First Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)
Stow, OH

PATHWAYS NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 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**

Christmas Ingathering Outreach Benefit Luncheon

November 15th, immediately following worship service

Sunday, November 15th, 11:30 a.m. (Or just as soon as Jonathan gets done preaching!)

As our Outreach Team gets set to lead us through another year of this important and far-reaching Christmas outreach program, they are inviting your support by EATING LUNCH!
Make plans to join in this benefit! Invite your family and friends!
All for the incredible price of FREE!
Look for more details inside this issue of the Pathways for how you can get involved!

Loaves and Fishes + Pantry

November 15th, 4-6 p.m.

Free monthly dinner! Drive-Thru/Carry Out, 4-6 p.m.
On the menu this month are Sloppy Joes and sides. Volunteers are always needed and appreciated!
This also includes the +Pantry food distribution.

Governing Board Meeting

November 16th, 7 p.m.

The Governing Board will meet on Monday, November 16th at 7 p.m. at the church.
This meeting will include voting on the proposed 2027 church budget.
All Governing Board members are needed for this important meeting.
Bonus! There will be no Governing Board in December!

All-Church Thanksgiving Dinner

Sunday, November 22nd

The Christmas songs are playing and decorations are popping up, but FIRST! Thanksgiving!
On Sunday, November 22nd all are invited to be part of a special Thanksgiving time of worship followed by our church's annual ***Thanksgiving Pot-Luck Dinner!***
See inside for more details about how you can be part of this long time First Christian tradition!

"Making Spirits Bright"

A Fun Morning for Children!
A Much Deserved Breather for Parents!

Saturday, December 5th, 9 a.m.-Noon

Children ages 0-5th grade are invited to a time of Christmas games, crafts, and fun while parents enjoy a morning "off" to relax, shop, or go out to brunch. Please RSVP to the church office.

November 2026 Pastor's Pen

Full disclosure… this is going to be a repeat Pastor's Pen. Well, kinda. It's a repeat of a particular Pastor's Pen topic. And, again in full disclosure, it's a repeat of a particular *Christmas* topic. But don't fret! Thanksgiving will not be overlooked as our culture is wont to do as the calendar turns from October to November. Nevertheless, I am getting this message out in early November because I am seeing its ubiquitous blasphemy popping up already, and I just can't let this go without voicing my ~~outrage!~~ I mean, my deep pastoral concern for your spiritual wellness. Ready? Here goes…

Most Advent Calendars are NOT Advent Calendars!!

Yep, I am back on my soapbox once again about this egregious liturgical violation and Advent blasphemy! But it needs to be said—nah, it ***MUST*** be said. *Most Advent Calendars are NOT Advent Calendars*, rather they are **"count-down to Christmas calendars"** that corporations and marketers call *"Advent Calendars"* because it's a convenient term that also helps make more money. Permit me to explain…

First these *"calendars"* (if you can even call them that) begin on December 1st and run through December 24th. What kind of calendar stops less than four weeks into the month!? I'll tell you what calendars does— NO CALENDAR stops just twenty-four days into the month and then calls it quits and implicitly says you're on your own for the remaining days. The season of Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas, and that date often falls in November—this year on November 29th. But that's just the tip of this proverbial egregious liturgical violation and Advent blasphemy!

Most *"advent calendars"* have you open a little perforated cardboard window each day to find inside tiny pieces of something trying to pass off as chocolate. But how exactly is this preparing you for Christmas? I'll give you a hint: It *DOESN'T*! This is preparing you for the arrival of Willy Wonka and poor eating habits, not the Messiah! Oh, but candy chocolates are just one tiny little ornament on this deceitful Christmas abomination.

Today there are literally dozens upon dozens of these golden calf *"advent calendars."* There are some with jelly, hot sauce, coffee, tea, and beef jerky. There are some featuring Disney Princesses or Star Wars Legos, or Bluey or squishies, and anything else you can think of. But the ones that really pull the hay out of my manger feature things like beauty products, coffee, beer, wine, and liquor—this Bud's for you Kris Kringle! Cheers!

Now to be clear, I have absolutely ***nothing*** against any of these products and fully admit I enjoy many myself—I love Legos, hot sauce, beef jerky, and a tasty beverage. I just want it to be known that none of these ***things***—*NONE OF THEM*—has anything to do with Advent, nor do any of them prepare us for the arrival of Christmas. As much as I love coffee, a different cup of joe for twenty-four straight days does NOTHING to prepare me for the Messiah. No amount of building Legos with my kids while eating chocolate and beef jerky prepares me for the baby Jesus.

