



First Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)
Stow, OH

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PATHWAYS

DECEMBER 2020

*You show me the path of life. In
your presence there is fullness of joy.*
Psalm 16:11

Find us on Social
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The Season of Advent **November 29-December 24th**

Welcome to the Season of Advent! It marks the beginning of a new year in the liturgical life of the church and it is a time of moving from dimness to light as each week we light candles of hope, peace, joy, and love. It all culminates on Christmas Eve when we light the Christ candle and give thanks for, and rejoice in, the light of the world finally coming to us at Christmas.

Check out the amusing and yet theologically sound explanation of the Advent season and its difference to counting down the days til Christmas in this issue's Pastor's Pen!
Happy Advent everyone! And Merry Christmas!

Governing Board **Monday, December 14th, 7 p.m.**

The Governing Board will meet on Monday, December 14th at 7 p.m. via Zoom.
This meeting will include voting on the proposed 2021 church budget.

We will need a quorum!

If you are a voting member of the Governing Board please make every effort to be on this meeting.

Christmas In-Gathering Outreach Program Distribution **Tuesday, December 15th and Wednesday, December 16th**

Once again our church is preparing itself to make Christmas a bit more merry and bright for folks from our community in need of a little helping hand. There is still time to get involved by shopping for gifts, filling food boxes, making a donation, or being on hand to help distribute.
More information about the In-Gathering is inside this issue of the Pathways!

"The Colors of Christmas" Light Display—A Community Event **Tuesday, December 15th, 5-8p.m.**

The Membership Team is preparing for our church to participate in the first ever "Colors of Christmas" sponsored by the Stow Parks and Recreation Department.
The team invites you to bring to the church your one gallon empty milk jugs to be used for luminaries. A collection bin is located outside the upper doors of the church.
More information about how you can be part of this event is inside this issue of the Pathways!

More information on all these events and so much more inside this newsletter



You know those disclaimers given at the beginning of news reports that say something to the affect, “*First, just a word of warning. Some viewers may find parts of the following upsetting and unsettling*” and then they even

invite you to consider changing the channel. Well with that in mind let me say... *First, just a word of warning. Some readers of this Pastor’s Pen may find parts of the following, upsetting, unsettling, sacrilegious, unholy, heretical, blasphemous, irreverent, Grinchy, Scrooge-like, and I can’t believe he just ruined Christmas.*

So with that disclaimer given, you may want to change the channel...I mean pick-up a different church newsletter. Here we go...

Most Advent Calendars are NOT Advent Calendars!

It’s true. Most Advent calendars are not Advent calendars...and it is among one of this preacher’s biggest pet-peeves. Ever! Most “advent-calendars” are “count-down to Christmas calendars” and here’s why.

First these “calendars” (if you can even call them that) begin on December 1st and run through December 24th. What kind of calendar stops less than four weeks into the month!? I’ll tell you what calendars does—NO CALENDAR stops just twenty four days into the month and then calls it quits and implicitly says you’re on your own for the remaining days. The season of Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas, and that date often falls in November. But that’s just the tip of this proverbial Christmas tree debacle.

Most “advent calendars” have you open a little perforated cardboard window each day to find inside tiny pieces of something trying to pass off as chocolate, but how exactly is this preparing you for Christmas? I’ll give you a hint: IT DOESN’T!! This is preparing you for the arrival of Willy Wonka not the Messiah! Oh, but candy chocolates are just one little tiny ornament on this decrepit and dilapidated Christmas tree.

Today there are literally dozens upon dozens of these golden calf “advent calendars.” There are some with foods like jelly, hot sauce, coffee, tea, cookies, nuts, and beef jerky. There are some for kids featuring Disney characters, Hot Wheels, Harry Potter, and Legos. (Full disclosure, my kids have a couple of the Lego versions, but I DO NOT let them

call them Advent Calendars!) There are even some for your pets—24 Days of Fancy Feasting for Fluffy! Thank you Jesus!! But the ones that really pulling the hay out of my manger are the ones featuring things like beauty products, jewelry, nail polish, beer, wine, and liquor—this Bud’s for you Kris Kringle! Cheers!

