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PATHWAYS

AUGUST 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!



➤ **Bulldog Bag Donation: Toothpaste and Toothbrushes**

➤ **Special Presentation: “The Narrative of
Mark in Performance,” Sundays Aug. 8th
and 15th in Worship**

➤ **Loaves and Fishes Plus Pantry
Sunday Aug. 15th**

➤ **Night at Canal Park with the Akron
RubberDucks,
Aug. 21st**

➤ **Youth Group Kick-Off
Sunday, Aug. 29th**

Pastor's Pen,
August 2021

Pastor Karl Vaters has been in pastoral ministry for over 40 years, and is the teaching pastor of Cornerstone Christian Fellowship, a healthy, small church in Orange County, California, where he has ministered for over 28 years. He is the author of several books all geared to helping small churches thrive. Several years ago I had the pleasure of hearing Pastor Vaters speak at a clergy conference and I got to meet him. I have read a couple of his books, followed his blog, and listened to several podcasts in which he was featured. I have found him especially helpful and inspiring over the last several months as we continue to live through, and hopefully out of, this time of global pandemic.

One of Vaters's recent blogs was entitled, *"Healthy Churches Will Get Stronger—And Four Other Post-COVID Realities."* I click on his blogs often, but when I read the words of this title you can bet I clicked real fast. And the reason I clicked so fast was because every pastor, especially the small church pastor, wants and needs answers to the thousand questions we are all asking, and well, I was hoping and praying this blog would have them all. It didn't, of course, but I wasn't disappointed because even though there were no simple and easy answers in his blog (because there aren't any) what there was nonetheless was encouragement. And encouragement can be way better than answers.

In this blog post Vaters shares what amounts to five realities churches are facing in this time of global pandemic—the during, after, and what might even be a continuation. His five realities are: *Healthy Churches Will Keep Getting Stronger; Adaptable Churches Will Become Even More Resilient; Majoring On the Minors Won't Just Be A Distraction, It Will Be Deadly; Church Size Is Becoming Less Important; The Next Crisis Will Accelerate And Amplify These Differences.* You can find the full blog post at: [Healthy Churches Will Get Stronger – And 4 Other Post-COVID Realities | KarlVaters.com](https://www.karlvaters.com/healthy-churches-will-get-stronger-and-4-other-post-covid-realities)

Long term vision, adaptability, operating with integrity while focusing on the essentials of faith, small churches are coming back on people's radar—these were just a few points within the larger body of work that Vaters was spelling out as



the traits, qualities, visions, and blessings healthy and thriving churches are living out. And as I read through them, I began to find, not the answers I was looking for, but the encouragement I was needing because within them all I saw how First Christian Church has been, and is making them happen.

Feeding the hungry and being a broader community presence has been a long term vision of First Christian church, and that vision has only expanded in the last sixteen months. Focusing on the essentials of faith—that we connect with God and one another, that we are present in times of need, that we live and share the Good News of Jesus Christ has been maintained and furthered over these months. Our church is small, but our community knows we are here for them and people are noticing.

All of these points, and more, are coming into a clearer focus and a faithful direction week after week. We have created and hired two new staff positions in just the last few months, each of them setting us up to further our ministries, further our reach within the community, and further our call to share and spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. *THIS!* This is encouraging! And I hope and pray you see it and know it because too often, and far too much, we only hear about the negative happening in and to churches today.

Add in, as Vaters says, *"adaptable churches will become even more resilient."* Have you seen the adaptability we have pulled off!?!? In one week we went from in-person worship to full on streaming. In the following weeks we had members quickly figure out and navigate how we would stay connected with a broader online presence. We found ways to make upgrades and repairs, do zooms meetings, expand giving methods, worship feel as close to home as possible, and fellowship connections all continue, in new and effective ways. I could go on and on about our adaptability.

But we are not done yet. Not with the pandemic and not with how we will continue to make our church even stronger for the work and ministry God is calling us to do. So as we peek out the last bits of summer, let us begin to prepare our hearts—with the encouragement that can clearly be seen—for all that God is going to be doing in us and through us in the weeks and months to come.

Your Pastor and Friend,
Jonathan

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Loaves & Fishes + Pantry Update

The August Drive Thru Meal will be the third Sunday which is August 15th from 4-6p.m. In keeping with our summer picnic theme, we will have kielbasa sandwiches and sides!

