



431 Columbus Avenue
Sandusky, Ohio 44870
firstconguccsandusky.com

FIRST
CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
AN OPEN & AFFIRMING CONGREGATION

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

December 2016

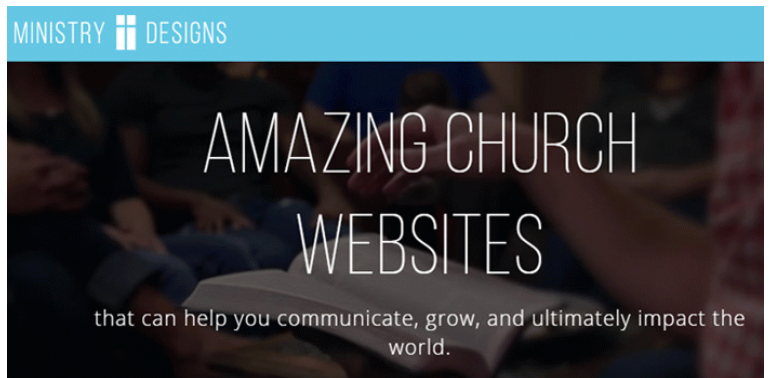
COMING SOON - OUR NEWLY UPDATED WEBSITE!

At long last we are updating our website. We have contracted with Ministry Designs, a webbuilder partnered with the UCC, to help us redesign our site and learn how to maintain and change it ourselves. Paula and Robin have been busy working with them.

The first step was selecting a basic template for the site and then the company copied most of our existing content over to a "dummy" site. When we have decided what we want to add to the site (and learned how to add it!), the new site will go live. Our goal is to have it up and running by the new year. Meanwhile, the old site is still operational. The web address will not change.

The new site will have room for lots more content than we currently have. We hope to add a page about weddings and building rentals, as well as one about our history. Another will feature our newly established Center for Peace Building.

We also hope to have an ever-changing gallery of photos. To make that work, we need your help! Please take photos at all church events and email them to the church email, FirstCongrUCC@aol.com. In addition to including them on the website, we will post them on our Facebook page. We always get more hits when we post pictures. More hits means more interest in what we're doing and that could lead to more people coming to the church to check us out.





Have you checked the calendar? Christmas falls on Sunday this year. Traditionally that means attendance for worship that day will be lower than usual as many folks will be busy with family or exhausted from Christmas Eve activities. Because of that, many churches are cancelling services that day.

That won't be the case here at First Congregational. We have always been more concerned with meeting the spiritual and emotional needs of those in attendance, rather than the number of people who show up for a service, no matter what day it is. Our Longest Night service (December 21st), designed for those struggling to find peace and joy during the holiday season clearly demonstrates that. There may only be 30 - 40 participants, but we have been told over and over again how meaningful it is for those who come. So be sure to invite others by posting the enclosed invitation, or personally inviting someone you know who is facing a bleak Christmas or just feels totally stressed out.

Some of us are estranged from our relatives, or live a great distance from them; others are simply alone. That's why we have become as family to one another and as such will gather together December 25th to continue the celebration of our Lord's birth that begins on Christmas Eve.

Knowing we will be few in number that morning, the service will be more casual and intimate than usual. We'll take time to sing all those dearly loved Christmas carols we don't get to sing during the Advent season. Instead of a sermon, we'll share personal Christmas stories - silly, sentimental, inspirational. So, I ask you to think about Christmas over your lifetime - what does Christmas mean to you? What is your favorite memory? What was the best gift you ever received? Gave? Let me know if you'll be here and willing to tell your story. If you can't be with us that morning, I'll be glad to share it for you.

After the service we'll have fellowship time as always, maybe lingering a little longer than usual. We'll simply bask in the joy of this holiest of days with members of our beloved church family. After all, isn't that what Christmas is really all about - Jesus and family, no matter what day of the week it falls on.

Shalom, Rev. Lenore



BOOK CLUB NEWS

The Book Club will meet Friday, December 2nd to discuss *Destiny of the Republic: A Tale of Madness, Medicine and the Murder of a President* by Candice Millard. At that time the book for January will be distributed. It will be *Being Mortal* by Dr. Atul Gawande. He addresses both medical procedures and living conditions in later life and how we're getting it wrong, both within the medical establishment and in our families.

