

Florida United Church of Christ Women
Reading for Renewal
2026- 2027
Being Courageous

This year's list contains a selection of books with content related to the theme of "Being Courageous." There are also a few books that touch on current, cultural topics. Some books are based on real events (factual or fictionalized) others are events/stories created by the writer. The Mission Study books this year are focused on Palestine. 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.

Please note that I have also added a few "Young Reader" books to share with the young people in your life – or enjoy yourself! Although these titles are not officially part of Reading for Renewal, I hope you share them as appropriate. ~Terri Crawford, FL UCC Women/Reading for Renewal

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 March 2027 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 readingforrenewal@uccfla.org

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 on 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.

AND - if you are interested in assisting with the Reading for Renewal program and book selection, please provide me with your contact information

Reading for Renewal List for 2026 – 2027

#1. Abundant Lives: a progressive Christian ethic of flourishing – Amanda Udis-Kessler (Non– Fiction, Religious Ethics) What is the purpose of freedom? We can debate freedom, rights, and justice . . . but what is the purpose of such debates if they do not tangibly contribute to human flourishing? *Abundant Lives: A Progressive Christian Ethic of Flourishing* invites our engagement in shared well-being, based on Jesus' commandments to love God, our neighbors, ourselves, and our enemies. Through *Abundant Lives*, Amanda Udis-Kessler provokes rich conversation so that we might understand—and enact—the Kingdom of God as a realm of human and planetary flourishing.

#2. The Book Club for Troublesome Women – Marie Bostwick (Women's Fiction) By 1960s standards, Margaret Ryan is living the American woman's dream. She has a husband, three children, a station wagon, and a home in Concordia—one of Northern Virginia's most exclusive and picturesque suburbs. She has a standing invitation to the neighborhood coffee klatch, and now, thanks to her husband, a new subscription to *A Woman's Place*—a magazine that tells housewives like Margaret exactly who to be and what to buy. On paper, she has it all. So why doesn't that feel like enough? Margaret is thrown for a loop when she first meets Charlotte Gustafson, Concordia's newest and most intriguing resident. As an excuse to be in the mysterious Charlotte's orbit, Margaret concocts a book club get-together and invites two other neighborhood women—Bitsy and Viv—to the inaugural meeting. As the women share secrets, cocktails, and their honest reactions to the controversial bestseller *The Feminine Mystique*, they begin to discover that the American dream they'd been sold isn't all roses and sunshine—and that their secret longing for more is something they share. Nicknaming themselves the Bettys, after Betty Friedan, these four friends have no idea their impromptu club and the books they read together will become the glue that helps them hold fast through tears, triumphs, angst, and arguments—and what will prove to be the most consequential and freeing year of their lives.

#3. Canticle: a novel – Janet Rich Edwards (Historical Fiction) Aleys is sixteen years old and unusual: stubborn, bright, and prone to religious visions. She and her only friend, Finn, a young scholar, have been learning Latin together in secret—but just as she thinks their connection might become something more, everything unravels. When her father promises her in marriage to a merchant she doesn't love, she runs away from home, finding shelter among the beguines, a fiercely independent community of religious women who refuse to answer to the Church. Among these hardworking and strong-willed women, Aleys glimpses for the first time the joys of belonging: a life of song, meaning, and friendship in the markets and along the canals of Bruges. But forces both mystical and political are at work. Illegal translations of scripture, the women's independence, and a sudden rash of miracles all draw the attention of an ambitious bishop—and bring Aleys and those around her into ever-increasing danger, a danger that will push Aleys to a new understanding of love and sacrifice.

#4. The Daughter of Rome – Angela Hunt (Christian Fiction) In Nero's Rome, Calandra helps her father, a renowned sculptor, complete the most significant commission of his illustrious career. But then a catastrophic fire nearly destroys the imperial city, leaving Calandra reliant on a group of Christians—unusual individuals unlike any she has encountered before. Intrigued by their worship of the Son of an invisible God, Calandra grapples with her mistrust, only to find herself indebted to these believers as they help her rebuild her shattered world. When Emperor Nero begins constructing his opulent Golden House, the people of Rome grow resentful, suspecting him of starting the fire in order to clear the land for his immense palace. Needing a scapegoat, Nero points at those who follow the Jewish Messiah, forcing Calandra to make an impossible choice between right and wrong, friends and family, love and death.