Advent, unlike the first twenty-four days of December, is *a season* of the liturgical year, observed by Christians around the world as a time of *expectant waiting* and *preparation* for the celebration of the birth of Jesus. During Advent, we prepare Him room; we hear a voice in the wilderness calling to make our paths straight; are reminded God came not as a mighty warrior as many expected, but as a child born for us, and authority rests upon his shoulders, and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. This is what Christmas is about, and this is what we prepare for in the season of Advent. AND! This is what we give thanks for, among so many other blessings, when we celebrate Thanksgiving this year on November 26th.

Again, please understand, counting down to Christmas is great fun. If you want to have fun with a *"countdown to Christmas calendar"* by all means do so and enjoy. If you've already put up your Christmas tree and decorated your home—wonderful! Soak in all the hope, peace, joy, and love it brings you. Just don't stop there. Keep going, and don't be misguided by what the weeks to come are truly about. Also prepare for Christmas through hopeful waiting and faithful anticipation. Also give thanks for God's blessings with a robust recognition and celebration of Thanksgiving. For when we do such, we fully embrace the truth that the dimness of the world will soon be overtaken by the light of Christ, a light that shines within us all, and shows those around us what the days and weeks to come are really and truly about.

Happy Thanksgiving y'all! And Happy Advent as well!

Your Pastor and Friend,
Jonathan

Music Notes

Sing Gently

May we sing together, always.
May our voice be soft.
May our singing be music for others
and may it keep others aloft.
Sing gently, always.
Sing gently as one.
May we stand together, always.
May our voice be strong.
May we hear the singing and
May we always sing along.
Sing gently, always.
Sing gently as one.
– Eric Whitacre

Musicians have to think ahead. We plan our music well ahead of time, so that we have time to rehearse and get ready to sing and play our instruments faithfully in worship. And it's November already (!) – so we've already been working on music for Thanksgiving Sunday, Advent, and Christmas Eve. It's a lot of work, but what a joy and privilege! Many thanks, as always, to all those who faithfully attend rehearsals (and practice on their own). We're grateful for Andrea, and for all the group leaders.

Oh, and one more thing: we're happily planning another Lessons and Carols Sunday, when all our musicians will lead worship with scripture and song – this year on December 20.



All Church Work Day

What beautiful fall weather we've been having! Not to mention the colorful leaves that eventually need to be raked, blown, etc.

The Trustees are holding a workday **November 7 from 9 AM to 12 PM** to do just that. All hands (and rakes, blowers, etc.) are appreciated!

With Thanks and Grateful Hearts

The Rumburg Family

Dear First Christian Church Family,

Words cannot fully express the profound gratitude and joy filling our hearts as we reflect on the immensely thoughtful recognition and wonderful celebration you gave to us this past Sunday. Being honored for both Pastor Appreciation Month and our 17th anniversary at First Christian Church is a milestone we will not soon forget as our hearts and spirits are filled with gratefulness and love.

Thank you so much for the incredibly generous gifts, the beautiful cards, and the thoughtful expressions of love we received. While the tangible gifts are truly wonderful (and believe me, we are all thrilled about the upcoming nights in Cleveland's theater district!) what means the most to us is your enduring love and support for our family and this ministry.

Serving you for the past seventeen years has been the privilege of a lifetime. This church is not just a congregation to us— it is our home. Our two teenage children have literally spent their entire lives surrounded by your care, wisdom, and prayers. Having them grow up in the warmth of this church family has been one of our greatest blessings as parents. Your constant encouragement of me, Julie, Violet, and A.J. is a sustaining blessing that strengthens our partnership in ministry every single day. This celebration has completely renewed my vigor and passion to keep leading First Christian Church exactly as God calls me to do.

With each milestone we arrive at together, I become even more excited and thankful than ever for the countless ways God continues to bless our congregation and it's a blessing to witness that grace filling our sanctuary, but it is even more powerful to watch it overflow into our community and into the world.

So thank you for being a people who do not keep God's blessings to themselves, but instead let God's love flow through us and out into the larger community and the world. We love you deeply, we praise God for you, and we look forward with great anticipation to the many years of ministry ahead.