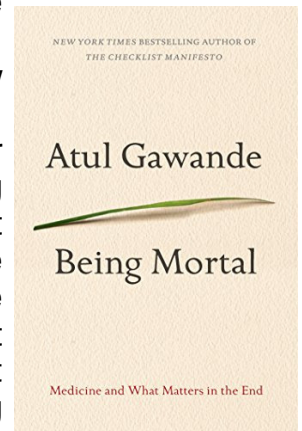
Gawande discusses the reality that as people age, decisions about their living situation are primarily aimed at ensuring safety at the expense of retaining autonomy, especially when adult children are making the decisions. "We want autonomy for ourselves and safety for those we love," a friend tells the author. We mistakenly treat elders as children, Dr. Gawande says, when we deny them the right to make choices, even bad choices.

People of any age want the right to lock their doors, set the temperature they want, dress how they like, eat what they want, admit visitors only when they're in the mood. Yet, assisted living communities and nursing homes are geared toward making these decisions for people in order to keep them safe, gain government funds, and ensure a routine for the facility.

This book is a must-read for young and old, because all are faced with their own aging and mortality. There are options in dealing with both, but personal preferences are often not discussed, or they are not fully understood. Dr. Gawande walks readers through various stories, which are eye openers to better possibilities and a better quality of life for all.

Rev. Catherine Lawrence, Parkvue Chaplain, highly recommends this book. She has been invited to the discussion to answer questions and share her perspective on the issues Gawande presents.

The Book Club meets at 2:00 p.m. on the first Friday of the month in Frosty's Activity Center at the Parkvue Health Care Center. Everyone is welcome. Books are available from the church office.





Rev. Lenore will be attending the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center's Clergy Clinic in Family Emotional Process in San Diego. She will be out of the office through December 9th. If you have a pastoral emergency during that time, please call Rev. Bob Bottoms at 419-271-0086. He will be preaching on December 4th.

POINSETTIA ORDERS

Poinsettia orders are due by December 11th. Payment should accompany the order form. An order form is enclosed. Additional forms are available in the sanctuary.



In this Christmas season, it's time to thank our Pastor and church staff for the fine job they do. You may give your contribution directly to our Treasurer, Scarlet Berry, or put it in the offering plate, but please be sure to mark it "staff gifts" and turn it in by Sunday, December 11th.



CHRISTMAS TEA TO BE HELD DECEMBER 12TH

Our annual Christmas Tea for our older members will be held Monday, December 12th at 2:00 p.m. in Frosty's Activity Center at the Parkvue Health Care Center. We've also invited the Book Club participants.

If you would like to donate Christmas cookies or some other treats, or could lend a helping hand, please let Rev. Lenore know. We expect 15 - 20 people.

CONGREGATIONAL MEETING DECEMBER 18TH

Following the worship service on December 18th there will be a congregational meeting to vote on the 2017 budget. Copies of the proposed budget will be available December 11th.



Enclosed you will find an invitation to our Longest Night Service, to be held Monday, December 21st at 6:45 p.m.. Please post it somewhere where others will see it, or give it to someone you know who is having trouble finding joy this holiday season.



CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT SERVICE

We will hold our traditional Christmas Eve Candlelight service at 5:30 p.m.. Rev. Lenore will host a reception in the Boardman Room following the service. We want to extend a welcome to everyone - please invite your friends and neighbors to join us.

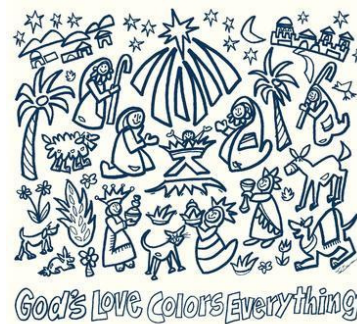
Congratulations to **Karen Mork** on the birth of her granddaughter, Bobbi Jo Schlitzkus, born November 7th.



CHRISTMAS FUND

The Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund is a special mission offering of the United Church of Christ that grants us an opportunity to recognize and honor those who have served and continue to serve in lay and authorized ministries of the United Church of Christ. We will be taking donations throughout December.

