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PATHWAYS

APRIL 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!



Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday Prayer Vigil, Easter Sunday

Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday on March 28th

Maundy Thursday time of worship on April 1st, at 7 p.m. Livestream on Facebook Live
Community Good Friday worship on April 2nd. A link to this service will be emailed out.

Holy Saturday Prayer Vigil, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. More information inside.

Easter Sunday worship, April 4th. Livestream on Facebook Live and YouTube

Governing Board, Monday

The Governing Board will meet via Zoom on Monday, April 12, at 7 p.m.

Kathy Gustafson Retirement Celebration and Open House

We will honor and celebrate the retirement of our Administrative Assistant,

Kathy Gustafson during an outdoor open house event

on Sunday April 18th beginning at 11:30 a.m.

More details inside and forthcoming to your email inbox!

Loaves and Fishes + Pantry April 18, 4-6p.m.

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

This will also time will also include the +pantry food distribution.

See inside this issue for more information.

Pastor's Class!

Begins Sunday, April 11th at 11:15 a.m.

Attention all youth in fifth grade or older who have not been baptized or want to make a reaffirmation of their baptism, and their parents: You are invited to be part of this year's Pastor's Class that will begin on Sunday, April 11th. More information inside this issue of the Pathways!

FROM THE PASTOR



Now when Job's three friends heard of all these troubles that had come upon him, each of them set out from his home—*Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite.*

They met together to go and console and comfort him. When they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him, and they raised their voices and wept aloud; they tore their robes and threw dust in the air upon their heads. They sat with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.

~Job 2:11-13

This text has become a foundational stone for my ministry because it shows powerfully a model of ministry we all can, and should, strive to emulate in our lives. It is the *ministry of presence*.

When Job's friends heard of what happening with him, they did what needed to do for their friend. They showed up, sat with him, and were present to Job. Their *ministry of presence* made it known to Job that even when life made him think God wasn't anywhere to be found, he was still not alone. Their *ministry of presence* made it known to Job that he was loved.

Job's friends didn't show up and start telling him everything was going to be ok. They didn't show up and give him some pithy pep talk in hopes of cheering him up. These friends didn't bring a casserole in an effort to replace their discomfort with comfort food. These friends simply showed up and permitted their presence to say, "*We are here. You are not alone. We love you.*"

That has been a model of ministry I have strived to embody. And it is a model of ministry that Kathy Gustafson has lived out each and every day she has served First Christian Church of Stow, Ohio. Kathy has been present to all of us. No matter how near or how far away Kathy was from us, or we from her, she was always present—for us. Whether it was through a word of love and support when she came through the line after church, whether it was in a card that said *Happy Birthday, Happy Anniversary, Get Well Soon, or Deepest Sympathy*, or whether it was through a thoughtful conversation in the church office, Kathy Gustafson was present. She was always present to let us know someone was thinking about us, someone was praying for us, someone was making sure we knew we are loved and we are not alone.

During her time at First Christian Church of Stow, Kathy Gustafson has been the quintessential Minister of Presence.

I will never forget when I came to First Christian Church of Stow. After serving as an Associate Pastor for six and half years, I had just put on my big boy preacher pants and was set to find my way as a Senior Pastor. I quickly learned that three years of seminary, years of field placement, and years with an incredible church and amazing mentor had equipped me greatly, I still didn't know everything about being a Senior Pastor. And soon I couldn't help but wonder if I was in over my head.

Fortunately for me, Kathy was there, fully present, ready to show me the ropes of First Christian Stow; introduce me to members; slyly remind me of names; bring me up to speed on historic events; and most importantly, keep me from messing up too badly. Kathy, from my first day, set me up for, and put me on a path towards, a successful pastorate. She was kind, considerate, helpful, compassionate, and oh so patient with me. And she was this way not because I was new and possibly in over my head, but because that is who she is. And I was blessed because of it.

Kathy has always been present in ways that is rarely seen anymore. Through the gifts she blessed me with, and through the gifts she has blessed others with, Kathy has been more than our church's Administrative Assistant. She has been a Minister of Presence. And it is a model of ministry we all can, and should, strive to emulate and continue to make real in our world. This rarely seen way is needed because people need more than just being told they are loved and not alone. People need to be shown, reminded often, and assured through the presence of others in their life that they are loved and that they are not alone.

So just as we have been shown by Christ Jesus; and as we have been shown through the good and faithful career of God's servant to First Christian Church of Stow, may we all strive to be ministers of presence.

Your Pastor and Friend,
Jonathan

from the Music Department



Hello everyone!

