

The Messenger

The monthly newsletter of First Congregational Church UCC of North Ridgeville

December 2020

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From the Pastor's Pen

Advent is upon us and the promise of Christmas morning draws closer with every passing day. This year, more than any other year, we are in desperate need of the hope, peace, joy and love that this Christmas season brings. That is why to help us navigate these difficult times, our worship services through the course of this month will be focused on these aspects of faith as we try to remember what this season is all about.

However, we cannot ignore the pain that this past year has brought to so many in our world; and especially as the Holiday season approaches, we feel that pain and loneliness more than ever. That is why on December 23 we will be having an online Blue Christmas service for those who need a place to grieve and mourn. It will be premiering on our Facebook page and on our website as well at 7 pm; so if you need a space to acknowledge the difficulty of this year's holiday season, we hope you will join us for this important service.

Then on **Christmas Eve** our *tentative plans (depending on how bad the pandemic surges in the next few weeks)* is to host four mini-services in person at 6 pm, 7 pm, 8 pm, and 9 pm. These services will contain some opening organ music, a recorded song from the choir, a scripture lesson, Holy Communion, and will end with us humming silent night. These will be 20 minute services in order to give us time between each service to disinfect the sanctuary for the next group coming through. **In order to attend these services, you must RSVP to one of the services ASAP.** You can call the church to reserve a time, but it is first come, first served. And once we fill up one of the services, it will no longer be available. We are hoping to make the 7 pm service more of the "family" service so that all the kids and families can see each other even though it will be at a distance. At 10 pm on Christmas Eve we will be premiering our special Christmas Eve service which includes our "Pandemic Christmas Carol" movie, which promises to bring smiles and warmth as Christmas morning approaches. This service can also be watched on Facebook or on our website at 10 pm.

My friends, as we approach the upcoming Christmas holiday, I hope that you take time to reach out and send cards or make phone calls to the people around you. We are all hurting this year, and for many of us the holidays are difficult and lonely even in the best of times. May we remember

the promises of Christmas and the hope that springs forth in our lives as we await the birth of the Christ child into our lives once more.

Blessings and Peace, and Merry Christmas!
Pastor Arik

Moderator's Moment – Roy Dreger

There is no better time than now, this very Christmas season, for all of us to rededicate ourselves to the principles taught by Jesus the Christ. It is the time to love the Lord, our God, with all our heart - and our neighbors as ourselves.-Thomas Monson

I don't know about you, but this holiday season doesn't feel right to me. No gatherings, no shopping for just the right present for someone....but I'm just telling you what you already know and feel. And it is that feeling I think I miss the most. Edna Ferber said that "Christmas isn't a season, it's a feeling". What is that feeling I'm missing? I have to believe it is in being with others while we celebrate the birth of the Christ child and the hope of "on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14).

Jesus tells us that we need to love God with all our heart. This is not easy due to all the distractions in our modern way of living that pull us in other directions, telling us that we deserve them. But the admonition to love our neighbor as ourselves is likewise challenging. We are supposed to love without regard to someone's citizenship, color, race, political inclination, sexual orientation, and the list goes on. Depending on how much we love ourselves, it can be hard to love others as much. Or, as Bob Hope once said, "If you haven't any charity in your heart, you have the worst kind of heart trouble".

Maybe the most important gift we can give ourselves at Christmas this year is to love others even though we feel depressed and anxious and, let's face it, angry about our current state of separation from others. This is not the way we, as humans, are supposed to be living our lives and it affects us all, myself included.

I still want to find just the right gift for others but I am going to try to give others love first. I want to be more gracious and less

impatient in my relationships. I want to show more patience and less frustration while living in these strange times. The funny thing is that by giving these things to others I also give back to myself. Somewhat mercenary perhaps, but worthwhile nonetheless.

So I wish everyone the peace of Christmas, the love of God, and the hope for better times ahead. Merry Christmas!

AFTERTHOUGHT: Recently I have been rereading some old books. I came across a story dealing with the difference between problems and inconveniences that struck a chord and I thought it might have a renewed meaning at this time. Robert Fulghum wrote, "If you break your neck, if you have nothing to eat, if your house is on fire - then you got a problem. Everything else is inconvenient. Life is inconvenient. Life is lumpy...and a lump in the oatmeal, a lump in the throat, and a lump in a breast are not the same lump. One should learn the difference." The difference between a problem and something that is merely inconvenient. This made me think that, at this time in history, a face mask and social distancing are inconvenient. Being sick or making others sick, that, I believe, is a problem.