As always, volunteers are needed and appreciated to facilitate this ministry. Thanks to our outreach team who keeps this mission going every month!

Donations to Good Neighbors

The Outreach Team would like to thank everyone for their donations to the Good Neighbor Back to School program. Our involvement in community driven ministries is critical to being the hands and feet of Christ in this world.

We delivered two bins and two boxes of school supplies!

Sponsor-A-Camper Matching Gifts Continues!

The fundraising continues! Camp Christian is still taking donations for the Sponsor-A-Camper Fund that will be matched up to \$10,000! They've reached \$3,500 in donations, but they're still looking to fund more campers with this gift. If you feel like a joyful giver today, consider sending a little extra pocket change to Camp Christian! Every penny becomes two, and that adds up. Thanks again to our faith-family over at First Christian Church of Athens for matching all these gifts!

For more details, and how to donate, visit <https://www.ccinoh.com/ccio-blog/2021/july/27/sponsor-a-camper-matching-gift.aspx>. Help them reach as many campers as they can! We need more kids to play Gaga ball next year!

Disciples Church Extension Fund Tech Grant

In the last week of May, Disciples Church Extension Fund (DCEF) offered an opportunity for churches just like First Christian Church of Stow: a matching grant up to \$5,000. The granted funds are to be used for enhancing a church's online presence, whether through live streaming or social media. After crafting an application with input from other churches and their technical staff, First Christian Church of Stow has been approved for a grant!

With this grant, we have an opportunity to improve the quality of our livestream worship services. This will better serve our families (and any other folks who find us online) who worship with us remotely.

To take advantage of this grant, however, we need to raise enough of our own funds for DCEF to "match" our own fundraising. DCEF is willing to provide up to \$4,171 towards our purchase of tech equipment. The amount they provide is dependent on the amount we raise through contributions first. For example:

- **If we raise \$3,000** then DCEF will provide an additional \$3,000.
- **If we raise \$4,000** then DCEF will provide an additional \$4,000.
- **If we raise \$5,000** then DCEF will provide an additional \$4,171.

If you feel called to contribute to the online life of our church beyond your initial offerings, please note that part of your contribution as "Tech Grant" and our financial team will include it as part of this effort.

Fran and Dave Brandon

For decades Fran and Dave Brandon called First Christian Church of Stow their church home and its members as their family. And the feelings for them were entirely mutual. Which is why we were sad to see them move from Stow, but could also rejoice and give thanks that they were moving to a place where they would be close to their daughter, son-in-law, and grandchildren.

Reports from their daughter are that they have settled well into their new living arrangements, are meeting new people, getting involved in community

activities, and having frequent visits from their family—especially their grandchildren—which they love to have. May we continue to keep Fran and Dave in our prayers, praying God’s blessings of love and family continue to fill them wherever they are.

The church office does have the Brandon’s new snail-mail address. If you would like to get that and connect with them, please contact Christian or Jonathan. The Brandon’s would love to hear from you.

Just Summer Conversations of Healing – Facing Brokenness: Creation



Join the Disciples Justice Ministries this summer as we begin courageous conversations to bring about healing in areas of brokenness.

Recorded conversation to be followed by live Q & A is scheduled for several times this summer. Representatives of the justice ministries will discuss how church, community, the world, and creation are impacted as well as offer suggestions on what we can do to address the broken places. Stay tuned for more details in the Disciples Justice Ministries newsletter. To find more information and links to additional information, follow this link:

<https://disciples.org/resources/justice/>

- **August 15** is where the Conversation will focus on the brokenness of the **WORLD**
- **August 29** is where the Conversation will focus on the role/work of the **CREATION**.

A Whole New Era of Youth Ministry At First Christian Stow

Last month we were thrilled to share with you the exciting news that our very own Katie Taylor has come aboard the First Christian Church staff as our new Director of Youth Ministries! She brings

STEWARDSHIP CHALLENGE

Giving can sometimes be a hard thing to do. Some weeks we feel we can’t give, others we feel as though our small gift doesn’t mean anything. How can one person with one small gift make a difference? What we need to remember is that giving or tithing is something God calls us to do. God created us to be involved in his work. One way we can do this is to faithfully and cheerfully give with a heart focused on worshipping God in generosity, because according to a song by Matthew West:

“If not us than who, if not me and you. Right now, it’s time for us to do something.”

We can all do something whether we donate our time, talent, or tithes. Where is God calling you to give?