When one starts a new job, there are always people who help out the “new guy” get in the swing of things. Such was my case several years ago when I began to work here. Jonathan (of course), Andrea Drews, Scott Haywood and Cheryl and Ralph Lorenz come quickly to mind (especially Cheryl, who knew where all the files were hidden and was always happy to help). However, there was one person who did more to help me get on my feet as it were, and that would be Kathy Gustafson. Kathy knows everything *else* is and has always been very gracious and accommodating as I plunged into my new work schedule. Of all the people who have helped me, I know that I owe Kathy the greatest debt of gratitude. And now, it’s time to say “Goodbye” to her. Kathy, you will be missed, perhaps more than you know. But know this: your friendship, aid, and guidance mean the world and I shall always be grateful. May you and John enjoy your well-deserved retirement. May you have many years of pleasure with grandkids, travel and whatever else you may set your hands to. God bless you and don’t be a stranger!

Chuck Kobb

Oh What A Night!
Sketti N Skits 2021!!

It was a night to behold! Sketti n Skits 2021 was an absolute blast! Special thanks to everyone who contributed to, and turned out for last Sunday’s Sketti N Skits! What a great show! Thanks to everyone who submitted an act and a “shout-out.” Thanks to everyone who participated in “Name That Tuba!” Thanks to everyone who even laughed at Chuck and Jonathan’s jokes! You are so kind. And thanks to Anna and Richelle for making all the behind the scenes magic happen so seamlessly! If you missed the show do yourself a favor and check it out on our church’s Facebook page or on our YouTube channel.

Loaves and Fishes

The monthly Loaves and Fishes Drive-Thru dinner will be held on April 18, 2021, from 4 pm to 6 pm. The menu will include baked rigatoni, salad, and dessert. Volunteers will be needed for serving this important meal.

Plus Pantry Update

On March 21 we held the third Plus Pantry Food Distribution held in conjunction with our monthly Loaves & Fishes Dinner. We served 15 households for a total of 36 people. While the total numbers served are down from February we did serve 5 new households, which included 8 senior citizens.

The people who came to Loaves & Fishes + Pantry were very grateful to receive both a meal and groceries. Seeing their smiles and receiving their thanks validates all the outreach work that our church and its members do throughout the entire year.

A special thanks to all the volunteers who do the work behind the scenes to make this ministry possible.

Bulldog Bags

We continue to collect items monthly. There is a plastic bin in the outside entry of the church marked Bulldog donations.

April: Ramen Noodles Due April 14

May: Juice Boxes Due May 12

As the school year draws to a close,, Bulldogs are planning for the summer Bulldog Boxes program. The church will again participate in this effort, opening our doors and welcoming in the volunteers and those served monthly. For more information on the Bulldog programs, contact Wanda Deiwert 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 with Bulldog Bags noted in the memo.

Holy Saturday Prayer Vigil
Saturday April 2, 7 a.m.-7 p.m.

The Apostle Paul calls for us to “*pray without ceasing.*” He didn’t mean we have to be on our knees or kneeling before a chancel 24/7, but rather that we are open to God’s presence with us at all times, and that a prayerful life is what ought to lead us in our daily lives.

As we seek to focus on our Holy Week walk, from the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, to the confusion and fear of Maundy Thursday, to the agony of Good Friday, may we aim to take a part of Holy Saturday to intentionally be in prayer for the new life that is made possible through the life, death, and soon resurrection of our Savior Jesus.

To do this we invite you to be part of this annual prayer vigil on Saturday, April 2nd. This prayer vigil will be held from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., in any location of your choosing—your home, a park, a quiet spot, or maybe even the front steps of our Chapel where you can let the sounds of the busy road and the people passing by guide your prayers for our community and the world around us.

You can follow this link to our Sign-Up Genius and sign-up for a half hour time slot for the prayer vigil: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/9040e4ca5af22a0fb6-2021> (Although sign-up is not required to be part of this day of prayer.)

Multiple people can sign-up for the same time-slot. We invite you to use the comment section of the sign-up to share a prayer you will be lifting up, a prayer request, where you plan to be praying from, or any other relevant information to the prayer vigil. It won’t be difficult to come up with matters to lift in prayer, but some themes and focuses to pray about could include: Essentials for our members and community; healing for those in need; peace for those feeling restless; hope for those feeling hopeless; comfort for those feeling alone; gratefulness for God’s constant and abiding presence.

Let us join our hearts and minds and spirits together, no matter the distance between us, and go to God in prayer.

SAVE THE DATE!
Vacation Bible School

VBS will be held in person here at church
Sunday July 11th – Thursday July 15th
From 6pm – 8pm
The Theme this year will be
“Knights of North Castle”
~ More info coming in the months ahead!