Christian Education Corner – Mary Karlovec

Advent...a time of waiting is upon us. During Advent the virtual Sunday School programming is centered around the waiting for the birth of Jesus. We are exploring HOPE, PEACE, JOY and LOVE to help us understand what Advent is truly about. Each week as our families explore these themes, they will light their Advent wreath and add parts to their very own Nativity scenes. The Nativity story, music, and crafts will round out each Sunday. We will be waiting with anticipation! I hope you made an Advent wreath to light as we worship together in anticipation of the coming of Jesus' birth.

Special thanks to Millie Gilly, her brother-in-law, Sandy Chalkwater, Kris Dornan, and Nancy Findlay for their help in cutting and/or staining the wood for our Nativity scenes. Each child will make their own set to display in their

bedrooms or special places in their houses. Each week 2-3 pieces will be added to their display during their Family Advent Time.

Our Outreach component for Advent is being done in conjunction with our Advent calendar. We are filling Christmas boxes with non-perishable food items. They will be distributed to North Ridgeville families in need of support this Advent season. Thanks to all the families that supported this project.

As we begin 2021, we will finish our exploration of the Beatitudes. What a wonderful time we have had each Sunday morning as we have climbed the mountain to learn about the meaning behind these Bible verses. It is by far my favorite part of the week!

Joy to the World, the Lord has come!
Merry Christmas and may 2020 bring us HOPE, PEACE, JOY and LOVE!



Turkeys needed! We are in need of nine 10-12 pound turkeys to go with the Advent food boxes that the Sunday school families are filling for North Ridgeville families. We would need them by December 14. We will pick them up! Just contact Mary Karlovec or the church office.

Deacon's Desk – Dr. Kurt Dornan

This year it's even more important to get a flu shot! Although I recommend most people get a flu shot every year, the fact that COVID-19 is also still very present this year presents more problems during this flu season.

1) You could possibly become infected with both illnesses. Both influenza and COVID-19 are spread through close contact through droplets that can be inhaled. Having one illness

does not protect you from the other. Having both illnesses also could make you quite sick.

2) It is very important not to place more stress on our healthcare systems. A lot of hospitals in our country are already full, so more sick patients could overwhelm the services available to all of us, making it very difficult to handle emergencies

3) There is no reason to avoid a flu shot due to worry of going to the doctor's office during the pandemic. Nearly every medical facility has significant safeguards to prevent anyone from spreading COVID-19 due to temperature screening and sanitizing surfaces frequently.

Get your flu shot this year!!

Outreach Committee News – Nancy Franks

Greetings to all and welcome to the last month of 2020 with hope and anticipation for good health, strength, and a new outlook that will carry us into and through the year ahead. Together, with God's assistance, we can and will accomplish many things in His name for the greater good.

The Giving Tree event went very well under the guidance of Barb Zinsmeister and her husband Brian. Outreach elves worked to keep the cars moving as ornament pick up took place in October. Once again our elves appeared in November to accept the filled requests from the smiling (behind face masks) church folk who selflessly shopped then dropped the gifts off at church to make someone's wish come true. Then the elves got together to check the gift list to make sure all the gifts were accounted for to deliver to Community Care. What joy and satisfaction was experienced by all participants! Merry Christmas to all!!

This year Outreach has a new Community Care family to care for, a mom and dad with seven children. Gift cards were provided for all of the family members along with individual gifts for the children provided by our Outreach elves, Christmas candy, musical stable and holy family scene in crystal, lip balm, crafts, coloring books, and more. A variety of books for each age group was donated by our Christian Education

committee. Again, caring and sharing with a family we will never meet personally yet we find connection through acts of agape love. Love in action.

The special Christmas Fund offering during December supplements retired clergy and staff members who find themselves a bit short on finances at the end of the month after having helped so many people during the course of their careers. Please fill in the blank "other" space on your offering envelope with "Christmas Fund" and enclose a generous donation to help defray the hardship of retired clergy. Thank you.

A gift given in the form of acceptance of co-coordinators of the Hospitality with a Heart program for our church in 2021 (should the program begin again) are Millie Gilly and Cathy Cornman. Thank you for stepping up to this Outreach monthly event. You will find many helpers from our congregation to back you up.

