

Florida United Church of Christ Women  
Reading for Renewal  
2024 - 2025  
*How Do We Worship?*

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This year's list contains a selection of books with content related to the theme of "Worship", including titles focused on content related to the theme of the worship experience, building a faith relationship or living a life of faith. There are also a few books that touch on current, cultural topics. The Mission Study books this year are focused on Foster Youth Aging Out. Some books are based on real events (factual or fictionalized) others are events/stories created by the writer. My hope is that you will find a book or two that challenges you, entertains you, delights you, engages you and provides a common topic of conversation to share with others both in your home congregation as well as throughout the state of Florida.

You can join the *Reading for Renewal – Florida UCC Women* book club by visiting the website using the following link: <https://bookclubz.com/clubs/32786/join/793c8f/> Once you join you will see the books from this year listed under Books We Want to Read. Please do not add other books to this list but feel welcome to add comments/messages as you are reading. If you are hosting a meeting to discuss any of the books the meeting can be posted on the site. This is a closed club so the link should only be shared with other FL UCC Women and friends.

~Terri Crawford, FL UCC Women/Reading for Renewal

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Any number of books from this list that are read during the year should be reported. (See Record Sheet on last page.) Reports are due in April 2025 to your local church's Reading for Renewal contact.

A **Qualified Reader** must read **six (6)** books from this list, **including** one (1) Mission Study book,

In addition to retail bookstores, the books on the list may be available from your local public libraries and/or from online booksellers. Most are available in more than one format including large print, compact disc and various kinds of electronic media.

If you have questions or comments about this list, please contact me at [terric57@yahoo.com](mailto:terric57@yahoo.com). **Please include "Reading for Renewal" in the email subject line.**

You may also send titles of books to be considered for future lists\*. In general books to be considered should be:

- No more than 3 years old – based on release date
- Not a best seller or book from a best-seller list
- Available in multiple formats
- Not an author that has been the list in the past 2 years.

\*In most cases, books selected for the list should (in some way) tie to the selected annual conference theme. There are occasional exceptions.

## Reading for Renewal List for 2024 – 2025

**#1 Create: New Beginnings; an artistic journey to deepen your connection with God and experience healing and hope** – Martha Ackerman (Non-Fiction) If you've ever needed a fresh start or wanted to find a new way to begin to heal from the pain in your life...this 10-week series of restorative art projects rooted in Scripture offers a safe space to process your own experiences in community with other women. You don't have to be "creative" to do this. You don't have to have any art background—the goal is not to create a masterpiece. It is to simply deepen your relationship with God and others . . . and walk forward into a new beginning.

**#2 Other Birds** – Sarah Addison Allen (Contemporary Women Fiction) Down a narrow alley in the small coastal town of Mallow Island, South Carolina, lies a stunning cobblestone building comprised of five apartments. - called The Dellawisp. It is named after the tiny turquoise birds who, alongside its human tenants, inhabit an air of magical secrecy. When Zoey Hennessey comes to claim her deceased mother's apartment at The Dellawisp, she meets her quirky, enigmatic neighbors including a girl on the run, a grieving chef whose comfort food does not comfort him, two estranged middle-aged sisters, and three ghosts. Each with their own story. Each with their own longings. Each whose ending isn't yet written. When one of her new neighbors dies under odd circumstances the night Zoey arrives, she is thrust into the mystery of The Dellawisp, which involves missing pages from a legendary writer whose work might be hidden there. She soon discovers that many unfinished stories permeate the place, and the people around her are in as much need of healing from wrongs of the past as she is. To find their way they have to learn how to trust each other, confront their deepest fears, and let go of what haunts them.

**#3 And Then There's Margaret: a laugh out loud family dramedy** - Carolyn Clarke (Fiction, Women's Humor) When Allison Montgomery's beloved father-in-law and long-time confidant passes away, her mother-in-law, Margaret, 'temporarily' moves in. From rearranging the furniture and taking over the kitchen, to undermining and embarrassing Allie at every turn, including funding her daughter's escape, throwing a hissy fit at the mall, and publicly equating Allie's glass of Chardonnay to full blown alcoholism, Margaret turns Allie's life upside down causing her to bounce between a sincere desire to support her grieving mother-in-law and an intense urge to simply push her out of the nearest window. Feeling annoyed, trapped and even a little childish, Allie struggles to avoid a complete meltdown with help from her fearless and audacious best friend, a plan for reinventing herself and enjoying a second act, and, yes, a few glasses of Chardonnay. Along the way, Allie discovers the reasons behind Margaret's attitude toward her all these years. Does it help? Maybe...

