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# PATHWAYS

## FEBRUARY 2021

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

Find us on Social  
Media @FCCStow!



### **Youth Group This Sunday, February 7<sup>th</sup>**

The Youth Group will meet—hopefully for a special ice skating outing—on Sunday, February 7<sup>th</sup>.  
Watch your text messages for more information!

### **Governing Board, Monday, February 8<sup>th</sup>, 7 p.m.**

The Governing Board will meet via Zoom

### **Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent**

Wednesday, February 17<sup>th</sup>

Drive-Thru Touchless Ashes and Communion  
Facebook Live Time of Worship, 7 p.m.

### **Loaves and Fishes + Pantry February 21, 4-6p.m.**

Free monthly dinner! Drive-Thru/Carry Out, 4-6 p.m.

On the menu for this month: Chili Cook-off Chili!

This time will also include the +pantry food distribution.

See inside this issue for more information on the food pantry  
and how you can be part of the Chili Cook-off.

### **Financial Peace University**

Class Begins, Sunday, February 21<sup>st</sup> at 11:15 a.m.

See inside this issue of the Pathways for more information

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

# FROM THE PASTOR



*“Take it off! Take it off!  
Take it off!”*

If you chimed in on this chat then you might be familiar with the hit TV show, “The Masked Singer” and the just as popular new hit TV show, “The Masked Dancer.” But if

you chimed in on this chant for some other reason, spurred on by some other memory, then it might just be a good thing that Lent begins later this month—a season of repentance and turning our lives again toward Christ. (Insert check smiley emoji here!)

My kiddos have gone crazy for these masked shows, reveling in the mystery, the pageantry, the excitement, the comedy, and of course the masks and costumes which are absolute works of art. These masks and costumes include the Dragon, Giraffe, Baby Alien, the Disco Ball, Cotton Candy, Hammerhead Shark, Tulip, and many more, all beautifully crafted with incredible engineering to give the singer or dancer the freedom to move and sing and dance while still concealing their identity.

And even though Violet and A.J. have no idea who any of the guest celebrity singers or dancers being discussed as possibly being inside those masks and costumes they still count the sleeps until the next episode and get the most excited when the character with the least amount of judge and audience votes is voted off the show and sent home, but not until after they “*take it off*”—their mask that is.

The big reveal shows if the judges were able to accurately put together all the clues given during performances and voice altered interviews and guess who was right, while also revealing the celebrity’s thoughts and feelings about being a masked performer. It’s a fun ride if you haven’t seen it yet.

All of it leads me think about the season of Lent that begins later this month, and what this holy and sacred season invites us to do. During Lent Jesus wants us to take our mask off and show him all of ourselves—the parts we have been working hard for so long to conceal from others, including ourselves.

We all wear masks all day long, every day. We wear them at work, we wear them with our friends, we wear them with our church family. We even wear them when we look in the mirror, seeing only that which we want, and hiding from all that we want to

forget. And I get it. I am guilty of this myself. It is not easy to reveal ourselves—especially in today’s divisive culture where the slightest reveal can lead to ostracizing at best and lost relationships at worst. But while this may be the case with other people, it is never the case with Jesus. No matter what we reveal, no matter what we confess, Jesus will always accept us, always forgive us, always bless us, and always love us. No matter what’s behind the mask we wear.

Jesus us wants us to take off the mask that keeps us, and convinces us, to not confess our sins and open ourselves up to Him and show Him who we are. Jesus wants us to take off the mask we wear, and tell Him that we want to be the person He has created and called us to be.

So, as we go through the season of Lent, let us all listen for and hear Jesus chanting, “*Take it off! Take it off! Take it off!*” For Lent is a time when we can take it off—the masks we wear—and reveal to Jesus who we really are and what exactly we need.

Yes, this sounds incredible hard as we don’t want to look at the parts of ourselves we are trying to hide from others, and we certainly don’t want to reveal them to Jesus. But that’s when we need to remember, He already knows, He’s already seen it all. But He loves us still.

So let us hold on to this truth as we begin our Lenten walk. And let us strive to embrace the freedom that will come through grace, mercy, forgiveness, and unconditional love when we “*Take it off!*”

I look forward to taking this Lenten journey with you.

Your Pastor and Friend,  
Jonathan

## Week(s) of Compassion!

**February 2021**

***“Let Love Flow”***

***Nobody hungry, nobody thirsty, shade from the sun, shelter from the wind,***

***For the Compassionate One guides them, takes them to the best springs.***

***~ Isaiah 49:10 (The Message)***

Each February all Disciples churches take up a special offering for the organization Week of Compassion, the relief, refugee and development mission fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada. Week of Compassion seeks to equip and empower Disciples to alleviate the suffering of others through disaster response, humanitarian aid, sustainable development and the promotion of mission opportunities. This year's WOC theme is ***“Let Love Flow”*** seeks to help us see and know that when we support WOC, God's goodness, grace, hope, and healing will do more and impact more than we can imagine.