With all our love and blessings,
Jonathan, Julie, Violet, and A.J.

"Devoted to Generosity"
2027 Consecration Campaign Concludes

We have heard our narrative budget, we have been made aware of the impact our annual giving has not just within our church, but beyond our walls as well; and we have heard the divine mandate that *"the righteous live by their faith."* All of it has been part of the faithful encouragement to continue to do the good and faithful ministry God has called us to do, and to continue to be a church devoted to generosity by being the *difference makers* God calls us to be. That is our aim for 2027.

On the last Sunday of October, we concluded our 2027 *Devoted to Generosity* consecration campaign through the making of our estimated pledge of giving for next year. As living expressions of God's generosity may our pledge to God be in response to all God has given us.

If you were unable to be in either worship service on that Sunday, there is still time to get your estimate of giving card in. You can drop it off any time at the church office or even just drop it in the mailbox by the upper doors, as all mail drops down in a secure lower section and only retrieved by church staff. Or you can submit your pledge card online via our church website.

Together we are witnesses to the abundant life we know in Jesus Christ. May our giving be an act of joy, generosity, and faithfulness to all God has done, and continues to do for us.

"From Bah Humbug to a Blessed Advent"
An Advent Study and Reflection
November 29th, December 6th, and December 13th

Is redemption possible for Ebenezer Scrooge? Pastor and author Matt Rawle believes so as he reveals the teachings of Jesus in the words of Charles Dickens' classic, *A Christmas Carol*. In this Bible study, we will dive deep into the dim, sad, greedy world of Scrooge and discover a man in dire need of a second chance. Along with Scrooge, we'll meet the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Future and, in the process, learn about living with and for others in a world blessed by Jesus.

Overall, we will see this familiar tale with fresh eyes, exploring how generosity and hope can reshape our own lives during Advent and what it means to live for others in a world blessed by Christ—because if redemption is possible for Scrooge, it's possible for anyone, and this study will help you open your heart to the transformation that Christmas offers.

These three sessions will be led by Jonathan, in the Our Classroom, and will begin promptly at 9:25 a.m. and conclude at 10:00.

Christmas In-Gathering Outreach Benefit Luncheon!
Sunday, November 15th, 11:30 a.m.

As our Outreach Team gets set to lead us through another year of this important and far-reaching Christmas outreach program, they are inviting your support by EATING LUNCH! Yep, that's all you gotta do! Come eat lunch that is being provided and prepared by the staff of the world-famous Mike's Place of Kent! (Sorry, the X-Wing star fighter will remain at the restaurant.)

The luncheon that will feature delicious creamed chicken and biscuits along with other savory sides! All for the incredible price of FREE!

And we know what you're thinking! *"How can it be free if it's a fundraising benefit!?"* Great question! It's free to all who come and a ***"Free-Will"*** offering will be collected with 100% of those gifts going toward our Christmas In-Gathering Outreach program!

This Christmas Ingathering Outreach project will support over 40 families – which typically includes over 100 children – with food gifts and a blessed reminder that God is at work in their lives.

Can you think of any better way to serve families in our community and help make their Christmas merry and bright and filled with the hope, peace, joy, and love of Jesus Christ than by having lunch!? Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

Loaves & Fishes + Pantry October Update

October was busy month for Loaves & Fishes + Pantry. We served 92 meals of Orange Chicken and Rice along with sides and a dessert.

Groceries this month included Penne Pasta & Pasta Sauce, Red Beans & Rice Dinner, Mac & Cheese, Canned Peaches, Canned Pears, Green Beans, Carrots, Peanut Butter & Jelly, Instant Potatoes, Cold Cereal, Milk, Bread, English Muffins, and Sandwich Cookies.

First Served By since 2021

# Families	First Served by
282	FCC-Stow
49	C.F. Good Neighbors
19	Bulldog Bags, Inc.
16	ACRFB Pantry
14	Kent Social Services
13	St. Stephen Church
13	Riverwood Chapel
11	Fish & Loaves Food Pantry
11	Celebration Church
11	Good Neighbors
170	Other

First Served By 2026

# Families	First Served By
44	FCC-Stow
11	C.F. Good Neighbors
5	Bulldog Bags, Inc.
5	ACRFB Pop-up Pantry
5	St. Stephen Church
4	ACRFB Pantry
4	Fish & Loaves Food Pantry
56	Other

The families counted in these two charts have been served at our Loaves & Fishes + Pantry (L&F+P). The charts show where these families first went for food assistance. You can see that we are the first stop for most local families in need.

