

Parish Visitor

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First Congregational
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

An Ecumenical Congregation in the Congregational Tradition
200 NORTH MAIN STREET • MOUNT VERNON, OHIO • 43050



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**Happy
New
Year!**

Contact Us



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Hours

Monday—Thursday

9:00 am to 12:00 noon

1:00 pm to 3:00 pm

Friday

9:00 am to 12:00 noon

From Pastor Jay



Water, Wind and Life

For twenty-five years or so – so many I am not sure – in January, I have attended a national gathering of United Church of Christ clergy.

Over the years we have met at Daytona Beach, Phoenix, Chicago, St. Simons Island – but the past fifteen years we have gathered at the same resort on the Gulf of Mexico in St. Pete Beach, Florida. I plan to attend there again in three weeks.

The event is holy ground for me. Of course the 75 degree sunny weather in January is a delight. The fresh seafood and orange juice is heavenly. And my roommate every year is a best friend in the ministry I have known for thirty-five years. We spend most of our five days together laughing.

But the event is more than those things – and becomes more holy for me every year. The holiness has something to do with being in a hotel banquet room with sixty or so other human beings who were called into ordained ministry. One of his biographers said Thomas Merton was a man “burnt” by God. That is a bit extreme for me. I prefer thinking of Merton, and others in ministry less known but just as dedicated, as people “seasoned” by God. The salt and pepper of life over years can season.

At our gathering my friends and I eat together, hang out at the beach bar at night together, and during the day listen together to guest experts lecture on subjects related to ordained ministry. In these moments I often surreptitiously look around at my friends and wonder how like me they have experienced decades of life, death, laughter, tears, victories, defeats, joy, despair, community, loneliness, courage and fear in their ministries. We’re all “seasoned” by Christ’s church.

It changes you. It’s bittersweet and can taste good. It’s holy. Being around these friends is good for me. They can minister to me without saying a word.

And I plan to do what I always do the first morning I am there. I always walk to the edge of the Gulf of Mexico waters along the beach and greet the gulf a good morning. She always gives me the same reply, and I am always glad to hear it – she greets me with the holy sounds of water, wind and life.

Then I go and look for my friends.

Blessings! - Pastor Jay

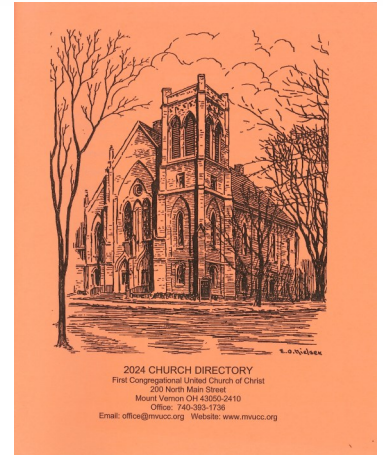
What's Happening at Church

WHAT	WHEN	WHERE
Regular Worship Service	Sundays 9:30 am	Sanctuary
Social Time	Sundays 10:30 am	Social Hall
Adult Forum	Sundays 11:00 am	Chapel
Services for Steve M.	January 3 Calling Hours 11:00 am to 1:00 pm. Service 1:00 pm.	Snyder Funeral Home, Lasater Chapel, 11337 Upper Gilchrist Rd, Mount Vernon, OH 43050
Christmas Undecorating	January 11 10:00 am	Sanctuary
Annual Congregational Meeting	January 29 Following worship service	Sanctuary

"Be kind and merciful. Let no one ever come to you without coming away better and happier. Be the living expression of God's kindness." - Mother Theresa

2025 Church Directory

The 2025 Church Directory for our local church family is coming soon! If you would like to update your photo (or personal information) for the new directory, please email, or give Bill in the office a copy of the picture you would like to use. If you would like a new one taken, please see Charlotte Watson following the church service and she'll be glad to take it for you. Remember, we are using pictures of your whole family, if possible. We would also love to include our new folks, so please email us if you would like to be included, and don't forget your picture! The deadline to submit information is **January 12th**.



Tree of Sharing



Our church's part in this year's Interchurch Tree of Sharing Project helped donate new Christmas gifts to kids in need in our community. Gifts included essential clothing items, and some specific toys the kids requested. In addition, \$2415 in cash donations were received, which went to purchase blankets and grocery gift cards. There are lots of children who had a nicer Christmas and are a bit warmer and better fed because of your generous donations. Thank you to all who participated!

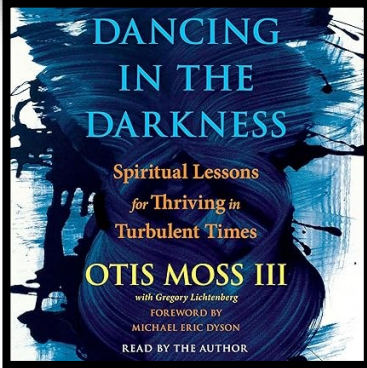
Christmas Eve

If you were not able to attend the Christmas Eve Candle Light service, here is a beautiful image of a beautiful time of fellowship, worship, joy and celebration of the Savior.



Thanks to Becky C. for the photo.

Book Review



Dancing in the Darkness: Spiritual Lessons for Thriving in Turbulent Times, Otis Moss III with Gregory Lichtenberg. Simon & Schuster Paperbacks: New York. 2023.

Dancing is the book just completed by the Adult Forum discussion group. This review is offered as a way to inform you and invite you to join the Sunday discussions!

Rev. Moss writes as he probably talks, in the manner of an American Black Baptist preacher in his glory. He offers in this book the seeds of a number of sermons, with insights as to their origins and examples from his friends, parishioners, and family, and strongly recommends some ways to endure hard times and difficult experiences.

Moss shows ways to channel righteous anger, disappointment, and frustrated hope into a greater spiritual expression. He exhorts us to never stop working constructively for change, seeking to build better spiritual foundations for American national life. Generally following his chapters, Moss tells us to:

- 1) Love must be linked to justice, as love is the most difficult virtue to live. Love is measured by how we care for those least able to care for themselves.
- 2) Back off of chaotic responses, to turn that energy into channels we plan. Quiet contemplation can help us to hear how the spirit moves us.
- 3) Practice restraint to redirect anger into working for the greater good.
- 4) Practice listening for the voices of those who may be left out of an early plan.
- 5) Reshape or reframe your own understandings. This is a way to become a champion rather than a victim. It can be difficult, but we do this through relationships.
- 6) Learn to mourn as the Old Testament prophets did. Grieve, and learn of the roots of violent tragedy. Work to change the roots, to learn to forgive and break the burden of revenge and retribution.
- 7) Forgive yourself and others who fail in this mission.
- 8) Summon love to face down the evil acts and intentions of others.
- 9) In a long epilogue he summarizes the history of slavery and racism in North America, and honors modern Americans who join in love and hope—and anger- to build a future without racism.

Kris S.