#5. Dream Count – Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Literary Fiction) Chiamaka is a Nigerian travel writer living in America. Alone in the midst of the pandemic, she recalls her past lovers and grapples with her choices and regrets. Zikora, her best friend, is a lawyer who has been successful at everything until—betrayed and brokenhearted—she must turn to the person she thought she needed least. Omelogor, Chiamaka’s bold, outspoken cousin, is a financial powerhouse in Nigeria who begins to question how well she knows herself. And Kadiatou, Chiamaka’s housekeeper, is proudly raising her daughter in America—but faces an unthinkable hardship that threatens all she has worked to achieve. In *Dream Count*, Adichie trains her fierce eye on these women in a sparkling, transcendent novel that takes up the very nature of love itself. Is true happiness ever attainable or is it just a fleeting state? And how honest must we be with ourselves in order to love, and to be loved? A trenchant reflection on the choices we make and those made for us, on daughters and mothers and on our interconnected world.

#6. Evensong: a novel – Stewart O’Nan (Contemporary Women’s Fiction) The Humpty Dumpty Club is distraught when their powerhouse leader, Joan Hargrove, takes a bad fall down her stairs, knocking her out of commission. Now, as well as running errands and shepherding those less able to their doctors’ appointments, they have to pick up the slack. Between navigating their own relationships and aging bodies and attending choir practice, these invisible yet indomitable women help where they can. They bake cookies, they care for pets, they pick up prescriptions, they sit vigil by the sick, and most of all, they show up for the people they’ve pledged to help. In the face of death, divorce, and the myriad directions our lives can take, the Humpty Dumpty club represents the power of community and chosen family. Vivid, warm, and often wryly funny, *Evensong* reminds us that life is made up of moments both climactic and quotidian, and we weather those moments with the people we choose to keep close.

#7. The Fairytale Life of Dorothy Gale – Virginia Kantra (Contemporary Women’s Fiction) Dorothy “Dee” Gale is searching for a place to belong. After their globe-trotting mother’s death, Dee and her sister Toni settled with Uncle Henry and Aunt Em in Kansas, where Dee attends graduate school. But when Dee’s relationship with a faculty member, a bestselling novelist, ends in heartbreak and humiliation, she’s caught in a tornado of negative publicity. Unable to face her colleagues—or her former lover—Dee applies to the writing program at Trinity College Dublin. Dee’s journey to Ireland leads her to new companions: seemingly brainless Sam Clery—who dropped out of college and now runs a newsagent’s shop—is charming and hot, in a dissolute, Irish poet kind of way; allegedly heartless Tim Woodman—who stiffly refused to take back his ex-fiancée—seems stuck in his past; and fiercely loyal Reeti Kaur, who longs for the courage to tell her parents she wants to teach underprivileged girls rather than work in the family business. In a year of opportunities and changes, love and loss, Dee is mentored by powerful women in the writing program, challenging her to see herself and her work with new eyes. With her friends, Dee finds the confidence to confront her biggest fears—including her intimidating graduate advisor, who may not be so wicked after all. Faced with a choice with far-reaching consequences, Dee must apply the lessons she’s learned along the way about making a family, finding a home...and recognizing the power that’s been inside her all along.

#8. For the Sun After Long Nights: the story of Iran’s women-lead uprising – Fatemah Jamalpour & Nilo Tabrizy (Non-Fiction, Iranian History) In September 2022, a young Kurdish woman, Mahsa Jîna Amini, died after being beaten by police officers who arrested her for not adhering to the Islamic Republic’s dress code. Her death galvanized thousands of Iranians—mostly women—who took to the streets in one of the country’s largest uprisings in decades: the Woman, Life, Freedom movement. Despite the threat of imprisonment or death for her work as a journalist covering political unrest, state repression, and grassroots activism in Iran—which has led to multiple interrogation sessions and arrests—Fatemeh Jamalpour joined the throngs of people fighting to topple Iran’s religious extremist regime. And across the globe, Nilo Tabrizy, who emigrated from

Iran with her family as a child, covered the protests and state violence, knowing that spotlighting the women on the front lines and the systemic injustice of the Iranian government meant she would not be able to safely return to Iran in the future. Though they had met only once in person, Nilo and Fatemeh corresponded constantly, often through encrypted platforms to protect Fatemeh. As the protests continued to unfold, the sense of sisterhood they shared led them to embark on an effort to document the spirit and legacy of the movement, and the history, geopolitics, and influences that led to this point.

