



## THE STATE OF THE CHURCH 2023

2023 was a year of transition, with goodbyes to Pastor Mike and Pastor Karol. While we miss them and their gifts, we are pleased to know they are thriving in their new appointments. Pastor Pippin has leapt into the ministry here with grace and gusto and we are so pleased to have not missed a beat.

This fall, we began a new worship schedule with both the Epworth and Chancel choirs singing weekly at the 10:30 service and communion being served weekly at the 8:30 service. Both services have taken shape with their unique joyful character. We continue to be blessed by our Art Series Concerts, two children's choirs, and several bell choirs as part of our music and worship program. We are giving glory to God and meaning to our congregation through passionate worship!

In May, we welcomed our first class of new members through our new discipleship pathway. These families completed a series of classes and shared when they joined how they are getting involved. We have several families serving in various missions and children's ministries as well as a new member on our Finance committee. Discipleship is also flourishing among our current members, with almost all of our adult Bible study groups and Sunday school classes back and most meeting in-person. We are grateful for the ways discipleship is forming the core of our congregational DNA.

Several of our missions have transformed themselves through COVID, including Soup's ON which now serves over 100 meals to clients of Good Neighbors in a new community partnership. We also serve over 50 persons, on average, with our First Church Feeds that provides a full month of fresh and non-perishable groceries. This began as a transformation of our Preston backpacks of food for children in need and has bloomed into a wonderful way to meet the needs of our community. In addition, this year we are restarting our Preston school backpacks program as God continues to grow new and old ministries through our congregation.

Our finances are strong, but we did identify a budget deficit during COVID that has been met by grants and over and above giving from the congregation for the past two years. We are beginning to make staff cuts to close some of this deficit and will begin using reserve funds in 2023. Several stewardship and endowment programs are in place to increase pledged giving and grow the Music and Worship endowment to support our music and worship budget expenses including music staff. These plans hope to bring the budget back into balance by 2025.

At the end of 2022, we paid off (early!) the mortgage from our 2018 sanctuary and organ renovation project. Our beautiful sanctuary is used regularly for worship, children's programs through our preschool, concerts, and even the occasional staff meeting.

**God has been faithful in 2023, the 193<sup>rd</sup> year of the ministry of First Church.**



# UPCOMING *Events*

## NEO5 Brass - Friday, October 27

The NEO5 Brass Quintet consists of members of the Cleveland Orchestra, Cleveland Pops, and the Akron and Canton Symphonies. Enjoy a variety of music from some of the finest brass players around!



## Used Book Donations/Sale - November 3 & 4

The United Women of Faith is having their annual Book Sale fundraiser in Wesley Hall. On sale will be used adult and children's books, puzzles, DVD's, and more. **We are looking for donations of these items from October 30 to November 2.** Please bring all donations to the church on these dates and come back for the big sale on Friday and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. All profits go to a variety of local and national missions.



All the men of the church and community are invited to gather on the first Saturday of every month for some food, a time for discussion, and lots of fellowship! It runs from 8:30 to 9:30 in Asbury Hall and the next one will take place on **Saturday, November 4.**



## ThankSinging Hymn Festival

Join us on Sunday, November 19, at 6 p.m. as Dean Wagner and Friends present a concert to benefit Flat Rock Homes for the developmentally disabled. An offering will be taken during intermission. All are welcome to come and enjoy an evening of great music. Let's praise God with ThankSinging!



Folks from First Church enjoying a meal and fellowship at the recent Potluck Lunch. Hopefully there will be more to come!

**Christmas Poinsettias:** The florist has given us an early deadline, so now is the time to order the poinsettias which will adorn our altar on Christmas Eve. The plants are \$9 each. The list of donors and those memorialized or honored will appear in the bulletin on Christmas Eve. Please make your check out to First Church and return it with the order to the church office by noon on Wednesday, November 15.



Donor \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

In memory or honor of (circle one) \_\_\_\_\_



All Hallow's Eve will be celebrated by children aged 4 through 6<sup>th</sup> grade on Sunday evening, October 29, at 5:15. Activities will include dinner, a story, crafts, games, prizes and treat bags. Costumes (non-violent) are welcome. Children younger than 4 may attend if accompanied by a parent. Please register as soon as possible.

