

The Book Club

Fuquay-Varina United Methodist Church

Books, Hosts, Facilitators, and Meeting Times

2024-25



Books give a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and life to everything.

- Attributed to Plato

August 16 @ 6:30 PM

Host: Judy Casper

Facilitator: Matilda Storm

Book: *The Bondwoman's Narrative* by Hannah Crafts (Author), Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Editor)

September 20 @ 6:30 PM

Host: Maggie Davis

Facilitator: Tammie Quick

Book: *The Country of the Blind* by Andrew Leland

October 18 @ 6:30 PM

Host: Leila Hartman

Facilitator: Leila Hartman

Book: *The Women* by Kristin Hannah

November 15 @ 6:30 PM

Host: Suzanne Eaton Jones

Facilitator: Suzanne Eaton Jones

Book: *The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory: American Evangelicals in an Age of Extremism* by Tim Alberta

January 17 @ 6:30 PM

Host: Tammie Quick

Facilitator: Matilda Storm

Book: *James: A Novel* by Percival Everett

February 21 @ 6:30 PM

Host: Betty Vaughan

Facilitator: Suzanne Eaton Jones

Book: *Our Ancient Faith: Lincoln, Democracy, and the American Experiment* by Allen C. Guelzo

March 21 @ 6:30 PM

Host: Karen Junkin

Facilitator: Karen Junkin

Book: *The Sun Does Shine: How I Found Life and Freedom on Death Row* by Ray Hinton, Lara Love Hardin

April 11 @ 6:30 PM

Host: Joy Brown

Facilitator: Tiffany Buhrman

Book: *Betty* by Tiffany McDaniel

May 16 @ 6:30 PM

Host: Tiffany and Greg Buhrman

Facilitator: Tammie Quick

Book: *The Berry Pickers* by Amanda Peters

June 20 @ 6:30 PM

Host: Keena Teague

Facilitator: Matilda Storm

Book: *Crying in H Mart: A Memoir* by Michelle Zauner

The Bondwoman's Narrative by Hannah Crafts (Author), Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Editor) (Warner Books 2003)
Possibly the first novel written by a black woman slave, this work is both a historically important literary event and a gripping autobiographical story in its own right. When her master is betrothed to a woman who conceals a tragic secret, Hannah Crafts, a young slave on a wealthy North Carolina plantation, runs away in a bid for her freedom up North. Pursued by slave hunters, imprisoned by a mysterious and cruel captor, held by sympathetic strangers, and forced to serve a demanding new mistress, she finally makes her way to freedom in New Jersey. Her compelling story provides a fascinating view of American life in the mid-1800s and the literary conventions of the time. Written in the 1850's by a runaway slave, *The Bondwoman's Narrative* is a provocative literary landmark and a significant historical event that will captivate a diverse audience.

The Country of the Blind by Andrew Leland (Penguin Press 2023)

We meet Andrew Leland as he's suspended in the liminal state of the soon-to-be blind: he's midway through his life with retinitis pigmentosa, a condition that ushers those who live with it from sightedness to blindness over years, even decades. He grew up with full vision, but starting in his teenage years, his sight began to degrade from the outside in, such that he now sees the world as if through a narrow tube. Soon—but without knowing exactly when—he will likely have no vision left. Full of apprehension but also dogged curiosity, Leland embarks on a sweeping exploration of the state of being that awaits him: not only the physical experience of blindness but also its language, politics, and customs. He negotiates his changing relationships with his wife and son, and with his own sense of self, as he moves from his mainstream, “typical” life to one with a disability. Part memoir, part historical and cultural investigation, *The Country of the Blind* represents Leland's determination not to merely survive this transition but to grow from it—to seek out and revel in that which makes blindness enlightening. Thought-provoking and brimming with warmth and humor, *The Country of the Blind* is a deeply personal and intellectually exhilarating tour of a way of being that most of us have never paused to consider—and from which we have much to learn.