- Laurie Robinson,
- July Elder Lay Leader

to this position not only her lifelong experience of growing up in First Christian Stow, but she also brings with her an enthusiasm and passion for working with young students and being in a role of support for those who are working to figure out what it means to be a young person of faith in today’s world. Throw in that she is just a heck of a lot of fun and a professionally trained baker, and our church has all the makings of an amazing and delicious youth ministry program!

And Katie is ready and eager to get the new year in Youth Group going and has set Sunday, August 29th, right after church, for the Youth Group Kick-Off! So mark your calendars for the 29th, (and Sundays, September 12th and 19th), each right after church. Bring a friend and bring a spirit that is

ready to welcome Katie and join with her on the wild and crazy ride that always is the First Christian Church Youth Group!

(Pssst... and take note there is in the works for one of those Sundays in Sept a special **“Youth vs. Parents/Adults Kickball Extravaganza!”** More details to follow in the coming weeks. Also note Jonathan thinks he’s some king of *“shut-down”* kickball pitcher, so make plans to help him humbly realize he might be a wee bit off in that thinking!)

May God’s blessings abound as we begin a whole new era in Youth Ministry here at First Christian Church!

Welcome Sunday! Mark Your Calendars! **Sunday, September 12, 2021**

Though it is the week of August, and we have a bit more of summer left, please take note we are already looking ahead to a *“new year”* in the life of the church—which is set to begin on Sunday, September 21.

There are plans in the works for us to return to a “more normal” routine—although it will still be a new normal—and only if we can do so safely. But this return to a “more normal” routine aims to include the return of our 8:30 a.m. Sunday worship in the Chapel, 9:30 Christian Education opportunities, and of course what becomes then our second service in the sanctuary. Additionally, the music department is gearing up for adult and children’s choir’s to return. And we aim to all be singing again.

This is, of course, all dependent and contingent upon recommended guidelines, state mandates, and church leadership’s continued consideration as to what is best to offer worship and church activities in safe and healthy ways.

More information will be forth coming in the weeks ahead.

Taking Care of God’s House

While some work is underway, there is more to be done! If you have a spare afternoon that you would like to volunteer to the church, read on! (I’m sure the smell of fresh paint and elbow grease is what is meant by “an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.”)

If you are able to take on one of these projects, either alone or with a friend, contact John McCreight Jr. or Rick Lloyd. They will help secure needed materials and check it off the list.

Thanks,
The Church Trustees

- * Wash inside the library windows
- * Scrape, primer, and paint 4 exterior doors.
- * Paint the outside bench by the elevator entrance
- * Clean windows inside and out - lower entrance and front entrance
- * Seal coat the benches by fire circle
- * Paint the block and brick around the emergency porch south of Chapel
- * Repair and paint the trim above office windows

John Hagat has stained the downstairs bathroom door, cleaned out the big window well under church offices, and secured the loose wires outside the offices. Andy & Lori Thomas have painted the outside doors, and are working on the bench by the elevator and the outside elevator room. Give your thanks to John, Andy, and Lori when you see them!

(This is a great way to work ***with*** your kids or a niece/nephew and help them develop a heart of service and volunteering! Perhaps they could use some handy skill development as well? -Christian)

A word from our new Director of Youth Ministries... Katie Taylor!

Hello First Christian youth! I would like to introduce myself to all of you who don't already know me, my name is Katie Taylor and I have been a proud member of the church for almost 27 years! I have very fond memories of the times I spent in youth group. I feel very blessed to have had the experience of attending Camp Christian and also the many mission trips across the country. I am currently a Kent State student pursuing my passion for helping others. In my free time I enjoy cooking and baking, hiking, reading, and gardening. I also love to play sports! So I hope you are all ready to have a fun and adventurous year. I am very excited to get to know all of you and be a part of your faith journey.

Sincerely,
Katie Taylor

Looking for Tech Volunteers!

If you're interested in learning more about streaming technology and the work that goes on behind the scenes at church, get in touch with the church office and let Christian know you're interested in volunteering with the tech area!

This is a great opportunity for our kids who have aged out of junior church to start developing real-world skills in media and technology as we look to make some updates to our streaming with the tech grant described above. Anyone is welcome to help! You won't want to miss out on the exciting opportunities that are coming to the tech area!

