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PATHWAYS DECEMBER 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!



Christmas Ingathering Outreach

Tuesday and Wednesday, December 14th – 15th

The Season of Advent is upon us! In anticipation and with hope, joy, peace and love, join us by giving a great Christmas to those in need!

List of needs to donate can be found below!

Colors of Christmas

December 14th, 5-8 p.m.

On a busy Tuesday night, we will be hosting a station for Colors of Christmas here in Stow! We're still looking for Wise Guys and all sorts of roles from Search for the Christ Child! Contact Jonathan or Cora to note your interest!

Congregational Meeting to Approve

The 2022 Budget

Sunday, December 5th

Stick around after service to vote on the 2022 Budget! We are blessed and thankful for a successful fiscal year—Let us gather together to prayerfully start a new one!

Youth Group Events

Sundays, December 5th & 12th

11:45 a.m. – 1:15 p.m.

Youth Group has two more events each Sunday through Advent! Make sure to bring Ugly Christmas Sweaters and all your Christmas Cheer!

Pastor's Pen, December 2021

It's December, and that means... Christmas! I love Christmas. Sure, it's cliché to say because who doesn't love Christmas? Well, actually, I believe there are some, but in general December, Advent, Christmas, New Years, the Holidays—they really are *the most wonderful* time of the year! (Not to be confused with *the best* time of the year—summer! Two separate seasons, both with their wonder, whimsy and good times. Paradoxical, I know. But I digress.)

If you heard/read my sermon from the first Sunday of Advent then you heard/read my admission of listening to Christmas music since the first week of November. (Again, really, it just happened. And I swear I was thinking of Thanksgiving the whole time!) And I've been listening because it has made me feel cheery, joyful, and peaceful. And who couldn't use a few more moments of cheeriness, joyfulness, and peacefulness? I can't think of anyone—not even those who don't love the holiday season! (Because let us remember, chances are the reason some don't love the holiday season is because either they are without a loved one and their absence makes the season exceedingly difficult; or perhaps their past experiences within the season left them scarred from a trauma that still lingers strong. Among other reasons too, of course.) So no matter the circumstances, I won't believe for a second there is anyone who would say, "*You're offering more cheeriness, joyfulness, and peacefulness? Nah, I'm good.*" There is just too much that robs us of such feelings, and when opportunities to find again those feelings and moments—we should take them.

And yes, for those who have been paying attention over the years, this is a shift in beliefs and practices for me. Before I would get annoyed with the playing of Christmas music and the putting up of Christmas trees and decorations three weeks before Thanksgiving. But I'm over that school of thought. Call me a flip-flopper if you want. Accuse me of saying one thing one time, and something different another time. It's fine. I suppose it's accurate. But the deeper truth is...times have changed... circumstances have changed... the world has changed...I have changed. And with changes comes the changing of needs. Before, I could wait until at least the day after Thanksgiving for the Christmas season to start. But now I'm cranking up to "11" all my favorite versions of *Oh Holy Night* and *The First Noel*. (Incidentally, look up on YouTube Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley of the famous rock band Kiss perform *The First Noel*...on the triangle! Its whimsy meets mind blowing ironic joy! You can thank me later.) And I let myself make this change because I needed, just like



many of us need, more cheeriness, joyfulness, and peacefulness today.

But I don't stop with music, mind you. I turn also to familiar passages of scripture that remind me of the message, truth, power, hope, peace, joy, and love that Christmas brings. Scripture readings like... Isaiah 43:18-19, where the prophet says, "*Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.*" I tell you what...that's what I'm talkin' about! "*Forget about the former things. I'm doing a new thing,*" says God. "*Can you not see that? And I am inviting you to be a part of it?*" (Paraphrased, of course.) Isaiah is speaking of the coming Messiah who would come and do a *new thing*. And Jesus fulfilled that prophecy in showing us that *new thing*, a *new way* of living and being and moving in life.

And always that new way will stretch us. Over and over again in the Gospels, the message Jesus has for those who would emulate him in the world is, in essence, "*I want to show you something new. Whatever standard you once used for how to live and treat people and find meaning, I'm asking you to do something different.*" Which is hard—it *stretches* us. But the reason Jesus calls us to stretch and do something different is because times have changed, circumstances have changed, the world has changed, and we have changed. The needs of those around us, and those who we cross paths with, they are going through times of change too—and most of those changes are really, really hard. This is true today, just as it has been true always. So God sends the message, through the prophet Isaiah, and then later in Jesus, for us to emulate and learn that we need to at times forget the "*way we've always done it*", and perceive the new "*it*" God is doing around us. But here's the amazing part we dare not forget. Whatever new thing God is doing, it's going to be so amazing, so incredible, so life giving it will be like a way in the wilderness (when we are lost) and waters flowing in the desert.