**#4 Shopping for Church: searching for Christian community, a memoir** – Peter DeHaan (Non-Fiction – Memoir) Who would have thought finding a church home could be so hard? Peter and his wife have a strong marriage. But when it comes time to find a new church after they move, their differences couldn't be more pronounced. At first, their aim is straightforward. He'll write a book about the churches they visit. She'll choose the one they'll embrace as their new spiritual family. It sounds like a simple plan, but this Christian couple soon discovers their quest for a home church is far more difficult.

**#5 The Rabbit Hutch** – Tess Gunty (Contemporary Literary Fiction) Blandine isn't like the other residents of her building. An online obituary writer. A young mother with a dark secret. A woman waging a solo campaign against rodents — neighbors, separated only by the thin walls of a low-cost housing complex in the once bustling industrial center of Vacca Vale, Indiana. Welcome to the Rabbit Hutch. Ethereally beautiful and formidably intelligent, Blandine shares her apartment with three teenage boys she neither likes nor understands, all, like her, now aged out of the state foster care system that has repeatedly failed them, all searching for meaning in their lives. Set over one sweltering week in July and culminating in a bizarre act of violence that finally changes everything,

**#6 The Secret Book of Flora Lea – Patti Callahan Henry (Literary Fiction)** In the war-torn London of 1939, fourteen-year-old Hazel and five-year-old Flora are evacuated to a rural village to escape the horrors of the Second World War. Living with the kind Bridie Aberdeen and her teenage son, Harry, in a charming stone cottage along the River Thames, Hazel fills their days with walks and games to distract her young sister, including one that she creates for her sister and her sister alone—a fairy tale about a magical land, a secret place they can escape to that is all their own. But the unthinkable happens when young Flora suddenly vanishes while playing near the banks of the river. Shattered, Hazel blames herself for her sister’s disappearance, and she carries that guilt into adulthood as a private burden she feels she deserves. Twenty years later, Hazel is in London, ready to move on from her job at a cozy rare bookstore to a career at Sotheby’s. With a charming boyfriend and her elegantly timeworn Bloomsbury flat, Hazel’s future seems determined. But her tidy life is turned upside down when she unwraps a package containing an illustrated book called *Whisperwood and the River of Stars*. Hazel never told a soul about the imaginary world she created just for Flora. Could this book hold the secrets to Flora’s disappearance? Could it be a sign that her beloved sister is still alive after all these years?

**#7 When You Were Mine: an utterly heart-breaking page turner – Kate Hewitt (Contemporary Women Fiction)** Single mother Beth loves her seven-year-old son Dylan with all her heart. So when a terrible series of events lead Dylan to be taken into foster care, she is determined to do whatever she can to get him back. Mother of two, Ally has always dreamed of fostering—it feels like her chance to give back when she has been so lucky in life. But when Dylan joins their family, Ally finds herself struggling to balance his needs with those of her own children and husband—something Beth can’t help but witness when she visits. Beth wants nothing more than to find a way to bring her beloved child home. But when she also sees Dylan bonding with Ally, she has to ask herself – where is the right home for Dylan? She wants to believe it is with her... But does a mother always know what’s best for her child?

**#8 Be Brave, Lose the Beige: finding your sass after sixty – Liz Kitchens (Non-Fiction)** Society has decidedly beige expectations when it comes to aging, and the intrinsic danger of beige and its many practical aspects is that it precludes creative thinking. Creative thinking is critical in avoiding a beige aging journey. *Be Brave. Lose the Beige! Finding Your Sass after Sixty* encourages women to trot out their inner magenta and defy those beige expectations. *Be Brave. Lose the Beige!* started as a blog and morphed into a movement. This movement gently pokes fun at ageist rules and expectations. The stories and creative techniques outlined in this book are guaranteed to introduce color, sass, and a lightness of spirit into your later years. Are you ready to start coloring outside the lines, even if a few pesky rules get trampled in the process?