Now to be clear, I have nothing against any of these products and fully admit I enjoy many such products, loving me some Legos, hot sauce, beef jerky, and a tasty beverage. I am simply telling you none of these **things**—NONE OF THEM—has anything to do with Advent, nor do any of them prepare you for the arrival of Christmas. As much as I love coffee, a different cup of joe for twenty four straight days does NOTHING to prepare me for the Messiah. No amount of building Legos with my kids while eating chocolate and beef jerky prepares me for the baby Jesus. I cannot fathom how painting your nails to coordinate with your new charm bracelet prepares you to pay homage like the Magi.

Advent, unlike the first twenty four days of December, is a season of the liturgical year, observed by Christians around the world as a time of *expectant waiting and preparation* for the celebration of the birth of Jesus, the long awaited Messiah, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Additionally, Advent marks the beginning of a new liturgical year in the life of the church. (Happy New Year y’all!) During Advent we light candles to acknowledge the dimness of a world without a Savior, but each week we see the Light of the World coming closer and closer, culminating with that light coming into full brightness with the birth of Jesus.

During the season of Advent we prepare Him room; we hear a voice in the wilderness calling to make our paths straight; are reminded God came to God’s children not as a mighty warrior as many expected, but as a child born for us and authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of

Peace. This is what Christmas is about, and this is what we prepare for in the season of Advent.

So to be clear (and not so Grinchy and Scrooge-like) counting down to Christmas is great fun, and if you want to do so with candy, food, toys, and/or beverages, by all means do so and enjoy. But let's **also** prepare for Christmas through hopeful waiting and faithful anticipation. Let us prepare to share hope, peace, joy, and love through our words, actions, and generosity. Let us embrace the truth that the dimness of the world will soon be over taken again by the light of Christ, a light that shines within all who believe in Emmanuel, God with us; and because of this truth and this gift, everything changes...for the better. This is what comes at Christmas, and this is what we prepare ourselves for through scripture, prayer, meditation and worship—not just by counting down the first twenty four days of December.

It is my hope and prayer that each of you and your families has a holy and blessed Advent season, and the merriest and brightest Christmas ever.

Your Pastor and Friend,
Jonathan

Congregational Meeting

Sunday, December 20th

The Elders and the Stewardship Team want to inform the congregation that there will be a Congregational meeting on Sunday, December 20th, and it will be held remotely. More details and information as to how it will be conducted will follow in the coming weeks. Copies of the proposed budget will be available prior to the meeting.

Youth Group in December

After a fun and successful In-Gathering Outreach project shopping outing to Target on November 29th, followed by a little bit of Cyber Monday shopping, the Youth Group will gather on Sunday, December 13th at 11:30 a.m. for a Christmas Wrapping Party and maybe some Christmas rapping by Jonathan. (A vote will be taken to see if anyone really wants Jonathan to offer up a Christmas rap. Note, it's likely to be as long as one of his sermons.)

Please bring with you a lunch and any wrapping supplies you can spare. If time permits we will play either some reindeer games or a rousing game of full court giant beach ball volleyball.

“The Colors of Christmas” Light Display

—A Community Event

Tuesday, December 15th, 5-8p.m.

A Community Tour Celebration of *The Colors of Christmas!* is set to take place on Tuesday, December 15th from 5-8 p.m. This will be your chance to journey across the City of Stow and experience the joy of Christmas as local churches provide festive lights, live nativities, singing and more to help make your holiday season merry and bright.

Our church will be among the area churches participating in this event, and the Membership Team is coordinating our display, however anyone interested in helping plan and create the display is welcome to do so. Do you have some working Christmas lights you could loan or even donate? Or maybe you have some ideas for how we can decorate the portico for our display. Please reach out to Jonathan or Cora Dowey to let them know!

This event is sponsored by the City of Stow and the Stow Parks and Recreation. A map of participating churches will be on the City of Stow's Website in early December.

December Junior Church: At-Home Edition

Junior Church activities for the Advent & Christmas season are available. Simply pull up to the ramp to pick up your advent calendars and activity kits from the Junior Church bin right outside the main doors. Be sure to stop by and grab yours! While you're here grab one for family, friends and neighbors! :)

ATTENTION ACME SHOPPERS

Save those Acme receipts !

This year's campaign closes at the end of December. Receipts will be collected until the first of 2021. Please send your receipts in to the church office or put them in the box just inside the upper level entry to be collected. Thanks for your help.

How do you do Ingathering during a Pandemic????