Pastor’s Class!
Begins Sunday, April 11th at 11:15 a.m.

It is finally happening! After being postponed last year, and after being delayed this year, the annual Pastor’s/Baptism class will begin on Sunday, April 11th. This class will be held weekly, at the church, from 11:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. There will, however, be one exception to this schedule—on Sunday, April 18th the class will meet at 9 a.m. so all can attend the open house celebration for our Administrative Assistant after worship.

This class will be held each week through Sunday, May 23rd. As we move through the class, Jonathan and parents and guardians will discuss how we will conduct the baptisms, taking into consideration all the needed safety precautions for the students.

Stow Community Easter Egg Hunt
Success!

On behalf of the City of Stow, Parks and Recreation, and the Stow community, I would like to thank you for your participation in this year’s, City of Stow Community Easter Egg Hunt. Your time, enthusiasm and generous contribution of treats was instrumental in creating a truly appreciated, fun family event!

Because this was the first year doing an egg hunt in this manner, we were not sure how well received it would be. Honestly, it far exceeded our expectations! An important mission of Parks and Recreation, is to provide recreation and leisure to our community members. Program and event planning has been a challenge, to say the least, during these unprecedented times. It was awesome having a role in bringing the community together, while still being able to follow safety protocols, to share in such a festive event. You helped make that happen!

Considering the event’s success, I believe this event will become a tradition. I hope you will consider participating with us in 2022.

Until next spring, wishing you a happy and healthy Easter!

Thank you, Your Stow Parks and Recreation Staff

The Retirement of Kathy Gustafson

On Wednesday, March 31st, Kathy Gustafson concluded her ministry as our church Administrative Assistant and entered into retirement. While we are sad to see her leaving her office, we celebrate this milestone and all Kathy has done in her nearly twenty five years with First Christian Church of Stow.

When Kathy set her retirement date, she was well aware that it fell right in the middle of Holy week, and so she requested that since this date was during Holy Week that we do not do anything for her and her retirement that would distract from the holiness of this week as she does not want her retirement to in any way impede the sacredness of this week. So we have abided by this request, and we will look to honor, recognize, and celebrate Kathy and her ministry on **Sunday, April 18th** during an outdoor open house here at the church.

More logistical details of this celebration will be forthcoming—times and structure to the celebration, etc—but in the meantime we invite you to please remember Kathy and her family in your prayers. Let us all give thanks to God for the not just the work Kathy has done over her nearly 25 years, but the ministry she has done.

A church's administrative assistant is the front line worker of a church—so often the first to receive the call from someone reaching out to the church for its presence in their life. To be that kind of front line worker requires a special skill set—kindness, compassion, empathy, helpfulness, grace, patience, and love—among a whole host of gifts. It requires a servant's heart—and that has been Kathy Gustafson—not just throughout her time as the Administrative Assistant of First Christian Church of Stow, but that has been who she is throughout her life.

That servanthood will be missed—in the office she has held for so long. But we can rejoice in knowing that Kathy and her servant's heart will never be too far away from us, her church family. The blessing of her presence and her friendship and her servanthood will still be with us even after she retires.

So we will look forward to celebrating Kathy on April 18th. And we will lift her and John and her family in our prayer on March 31st—the day of her retirement. But let us be of one spirit and offer our prayers to God for Kathy and her ministry and all the blessings that will surely come in retirement.

Week(s) of Compassion!

“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 our church seeks to support our denomination's relief and humanitarian aid ministry called Week of Compassion. Our goal for 2021 was to raise \$2,000. As of the end of March we have collected a total of \$1,869. There is still time to get a gift to the church to be included in this year's offering and help our church reach our goal.

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

Grow Group

Wednesdays, 7 p.m. via Zoom

April 14th, 21st, and 28th

Looking for some human interaction, good conversation, and the chance to further your faith formation? Then look no further than the Wednesday Night Grow Group! This group typically spends part of its time watching video shorts at the beginning of the meeting, and follows 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.

**Update from the Stewardship Team
Financial Giving from the Congregation for
January – March 2021**

We won't close the financial books for March 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 \$20,741 per month. This includes loose offerings and Week of Compassion donations.

For the month of March (through 03/28) we have received \$20,581. For the month this is slightly below the budget amount by \$160.

Year to date we have received \$62,224. This is below the budget amount Year to date by \$1,757.

