

Florida United Church of Christ Women  
Reading for Renewal  
2023 - 2024  
*Prayer Journey*

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This year's list contains a selection of books with content related to the theme of "prayer journey", including titles focused on praying, meditating, living a life of prayerfulness or in a faith community, or building a faith relationship; there are also a few books that touch on current, cultural topics; the Mission Study books this year are focused on Ukraine. 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 2024 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 must in some way tie to the selected annual conference theme. There are occasional exceptions.

## Reading for Renewal List for 2023 - 2024

**#1 Bless Your Heart, Rae Sutton** – Susannah B. Lewis (Women’s Fiction) When Raeley Ann Sutton’s mother passes away and leaves her the house where she grew up, Rae can’t imagine how the little old place might restore her broken life. Mourning the recent end to her marriage she moves back into the house, with her daughter and overweight dog. One there she is embraced by her mother’s close-knit circle of friends: the Third Thursday ladies. Rae joins their ministry-slash-book-club-slash-gossip-circle and allows the women to speak wry honesty and witty humor into her tired heart.

**#2 The Book of Lost Names** – Kristin Harmel (Women’s Fiction) Eva Traube Abrams, a semi-retired librarian in Florida, is shelving books when her eyes lock on a photograph in the *New York Times*. She freezes; it’s an image of a book she hasn’t seen in more than sixty years—a book she recognizes as *The Book of Lost Names*. The accompanying article discusses the looting of libraries by the Nazis across Europe during World War II—an experience Eva remembers well—and the search to reunite people with the texts taken from them so long ago. The book in the photograph, an eighteenth-century religious text thought to have been taken from France in the waning days of the war, is one of the most fascinating cases. Now housed in Berlin’s Zentral- und Landesbibliothek library, it appears to contain some sort of code, but researchers don’t know where it came from—or what the code means. Only Eva holds the answer, but does she have the strength to revisit old memories?

**#3 Daughter of Cana** – Angela Hunt (Biblical Fiction) Thomas and Tasmin, twin siblings hired to oversee a wedding feast in Cana, worry when the host runs out of wine . . . until a guest tells Tasmin to have the servants fill the pitchers by the gate with water from the cistern. Reluctantly, she obeys and is amazed when rainwater turns into the finest wine ever tasted in Cana. When Thomas impulsively decides to follow the teacher from Nazareth, he and Tasmin argue—since the twins have been together since the womb, Tasmin can’t accept losing her brother to some magician-prophet. Aided by Jude, younger brother to Jesus of Nazareth, she decides to follow the Nazarene’s group and do whatever she must to mend the fractured relationship and bring her brother home.

**#4 The Daughters of Madurai** – Rajasree Variyar (Women’s Fiction) **Madurai, 1992.** A young mother in a poor family, Janani is told she is useless if she can’t produce a son—or worse, if she bears daughters. They let her keep her first baby girl, but the rest are taken away as soon as they are born, and murdered. But Janani can’t forget the daughters she was never allowed to love . . . **Sydney, 2019.** Nila has a secret; one she’s been keeping from her parents for too long. Before she can say anything, her grandfather in India falls ill, so she agrees to join her parents on a trip to Madurai. Nila knows little about where her family came from or who they left behind. What she’s about to learn will change her forever. While *The Daughters of Madurai* explores the harrowing issue of female infanticide, it’s also a universal story about the bond between mothers and daughters, the strength of women, the power of love in overcoming all obstacles—and the secrets we must keep to protect the ones we hold dear.

**#5 Dusk, Night, Dawn** - Anne Lamott (Non-Fiction/Spiritual Self-Help) Anne Lamott explores the tough questions that many of us grapple with. How can we recapture the confidence we once had as we stumble through the dark times that seem increasingly bleak? As bad news piles up—from climate crises to daily assaults on civility—how can we cope? Where, she asks, “do we start to get our world and joy and hope and our faith in life itself back . . . with our sore feet, hearing loss, stiff fingers, poor digestion, stunned minds, broken hearts?” We begin, Lamott says, by accepting our flaws and embracing our humanity. Drawing from her own experiences, Lamott shows us the intimate and human ways we can adopt to move through life’s dark places and toward the light of hope that still burns ahead for all of us.