So as we walk deeper into this "*most wonderful time of the year*" let us consider what new thing God is calling us to. Let us be mindful of those who find this time of year not so wonderful, and consider how we can share with them the Good News of the new thing God is surely doing for them, and help them perceive it. For when we become part of the new thing God is going—during the holiday season and all throughout the year—then we will always find not just whimsy and cheeriness, but we will be enveloped by God's hope, peace, joy, and love. And who couldn't use a bit more of that? Merry Christmas everyone.

Your Pastor and Friend,
Jonathan

Ingathering Outreach Approaches! December 13th – 15th

Preparation is still ongoing for this event! There are still many grocery items we are looking for, and there's We are receiving information from the schools, stocking up on socks and hats and gloves, cutting and tying fleece blankets, and getting ready to shop! If you are interested in shopping for a family and I have not yet contacted you, please call or email me (330-524-2228 or jnahalpin@sbcglobal.net) so we can discuss how you can get involved in this amazing ministry! If you are not a shopper, we will gladly accept your donation and do the shopping for you!! Thank you for your generosity that makes this ministry awesome, year after year.

-Ann Halpin, World Outreach Team.

“The Colors of Christmas” A Community Event

Tuesday, December 14th, 5-8p.m.

A Community Tour Celebration of *The Colors of Christmas!* is set to take place on Tuesday, December 14th 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 **THAT WILL INCLUDE**, wait for it...vignettes of our **Search For The Christ Child** event! Yep, we are busting out the angels, the wise ~~guys~~ men, shepherds (and any shepherd dogs!), Mary and Joseph, and maybe even mean old King Herod if we can pull him out of retirement! All parts will be condensed but will still have our drive-thru guests see AND hear the Christmas story come to life! Last year, we had over 100 families drive through and visit our display— This year, we're going bigger and WE NEED YOU!

If you would like to participate in anyway— set-up, character portrayal, greeters, tear-down, or working Christmas lights you could loan or even donate please reach out to Cora Dowey at

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Loaves & Fishes + Pantry Update

The drive thru meal will be December 19th, 4-6 p.m.! See below for the incredible story of our Thanksgiving drive thru! As we're approaching Christmas, providing for families is going to be incredibly important as parents pull together Christmas gifts for their children—your help in this outreach is appreciated!

Needs for the Ingathering Outreach

Below is a list of all the foods that we're going to need to supply our families for Ingathering Outreach! Many hands makes for light work, and many contributions will feed many families for the Christmas season!

Beans	Boxed Potatoes
Cake Mix	Cereal (Cheerios or like)
Fruit or Applesauce	Icing
Jell-O or Pudding	Jelly
Juice	Rice
Spaghetti Sauce	Soup
Tuna	Velveeta Cheese
Veggies	Tomato Products

Bulldog Donations '21-'22 School year

Below is a list of our upcoming donation items for Bulldog Boxes/Bags. Be sure to follow along WITH the dates! Perishable goods may not keep forever in a donation bin!

Dec.: Hot chocolate packets, Due Dec. 6

Jan.: Toothpaste and toothbrushes, Due Jan. 10

Feb.: Individual snack bags of Goldfish, Due Feb. 7

Acme Cashback Program

Make sure you keep your receipts and place them in the collection box in the Gathering area. We will be collecting until December 25th, so make sure you save your receipts! All proceeds go to benefit the Dorcas Rebekah Guild, Mary Martha Guild, and our Blanket Ministry

coradowey@yahoo.com (330-592-3170) or Jonathan and 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.

Congregational Meeting to Approve the 2022 Budget December 5th, after each service

We are thankful for the great year we've had with incredible outreach, record numbers for Loaves and Fishes Drive Through, and more. A number of ministries and new works have began here at First Christian Stow. Despite many difficulties in 2020 and 2021, we've had a successful fiscal year, which reflects After each service, there will be a meeting and a process for you to make your vote for the 2022 budgets. We hope to see you there!

Clergy Renewal 2022

FCC Stow's period of Clergy Renewal (a.k.a., Sabbatical) now is scheduled for summer of 2022. This renewal was initially scheduled for summer of 2020 but was delayed because of extraordinary circumstances.