Here is the information in table format:

2021	Jan	Feb	Mar	YTD
Budget - Congregational Giving	\$20,741	\$20,741	\$20,741	\$62,224
Actual Congregational Giving	\$20,472	\$19,414	\$20,581	\$60,468
Actual - Budget	-\$269	-\$1,327	-\$160	-\$1,757

As we shared in December, the budget approved by the Governing Board and the congregation for 2021 has the total expenses higher than the total income. We refer to that gap as our Leap of Faith, with the hopeful expectation that throughout the year we will be able to both increase our income and control our expenses appropriately.

The 2021 Leap of Faith amount is \$20,046 for the year.

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.

**Regional Church Announcement from the
Christian Church in Ohio!**

**The Calling of our new Regional Minister
and President: Rev. Allen V. Harris**

Dear Christian Church in Ohio,

Through the season of Lent, we journey together through stories and experiences of death and resurrection, grief and hope. Over the past year(s), we have experienced all of these in our Region and congregations -- and through it all, God's presence among us and invitation into hope persevered. As one superhero recently put it, "What is grief if not the perseverance of love?" This is what leads us through the process of transformation from death to new life. Friends, we are so delighted to share that we are entering a time of NEW LIFE for the Christian Church in Ohio!

At the Regional Church Council meeting held February 27, 2021 the Search Team for our Regional Pastor and President presented a final candidate after over a year of prayer, conversation, deliberation, and discernment. While we were in awe of the quality of candidates with whom we were able to explore possibilities, this individual was consistently affirmed by the Spirit in our prayers and conversations. Upon recommendation of the Regional Search Team and unanimous affirmation of the Regional Church Council on Saturday, it is with great delight that we welcome the Rev. Allen V. Harris as our next Regional Pastor and President for the Christian Church in Ohio!

Rev. Harris is no stranger to Ohio, having served as the Senior Pastor of Franklin Circle Christian Church in Cleveland and active as a leader in the Region and at Camp Christian for many years before more recently serving as the Regional Minister for the Christian Church Capital Area (Washington D.C). His official start date will be April 1, 2021 with hopes of sharing a digital greeting to all congregations for Sunday morning prayers of resurrection in our midst.

If you have any questions about the procedures and practices of the Executive Search Model that were followed throughout, we encourage you to explore the documents linked below. We look forward to full and loving celebrations for this next phase in the life of God's church as we look toward the future of ministry together!

Grace & Peace, Rev. Debbie Saxe & Rev. Melanie Harrell Delaney,
Regional Search Team Co-chairs
Candis Wilson, Moderator of the CCinOH
Regional Church Council

Search Team Update

As we prepare to say goodbye to our administrative assistant, a search team has been working hard for the past couple of months to find her replacement. This team consists of Elders, Financial staff, Christian Education staff, Technical crew members, and the Pastor. Meeting weekly for some time, this team has identified and discussed at length the ever changing landscape in church dynamics, functions, and needs when it comes to being a twenty-first century church. And in doing so the team identified several key areas of need for our church, all while discerning the direction God is calling us to take with our next hire.

The bottom line is that the position will look and function in many similar manners to how the position has been historically; however there are new aspects as well. Therefore to adjust to these changes, while incorporating the needed current aspects, the search team felt now was the time to revamp and revision the position—starting with a new job title and job description.

Below is the job posting that has been put out into the universe. We have received several applicants, but due to the March calendar and Holy Week, interviews are not being scheduled until after Easter. Which means there is still time for you to share this ministry opportunity with someone who you think might fit the job description below.

We are excited for the new direction and new ministry opportunity God is revealing to us here at First Christian Church. May we all be in prayer for this ongoing search process.

Position Description: Director of Church Relations Summary

The First Christian Church of Stow has an open position for a part time church Director of Church Relations.

The successful candidate will be the heart of our church operations and the bridge of communication to the many generations of our church family, guests and community members. We are looking for an applicant who has strong organizational skills and the ability to think creatively and critically in order to develop systems that facilitate communication that lead to deeper relationships and broader community connections.

The position will require a maximum of 25 hours/week, 5 hours of which are on Sunday morning to coordinate and manage the live streaming of worship.

Responsibilities

- Work closely with the Senior Pastor in partnership to facilitate effective communications and

relations with church members, guests, and the broader community.

- Manage the operations of the church, including: answering phones, scheduling meetings and church spaces, setting up Zoom calls , and putting together weekly worship bulletins and a monthly newsletter.
- Coordinate and facilitate the technology for Sunday morning live-streaming of the worship service.
- Execute updates to the church website and post social media content
- Draft and execute communication to Governing Board, Elders, Trustees, committees, members of the church, guests, and broader community involvement

Preferred Qualifications

- minimum of 2 years experience in an office environment
- experience using MS Office products and other Software Applications (for example PowerChurch, ProPresenter, WordPress)
- knowledge of maintaining an office phone system and other typical office equipment (copiers, printers, etc.).
- strong writing skills to draft communications (social posts, prayer chain emails, newsletter, emails)

If you are someone who thrives in a collaborative environment, but can work independently as well, and has a heart for people and mission, coupled with a passion to communicate, create, and implement systems of organization and connection that will enable any and all to further and deepen their faith walk please send your resume to searchteam@firstchristianstow.org or 3494 Darrow Rd., Stow OH 44224.