**#6 Faith Still Moves Mountains: miraculous stories of the healing power of prayer** – Harris Faulkner (Non-Fiction/Prayer) We need reminders of God’s power now more than ever. We often think about prayer as a wish list, with God as Santa Claus. The reality is that the power of prayer reminds us not only how small we are, but also how big God is. Prayer is hope put into action. And prayer works. Along with stories of God’s presence, the book includes an exclusive packet of newly written prayers. Created to reflect the current times, this prayer booklet will provide a road map for putting the lessons of these stories into action. *Faith Still Moves Mountains* reminds us that God’s light always shines through the darkness. Through these testimonies, we learn prayer isn’t just a ritual, it’s a vital spiritual strategy in a world that wants us to give up the fight.

**#7 Feathers of Hope** – Sharon Garlough Brown (Contemporary Christian Fiction) In a season of change, Wren Crawford and her great-aunt, Katherine Rhodes, share the journey as companions in sorrow and hope. As Katherine prepares to retire as the director of the New Hope Retreat Center, she faces both personal and professional challenges—especially after the arrival of the board's candidate to replace her. Not only must she confront more unresolved grief from her past, but she's invited to embrace painful and unsettling insights about her own blind spots. Wren's world is shifting and expanding as she presses forward in recovery from a period of deep depression. Still processing open questions around the death of her best friend, Casey, Wren stewards her grief by offering compassionate care to the residents of the nursing home where she now works. But the shedding of her old life is exhausting—especially as she doesn't yet see what new life will emerge

**#8 Learning to Pray: a guide for everyone** – James Martin (Non-Fiction/Prayer) *Learning to Pray* explains what prayer is, what to expect from praying, how to do it, and how it can transform us when we make it a regular practice in our lives. A trusted guide walking beside us as we navigate our unique spiritual paths, Martin lays out the different styles and traditions of prayer throughout Christian history and invites us to experiment and discover which works best to feed our soul and build intimacy with our Creator. Father Martin makes clear there is not one secret formula for praying. But like any relationship, each person can discover the best style for building an intimate relationship with God, regardless of religion or denomination. Prayer, he teaches us, is open and accessible to anyone willing to open their heart.

**#9 The Lives We Actually Have: 100 blessings for imperfect days** – Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie (Non-Fiction/Prayer) Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie offer creative, faith-based blessings that center gratitude and hope while acknowledging our real, messy lives. Formatted like a prayer book, *The Lives We Actually Have* is an oasis and a landing spot for weary souls, with blessings that focus on the full range of human moments: garbage days, lovely days, grief-stricken days, and even (especially) completely ordinary days. These heartfelt blessings are a chance to exhale when we feel everything from careworn to restless, devastated to bored. Let's have a reminder that we don't need to wait for perfect lives when we can bless the lives we actually have.

**#10 Master Slave Husband Wife: an epic journey from slavery to freedom** – Ilyon Woo (Biography) In 1848, a young, enslaved couple, Ellen and William Craft, achieved one of the boldest feats of self-emancipation in American history. Posing as master and slave, while sustained by their love as husband and wife, they made their escape together across more than 1,000 miles, riding out in the open on steamboats, carriages, and trains that took them from bondage in Georgia to the free states of the North. The tale of their adventure soon made them celebrities, and generated headlines around the country. Americans could not get enough of this charismatic young couple, who traveled another 1,000 miles criss-crossing New England, drawing thunderous applause as they spoke alongside some of the greatest abolitionist luminaries of the day—among them Frederick Douglass and William Wells Brown. But even then, they were not out of danger. With the passage of an infamous new Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, all Americans became accountable for returning refugees like the Crafts to slavery. Then yet another adventure began, as slave hunters came up from Georgia, forcing the Crafts to flee once again—this time from the United States. With three epic journeys compressed into one monumental bid for freedom, *Master Slave Husband Wife* is an American love story—one that would challenge the nation's core precepts of life, liberty, and justice for all—one that challenges us even now.