On Sunday, November 12, during ROCK, children, youth, and any interested adults will be preparing the gifts collected by the Acts of Grace Circle for distribution to the children of our community. Some will be handed out at the December Food Distribution and others will be given to children at Preston Elementary School. Come join in from 4:00 on.

Sunday, December 3, will be the Annual Advent Event during ROCK. It will include dinner, a chance to help prepare for Christmas Eve, a craft, making cards for our shut-ins, and coloring for Christmas. Registration is requested and will be needed **by Monday, November 27.**

The annual **Santa Brunch** will be on Sunday, December 10, in Wesley. This special breakfast will be served to children and their families. Registration is required by December 3. Donations will be requested to cover the cost of the event. A special guest will be present and family pictures will be taken.



For years First Church has partnered with OPEN M to provide Christmas gifts for children and turkeys for Christmas dinners. We will again help, but part of it looks a little different this year!

**Christmas Gifts:** You may make a check out to First Church with Open M in the memo and turn it in to the church office or you may go online to [www.openm.org/christmas](http://www.openm.org/christmas) and follow the instructions to either make a donation or choose to sponsor a child.

**Turkeys:** We have committed to help OPEN M provide turkeys for 200 Akron area families for Christmas. You may sign up to donate a frozen turkey or you may sign up to make a cash donation until Friday, December 1. **Please bring your frozen turkey donations to the OPEN M refrigerator truck in our parking lot on Saturday, December 9 between 8-10 am.**

**Acme Receipts...** The Acme Cashback program is moving along, so save your receipts as of August 1! This is an easy way to help fund the projects that are done at Henderson Settlement in June.



**The Acts of Grace Circle,** in conjunction with the children's ROCK group, are collecting items each month in an effort to pack 100 Christmas bags for children of our community. These will be distributed at 1st Church Feeds and Preston Elementary School. Items being collected in November are: play dough, coloring books, car games, and children's tooth paste.



# First Church News

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## First United Methodist Church

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Jon Priebe - Lead Minister x211; Howard Pippin - Associate Minister x217; Forrest Waller and Marvin Brown - Senior Ministers Emeriti; Dean Wagner - Director of Music Ministries/Organist x221; Jennifer Brooks - Director of Weekday Preschool x220; Tim Zuschin - Assistant Choir Director; Donna Curfman - Children's Ministry Coordinator x219; Kathy Kuzas x212; Christy Meyers x210; Nancy Yeager x216; Ann Kaiser; John Fox; Joe Demeter



*The Gift/Memorial Book* is located in the parlor and is open to **Myron "Mike" Wilson**.

*Our Sympathies to Linda Balmaseda* and family on the death of her husband, **Cesar Balmaseda**, on 10/15; to the family of member **Mary Beth Milford** on her death on 10/18.

**Did You Know?** We will be glad to publish (space allowing) milestone birthdays, anniversaries, births and other special events in your family if you send a note c/o Kathy Kuzas, call us at 330-923-5241 x212 or email [kkuzasfumccf@gmail.com](mailto:kkuzasfumccf@gmail.com).

**Expressions of Thanks From Kathy Kuzas:** Thank you so much for the cards and kind words with regard to my 35 years here at First Church. It has been a joy and privilege to serve Christ in this capacity. Not everyone can say they have the job of their heart, but I can, and it's due, in large part, to all of you!

## NOVEMBER WORSHIP

### Sunday, November 5 - All Saints Day

8:30 & 10:30 - Pastor Jon Priebe preaching

### Sunday, November 12

8:30 & 10:30 - Pastor Jon Priebe preaching

### Sunday, November 19 - Consecration Sunday

8:30 & 10:30 - Pastor Jon Priebe preaching

### Sunday, November 26

8:30 & 10:30 - Pastor Howard Pippin preaching

The deadline for the next issue of the FCN is **Wednesday, November 15** (early because of Thanksgiving.) Please submit your articles to Kathy at [kkuzasfumccf@gmail.com](mailto:kkuzasfumccf@gmail.com).