



WINTER 2019-2020 • Number 10

Chronicle

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH OF AKRON

Rooted in Christ · Fostering Justice · Celebrating Diversity



Dear friends,

The first chapter of Genesis reflects beautifully our ancient forebears' intuitions about God's proactive involvement in creation. I am especially drawn to Everett Fox's translation of the first few verses of Genesis:

At the beginning of God's creating
of the heavens and the earth,
when the earth was wild and waste,
darkness over the face of ocean,
rushing-spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters—
God said: Let there be light! And there was light.
(Gen 1:1-3, *The Five Books of Moses*, The Schocken Bible,
Volume 1, 2000)

Our tradition has a lot to say about darkness and light, albeit that the former is often cast in a negative light (see what I did there?). But what I love about Genesis 1 is that in the end God looks out over all of creation and sees it as not just good, but very good. Yes, even the night! And this is good news for all of us in the northern hemisphere facing the dark, cold months of December and January.

There is an invitation in the darkness: an invitation to see the goodness in it, an invitation to burrow down, keep warm, and rejuvenate our bodies, minds, and spirits.

There's an opportunity in these dark, cold months to reflect on and let go of everything that holds us back as we watch and wait for the return of the light as we remember at Christmastide the light that shines in the darkness (John 1:5). And we are beckoned to embrace at the passing of one year to the next, one decade to the next, the promise of lengthening days and the spring that always does arrive in spite of how long and cold the night may seem. But let's not wish away the darkness. Rather, let us prepare ourselves in the midst of the darkness to welcome in the lighter and warmer days ahead with fresh vigor – preparing our hearts, minds, and spirits to embrace the promise of a hope-filled future.

As we watch and wait and prepare ourselves, we know that we are not alone. For God is with us as surely as God has been with us and will be with us come what may. My prayer for you is that in the midst of the darkness you will find this Christmas a truer meaning of hope, fresher perspective on yourself as a beloved child of God, and with the angel chorus be able to sing "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace!" (Luke 2:14).

Steven and I and our little family wish you and yours a blessed Christmas and a hopeful and happy 2020.

With warmest wishes,

Nanette

Working Group Survey Update

My dear friends,

Earlier this year the Governing Board and Senior Minister recognized that First Church has entered a period of significant change, as have many other healthy congregations.

To shore up our legacy and prayerfully forge into the future that God is shaping amidst rapidly shifting societal norms, First Church assembled a representative group of congregational members as a Working Group and contracted with a consulting firm to survey of the congregation to:

1. Assess the congregation to ascertain the history, dynamics and issues of current tensions in the congregation.
2. Promote increased understanding in the congregation across members with different perspectives.
3. Increase the capacity for the congregation to face differences, improve communication and work toward agreement.
4. Develop a set of recommendations for addressing key issues affecting the health of the congregation.

Among the first steps the Working Group took was to agree to abide by the following group norms:

1. Value the voice of every person and their perspective.
2. We have to trust each other and speak our truth in this group without retribution.
3. Agree on what will be reported out about this group and what is said here.
4. We model how to have an honest conversation and help others engage in a similar process.
5. Listen like the other person might be right.
6. Fearless honesty: Tell your truth in an authentic way that connects the head and heart.
7. Ask clarifying questions when uncertain of the other's intentions.
8. Be clear when you are representing the voice of others not in the circle that need to be heard.

The Working Group – Ruth Allison, Logan Baez, Larry Becker, DeAnn Clemons, Beth Cooper, Jay Hershey, Kellie Ramirez, Pastor Nanette Pitt, and Sarah Vradenburg – have now received the input and guidance of our consultants and are looking ahead and planning our report to the Governing Board and Congregation.

We want to be sure that we do this right, rather than doing it quickly! And so we thank you for your patience. When the Working Group started we were naive to think this would be a quick process. There was a tremendous amount of information collected from 187 total surveys and interviews. Thank you to those who responded for your honesty and forthrightness.

If you have questions please ask any member of the Working Group.

Submitted by Larry Becker, Moderator

Giving Stock

Most charitable donations take the form of food drives, clothing donations or simply a donation of cash to support a cause. But did you know you could also donate stocks? While you always have the option to sell your stocks and donate the proceeds, it might make more sense to donate the stocks themselves. This way you can give a larger gift at a lower original cost to you and it can prove to be a smart tax move for you, too.

How to Donate Stock to Charity

Your first step in donating stock is to determine which stocks you want to give. This is both a matter of personal preference, and a question of tax implications. Giving appreciated stock is better than giving cash. If you donate stock that has increased in value since you bought it - and if you itemize deductions - you can take a charitable deduction for the stock's fair market value on the day you give it away. You'll also avoid capital-gains taxes on the increase in value over time, which you would have had to pay if you sold the stock, then gave the cash proceeds.