**#9 Hello Beautiful – Ann Napolitano (Literary Fiction)** William Waters grew up in a house silenced by tragedy, where his parents could hardly bear to look at him, much less love him—so when he meets the spirited and ambitious Julia Padavano in his freshman year of college, it’s as if the world has lit up around him. With Julia comes her family, as she and her three sisters are inseparable: Sylvie, the family’s dreamer, is happiest with her nose in a book; Cecelia is a free-spirited artist; and Emeline patiently takes care of them all. With the Padavanos, William experiences a newfound contentment; every moment in their house is filled with loving chaos. But then darkness from William’s past surfaces, jeopardizing not only Julia’s carefully orchestrated plans for their future, but the sisters’ unshakeable devotion to one another. The result is a catastrophic family rift that changes their lives for generations. Will the loyalty that once rooted them be strong enough to draw them back together when it matters most?

**#10 Things I Wish I Told My Mother – Susan Patterson / Susan DiLallo / James Patterson (Contemporary Women Fiction)** A mother and daughter on vacation in Paris unpack a lifetime of secrets and hopes—with a giant Pattersonian twist at the end! Laurie is an artist, a collector of experiences. She travels the world with a worn beige duffel bag. “Dr. Liz,” Laurie’s mother, is an elegant perfectionist who travels the world with a matched set of suitcases. When Laurie surprises her mother with a dream vacation, it brings an unexpected sparkle to her eyes. So begins *Things I Wish I Told My Mother*. You will wish this novel never ends.

**#11 He's Inviting Us In: the story of Isaiah 117 House - Ronda Paulson (Non-Fiction)** What if you just said "Yes"?

In *He's Inviting Us In*, author Ronda Paulson explores the idea of saying yes to whatever God may be asking you to do. Living a life of obedience, open to His call, and no longer paralyzed by fear. She uses humor and heart through examples from her own life to encourage the reader to say yes to God's invitation to be the hands and feet of Jesus here and now. Through the story of Isaiah 117 House, Ronda provides examples of what God can do with a very scared little "yes". Let your first "yes" be the yes to reading this book!

**#12 The Lost Apothecary – Sarah Penner (Historical Fiction)** Hidden in the depths of eighteenth-century London, a secret apothecary shop caters to an unusual kind of clientele. Women across the city whisper of a mysterious figure named Nella who sells well-disguised poisons to use against the oppressive men in their lives. But the apothecary's fate is jeopardized when her newest patron, a precocious twelve-year-old, makes a fatal mistake, sparking a string of consequences that echo through the centuries. Meanwhile in present-day London, aspiring historian Caroline Parcellwell spends her tenth wedding anniversary alone, running from her own demons. When she stumbles upon a clue to the unsolved apothecary murders that haunted London two hundred years ago, her life collides with the apothecary's in a stunning twist of fate—and not everyone will survive.

**#13 The Berry Pickers – Amanda Peters (Literary Fiction)** July 1962. A Mi'kmaq family from Nova Scotia arrives in Maine to pick blueberries for the summer. Weeks later, four-year-old Ruthie, the family's youngest child, vanishes. She is last seen by her six-year-old brother, Joe, sitting on a favorite rock at the edge of a berry field. Joe will remain distraught by his sister's disappearance for years to come. In Maine, a young girl named Norma grows up as the only child of an affluent family. Her father is emotionally distant, her mother frustratingly overprotective. Norma is often troubled by recurring dreams and visions that seem more like memories than imagination. As she grows older, Norma slowly comes to realize there is something her parents aren't telling her. Unwilling to abandon her intuition, she will spend decades trying to uncover this family secret.