About First Christian Church of Stow

At First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), we strive as a community of believers to share the love of God with others, as taught by the scriptures and illuminated by the Holy Spirit. Founded in 1831 and located in the heart of Stow, FCC Stow has a rich heritage serving the Stow community. We are a friendly, welcoming, vibrant, musical church that offers ministries for all, from the youngest child to the most seasoned adult.

Pre-Sabbatical Studies

Though Jonathan has had to postpone his sabbatical for yet another year, until summer 2022, the Elders are glad to share with you that he is not holding off on all aspects of his sabbatical.

In February Jonathan was able to enroll in a class with the organization Heart to Heart Communications of Akron called the “*Inclusive Leadership Series: Taking Your Leadership To The Next Level*”

This twelve-month series will enable participants to join the forefront of current leaders and organizations that are leveraging inclusivity as a strategic best practice that creates a strong culture and gets results. In today’s technology-driven world, understanding the power of inclusivity enables leaders to address workplace and personal challenges such as unconscious bias and miscommunication while strengthening personal and employee engagement.

Through this course leaders will:

- Recognize and experience personal development and inclusive leadership at every level as a significant foundation for their leadership development.
- Better connect with their inner selves and the life experience of others – recognizing their commonality with others and realizing that they are not alone in dealing with human struggles.
- Become more vital, energized, and proactive from monitoring their conscious and unconscious thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and biases and learning ways to become healthier from the inside out.
- Develop a stronger sense of meaning and purpose to their work and overall lives.
- Become more effective as a leader in dealing with and coaching others to deal with workplace challenges – including stress, miscommunication, interpersonal relationships, and work-life imbalance.
- See themselves as more confident, able to be an authentic and effective leader.

The overall goals of the program are:

- Introduce leaders to foundational concepts that guide their recognition of the dimensions of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) both personally and professionally.
- Provide opportunities for leaders to reflect, renew, and connect with others, as they focus on personal growth as an inclusive leader.
- Support leaders in their ongoing development to become more self-aware, authentic, purposeful, ethical, caring, balanced, and proactive.
- Foster and expand thinking about how to promote DEI in the workplace.
- Determine practical action steps and develop action plans to leverage DEI to become more effective leaders.

Heart to Heart Communications is a training and development group that aims to cultivate values-based, community-minded leadership in individuals and workplace teams. For over 25 years Heart to Heart has inspired and developed the heart of organizations—their people, passion, purpose and performance. Their mission is to enrich lives by helping individuals and organizations strengthen and live their inner values. Their vision is to be a community where people find meaning and purpose and live ethical values in daily work and community life.

We celebrate the chance for Jonathan to be part of this class, and pray it furthers his drive and commitment to live out and fulfill his ministry with us here at First Christian Church, throughout our community, and beyond.

Sincerely, the Elders of First Christian Church, Stow

The First Christian Tech Team
**A Special and Faithful Group. But Always Room
For More!**

Over the last year our church, just like many churches, has had to figure out incredibly quickly the world of livestreaming, simulcasting, editing, posting, computer hardware, software, plug-ins, sound board, sound levels, sound equipment, uploading, downloading, syncing, and all the other multifaceted and complex processes of getting our church out to world via the internet. We have had a faithful and dedicated team of people who have tirelessly, and voluntarily, made it all happen. And our church and its ministries are blessed and better for the incredible work they have done and continue to do.

Folks, these folks know what they are doing. They are all incredibly smart and gifted with mad skills on computers, smartphones, sound boards, and all the equipment we have available to them—and the equipment they make available to us. So please know if there are ever issues with our livestreaming they are issues that are caused by equipment malfunction and not operator error. Yes, sometimes issues happen that aren't intended, nor can they be explained, but you can be certain our Tech Team is working the equipment, are working exceedingly hard, to correct the issue and make things function properly.

So please hold in your prayers our Tech Team. Each of them and the hard work they give to us and the church is a blessing. May we pray God continues to bless them and equip them for the work and ministry they provide.

And please know there is always room for more on the Tech Team. No experience is needed—just a willingness to learn and help where help is needed. Please contact Jonathan to become part of the Tech Team!