Did you know that out of every dollar given to Week of Compassion: 50 cents goes toward emergency responses; 25 cents to sustainable development, 8-10 cents to ecumenical partners, mission stations and volunteer work trip grants; 8 cents to refugee and immigration ministries; and just 6-8 cents for administrative costs. With our help, Week of Compassion is able to change the world in an accountable, efficient, trustworthy, effective, sustainable way.

This year, our church has once again set as a goal for our offering the amount of \$2,000. (This offering is over and above our general fund giving.)

Please prayerfully consider how you can support this vitally important ministry because our individual offerings matter. Gifts to Week of Compassion multiply a thousand times over, enabling the Church as one body to achieve significant change in the world. We are one in Christ Jesus, and our many gifts together, make a world of difference.

For more information check out the Week of Compassion website at [www.weekofcompassion.org](http://www.weekofcompassion.org)

## Ash Wednesday

**Wednesday, February 17th**

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the season of Lent, the time when we commemorate Jesus' post-baptismal, forty days of fasting and temptation in the wilderness as preparation for his ministry to follow. Lent is also the time when we strive to prepare ourselves spiritually for the ministry we are called to. We do this prior to Easter through personal introspection, study, prayer, sacrifice or giving something up, or maybe even by taking up something such as volunteering/serving or getting involved in a new ministry. And what better way to begin this Holy season than in worship.

On Wednesday, February 17th, beginning at 7:000 p.m., an Ash Wednesday time of worship will be broadcast via Facebook Live.

Additionally, throughout the day touchless ashes and communion will be available throughout the day at the church via drive through of the church ramp/portico. Though these time require diligent safety precautions, we can still remember the imposition of ashes as a symbolic reminder of repentance, along with the reminder that earthly things may become ash and dust, but the divine love of God made possible through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ are eternal.

The Worship Ministry Team hopes you will participate in these Ash Wednesday opportunities and we wish you a spirit-filled Lenten season of preparation for our Savior's death and resurrection.



## **Financial Peace University**

Class Begins Sunday, February 21

Have you wanted to get your finances in order? Well here's your chance for success because once again our church will be offering Financial Peace University. Over 5 million people have learned to pay off debt, save and invest for their future with Financial Peace University.

What is Financial Peace University? FPU is world renowned financial advisor and author Dave Ramsey and his teaching team walking you through the basics of budgeting, dumping debt, planning for the future, and much more. Financial Peace University includes nine video lessons featuring Dave Ramsey, Rachel Cruze, and Chris Hogan teaching and equipping you to take control of your money and your future.

Our church will host this nine week course each Sunday from 11:15 a.m. (right after worship) to 12:15 via Zoom led by Dan Reiman of our church. Class participants will need to watch an online video prior to each week's class. The Zoom class will then take the video lesson and apply it to workbook exercises and open discussion. Class participants will need to purchase a FPU class kit which is filled with resources and tools that will contribute to your success.

Reach out to the Church office or Jonathan for more information or how to get enrolled in the class. You don't have to feel overwhelmed and powerless about your money. Try the class and see how it can change everything.

## **Bulldog Bags - Monthly Offering**

We continue to collect items monthly as well. 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.

Hot chocolate packets	Due Feb 10
Band-aids.	Due Mar 10

As always, Bulldogs thanks you for your kind donations to assist with feeding the kids. If you would like to donate money instead of shopping for items, please make check out to First Christian church and I will do the shopping!

## **Grow Group**

**Wednesday, 7 p.m. via Zoom  
February 10<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>**

Looking for some human interaction, good conversation, and further your faith formation? Then look no further than the Wednesday Night Grow Group! After two successful book studies the group has evolved to watching video shorts at the beginning of the meeting, and following it with lively, faith based discussion that is both challenging and fun while being a safe space for all to share and be heard.

A Zoom link will be shared with anyone who would like to join the group for these faith based discussions aimed to help us all broaden our perspectives, heightened our awareness, and deepen our faith through thoughtful, attention-grabbing, fun, amusing, and meaningful conversation. Contact the church office or Jonathan to get yourself on the grow group email list.



## **Youth Group Meetings, Events and Frivolity!**

The Youth Group will meet again on Sunday, February 7<sup>th</sup> for an ice skating outing in either downtown Cuyahoga Falls or at Lock 3 in Akron (depending on which rink 151.40 is open and which one we can get a reservation at!) There will be a small fee for ice skating, but all youth will be able to skate no matter what! When we know which location we will be skating at we will let you know and then youth should be brought to, and picked up at the skating locale.

We will meet again on Sunday, February 21<sup>st</sup> for a "regular" Youth Group meeting on Sunday, to prepare and record our skits and presentations for the virtual Sketti N Skits that will be held on Facebook Live Sunday, March 7<sup>th</sup>!

And if along the way weather conditions present themselves in a timely and fitting manner, we will go sled riding!

**from the Music Department**



I hope everyone got to see Kaylee Lott play her trumpet for us this past Sunday. She did a fantastic job, and we are proud of her. God has blessed her. Thank you, Kaylee, for sharing your talents with the congregation.