**#14 Rebecca, Not Becky – Christine Platt and Catherine Wigginton Greene (Contemporary Fiction)** De'Andrea Whitman, her husband Malik, and their five-year-old daughter, Nina, are new to the upper-crust white suburb of Rolling Hills, Virginia—a move motivated by circumstance rather than choice. De'Andrea is heartbroken to leave her comfortable life in the Black oasis of Atlanta, and between her mother-in-law's Alzheimer's diagnosis, her daughter starting kindergarten, and the overwhelming whiteness of Rolling Hills, she finds herself struggling to adjust to her new community. To ease the transition, her therapist proposes a challenge: make a white girlfriend. When Rebecca Myland learns about her new neighbors, the Whitmans, she's thrilled. As chair of the Parent Diversity Committee at her daughters' school, she's championed racial diversity in the community—and what could be better than a brand-new Black family? It's serendipitous when her daughter, Isabella, and Nina become best friends on the first day of kindergarten. Now, Rebecca can put everything she's learned about antiracism into practice—especially those oh-so-informative social media posts. And finally, the Parent Diversity Committee will have some... well, diversity. Following her therapist's suggestion, De'Andrea reluctantly joins Rebecca's committee. The painfully earnest white woman is so overly eager it makes De'Andrea wonder if Rebecca's therapist told her to make a Black friend! But when Rolling Hill's rising racial sentiments bring the two women together in common cause, they find it isn't the only thing they have in common.

**#15 A Grandmother Begins the Story – Michelle Porter (Literary Fiction)** *A Grandmother Begins the Story* follows five generations of women and bison as they reach for the stories that could remake their worlds and rebuild their futures. Carter is a young mother, recently separated. She is curious, angry, and on a quest to find out what the heritage she only learned of in her teens truly means. Allie, Carter's mother, is trying to make up for the lost years with her first born, and to protect Carter from the hurt she herself suffered from her own mother. Lucie wants the granddaughter she's never met to help her join her ancestors in the Afterlife. And Geneviève is determined to conquer her demons before the fire inside burns her up, with the help of the sister she lost but has never been without. Meanwhile, Mamé, in the Afterlife, knows that all their stories began with her; she must find a way to cut herself from the last threads that keep her tethered to the living, just as they must find their own paths forward.

**#16 Council of Dolls – Mona Susan Power (Literary Fiction)** From the mid-century metropolis of Chicago to the windswept ancestral lands of the Dakota people, to the bleak and brutal Indian boarding schools, *A Council of Dolls* is the story of three women, told in part through the stories of the dolls they carried: **Sissy, born 1961:** Sissy's relationship with her beautiful and volatile mother is difficult, even dangerous, but her life is also filled with beautiful things, including a new Christmas present, a doll called Ethel. Ethel whispers advice and kindness in Sissy's ear, and in one especially terrifying moment, maybe even saves Sissy's life. **Lillian, born 1925:** Born in her ancestral lands in a time of terrible change, Lillian clings to her sister, Blanche, and her doll, Mae. When the sisters are forced to attend an "Indian school" far from their home, Blanche refuses to be cowed by the school's abusive nuns. But when tragedy strikes the sisters, the doll Mae finds her way to defend the girls. **Cora, born 1888:** Though she was born into the brutal legacy of the "Indian Wars," Cora isn't afraid of the white men who remove her to a school across the country to be "civilized." When teachers burn her beloved buckskin and beaded doll Winona, Cora discovers that the spirit of Winona may not be entirely lost...

**#17 The Well-Watered Woman – Gretchen Saffles (Non-Fiction)** In the chaos of our everyday, it can be difficult to live out and apply the truths of Scripture. We want more of Jesus, but we find ourselves looking to our own lives and accomplishments for our worth and identity. And while that may buoy us for a time, we're often left feeling dried up, discouraged, and longing for more. In *The Well-Watered Woman*, Gretchen leads us to the Well of fullness, the Word of freedom, and the Way of fruitfulness. She teaches that God's Word will satisfy us for all eternity. Using Scripture and her own personal story of surrender, Gretchen offers spiritually hungry women tangible tools to not only know Jesus more but to live a life that thoroughly enjoys Him, seeks Him, and follows Him into freedom.

**#18 Ladies' Lunch and other stories – Lore Segal (Short Stories)** Beloved *New Yorker* writer Lore Segal, at 95-years-old, is a national treasure. In this story collection she turns her gimlet eye and compassionate humor on aging and life in the slow lane. From the master of the short story comes a collection of 16 new stories featuring old friends who have loved and lunched together for over 40 years. These erudite, sharp-minded nonagenarians offer startling insights into friendship, family and aging. Can the group organize a visit to one of their number in her new, and detested, assisted living situation? Is this a fabulous party with old friends, or a funeral reception? And does who was sleeping with whom, way back when, still matter? In story after story, Segal's voice is always hilarious and urbane, heartbreaking and profound, keen and utterly unsentimental, as she tackles aging's affronts.

