



PATHWAYS NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2026

*You show me the path of life. In your presence
there is fullness of joy. --Psalms 16:11*

3493 Darrow Road, Stow, Ohio 44224
330.688.4450
fccstow@firstchristianstow.org

www.FCCStow.org

Find us on social media @FCCStow   

Loaves and Fishes + Pantry

August 16, 4-6 p.m.

Free monthly dinner and +Pantry food distribution!

Drive-Thru/Carry Out, 4-6 p.m.

Mac & Cheese with side dishes is on the menu this month.

Plan to come to eat, or serve, or both!

RubberDucks Game and Fireworks, Saturday, August 22nd

First Pitch is set for 6:05*

Once again FCC Stow will spend a summer evening with the Akron RubberDucks. This summertime tradition for our church and friends is a great opportunity to enjoy a carefree night at Canal Park watching the RubberDucks and following the game, enjoying a spectacular fireworks display. Tickets are just \$15.00!

See Bill Dowey or contact the church office to reserve your tickets.

Welcome Sunday

September 13, 2026

The School year beginning and Labor Day fast approaching signal a return to our regular worship time. Join us for Welcome Sunday worship **September 13 at 10:30 a.m.**

2026 Women's Retreat

Friday September 25th – Sunday September 27th

The women of Stow FCC will again travel to Chautauqua, New York for our annual Women's Retreat. Registration forms are beginning to roll in. Registration forms are available in the Gathering Area. If you have questions, please see Barb Bell or call her at 330-807-5498.

Trunk or Treat - Save the Date!

This year's Trunk or Treat is happening October 25th from 3-5 p.m. in the Church parking lot. Time to start planning your trunk décor!

August 2026 - Pastor's Pen

"What does a healthy small church look like?"

This is a question Karl Vaters, speaker, author and small church pastor, asked a group of church leaders at a pastoral conference. These pastors and church leaders took some time in small groups to discuss the question, then each group reported their results. In no particular order, here are the responses that are characteristics of a healthy small church: *Christ-centered; Bible-based; Ministers to people inside and outside the church; Stays true to the purposes of the Gospel; Makes disciples; Works through conflict in healthy ways; Welcomes new people; Listens to people; Values everyone; Gives the glory to Jesus; Ministers those who are absent; Combines old traditions with new ideas to make new traditions; Follows the Great Commission and Great Commandment; Visible in the community; Practices good stewardship; Stays on mission; Expresses evident love; Prays together; Has respect between the pastor and congregation; Is reaching the next generation; Is spiritually and biblically healthy; Is knowing and growing in God's Word; Has high engagement of its membership; Values mission over survival; Friendly; Adaptable and teachable; Passionate; Theologically sound; Generous; Clear about their identity; Practices the spiritual disciplines; Worshipful; Open to new possibilities; And more...*

When I read this list, I asked myself if First Christian Church of Stow holds to and lives out these characteristics. And I am glad to say I believe we do. Now some of you might be thinking, *"Well of course you do. You're the pastor of the church. To think otherwise would be to put yourself in a bad light."* And I can understand that line of thinking completely. So that's why I want—check that—I need you to do a **homework assignment**. (Hey, school starts next week so let's get into the swing of things, right?!) I need you to go back, read through the list again, and ask yourself if our church holds to and lives out these characteristics. So grab a writing implement, go through the above list, and circle the ones you think our church holds to and lives out, and cross out the ones you think we're not doing as well at. Then, when you've completed this homework assignment, take a picture of your results and text it to me, or hand them in on Sunday morning, or even snail mail them to the church. Seriously. Please. Do. This. I'm giving you this assignment because I really

want to know your responses, but more importantly, we all need to know. (Don't worry, I will never share who said what.) We need to know what we feel we are doing well and faithfully, and we need to know what we are failing to live out. We need to know so we can celebrate these gifts and share with others that we are living up to these callings. And we need to know so we can work to be better and share with others that we as a church are asking ourselves hard questions, looking at ourselves in the mirror so we can clearly see where and how we can always be living out, and sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Now, as you are doing this homework assignment, I do want you to keep in mind a few other points that Vaters notes came out of this discussion with pastors and church leaders. He notes none of the above responses were about events or programs filling up the calendar. The leaders did not state that being *"pastor-dependent"* was necessary, and no one said anything like *"the pastor needs to preach well, have a good grasp of theology, and dress in jeans"* and so on. And lastly, none of the items stated above are dependent on having more money, more people, or more facilities.