I cannot tell you how much I appreciate when others step up to the plate, so to speak, and volunteer to sing or play for a Sunday service. This past year has not been my idea of music in church. I'm used to having singers, in a choir, live, and in person. That interaction of making music on the spot is a wonderful and rewarding experience. But now, I find myself singing by myself in an almost empty building, to a congregation I can't see, hoping that the words and thoughts of the musical message come through. And although you are not all singing in the choir or playing an instrument you must feel the same way: to no longer be able to interact, encourage or commend each other in person has got to be frustrating and sad at the same time. The human touch is certainly missing on Sunday and I know we all feel it. But God is still on His throne, and He knows exactly what each of us are feeling. And it is okay to question what He has in store. And it is not the first time human beings have had to deal with difficult situations. In fact, when I think of the world as it was as little as 100 years ago, and of all the conveniences we have today, I think we have much to be thankful for. We can worship together via the internet. We can communicate via phones (both landline and mobile). We can see each other even when separated by miles (Zoom and FaceTime). And getting food delivered to the house is not all that bad. You can make your own list of blessings.

I guess, when I consider all we have for which to be thankful, we should thank God all the more.

Psalms 30:4, 5

Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints,  
and give thanks to his holy name.  
For his anger is but for a moment,  
and his favor is for a lifetime.  
Weeping may tarry for the night,  
but joy comes with the morning.

I Th. 5:18

...give thanks in all circumstances;  
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

“See” you Sunday.  
Blessings to all,  
Chuck

**Plus Pantry in January**

During the Loaves & Fishes dinner on January 20 FCC-Stow also hosted our first pantry drive through. Attendance was light because of the Browns' playoff game. Nevertheless, we distributed the equivalent of 156 meals to 11 households. Members of the households served ranged from ages 5 to 91. We will save the unused shelf stable food for February's Plus Pantry. We did not distribute all of the bread (obtained at no cost) so we took those loaves to Riverwood Chapel for distribution at their weekly pantry. We anticipate a larger turnout at the February Loave & Fishes + Pantry on Sunday February 21.



Ready to Go!

**Lent & Easter Jr Church:  
At-Home Edition**

Junior Church activities for the Lent & Easter season will be available for pickup beginning Sunday, February 14th. Be sure to stop by and grab yours! Pull up to the ramp to pick up your activity kits from the Junior Church bin right outside the main doors. While you're here grab one for family, friends and neighbors! One per family please.

## End of an Era

### **The Retirement of Kathy Gustafson**

It is with mixed emotions that we share the news that our beloved Administrative Assistant, Kathy Gustafson, has decided to retire after nearly 25 years of work and ministry at First Christian Church as of March 31st. While we rejoice that she has come to and achieved this milestone in her life, and wish the best for her and John and their family in a well earned time of retirement, we are sad to see her go. She leaves behind a legacy of hard and committed work and ministry to God, the church, and our church family that we all have been blessed by throughout her many years of service. Always ready to lend a compassionate and comforting listening ear, always willing to do whatever she could for each of us and the church, and always doing all of it with a smile and an encouraging word. Her work and presence in our church office will be missed immensely. Let us all give thanks for Kathy and her ministry, and let us all pray God's blessings surround her and her family during these retirement years, that they may be filled with the hope, peace, joy, and love of God, family, and friends.

The Elders and Governing Board have been made aware of her decision and is currently working on plans to honor and celebrate Kathy and her ministry to First Christian Church. Look for more details on this celebration in next month's issue of the Pathways.

## 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, Tom Safford or Jonathan and let them know. Anyone can be part of this team and your participation will be immensely appreciated!



## Virtual Sketti & Skits!

Tune into Facebook Live on Sunday March 7<sup>th</sup> @ 5pm

Anyone wishing to participate can video themselves performing their talent and send it to [christianed@firstchristianstow.org](mailto:christianed@firstchristianstow.org) OR make an appointment via email to come in on a Sunday after church service to be recorded with the church's camera. Anna and Richelle will then combine all videos into one jam packed virtual Sketti&Skits to be shown via Facebook Live with our very own Pastor Jonathan emceeding the event!

## Chili Cook Off with Loaves and Fishes!

Two great activities combine to keep our tradition going and feed our neighbors!

Calling all chili cookers to make their best crock pot of chili for our February 21st Loaves and Fishes Dinner.

What you need to do:

- Contact us by Sunday Feb. 14 to let us know you are a chili cooker!
  - Cora Dowey  
([coradowey@yahoo.com](mailto:coradowey@yahoo.com), 330-592-3170) and
  - Barb Bell  
([bajabe52@yahoo.com](mailto:bajabe52@yahoo.com), 330-807-5498)
- Cook a crock pot sized batch of delicious chili.
- Bring your chili to the church by Sat. Feb 20. Put it in the main refrigerator (by BUN coffee maker)
- Tune into church or read your March Pathways to see who has won the golden spoon. All Loaves and Fishes helpers will be our chili judges.



Thank you in advance to all of our chili cookers and Loaves and Fishes volunteers. The Membership Team