**#11 A Million Reasons Why** – Jessica Strawser (Contemporary Fiction) When two strangers are linked by a mail-in DNA test, it's an answered prayer – that is for one half-sister. For the other, it will dismantle everything she knows to be true. From the moment Caroline meets Sela, both must reexamine what it really means to be family, the depths of a mother's love and the limits and the power of forgiveness.

**#12 On the Corner of Hope and Main: a blessings novel** – Beverly Jenkins (Fiction) Trent July has been the mayor of this historic town for the past four years, but now he's ready to let someone else take up the mantle. Barrett Payne, a former Marine, decides he wants the job. But when a surprise candidate also enters the ring, the town has opinions on who would be the best candidate. And that's not the only drama, as Malachi "Mal" July continues to make reparations for the damage he's caused and to the people he's betrayed, especially his lady love Bernadine. Is she finally ready to forgive him and let the past go? As the residents of Henry Adams have learned, life will throw obstacles their way, but it's how they come together and rise above these challenges that keep the bonds of their close-knit community strong.

**#13 The Prayer Jars Trilogy: 3 Amish romances** – Wanda Brunstetter (Amish Fiction) Antique jars hidden around an Amish farm are found filled with slips of paper containing thoughts, quotes, and prayers by an unknown author. Three young women each find a jar that takes her on a journey of personal reflection. When the author is revealed, can the jars become a tool to restore a family's faith?

**#14 The Prophet's Wife: a novel of an American faith** – Libbie Grant (Religious Historical Fiction) In 1825, in rural Pennsylvania, Emma Hale marries an itinerant treasure-digger, a man who has nothing but a peep-stone in his pocket and a conviction that he can speak directly to God. His name is Joseph Smith and in a few short years, he will found his own religion, gather zealous adherents by the tens of thousands, and fracture Emma's life and faith. While the Mormon religion finds its feet and runs beyond the grasp of its founder, Emma struggles to maintain her place in Joseph's heart—and in the religion that has become her world. The Mormons make themselves outcasts everywhere they go. Joseph can only maintain his authority by issuing ever-stranger commandments on God's behalf, culminating in an edict that men should marry as many women as they please. The Mormons' adoption of polygamy only sets them further apart, and soon their communities are ravaged by violence at the hands of their outraged fellow Americans. For Emma, things take a more personal toll as Joseph brings in a new wife—a woman whom Emma considers a sister. Emma knows there will never be peace until Joseph faces the law. But on the half-wild edge of the frontier, he's more likely to find death at the hands of a vigilante posse than a fair trial. For the sake of her people—and her soul—Emma must convince the Prophet of God to surrender... and perhaps to sacrifice his life.

**#15 The Restoration of Celia Fairchild** – Marie Bostwick (Women's Fiction) Celia Fairchild, known as advice columnist 'Dear Calpurnia', has insight into everybody's problems – except her own. Still bruised by the end of a marriage she thought was her last chance to create a family, Celia receives an unexpected answer to a "Dear Birthmother" letter. Celia throws herself into proving she's a perfect adoptive mother material – with a stable home and income – only to lose her job. Her one option: sell the Charleston house left to her by her recently departed, estranged Aunt Calpurnia. Arriving in Charleston, Celia learns that Calpurnia had become a hoarder, the house is a wreck, and selling it will require a drastic, rapid makeover. The task of renovation seems overwhelming and risky. But with the help of new neighbors, old friends, and an unlikely sisterhood of strong, creative women who need her as much as she needs them, Celia knits together the truth about her estranged family — and about herself.

