

**First Congregational Christian
UNITED CHURCH of CHRIST**

February 2025



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From the Pastor – February 2025

We Christians are all too familiar with the internal conflicts that have plagued church history. Arguments over dogma, fights over standard practices, even opposition over which carpet to buy for the sanctuary can turn God's households into a tinder box. But have you ever seen a fight over a saint? Chances are that you may be witnessing one now over the German pastor, theologian, and martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life and death are certainly worthy of a saint's hagiography. He was theologically trained at what was still then one of the most prestigious religious studies environments in the world. He then traveled to America where his post-doctoral education paired the intellectualism of NYC's Union Theological Seminary with the ferment and fervor of the Harlem Renaissance, distilled most powerfully for the young Bonhoeffer through Abyssinian Baptist Church.

Theological ethicist, Dr. Reggie Williams, chronicles this time period well in his book, *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus* (Fortress Press, 2014). There, Williams details the case that Dietrich's time among Black thinkers and fellow church members, not to mention his trips to Mexico and Cuba, helped to shape his ethic of resistance later in Nazi Germany.

Mystery still surrounds the professed pacifist pastor's involvement with a plot to assassinate Hitler. Both the extent of his involvement as well as the extent of his approval continue to provoke fierce discussion among scholars. Nevertheless, we do know that Bonhoeffer was a fixture in the resistance movement against the Nazis, both within the German Lutheran church and in larger German society.

We also know that whatever his involvement, his arrest on the basis of that plot, his incarceration in prisons and at concentration camps, and his subsequent hanging just days before the camp's liberation by allied forces – these are all matters of record that have added to Bonhoeffer's status as a hero in the faith.

In the years since his martyrdom, very different kinds of Christians have made claims on pieces of his halo. "Death of God" (a)theologians in the 1960's loved him for his proclamation of a "religionless Christianity" and his seamless movement between discourses on theology and the public good.

Evangelical Christians take Bonhoeffer's "religionless Christianity" in a completely different direction. Bonhoeffer's *Cost of Discipleship* (1937) reads like missionary devotional literature to an evangelical lacking any awareness of Bonhoeffer's theological contexts. I speak from experience here.

For example, movies like the recent *Bonhoeffer: Pastor. Spy. Assassin.* (Angel Studios, 2024) and the bestselling biography by the similar title, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Thomas Nelson, 2011) fashion the liberal Protestant Bonhoeffer into a proto-evangelical whistleblower, decrying his liberal Protestant denomination for its friendliness with modern thinking. These attempts – whether implicitly or explicitly – would have us believe that Bonhoeffer would have been a Trump-supporter today.

A more balanced Bonhoeffer biography can be found in Charles Marsh's *Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Knopf, 2014). Marsh, a religious studies professor at UVA, handles Bonhoeffer's life and development with the nuance it deserves, even if one is left with the feeling that Bonhoeffer remains an enigmatic figure.

These contrasting presentations of Dietrich Bonhoeffer will persist for some time, but this comes as no surprise. As we face our own “Bonhoeffer moment”, we encounter a situation demanding a verdict from each one of us on whether the dangers appearing in our country really are that clear and truly are that present. We find ourselves having to affirm empathy, diversity, equity, and inclusion against those who see these things as extreme or radical, if not sinful and evil.

Like the “confessing churches” of Bonhoeffer’s resistance, we find ourselves having to bear witness to those who profess Christian belief, of what the true Gospel entails, and that hatred and bigotry are incompatible with the most basic and central tenets of our faith. But then again, Jesus came to his own, and not all of them welcomed him. So, like Bonhoeffer, and like Jesus – among all the competing identities – it’s also time for the real Christians to please stand up.

FEBRUARY WORSHIP CALENDAR Sundays at 11:00 AM

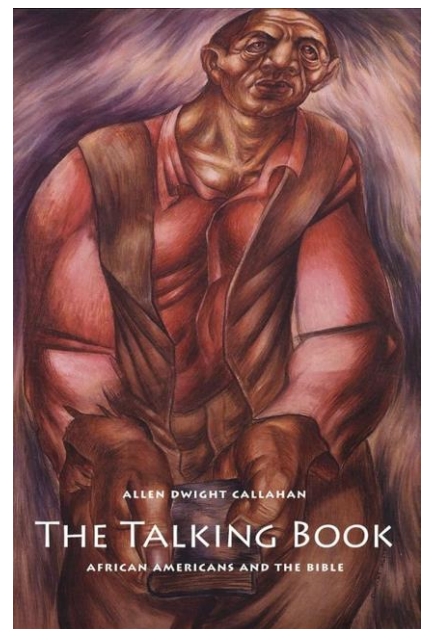
Worship is livestreamed on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/1stUCC>

- February 2** **Fourth Sunday after Epiphany (Communion celebrated)**
Luke 4:22-30; “Cliff Notes” with Rev. Willson
- February 9** **Fifth Sunday after Epiphany – “Souper Bowl” Sunday**
Luke 5:1-11; “Net Worth” with Rev. Willson
- February 16** **Sixth Sunday after Epiphany**
Luke 6:17-26; “Plain Truth” with Rev. Willson
- February 23** **Seventh Sunday after Epiphany**
Luke 6:27-38; “How to Have an Enemy” with Rev. Willson

Adult Faith Formation Sundays at 9:30 AM

From now until the beginning of April, the Adult Faith Formation class is reading Allen Dwight Callahan’s history of African Americans and the Bible, “The Talking Book.” All are welcome to join us on Sunday mornings for our discussions – even if you haven’t read the book! If you would like a PDF copy to read on your laptop or tablet, let Gail Christie know.