Go through the list and you can clearly deduce, any church of any size can hold to and live out these characteristics. A healthy church makes, activates, and behaves like Disciples instead of expecting all the ministry to be done by the pastor. A church can be healthy with limited resources because health looks the same in churches of any size. And whether the church is big or small, growing, shrinking, or static, this list needs to be considered. We have a lot more in common than we think.

And yes, I can also understand that a list like this can easily feel overwhelming. Which is why we must remind ourselves that though the list is big, it is doable and we are already doing much of it!

So, with the specter of increased numbers, programs, pastoral skill and resources removed, this is not an intimidating list. Rather it's an encouraging one. Instead of telling us to work harder, get smarter, and figure out what's relevant, this list of healthy church characteristics reminds us that our entire calling is to lean more on Jesus and draw people to the Good News of Jesus Christ.

I look forward to seeing the results of your homework assignment and talking with you about your thoughts and feelings about it all.

Your Pastor and Friend, Jonathan

Music Notes

September starts a new season of music, and regular rehearsals will begin after Labor Day weekend! We welcome new members in most of the groups. Making music together is rewarding, spiritually fulfilling, and fun. See any of the group leaders to find out more!

Chancel Choir (high school juniors through centenarians!) – Thursdays 7:30 p.m. in the Choir Room. Ralph is the director.

Joyful Noise (beginning/intermediate handbell ensemble) – Wednesdays 7:00 p.m. in Room 201. Director Barb Eppley invites anyone and everyone who wants to learn to play handbells to join us!

Grace Notes (middle school and high school girls) rehearse at 10:15 Sunday mornings in the Chapel. Cora Dowey directs.

Youth Bells (grade school through high school) meet most Sundays after worship, in the balcony. Ralph directs.

Children's Choir (age 3 through 5th grade) meets during worship in the Choir Room; Cora Dowey is the director.

Silent Praise (adults; children are welcome accompanied by an adult) – We use American Sign Language to express music. We rehearse as needed, and anyone can learn! Cheryl leads this group.

Groups that require a certain skill level are:

Joy Bells (advanced adult handbell ensemble) meet Thursdays 6:00 p.m. in the balcony; Ralph is the director.

Spiritus is an adult vocal ensemble, meeting most Sundays at 9:15 a.m. in the Choir Room, led by Ralph and Cheryl.

Resurrection Brass rehearses as needed. Scott Haywood is the leader.

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

Preparing to Worship – Through Music (from cnl)

Once upon a time, a college professor told our music history class that people were being conditioned to regard music as background. He said that people didn't listen to music the way they did in the past, when listening to music was an experience people sought out.

This was in 1974 (yep, I'm that old). So think how much more this is true in 2026: music is played as background to nearly every experience, from riding an elevator to shopping at the grocery store, working out at the gym, eating at a restaurant or coffee shop... Music is even played at sporting events that you'd figure had enough excitement on their own.

There's nothing inherently wrong with background music. It enhances the scene in movies. It can energize us or relax us. Music is powerful.

In worship, music can connect us to each other and to our God. Hymns are powerful; that's why we choose them with such care. They can teach us scripture. Well-written lyrics reach our hearts and memories.

Which brings us to the Prelude: the beginning of worship. Whoever is singing or playing the prelude has chosen it, practiced it, and now performs it, all with love and care.

When we come together in the Sanctuary on Sunday, we greet each other, laugh together, and catch up on the previous week. It's beautiful. Then when the chime is rung, that's our cue to prepare to worship, to meditate, to pray... to feel the presence of God in this holy space.

Loaves & Fishes + Pantry **June & July Update**

During the months of June and July we have had 84 separate families visit our Loaves & Fishes + Pantry. We served 178 meals and handed out 75 complete sets of groceries. 6 families did not want the complete set of groceries but opted for selected items.

As always, the paper products of toilet paper and paper towels proved popular with everyone.

In June we were able to provide a dozen eggs for each family along with ground beef or chicken tenders.

We included the usual mix of vegetables, canned fruit, breakfast and dinner items.

In July our specialties were hot dogs, buns, grapes, pancake mix and syrup.

We don't yet know what specialty items we'll have in August, but we will continue to hand out the standard items.

We also know that people in need will show up on the third Sunday (August 16) knowing that they'll find smiles, friendly faces, a good hot meal, and groceries to go.

Christmas Outreach in July **An Outreach Team Ministry That Blesses Everyone!**

Thank You, Thank You, Thank You to all who contributed to the effort to get a jump start on our food collection for Ingathering 2026.

Also, many thanks to those who brought in school supplies for Good Neighbors. They were especially needed this year. The generosity of this congregation never ceases to amaze!

2026 Women's Retreat

Stow FCC Women's Retreat is coming up soon...