**#16 Revival Season** – Monica West (Literary Fiction) Every summer, fifteen-year-old Miriam Horton and her family pack themselves tight in their old minivan and travel through small southern towns for revival season: the time when Miriam's father—one of the South's most famous preachers—holds massive healing services for people desperate to be cured of ailments and disease. But, this summer, the revival season doesn't go as planned, and after one service in which Reverend Horton's healing powers are tested like never before, Miriam witnesses a shocking act of violence that shakes her belief in her father—and her faith. When the Hortons return home, Miriam's confusion only grows as she discovers she might have the power to heal—even though her father and the church have always made it clear that such power is denied to women. Over the course of the following year, Miriam must decide between her faith, her family, and her newfound power that might be able to save others, but if discovered by her father, could destroy Miriam.

**#17 A Rhythm of Prayer: a collection of meditations for renewal** – Edited by Sarah Bessey (Non-Fiction/Religious Meditation) Sarah Bessey introduces this collection by stating that she "grew up and came of age in prayer circles, particularly prayer circles with women...Given the nature of my work as both a writer and in co-leading the Evolving Faith (with the late Rachel Held Evans) community, I hear from people all the time that they don't know how to pray anymore, that they miss prayer, or that they need to reimagine prayer...and so I began to dream of this book" Her hope is that every reader will have their understanding of prayer expanded, lit up, renewed and reengaged - to find a new way to pray, a new understanding of the ancient ways and a new language to express deepest longings and hopes for themselves and the world through prayer.

**#18 Something Good** – Vanessa Miller (Women's Fiction) Alexis Marshall never meant to cause the accident that left Jon-Jon Robinson paralyzed – but though guilt plagues her, her husband hopes to put the past behind them. Trish Robinson is just trying to hold it together after the accident that left her 20-year-old son, Jon-Jon, dependent and depressed. As the bills pile up Trish wants to move on, but her husband is filled with rage toward Alexis. Trish can't see

how anything good can come from so much hate and strife, so she decides to pray until God intervenes. The one day Marquita Lewis rings the Robinson's doorbell with a baby in her arms and changes everything.

**#19 Sparrow's Prayer** – Roger Hutchison (Children's Fiction - appropriate for all ages!) Sparrow wakes each morning, ready to sing a prayer of thanksgiving. But not today. Today his words get tangled and knotted in his beak like old yarn and straw. He feels sad and gray, and he's not sure why. So, Sparrow decides to ask his friends Turtle, Mousie, and Buck for advice on how to pray. Each friend shows Sparrow a different way to pray without words, through generosity, art, and movement. As the day ends, Sparrow meditates on a rose aglow in the evening light and has an epiphany: Every living thing does what God created them to do. Each life is, itself, a prayer of thanksgiving. Often, the most powerful prayers do not include words. Lyrical and unique, *Sparrow's Prayer* is a tale about an unexpected and life-changing encounter with the holy.

**#20 Stealing** – Margaret Verble (Cultural Heritage Fiction) Kit Crockett lives on a farm with her grief-stricken, widowed father, tending the garden, fishing in a local stream, and reading Nancy Drew mysteries from the library bookmobile. One day, Kit discovers a mysterious and beautiful woman has moved in just down the road. Kit and the newcomer, Bella, become friends, and the lonely Kit draws comfort from her. But when a malicious neighbor finds out, Kit suddenly finds herself at the center of a tragic, fatal crime and becomes a ward of the court. Her Cherokee family wants to raise her, but the righteous Christians in town instead send her to a religious boarding school. Kit's heritage is attacked, and she's subjected to religious indoctrination and other forms of abuse. But Kit secretly keeps a journal recounting what she remembers—and revealing just what she has forgotten. Over the course of *Stealing*, she unravels the truth of how she ended up at the school and plots a way out. If only she can make her plan work in time.

