWS _____ BAG
6. HOT _____ CHIP
7. STEAK _____ EDGE
8. BACK _____ SUIT
9. QUICK _____ FISH
10. RAIN _____ RACK
11. TREE _____ BOAT
12. BED _____ MATE
13. TIN _____ OPENER
14. BASKET _____ TEAM
15. CAR _____ STATION

Romeo and Juliet

Romeo and Juliet are found dead on the floor in a bedroom. When they were discovered, there were pieces of glass and some water on the floor. A shelf and a bed are the only furniture in the room. The house is in a remote location, away from everything except for the nearby railway track. What caused the deaths of Romeo and Juliet?

Solution below.

Romeo and Juliet:
Romeo and Juliet are fish. The rumble of the train knocked the tank off the shelf.
Misquoted: Proverbs 21:23, To watch over mouth and tongue is to keep out of trouble.
Before and After Words:
1. Bar, 2. Tea, 3. Lion, 4. Pool, 5. Paper, 6. Potato, 7. Knife, 8. Track, 9. Silver, 10. Coat, 11. House, 12. Room, 13. Can, 14. Ball, 15. Radio.

Sunday, February 9, 2025

Scripture Reading: Luke 5:1-11

A work of art was once a work in progress. –Adele Leon

The Galleria dell'Accademia di Firenze is the famous museum in Florence, Italy, where one can see Michelangelo's magnificent *David*. But the gallery is also home to four statues almost equal in fame — the Four Prisoners, also known as the Four Slaves. They were to be a part of the tomb of Pope Julius II, but they were unfinished. They seem to be half-born from the marble with which the sculptor was working. Scholars have given names: “The Awakening Slave,” “The Young Slave,” “The Bearded Slave,” and “The Atlas (or Bound Slave).” According to the gallery website, “they are some of the finest examples of Michelangelo's habitual working practice, referred to as *non-finito* (or incomplete), magnificent illustrations of the difficulty of the artist in carving out the figure from the block of marble and emblematic of the struggle of man to free the spirit from matter.”

It wasn't Michelangelo, but a renowned sculptor was once asked about his method for creating beautiful and lifelike statues. He replied, “When I look at a block of marble, I see the finished piece of art within it. All I have to do is chip away the excess stone to reveal the masterpiece inside.”

The sculptor was then asked how he could envision such beauty in a rough block of marble. He answered, “I see the potential within the stone, not its current state. I know that with time, effort and patience, I can bring that potential to life.”

In a way, we, too, are *non-finito* works of art in the hands of the Artist. In the hands of God, we are unfinished and incomplete, but growing toward splendor. God sees the potential within each of us. Jeremiah 18:1-6 tells the story of the potter and the clay, reminding us of God's sovereign ability to shape and transform us.

Though we may feel like unformed blocks of marble, God is at work, chipping away our rough edges, molding us, and shaping us into divine masterpieces. Our role is to remain pliable and open to God's transformative work, trusting that God knows what is best for us.

—Timothy Merrill

Prayer: Creative God, you know what you want to make of me. Help me to be amenable to your touch, your paintbrush, your chisel, your design. May I be a work of art that brings glory to your name. Amen.



Daily Bible Readings

- Sunday:** Exodus 1-4
- Monday:** Exodus 5-7
- Tuesday:** Exodus 8-10
- Wednesday:** Exodus 11-13
- Thursday:** Exodus 14-17
- Friday:** Exodus 18-20
- Saturday:** Psalms 13-15

VERSE TO REMEMBER

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."

—Psalm 14:1 (NIV)

MYSTERY PERSON!

Directions: The purpose of this exercise is to discover the identity of a well-known biblical person. To do so, you must assign a number value to each letter of the alphabet, assuming that **M equals 1**. A word and number chart for you to fill in has been provided for your convenience. Complete each of the clues and then write your answer in the space below.

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

1

First Clue: 22-19 26-23-10-19-18 23-2 7-13-6-23-15 15-2-18 17-23-26-23-17-23-15

20-3-6 20-3-9-6-8-19-19-2 13-19-15-6-7.

Second Clue: 8-23-8-9-7 15-2-18 16-15-6-2-15-16-15-7 11-19-6-19 22-23-7

20-6-23-19-2-18-7.

