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PATHWAYS

JANUARY 2025

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

Find us on social
media @FCCStow!

Youth Group This Sunday, January 5th

Include kicking off the New Year by making plans to come to Youth Group this Sunday!

We will meet after worship and help take down Christmas decorations.
More information on Youth Group in January inside!

Governing Board, Monday, January 13th, 7 p.m.

The Governing Board will meet on Monday, January 13th for its first meeting of the New Year.

Loaves and Fishes + Pantry January 19th

Free monthly drive-thru dinner and pantry, 4-6 p.m. Volunteers are always greatly appreciated. A wrap-up review on 2024's Loaves & Fishes + Pantry outreach can be found below.

Super Soup Cook-Off, Sunday, January 26th, after worship!

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 January 26th!

Building Manager Position Update

We're grateful to welcome Paul Kleis to the Building Manager position here at First Christian Church of Stow! If you see someone around cleaning up, helping take care of our space, and stewarding the church's facilities this month, say "Hi!" and take a second to meet him! Paul will begin working for the church on January 6th, 2025.

Pastor's Pen, January 2025

An email came to me on Thursday, January 2nd that had as its title, "*Lent Begins in just 63 days! Ordered your devotionals yet?!*" January 2nd. The wisemen haven't even made their January 6th Epiphany pilgrimage appearance yet, and here I am getting an email telling me Lent begins in just 63 days and so I need to be sure to get my Lenten devotional ordered lest I am ill-equipped and unprepared for the forty days, plus Sundays, "*journey through the wilderness*" and to the cross at Calvary. Sheesh! We haven't even packed up the baby Jesus and already we're being told we need to prepare to walk with him through the desert of Lent. The wisemen are still westward leading, still proceeding, following the "*star of wonder, star of light, star of royal beauty bright*", but yet we are being told to get ready to muddle our way through the dim valley between Bethany and Jerusalem all the way to Golgotha. I mean... I get "getting ready", but couldn't they have sent that email on January 7th? Would a few more days make any difference in sales of their Lenten devotionals?

I do this a lot, I know. I rant about the timing of the seasons and timing of the holidays—Christmas starts too early, and it definitely ends too soon. (I once again saw Valentine's Day products out and available for purchase *before* Christmas!) I know I rant about the pace of the world, and the expected pace pressed upon us as individuals by the world. I rant about how we never slow down, how we are always pressed to go faster, do more, and get more accomplished. I rant about how we don't even know how to slow down, let alone take or observe *sabbath*. And I make all these rants of disgruntlement and discouragement all while I remain guilty of succumbing to them all myself. (However, I will NEVER buy any Valentine's Day products BEFORE Christmas! Never I tell you!)

Maybe I'm ranting this rant because Christmas and the holidays are over, and now we begin the long slog through the rest of winter, hoping against hope the groundhog will see their shadow and Spring will be here sooner than later. And actually, my hope for an early spring is one reason why I don't get upset at all retailers who are quick to move ahead from winter to spring, or even summer, and start to put out their "warm weather" products. I have been known, on particularly dreary, cold, gray days, to stop into Lowe's and check out their

new line of grills, lawn mowers, weed whackers, and patio furniture just to get a glimpse of summertime. (Note, upper management at Lowe's does *not* appreciate it when you "test out" the patio furniture by lighting a few tiki torches and putting your feet up while drinking down a Circle K Polar Pop! They'll kindly ask you to leave if you do. Trust me on this one!)

Now don't get me wrong, all y'all know I know how important the season of Lent is. And I know how important it is for us to be prepared for it. However, I am more than confident that in the next 63...62 days we will get there. We will be ready. We're not going to miss out on the chance to "journey" again with Jesus through the "wilderness wandering" of Lent. It's one of my favorite times of the liturgical year after all. I promise you, we will NOT miss Lent. But let's not miss all that's still to come. Let's not miss what's happening now, today, or even a few days from now.

The wisemen are coming. Epiphany is almost here. There is much to pray about, and for, in our country as we get closer to a peaceful transfer of presidential power. There is a great opportunity for us to be proactively engaged in an important and crucial community conversation on the day we observe the birthday of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (See inside this issue of the Pathways for more information about that event.) There are fun and exciting church fellowship opportunities. There are people in our church family who need our prayers and our presence. There are still hungry students in our community who are dependent upon our offerings to Bulldog Bags, and still others who will need us to be ready and prepared to serve them at Loaves and Fishes Plus Pantry.

Dare I say the work of Christmas isn't over? Dare I say, the light of the world that came at Christmas is still shining, and we are called to make sure it shines in any and all dim places where we can? Yes, I believe I read somewhere "*do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself.*" (Matthew 6:34) So yeah, I'm going to rant—again—that though Christmas may be over (on January 6th) the work of Christmas still remains for us to do. After all, it's just 356 days (or less) until Christmas!