**#19 Lady Tan's Circle of Women - Lisa See (Historical Fiction)** According to Confucius, "an educated woman is a worthless woman," but Tan Yunxian—born into an elite family, yet haunted by death, separations, and loneliness—is being raised by her grandparents to be of use. Her grandmother is one of only a handful of female doctors in China, and she teaches Yunxian the pillars of Chinese medicine, the Four Examinations—looking, listening, touching, and asking—something a man can never do with a female patient. From a young age, Yunxian learns about women's illnesses, many of which relate to childbearing, alongside a young midwife-in-training, Meiling. The two girls find fast friendship and a mutual purpose—despite the prohibition that a doctor should never touch blood while a midwife comes in frequent contact with it—and they vow to be forever friends, sharing in each other's joys and struggles. But when Yunxian is sent into an arranged marriage, her mother-in-law forbids her from seeing Meiling and from helping the women and girls in the household. Yunxian is to act like a proper wife—embroider bound-foot slippers, pluck instruments, recite poetry, give birth to sons, and stay forever within the walls of the family compound, the Garden of Fragrant Delights. How might a woman like Yunxian break free of these traditions, go on to treat women and girls from every level of society, and lead a life of such importance that many of her remedies are still used five centuries later? How might the power of friendship support or complicate these efforts? *Lady Tan's Circle of Women* is a captivating story of women helping other women. It is also a triumphant reimagining of the life of a woman who was remarkable in the Ming dynasty and would be considered remarkable today.

**#20 Beholding and Becoming: the art of everyday worship – Ruth Chou Simons (Non-Fiction)** You are in the process of *becoming*. Every day is an opportunity to be shaped and formed by what moves your heart...drives your thoughts...captures your gaze. Is it any wonder that where you direct your eyes and your heart matter in your day-to-day? *We become what we behold* when we set our hearts and minds on Christ and His redemption story here in the details of our daily lives. Not just on Sunday, not just on holidays, not just when extraordinarily hard or wonderful things happen...but *today*. With more than 850 pieces of intricate, original artwork, Simons encourages you to elevate your gaze to the One who created all things.

**#21 How to Say Babylon: a memoir** – Safiya Sinclair (Non-Fiction - Memoir) Throughout her childhood, Safiya Sinclair's father, a volatile reggae musician and militant adherent to a strict sect of Rastafari, became obsessed with her purity, in particular, with the threat of what Rastas call Babylon, the immoral and corrupting influences of the Western world outside their home. He worried that womanhood would make Safiya and her sisters morally weak and impure, and believed a woman's highest virtue was her obedience. In an effort to keep Babylon outside the gate, he forbade almost everything. In place of pants, the women in her family were made to wear long skirts and dresses to cover their arms and legs, head wraps to cover their hair, no make-up, no jewelry, no opinions, no friends. Safiya's mother, while loyal to her father, nonetheless gave Safiya and her siblings the gift of books, including poetry, to which Safiya latched on for dear life. And as Safiya watched her mother struggle voicelessly for years under housework and the rigidity of her father's beliefs, she increasingly used her education as a sharp tool with which to find her voice and break free. Inevitably, with her rebellion comes clashes with her father, whose rage and paranoia explodes in increasing violence. As Safiya's voice grows, lyrically and poetically, a collision course is set between them. *How to Say Babylon* is both a universal story of a woman finding her own power and a unique glimpse into a rarefied world we may know how to name, Rastafari, but one we know little about.

**#22 The Science of the Good Samaritan: thinking bigger about loving our neighbors** - Emily Smith (Non-Fiction) Join Dr. Emily Smith, global health expert and creator of the popular Facebook page *Friendly Neighbor Epidemiologist*, as she dives into what loving your neighbor—as illustrated in the biblical parable of the Good Samaritan—truly means. Combining Dr. Smith's expertise as a scientist with her deep Christian faith while drawing from her journey from small-town Texas to a prestigious university, *The Science of the Good Samaritan* shares fascinating stories from Dr. Smith's life and the lives of other inspiring people around the world to show us how to: Find shared values with people from different backgrounds, faiths, and cultures than our own; reach outside our immediate circles to bring in those on the margins; redefine our concept of "neighbor" and love our neighbors in more practical and global ways; and bridge the gaps of society's disparities and inequities..

