



# January 2021



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1 <i>Happy New Year</i>	2 6:00pm Worship
3 9:15am Adult Sunday School 10:30am Worship 7:00pm Women's & Youth Bible Study	4	5	6 6:15pm Confirmation 7:30pm Trustees 7:30pm Youth	7	8	9 6:00pm Worship
10 9:15am Adult Sunday School 10:30am Worship 7:00pm Women's & Youth Bible Study	11	12	13 9:00am Sew 'N Sews 6:15pm Confirmation 7:30pm Youth	14 7:00pm Bible 101	15	16 6:00pm Worship
17 9:15am Adult Sunday School 10:30am Worship 7:00pm Women's & Youth Bible Study	18	19	20 9:30am UMW 7:00pm Ad Council 7:30pm Youth	21	22 NEWSLETTER DEADLINE	23 6:00pm Worship
24 9:15am Adult Sunday School 10:30am Worship 7:00pm Women's & Youth Bible Study	25	26	27 9:00am Sew 'N Sews 6:15pm Confirmation 7:30pm Youth	28 7:00pm Bible 101	29	30 6:00pm Worship
31 9:15am Adult Sunday School 10:30am Worship 7:00pm Women's & Youth Bible Study						

DATE	USHERS	SCRIPTURE READER	CHILDREN'S TIME	AUDIO	
3-Jan	Christyne Eckloff	Christyne Eckloff		Miller	
	Sandy Sell				
10-Jan	Brandon Jacques	Betty Jacques			Holcomb
	Betty Jacques				
17-Jan	Christyne Eckloff	Sandy Sell			Rockefeller
	Sandy Sell				
24-Jan	Brandon Jacques	Betty Jacques			Christensen
	Betty Jacques				
31-Jan	Christyne Eckloff	Christyne Eckloff			Miller
	Sandy Sell				



01– Lacey Leonard

12– Kara Leisinger

22– Karley Luther

02– Harry Husman

13– Sherry Zwink

22– Blayke Kern

02– Andy Jader

14– Alberta Grayek

26– Kory Kern

02– Keira McCormick

15– Breanna Gillming

28– Margy Trambly

03– Rick Brown

16– Scott Danielson

28– Lindsay Gillming

07– Shawn Mitchell

18– Kim Snavely

29– Jeff Montgomery

09– Olivia Peterson

20– Matthew Davis

31– Beverly Weston

10– Macy Milks

20– Makenna Smallcomb

31– Bobbie Cline

12– Florence Lienemann

21– Kristofer Krupp

# As crazy year ends, what's next seems to be mystery

I do it every year. Once Christmas starts to wrap up and I look toward New Year's, I find myself reflecting on the past year and dreaming about the next. And every year it seems I look back and go "well that wasn't the year I expected."

Sometimes it's amazing to look back over the last 5 and a half years at Gibbon Faith United and remember how far we've come. But as I reflect back on each year, it seems the tasks that took up so much of my time and energy are never quite what I expected.

Just consider how these last 5 years have taken us by surprise as a church. Like, on January 1 of 2016, I never would have guessed that by the end of the year we would have fully funded a \$40,000 capital campaign – the first in decades. Or, on day one for 2017, I never would have guessed that by year-end we would be remodeling the basement of the old parsonage to take over the community food pantry. On the first day of 2018, we might have had an idea that a new parsonage was on our "someday" list, but I never would have believed it if someone had said we would purchase a lot and fundraise half the cost of a new home by year end.

And then there were years like 2019, when I was sure I knew what the major tasks of the year would be – building the parsonage of course. It was certainly big, but then not one, but two major flooding events happened. Organizing volunteers both locally and regionally, helping create and fundraise for the Gibbon Area Relief Fund, going door to door doing flood assessments, and countless hours cleaning out and putting basements back together was not on my radar as the year began. And, of course none of us started 2020 thinking we'd go through a major pandemic. I hope and pray that by the end of 2021 masks, directed health measures, CDC approved cleaning checklists, and all the rest of the extra work surrounding COVID can fade away, but we honestly just don't know.

In reality, we never know what to expect. Even for a planner such as myself, life is too unpredictable to assume we know what's around the corner. A couple years ago we had no plan to foster again, but I'm glad we did. I never would have guessed my son would go out for wrestling for the first time ever as a sophomore, but it's been a fun adventure. It seems the unexpected parts of life can be amazing and meaningful even when we don't see them coming. While floods and a pandemic certainly aren't the sort of surprises we'd ever want, both gave us opportunities to live out our faith in tangible ways.

I have no idea what 2021 will bring. None of us do. I am hopeful it is less traumatic and hopefully not as busy. But whatever comes along, I am thankful that I don't have to face it alone. I am so blessed by the gifts God has given me – the people who make life amazing. My family, my church family, the support of friends and colleagues, have all been critical in making all the "extras" of the last several years amazing – yes even the bad extras. Because trust me, if I ever need to organize a group to help a neighbor in need – Gibbon Faith rocks. And if I have to be isolated with anyone, I'm glad it's my family. What's next? I just don't know. But I'm thankful for all those I get to face the future with.