Third Clue: 22-19 11-6-3-8-19 8-22-19 16-3-3-25 3-20 21-15-26-15-8-23-15-2-7.

WHO IS THIS PERSON?

Answer (spelled backward): luap.

Sunday, February 16, 2025

Scripture Reading: Psalm 1

*We can learn a lot from trees: they're always grounded
but never stop reaching heavenward. —Everett Mamor*

Have you ever stood beneath an enormous tree and had someone take a photo? Compared to the mighty oak or redwood, you looked so small and insignificant.

I have had the pleasure of seeing up close and personal a number of mighty tree species. For example, the sequoias and redwoods of California, the Sitka spruce of Oregon, enchanting weeping willows along the canals of eastern China, the magnificent banyan trees of India. Perhaps you have some favorite memories of trees. You might remember a special tree from your childhood.

The psalmist is thinking of a tree. It is standing tall and proud by the riverside. Its roots delve deep into the soil, drawing life-sustaining water from the ever-flowing stream. This tree is not just surviving; it is thriving. Its leaves are lush and green, and its branches heavy with fruit in due season.

For David, this tree, so vibrant and full of life, stands as a beautiful metaphor for the life of a believer who is rooted in God's Word.

Just as the tree flourishes by the water, we, too, are called to thrive by immersing ourselves in the word of God. The streams of water represent the life-giving, sustaining power of Scripture. When we meditate on God's word day and night, allowing it to nourish and guide us, we become like that tree — stable, strong and fruitful.

Of course, like us, trees face storms from time to time. But a tree with deep roots stands firm. In the same way, when our lives are deeply rooted in the word of God, we, too, can withstand trials and temptations. The psalmist promises that our "leaves do not wither" — even in times of drought or hardship.

There's more! A tree that yields fruit in its season is *fulfilling its purpose*, providing nourishment and shade to those around it. As we grow in our faith and understanding, our lives will naturally bear fruit — acts of kindness, love, patience and joy — that bless others and glorify God.

Let's redouble our efforts to stay deeply rooted in God's word. Let's draw from the wisdom and strength of God. Let's commit to making the study and meditation of Scripture a priority. By doing so, we will become like the mighty oak, or the redwood, sequoia, willow or banyan tree. We will bear fruit in season, our leaves never withering.

—Timothy Merrill

Prayer: O Lord, may I delight in your word and meditate on it day and night, so that I might stand tall and firm, reflecting the beauty and strength of a life deeply rooted in you. Amen.

Daily Bible Readings

Sunday: Exodus 21-24

Monday: Exodus 25-27

Tuesday: Exodus 28-31

Wednesday: Exodus 32-34

Thursday: Exodus 35-37

Friday: Exodus 38-40

Saturday: Psalms 16-18

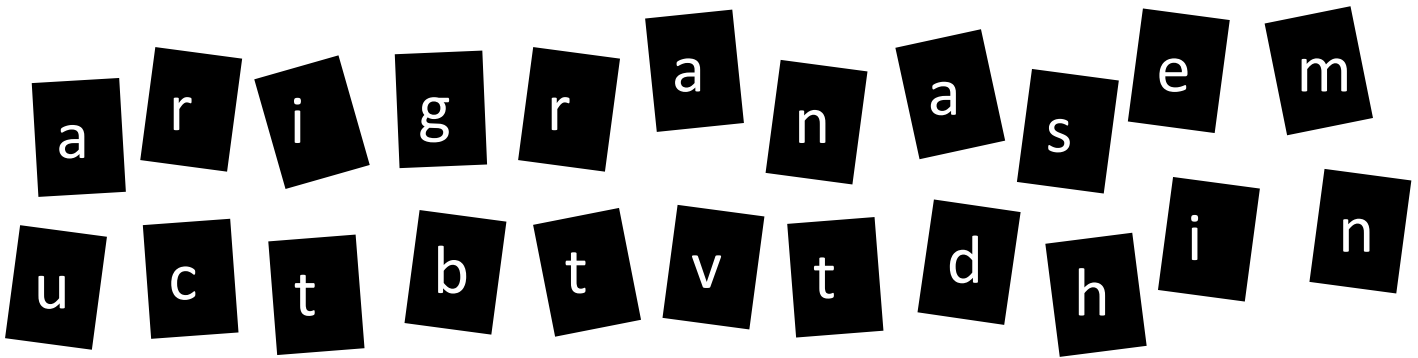
Verse to Remember

My God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

—Psalm 18:2 (NIV)

SCRAMBLED LETTERS

Directions: Arrange the letters below in the grid as needed to make a collection of intersecting words. Use each letter only once (some letters repeat — for example, “a” and “t”).