While the definition of Ingathering is to “gather together”: during a pandemic we have to make changes to avoid gathering *too many* together. We want to keep church members and the families we serve safe while still filling a vital mission in the community. Because it is such a vital mission, we will again be serving families in our community with food boxes, a gift card for fresh items, and gifts for the children. The distribution for families will change and be more spread out to avoid too many folks here at one time, masks and gloves will be required and time for each family in the church will be limited. We reluctantly decided that no home baked cookies can be dispensed, but some may be compelled to purchase a bag of candy for each of our families?

Please donate food items for our Ingathering food baskets. The list is included in Pathways. There is a wagon near the door of the Church for contributions.. Monetary donations are always welcome! Give a little-give a lot! We are grateful for your support!

Ingathering Food List

Beans	Boxed Potatoes	Cake mix
Cereal	Fruit or Applesauce	Icing
Jelly	Jello or pudding	Juice
Rice	Meat or stew	Mac & Cheese
Soup	Peanut butter	Pasta
Tuna	Spaghetti Sauce	Vegetable
Toilet Paper	Velveeta style cheese	
Tomato products		

New Year-New Study Group- New Night-Same Zoom

Wednesday, January 13th, 7 p.m.

After two successful book studies the group expressed the desire for the studies to continue. It was also discussed how meeting on Thursday evenings created scheduling issues. And so with the New Year will come new change to this weekly evening time group discussion that meets via zoom.

The group will now meet on Wednesday evenings at 7 p.m., but will still meet via Zoom. And for the first study of the New Year we will not be reading a book, but instead will be viewing video shorts to serve as our discussion fodder. More information will be made available as details and plans are put together, but mark your calendars now for this new year new study opportunity!

Loaves and Fishes

It was a warm, wild and windy Sunday afternoon .A storm had pounded the area and another was predicted. T-ninety minutes till turkey dinner time. Not just any turkey dinner but a meal to be distributed by drive-through at First Christian Church of Stow. Seven turkeys had been donated and were carved and ready in three roasters. Stuffing and mashed potatoes to feed more than a hundred cooked in the oven. Corn and green beans waited to be heated. The desserts were packed and the bagels were bagged.

“There’s no power!” someone exclaimed! The first thought was that the electricity was just out at the Church but soon it became evident that it was the area. Thank goodness the stove is gas! Turkey was quickly transferred.

The cars began to line up. The distribution crew calmly adapted and adjusted. Kitchen work by lantern. Food delivered to cars by flashlight as it darkened. Challenge accepted. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” Over a hundred meals were given out that afternoon. Some people without power took advantage of a hot meal. So many were involved- the cookers, the bakers, the servers, the packers, the runners, the cleaners, and the prayers. Servants of the Lord!

The monthly drive-through meal will be on December 20th from 4-6p.m. Being so close to Christmas we anticipate a large turnout. Please consider volunteering your time. We are asking the congregation for Christmas cookies for dessert. The menu will be a turkey casserole/ ham and scalloped potatoes.

Bulldog Bags - Monthly Offering

We continue to collect items monthly. There is a plastic bin in the outside entry of the church marked Bulldog donations. The bin is for easy drop off of the monthly items we are collecting for bulldog bags.

We are collecting
Hot chocolate packets due December 9
Toothpaste
& Toothbrushes due January 13

Update from the Stewardship Team Financial Giving From the Congregation

We won't close the financial books for November for a couple more days but I wanted to provide a status of where we are currently with our congregational giving. The Congregational Giving budget amount is \$22,384 per month. For the month of November (through 11/29) we have received \$23,973. For the month this is above the budget amount by \$1,589.

Year to date (through 11/29) we have received \$225,767. This is below the budget amount

Year to date by \$20,457.

Our expenses continue to be lower than budgeted right now, with the limited building use. However, if you personally are feeling financially stable and would like to make an additional gift to the church above your normal giving, those are always appreciated. Any increases will help position us to be able to increase the outreach assistance we can provide to our community, both local and globally.

Here is the information in table format:

2020	Nov	Oct	Jul-Sep	Apr-Jun	Jan-Mar	YTD
Budget	\$22,384	\$22,384	\$67,152	\$67,152	\$67,152	\$246,224
	\$	\$				
Actual	23,973	19,049	\$62,780	\$63,050	\$56,914	\$225,767
Actual	\$					
Budget	1,589	(\$3,335)	(\$4,372)	(\$4,102)	(\$10,238)	(\$20,457)



from the Music Department

It's almost Christmas and Christmas carols can be heard almost everywhere. Did you know that carols have stories behind their

creation? Some stories are interesting, some inspiring, some fascinating, and some are just plain mundane. Whatever the origin, carols have this way of invoking the Spirit of Christmas in all of us. Here are three short examples of carols and the story behind each.