**#23 Who Brought the Dog to Church** – Tracy L. Smoak (Christian Fiction) Betty is sure that Ida Lou does not belong in their church when the woman shows up to the Good Friday service with her small dog in tow. But before she knows what's happening, Betty is pushed into helping the woman as she deals with the sudden hospitalization of her husband. Having lost her own husband just one year ago, Betty is chosen as the perfect person to help walk through this valley with the newcomer—along with the other women of the WUFHs (Women United For Him). Sarah McAdams knows her husband loves her. He just loses his temper sometimes. It comes with the stress of being a highly recognized police officer. But when Sarah makes the decision that this is not the life she wants for her young son, will she be able to get out alive? Where can she go? And who will help her? God works in mysterious ways—and through ordinary people. The town of Prosper is about to experience some drama—and it all starts with a dog who comes to church.

**#24 Saturday Night at the Lakeside Supper Club** – J. Ryan Stradal (Family Fiction) Mariel Prager needs a break. Her husband Ned is having an identity crisis, her spunky, beloved restaurant is bleeding money by the day, and her mother Florence is stubbornly refusing to leave the church where she's been holed up for more than a week. The Lakeside Supper Club has been in her family for decades, and while Mariel's grandmother embraced the business, seeing it as a saving grace, Florence never took to it. When Mariel inherited the restaurant, skipping Florence, it created a rift between mother and daughter that never quite healed. Ned is also an heir—to a chain of home-style diners—and while he doesn't have a head for business, he knows his family's chain could provide a better future than his wife's fading restaurant. In the aftermath of a devastating tragedy, Ned and Mariel lose almost everything they hold dear, and the hard-won victories of each family hang in the balance. With their dreams dashed, can one fractured family find a way to rebuild despite their losses, and will the Lakeside Supper Club be their salvation?

**#25 Drums in Our Veins** – Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson (Non-Fiction – Poetry) A collection of poems that explore spirituality and identity through the lenses of African Ancestors and the realities of African descendant people living in these modern times. Written to the beat of life's drum, these poems are described as "resistance poetry" by the author. A great read for anyone who is inspired to make social change and is passionate about justice and equality as well as those looking to be advocates and allies. *Drums In Our Veins* will take you on an emotional journey of the black global experience, while nurturing your spirit and purpose.



**#26 Remarkably Bright Creatures** – Shelby Van Pelt (Humorous Fiction) After Tova Sullivan’s husband died, she began working the night shift at the Sowell Bay Aquarium, mopping floors and tidying up. Keeping busy has always helped her cope, which she’s been doing since her eighteen-year-old son, Erik, mysteriously vanished on a boat in Puget Sound over thirty years ago. Tova becomes acquainted with curmudgeonly Marcellus, a giant Pacific octopus living at the aquarium. Marcellus knows more than anyone can imagine but wouldn’t dream of lifting one of his eight arms for his human captors—until he forms a remarkable friendship with Tova. Ever the detective, Marcellus deduces what happened the night Tova’s son disappeared. And now Marcellus must use every trick his old invertebrate body can muster to unearth the truth for her before it’s too late.

**#27 Created to Dream: The 6 Phases God Uses to Grow Your Faith** – Rick Warren (Non-Fiction) A great dream is a statement of faith. Whether you dream of creating something beautiful or accomplishing something incredible, your dream is the first step God uses to develop your spiritual maturity and change your life. The Bible is full of stories of people whose God-given dreams became reality—but to get there, they had to take a journey of faith. Rick Warren reveals how God uses six phases to develop your spiritual maturity while fulfilling the dreams he gives you. Each phase is a test of your faith, bringing you closer to your goal. Knowing these six biblical phases of faith will allow you to stop wondering if you’ll succeed or what you’re doing wrong and begin looking instead for God’s way forward so that you can be prepared for all that God has dreamed for your future.