Wishing you a very Merry Christmas and a blessed New Year from Outreach.

"For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:11

The Trustees Turn – Chris Dlugosz

I just read my post from last month which was so full of hope and promise. The bustle of energy as people were getting back to work, getting back to school, and getting into fall activities was so encouraging!

Today (November 16), I found out that our school (Bay Village) was going back online from November 18 to at least December 7. It was a crushing blow to all of our teachers and students. As the teachers, we try and stay as positive as we can but it is very hard. For the students of North Ridgeville, going to school only a few days a week is taking its toll. For my friends and families going through rough times economically, emotionally, and physically it seems like the end is nowhere in sight.

I gave myself a second to mope around, and then I changed. I set my jaw and furrowed my brow. "Let's go, it's time to get to work. Control what you can control. People are counting on you," I told myself.

I am so happy to have the support of my family and friends during this time as I am sure all of you are. My mom and dad taught me what it meant to work hard and lead during tough times. Never have I needed those lessons more than now. My wife and daughter give me the focus that I need to keep going. My friends give me the laughter that I need to blow off the steam that seems to build without end. Lean hard into the ones you care about when you need it because in a minute, they will need to lean hard into you. When that moment comes, set your jaw and furrow your brow. It's time to get to work.

Parish Nurse's Notes – Karen Dreger

Lately I've been thinking about getting a cat or a kitten. When I was growing up with my five siblings, we always had pets. We had the usual cats and dogs but also rabbits, ducks, chickens, and, oh yes, a pony my baby sister had. When raising our three boys we always had pets, usually one dog and one cat. But we also had guinea pigs, hamsters, goldfish, rabbits, and a chameleon. Pets were a comfort, sometimes funny, and they would listen without judgement to your problems. Some pets cuddle, some greet you when you return home, and some like to play. I was thinking that having a pet now probably helps you cope with the pandemic. If you have a pet you already know that. It was interesting to find that the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) found that along with enjoyment, pets provide health benefits, such as:

- ✓ Decreased blood pressure
- ✓ Lowered cholesterol levels
- ✓ Decreased levels of triglycerides
- ✓ Reduced feelings of loneliness
- ✓ Increased opportunities for exercise and outside activities
- ✓ Improved opportunities for social connection

Pets can reduce anxiety and depression so, go ahead, talk to your pet. They are good listeners.

I came across an article about presidential pets. George Washington had so many dogs he had a kennel built for them. He even took one of his dogs, named Sweet Lips, to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia with him. It helped him make friends. President Rutherford Hayes supposedly had the first Siamese cat in the whole country. President-elect Joe Biden and Dr. Jill Biden will have two dogs, Major and Champ, in the White House. Major is a rescue dog.

With pet ownership comes responsibilities, and don't forget to practice good hygiene. Wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer before and after handling or touching your pet. No pets? I suggest watching some pet videos. They will lift your spirits. This holiday season I think we all need our spirits lifted. Merry Christmas!

- 12/4 Roy Dreger
- 12/6 Larry Mytnick
- 12/8 Jack Fitts
- 12/15 Carol Schubert
- 12/19 Avery Truskot
- 12/20 Betty Fitts
- 12/22 Jerry Henson
- 12/24 Diane Feigi
- 12/31 Pat Chapman



12/28 Chris & Kari Dlugosz

"Thank You!" to all the members of our church family who have been so very kind since the death of my husband Fred. The outpouring of sympathy in the form of cards and phone calls has been greatly appreciated. My family and I are extremely grateful for your compassion and love. Please stay safe everyone.

Sincerely,
Carol Scharmann and family



Congratulations to Holly & Ryan Hengartner on the birth of their baby boy Cole Alan who was born on November 24, weighing 6 lbs., 8 oz. and measured 18" long.



Online Auction Coming Soon!

We are having an online auction fundraiser in February (tentatively). **Donated items, gift baskets, and services are needed.** It will be a Facebook event that has photos posted with descriptions and a minimum bid for a week with no bidding, then at least another week of bidding, which will be done in the comments section. Diana Goode will be the point person. Items to be auctioned include: decorated wine glasses, children's book basket, lasagna dinner for four, 24 decorated cupcakes of buyer's flavor choice, hand crocheted dishcloths, wooden wreaths, hand sewn potholders with special recipes tucked in pocket, wooden porch "welcome" sign in buyer's color choice. Please contact the church office via email or phone with the item(s) you wish to donate.