Envelopes for your donation are available at the back of the sanctuary.



CROP WALK UPDATE

This year's CROP walk was held on October 2nd. Nine churches and 47 walkers participated, raising \$4638.08 for local food banks. We raised \$87.00. Trinity Lutheran Church won the Golden Sneaker Award by raising \$1827.00. Next year's CROP walk will be held on October 1st.

CENTER FOR PEACE BUILDING

Plans for our Center for Peace Building are moving along. Friends of the church interested in helping bring this dream to reality are joining members in meeting monthly on the third Thursday at 6:30 p.m. in the Boardman Room. They have decided to call these meetings The Peace Gathering.

On December 15th they will discuss outreach to the younger people in our community and trying to determine what they need to find peace in their lives. They will also be talking about possible peace programs to offer the public. Everyone is encouraged to invite peace-seeking people, especially those in the younger generations, to join the discussion.

We are seeking grant funding to turn our old choir room into a resource/meditation room for the Center. Meanwhile, we have some money to get started, thanks to Robin selling the old piano and a cabinet.

The search is on for new light fixtures, an oriental rug from one of the upstairs Sunday School rooms is being cleaned for use and Bill Roche exchanged windows so the room now boasts matching leaded glass windows. Little by little, the transformation of the room is progressing.



Eric & Amber Warren	12/03
Jack & Rhonda Neese	12/06
Ruth Baker	12/10
Denise Roberts	12/12
Bill Roche	12/14
Alex Wilhelm	12/20
Samantha Schermerhorn	12/24
Jerry & Libby Boros	12/28
Mat Justice	12/30

Since the last newsletter, we have received letters of thanks from the Boys & Girls Club and the LGBT Community Center of Greater Cleveland for our missions donations and from the Humane Society for our Shoreline donation.





Community Breakfast

COMMUNITY BREAKFAST UPDATE

Friends and family of First Congregational Church,

On Saturday October 29th, we held our second community breakfast.

We served 48 people and 10 volunteers, over 100 meals with seconds. I would call that a successful breakfast, but it would not have been successful without your generous donations of money and food items. I want to give a special shout out to Mark Pifer: He stepped up to do pancakes for us and I found out he has a hidden talent for flipping pancakes.

Our next breakfast will be December 31st and I will be posting a sheet on the bulletin board in the sanctuary for donations. Let's start ringing in the new year early with another successful breakfast.

Sincerely,
Chris Michaels

EMERGENCY CANCELLATIONS

If the weather is unfavorable and you aren't sure about leaving the house for worship, or any other church event, please check the "iAlert" on News Channel 3 WKYC. We have also registered with local radio stations WCPZ(102.7 FM), and WLKR(96.1 FM) who will also be notified of any cancellation involving the church. Obviously, if a level 3 snow emergency has been declared, everything is cancelled!



Paula, the church secretary, will be on vacation on December 7th and 14th. The church office will be closed on those days.

DIRECTORY UPDATE

Samantha Schermerhorn
5315 Lewis Ave., Lot 43
Toledo OH 43612



We offer our sympathy to Glenn Gast on the death of his father, Junior Gast, who died on November 20th.

CHRISTMAS CONCERTS

The North Coast Men's Chorus will perform *Our Gay Apparel* in the Hanna Theatre at PlayhouseSquare, Cleveland, on Saturday, December 3rd (3 and 8 p.m.) and Sunday December 4th (3 p.m.). Advance tickets start at \$20. For further information, see the bulletin board by the elevator, go online to www.ncmchorus.org or phone 216-556-0590. Glenn Gast is a member.



The Firelands Chorus will present *Tis the Season* at Zion Lutheran Church on Friday, December 9th (7:30 p.m.) And Saturday, December 10th (2:30 p.m.). Admission is free - a freewill offering will be collected. Bob Bottoms, Sari Kelley, Rev. Ed Shelly, Jacki Warren and Tim Work are members.



It's time to order Poinsettias to decorate the sanctuary for Christmas! Plants may be purchased in memory of a loved one or to honor someone. Following the Christmas Eve service, they may be taken home or left to decorate the sanctuary.