**#21 Truth's Table: black women's musings on life, love and liberation** – Christina Edmondson, Michelle Higgins, Ekemi Uwan (Non-Fiction; Christian Women Essays) Once upon a time, an activist, a theologian, and a psychologist walked into a group chat. Everything was laid out on the table: Dating. Politics. The Black church. Pop culture. Soon, other Black women began pulling up chairs to gather round. And so, the *Truth's Table* podcast was born. In their literary debut, co-hosts Christina Edmondson, Michelle Higgins, and Ekemini Uwan offer stories by Black women and for Black women examining theology, politics, race, culture, and gender matters through a Christian lens. For anyone seeking to explore the spiritual dimensions of hot-button issues within the church, or anyone thirsty to deepen their faith, *Truth's Table* provides exactly the survival guide we need.

**#22 Twice a Daughter: a search for identity, family and belonging** – Julie Ryan McGue (Non-Fiction/Memoir) Julie is adopted. She is also a twin. Because their adoption was closed, she and her sister lack both a health history and their adoption papers—which becomes an issue for Julie when, at forty-eight years old, she finds herself facing several serious health issues. Julie's adoptive parents aren't happy that their daughters want to locate their birth parents—and that is only the first of many obstacles Julie will come up against as she digs into her background. Julie's search for her birth relatives spans years and involves a search agency, a PI, a confidential intermediary, a judge, an adoption agency, a social worker, and a genealogist. By journey's end, what began as a simple desire for a family medical history has evolved into a complicated quest—one that unearths secrets, lies, and family members that are literally right next door.

**#23 The Unlikely Yarn of the Dragon Lady** – Sharon J. Mondragon (Christian Fiction) Margaret, Rose, Jane and Fran had a good thing going: meet every week in the dusty quiet of their peaceful chapel and knit prayer shawls. No muss, just ministry. That is, until their pastor boots them out of the church in his last-ditch effort to revive the dwindling congregation. Without the familiar pattern the group has been stuck in, their own losses, pain and struggles rise to the surface. The people and the situations they encounter every time they try to simply sit and knit take them further out of their comfort zone than they ever imagined. Uptight Margaret laments that knitting prayer shawls in the mall where people can watch is the most ridiculous idea she has ever heard. Prayer belongs in the church, not out in the public eye...how are they supposed to knit holiness into these shawls if they're constantly distracted by people?

**#24 Untamed** – Glennon Doyle (Non-Fiction/Memoir) In her most revealing and powerful memoir yet, Doyle explores the joy and peace we discover when we stop striving to meet others' expectations and start trusting the voice deep within us. This is how you find yourself. There is a voice of longing inside each woman. We strive so mightily to be



good: good partners, daughters, mothers, employees, and friends. We hope all this striving will make us feel alive. Instead, it leaves us feeling weary, stuck, overwhelmed, and underwhelmed. We look at our lives and wonder: Wasn't it all supposed to be more beautiful than this? We quickly silence that question, telling ourselves to be grateful, hiding our discontent—even from ourselves. For many years, Glennon Doyle denied her own discontent. Then, while speaking at a conference, she looked at a woman across the room and fell instantly in love. Three words flooded her mind: There She Is. At first, Glennon assumed these words came to her from on high. But she soon realized they had come to her from within. This was her own voice—the one she had buried beneath decades of numbing addictions, cultural conditioning, and institutional allegiances. This was the voice of the girl she had been before the world told her who to be.

**#25 Watering the Soul** – Courtney Peppernell (Non-fiction/Poetry & prose) Poetry and prose to encourage us to grow. *Watering the Soul* is a timeless reminder that everyone needs time, love, and forgiveness. In the deepest, most enchanting part of the forest, a creature hands you a seed. Within the seed is your soul, ready to be grown again. Filled with themes that focus on forgiveness, gratitude, togetherness, and equality, Peppernell takes you on a journey to find a precious yet profound understanding; that a seed is not grown with haste and nor is becoming whole, that in each and every step, we find the meaning of watering the soul.