Intro to Mark for August 8th and 15th From Christian, Director of Church Relations:

As Jonathan will be taking another "pause" through the next two weeks, I'm going to be filling in with an abbreviated performance of The Gospel of Mark. This performance was part of my honors thesis project at Malone University regarding new ways of understanding The Gospel of Mark. Here's a bit of an explanation on the topic:

According to new research through the past 15 years, the early church would not have been *reading* any of the books or letters that were sent around to various churches from the Apostles: One literate person would read it aloud for everyone in the church (since 90% to 95% of people were illiterate). This "performance" was animated, lively, and observed in just one night! The performance you'll see is about 30 minutes in total, divided into two parts for the 8th and the 15th. I hope you enjoy seeing and hearing The Word brought to life!

Stow Glen Closure

For nearly four decades Stow Glen has been operated in the City of Stow as an assisted living and skilled nursing facility. During that time dozens of members of our church have called Stow Glen home. So as news broke last week that Stow Glen would be closing it was shocking to hear to say the least. And then to hear residents would have to leave almost immediately was even more shocking.

Currently our church has just one member at Stow Glen and alternative housing is being secured, and her move will come after a short stay with family members. There may be a need for help moving this member/resident out of her apartment, and then into her new apartment. When/if the need arises we will let you know.

Let us hold in our prayers all the residents and their families who are impacted by Stow Glen's closure, keeping in mind that the stress and sorrow and having to leave a home where one feels safe and comfortable with caregivers they know is, and will continue to take a toll. Let us pray each of them is able to settle into new care facilities quickly, and that they feel soon the peace, care, and safety God is providing. Let us hold in our prayers the staff whose jobs and livelihood as all been turned upside down, that God's peace may surround them too, and that God leads them to new employment quickly. And let us give thanks to the dozens and dozens of community volunteers—many of them students from Stow Munroe Falls High School and our church's Boy Scout Troop 169 for showing up early on Saturday, July 31st to help in the process of packing up, moving residents, and then helping unpack the rooms of residents all with the thoughtfulness, care, and love as if the people they were helping was their grandmother or grandfather. Truly, when we work together as a community, we are all #StowStrong.

Rubber Ducks Game, Fireworks, and Tailgate Party, Saturday, August 21st

Registration is still open to attend the Akron Rubber Ducks game on Saturday, August 21st. We are thrilled this summertime tradition for our church and friends is returning to Canal Park as it is a joy to spend an evening with church family watching the Rubber Ducks "*hit 'em where they ain't,*" and then take in a spectacular firework show after the game.

Don't forget, this night will feature the man the myth, the legend, Uncle Ricco (Jon Gries) from the hit cult classic film, *Napoleon Dynamite!* Don't miss your chance to have Uncle Ricco tell you, "*Back in '82, I used to be able to toss a pigskin a quarter mile.*" If that means anything to you then you know you have to be at this game. If nothing

about this makes any sense to you, that's ok because it is useless knowledge and there won't be a quiz.

As stated before: Make plans to come and tailgate at the church from 4-6 that afternoon! Hot dogs, beverages, and fellowship will all be on hand for a socially distanced tailgate extravaganza!

Tickets are just \$10! What a bargain! Not as much of a bargain in past years, but hey, getting out to a night at the ballpark and tailgating for a couple extra bucks is worth it right!? See Bill Dowey or contact the church office to reserve yours tickets today!

Update from the
Finance/Stewardship Team:
Financial Giving from the Congregation
for January – July 2021

We won't close the financial books for July for a couple more days, but I wanted to provide a status of where we are currently with our congregational giving.

The Total Income budget amount is \$21,181 per month. This includes congregational giving and other income sources like building rental.

For the month of July, so far, our income is \$21,446. For the month this is above the budget amount by \$265.

Year to date our income has been \$152,599. This is above the budget for Year to date by \$4,330 (2.9%).

***The rest of the financial report can be
found below on the following page.***

Here is the information in table format:

2021	Jan- Mar	Apr- June	July	YTD
Actual Income	\$65,146	\$66,007	\$21,446	\$152,599
Budget Income	\$63,544	\$63,544	\$21,181	\$148,269
Actual Income- Budget Income	\$1,602	\$2,463	\$265	\$4,330
% Actual Over Budget Income	2.5%	3.9%	1.3%	2.9%

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 full year, which is 8% above our budget income.

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.

Please let any member of the Finance/Stewardship team know if you would like to see our full reports, we are happy to share them.