The cost this year is \$6.00 per plant.

Please place this form and payment in the offering plate, or return it to the church office. The deadline for orders is December 11th.

My Poinsettia is in memory / honor of: (Circle One)

Do you plan to take your Poinsettia home?

Yes No (Circle One)

Number of Poinsettias : Red ___ White ___ Pink ___

Total Amount _____

Your Name _____

Libby Boros, Donny Brooks, Bonnie Carroll, Chuck Corso, Jr., Solanna Harris, Sharon Johnson, Debbi & Marv Keller, Chris & Heyley Ketchum, Kevin Kiser, Cindy London, Jennifer McLees, Susan Meyer, Gannon McNamara, Kaitlyn Nemeth, Kim Nemeth, Julanne Owings, Mark & Cathy Pifer, Willene Pifer, Ron Porto, Brent Williams, Joe Work, Grace Yates, Farrell, Dodd, Gast, Schwan, Silcox and Smith Families

Ongoing: Carol Antonelli, Bowyer Family, Brock Family, Keagan Grames, Izabella, Waddington Family

Homebound: Ruth Baker, Jane Brock, Mary Fenker, Anne Johnstone, Elmeda Schwartz



Hello to the Congregation,

I hope you all had a great Thanksgiving. The Boys & Girls Club members are still coming down from their Halloween sugar-rama. We also got an extra treat when the Coca-Cola marketing department came through with some free Cedar Point tickets for the final HalloWeekends Haunt. Some of our members got their very first chance to visit Cedar Point.

We are not having a special dinner for Thanksgiving, but the kids are getting plenty of good eats this month. I am the chef right now and they get a priority vote on what's for dinner, especially when they help me choose it off the Kroger shelf. December will be the first month for our new meal program, when we get the okay from the Dept. of Agriculture. Miss Mary Sanders from the Teen Club will take over duties for preparing the meals each day in the church kitchen.

The November weather has been extraordinary (...hope I didn't just jinx it...) and we're still getting lots of outside play time. We also have over twenty kids signed up for the Rotary Clothes for Kids program with Meijer and the Volunteer Center of Erie County. Members get to spend \$125 on clothes with help from some high school students and adult volunteers at Meijer on Milan Rd. So we'll be ready for winter when it gets here.

"A lot of people like snow. I find it to be an unnecessary freezing of water." - Carl Reiner

~David Icsman, Youth Center Director



REPORTS FROM OUR LEADERSHIP TEAM AND BOARDS

Leadership Team

Halley Leffler- Chairman

1. We are still researching and getting quotes from cleaning companies to do a deep cleaning of our church. At this time, we may just go with getting the carpets professionally cleaned to keep our costs down.
2. The Pastor Evaluation is getting typed up. Members will receive this and will be asked to fill it out anonymously. Members will also be given a Leadership Expectation checklist to rank the top 12 items that are important to you in regards to the ministry of our church.
3. There will be a Congregational Meeting on December 18th following worship to vote on the proposed budget for 2017.
4. The Boys and Girls Club lease will be up for renewal at the start of the new year.
5. Please return pledge cards at this time so that Scarlet can complete the budget.

Board of Christian Education

Although finished with the *Loving Your Muslim Neighbor* series, the Study Group has decided to continue to get together monthly. The group met Thursday, November 17 sharing cake, homemade hummus, and lots of ideas for continuing to come together to help further the development of our Peace Center. The group will be called the Peace Gathering, and will meet next at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, December 15 in the Boardman Room. All are welcome to join.

The Study Group will continue the *Saving Jesus* series Thursdays at 7:00 p.m.. Please join this group to examine questions about our understanding of the life and teachings of Jesus in the 21st century.

The Board made Advent plans for our children and our Parkvue residents, ordered resource books, and agreed to keep our current budget for next year.

The Book Club at Parkvue continues to be very successful providing lively conversation and lots of laughter. Next meeting will be December 2nd.

Board of Finance

November was stewardship month, and I would like to thank everyone for their help and contributions of finances, time and talents.