Your best bet is to look for stocks that you bought at least a year ago and have risen in value since you bought them. Not only will that make for a more worthwhile donation, but it also means you get to avoid paying a capital gains tax on the stock's appreciation. If you have a financial advisor, they can assist you in choosing the best stocks to donate.

You'll need to contact your brokerage firm or investment advisor for the exact actions required of you to send your stocks. This usually involves filling out a transfer form, and you will need to contact First Church to get some required information to complete the transaction. At that time you can let us know the name of the stock you're sending, and that the transaction is in process. This way, we will know exactly who sent the donation, and can send you a tax-deductible receipt once the transfer is complete.

The most valuable gifts are undesignated and go to support First Church's operations and ministries. These gifts allow flexibility for responding to the most urgent needs. However, we do accept gifts designated to a specific purpose. Please feel free to reach out to Finance and Operations Manager Janis Worley, janis.worley@akronfcc.org anytime for more information.

First Church at the State Capital

On November 6, Pastor Nanette was invited to represent us at the Ohio Statehouse in Columbus and offer the opening prayer during the House Session.





FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Sunday, December 1, 9:30 and 11am services
The Advent season begins with a Communion Sunday.

ADVENT LUNCH AND WORKSHOP

Sunday, December 8, 9:30 and 11am services
Following our morning worship services, we will host an Advent Workshop for the congregation including a Sloppy Joe sandwich luncheon. Join us for a time of crafting and fellowship that will warm the heart and soul!

BREAKFAST WITH SANTA

Saturday, December 14, 9:30-11am in Fellowship Hall
Our congregation reaches out to the community through this family-friendly event inviting families with children to enjoy a pancake breakfast and a morning full of fun activities, including having a picture taken with Santa Claus! The event is free and open to the public. Sign up to be an elf volunteer and bring love and light into a neighbor's heart! Contact Kasey in the church office.

WASSAIL SUNDAY & CAROLING

Follow your nose and the scent of clove and spice to Fellowship Hall after each of our morning's Advent services and enjoy a warm cup of wassail (alcohol free). At 1pm join the Fellowship Team in the Conference Room, pick up a carol booklet as we head off to Concordia at Sumner Retirement Community, where we will joyfully sing the season's best tunes for the residents. No auditions required! All ages and singing levels welcome!



SERVICE OF HOPE AND HEALING

Wednesday, December 18, at 7:30pm in the Chapel
The festive season is not always an easy or joyous time for those of us who are grieving or who are struggling to make sense of our world and life experiences. You are invited to enter into a comforting and honest space for our Service of Hope & Healing that makes room for those who need a time apart, those who may be wrestling amidst all the holiday cheer. Music will be provided by guest pianist Marge Adler.

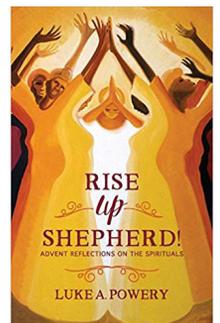
UNREHEARSED CHRISTMAS PAGEANT

Sunday, December 22, 11am
Following a regular 9:30am worship service, at 11am attendees of all ages are invited to pick up a costume as they enter the Meetinghouse and then to participate in our annual Unrehearsed Christmas Pageant. A telling of the birth story that brings the hope of the nativity to life in the midst of the gathered community as we tell the story once again and form a tableau around the manger.

Advent Devotional

This Advent season, we are reading Luke A. Powery's *Rise Up, Shepherd! Advent Reflections on the Spirituals*.

About the book: "African American spirituals give us profound insights into the human condition and the Christian life. In these devotions for the season of Advent, Luke Powery leads the reader through the spirituals as they confront the mystery of incarnation and redemption. In *Rise Up, Shepherd!*, each devotion features the lyrics of the spiritual, a reflection on the spiritual's meaning, a Scripture verse, and a brief prayer."



Books will be available for purchase in the church office for a suggested donation of \$9, or may be sourced from your favorite bookseller.

Children and Youth

Church School will be held during the 11am service every 2nd, 4th Sunday of the month. As always youth will begin worship with their families in the Meetinghouse and leave for Church School following *Thoughts for the Young*. On the 1st Sunday, youth are invited to remain in the 11am worship service with their families for Communion Sunday worship. Special bulletins for children and a *Thoughts for the Young* message will be a part of worship.

On every 3rd Sunday, during the 11am service, we will host a Sunday Funday craft for youth in the Art Room on the 2nd floor Educational Wing. Youth will again start in worship with their families and leave after *Thoughts for the Young*.

On Sunday, December 29, children and youth are invited to stay in worship at the 11am service and participate in the Carol Sing.

If you would like to volunteer to support these programs, please contact Pastor Antigone. Working with our youth can be one of the most important and rewarding roles in church.