- Feb 2 – Ch 2 (p 21-40)
- Feb 9 – Ch 3 (p 41-48)
- Feb 16 – Ch 4a (p 49-71)
- Feb 23 – Ch 4b (p 71-82)
- Mar 2 – Ch 5a (p 83-113)
- Mar 9 – Ch 5b (p 113-137)
- Mar 16 – Ch 6a (p 138-161)
- Mar 23 – Ch 6b (p 161-184)
- Mar 30 – Ch 7a (p 185-219)
- Apr 6 – Ch 7b & Postscript (pp 219-246)





February Birthdays

Mary Parker	2/02
Barbara Walrod	2/04
Gloria Snellings	2/06
Eva Hall	2/07
Ethel Witthaus	2/14
Harold McCants	2/14
Addie Hinton	2/15
George Marshall	2/19
Theresa Moore-Scarpo	2/23



Along with all of "Metro Richmond at Prayer," during February let's pray for the Coming of God's Realm in Metropolitan Richmond.



Our monthly Black Lives Matter protests continue. Wear a mask, bring a sign, and join us along Courthouse Road in front of the church after worship on **Sunday, Feb 16.**

Men's Fellowship

The monthly Men's Fellowship breakfast will be held on **Saturday, Feb 15 at 9 AM** at Joe's Inn Bon Air, 2616 Buford Rd.

Women's Fellowship

Women's Fellowship enjoyed a post-holiday brunch on Jan 18 at the home of Rhoda Blocker. In addition to socializing, they voted to disburse some of the funds raised by the Olde Curiosity Shoppe in November as follows: \$100 to Planned Parenthood of VA, \$100 to He She Ze & We, which supports transgender children and their families, and \$100 to Latinos in Virginia Empowerment Center, which provides assistance to Latinos experiencing domestic violence. Another \$100 was set aside for a project to support CARITAS.



Souper Bowl of Caring

Sunday February 9

Special Offering and Potluck

In 1990, Souper Bowl of Caring began with a simple prayer from a single youth group:

"Lord, even as we enjoy the Super Bowl football game, help us be mindful of those without a bowl of soup to eat."

Since then, the Souper Bowl of Caring has become a powerful movement that transforms the time around the Big Game into the nation's largest celebration of giving and caring for those in need.

Share in God's love for our neighbors in need and give generously on Souper Bowl Sunday. All of the donations collected will go directly to our Souper Bowl of Caring Charity of Choice - Shalom Farms – to support their mission to provide fresh, healthy food and educational programs about healthy eating to the Richmond community. You can learn more about them at shalomfarms.org

Our Souper Bowl potluck luncheon of soups and bread returns this year – thanks to Women's Fellowship for organizing this! We will have a collection pot there for the offering, or it can be mailed to the church or donated online.

Please indicate "Souper Bowl" on the memo line of your check or Venmo payment.



GROW FOOD. GROW COMMUNITY.



Congregational RISC Network Meeting Sunday, Feb 2

The RISC Issue Committees have been busy meeting with officials and gathering information for our issue campaigns – Affordable Housing, Healthy Homes, and Gun Violence Prevention. Updates on these issues will be presented at our upcoming Congregational RISC Network Meeting, which will be held immediately after worship on February 2nd. All are welcome to attend and learn more about these issues. **It is very important that all of our RISC Network Members attend** – this is also the meeting at which we will plan for our congregational participation in the Nehemiah Action.

RISC Justice Rally - Monday, March 3
7 PM, Second Baptist Church Southside
3300 Broad Rock Blvd. Richmond.
One of the 4 annual meetings for all Network members.

We will present to our membership the specific set of "asks" for this year's Nehemiah Action, and provide detailed reports on our preliminary meetings with officials.

Nehemiah Action - Tuesday, March 25
6:30 PM, St. Paul's Baptist Church
4247 Creighton Rd. Richmond

Come and bring your friends as we gather to demand justice in numbers too large to ignore! **For all Network Members and everyone in the congregation!**



Virginia's 2025 legislative session is in full swing, and our state action network has been busy working to support several bills this year through lobbying and action alerts. This year's priority bills are:

Voting rights restoration: HJ2, SJ248
This constitutional amendment would restore voting rights automatically for those convicted of a felony, upon their release.

Same sex marriage protection: HJ9, SJ249
This constitutional amendment would remove the language from Virginia's Constitution defining marriage as between one man and one woman, and protect the rights of same sex couples.

Restrictions on solitary confinement: HB2647, SB1409
This legislation puts a time limit and mandated oversight on the use of solitary confinement in our prisons.

We are also supporting several bills addressing maternal health:

HB2102, SB831 would allow pregnant women to enroll in Medicaid without a waiting period (which can be up to 45 days)

HB1904 would keep labor & delivery units in rural hospitals open if a certified nurse midwife or certified midwife is available for newborn care, even if a pediatrician is not available.

HB 1649, HB1675, SB740 would require unconscious bias/cultural competency training for medical practitioners

If you are interested in being part of our congregation's Justice Team, see Gail Christie. You can join the Justice and Witness Action Network and get Action Alerts [here](#).