



First Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)
Stow, OH

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PATHWAYS

JANUARY 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!



Loaves and Fishes + Pantry

Chili Cook-Off, January 16th, 4pm-6pm

Ready Your Recipes! Prepare the Pampered Chef!
For Loaves and Fishes this month, we're hosting
the annual Chili Cook-Off!

2022 Budget Approved

With the new fiscal year underway, Jim Hindel
notes the successes and achievements of 2021

Youth Group Events

Sundays, January 9th & 23rd

11:45 a.m. – 1:15 p.m.

Just because the holidays are over doesn't mean
there's nothing to celebrate! Youth will be
meeting on January 9th to talk about goals for the
new year, and reflecting on MLK Jr. on the 23rd!

Pastor's Pen, January 2021

Are you determined to make 2022 the year you finally lose those extra 10 pounds? Sure, you can add in three days of exercise and cut down on sugar, but is that enough to achieve your goal? What you need is a secret weapon to start the year off right. We have just the things—the Sweet Sweat Waist Trimmer. Never thought you were the waist trimmer type? Read on and maybe your mind—and your body—will be changed this year.

This is an actual article posted on January 2, 2022, entitled, “New year, new you: This \$22 waist trimmer from Amazon is the ‘best thing I’ve ever bought’”

To which I say... Oh really? The best thing you’ve ever bought? **Ever**? Of all the things you’ve bought, **ever**, this is the best of them all? Better than a car? Better than a home? Better than any of the food/meals you have bought? Better than your phone? So are you saying if you had to pick one *thing* out of all your *things* THIS would be the *thing* you...

Ok, I’ll stop. I’m getting into one of my characteristic rants about the ridiculousness of skewed and eroded priorities, and how they are blatantly touted as “*life changing*” when in reality it’s just another snake oil con-artist trying to convince us all we need for “*the best thing ever*” is to simply click the provided link.

This is so bad and exceedingly aggravating on so many levels. Among them, this person got paid to write this piece—by both Yahoo and by Amazon. It’s **not** life changing! It’s a racket, flimflam, and gobbledygook. It is taxation on hope—the hope of those who have been hoping against hope for years to finally achieve a goal which is quite possibly a life changing/lifesaving need.

But maybe I am just jealous. Nothing I write makes it to such level of publication and distribution. Nothing I write gets the kind of clicks this “writer” gets. So maybe I should be saying good for them for finding a way to get paid to write—even if at best its piece on par with the “*What I want for Christmas*” assignment Ralphie wrote in a *Christmas Story*. (Yes, it’s January, but I watched *Christmas Story* later than usual this year so it’s still fresh in my mind.) I hope their next piece will be about how the rest of us can dupe an entity like *Yahoo!Life* into paying us to write a click bait opinion piece that is obviously written at a third grade level, has not-so-implicit shaming intentions, stems from the shallowest of thoughtfulness, completely ignores commonsense, all while containing absolutely zero creativity in presentation—“*New Year-New You?!*” Wow! No one has ever said that before! (SMH*.) So bravo to you Nicole “*Best Ever Waist Trimmer*” whatever your name is hullabaloo hustler! Good for you for building up your career with so few tools in your toolbox. Keep up the



mediocre writing and the predatory sales pitching upon desperate and already shamed people who are constantly thinking about “finally” losing their extra weight, because it’s all getting you paid.

Maybe I am jealous. But I am also tired and discouraged that though everything changes, nothing changes. New Year-New You? Really? Is this still what we are doing? Yes, admittedly, my characteristic rants about the ridiculousness of skewed and eroded priorities is what I am still doing, and I suppose that is just as tiresome. So how about we do something different? How about, before we **ever** do anything, we do it from just a slightly different perspective? Ok, that might be a bit much? So how about we before we **ever** do **one** thing, we do it from just a slightly different perspective.