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year everyone! May God's blessings be seen and felt and received in great abundance by you all in 2025.

Your Pastor and Friend,
Jonathan/

Marjorie Howard's Memorial

Friends, please join us in remembering and celebrating the life of Marjorie Howard on January 7th and 8th. In addition, please see the TPC for Liz Cawley, and send a card of condolences to the family in the light of the loss of Marge.

Calling Hours: Tuesday, Jan. 7th, 4-7 p.m.
Hosted at Redmon's Funeral Home

Memorial: Wednesday, Jan. 8th, 11 a.m.
Hosted at First Christian Church of Stow.
Luncheon to Follow in Fellowship Hall.

ALL CHURCH SOUP COOK-OFF! **January 26th** **After Sanctuary Service**

Ready your Ladles and prep your pots! Bring your A-Game Soups! Stay after service for a great lunch and vote for your favorite soup! Bread, dessert, and beverages are included with your lunch. Sign up online at the link below or on your connection card in service!

<https://forms.gle/aipy3NiqV5SGHXcW9>

"Do You Think You Might Want To Be A Lay Leader?" **Beginning Sunday, January 12th, 9:30-10:00 a.m.**

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has always held to the stance we call "*The priesthood of all believers.*" This is a belief and view that stresses all have a role in sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ, even in and during worship. Which is why our church is aiming to do a new thing when it comes to it Lay Leadership in our weekly worship services.

If you have ever entertained the idea of helping to lead worship services as our Elders have, or if you have ever thought you might enjoy being part of worship in such a role, or if you have ever felt God giving you that calling "nudge" to guide the gathered community in times of word and prayer, then you are invited to further that consideration by attending the upcoming seminar "Do You Think

You Might Want To Be A Lay Leader?" This seminar will begin on Sunday, January 12th, from 9:30-10a.m. in the Our Classroom with Jonathan. It will begin with an introduction to what a worship lay leader is and does. Then, in subsequent weeks, again on Sundays from 9:30-10a.m., the seminar will cover how to prepare for, and then lead, various elements of worship.

By coming to the first session, or any session, you are not at all committing to or signing up to be a Lay Leader. If you simply want to come and learn more about this opportunity and then decide if this is something you might like to try, then you are more than welcome to come and check it out. 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!

Chapel Update

Friends, we're excited to share with you that the Chapel Restoration Project is making incredible headway, and that we expect to return to it this year. The drywall has been painted. Now, we're waiting on the lights to be install, windows to be replaced, and the floor to be refinished. As you remember from last year, we already have our pews ready to be installed as soon as the space is ready.

Additionally, please be on the lookout for an article regarding updating our Church Directory for 2025! As soon as the chapel is ready to be used, we will be taking photos for the directory in that space to welcome it back into our church life.

Winter Storms and Snowy Paths— Shoveler's Needed!

While we face the winter storm, our sidewalks will need attention for snow clearing and salting. Anyone who is available to shovel and salt the paths to the upper entrance, please let the church office know. We'll add you to a contact list, and someone will be in touch!

Loaves & Fishes + Pantry & December Recap

The January drive through meal is Sunday January 19th 4- 6 p.m. Jambalaya and Macaroni and cheese will be served. All are welcome!

2023/2024 Comparison

Sunday December 15 was the last Loaves & Fishes + Pantry for 2024. We served 49 families consisting of 128 individuals. As usual everybody who wanted a hot meal got a hot meal of creamed turkey (or chicken) and every family received groceries.

We handed out groceries with the usual mix of dinners, canned fruit & vegetables, bread, Entenmann's treats, cereal, milk and other items We were able to add blueberries to the grocery bags this month because of our new freezer.

This table shows how many families and people we helped in 2023 and 2024.

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Month	2023		2024	
	Families	People	Families	People
Jan.	30	72	35	89
Feb.	36	92	46	122
Mar.	41	108	39	105
Apr.	32	89	32	88
May	40	105	43	120
Jun.	49	140	30	79
July	46	120	36	104
Aug.	48	140	40	99
Sept.	67	182	39	101
Oct.	45	129	49	123
Nov.	59	160	53	137
Dec.	94	291	88	282
Grand Total	587	1628	530	1449

As you can see our 2024 numbers were a little lower than 2023. We must all keep in mind that we are serving a need in our community. The number of neighbors who need help varies all the time. Let's take it as good news that our numbers are a little lower.

