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PATHWAYS JANUARY 2026

*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 & Fishes + Pantry

January 18th, 4 p.m. - 6 p.m.

Please mark your calendars and please consider sharing your time with this important ministry.
Serving jambalaya and sides.

Youth Group Meets Sunday, January 18th & Feb 1st

Youth will be doing an activity each Sunday with lunch provided! Parents, stay tuned for more details via text.

All-Church Soup Cook-Off

Sunday, February 1st

Is this your year?! Will you hoist the coveted “*Golden Calf... Spoon*”!?
Whether you enter a soup in the competition, or just come out to help crown the winner,
make plans to be a part of the Super Soup Cook-Off after worship on February 1st!

Sketti N Skits

Sunday, March 1st

Join us in Fellowship Hall for an incredible talent show of music, skits, and other acts! Don't forget to invite your friends and family for this affordable Spaghetti Dinner for just \$8 for adults, \$4 for kids, and children under 3 have dinner for free!

Ash Wednesday

February 18th

Please mark your calendars and be on the lookout for more information as we approach the season of Lent.

2025-2026 Acme Cash Back—Just Days Left!

Please remember that Acme Community Cash Back has just a few more days left in 2026! The FINAL day for collections is **February 15th**! Please SHOP ‘til YOU DROP and get them to the church ASAP up-to-and-until that date!

January 2026,

Pastor's Pen

Welp... the holidays are over, and now we're in the coldest part of the season, and by the looks of the extended forecast, the coldest days haven't yet arrived. Ugh. And though the days are technically getting "longer" it all seems much darker because the whimsical and colorful lights and inflatables that adorned so many houses and yard are now all turned off. All this is to say that I really don't care for January because January can be a pretty bleak month in Ohio.

I can say, though, that January does always have one aspect I enjoy. And that is the New Year. A new year always seems so... well... new to me. Fresh. Clean. Without blemish. It carries with it the sense that the days ahead *could* be, even *can* be, filled with new opportunities, accomplishments, renewed vigor, focus, determination, and endless possibilities. Maybe this is the year you'll take "that vacation." Maybe you'll try that "activity" you've always wanted to try. Maybe you will finally "exercise regularly," "reach out to that old friend," "save money," or whatever you've been waiting and wanting to make happen. A new year, for me, always brings a bit of encouragement and a lot of hope. Which goes a long when during an Ohio January.

Now of course the new year beckons us to make a New Year's Resolution. But a resolution is not what I'm talking about here, and I am certainly not encouraging all y'all to make one. Resolutions, I've come to believe just sent us up for discouragement and failure. We make them, are inspired by them, motivated to act upon them...but then forget them by February. Instead, I've come to find that setting goals are way better than making resolutions.

Now, I can hear you saying, "Ummm...Rev... in the context you've set here, 'goals' are really just another word for 'resolutions.'" To which I would say, "Yes, you are right. However...!" Yes, *resolutions* and *goals* are not far apart in meaning, but the term and idea and concept of setting a goal feels different to me, it feels like a pursuit, while "resolutions" feel like a rule or law I know I will inevitably break. Also, I simply think it is important to set goals for ourselves, whether it's at the beginning of the year, or in any endeavor we are part of—even in the church. And my stance toward goal setting was only strengthened after recently

reading about SMART goal setting. SMART being an acronym for: *Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timed*. This SMART method for setting goals specifies these parameters because they break the goal down in ways that set us up for success.

And yet, the SMART method lays out something more. My favorite word... "*Intentionality*." When we are intentional about goals that are SMART we have set ourselves up for greater success. Being healthier, financial stability, creating joy and the like are good goals because they make life better, more joyful, less burdensome, and brighten up gray days.

All this makes me wonder then... Have we ever thought about making goals for our spiritual life? Have any of our resolutions or goal setting ever included intentional plans to improve our faith walk? II Thessalonians 1:11-12 we read, "*To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfill by his power every good resolve and work of faith, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*"

This text is a prayer by Paul asking God to empower us believers to live worthy of their calling, fulfilling their good desires and faith-filled works, so that Jesus' name is glorified in us, and us in Jesus, through God's grace. "*To this end...*" focuses on divine enablement for good deeds and glorifying Christ, highlighting that God's power enables believers to be "*worthy of his calling*" and to see their "resolve" their goals, turn into good while fulfilling our faithful work.

There is a lot of life in First Christian Church of Stow, and there are a lot of life events coming up in our church—Loaves and Fishes Plus Pantry, Bulldog Bag support, Soup Cook-Off, Super Bowl Subs, Ash Wednesday and the season of Lent, and even some tending to our "sacred spaces." All, and more, are opportunities for us to make some SMART goals for our faith walk in 2026. Goals we can achieve, all... "*according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*" Happy New Year everyone!

Your Pastor and Friend,
Jonathan

Happy New Music Year!

We're grateful to be back home at First Christian Church, for so many reasons. The thriving music program here is a beautiful blessing that many churches no longer have. The pastor and other staff are a joy to work with. We love the way people care for each other and the local community.