Friday September 25 through Sunday

September 27. If you have never been to a retreat but are curious what it is like, let me give you a sneak peak of what to expect.

Location: The retreat is held in Chautauqua, New York on the grounds of the Chautauqua Institution, about a 2.5 hour car ride. No need to drive yourself, we do carpool.

Accommodations: We stay in two houses which are owned by the Disciples of Christ. Headquarters House is a historic house owned by Disciples of Christ since 1874. The guest rooms in Headquarters House are accessible only by stairs. Graybiel House is right next door and was rebuilt in 2019. It features an elevator to access all guest rooms in this house, as well as the basement. This is where the main kitchen is and where we will gather for our meals.

Program: Our activities for the weekend include introductions and an ice breaker on Friday evening, two Bible lesson presentations on Saturday morning, an opportunity to go out to lunch on Saturday, followed by free time. We gather for dinner together on Saturday evening and then fellowship time including games and puzzles. Throughout the weekend there will also be an opportunity to do a craft. Sunday morning we present the 3rd Bible lesson, break to begin packing and clean up, and close with a communion worship service.

Retreat means different things to different people. You may need to recharge your batteries. Or get away from a stressful situation to think. Or maybe you just need some alone time, or conversely, some time with friends. We offer the place and the resources, but you make it what you need it to be. There is no judgement for deciding to withdraw and just take a nap!

If you are interested but still have questions, please call Barbara Bell at 330-807-5498 or call the church office at 330-688-4450. Registrations forms are available in the Gathering Area. The cost is \$150 per person, but scholarships are available. Our motto is "No Woman Left Behind".

Diaconate Update

In early 2023, the First Christian Church Diaconate was restructured to support the current needs and ministries of our church. At that time, many willing individuals joined the Diaconate via a self-nomination process and have been fulfilling the Diaconate duties since.

That self-nominating volunteer opportunity continues to be available to any and all individuals who are part of the First Christian Church family. Tasks performed by the Diaconate include –

- Sunday morning building opening and closing—unlocking/locking doors, turning on/off lights.
- Worship space set-up and post worship tidying—prepping bulletins, communion supplies, checking chancel candles, re-racking hymnals, etc.
- Changing the front yard letter sign.
- Support worship chime ringing/candle lighting.
- And of course... other duties as needed.

More information about these tasks can be found on the Diaconate sign-up sheets located on the bulletin board outside the library.

If you are interested in joining the Diaconate and/or have questions about the Diaconate, reach out to Jacob Aukeman or Lisa Roseman.

Board of Trustees Opportunities

*I need somebody,
Help – not just anybody,
Help – you know I need someone, Help....
(apologies to the Beatles).*

As with our own homes, our church home requires ongoing maintenance. The Trustees have a growing list of needs. These vary from painting, light plumbing, light building repair, changing HVAC filters, checking the batteries in EXIT signs, help with maintaining the garden areas, etc.

If you can help, please contact John McCreight (330-814-3825) and we'll match your skills/talents with a task we have. We typically supply materials for the work, and these things can generally be done on your schedule.

In Appreciation

I would like to express my gratitude to all volunteers who have been working behind the scenes this summer to keep our church looking beautiful inside and out.

Folks have been weeding, mulching, planting, trimming, mowing, cleaning, organizing and decorating.

Their efforts are gifts to God and to this church's ministry. I will not attempt to name them all because I will be sure to miss someone, but you know who you are. Thank you for your ministry!

~ Anonymous

“Do You Think You Might Want To Be a Lay Leader?”

If you have ever entertained the idea of helping to lead worship services, or if you have ever felt God giving you that “nudge” to guide the gathered community in times of word and prayer, then you are invited to further that consideration by indicating your interest on the back of a Connection Card or by reaching out to Jonathan or the church office. By inquiring about and sharing your interest in this opportunity, you are not committing to being a Lay Leader. If you simply want to learn more about this opportunity and then prayerfully consider and decide if this is something you might like to try, then that is all you initial interest needs to be.

As Disciples of Christ, we are all called to share our God given gifts and talents in a variety of ways. Maybe being a worship Lay Leader is a new way God is calling you to serve.

Yoga Class

Wednesdays, 5:45 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

Disciples Hall

Join us for a Yoga Basics class Wednesday evenings at 5:45 p.m. Your \$5 donation for admission helps to support various outreach programs throughout the church, including Week of Compassion, Ingathering, and our Loaves & Fishes + Pantry Outreach program.

Yoga is for Everybody and Every Body!