#9. The Girl Who Baptized Herself: how a lost scripture about a saint named Thecla reveals the power of knowing our worth – Meggan Waterson (Non-Fiction, Christian Bible Apocrypha). A teenage girl named Thecla is sitting at her bedroom window listening to a man share stories nearby. Her mother and fiancé order her to stop. But Thecla, trapped in a world that expects her to marry and have children, refuses. This man, Paul, is talking about a world she wants to believe in: an inner world of freedom to define her own life. And he's talking about a kind of love she hasn't known before—a love that asks her to be true to who she is within. For Meggan Watterson, a Harvard-trained feminist theologian, Thecla's story in *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* has everything to do with power. Thecla's refusal to be controlled, as well as the authority she reclaims by baptizing herself, reads like a lost gospel for finding our own source of power within—a power that allows us to know who we are and to make choices based on that knowing. This hidden scripture suggests that Christianity before the fourth century was about defying the patriarchy, not deifying it. But early church fathers excluded *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, along with other sacred texts such as *The Gospel of Mary*, from the New Testament. Watterson synthesizes scripture, memoir, and politics to illuminate a story that has been left out of the canon for far too long, one that follows a girl freeing herself from a life predicated on the expectations of others—a path that made her feel unworthy. Thecla's story offers us a path to take back the power we often give to others and live based on the truth of who we are.

#10. Happy Land – Dolen Perkins-Valdez (Historical Fiction) Nikki hasn't seen her grandmother in years. So when the elder calls out of the blue with an urgent request for Nikki to visit her in the hills of western North Carolina, Nikki hesitates only for a moment. After years of silence in her family, due to a mysterious estrangement between her mother and grandmother, she's determined to learn the truth while she still can. But instead of answers about the recent past, Mother Rita tells Nikki an incredible story of a kingdom on this very mountain, and of her great-great-great grandmother, Luella, who would become its queen. It sounds like the makings of a fairy tale—royalty among a community of freed people. But the more Nikki learns about the Kingdom of the Happy Land, and the lives of those who dwelled in the ruins she discovers in the woods, the more she realizes how much of her identity and her family's secrets are wrapped up in these hills. Because this land is their legacy, and it will be up to her to protect it before it, like so much else, is stolen away. Inspired by true events, *Happy Land* is a transporting multi-generational novel about the stories that shape us and the dazzling courage it takes to dream.

#11. Harlem Rhapsody – Victoria Christopher Murray (Historical Fiction) In 1919, a high school teacher from Washington, D.C arrives in Harlem excited to realize her lifelong dream. Jessie Redmon Fauset has been named the literary editor of *The Crisis*. The first Black woman to hold this position at a preeminent Negro magazine, Jessie is poised to achieve literary greatness. But she holds a secret that jeopardizes it all. W. E. B. Du Bois, the founder of *The Crisis*, is not only Jessie's boss, he's her lover. And neither his wife, nor their fourteen-year-age difference can keep the two apart. Amidst rumors of their tumultuous affair, Jessie is determined to prove herself. She attacks the challenge of discovering young writers with fervor, finding sixteen-year-old Countee Cullen, seventeen-year-old Langston Hughes, and Nella Larsen, who becomes one of her best friends. Under Jessie's leadership, *The Crisis* thrives...every African American writer in the country wants their work published there. When her first novel is released to great acclaim, it's clear that Jessie is at

the heart of a renaissance in Black music, theater, and the arts. She has shaped a generation of literary legends, but as she strives to preserve her legacy, she'll discover the high cost of her unparalleled success.

#12. Heart of a Stranger: an unlikely rabbi's story of faith, identity and belonging – Angela Buchdahl (Memoir) Angela Buchdahl was born in Seoul, the daughter of a Korean Buddhist mother and Jewish American father. Profoundly spiritual from a young age, by sixteen she felt the first stirrings to become a rabbi. Despite the naysayers and periods of self-doubt—Would a mixed-race woman ever be seen as authentically Jewish or chosen to lead a congregation?—she stayed the course, which took her first to Yale, then to rabbinical school, and finally to the pulpit of one of the largest, most influential congregations in the world. Today, Angela Buchdahl inspires Jews and non-Jews alike with her invigorating, joyful approach to worship and her belief in the power of faith, gratitude, and responsibility for one another, regardless of religion. She does not shy away from difficult topics, from racism within the Jewish community and the sexism she confronted when she aspired to the top job to rising antisemitism today. Buchdahl teaches how these challenges, which can make one feel like a stranger, can ultimately be the source of our greatest empathy and strength.