The Women by Kristin Hannah (Pan Macmillan 2024)

Women can be heroes. When twenty-year-old nursing student Frances “Frankie” McGrath hears these words, it is a revelation. Raised in the sun-drenched, idyllic world of Southern California and sheltered by her conservative parents, she has always prided herself on doing the right thing. But in 1965, the world is changing, and she suddenly dares to imagine a different future for herself. When her brother ships out to serve in Vietnam, she joins the Army Nurse Corps and follows his path. As green and inexperienced as the men sent to Vietnam to fight, Frankie is over-whelmed by the chaos and destruction of war. Each day is a gamble of life and death, hope and betrayal; friendships run deep and can be shattered in an instant. In war, she meets—and becomes one of—the lucky, the brave, the broken, and the lost. But war is just the beginning for Frankie and her veteran friends. The real battle lies in coming home to a changed and divided America, to angry protesters, and to a country that wants to forget Vietnam. *The Women* is the story of one woman gone to war, but it shines a light on all women who put themselves in harm's way and whose sacrifice and commitment to their country has too often been forgotten. A novel about deep friendships and bold patriotism, *The Women* is a richly drawn story with a memorable heroine whose idealism and courage under fire will come to define an era.

The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory: American Evangelicals in an Age of Extremism by Tim Alberta (Harper 2023)

Evangelical Christians are perhaps the most polarizing—and least understood—people living in America today. In his seminal new book, *The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory*, journalist Tim Alberta, himself a practicing Christian and the son of an evangelical pastor, paints an expansive and profoundly troubling portrait of the American evangelical movement. Through the eyes of televangelists and small-town preachers, celebrity revivalists and everyday churchgoers, Alberta tells the story of a faith cheapened by ephemeral fear, a promise

corrupted by partisan subterfuge, and a reputation stained by perpetual scandal. For millions of conservative Christians, America is their kingdom—a land set apart, a nation uniquely blessed, a people in special covenant with God. This love of country, however, has given way to right-wing nationalist fervor, a reckless blood-and-soil idolatry that trivializes the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Alberta retraces the arc of the modern evangelical movement, placing political and cultural inflection points in the context of church teachings and traditions, explaining how Donald Trump's presidency and the COVID-19 pandemic only accelerated historical trends that long pointed toward disaster. Reporting from half-empty sanctuaries and standing-room-only convention halls across the country, the author documents a growing fracture inside American Christianity and journeys with readers through this strange new environment in which loving your enemies is "woke" and owning the libs is the answer to WWJD. Accessing the highest echelons of the American evangelical movement, Alberta investigates the ways in which conservative Christians have pursued, exercised, and often abused power in the name of securing this earthly kingdom. He highlights the battles evangelicals are fighting—and the weapons of their warfare—to demonstrate the disconnect from scripture: Contra the dictates of the New Testament, today's believers are struggling mightily against flesh and blood, eyes fixed on the here and now, desperate for a power that is frivolous and fleeting. Lingering at the intersection of real cultural displacement and perceived religious persecution, Alberta portrays a rapidly secularizing America that has come to distrust the evangelical church, and weaves together present-day narratives of individual pastors and their churches as they confront the twin challenges of lost status and diminished standing. Sifting through the wreckage—pastors broken, congregations battered, believers losing their religion because of sex scandals and political schemes—Alberta asks: If the American evangelical movement has ceased to glorify God, what is its purpose?

James: A Novel by Percival Everett (Doubleday 2024)

When the enslaved Jim overhears that he is about to be sold to a man in New Orleans, separated from his wife and daughter forever, he decides to hide on nearby Jackson Island until he can formulate a plan. Meanwhile, Huck Finn has faked his own death to escape his violent father, recently returned to town. As all readers of American literature know, thus begins the dangerous and transcendent journey by raft down the Mississippi River toward the elusive and too-often-unreliable promise of the Free States and beyond. While many narrative set pieces of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* remain in place (floods and storms, stumbling across both unexpected death and unexpected treasure in the myriad stopping points along the river's banks, encountering the scam artists posing as the Duke and Dauphin...), Jim's agency, intelligence and compassion are shown in a radically new light. Brimming with the electrifying humor and lacerating observations that have made Everett a "literary icon" (*Oprah Daily*), and one of the most decorated writers of our lifetime, *James* is destined to be a major publishing event and a cornerstone of twenty-first century American literature.