# Attendance rebound goal of 2021, finances stable

This year has certainly been challenging for so many people in so many ways. As the church we have also worked hard trying to find a way to continue the meaningful ministries we have while being safe during the health crisis. Add in the national turmoil over politics and race riots, there has definitely been lots of “outside” stress in the life of our church family. One of the expected consequences of 2020 has been a significant decline in church attendance.

For the first time this year, we’ve added online worship into our figures. This has, of course, been a huge part of the way we continue to worship safely. Although we know the technology is not the greatest, it still offers people a chance to participate even when they can’t be here in person. While we continue to find cost-effective ways to make our online worship better, we also recognize this form of worship isn’t for everyone.

Despite averaging 18 people a week worshipping online, our overall attendance for 2020 was down 20%.

One of the explanations many churches are considering is how accurate online attendance numbers are. We rely on people commenting on our Facebook page to “track” attendance. But it’s certainly easier to forget to comment than it is to forget to sign the attendance pad when it’s passed!

One definite bright spot in all of this has been our giving. While our last-minute year-end gifts were not tallied by the time of this writing, we already saw an increase in giving to our general budget compared to 2019 (up an average of \$30 a week, or \$1,600 total). Add in the government Paycheck Protection Loan of \$14,900 which was forgiven (i.e. doesn’t have to be repaid), our church fared better than most in 2020.

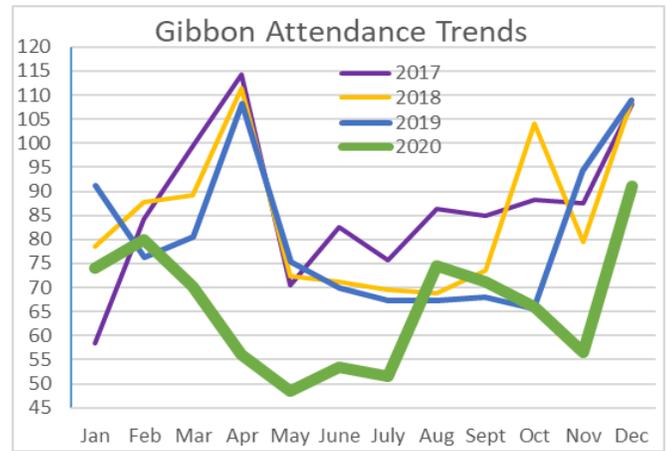
It’s completely understandable that our attendance would be down during this time, and we consistently remind people that their safety is more important than their attendance. Our church has worked diligently to find the balance between policies for everyone’s collective safety and remaining open so people can make the choice that fits best for them. The question remains how much our attendance will rebound as pandemic concerns ease throughout 2021.

Prior to the pandemic, Gibbon Faith United – like the majority of U.S. churches – was seeing a decline in attendance. As life continues to get busier for families, regular church attendance suffers. Of course, blaming society is an easy out. The church must continue to make worship meaningful and relevant as well!

So, why are these attendance goals such a big deal, especially if giving is OK? The number one reason is simply that these metrics are an indicator of spiritual health and vitality. Our major concern isn’t the numbers, but the people those numbers represent. And our goal isn’t filling the pews, but filling people’s lives. Unfortunately, there’s not great “metrics” for how spiritually healthy a church is, but attendance and offering are indicators even if imperfect.

A survey of church leaders in September revealed a growing concern over the spiritual health of America’s congregations. When interviewed by Barna a few weeks into the pandemic, 1% of pastors felt their congregation’s spirituality was suffering. In September, 18% answered yes to that question.

So what’s the solution? There’s no easy answer. Watching online when you can’t come in person is one way to help. But as the pandemic concerns ease in the months to come, special events and intentional pushes to increase attendance will need to be part of our ministry plan.



# COVID policies likely changing in January

Over the last several weeks the Nebraska COVID related policies have shifted several times. Thankfully the number of weekly cases has dropped drastically in our county and statewide since our last newsletter. Faith United remains committed to offering the best worship and fellowship opportunities possible while continuing to safely follow the guidelines set forth in this unprecedented season. At our January Ad Council meeting, revisions to our policies will be considered again. Currently the major changes we re-implemented over the last few weeks are:

No bulletins available in worship. Still no passing of the offering plate or attendance pads.

No Children's time in worship.

Masks are required when entering and exiting, or at times you can't keep 6 feet from others.

No Fellowship time, meals, or Communion served in the building.

No children's Sunday school, but there are activity bags for kids to pick up.

We expect some of these restrictions may be eased by the end of the month. However, practices such as passing of the peace, passing the attendance pads or offering plates, and removing the 6 ft. social distancing guidance between groups are likely to remain for longer. Please be patient and offer grace as we strive to find the right path forward that offers safe AND meaningful worship.



# Pantry sees huge increase in need during 2020



It's such a great ministry to have, but at times it's concerning how much our pantry is needed. We are hopeful that the huge increase in need during this last year is an anomaly and not an ongoing trend.