NOTE: There are a number of different ways to arrange the letters into intersecting words on this grid.

Biblical Brain Baffler: “Out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet.” This riddle was posed by Samson. The full story can be found in the book of Judges. See Judges 14:14.

Solution:
Bees making a honeycomb inside the carcass of a lion. See Judges 14:18.

Sunday, February 23, 2025

Scripture Reading: Genesis 45:3-11, 15

The church is the church only when it exists for others. — Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Near the quiet town of Nashua, Iowa, nestled among the rolling hills and verdant fields, stands a humble yet iconic place of worship known as The Little Brown Church in the Vale. This charming structure, with its distinctive brown exterior, is more than just a building; it is a testament to unwavering faith, community spirit, and the enduring power of God's love.

The Little Brown Church began at a time when the country was divided by tensions over the issue of slavery. Despite limited resources and the challenges posed by the Civil War, the founders pressed on with their mission. They trusted that God would provide, and indeed, God did. Their perseverance bore fruit, and the church was completed and dedicated in 1864.

In subsequent decades, the church became famous thanks to the popularity of the hymn inspired by this very church, "Come to the Church in the Wildwood."

*There's a church in the vale by the wildwood, / No lovelier spot in the dale;
No place is so dear to my childhood, / As the little brown church in the vale.*

Refrain

*Come to the church in the wildwood, / Oh, come to the church in the dale,
No spot is so dear to my childhood, / As the little brown church in the vale.*

Its lyrics speak of a sanctuary that offers peace, comfort and a place to commune with God, far removed from the noise and distractions of the world. The hymn reminds us that no matter where we are, God's presence is a sanctuary for our weary souls.

In the Reconstruction period after the Civil War, the church closed for a while as the country went through an economic downturn. But after reopening, it began to flourish, and today, thousands visit the Little Brown Church every year as tourists, or to worship or even get married. It still stands after a little more than 160 years as a beacon of hope and faithfulness.

Its existence encourages us to remain steadfast in our own lives, knowing that our efforts in the Lord's work are never in vain. "Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

—Timothy Merrill

*Prayer: O God, thank you for your church through which you express yourself to the world.
Amen.*

Daily Bible Readings

- Sunday:** Romans 1-4
- Monday:** Romans 5-8
- Tuesday:** Romans 9-11
- Wednesday:** Romans 12-16
- Thursday:** Proverbs 1-3
- Friday:** Proverbs 4-7
- Saturday:** Psalms 19-21

Verse to Remember

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer. —Psalm 19:14 (NIV)

7-WORD SPLIT

CLUES

SOLUTIONS

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1. To feel relaxed and at ease (11 letters) | _____ |
| 2. To sip (5 letters) | _____ |
| 3. An unwelcome joke at another's expense (5 letters) | _____ |
| 4. Winsome and attractive (6 letters) | _____ |
| 5. To evaluate carefully, consider (5 letters) | _____ |
| 6. Relative (6 letters) | _____ |
| 7. Preparing an orange, say (7 letters) | _____ |

DIRECTIONS

Study the numbered clues in the list to the left. Find a word to match each clue. The number in parentheses at the end of each clue represents the number of letters in each solution. You can only use each letter combination once, but you will need every one to finish the puzzle.

Answers below.

PE	PRE	NG	FO	TTY	US
IN	BLE	INK	WEI	RTA	CO
DR	PRA	GH	COM	ELI	NK



BRAIN TEASER: Here are three words:
job, polish, herb.
 What is special or interesting about these words?
(Answer to the right)

Answer: Each one is pronounced differently when the first letter is capitalized!

SOLUTION:
 1-com/fo/rtta/ble
 2-dr/ink
 3-pra/nk
 4-pre/tty
 5-wei/gh
 6-co/us/in
 7-pe/eli/ng