Our Ancient Faith: Lincoln, Democracy, and the American Experiment by Allen C. Guelzo (Knopf 2024)

Abraham Lincoln grappled with the greatest crisis of democracy that has ever confronted the United States. While many books have been written about his temperament, judgment, and steady hand in guiding the country through the Civil War, we know less about Lincoln's penetrating ideas and beliefs about democracy, which were every bit as important as his character in sustaining him through the crisis. Allen C. Guelzo, one of America's foremost experts on Lincoln, captures the president's firmly held belief that democracy was the greatest political achievement in human history. He shows how Lincoln's deep commitment to the balance between majority and minority rule enabled him to stand firm against secession while also committing the Union to reconciliation rather than recrimination in the aftermath of war. In bringing his subject to life as a rigorous and visionary thinker, Guelzo assesses Lincoln's actions on civil liberties and his views on race, and explains why his vision for the role of government would have made him a pivotal president even if there had been no Civil War. *Our Ancient Faith* gives us a deeper understanding of this endlessly fascinating man and shows how his ideas are still sharp and relevant more than 150 years later.

The Sun Does Shine: How I Found Life and Freedom on Death Row by Ray Hinton, Lara Love Hardin (St. Martin's Griffin 2019)

In 1985, Anthony Ray Hinton was arrested and charged with two counts of capital murder in Alabama. Stunned, confused, and only twenty-nine years old, Hinton knew that it was a case of mistaken identity and believed that the truth would prove his innocence and ultimately set him free. But with no money and a different system of justice for a poor black man in the South, Hinton was sentenced to death by electrocution. He spent his first three years on Death Row at Holman State Prison in agonizing silence—full of despair and anger toward all those who had sent an innocent man to his death. But as Hinton realized and accepted his fate, he resolved not only to survive, but find a way to live on Death Row. For the next twenty-seven years he was a beacon—transforming not only his own spirit, but those of his fellow inmates, fifty-four of whom were executed mere feet from his cell. With the help of civil rights attorney and bestselling author of *Just Mercy*, Bryan Stevenson, Hinton won his release in 2015. With a foreword by Stevenson, *The Sun Does Shine* is an extraordinary testament to the power of hope sustained through the darkest times. Destined to be a classic memoir of wrongful imprisonment and freedom won, Hinton's memoir tells his dramatic thirty-year journey and shows how you can take away a man's freedom, but you can't take away his imagination, humor, or joy.

Betty by Tiffany McDaniel (Vintage 2020)

"A girl comes of age against the knife."

So begins the story of Betty Carpenter. Born in a bathtub in 1954 to a white mother and a Cherokee father, Betty is the sixth of eight siblings. The world they inhabit in the rural town of Breathed, Ohio, is one of poverty and violence—both from outside the family and, devastatingly, from within. But despite the hardships she faces, Betty is resilient. Her curiosity about the natural world, her fierce love for her sisters, and her father's brilliant stories are kindling for the fire of her own imagination, and in the face of all to which she bears witness, Betty discovers an escape: she begins to write. Inspired by generations of her family, Tiffany McDaniel sets out to free the past by delivering this heartbreaking yet magical story—a remarkable novel that establishes her as one of the most important voices in American fiction.

The Berry Pickers by Amanda Peters (Catapult 2023)

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. For readers of *The Vanishing Half* and *Woman of Light*, this show stopping debut by a vibrant new voice in fiction is a riveting novel about the search for truth, the shadow of trauma, and the persistence of love across time.

Crying in H Mart: A Memoir by Michelle Zauner (Vintage 2023)

In this exquisite story of family, food, grief, and endurance, Michelle Zauner proves herself far more than a dazzling singer, songwriter, and guitarist. With humor and heart, she tells of growing up one of the few Asian American kids at her school in Eugene, Oregon; of struggling with her mother's particular, high expectations of her; of a painful adolescence; of treasured months spent in her grandmother's tiny apartment in Seoul, where she and her mother would bond, late at night, over heaping plates of food. As she grew up, moving to the East Coast for college, finding work in the restaurant industry, and performing gigs with her fledgling band—and meeting the man who would become her husband—her Koreanness began to feel ever more distant, even as she found the life she wanted to live. It was her mother's diagnosis of terminal cancer, when Michelle was twenty-five, that forced a reckoning with her identity and brought her to reclaim the gifts of taste, language,

and history her mother had given her. Vivacious and plainspoken, lyrical and honest, Zauner's voice is as radiantly alive on the page as it is onstage. Rich with intimate anecdotes that will resonate widely, and complete with family photos, *Crying in H Mart* is a book to cherish, share, and reread.