Childcare for infants and toddlers is available at the 2nd floor Nursery and Village opening at 9am every Sunday until after the 11am worship service.

During the 9:30am service in the Upper Room, youth are invited to attend worship with their families. There is an activity carpet available in the worship space and activity packs are available.

During the 11am service, the Family Room at the rear of the Meetinghouse is also available for your use and is equipped with toys, toddler furniture, a changing table, a rocking chair, and has access to a restroom. Activity packs are also available.

DECEMBER 1: First Sunday of Advent

DECEMBER 8: Church School classes & Advent Workshop

DECEMBER 15: Sunday Funday

DECEMBER 22: Unrehearsed Christmas Pageant

DECEMBER 29: Carol Sing Sunday

JANUARY 5: Festival of Epiphany

JANUARY 12: Church School classes

JANUARY 19: Sunday Funday

JANUARY 26: Church School classes

Time with Tots

Join us for Time with Tots on January 25, from 9am-10am. Breakfast will be served.

Time with Tots was created to provide a space for families with young children, 3 years and under, to connect, share experiences, and foster new and meaningful relationships. Parents / guardians and children are invited!

Please RSVP to Kasey Kalchert, Congregational Life Coordinator, at kasey.kalchert@akronfcc.org or by calling 330.253.5109 x112. We hope to see you there!

MERGE Youth Group

In collaboration with Trinity UCC in Canton, First Church youth are invited to participate in a multi-church youth group.

On December 15, high school and middle school aged youth will meet at Trinity UCC from different northeast Ohio churches for fun, food, and fellowship. The group meets from 6-8pm.

A carpool will be available from First Church, leaving at 5:30pm. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact Associate Minister Antigone Lowery at 330.780.8122 or antigone.lowery@akronfcc.org.



Ice Skating Outing at Lock 3

Looking for some FAMILY FUN this winter when the deep freeze sets in? Tired of the kids saying, "I'm bored"? First Church has it covered! On Saturday, January 25, you are invited to join our church family at 11am for brunch in the Fellowship Hall, paid for and sponsored by the Fellowship Team. Then we will carpool over to Lock 3 Park. What is happening over there? I'm glad you asked!

There is a large outdoor skating rink. Admission is \$2 with your own skates and \$4 if you rent skates. You don't ice skate? No worries. They also rent ice bikes for \$10 for 10 minutes. Be sure check the Lock 3 website at www.lock3live.com to see what fun these look like! The bikes are available from 2pm-4pm. Also available from 11:30am-1pm and 4:30pm-8:30pm are ice bumper cars for \$10 for 18 minutes. Don't worry; they separate the skaters from the bumper car drivers! You'd be wise to also reserve your time ahead online for both these activities.

In addition, there are indoor activities. There's a small skating rink inside, plus a 9-hole miniature golf, where admission is \$3 by itself OR only \$1 if you paid for skating. and there's a Children's Museum, which has many interactive exhibits. The museum's admission is \$5.

Hope you and your family will join us. Children and adults of all ages welcome! Bring your friends! Be sure to sign up in the church office by Sunday, January 19 so we know how much food to provide. Questions? Contact Chris Becker at 330.665.4746 or bitemegal@gmail.com

Submitted by Chris Becker, Fellowship Team Coordinator

Christmas Eve Services

CHILDREN'S WORSHIP

Tuesday, December 24, 5pm

This new 45 minute service is ideally suited for families with young children who are looking to celebrate in ways that appeal both to those who are young in age and young at heart! Worship will be led by our pastors and jazz pianist, Dave Aberth.

LESSONS AND CAROLS

Tuesday, December 24, 8pm

This traditional service of the birth narrative readings will hail Christ's arrival accompanied by organ, brass, handbells, and choir to lift your spirits as we listen and sing carols. The service will be led by our pastors and our Organist and Choir Director, Julie Lehman. Worship will conclude with *Silent Night* by candle light.

CAROLS, CANDLES, AND COMMUNION

Tuesday, December 24, 11pm

This late night service offers a more reflective opportunity for worship with communion, candle lighting, and carols accompanied by classical guitar and the sounds of *O Holy Night*. An ideal service for anyone who is looking to round out a busy festive season or who tries to avoid holiday hype.