**#26 While Time Remains: a North Korean defector's search for freedom in America** – Yeonmi Park (Non-Fiction/Political Freedom) After defecting from North Korea, Yeonmi Park found liberty and freedom in America. But she also found a chilling crackdown on self-expression and thought that reminded her of the brutal regime she risked her life to escape. When she spoke out about the mass political indoctrination she saw around her in the United States, Park faced censorship and even death threats. In *While Time Remains*, Park sounds the alarm for Americans by highlighting the dangerous hypocrisies, mob tactics, and authoritarian tendencies that speak in the name of wokeness and social justice. No one is spared in her eye-opening account, including the elites who claim to care for the poor and working classes but turn their backs on anyone who dares to think independently. Park arrived in America eight years ago with no preconceptions, no political aims, and no partisan agenda. With urgency and unique insight, the bestselling author and human rights activist reminds us of the fragility of freedom, and what we must do to preserve it.

**#27 Widowland** – C.J. Carey (Dystopian Fiction) Thirteen years have passed since England surrendered to the Nazis and formed a Grand Alliance with Germany. It was forced to adopt many of its oppressive ideologies, one of which was the strict classification of women into hierarchical groups based on the perceived value they brought to society. Rose Ransom, a member of the privileged Geli class, remembers life from before the war but knows better than to let it show. She works for the Ministry of Culture, rewriting the classics of English literature to ensure there are no subversive thoughts that will give women any ideas. Outbreaks of insurgency have been seen across the country with graffiti made up of seditious lines from forbidden works by women painted on public buildings. Suspicion has fallen on Widowland, the run-down slums where childless women over fifty have been banished. Rose is given the dangerous task of infiltrating Widowland to find the source of the rebellion before the Leader arrives in England for the Coronation ceremony of King Edward VIII and Queen Wallis. Will Rose follow her instructions and uncover the criminals? Or will she fight for what she knows in her heart is right?

**#28 Women Talking** – Miriam Toews (Literary Fiction) One evening, eight Mennonite women climb into a hay loft to conduct a secret meeting. For the past two years, each of these women, and more than a hundred other girls in their colony, has been repeatedly violated in the night by demons coming to punish them for their sins. Now that the women have learned they were in fact drugged and attacked by a group of men from their own community, they are determined to protect themselves and their daughters from future harm. While the men of the colony are off in the city, attempting to raise enough money to bail out the rapists and bring them home, these women—all illiterate, without any knowledge of the world outside their community and unable even to speak the language of the country they live in—have very little time to make a choice: Should they stay in the only world they've ever known or should they dare to escape? Based on real events and told through the "minutes" of the women's all-female symposium.

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## MISSION STUDY BOOKS: *Ukraine*

**#29 Black Square: adventures in post-Soviet Ukraine** – Sophie Pinkham (Non-Fiction) Each time Ukraine has rebuilt itself over the last century, it has been plagued by the same conflicts: corruption, poverty, and, most of all, Russian aggression. Sophie Pinkham saw all this and more during ten years in Ukraine and Russia, a period that included the Maidan revolution of 2013–14, Russia’s annexation of Crimea, and the ensuing war in Donbass. With a keen eye for the dark absurdities of post-Soviet society, Pinkham presents a dynamic account of contemporary Ukrainian life. She meets—among others—a charismatic doctor helping to smooth the transition to democracy even as he struggles with drug dependence; a band of Ukrainian, Russian, and Belarusian hippies in a Crimean idyll; and a Jewish clarinetist agitating for Ukrainian liberation. These fascinating personalities, rendered in a bold, original style, deliver an indelible impression of a country on the brink.