#13. How We Learn to Be Brave: decisive moments in life and faith – Mariann Edgar Budde (Non-Fiction, Spiritual Self-Help) On January 21, 2025, many Americans were introduced to Bishop Mariann Budde thanks to what *The New York Times* called “an extraordinary act of public resistance.” During her prayer service for Donald J. Trump’s second inauguration, Bishop Budde addressed the president directly, imploring him “to have mercy on the people in our country who are scared now,” from those who are part of the LGBTQ+ community to immigrants and refugees. But for Bishop Budde, this moment was the culmination of a lifetime spent thinking about those pivot points when we’re called on to push past our fears and act with strength. With *How We Learn to Be Brave*, she teaches us that being brave is not a singular occurrence; it’s a journey that we can choose to undertake every day. Here, Bishop Budde explores the full range of decisive moments, from the most visible and dramatic (the decision to go), to the internal and personal (the decision to stay), to brave choices made with an eye toward the future (the decision to start), those born of suffering (the decision to accept that which we did not choose), and those that come unexpectedly (the decision to step up to the plate). Drawing on examples ranging from Harry Potter to the Gospel According to Luke, she seamlessly weaves together personal experiences with stories from scripture, history, and pop culture to underscore both the universality of these moments and the particular call each one of us must heed when they arrive.

#14. I Buried Her in a French Press: a memoir about finding my voice and the power of being heard – Sarah Barnes-Humphrey (Memoir) *There is no final destination in the pursuit of realizing self-worth—just the courage to begin.* You might not see it, but you have a superpower waiting to be uncovered. In *I Buried Her in a French Press*, Sarah shares how to build a path toward claiming self-worth, discovering inner-strength, and embracing self-love. She reveals how to turn pain into power, silence into voice, and doubt into momentum. A memoir *and* mirror, this book is a reminder that your voice matters, your story counts, and your next chapter can be the boldest one yet. If you’ve ever needed to feel seen or make a comeback, this book provides permission to rise. *I Buried Her in a French Press* is a must-read for beginning the journey toward becoming empowered and realizing that you are your best advocate.

#15. Imagination: a manifesto – Ruha Benjamin (Non-Fiction, Political Ideologies) A world without prisons? Ridiculous. Schools that foster the genius of every child? Impossible. Work that doesn’t strangle the life out of people? Naive. A society where everyone has food, shelter, love? In your dreams. *Exactly.* Ruha Benjamin, Princeton University professor, insists that imagination isn’t a luxury. It is a vital resource and powerful tool for collective liberation. *Imagination: A Manifesto* is her proclamation that we have the power to use our imaginations to challenge systems of oppression and to create a world in which everyone can thrive. But obstacles abound. We have inherited destructive ideas that trap us inside a dominant imagination. Consider

how racism, sexism, and classism make hierarchies, exploitation, and violence seem natural and inevitable—but all emerged from the human imagination. The most effective way to disrupt these deadly systems is to do so *collectively*. Benjamin highlights the educators, artists, activists, and many others who are refuting powerful narratives that justify the status quo, crafting new stories that reflect our interconnection, and offering creative approaches to seemingly intractable problems.

#16. The Letter Carrier – Francesca Giannon (Historical Fiction) Salento, Italy, June 1934: A coach stops in the main square of Lizzanello, a tight-knit village where everyone knows each other. A couple gets off: The man, Carlo, a child of the South, is happy to be back home after a long time away; the woman, Anna—his wife—is a stranger from the North. Carlo’s brother is there to meet them, and he and everyone else can’t help but notice that Anna is as beautiful as a Greek statue. But Anna is not like the other wives. She doesn’t gossip or attend church. She reads books no one else has ever heard of, exploring ideas that some find threatening. She even wears pants, just like a man, and thinks a woman should have rights, just like a man. There aren’t many options for a woman with Anna’s sensibilities, so when she learns that the post office is hiring, she leaps at the opportunity. A female letter carrier? It is unthinkable! But Anna passes the postal exam and soon becomes the invisible thread connecting the town as she delivers letters between clandestine lovers, families waiting to hear news of loved ones away at war, and even helping those who can’t read. Letters connect people, and they convey information and emotion. But for some in Lizzanello, letters are too little and too late. *The Letter Carrier* taps into the universal feeling of connection—and what happens when that connection perhaps comes at the wrong time.