**#28 Lincoln’s God: how faith transformed a president and a nation** – Joshua Zeitz (Non-Fiction) Abraham Lincoln, unlike most of his political brethren, kept organized Christianity at arm’s length. He never joined a church and only sometimes attended Sunday services with his wife. But as he came to appreciate the growing political and military importance of the Christian community, and when death touched the Lincoln household in an awful, intimate way, the erstwhile skeptic effectively evolved into a believer and harnessed the power of evangelical Protestantism to rally the nation to arms. The war, he told Americans, was divine retribution for the sin of slavery. This is the story of that transformation and the ways in which religion helped millions of Northerners interpret the carnage and political upheaval of the 1850s and 1860s. Long underestimated in accounts of the Civil War, religion—specifically evangelical Christianity—played an instrumental role on the battlefield and home front, and in the corridors of government. More than any president before him—or any president after, until George W. Bush—Lincoln harnessed popular religious enthusiasm to build broad-based support for a political party and a cause. A master politician who was sincere about his religion, Lincoln held beliefs that were unconventional—and widely misunderstood then, as now. After his death and the end of an unforgiving war, Americans *needed* to memorialize Lincoln as a Christian martyr. The truth was, of course, considerably more complicated, as this original book explores.

## **MISSION STUDY BOOKS: Foster Youth Aging Out**

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**#29 Emancipating from the Care of Strangers: The Experiences, Insights and Recommendations of Ten Former Foster Kids** – Compiled by Waln K. Brown/John R. Seita (Non-Fiction) Aging out of foster care is a perilous event for foster youth. This is especially true for foster children whose experience in the foster care system included little or no preparation for leaving foster care and who emancipated directly from placement with little or no family support. Left to survive by their wits, this population of foster care kids would seem the most at-risk; yet, some former foster kids somehow manage to successfully navigate leaving foster care and go on to accomplish great things. Unlike most books about foster care and foster parent books, however, this book by foster children uses actual life experiences to present insider knowledge regarding what is required to prepare foster youth for life after foster care. The very personal setbacks, successes and life-lessons conveyed in these ten riveting and revealing foster care memoirs are the soul of this book. What these talented authors learned in the process of writing their foster care stories is their self-revelation of how their individual foster care experiences affected their adjustment to life after foster care.

**#30 From Foster to PhD: letters from a suitcase** – Danisha Keating (Biography) A memoir on resilience, grit, and determination of one foster care kid who realizes the importance of education and willingness to push through many obstacles. Danisha shares pages of her journal in a raw and vulnerable way, in hopes that other people can understand the hardships that foster care youth will face while pursuing their education, learning to be an adults at a young age, and dealing with the emotions that come with having their life turned upside down. Danisha opens up about how she came into foster care, homelessness, poverty and getting through her educational goals. She also shares the emotional pain that comes along with raising siblings, finding victory in standing against her abusers, and being able to walk across the stage to get her PhD. *From Foster to PhD* is truly inspirational as it follows the journey of overcoming every obstacle with determination. Danisha Keating graduated from Grand Canyon University with a PhD in Psychology, devotes her time to helping other students through their educational goals, and advocating for Foster Youth.

**#31 Life Changing Choices: the 7 essential choices at the heart of transformational change for foster youth and your community** – Just In Time For Foster Youth (Non-Fiction) All the resources and effort dedicated to improving child welfare systems have made little change in positive outcomes. At Just In Time For Foster Youth, we invite exploration of an alternative approach to resources for children and families that lead to measurably improved results. We wrote this book because we've continued to see a stubborn truth over the last two decades about the critical necessity of Community and Connection as the key to that lasting impact. This truth has been reinforced by our own experiences and speaks to why systems resist change and fail to be empowering, healthy places for young people or families, despite the best intentions. This book is not a lecture, but a challenge for all of us to consider a different point of view. It presents a mindset and model that has empowered our efforts at Just in Time and might do the same for anyone who is frustrated by the persistent trauma that seems built into the current experience of our children in care. We wrote this book so you can hear their voices as we have, and get to know their stories as we do. Once their voices are clearly heard, we hope you seek out youth stories in your community and ask others to join and listen. Most of all, we want this book to start crucial conversations about the old Assumptions and Choices we can change to replace historically negative outcomes with lasting, positive Empowerment.