How about we pick something we want, or even need to do, and instead of shaming ourselves for not having done it, we give ourselves grace, and then encouragement and space to do it. Want to lose weight? Ok, great! What is one thing you can do today to help yourself begin? Want to improve a relationship? Ok, great! What is one thing you can do right now to help yourself begin? And don’t reach for your phone to Google ideas. And for the love of all things holy, do not order a waist trimmer! Instead, just stop. You can do this. You and God can do this. So stop for a second, close your eyes, open your heart and spirit to God...and listen. Listen for God’s still small voice speak.

What if you wrote yourself a letter that says all you would want and need to hear that will encourage you, and inspire you to be wholly you? What if you wrote a letter to that someone who you have been wanting to say what you’ve been wanting to say? What if...

These are just ideas about one thing you can do to *begin*—right now. There are others though. And you already have them in your mind and heart and spirit. They are right there, waiting to be brought forth. The only “*secret weapon*” you need for the New Year is you and your already well crafted capacity to be open to God’s holy and divine presence. Not a new you. Just you and God. The you you’ve always been, the God who has always been. The you who is capable, the God who is capable. The you who is loved already just as you are by our God. The you who is able to make the decision to do what you need to do, the God who will bring it all out and lead you forward. Because here’s the thing you need to know... In God’s eyes **you** are the best thing ever. And all God ever wants for you, is for you to know you are so “best” God promises to walk with you every day and surround you with love and grace forever. New Year. ~~New~~ Faithful You.

Your Pastor and Friend,
Jonathan

(*SMH=*Shaking my head*. Acronyms are all the rage these days. Your pastor is hip.)

2021 Report for Loaves & Fishes + Pantry

2021 was a big year for our Loaves & Fishes + Pantry.

Our pantry provided groceries for 236 households consisting of 601 individuals. This included 292 children and 309 seniors.

All told we gave out enough groceries to provide 3,306 meals.

But wait, there's more... Our Loaves & Fishes crew prepared and served hot meals for all those households.

That's right, over 3,300 hot meals were served to our neighbors.

But wait, there's more... During the Ingathering Distribution, we provided groceries to cover 888 meals for the families we served.

In 2022 we look forward to continued growth with the Loaves & Fishes + Pantry program.

Our food costs will rise, but this increase will be partially offset by a grant from the Summit County Department of Jobs and Family Services. The money from this grant will be used by the Food Bank to offset the cost of food items in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.

Clergy Renewal Update; a.k.a Jonathan's Sabbatical Summer 2022

After postponing for two years due to the global health crisis, Jonathan will finally be taking his sabbatical this summer. Details, including beginning date and end date will be forth coming next month, but the Elders wanted to start by sharing this important news about this important opportunity for both our Pastor and for us the church.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Loaves & Fishes + Pantry Sunday, Jan. 16th, 4 p.m. – 6 p.m.

Next month will be the Chili Cookoff. Dust off your crock pots and compete for the coveted gold, silver and bronze spoons! Judging done by servers before distribution so have your entries there early! Loaves and Fishes + Pantry will be serving families on the 16th from 4-6.

Loaves & Fishes + Pantry December Wrap-Up

December was complicated by no water at the Church for cooking the drive thru dinner. Each pan of scalloped potatoes takes 5 quarts of water, but water can be purchased, and we served many hungry people. Imagine our surprise when we found that Freedom House had moved their residents because of COVID to another facility! Imagine their delight that we had ham, scalloped potatoes, green beans, carrots and Christmas cookies.

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!

Jan.: Toothpaste and toothbrushes, Due Jan. 10

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

Mar.: Individual cereal cups, Due Mar. 7

Laity Sunday February 13, 2022

Our church's annual Laity Sunday is a time honored and faithful time of worship in the life of our church when each element of the worship service is led by a layperson, reinforcing the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) stance we call "*The priesthood of all believers*", a view that stresses all have a role in sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. In a safe and healthy way the Worship

Team will bring this tradition back in February 2022. If you are interested in being part of this year's Laity Sunday please let Jonathan know or indicate your interest on a Sunday Connection Card.