#17. Looking at Women Looking at War: a war and justice diary – Victoria Amelina (Non-Fiction, Russian History) When Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Victoria Amelina was busy writing a novel, taking part in the country’s literary scene, and parenting her son. Now she became someone new: a war crimes researcher and the chronicler of extraordinary women like herself who joined the resistance. Everyone in Ukraine knew that Amelina was documenting the war. She photographed the ruins of schools and cultural centers; she recorded the testimonies of survivors and eyewitnesses to atrocities. And she slowly turned back into a storyteller, writing what would become this book. On the evening of June 27th, 2023, Amelina and three international writers stopped for dinner in the embattled Donetsk region. When a Russian cruise missile hit the restaurant, Amelina suffered grievous head injuries, and lost consciousness. She died on July 1st. She was thirty-seven. She left behind an incredible account of the ravages of war and the cost of resistance.

#18. The Mary We Forgot: What the Apostle to the Apostles Teaches the Church Today – Jennifer Powell McNutt (Non-fiction, Christian Living) Mary Magdalene's life was transformed when she was healed by Christ and joined his ministry from Galilee to Jerusalem. The Gospels teach that she was also a witness at the cross and the first one sent by Christ to preach his resurrection. Yet her story is often confused, scandalized, and undervalued by the church. In *The Mary We Forgot*, award-winning church historian and theologian Jennifer Powell McNutt unpacks Scripture and history to reveal the real Mary Magdalene: the first apostle of the good news and a model of discipleship for both men and women today. McNutt also invites readers along on her journey through southern France, tracing the path remembered by some church traditions as where Mary Magdalene spread the gospel. Christians will learn from the disciple known as the "apostle to the apostles" how to embrace Jesus's calling to "go and tell" with faith and courage. They'll also be encouraged by the reminder that God calls ordinary, imperfect, and unexpected people to share the good news of Jesus Christ. The hope of remembering Mary Magdalene is ultimately to better know the one to whom she pointed, the risen Christ.

#19. One of Our Kind – Nicola Yoon (Gothic Fiction) Jasmyn and King Williams move their family to the planned Black utopia of Liberty, California hoping to find a community of like-minded people, a place where their growing family can thrive. King settles in at once, embracing the Liberty ethos, including the luxe

wellness center at the top of the hill, which proves to be the heart of the community. But Jasmyn struggles to find her place. She expected to find liberals and social justice activists striving for racial equality, but Liberty residents seem more focused on booking spa treatments and ignoring the world's troubles. Jasmyn's only friends in the community are equally perplexed and frustrated by most residents' outlook. Then Jasmyn discovers a terrible secret about Liberty and its founders. Frustration turns to dread as their loved ones start embracing the Liberty way of life. Will the truth destroy her world in ways she never could have imagined? A gripping thriller with wry, razor-sharp social commentary, *One of Our Kind* explores the ways in which freedom is complicated by the presumptions we make about ourselves and each other.

#20. Paper Girl: a memoir of home and family in fractured America – Beth Macy (Memoir) Urbana, Ohio, was not a utopia when Beth Macy grew up there in the '70s and '80s—certainly not for her family. Her dad was known as the town drunk, which hurt, as did their poverty. But Urbana had a healthy economy and thriving schools, and Macy had middle-class schoolmates whose families became her role models. Though she left for college on a Pell Grant and then a faraway career in journalism, she still clung gratefully to the place that had helped raise her. But as Macy's mother's health declined in 2020, she couldn't shake the feeling that her town had dramatically hardened. Macy had grown up as the paper girl, delivering the local newspaper, which was the community's civic glue. Now she found scant local news and precious little civic glue. Yes, much of the work that once supported the middle class had gone away, but that didn't begin to cover the forces turning Urbana into a poorer and angrier place. Absenteeism soared in the schools and in the workplace as a mental health crisis gripped the small city. Some of her old friends now embraced conspiracies. In nearby Springfield, Macy watched as her ex-boyfriend—once the most liberal person she knew—became a lead voice of opposition against the Haitian immigrants, parroting false talking points throughout the 2024 presidential campaign. This was not an assignment Beth Macy had ever imagined taking on, but after her mother's death, she decided to figure out what happened to Urbana in the forty years since she'd left. The result is an astonishing book that, by taking us into the heart of one place, brings into focus our most urgent set of national issues.