The new year brings new opportunities, within First Christian and in reaching outward. In December, Joy Bells played for the Akron Children's Hospital memorial service (as they have for many years), and choir members sang at two different assisted living communities. We plan to do more of this, and we have other hopes and dreams, too.

If you'd like to try singing, or signing, or playing an instrument with us, we welcome new members in many of the groups! It's rewarding, spiritually fulfilling, and fun.

Chancel Choir – the adult choir, open to all, meets Thursday evenings. Ralph is the director.

Joyful Noise – the beginning/intermediate handbell ensemble, open to all adults, meets Wednesday evenings. Barb Eppley directs.

Silent Praise – we sign songs and hymns using American Sign Language, with occasional rehearsal. Anyone can learn – we all learn together! Cheryl leads this group.

Grace Notes – for middle school and high school girls, directed by Cora Dowey.

Youth Bells – grade school through middle school. Ralph directs.

Children's Choir – directed by Cora Dowey.

Groups that require a certain skill level are:

Joy Bells, the adult handbell ensemble – Ralph is the director.

Spiritus, a small vocal ensemble – Ralph and Cheryl lead.

Resurrection Brass – Scott Haywood is the leader.

The Way – our worship band includes guitar, bass, percussion, and keyboards. Ralph is the director.

“Tending to Our Sacred Spaces”

January-February

We are blessed by the building we have that is First Christian Church of Stow. We are also “cursed” by the building we have that is First Christian Church of Stow. Ok, ok, it's not a curse, but it can get to be... a lot to tend to let's say. Nonetheless, we use our building well. Did you know how much our building gets used? Sunday worship, music ministries, Christian Education, staff offices, Loaves and Fishes—we all can rattle these off. But there is so much more. Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, and two Girl Scout Troops. Alcoholics Anonymous. Bulldog Box storage and distribution. Our own Plus Pantry storage and distribution. Master Singers. Jazzercise. Yoga. Community groups use our space from time to time for meetings and events. Clarinet lessons and instructions happen in our building. We've hosted Stow Police training events and were recently asked again to host more training. Ping Pong Club. Church members and friends of the church use the building for special events and gatherings. Did you know there is even a Kent State University fraternity that has been using our building for that past several years for a special annual service. (But no, no keg stands are done while they are here.)

All of this, and more, makes our church a community hub for ministries, activities, special events, and so much more. And the need for useful space, in all sorts of capacities, is always needed. Which is why over the next several weeks we are going to convene any and all who are willing to pitch in and help, tend to our “Sacred Spaces.” This will include, first and foremost, making sure that every entity connected to the church will have the useful space needed. No one and no group is going to be thrown out in the cold or evicted from the church. We are simply going to ask questions that pertain to what is needed and how we can best serve each and every group who uses and counts on using our church for ministry and/or community work.

More information about the “Sacred Spaces” conversations and work will be forth coming. We will need not only the voices and input of ministry teams and groups, but we will also need those who will then pitch in and help make these needs and goals happen! After all, many hands make light work! If you have questions in the meantime,

please reach out to Jonathan who will be coordinating this Sacred Spaces endeavor.

Ingathering:
a living example of
“the heart of a servant”

Mark 10:45 states, in part “for even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve... On December 16, 2025 we served 10 families (without young children) and 42 families with children, providing food boxes of nonperishable food items, a gift card for perishable food items, gifts for their children, hats/gloves and coats for any/all family members, socks and underwear, new books/toys/school supplies, new personal care items and stocking stuffers and food extras, as well as tables and tables of available gently used items free for the taking. All participants were welcomed and encouraged to obtain the items they needed and had items bagged and loaded into their cars with a plate of homemade cookies and wishes for a blessed holiday. Many recipients were overwhelmed with the amount and quality of available items, the available willing helpers, and the organization and flow of the evening designed to meet their needs in a friendly and nonjudgemental environment.

We, the people of FCC Stow with our partners, truly serve these families through your generosity and hard work. We greatly appreciate each and every one: if you called and obtained family information, shopped, wrapped, or adopted a family, tied blankets, bought/sorted/hailed food items, packed food boxes, moved tables or broke down boxes, made cookies, sorted donated items, bagged socks and underwear, bought and organized coats/hats/gloves, purchased and chased down gift cards, copied messages for the recipients, organized the pick up schedule or any number of a hundred other tasks, WE THANK YOU.

Please be sure to thank our outside sponsors also:

Marhofer Chevrolet

Cascade Imports

Harvest Realty

Hudson United Methodist Nursery School

Redmon Funeral Home

Neighbors and friends of FCC members

The yoga class

A former recipient who wanted to give back

***My sincere gratitude to the Outreach Team members who work diligently year round to accomplish this amazing ministry!

Ann Halpin, Outreach

Loaves & Fishes + Pantry 2025 Recap

Now that 2025 has come to an end we took a look back at what we accomplished.

We served a total of 216 separate families throughout the year. 136 of these families were new to Loaves & Fishes + Pantry (L&F+P). 57 of those new families had never been to any emergency pantry anywhere; food insecurity was a new experience for them. Because many families came more than once we had a total of 558 family visits throughout the year.

These numbers show an increase over 2024. That year we had 167 separate families, 90 of whom were new to L&F+P. Of those 90 families 47 had not experienced food insecurity before.