Carol Sing Sunday

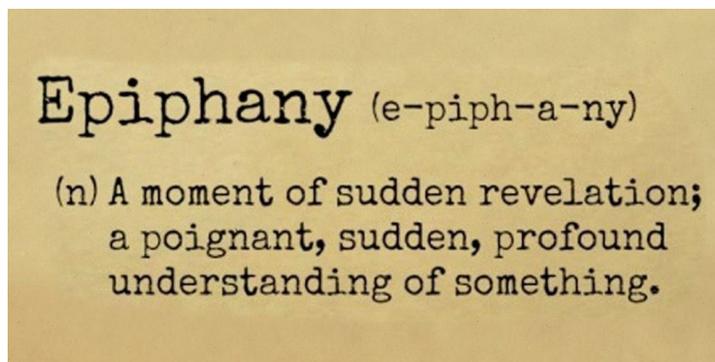
Sunday, December 29, 9:30 and 11am

Celebrate the twelve days of Christmas – the season of Christmas that lasts from Christmas Day until Epiphany – by joining us for a carol sing at both our 9:30 and 11am worship services. At 9:30am music is led by a group of contemporary musicians and, at 11am, by our stupendous Casavant Frères organ originally built in 1951 and refurbished in 2006.

Festival of Epiphany

Sunday, January 5, 9:30 and 11am

Welcome in the New Year with the revelation of the power and purpose of the Christ-child who we remember was revealed to the world on Epiphany Sunday.



Special Christmas Offering

The Governing Board has selected Mason Community Learning Center to be the recipient of this year's annual Special Christmas Offering. First Church has been helping Mason for seventeen years. Our outreach program has evolved into a multifaceted community ministry. First Church annually provides Christmas for approximately 20 families through our Sponsor-A-Family program. Math tutoring, for fourth grade students in need, is available on Wednesday mornings. Monies received from this offering in the past have been used to purchase 9 Smart Boards as well as one Chromebook cart for teacher/student use. Our goal is to reserve funds received this year for future purchases of instructional, educational, and/or computer programs that will benefit the Mason schoolchildren. The expenditure of these funds will be determined by the Mason CLC staff and administration.

Early in December, you will receive My Christmas Offering letter and envelope for this specific contribution. Your envelope may be placed in the offering plate any Sunday in December or mailed to the church office. Please designate "Special Christmas Offering" on your contribution check or envelope.

Thank you for your continuing support of Mason Community Learning Center and all of First Church's outreach programs.

An Earth-Saving Christmas Idea

Reduce your carbon footprint this holiday season and start new Earth-friendly. Make your own Christmas cards! This can even turn into family-fun event every year. Possible materials can be magazines, newspapers, old cards from previous years, and calendars. All you need is some scissors and glue to let the creativity flowing! Old Christmas cards also make great gift tags!



Winter Joining Sunday

On Sunday, December 8, at the 9:30am service, First Church will welcome new members including...

Nanci Self and Stephan Collins

Nanci Self and Stephan Collins join First Church after being active in our congregation for many years. Nanci is the Executive Director of local Akron nonprofit Nazareth Housing, which specializes in residential rehabilitation and energy efficient home improvements for lower income families and neighborhoods. She has a deep passion and commitment to the Akron community. Stephan serves as a Magistrate to the Summit County Domestic Relations Court. His primary non-work interests are his family, WWII history and cooking.

Michael Howard and Zion Yi-Howard

Rev. Michael Anthony Howard and Zion Yi-Howard are two of our newest First Church members! Michael and Zion have actively attended since April of 2019 with their daughter, Joey. Michael serves as the Minister of Faith in Action at the Living Water Association, ONE (Ohio NorthEast) Ohio Conference of the United Church of Christ. He enjoys hiking, reading, playing music and having fun with his family. Zion worked as a Medical Interpreter, but currently is a stay-at-home-mom for Joey. Her interests include permaculture as well as plant-based nutrition and exercise. Zion enjoys hiking and the outdoor experience.



Coming Out Christian

Spread the word and join us as we rethink God's love toward LGBTQ+ Christians in this support group.

In a safe space, members of the LGBTQ+ community can come together to explore Christianity and the possibility of understanding faith in new ways as we reclaim and explore our faith journeys. The group meets on the second Sunday of each month in the First Church Chapel from 6-7pm. All ages are welcome.



Contem-PAINT

On Sunday, December 1 and January 5, all are invited to join Amber Cullen in the 2nd Floor Art Room for Contem-PAINT. From 4-6pm, this is a space designed for you to get creative! For more information, or to RSVP, contact Amber at 330.310.0406 or ambercullenart@gmail.com. Contem-PAINT is the first Sunday of each month.

Women's Spiritual Journey

The Women's Spiritual Journey meets on the first and third Mondays of each month for lunch and discussion. This group of retired women welcomes you to join them. A meal can be purchased from the kitchen for \$8 or you're welcome to bring your own. Please contact Linda Peshina with any questions at 330.606.5874.

Men's Lunch Bunch

A small group of retired men in the church gather each week for lunch, conversation, and a documentary. New comers are welcome. On Mondays, a hot lunch is served, starting at 11:45 am. The program is a continuation of the excellent Great Courses series about colonial America. For additional information, contact Howard Tolley at 330.867.1469.