#21. Sandwich – Catherine Newman (Women's Fiction) For the past two decades, Rocky has looked forward to her family's yearly escape to Cape Cod. Their humble beach-town rental has been the site of sweet memories, sunny days, great meals, and messes of all kinds: emotional, marital, and—thanks to the cottage's ancient plumbing—septic too. This year's vacation, with Rocky sandwiched between her half-grown kids and fully aging parents, promises to be just as delightful as summers past—except, perhaps, for Rocky's hormonal bouts of rage and melancholy. (Hello, menopause!) Her body is changing—her life is, too. And then a chain of events sends Rocky into the past, reliving both the tenderness and sorrow of a handful of long-ago summers. It's one precious week: everything is in balance; everything is in flux. And when Rocky comes face to face with her family's history and future, she is forced to accept that she can no longer hide her secrets from the people she loves.

#22. Something to Look Forward To – Fannie Flagg (Short Stories) Fannie Flagg once said that what the world needs now is a good laugh. And that is what she gives us in these warmhearted, always surprising stories about people who are finding clever ways to deal with the curveballs life sometimes throws at us. Velma in Kansas, a loving great-grandmother, struggles to bridge generational gaps with her family. We cheer for Helen, in Ithaca, New York, who takes an audacious course of action when her husband leaves her for a younger woman. In Bent Fork, Wyoming; in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; in Tucson, Arizona; and in towns and cities all across America, people figure out inventive ways to overcome obstacles to happiness. And in Fort Wayne, Indiana, Special Agent Frawley is studying the mysteries of being human from an original perspective. With her imagination, humor, and great understanding of the human heart, Fannie Flagg holds a mirror up to the

foibles, ingenuity, and imagination of people, inspiring us to laugh at the sometimes eccentric, sometimes brilliant ways people cope with, and ultimately prevail over, the challenges of modern life.

#23. Still Life at Eighty: the next interesting thing – Abigail Thomas (Memoir) As she approaches eighty, what she herself calls old age, Abigail Thomas accepts her new life, quieter than before, no driving, no dancing, mostly sitting in her chair in a sunny corner with three dogs for company—three dogs, vivid memories, bugs and birds and critters that she watches out her window. No one but this beloved, best-selling memoirist, could make so much over what might seem so little. Memories fall like confetti, as time contracts, shoots forward, dawdles, and there she is, back in her twenties in Washington Square Park, drinking, having sex with strangers, falling in and out of love, believing in a better world. Whole decades evaporate as she sits in her chair, and a spider takes up residence beside her, who will become her boon companion for the next week. Sometimes dread arrives, inhabits her body like a shadow and all she can do is write it away, pay attention to what catches her eye, sticks in her brain. Whatever keeps her in the moment.

#24.. Tara Is Visible – Jane Tara (Women’s Fiction) Tilda Finch is a successful businesswoman, a mother to two wonderful adult daughters, and besides an unexpected divorce, she’s living a relatively happy life. Until she wakes up one morning and her finger seems to have disappeared. She thinks back to the kombucha she drank the night before—perhaps it was spiked? Studying herself in the mirror, she discovers one of her ears has also disappeared! She rushes to the doctor, who after a multitude of tests says she’s sorry to inform her that she has invisibility, a disorder that affects millions of women worldwide, mostly after the age of forty—she *is* disappearing, and there is no cure. Tilda isn’t overly surprised. She’s felt invisible for years. But after attending a support group for women like her and seeing how resigned they are to simply fading away, she thinks there must be a better way. Hesitant, she seeks out a controversial therapist who compels her to realize that she can’t expect the world to see her if she can’t first see herself. And the new man she meets, who she thinks is blind to her faults, might just see her more clearly than anyone has ever before. Because if we can get the voices in our heads to stop being so critical and be more compassionate, we might realize how wonderful we truly are.

MISSION STUDY BOOKS: Palestine

#25 In My Mother's Footsteps: a Palestinian refugee returns home - Mona Hajjar Halaby (Non-Fiction, Biography) 1948, Jerusalem. Zakia is forced to flee the only home she’s ever known as war rips through the leafy streets and the bustling spice-filled souqs. Taking just one suitcase, Zakia thinks she’ll be able to return soon. But within weeks, she realises she won’t be allowed back to her beloved homeland. 2007, California. Mona grew up with her mother Zakia’s memories of Palestine, imagining the muezzin’s call for prayer and the medley of church bells her mother so vividly described to her. So, when Mona gets the opportunity to teach conflict resolution in Ramallah, she also embarks on a personal pilgrimage to find her mother’s home in militarized and occupied Jerusalem. With cherished letters from her mother who writes to Mona regularly, sharing her story of Jerusalem, Mona dreams of one day being guided by her through the winding cobblestone alleys of the Old City. Yet it is Mona who instead holds her mother’s hand as they finally visit Jerusalem together. After fifty-nine years of exile, her mother is returning to the place she once called home – but can a lifetime of loss ever be healed?)