Out of the 216 separate families we served 84 were from Stow, 48 from Akron, 26 from Cuyahoga Falls, and 17 from Kent. The remaining 40 families were from various other nearby communities.

None of this could have happened without the support of all of you through your volunteering, your financial support, and your prayers. It takes commitment from everyone in our church to accomplish all this and we should all feel good about it.

No resting on our laurels though...let's get ready for 2026!

Loaves & Fishes + Pantry
January 18th, 4-6 p.m.

We went through all the food at the December meal. We had an order for six right at 6 that finished things up.

Many thanks to all who have helped make this program successful this year. January 18th 4-6 p.m. the menu is jambalaya and sides.

Bulldog Bags Collections
2025-2026 School Year

We're collecting items for Bulldog Bags again! Please see the list below for the WHOLE School year! We can't take items too early, but if you can plan ahead, please do. Additionally, please note: **NO NUTS IN ANY PRODUCTS**. If you can, check to make sure what you're providing doesn't have any nut/tree nut additives. Thanks to all for your contributions!

Box for donations can be found in the Gathering Area!

<u>Due</u>	<u>Items Needed</u>
12/7	Hot Chocolate Packets
1/11	Ramen Noodles
2/8	Deodorant (Travel Size)
3/8	Pudding Cups
5/10	Shampoo (Travel Size)

Acme Community Cash Back
Cash Back is BACK! Aug 1 – Feb 15

We can't believe it either, but it's once again time to save those Acme receipts! The 2025-2026 Cash Back campaign begins August 1st and runs through February 15th, 2026. As in years past, the money we make helps support our blanket fund. This year, we need the support of this program more than ever, so please remember to put your receipts in the collection box in the Gathering Area. It's an easy way to support a great cause!

Reminder: Emergency Pantry & Paper Product Procurement

Every once in a while, we just put out a little info to remind folks of what we do. Why you might ask? There's so many hardworking volunteers that make it happen week to week, so much so that without these little notices, you might not hear about it!

Such is the case (and gratefully so) with our Emergency Pantry, serving the needs of those in the gap between our Loaves & Fishes + Pantry, or between their availability to reach other pantries in our area. While it's not the biggest project, having enough food and basic supplies on site to tide folks over for a week or two can help ease people's difficulties when they just lost their job, get rejected for unemployment, or have found themselves without shelter for any reason. This program is a little-to-no ask pantry, where we serve individuals or families without needing proof of income. After all, even Christ wouldn't send folks away hungry, for they might faint on the way home.

If you or someone you know is in need of assistance at a moment's notice, please don't hesitate to leave a message for the church office, or send an email to the church through our Contact & Directions page on the website. Whenever Christian is in the office, (Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday evenings), he's able to meet folks at the church to prepare bags & share with those in need.

Additionally, one product we provide that is often overlooked from people's typical needs is Paper Products! Particularly, we have some feminine products, and toilet paper. While we are not in urgent need of extra food, we're always able to take TP and feminine products. They go out with every distribution of food. If you are able to assist with that need in particular, Marc's has a sale starting Wednesday (The 14th) for a great deal, and the folks we serve will always appreciate this little, extra help. After all, it's the small things that count.

Church Service Announcements
Recorded Announcements for Church

Don't forget! For folks who really need to get the word out, we offer pre-recorded Church Service Announcements! CSA's (Both as "Church Service" Announcements, but also "church SERVICE" announcements), will be played after prelude, right before Jonathan opens up our service. We will be recording 15-30 second announcement videos that we will run on Sunday Morning. If you run an

outreach opportunity or have an event coming up, we can even provide On-Location recording of where your service or event will take place! Contact fccestow@firstchristianstow.org for Christian or Jonathan to sign up for your CSA before your next church event!

Disciples Hall Yoga Class
Wednesdays, 5:45 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

Correction: The starting time for Yoga is 5:45 p.m. on Wednesdays! Your donations for admission participate in and provide for various outreach programs throughout the church, including Bulldog bags, Week of Compassion, and our Loaves & Fishes + Pantry Outreach program. Yoga is for Every Body and Everybody!

Think – Pray – Connect
Families from December

11/09/25

Donna & Tom Stanley

4139 Baird Rd, Stow OH 44224

Please send condolences, prayers, and encouragement to Donna in light of the recent loss of her sister, Deanna Gibson.

12/21/25

**Mike Drews & Andrea
Long Drews**

491 Gibbs Rd, Akron OH 44312-2039

Please pray with, and send comfort to the Drews family, in light of the passing of Betty Drews.

Rand & Kathy Waite

198 Trunko Rd., Fairlawn OH 44333

Continue to pray with and send support to the Waite & Buchtel families in light of the loss of their cousin Preston Buchtel.

01/04/26

Bill & Cora Dowey

1947 Hawthorne, Stow OH 44224

Cora recently fell and broke her arm. She has a follow up on the 12th to x-ray the arm to determine if surgery is required.

01/11/26

Steve & Michelle Gross

4414 Smokerise Drive, Stow OH 44224

Steve is finally home! Please continue to send support and encouragement as he recovers from COVID.