First Church Care Team

Author Anthony J. D'Angelo once wrote that, "without a sense of caring, there can be no sense of community." Seeking to be an intentionally caring community, we are forming a new Care Team at First Church. Different members with different skills and interests, will continue to provide meals, visit homebound parishioners, send cards, and help us engage and care for one another in new ways. If you would like to participate, please contact Associate Minister Antigone Lowery at 330.780.8122 or antigone.lowery@akronfcc.org.

Two Core Values and Bedrock Beliefs motivate us in this:

Mission: We believe God is the cause and mission is the effect. We receive God's love and extend that love to others, in word and deed, within and beyond the congregation.

Community: First Church seeks to unite individuals and families into a network of fellowship and compassion within the congregation and beyond.

Bible Study for Men*

You are warmly invited to join Rev. Steven Savides for a thematic exploration of the scriptures on the first Saturday of each month. You'll meet over breakfast in Fellowship Hall from 7:30 to 9am.

The theme for December 7 is *Who is Jesus the Christ?* with a focus scripture: Colossians 1:15-23.

Participants are encouraged to read the focus scripture before the meeting, to bring a Bible (any translation will do), and to be prepared for a journey through scripture aimed at providing both perspective and depth.

Please RSVP to Kasey Kalchert at kasey.kalchert@akronfcc.org or 330.253.5109 so that we can have a headcount for breakfast.

**The designation "men" is meant to create a space in which all who identify as male or who embrace a masculine identity can feel welcome and find fellowship.*



Night at the Movies

If you enjoy thought-provoking, insightful, and entertaining cinema, grab your free ticket for Wednesday Night at the Movies at 6:45pm, with discussion to follow. Each week's showing and conversation are facilitated by Bernie Babb. Visitors and new attendees are always welcome. Please contact Bernie with any questions at 330.687.0823. We hope you will join us for a fun evening in the 2nd floor Theatre Room!

THE CARER – DECEMBER 4

Dorottya, a young actress with a burning desire to make it on stage, becomes a caregiver to legendary actor Sir Michael Gifford who suffers from an incurable disease, and has one desire: to be left alone! Both hope their wish can be fulfilled.

NOEL – DECEMBER 11

Starring Susan Sarandon, Penelope Cruz, and Alan Arkin, this story explores spirituality at every turn and leaves us pondering many of life's questions, *Noel* is not your average holiday fare.

To learn more about these movies or what we will watch in January, please visit www.akronfcc.org/explore-learn/groups/movies



Advent Bible Study

Join both Pastor Nanette and Associate Pastor Antigone at either our morning or evening groups held in the Library and Conference Room from 10:45am–noon and 6:45–8pm respectively, for an exploration of the core themes of the Advent season – hope, peace, joy, and love – through the lens of scripture and the writings of Christian thinkers. Visit www.akronfcc.org to download advance readings.

Holiday Break Reminder

Please note there will be no Wednesday programming on December 18 (please see more about the Service of Hope and Healing on page 3), December 25, or January 1. Programming will resume on January 8, 2020.

Winter's Evening Bible Study

Beginning on January 8, from 6:45–8pm each Wednesday evening, Pastor Nanette will be offering a seven-week study of the book of Acts. Formally known as the Acts of the Apostles this text, written by the same author as the Gospel of Luke, tells of the formation of the early church and its spread through the Roman Empire. Often held up as the gold standard for Christian community, the book offers rich insight into God's purposes through Jesus Christ and the varied responses to and challenges of that Good News. Come and join the conversation as we explore this ancient text both in its time and our own.



Wednesday Community Dinners

When our Wednesday programs are offered, we also offer a dinner in Fellowship Hall. The meal will be served at 6pm with a suggested donation of \$8 per person. Please make reservations for each week's dinner online or in the church office by noon each Monday.

Messiah Sing

On Sunday, December 15, at 3pm, the Master Singers Chorale of Northeast Ohio, under the direction of the group's artistic director, Edward Arthur Shure, will host a Messiah Sing at the First Church, as a benefit to support Feeding Hope Food Pantry and raise awareness for the serious issue of food insecurity.

The Messiah Sing, where the audience becomes the chorus, is an opportunity for singers throughout Northeast Ohio to join the Master Singers Chorale in a performance of Part One of Handel's "Messiah" with the addition of the "Hallelujah Chorus." The Sing will include Daniel Hathaway on organ, Justin Kohan and Jack Brndiar on trumpet, Kyle Morelock, horn, and Tom Pylinski on trombone. The Chorale has partnered with Kent State University to engage exceptional young artists, either currently or recently enrolled, to sing the solo arias and recitatives. This year's soloists will be Heather Morrison, soprano, Natalie Butchko, mezzo, Benjamin Hayes, tenor, and Charles Austin Piper, baritone.