**#32 Redefining Normal: how two foster kids beat the odds and discovered healing, happiness and love - Alexis and Justin Black (Biography)** Alexis Black persevered through her mother's death and her father's imprisonment. And after escaping a long and abusive relationship, the college junior promised her foster parents not to date for at least a year. But when she meets an incoming freshman on the first day of their scholarship program, she feels the world melt away, as though it were only the two of them in the room. Justin Black lived in the poorest section of Detroit before his parents surrendered him to the foster care system at the age of nine. But when he grabs the chance for better opportunities by pursuing higher education, he can't help but be drawn to a beautiful third-year student. At first, their past traumas--and their age difference--conspired to complicate their attraction. But the joy each took in the other and eventually conquered those obstacles, and these two survivors journeyed together toward healing. In a stark and wholehearted true story that shares how two individuals on separate paths found each other, Alexis and Justin merge their course into one full of hope and purpose. And hand-in-hand, with a desire to help others, they learned to reject the abusive patterns of their past, thereby intentionally breaking the cycle of generational violence and unhealthy behaviors. *Redefining Normal* is a page-turning memoir that will open your eyes to possibilities and dreams. If you like honest tales of triumph, refreshing transparency, and resilient faith in God, then you'll adore Justin and Alexis' inspirational story.

**#33 Some Type of Way: aging out of foster care** – Lisa Schelbe (Non-Fiction) *Some Type of Way* seeks to address the following currently relevant questions: What are the realities of the lives of youth aging out? Why are they struggling? What are agencies and service providers doing to help them? What should be done to help these youth negotiate the transitions out of care and into adulthood? Based on over 90 interviews and almost 1,000 hours of observation of youth aging out and service providers in a mid-Atlantic county in the United States, the book presents real stories along with relevant research and theories to help understand how youth transition out of foster care and into adulthood. Featuring five youth--Plato, Solana, Titi, Matty, and Jaden--and including poignant examples from many others--the book explores the complex and complicated challenges youth face as well as their creative survival strategies and resilience. The book includes descriptions of service providers' efforts to assist youth aging out and shares service providers' insights. It highlights the limitations of the foster care system and the service delivery system for youth aging out. Schelbe details systematic barriers in society that create obstacle as youth leave care.



## Reading For Renewal Record Sheet 2024 -2025

*Due to your local church's Reading for Renewal contact in April 2025.* Each reader is asked to record the books read from this list during the year. Please indicate the books you read by placing a check in front of the number of the book title listed below. Any number of books may be recorded. A **qualified reader** must read **six (6)** books from the list, **including** one (1) Mission Study.

1 Create: New Beginnings - Ackerman	15 A Grandmother Begins the Story - Porter
2 other Birds - Allen	16 Council of Dolls - Power
3 And Then There's Margaret - Clarke	17 The Well-Watered Woman - Saffles
4 Shopping for Church - DeHaan	18 Ladies' Lunch and Other Stories - Sagel
5 The Rabbit Hutch - Gunty	19 Lady Tan's Circle of Women - See
6 The Secret Book of Flora Lee - Henry	20 Beholding and Becoming - Simons
7 When You Were Mine - Hewitt	21 How to Say Babylon - Sinclair
8 Be Brave. Lose the Beige. - Kitchens	22 The Science of the Good Samaritan - Smith
9 Hello Beautiful - Napolitano	23 Who Brought the Dog to Church - Smoak
10 Things I Wish I Told My Mother – Patterson / Dilallo	24 Saturday Night at the Lakeside Supper Club - Stradal
11 He's Inviting Us In - Paulson	25 Drums In Our Veins - Thompson
12 The Lost Apothecary - Penner	26 Remarkably Bright Creatures – Van Pelt
13 The Berry Pickers - Peters	27 Created to Dream - Warren
14 Rebecca, Not Becky – Platt / Greene	28 Lincoln's God - Zeitz

### MISSION STUDY BOOKS – FOSTER YOUTH AGING OUT

29 Emancipating from the Care of Strangers – Brown / Seita
30 From Foster to PhD - Keating
31 Life Changing Choices – Just in Time For Foster Youth
32 Redefining Normal - Black
33 Some Type of Way - Schelbe

Total number of 2024-2025 Reading for Renewal Books read: \_\_\_\_\_

I am a **Qualified Reader**: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_