We are still finalizing the details, but we can share this information:

- The renewal period will be 16 weeks from late May till early September.
- We will have an interim pastor for the renewal period.
- Our normal church functions will continue without interruption.
- The ongoing congregational conclave is part of our preparation for the renewal period.

We will share more details, such as the exact dates and the identity of the interim pastor, when available.

If you have any questions about this renewal process, please contact Jonathan or Tom Safford.

YOUTH GROUP
December Youth Group

Sunday, December 5th!

11:45 to 1:15pm

In-gathering shopping @ Target

We will be going on our annual shopping trip to Target for our Christmas in-gathering. Lunch will be provided before we leave. Parents: please remember to pick up your student at the Stow/Kent Target at 1:15pm!

Sunday, December 12th!

11:45-1:15pm

Youth group Christmas Party!

We will be wrapping the Christmas presents we bought for the in-gathering while listening to music, eating cookies, and sharing in some holiday fun! Wear your best holiday attire or ugly sweater! Lunch will be provided.

Notes for Youth Group

The holidays are often times when many of us pause and thank God for the blessings we have in our lives. During this time of reflection many of us Christians are called to spread God's love through service. Some of the many ways that we can share that love during this holiday season is by participating in the in-gathering, and the colors of Christmas. As a youth group we can help out with both of these events. We have our annual shopping trip to Target to shop for the children within our community. We may also volunteer to help our church put on a special Christmas event that helps spread the message of Jesus's birth.

We also have many fun things to look forward to in this holiday season including our youth group Christmas Party! We will be wrapping our gifts we bought for the children, decorating cookies, and playing some fun holiday games! And let us not forget that the greatest gift we could ever receive this holiday season is God's love. -Katie Taylor

Child Care

Available during 10:30 a.m. Worship.

Share Your Christmas Spirit Free Store @ Camp Christian

Bears, Blankets and Buckeyes (Oh my)! At Camp Christian, there's a number of ways to help out those in need over the holiday season.

On December 11th, from 7 p.m. – 9 p.m. at the Camp Dining Hall, volunteers will be putting together fleece blankets, making buckeyes, and creating bracelets to donate during their Camp Christmas program. You even get to sample the buckeyes and make your own bracelet! A local jewelry artist will be giving instruction as well. Youth and kids (as long as they're accompanied by an adult) are welcome to join in the fun, learn a few new skills, and sample the goodness!

On December 17th, from 4 p.m. – 8 p.m., volunteers will meet in the Camp Christian Dining Hall to give families in need the BEST Christmas! This is a shopping opportunity much like the Ingathering Outreach. "This is an adult only event to keep our Christmas magic ALIVE.

- Sign up genius link for donating items and/or volunteering: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/60b0948adaf28a1f94-camp1>
- Amazon wish list for needed items: https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/25IQXZ7DGIRTG?ref_=wl_share

If you have any questions or need more information please call or text Wendy Taylor directly at 614-832-9679.

You can also make a monetary donation to the Free Store at Camp Christian to support this Christmas Program at <https://www.ccinoh.com/donation.aspx>. Be sure to designate your donation to The Free Store at Camp"

Congregational Conclave Continues

Session 2: November 7-December 5th

Please attend at least ONE Conclave Gathering

A Congregational Conclave— "*an assembly that is designed to have special authority and influence.*" And assembly we have! Thank you to

STEWARDSHIP CHALLENGE

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke each tell the story of the rich man and Jesus. We're all familiar with it.

A faithful wealthy man asks what he needs to do to earn eternal life; Jesus tells him to keep the commandments.

The man says "yes, yes, I've done all this, what else should I do?".

And Jesus comes right back with: "Go sell all of your earthly possessions, give everything to the poor, and follow me".

The rich man goes away sad because he knows he just can't do it. And that's pretty relatable, isn't it? I don't know about you but I kind of like my stuff.

But of course, Jesus was giving a lesson that wasn't really intended for the rich man. He's giving a lesson to his disciples and through them to us. Jesus's lesson—it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter heaven—is that we can't earn or buy our way into eternal life. That is a gift given by God. "With men this is impossible." Jesus tells the disciples. "But with God all things are possible."

So why do we make our offerings and tithes? It's obviously not a quid pro quo arrangement.

We do it for many reasons. To support the ministries which are important to us and our community. To focus our mind by giving back a portion of what we receive. And, ultimately, we do it as an expression of love for God.

As always, your gifts and offerings are gratefully accepted through the mail to the church office, through the secure online giving page at our website, or for those worshiping in person in the offering basket near the door to the sanctuary.

everyone who has come to be part of this ongoing Congregational Conclave. Now that we have done this first session, where we have looked at the strengths and weaknesses of our church, we are set to take the next step in this discernment process that will lead us from intent to impact.