Meanwhile our costs were up. In 2023 we spent \$2,819 at the Food Bank on groceries. In 2024 we spent \$3,367 for an increase of \$558. There is one major reason for this increase.

Every year the Food Bank receives various government grants that they use to purchase certain food items. They pass the savings on to agencies like us, which means that we can get free food. There was less of this government grant money available in 2024.

Of course, we focus on using these grants whenever we can. In 2023 we were able to use these grants to obtain \$1,172 worth of food items. In 2024 we were only able to obtain \$564 worth of items with grant money. That works out to a decrease of \$608 of food items obtained via grant money, which is more than our cost increase.

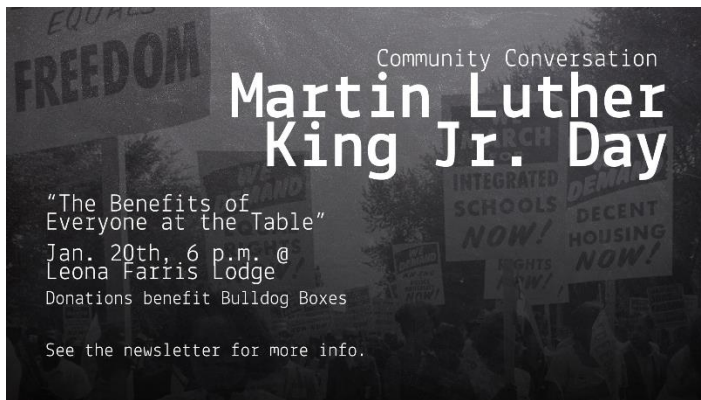
In 2023 our average cost per family was \$4.80; in 2024 the average cost per family was \$6.35. Even with the increase \$6.35 is a phenomenal price for a week's worth of groceries.

We look forward to your continued support during 2025.

- The meals and groceries we provide help us fulfill our mission.
- The thanks and gratitude we receive from the neighbors we serve is truly humbling.
- Our Loaves & Fishes + Pantry ministry makes a huge difference in the lives of our neighbors in need.

Acme Community Cash Back Program August Through December

For anyone with receipts left, there's still time to get your 2024 Acme Receipts in to the church! Please drop off any remaining receipts in the box in the Gathering Area labeled "ACME RECEIPTS." Proceeds will benefit Dorcas Rebekah Guild, Mary Martha Guild, and our Blanket Ministry.



Martin Luther King Jr. Day Community Conversations

We're excited to share info for this upcoming event on MLK Jr. Day, "*Otherness in Stow: The Benefits of Everyone at the Table*", inviting constituents and citizens from all around Stow to hear from local speakers and learn more about the strength we have in our communities.

This event is being hosted at Leona Farris Lodge in Silver Springs Park on January 20th at 6 p.m. more details will be available for reading in next week's bulletin insert.

Coffee Fellowship Opportunities After Second Service in the Library

Just a reminder for those who aren't yet in the know-- Coffee Fellowship is held after second service for all of us to chat, share a brief refreshment, and get connected! Now you're in the know!

Signups for helping with Coffee Fellowship are on a clipboard just outside the library doors. If you have any questions about how to host Coffee Fellowship, Lisa Roseman or Jacob Aukeman can fill you in on all the details. Help connect and fellowship with your church family!

Think – Pray – Connect Families from September

12/01/24

Laurie Scott

718 Franklin Ave, Cuyahoga Falls OH 44221
Please send encouragement and prayers to Laurie as she is having a CT scan to diagnose a mass on her neck this week, with surgery to follow.

Fred Lloyd

4361 Cherryhurst Dr, Stow OH 44224
Send support and well-wishes to Fred as he is out of the hospital after an emergency visit.

12/08/24

Sharon Sellers

1925 Hawthorne, Stow OH 44224
Please continue to send encouragement and support to Sharon Sellers. Sharon began Chemo on Wednesday morning for her pancreatic cancer, and will be on this treatment plan for the next two months.

12/15/24

David Harlow

159 Pinehurst Rd, Munroe Falls OH 44262
Please reach out to and send support to Dave during this Holiday season, as he has been experiencing some persistent health complications. Please pray for continued healing with treatment, and for peace and calm as we approach Christmas for the whole family.

12/22/24

Marilyn Lown

96 Pinehurst Rd., Munroe Falls OH 44262
Please send a Merry Christmas to Marilyn Lown from our church family to her and her family!

Ashley Mahaffey

1530 Bolingbrook Dr., Columbus OH 43228
Please send encouragement and support in light of an upcoming and difficult journey with her health.

12/05/24

Liz Cawley

539 Vine St., Kent OH 44240
Please send condolences and support to Liz and the Howard family in light of Marjorie Howard's passing