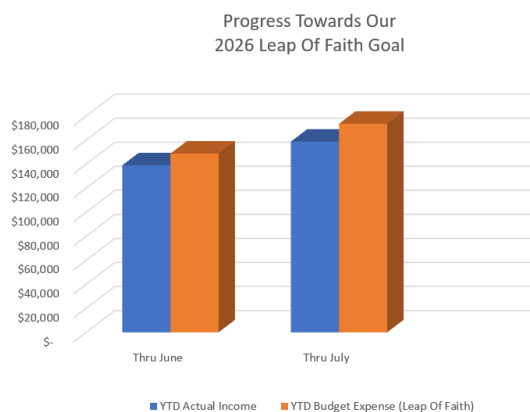
Update from the Finance/Stewardship Team

Hello all! The Stewardship/Finance team has the following information that provides an update on our “Leap of Faith” financial journey through the end of July.

As you may recall, the Governing Board and the congregation approved the 2026 budget proposed by the Finance/Stewardship with the budgeted Expenses being higher than the budgeted Income. We refer to this difference as our Leap of Faith. We can achieve that Leap of Faith combining 2 goals; increasing our Income (primarily made up of Individual Giving) and decreasing our Expenses by controlling our spending.

The Leap of Faith amount for 2026 is \$20,533 (Budgeted Expenses minus Budgeted Income).

Here are 2 views that show our progress towards meeting our Leap of Faith. These compare our total actual income to our total budgeted expenses, showing how close we are now at the end of July, comparing that to end of June.



Progress Towards Our 2026 Leap Of Faith Goal		
	Thru June	Thru July
YTD Actual Income	\$ 139,029	\$ 158,721
YTD Budget Expense (Leap Of Faith)	\$ 148,771	\$ 173,566
How Close to LOF (%)	93.5%	91.4%
How Close to LOF (\$)	\$ (9,742)	\$ (14,845)

The Total Income **budget** amount is \$23,084 per month. This includes congregational giving and other income sources like building rentals.

The Total Expense **budget** amount is \$24,795 per month.

The **Leap of Faith** amount is the difference between our budgeted Expenses and our budgeted Income.

For the full year that amount is \$20,533 and monthly the amount is \$1,711.

If you prefer to think of this as a percentage, our actual income needs to be **7.5% higher** than our budgeted income to meet our Leap of Faith, and thru the end of July our income is **2 % lower** than our budgeted 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 meet our Leap of Faith, and to sustain the outreach assistance we can provide to our community, both locally 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.

Vacation Bible School 2026 SonTreasure Island

We had great week at SonTreasure Island Vacation Bible School!

Twenty-one children joined us for a week filled with colorful crafts, island activities, joyful songs, and tropical treats. Most importantly, they discovered the greatest treasure of all—God's love! A huge thank-you to all the volunteers who helped make this week so much fun for everyone!

Be sure to visit the [FCC Stow Facebook page](#) to see more photos from our week at VBS!



Think – Pray – Connect
Recent Families

Andrea Drews

**491 Gibbs Rd.
Akron OH 44312-2039**

Prayers for Andrea as she recovers from a fall that resulted in a broken nose and facial lacerations. Pray that God grants Andrea peace and patience as she heals and feels the love and care that surround her.

Molly (Halpin) and Bryan Skala

Newlyweds!

Molly and Bryan were joined in Holy Matrimony last Friday, July 17th. Congratulations can be sent to

*Mr. and Mrs. Skala
317 Birchwood Ave.*

Cuyahoga Fall, Ohio 44221

Jeff Crane

Friend of Barb Ague

Jeff had a fall resulting in a broken neck and is paralyzed from the neck down. Prayers of comfort for Jeff and his family as they deal with the challenging outcome of this accident.

Judy and Jim McGrath & son Scott

Friends of John and Jackie Dutton

Please pray that the entire family feels the strength and comfort of God's love as they face Scott's cancer diagnosis and Jim's hospitalization.

Dave & Dorothy Robinson

783 S. Lincoln St, Kent, OH 44240

Please extend support and encouragement to Dave & Dorothy as they adjust to their move and get settled at a new (temporary) apartment.

Patricia Laughlin

Mother and Mother-in-law of Marcie and Ted Shorter.

Marcie and Ted Shorter

147 River Park Blvd, Munroe Falls, OH 44262

Please keep Patricia and the entire family in prayer as she has recently been hospitalized. Pray that the doctors are guided by God's wisdom to diagnose what is happening and that a clear path forward for Patricia is found and implemented soon and effectively.

Tim and Mary Ellen Neitz

1661 Third St

Cuyahoga Falls, OH 44221

Prayers for Tim & Mary Ellen's recovery from illness.

John Fauvie

2669 Northland St.

Cuyahoga Falls, OH 44221

Prayers for healing following John's shoulder surgery.