The Messiah Sing is not just restricted to folks who want to come and sing. It is also open to people who just want to come and listen. The afternoon will conclude with all in attendance ringing in the holiday season with a Christmas carol sing-a-long arranged by the great Sir David Willcocks.

The Master Singers Chorale requests that all participants bring (unexpired) non-perishable foodstuffs or personal hygiene items for the Food Pantry that can be used during the upcoming cold winter months.

For more information on this event, or if you are interested in joining the Chorale for its 2020 season, please visit the Chorale's website at www.mastersingersinc.org or find them on Facebook at www.facebook.com/mastersingerschorale



Photo courtesy of Woolf Photography

UA Symphony Orchestra

Join us on Thursday, December 5, for a performance of the University of Akron Symphony Orchestra! The concert will be held in our historic Meetinghouse, starting at 7:30pm. The concert will feature music from Gregson's *Trombone Concerto*, Beethoven's *Symphony No. 6*, with faculty trombonist Elisabeth Shafer. The Symphony Orchestra is conducted by Dr. Guy Victor Bordo.



Photo courtesy of Woolf Photography

"Organizing 101"
AN INTRODUCTION TO FAITH-BASED ORGANIZING



JOIN US FOR AN INTRODUCTORY TRAINING ABOUT PUTTING FAITH INTO ACTION BY ORGANIZING TO BUILD AND RESTORE OUR COMMUNITIES.

SAT, JANUARY 25, 2020 - 2 to 4pm
First Congregational Church of Akron
292 E Market St, Akron, OH 44308
Please register by email to michael.mfia@lignwaterone.org



Preserve and Share Your Art

First Church is looking to broaden our collection of fine, framed wall art. Do you have framed canvases, special paintings, textiles or other collectibles that need a new home? There is no restriction on size or style, but we are limiting our request to artistic items that can be hung on a wall. If you can provide any details about the work, such as title, artist, medium, age or value, that would be greatly appreciated. Broadening our collection will permit us greater flexibility to rotate displays throughout the building, add beauty to our facility, and provide our many diverse guests from the wider community the opportunity to view some amazing talent! Please reach out to Finance and Operations Manager Janis Worley at janis.worley@akronfcc.org to make arrangements to bring pieces in. All donations will become the property of First Church, and will be recognized with an in-kind donation receipt for tax purposes if requested.

Ecuador Scholarship Program

This year First Church has supported three high school students and one college student in Ecuador with their education expenses thereby empowering and enriching the rural area in which they live. This ministry began many years ago when John and Agneta Solomon met ministry organizer, José Chavez. John made a bequest that has sustained the ministry in recent years. José wrote to share this information with us:

It has been a great pleasure to have you helping our scholarship program over all this long time. Personally, I am very thankful, and I wish you too the best. As probably Mrs. Solomon told you this will be our last year for the program, all High School students are graduating after this year. We will have just one University student, that Mrs. Solomon may help to finish her College education. We are planning to switch our Health Center facility for a center to care elderly people from our nearby villages. Currently we don't have any and it will be a great support for this elderly group in the countryside. Thank you again.

Sincerely, José Chavez

We are enormously grateful to the Solomons and to everyone who has contributed to this international ministry over the years. It has played an important role in our understanding ourselves as part of the larger global family and been a core part of our annual outreach ministries.



Christmas at Mason CLC

If you are participating in the Mason CLC Sponsor-A-Family program, please make sure to return your gifts to the church office by December 8, 2019.

This year, the First Church congregation is helping to provide Christmas to 20 Mason families!

Thank you for your support!

*Submitted by Laura Bishop, Nancy Jenkins, and Tonya & Tiffani Akers
2019- 2020 Mason Ministry Team*

Love Truck

The Love Truck is next serving on Saturday, December 7. This ministry needs donations of desserts! No need to bake them, unless you really want to. We welcome you to pick up some sweets at the store. Please drop donations at the church on the Thursday or Friday before. Thank you!

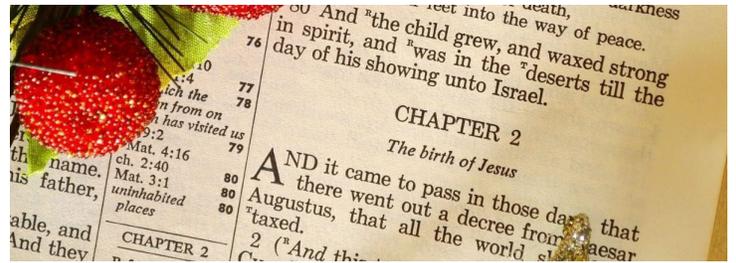
Please consider giving donations of men's socks and personal hygiene products including deodorant, toothpaste, toothbrushes, shampoo, etc. We are also seeking men's and women's gloves, winter hats, and winter scarves to help those served by the Love Truck ministry.