**#30 The Dreamtime** – Mstyslav Chernov (Fiction; a novel translated by Peter Leonard and Felix Helbing) A unique point of view on the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014, through four intertwining narratives: a guilt-ridden doctor trying to exorcise his demons by exposing himself to war; a young woman tending to her ailing father as the bombs fall around them in Russian-occupied Slovyansk; a mysterious sociopath playing a cat-and-mouse game with an ex-lover; and a forensic expert solving a murder case while trying to save her marriage with a discharged soldier. As these threads unfurl, through harrowing scenes of personal and collective trauma, an enigmatic pattern emerges. The plots span in space from Ukraine’s war-torn Donbas to southern Europe and southeast Asia, tied together by themes of existential conflict and the blurred line between reality and dreams. The novel was first published in Kyiv in 2020 as the focal point for a video-art exhibition on the media’s role in creating public collective experiences. It was well received by critics and audiences and praised for its realism in depicting war, for its creative literary depiction of how dreams reflect the psyche, and for its masterly prose.

**#31 The Fight of Our Lives: my time with Zelensky, Ukraine’s battle for democracy and what it means for the world** – Iuliia Mendel; translated by Madeline G. Levine (Non-Fiction) Zelenskyy’s former press secretary tells the story of his improbable rise from popular comedian to the president of Ukraine. Mendel had a front row seat to many of the key events preceding the 2022 Russian invasion. From attending meetings between Zelenskyy and Putin and other European leaders, visiting the front lines in Donbas, to fielding press inquiries after the infamous phone calls between Donald Trump and Zelenskyy that led to Trump’s first impeachment. Mendel saw firsthand Zelenskyy’s efforts to transform his country from a poor, backward Soviet state into a vibrant, prosperous European democracy and sheds light on the massive economic problems facing Ukraine and the entrenched corrupt oligarchs in league with Russia. She witnessed the Kremlin’s repeated attacks to discredit Zelenskyy through disinformation and an army of bots and trolls. Woven into her account are details about her own life as a member of Zelenskyy’s new Ukraine. Written with the sound of Russian bombs and exploding shells in the background, Mendel details life lived under Russian siege in 2022. She says goodbye to her fiancé who joins the front lines, like so many other Ukrainian men. Throughout this story of Zelenskyy, Ukraine, and its extraordinary people, Iuliia Mendel reminds us of the paramount importance of truth and human values, especially in these darkest of times.

**#32 The Gates of Europe: a history of Ukraine** – Serhii Plokhy (Non-Fiction) As Ukraine is embroiled in an ongoing struggle with Russia to preserve its territorial integrity and political independence, celebrated historian Serhii Plokhy explains that today’s crisis is a case of history repeating itself: the Ukrainian conflict is only the latest in a long history of turmoil over Ukraine’s sovereignty. Situated between Central Europe, Russia, and the Middle East, Ukraine has been shaped by empires that exploited the nation as a strategic gateway between East and West—from the Romans and Ottomans to the Third Reich and the Soviet Union. In *The Gates of Europe*, Plokhy examines Ukraine’s search for its identity through the lives of major Ukrainian historical figures, from its heroes to its conquerors. This revised edition includes new material that brings this definitive history up to the present. As Ukraine once again finds itself at the center of global attention, Plokhy brings its history to vivid life as he connects the nation’s past with its present and future.

**#33 In Wartime: stories from Ukraine** – Tim Judah (Non-Fiction) Ever since Ukraine’s violent 2014 revolution, followed by Russia’s annexation of Crimea, the country has been at war. Misinformation reigns, more than two million people have been displaced, and Ukrainians fight one another on a second front—the crucial war against corruption.