We have one last Congregational Conclave, this coming Sunday. We do hope to see you there if you haven't had the chance to stop by yet!

Sunday, 12/5/21: 9:30 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.,
Disciples Hall

Loaves and Fishes + Pantry

That was quite a way to kick off the giving season. On Sunday November 20th our church served food to over 35 separate families. All told, over 108 people received a full meal and four bags of groceries.

This is 108 people who will have food to eat during Thanksgiving week because of prayers, financial support, and hard work from the members of First Christian Church.

This is the highest number of families and people that we have served at Loaves & Fishes + Pantry. The people who received food were all thankful that we have this ministry. Their gratitude is heartfelt and special and makes the effort worthwhile.

And a very special thanks to all our volunteers, those who bought the food, cooked the food, bagged the food, served the food, and loaded the food into cars. It's a team effort and each person who helped is vital to the success of this ministry.

Miracles? Magic? And Beans?

It takes a village. It takes a Church! Miracles and magic! Drive thru meal blessings!

We served 108 meals this Sunday, from seven donated turkeys and every last spoonful of mashed potatoes, stuffing, and green beans. At one point, we ran out of beans! We started looking around the kitchen for any green beans we had left, and we found just two cans of beans. They served our very last guests this Sunday. Thanks to God for saving two cans for them!

An Opportunity for Outreach!

It is amazing to think that Christmas is weeks away! This time of year is so wonderful for friends, family, and the Christmas spirit, but I feel the time between Thanksgiving and Christmas is a special time to acknowledge the true meaning of the season, remember our blessings, and give to others.

I want to take this platform to share an outreach opportunity I have enjoyed for years and invite my church family to participate! I read a book many years ago, and the author explained how his father would take him as a child to nursing homes to visit complete strangers. These visits turned into opportunities for the father and son to listen to the residents, especially the ones who had no visitors. Everyone has a story to share, and I realized after reading this book that I could do something special for strangers who have no visitors.

I think many people can relate when I confess that I would buy Christmas cards, not use all of them, and convince myself that I would use the remaining cards next year. Of course, I would buy new cards and the previous ones are forgotten. I decided to repurpose my abandoned cards, collect "we'll use them next year" cards from others, and give them to people who would appreciate them. Every year I write messages in the extra cards and drop them off to local nursing homes with the instructions to distribute them to residents, especially the ones who have no visitors.

I would love to extend an invitation to join this tradition that I love to do each year! There will be a card donation tote in the front lobby for "We'll Use Them Next Year" Cards. There are a few ways to become involved!

- If you have any boxes of unused cards (even if it is a few), please consider donating them and dropping them off in the donation tote. I will fill them out with a message and deliver them to a local nursing home.
- Feel free to fill out your donated cards with messages for the residents! Wish them a blessed Christmas season to remind them they are thought of and prayed for.
- Don't have cards to give this year? That's okay, you can still be involved! Like Easter and Halloween candy, the best time to buy

Christmas cards is after Christmas! Stock up on 75% off boxes of cards and donate them to the tote for next year.

Thank you for your donations!
Cate Fioritto

I hope you enjoy this outreach idea, and I look forward to sharing the true meaning of the Christmas season with all of you. Please contact me through the church office if you have any questions.

Update from the Finance/Stewardship Team

Financial Giving from the Congregation for January – November 2021

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 numbers below are not final but I believe they are a close estimate of the final numbers.

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 November, so far, our income is \$26,715. For the month this is above the budget amount by \$5,534.

Year to date our income has been \$251,841. This is above the budget for Year to date by \$18,846 (8.1%).

This is very good news, and as long as our giving continues on this path for December, we will hit our Leap of Faith amount!!

We are so very grateful and blessed that our congregation is willing to share these good gifts, and we look forward to how we collectively can use them to share God's love to our local and global community!

Here is the information in table format:

2021	Jan-Mar	Apr-June	July-Sept	Oct	Nov	YTD
Actual Income	\$65,146	\$66,017	\$68,690	\$25,273	\$26,715	\$251,841
Budget Income	\$63,544	\$63,544	\$63,544	\$21,181	\$21,181	\$232,995
Actual Income-Budget Income	\$1,602	\$2,473	\$5,146	\$4,092	\$5,534	\$18,846
% Actual Over Budget Income	2.5%	3.9%	8.1%	19.3%	26.1%	8.1%

As we shared last 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.