December Mission: Mason CLC

Mason Community Learning Center has been selected as the December Mission of the Month. Please consider making a monetary donation which will be used to continue the Mason initiative. Your donation will help provide funds for future purchases of instructional, educational, and/or computer programs that will benefit the learning experiences of the Mason schoolchildren. Items to be purchased will be determined by the Mason CLC staff and administration. Please indicate Mason CLC on the memo line of your check or use the Mission of the Month envelope provided in your pew. Thank you for your continued support of the Mason Outreach Program.

Mission of the Month Updates

The October Mission of the Month, Minority Behavioral Health Group (MBHG), received a combined donation totaling \$753. Thank you for your generosity.



Homeless Outreach

We are accepting donations for winter clothing items, including winter items such as gloves, socks, hats, scarves, pants, sweaters, etc. Please bring your donations to the front office. Thank you!

Canaan Sales

Olive oil from the Holy Land will be available in the Fellowship Hall following both worship services on December 1, 15 and 22. Starting December 1, we will also have the beautiful hand carved pieces by Palestinian Christians in Bethlehem. A new order will be placed soon, so please stop by the table or contact Carolyn Durway with what you would like for the holidays 330.836.8564 or spicewood@neo.rr.com.

Urban Housing Discussions

The Living Water Association of the United Church of Christ invites you to Community Discussions about housing in the city of Akron with other church's and community groups.

The group will meet the fourth Tuesday of every month at the Cascade Village YMCA (210 E North Street, Akron, 44304) from 6:30-8pm. Discussions will center on a study of the Bible and Matthew Desmond's book called *Evicted*.

The group is free and open to the public, but you will need to register at akronhousingdiscussion.eventbrite.com. The next meeting is January 28! All materials will be provided.

Stewardship/Finance Report (unaudited)				
	October	YTD	YTD Budget	Percent to Budget
INCOME				
2019 Loyalty Campaign	\$14,091	\$182,761	\$200,753	91.0%
Non-pledge Income	\$4,095	\$48,313	\$49,980	96.7%
Food Pantry	\$1,373	\$25,954	\$25,240	102.8%
Other Special Ministries	\$178	\$7,784	\$6,914	112.6%
Endowment, Sparrows Trust, Pollock	\$45,217	\$471,530	\$466,987	101.0%
Rental and Food Service Income	\$2,746	\$23,873	\$20,028	119.2%
Other Income	\$1,233	\$52,261	\$8,996	580.9%
TOTAL	\$68,933	\$812,475	\$778,898	104.3%
EXPENSES				
Personnel & Admin Expenses	\$46,450	\$441,997	\$458,205	96.5%
Membership Board	\$690	\$207	\$5,873	3.5%
Governing Board	\$0	\$11,596	\$19,159	60.5%
Food Pantry	\$3,896	\$31,520	\$45,815	68.8%
Other Special Ministries	\$1,870	\$27,145	\$31,217	87.0%
Congregational Care & Education	\$1,024	\$9,176	\$12,037	76.2%
Music	\$3,075	\$15,338	\$18,401	83.4%
Fellowship Team	\$3	\$9	\$666	1.4%
Development Team	\$0	\$0	\$875	0.0%
Food Service Expense	\$1,503	\$16,028	\$15,261	105.0%
Maintenance/Utilities	\$35,191	\$249,210	\$272,748	91.4%
TOTAL	\$93,702	\$802,225	\$880,256	91.1%
Net Income/Loss	-\$24,769	\$10,250	-\$101,358	-10.1%

2020 Stewardship Campaign

Financial pledges allow the church to plan its annual ministries more effectively. In addition, at the recommendation of the Stewardship & Finance Board, the Governing Board has approved shifting our financial year in 2020 from the calendar year to match our program year. To make this move, we will implement a 5 month budget in January 2020 and then, at our Annual Meeting in May 2020, implement a 12 month budget, effective June 2020, that will take us through each program year from that point on (June 1 - May 31). As of November 27, 2019, our pledge total for the first 5 months of 2020 is \$70,737. Our pledge total for the new program year of June, 2020-May 2021 is \$164,916. Thank you. We continue to welcome pledges. Forms are available in the office. Online payments are preferred and can be easily made through the church's website: www.akronfcc.org/support/donate/

End of Year Contributions

To receive notice of contributions on your 2019 tax returns, please make your gift before December 31, 2019. Thank you!