#26 Israel–Palestine Explained: a rigorous guide to a long-running conflict - Lorenzo Llorente (Non-Fiction, Middle Eastern Politics) If you want Israel, Palestine, Gaza, Jerusalem and the West Bank explained with clarity, rigor and humanity, this is the book you were looking for. It follows history, international law, geopolitics and everyday life from the origins to the present day with one ambitious aim: that you can form your own view from verifiable facts and documented sources. Every sensitive assertion is attributed, dated

and cross-checked. Where there is disagreement, it is explained; when better data emerge, they are updated with a note. A book that changes how you read the news. Afterwards you will follow Israel–Palestine with a compass: you will recognize the historical references, the legal language, the routes on the map, and the logic behind the numbers. It will not tell you what to think; it will give you the tools to think better.

#27 Rooted in Faith and Justice: Christian Calls to Conscience & Cries for Peace in Palestine – Edited by Rebecca Choate, Krista Johnson Weicksel & Peter Makari (Non-Fiction, Christian Social Issues) Are you struggling to understand the complexities and injustices of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? *Rooted in Faith and Justice* offers a powerful and enlightening perspective through the eyes of Palestinian Christian leaders and thinkers. As the world's attention is on the devastation of Gaza, immerse yourself in the issues of the ongoing struggle for justice and peace, informed by our faith and perspectives of our church partners there. Gain deep insights into the historical and contemporary issues facing Palestinians, from displacement to daily oppression. *Rooted in Faith and Justice* will challenge your perspectives, confront double standards, and help you discover pathways to solidarity and action. Engage with the realities of Palestine, rooted in faith, justice, and peace, and become part of the movement towards a just and lasting peace. (This book is endorsed by the General Ministers of the United Church of Christ.)

#28 Speak Bird, Speak Again: Palestinian Arab folktales - Ibrahim Muhawi & Sharif Kanaana (Non-Fiction, Middle Eastern Folktales) As native Palestinians, the authors over the course of several years, collected tales from the regions of the Galilee, Gaza, and the West Bank, determining which were the most widely known and appreciated and selecting the ones that best represent the Palestinian Arab folk narrative tradition. Great care has been taken with the translations to maintain the original flavor, humor, and cultural nuances in tales that are at once earthy and whimsical and that also parallel stories found in the larger Arab folk tradition. *Speak, Bird, Speak Again* is an essential text in Palestinian culture and a must for those who want to deepen their understanding of an enduring people.

#29 A Very Short History of the Israel-Palestine Conflict - Ilan Pappé (Non-Fiction, Middle Eastern History) The devastation of 7 October 2023 and the horrors that followed astounded the world. But the Israel–Palestine conflict didn't start on 7 October. It didn't start in 1967 either, when Israel occupied the West Bank, or in 1948 when the state of Israel was declared. It started in 1882, when the first Zionist settlers arrived in what was then Ottoman Palestine. Ilan Pappé untangles the history of two peoples, now sharing one land. Going back to the founding fathers of Zionism, Pappé expertly takes us through the twists and turns of international policy towards Israel–Palestine, Palestinian resistance to occupation, and the changes taking place in Israel itself.

#30 The Wall Between Us: Notes from the Holy Land - Matthew Small (Non-Fiction, Biography) Writer Matthew Small travelled to the Holy Land to further his understanding of the enduring conflict between Israel and Palestine. While there, he discovered beauty, fear and suffering like nowhere else in the world. In these honest and evocative reflections, Small retells his experiences of crossing into the West Bank to work the olive harvest with Palestinian farmers. He relates his encounters with organizations that are determinedly working to sow the seeds of peace in soils that are deeply scarred by suffering and war. While reliving these unforgettable experiences, through his writing he struggles to find why the wall between these two groups of people exists. Deciding to join a group of international and Israeli volunteers, Small attempts to show that, despite the ongoing occupation, peace is not lost, but still to be discovered.