Silent Night

Over the years the music for this ubiquitous Christmas song has been erroneously attributed to plenty of famous composers, including Haydn and Beethoven. But the true lyricist was unknown until as recently as 1995, when an 1820 manuscript was discovered that confirmed the men behind the song.

The song was actually written by two Austrians: one named Franz Xaver Gruber, a primary school teacher, the other Joseph Mohr, an assistant pastor at St.

Nicholas Church, in Salzburg. In 1816, Gruber started a side hustle as choirmaster and organist at the church when he quickly decided to compose a new hymn for the congregation to sing. The two created *Stille Nacht*.

To be clear: Mohr wrote the lyrics and Gruber composed the music. The pair performed their masterpiece for the first time at Christmas Mass in 1818, with Gruber on the organ and Mohr on guitar. The song went mini-viral (at least in 19th-century terms) when an organ builder who serviced the church's organ fell in love with the song and spread the word about it to other churches.

Carol of the Bells

This haunting, four-note holiday tune has popped up everywhere from *Home Alone* to *South Park*. But surprisingly, it wasn't originally a Christmas song. Carol of the Bells started out as a Ukrainian folk chant that told of the coming New Year, which pre-Christian Ukraine celebrated in April.

The chant's meaning shifted in the 1930s, when American composer Peter J. Wilhousky gave the tune new lyrics and rearranged its melody so it could be performed by the NBC Symphony Orchestra. This proved to be a canny change, as the song has become a Christmas standard since he wrote his new lyrics in 1936.

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Originally composed as a Christmas Day hymn in 1739 by Methodist leader Charles Wesley, who wrote more than 6,000 hymns, this tune was originally given the bland name of "Hymn for Christmas-Day." (Apparently, when you create that many songs, you run out of clever titles.) The opening lyrics were different, too, beginning: "Hark how all the Welkin rings / Glory to the Kings of Kings." (For the record, the word "welkin" is an old English term for the heavens.) English evangelist George Whitefield tweaked the lyrics about 15 years later and renamed it "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing."

Finally, in 1782, it was tweaked again with the repetition of the opening lines at the end of each stanza.

Thanks to bestlifeonline.com.

Have a Merry Christmas, everyone!

Something To Keep In Mind
During the 2020 Advent Season

The following is the opening portion of Jonathan's sermon from the first Sunday of Advent which gives an important reminder that even though the most wonderful time of the year is being upended and not how it is supposed to be, that the hope, peace, joy, and love of Christmas will still come. To read or hear this sermon in its entirety head over to the church website or YouTube page.

“Christmas Is Coming”

Isaiah 64:1-9

November 29, 2020

It is my hope and prayer that despite the circumstances of the global health crisis we find ourselves within, each of you was able to find a way to have a very happy Thanksgiving celebration this past week. Perhaps you, like my family, spent hours on Zoom making connections with those who were far away, or even not so far away, but because of stay-at-home orders were further away than you wanted.

Violet and A.J. made the best of the situation, finding joy running back and forth between the two rooms where Julie had one device streaming our zoom gathering, and I was room streaming on another device.

Perhaps you, like my family, included doing altered versions of your usual Thanksgiving traditions. The Barkovichs still played Turkey Bingo and read our Thanksgiving interviews. The Rumburgs told again the story of the failed Thanksgiving dinner at my Aunt's house with the usual lamenting laughter around a hard lessoned learned.

Trying to make things as normal as possible helped, but no, it wasn't the same. Everything was still upended and not how it was supposed to be and the prospects of our Christmas celebrations being impacted in similar fashion is hard to think about because Christmas might also be upended and not how it is supposed to be.

Today this reality is even more stark because we were ready to begin again in-person worship—albeit in limited fashion—on this the first Sunday of Advent, a favorite season of mine and yours too.

But as I often say, in times such as these we still have a choice before us. We can still chose how we will perceive and live into that which is the reality of the day.

We can chose to be those who see this reality as a time of oppression, or as a time that is preparing us for something new that is surely coming.

And what Advent assures us is always coming is the hope, peace, joy, and love of God found in the birth of Jesus Christ.

So let me say this right now, at the beginning of this Advent season, so that you can make the choice to or not to set this in your mind, heart, and spirit... No matter what...Christmas is coming and Christmas will come.