This also illustrates that there is need in our area that was not being met until we launched L&F+P.

All Church Thanksgiving Dinner Sunday, November 22nd, 11:30 a.m.

On Sunday, November 22nd all are invited to be part of a special Thanksgiving time of worship, followed by the return of our church's **Thanksgiving Pot-Luck Dinner!**

Please remember to bring your own place setting and a side dish (or two) to share to add to the feast. The committee will be preparing the turkey, gravy and mashed potatoes ***- and thanks to them for that!***

Thanksgiving is a blessed time to share a bountiful meal and robust fellowship with our families. So let us do the same as a church family and mark our calendars for this special day of worship to celebrate all we have to give thanks for, and to give glory, honor, and praise to the One who has made it all possible. Thanks be to God. Happy Thanksgiving everyone!!

Planning Ahead: Christmas In-Gathering

The Outreach Team is already hard at work preparing for this tremendous ministry endeavor by purchasing adult gifts, socks, undergarments, hats, coats, and much more. As they prepare, they invite all of us to think about Christmas too! There are many ways to be part of this ministry.

Beginning this month, lists for food donations will be available in the Gathering Area.

If you are interested in shopping for a family for this year's program, see Ann Halpin (330-524-2228)

Trunk or Treat 2026
Thank You!

It was a beautiful fall afternoon for Trunk or Treat 2026 - we welcomed 99 trick-or-treaters and their families! Thank you to everyone who hosted a trunk, served snacks and donated candy for this event.

We can't wait to see your creative trunks next year!







Buddy the Elf Bazaar!
aka Summit Arts & Crafts Holiday Mart
Nov. 7th & 8th (10 a.m. – 4 p.m.)

JG Promotions is hosting their Holiday Mart at our church again this year! Details on the event held in Fellowship and Disciples Halls are below.



The Season of Advent
November 29th- December 24th

Advent marks the beginning of a new year in the liturgical life of the church, and it is a time of moving from dimness to light as each week we light candles of hope, peace, joy, and love. It all culminates on Christmas Eve when we light the Christ candle and give thanks for, and rejoice in, the light of the world finally coming to us at Christmas. Mark your calendars now, and don't miss a single Sunday of Advent!

Bulldog Bags Collections
2026-2027 School Year

We're collecting items for Bulldog Bags again! This is our 10th year supporting the wonderful organization.

Please see the list below of items needed over the next couple of months. The box for donations can be found in the Gathering Area.

Due	Items needed
November 11	Cup of Soup
December 9	Hot Chocolate Packets
January 13	Ramen Noodles

*Please note: **NO NUTS IN ANY PRODUCTS**. Thanks to all for your generous contributions!

Acme Community Cash Back
Aug. 1 – Feb. 15

We can't believe it either, but it's once again time to save those Acme receipts! The 2026-2027 Cash Back campaign began August 1st and runs through February 15th, 2027.

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!

Yoga Class
Wednesdays, 5:45 p.m.

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 Bulldog Bags, Week of Compassion, and our Loaves & Fishes + Pantry Outreach program.

Yoga is for Everybody and Every Body!

Think – Pray – Connect
Recent Families

Elise and Alex Sandoval
1522 Slusser Rd
Akron OH 44305

Celebrate and join in prayer with Elise and Alex Sandoval and John and Lynn Fauvie on the dedication to new life of their daughter and granddaughter Maria Lynn Sandoval.

Sue & Tony Falcione and family
1588 Robin Lane
Stow, OH 44224

Please continue to keep Sue and Tony, grandsons Anthony and Christopher Falcione, along with Sue's sister Lori, more grandchildren and their entire family in your prayers as they grieve the passing of Ed Landis, Sue's father, and a beloved member of our congregation.

Marilyn Lown
395 S. Main St.
Room #238
Munroe Falls, OH 44262

Let's let Marilyn know we are thinking of her and pray she feels the great abundance of God's blessings surrounding her each day.

John Sr. and Gloria McCreight
73 East Ave.
Tallmadge, OH 44278

Let's let John and Gloria know we are thinking of them and praying for God's blessings on them.