The Spaghetti Dinner was a great success. We made \$1838.50, and another \$262 from the 50/50 was donated to the Air Conditioning Fund by the anonymous purchaser of the winning ticket.

Scarlet Berry, Treasurer

Board of Mission & Outreach

Barb Petersen - Chairperson

The Board met on November 13th. Present were Barbara Petersen and Robin Pratt.

Old business: Thank you notes were received from: Boys and Girls Club, CWS Blanket Drive, Crossroads Children's Home, Stein Hospice, Safe Harbor, Firelands Habitat for Humanity.

Disaster Team: No report - meeting canceled. Chris was looking for a place to store disaster buckets. We recommended temporary storage in new choir room until it is remodeled.

New Business: There will be 5 Special UCC Collections for the 2017 Christmas Fund to be taken all Sundays in December, with one Mission Moment on 12-4-2016. Bulletin insert in Sundays of December but NOT Christmas Eve.

Thank you to all who donated to Neighbors in Need. We collected \$405.

WHAT'S GOING ON CONTINUED - BOARD OF MISSION & OUTREACH

Advertising in Serving Our Seniors magazine was discussed and approved for 2017. First accessible issue would be April 2017 for 1/4 page ad.

New church web site cost will be budgeted in the 2017 budget at \$420 per year which comes out of the regular budget. Longest Night ad cost will be \$60.00. Marketing budgeted costs for 2017 \$1600 for advertising and web site.

Next meeting will 12-11-2016

Robin Pratt, Secretary

With the holidays comes an expectation of joy and celebration, but for many people it is anything but that. Stress, grief, unemployment, depression, illness and the uneasiness currently distracting our society can rob us of the joy of the season. If you are feeling lost in the midst of everyone else's joy, please join us.

Our Annual

LONGEST NIGHT SERVICE

A brief candlelight service of music, scripture, prayers and meditation designed to help you experience God's presence and comfort on what is literally the longest night of the year

Wednesday, December 21, 2016

beginning at 6:45 p.m. with 15 minutes of harp music by Karen Westgate

First Congregational United Church of Christ

An Open & Affirming Congregation - Embracing All God's Children

431 Columbus Ave., Sandusky

(elevator entrance & handicap parking at rear of building)

Everyone, regardless of church background (or lack thereof), is welcome!

Open Communion - Optional Participation

Light refreshments and fellowship will follow.

419-625-8105

firstconguccsandusky.com

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>December 2016</h1>					At Grace Episcopal: Tu & Th 10 am BonesandBalance	
Unless otherwise noted, our typical Sunday schedule is: 10:00 a.m. Worship 11:00 a.m. Fellowship Office Hours: Monday - Friday 9 a.m. - Noon				1 11 th Step Meeting 11:00 p.m. Study Group 7:00 p.m.	2 Book Club 2:00 p.m.	3
4 Second Sunday of Advent Care & Share	5	6 Board of Christian Education 11:00 a.m.	7 Office Closed	8 11 th Step Meeting 11:00 p.m. Study Group 7:00 p.m.	9	10
11 Third Sunday of Advent Poinsettia orders due Mission 11 a.m. Unitarians 5:30 pm	12 Staff Meeting 10:30 a.m. Christmas Tea 2:00 p.m.	13 Leadership Team 6:30 a.m.	14 Office Closed	15 11 th Step Meeting 11:00 p.m. The Peace Gathering 6:30 p.m.	16	17
18 Fourth Sunday of Advent Congregational Meeting 11:00 a.m.	19 Staff Meeting 10:30 a.m.	20	21 Longest Night 6:45 p.m.	22 11 th Step Meeting 11:00 p.m. Study Group 7:00 p.m.	23	24 Candlelight Service 5:30 p.m.
 Christmas Day Worship 10:00 a.m.	26 Office Closed	27 Staff Meeting 10:30 a.m.	28	29 11 th Step Meeting 11:00 p.m.	30	31 Community Breakfast 9:00 - 11:00 a.m.

**Boys & Girls Club hours: 2:30 - 7:00 p.m., Monday - Friday, December 1 - 15th; 12:00 noon - 6:00 p.m. December 16th, 19th - 22nd ;
 CLOSED December 23rd - 30th.**