From Good Neighbors:
"Thank you!"

A letter from our friends at Good Neighbors:

"First Christian Church, you make a difference.

Our Sincerest Thanks to you for your generous contribution. You are helping Cuyahoga Falls Good Neighbors fulfill its mission to assist families within our community with food, clothing, personal, and household items."

With the faithful sharing of our resources with organizations like Good Neighbors, FCC Stow is making an impact in the local community. This is just one of the places where we put our energy, but Good Neighbors recognizes it, and is using our contributions for the good of the Stow community, and our neighbors. Maybe we'll be doing even more next year! Think on that for your resolutions. The gym is going to be way too busy anyways!

Christmas Card Donation
Follow-Up and Thank You

To my amazing church family,
I am absolutely overwhelmed by the support I received for the nursing home Christmas card outreach and ministry. I received over 700 cards in donation! With the help of my mom, Ginnie Porter, we personally wrote a message and salutation and sealed each of the 525 cards card we delivered so each resident would feel they were receiving a personal piece of mail to open.

The distribution of the cards is as follows:

- Briarwood Estates: 100 cards
- The Arbors of Stow: 100 cards
- Mulberry Gardens Senior Living: 125 cards
- Heather Knoll Nursing: 100 cards
- KentRidge Senior Living: 100 cards

YOUTH GROUP

Sunday, January 9th!

11:45 to 1:15pm

Happy New Year!

We will be starting off the new year by setting our New Year's intentions as Christians. We will be getting back to the basics and finding out what we know, and what we want to know more about in our religion. Get ready for a fun Quiz to test your knowledge and games to follow!

Sunday, January 23rd!

11:45-1:15pm

MLK day inspiration

With MLK day this week we will be taking a look at all the inspirational things he did to change the world we live in. How can we also make an impact in our world? We will be taking a look at our own spiritual gifts and how we can use them for good.

****With the increasing number of Covid cases I am encouraging everyone to wear a mask and pack their own lunch at this time. I will have snacks provided just in case someone does not bring lunch. We will try our best to maintain social distance and continue our ministry safely. If any parents have any comments or concerns, please feel free to contact me at 330-608-8810 or email me at youthdirector@firstchristianstow.org****

Child Care

Available during 10:30 a.m. Worship.

The nurse or receptionist at the welcome desk of each location was grateful and thankful that our church would think of their residents during the holidays. It is a wonderful thought that a simple card could brighten a day of a stranger, and especially to the ones who may be celebrating alone. Also, with each packet of cards we distributed information brochures for FCCS for the facility and residents to know who and where we are and how to connect to our services virtually. I hope this outreach expands outside of Christmas, and we can welcome new viewers every Sunday!

This is a ministry I prepare for during the year to be ready for Christmas. The abundance of cards I received gave a jump-start for the 2022 season, but we can never have enough Christmas cards! I will continue to collect unused cards or clearance Christmas card boxes (hurry to pick them up before the stores decide Christmas is over before we do!). Please drop off your cards to the church office or Jonathan, and they will make their way to me.

I can't thank you enough for the involvement and help with this special ministry. I am blessed to be part of a church that steps up when God calls us to act and spread His love and charity. I hope everyone had a beautiful, blessed, and joyous Christmas!

Thank you, Cate Fioritto

Epiphany Sunday, January 9th

Epiphany is coming! January 6th of the Church calendar is a day that we celebrate the revelation of Jesus Christ as God Incarnate. This day we commemorate the Wise Men's visit to the Holy Family as they observed the birth of Christ. After this, we celebrate a time of Epiphanytide...

But when do we take down our decorations?! Some Christians take them down the day before Epiphany, known as Epiphany Eve (Or the 12th Day of Christmas!!!), And others wait until the end of Epiphanytide, which is February 2nd. I like the latter option more, personally.

Whatever day you take down your decorations, join us in remembering the awe and wonder of The Messiah, God Incarnate, Light of Lights, found in the person of Christ. And keep Christ in your heart all year round, not just in Christmas (But yes, also keep Christ in Christmas)!