Say that to yourself. No matter what...Christmas is coming and Christmas will come.

Write it down if you need to. Put it on your refrigerator or bathroom mirror or in your pocket—but make it a constant fixture each day to remind yourself, and to give yourself the hope filled assurance that no matter what...Christmas is coming and Christmas will come.

Because when we keep this message front and center in our minds, hearts, and spirits, then what can potentially cause us to miss the sacredness that surrounds us during the Advent and Christmas seasons will not be missed. When we keep this message—Christmas is coming and Christmas will come—we receive the hope, peace, joy, and love that abounds no matter life's varied circumstances.

Explanation of In-Person Worship Being Suspended

For those who missed it the following is a letter sent out to the congregation on November 25th, reprinted so as to keep everyone informed of on the ongoing process of how the Pastor and Elders work to discern how and when in-person worship can resume.

Friends,

God's grace and peace to you. In the midst of this Thanksgiving season each of you and your families have been in our continued prayers, praying God's grace and peace is felt ever more deeply while giving thanks to God for the abundance we have.

We are writing today in response to all that has recently unfolded regarding the COVID season we continue to work through. Church leadership has not stopped discussing and discerning how we are being called to be church during these uncertain times, and from the beginning it has been our

aim to focus on and maintain the essentials, and we believe we have done this over the past eight months. We have had to do things differently, but through it all we have carried out our call to share and spread the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Earlier this month the Elders and I discerned a path forward to return to in-person worship, albeit in a limited manner. We were excited and hopeful for this opportunity. That decision and excitement, however, was before new information, statistics, and directives from the Governor and Ohio Department of Health were revealed and issued. Ohio and Summit County, along with the rest of the country, has seen significant rises in COVID-19 cases which has prompted stay-at-home orders, a curfew, mandates for only small group gatherings when necessary, among other directives. And though houses of worship are exempt from these orders the Elders and myself have made the hard decision that we should nonetheless adhere to these recommendations for both the health and safety of our gathered community as well as continuing to be a model of mutuality and solidarity for our community. Therefore we have decided to not resume in-person worship this Sunday. We will continue to monitor and discuss this matter in the days and weeks to come with the hope and prayer that we will be able to offer an in-person worship opportunity on December 20th.

Yes, we understand we are entering the season of Advent, and the importance it holds to all of us. Undoubtedly, the spiritual well-being of each of you is of utmost importance to us, but so is your physical well-being. We believe our online worship services, the opportunities for zoom gatherings and counseling sessions, online and mailed publications, text messages and phone calls are satisfactory for the time being to meet the spiritual needs of the congregation. And we feel this decision to continue the suspension of in-person worship also meets the need of safely tending to the physical well-being of the congregation. This is not a perfect decision, but we believe in our hearts it is the faithful one.

Advent is a time of preparation of our spirits for the coming of Christ. These preparations are done in all times and places, not just in our church on Sunday morning. So let us prepare Him room this Advent season. And let us do so aware that Jesus himself was born into uncertain circumstances, amidst much worry and concern, but no matter how bleak the setting God was still at work, and God's work was always for good bringing forth the greatest gift any of us would ever receive. This truth reminds us that with God as our strength and help in times of trouble, together we will undoubtedly get through this troubled time, and we will be made stronger because of it. May God's hope, peace, joy, and love surround us all.

Together in Christ,

Jonathan Rumburg, Pastor

Cell Phone: (330) 347-7500

Email: jrumburg@firstchristianstow.org

Elders of First Christian Church: Jim Hindel (Chair), Jacob Aukeman, Lynn Fauvie, Joni Fitch, Dianne Haywood, Sue Hobson, Rick Lloyd, Judy Maffhey, Tom Safford, Andrew Robinson, Bob Vanik, Diane Waite

Help Return to In-Person Worship

As we look to return to in-person worship it will be an imperative that our building is prepared to host those who will gather. But this important work will require a broader cleaning regiment than what is normal from our custodians. It will also require people who are willing to welcome, host, and direct those who will come for worship on Sunday mornings.

To do this work the Elders are looking to create a team of folks who are willing to coordinate, facilitate, and implement the policies and procedures needed to make in-person worship happen.

If you are willing to be a part of this important team please reach out to the church office, Jim Hindel or Jonathan and let them know. Anyone can be part of this team and your participation will be immensely appreciated!