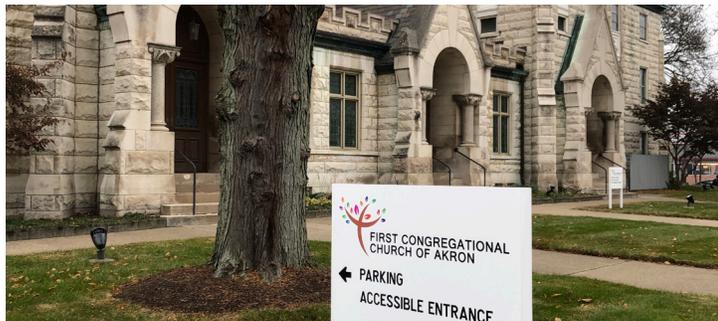


Join us in celebrating our Administrative and Financial Assistant, Patty Durkos, who will retire on December 31, 2019. We will celebrate her nearly 31-year career with First Church on Sunday, December 15, 2019 with a reception in the Fellowship Hall after the 11am service. We wish to honor her with your presence, refreshments, and cake for all to enjoy. Patty is looking forward to the next chapter in her life; she plans to spend more time with "Larry, our grandchildren, and our family." Let's honor Patty and her longtime service by sharing in her retirement observance on December 15. See you then!

Submitted by Sue Yoder, Human Resource Board Chair

Which Way Do I Go?

Have you seen the new signage on the First Church campus? These bright signs help to identify our property, as well as assist guests that are first-time visitors to our building. You may have also noticed that our main sign on Market Street has been partially taken down. This sign was removed as the first step towards the addition of a new, electronic sign. The new, main sign is in the design stages now, and we hope to see it up in the next few months if the weather cooperates.



Thank you!

A huge thank you to everyone who: 1) Sponsored Mason families and provided wonderful Christmas gifts to the children in those families; 2) Selected ornaments from our Christmas trees in Fellowship Hall to help make a special wish come true for our beautiful Mason children and/or: 3) Made a donation to be used in our Mason Christmas Program. Our mission would not be successful without YOU! We are truly a blessed church community. Thank you!

We wish you and your family and friends a very Happy New Year!

*Submitted by Laura Bishop, Nancy Jenkins, and Tonya & Tiffani Akers
2019-2020 Mason Ministry Team*

Who Is That?

Can you recognize this little guy? He's a long time member of First Church and very active in the congregation, including volunteering in the Food Pantry and serving as an At-Large member of the Governing Board! Send your guesses to Kasey Kalchert, at kasey.kalchert@akronfcc.org



In Sympathy

Our prayers are with Alfred and Judy Nicely following the loss of their grandson, Travis, son of Charles and Diana. Travis, 28, passed away in his sleep on October 20, 2019. From the moment Travis was born, he was faced with a great hardship due to a congenital heart defect. Services were held on October 25, 2019, in Dublin, Ohio.

Seasonal Recipes from the Archives

Over the years, First Church has published many recipe books. Each month we'll share a recipe from the archive celebrating the submissions made by church members.

Red & Green Christmas Cookies

Originally submitted by Juanita Carlson

Ingredients:

- 1 cup butter
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 ½ cups flour
- ¾ cup finely chopped red and green candied cherries
- ½ cup finely chopped pecans
- ¾ cup flaked coconut

Directions:

- Cream butter and sugar; blend in milk and vanilla. Stir in remaining ingredients.
- Roll into a log that is 3 inches in diameter.
- Wrap and chill overnight. Slice roll into ¼ inch slices and bake on an ungreased cookie sheet at 375 degrees for 12 minutes. Yield: 5 dozen



Call to a Special Congregational Meeting

First Church will hold a specially called meeting on January 12 in the Meetinghouse, immediately following the 11am worship service. The purpose of this meeting includes voting on the 5 month budget that will last from January 2020 until May 31, 2020. See page 10 for more information.

A minimum of 64 members must be present to have a quorum during voting. We value your presence and participation.

Worship Flowers

First Church requests donations of worship flowers for the 11am service. If you would like to honor, celebrate, or remember a loved one, please contact Kasey Kalchert at 330.253.5109 x112 to see which dates are available and to place an order.





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Winter Highlights

Advent Workshop

Sunday, December 8, after worship

Breakfast with Santa

Saturday, December 14, 9am-11am

Wassail Sunday

Sunday, December 15, after each worship service

Fellowship Outing: Christmas Caroling

Sunday, December 15, meet at 1pm in the Conference Room

Service of Hope and Healing

Wednesday, December 18, 7:30pm in the Chapel

Unrehearsed Pageant

Sunday, December 22, 11am

Christmas Eve Services

Tuesday, December 24 5pm, 8pm, and 11pm
See page 2 for more information

Carol Sing Sunday

Sunday, December 29, 9:30am and 11am

Festival of Epiphany

Sunday, January 5, 9:30am and 11am

Rev. Dr. MLK Celebration Sunday

Sunday, January 19, 9:30am and 11am

Fellowship Outing: Lock3 Ice Skating

Saturday, January 25
See page 4 for more information

Organizing 101 Workshop

An Introduction to Faith-based Organizing
Saturday, January 25, 2-4pm
See page 8 for more information