Reading For Renewal Record Sheet 2026 -2027

Due to your local church's Reading for Renewal contact in March 2027. 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	Abundant Lives - Amanda Udis-Kessler	13	How We Learn to Be Brave – Mariann Edgar Budde
2	The Book Club for Troublesome Women - Marie Bostwick	14	I Buried Her in a French Press – Sarah Barnes-Humphrey
3	Canticle – Janet Rich Edwards	15	Imagination -Ruha Benjamin
4	The Daughter of Rome – Angela Hunt	16	The Letter Carrier – Francesca Giannone
5	Dream Count – Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie	17	Looking at Women Looking at War – Victoria Amelina
6	Evensong – Stewart O’Nan	18	The Mary We Forgot – Jennifer Powell McNutt
7	The Fairytale Life of Dorothy Gale – Virginia Kantra	19	One of Our Kind – Nicola Yoon
8	For the Sun After Long Nights – Fatemah Jamalpour & Nilo Tabrizy	20	Paper Girl – Beth Macy
9	The Girl Who Baptized Herself -Meggan Waterson	21	Sandwich – Catherine Newman
10	Happy Land -Dolen Perkins-Valdez	22	Something to Look Forward To – Fannie Flagg
11	Harlem Rhapsody – Victoria Christopher Murray	23	Still Life at Eighty – Abigail Thomas
12	Heart of a Stranger – Angela Buchdahl	24	Tilda Is Visible – Jane Tara

MISSION STUDY BOOKS -

25	In My Mother’s Footsteps – Mona Hajjar Halaby
26	Israel-Palestine Explained – Lorenzo Llorente
27	Rooted in Faith & Justice - Rebecca Choate, Krista Johnson Weicksel & Peter Makari
28	Speak Bird, Speak Again – Ibrahim Muhawi & Sharif Kanaana
29	A Very Short History of the Israel-Palestine Conflict – Ilan Pappé
30	The Wall Between Us – Matthew Small

Total number of 2026-2027 Reading for Renewal Books read: _____

I am a **Qualified Reader**: Yes _____ No _____

Name: _____

YOUNG READER BOOKS: Books to share with the young people in your life...or to enjoy yourself!

Girls on the Rise by Amanda Gorman - Girls are strong and powerful alone, but even stronger when they work to uplift one another. In this galvanizing original poem by presidential inaugural poet Amanda Gorman, girls and girlhood are celebrated in their many forms, all beautiful, not for how they look but for how they look into the face of fear. Creating a rousing rallying cry with vivid illustrations by Loveis Wise, Gorman reminds us how girls have shaped our history while marching boldly into the future. (Ages: 5 – 10)

May You Love and Be Loved: wishes for your life by Cleo Wade - From the bestselling author of *What the Road Said*, Cleo Wade’s next heartfelt and lyrical picture book is a love letter to the infinite potential of the future, expressing the many hopes and dreams we hold for our children and ourselves. Gorgeously illustrated by the author and filled to the brim with her signature big-hearted emotions, this book is an important reminder that, above all, what we wish for everyone’s precious life is that they can love and be loved. (Ages: 1 -8)

Be You! by Peter H. Reynolds - Discover a joyful reminder of the ways that every child is unique and special, from the beloved creator of *The Dot*, *Happy Dreamer*, and *New York Times* bestseller, *The Word Collector*. Here, Reynolds reminds readers to "be your own work of art." To be patient, persistent, and true. Because there is one, and *only* one, YOU. (Ages: 3 – 7)

Growing Home by Beth Ferry - An unlikely team of talkative plants, a curious spider, and a grumpy goldfish use their newfound magical abilities to defend their family from a greedy human in this charming middle grade novel from *New York Times* bestselling author Beth Ferry, with illustrations from the award-winning Fan brothers. (Ages: 6 – 9)

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If your church has shared these books, or used the books, with young people in you congregation, please complete the following form and return to:

readingforrenewal@uccfla.org

Church Name _____

Church Address _____

Name and contact information for person completing the form:

Name _____

Contact email or address _____

Please note which of the books were read or shared (and number of times) and the number of young readers served.

BOOK TITLE	READ/SHARED (# of times)	NUMBER OF YOUNG READERS
<i>Girls on the Rise</i>		
<i>May You Love and Be Loved</i>		
<i>Be You!</i>		
<i>Growing Home</i>		

Thank you for your participation!