Family Promise Promises Fulfilled

God's work in our community is being more fully realized as different programs are responding to participants with reviews of their successes and blessings. From Family Promise, a great report of 2021 comes through. Over 80% of the families that Family Promise served this year have left into permanent housing! They had only expected to see 60% of families housed, but through blessings this year, they have had the opportunity to see another 1/5th of their families being housed. Additionally, they have 26 children in their program, and each received at least 6 gifts this Christmas, giving them some joy despite all circumstances.

Thank you for all of your gifts towards the church and these programs within the community. Ushering families in need toward permanent housing can give them great peace of mind and a much higher quality of life in comparison to circumstances that they've come from. These families will be a little warmer this winter.

Sunday Sermons and Pastoral Prayers Available By Snail Mail

If you or someone you know would like printed copies of the Sunday sermons and pastoral prayers sent via snail mail please let the church office know. We will be glad to mail copies to anyone who would enjoy reading the pastor's message.

Also note that all sermons and prayer are also available on our church website, and videos of weekly worship services are always available at our church's Facebook page and YouTube Channel.

2022 BUDGET APPROVED

Hello First Christian Family!

We just wanted to make sure you heard the good news. We have unanimously approved our church budget for 2022. We are truly blessed by the fact that you have remained “Devoted to Generosity,” the theme of this year’s campaign. Because of your devotion to the mission and ministry of THIS CHURCH, we have been able to stay open and active during these very trying times, to continue the ministries that are so important to so many, and to provide a place for organizations that rely on our church to meet and serve those in need. Your devotion to this church is really your faithfulness and commitment to God through which we can emulate his Peace, Love and Joy, and receive His final promise of Everlasting Life.

The blessings received from 2021 has allowed us to make our Leap of Faith, and gives us the confidence that not only allows us to maintain our current status, but to flourish and further our growth and commitment within the community, region, for you, the people of Stow First Christian, and most important our God. A few of the approval hi-lights, include:

- A well deserved 5% pay increase for our Church Staff, the first since 2019.
- Although we can never replace someone like Kathy Gustafson, we have been able to fill our church secretarial duties with Christian Sanko, in a newly created position “Director of Church Relations”. Christian’s skillset will not only allow us to fill Kathy’s administrative duties, but also allows a look at advancing our technologies. One such item would be our Facebook Live Worship Service, which we will continue with as part of our normal operating procedure into the future.
- We have added a position “Director of Youth Ministries”, filled by our own life-time church member, Katie Taylor to better serve our youth and its programs.
- We have added money to upgrade our worship and other technologies for better audio and video capabilities, and also ways to upgrade the processing of the service.
- We have increased our financial support for the monthly food outreach Plus Pantry, which is held monthly along with the Loaves and Fishes meal. With these additional funds we can continue to provide grocery items along with the meal, to better serve the needs of our local community.

We know in times like these, personal financial decisions can be difficult, and we thank you so much for your thoughtfulness and faithfulness in support of our work here on earth. Because of that, we can continue to share God’s love and blessings with our local and global communities.

God Bless,

The Stewardship Team
Jim, Lisa, Barb, Al & Jonathan

Update from the Finance/Stewardship Team

Financial Giving from the Congregation for January – December 2021

We won't close the financial books for 2021 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 December, so far, our income is \$24,811. For the month this is above the budget amount by \$3,667.

Year to date our income has been \$276,653. This is above the budget for Year to date by \$22,477 (8.8%).

This is very good news!! This means that we have made 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- Dec	YTD
Actual Income	\$65,146	\$66,017	\$68,690	\$76,800	\$276,653
Budget Income	\$63,544	\$63,544	\$63,544	\$63,544	\$254,176
Actual Income- Budget Income	\$1,602	\$2,473	\$5,146	\$13,256	\$22,477
% Actual Over Budget Income	2.5%	3.9%	8.1%	20.9%	8.8%

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.