With *In Wartime*, Tim Judah lays bare the events that have turned neighbors against one another and mired Europe's second-largest country in a conflict seemingly without end. In Lviv, Ukraine's western cultural capital, mothers tend the graves of sons killed on the other side of the country. On the Maidan, the square where the protests that deposed President Yanukovich began, pamphleteers, recruiters, buskers, and mascots compete for attention. In Donetsk, civilians who cheered Russia's President Putin find their hopes crushed as they realize they have been trapped in the twilight zone of a frozen conflict. Judah talks to everyone from politicians to poets, pensioners, and historians. Listening to their clashing explanations, he interweaves their stories to create a sweeping, tragic portrait of a country fighting a war of independence from Russia—twenty-five years after the collapse of the USSR.

**#34 The Memory Keeper of Kyiv** – Erin Litteken (Historical Fiction) In 1929, Katya is 16 years old, surrounded by family and in love with the boy next door. When Stalin's activists arrive in her village, it's just a few, a little pressure to join the collective. But soon neighbors disappear, those who speak out are never seen again and every new day is uncertain. Resistance has a price, and as desperate hunger grips the countryside, survival seems more a dream than a possibility. But, even in the darkest times, love beckons. Seventy years later, a young widow discovers her grandmother's journal, one that will reveal the long-buried secrets of her family's haunted past. This is a story of the resilience of the human spirit, the love that sees us through our darkest hours and the true horror of what happened during the Holodomor.

**#35 You Don't Know What War Is: a diary of a girl from Ukraine** – Yeva Skalietska (Memoir/Biography) Yeva Skalietska's story begins on her twelfth birthday in Kharkiv, where she has been living with her grandmother since she was a baby. Ten days later, the only life she'd ever known was shattered. On February 24, 2022, her city was suddenly under attack as Russia launched its horrifying invasion of Ukraine. Yeva and her grandmother took shelter in a basement bunker, where she began writing this diary. She describes the bombings she endured while sheltering underground and her desperate journey west to escape the conflict raging around them. After many endless train rides and a prolonged stay in an overcrowded refugee center in Western Ukraine, Yeva and her beloved grandmother eventually find refuge in Ireland. There, she bravely begins to forge a new life, hoping she'll be able to return home one day.



## Reading For Renewal Record Sheet 2023 -2024

Due to your local church's Reading for Renewal contact in April 2024. 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 Bless Your Heart, Rae Sutton - Lewis	15 The Restoration of Celia Fairchild - Bostwick
2 The Book of Lost Names - Harmel	16 Revival Season - West
3 Daughter of Cana - Hunt	17 A Rhythm of Prayer - Bessey
4 The Daughters of Madurai - Variyar	18 Something Good - Miller
5 Dusk, Night Dawn - Lamott	19 Sparrow's Prayer - Hutchison
6 Faith Still Moves Mountains - Faulkner	20 Stealing - Verble
7 Feathers of Hope - Brown	21 Truth's Table – Edmonson, Higgins & Uwan
8 Learning to Pray -- Martin	22 Twice a Daughter - McGue
9 The Lives We Actually Have – Bowler & Richie	23 The Unlikely Yarn of the Dragon Lady - Mondragon
10 Master Slave Husband Wife - Woo	24 Untamed - Doyle
11 A Million Reasons Why - Strawser	25 Watering the Soul - Peppernell
12 On the Corner of Hope and Main Jenkins	26 While Time Remains -- Park
13 The Prayer Jars Trilogy - Brunstetter	27 Widowland - Carey
14 The Prophet's Wife - Grant	28 Women Talking - Towles

### MISSION STUDY BOOKS - UKRAINE

29 Black Square: adventures in post-Soviet Ukraine - Pinkham
30 The Dreamtime - Chernov
31 The Fight of Our Lives: my time with Zelensky, Ukraine's battle for democracy and what it means for the world - Mendel
32 The Gates of Europe: a history of Ukraine - Plokyh
33 In Wartime: stories from Ukraine -- Judah
34 The Memory Keeper of Kyiv – Litteken
35 You Don't Know What War Is: a diary of a girl from Ukraine - Skalietska

Total number of 2023-2024 Reading for Renewal Books read: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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