Over the last 6 months, we've averaged 110 different families using our service each month, double what it was in 2019. In total, just under 3,000 "visits" to the pantry will be recorded. There is no doubt this ministry was needed, and we are so thankful we were "up and running" prior to the crisis of 2020.

It's impossible to accurately quantify how much food has been handed out this year. We ordered 32,000 lbs of food from the Food Bank of the Heartland, but that only scratches the surface of what's been distributed this year. We've been blessed with so many sources of food and funding in 2020. Cash donations anchored by a \$10,000 gift from Cargill, and over \$4,000 raised in our Give Where You Live campaign, we've been able to purchase nearly that amount of food locally as well. When Adam's market had their fire, they donated all non-perishable items to us they could. That donation easily topped 10,000 lbs. We also were able to partner with the federal Farmers to Families program which now provides 80 "ready to go" boxes of produce and perishable items to our families each week. Add in our partnership with the Eastlawn Pantry, the Exchange bank and Gibbon Public School's food drives, and many personal donations, we've easily seen 100,000 lbs of food go through our doors in 2020. It's certainly been an unprecedented year. While we hope and pray the need decreases in the months to come, we're thankful for the chance to meet whatever need exists.

## 16 months after moving in, parsonage projects wrap up

It's hard to believe that the parsonage was just built last year! Thanks to the incredible support of our church family, this 3,500 square foot, 7 bedroom home became a reality with minimal debt and no money taken out of the general offering. As 2020 wraps up, our remaining loan dips to less than \$12,000, and may be paid off by the end of 2021!

This year a number of additional projects were completed as well. In an effort to be as fiscally responsible as we could, the Trustees listed a number of "someday" projects they hoped to see finished at the parsonage as funds were available. These included a deck, fence, and new garage doors on the existing shed as well as finishing the trim work in the basement, and insulating and finishing the garage. We're pleased to say every one of the projects has been completed! A few finishing touches on the storm shelter and storage rooms are still to be completed, but because of your generosity, "someday" came quickly! We should be proud of just how much we were able to do on such a project. Hopefully, once the pandemic concerns ease, our church family will again be able to see and enjoy this extended area for ministry! Thanks for making this dream a reality!



## Saturday potluck/meal on hold for at least Jan.



Due to our current church COVID policies, and in an abundance of caution, we have not scheduled a Saturday night meal for January yet. We know this is such a great tool for ministry and we want to see this form of fellowship resume as soon as possible. Depending on how numbers look for our area, and what is decided by our Administrative Council on January 16 a meal may still be set before the end of the month. Keep an eye on our Facebook page or listen for announcements in worship as the month goes on.

## Saturday Night Worship pianist sought

We are looking for a Saturday night pianist to help lead worship. For many years, Joan Hemmerling graced us with her gift. But as she retired, we have not been able to find a replacement. Currently we are singing along to recordings, but we would love to have a pianist again. If you or someone you know might be interested in sharing and serving in this capacity, please contact Pastor Mike by calling 308-468-5521, or emailing him at [mevans@greatplainsumc.org](mailto:mevans@greatplainsumc.org) for more information.

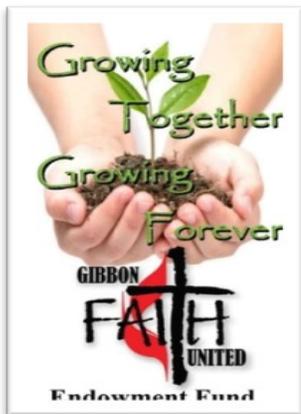


# Planned Giving Secures Future for Faith United

One of the ways everyone can be a part of assuring the future health of our church family is through planned giving. Have you ever considered how you can care for your church and what impact you could have on future generations' faith by remembering Faith United in your will? Imagine how you could make an extraordinary difference by adding a paragraph in your will saying you'd like to give five or maybe even ten percent of your estate to Faith United. Many people find it a challenge to tithe during their life but giving a tithe from your estate can establish an amazing legacy for our faith community. If you have questions about Faith United's Endowment, contact Pastor Mike anytime at 308-440-2686 or by email at [mevans@greatplainsumc.org](mailto:mevans@greatplainsumc.org).



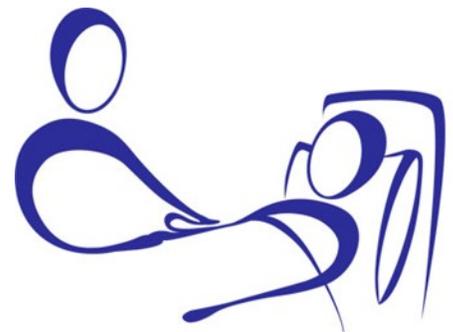
## Endowment Grant Application Deadline Set for Monday, February 1



The next deadline for consideration of a grant from our Endowment Program is February 1. Grant requests can be made by any group or ministry associated with the church by completing a short grant application and returning it to the church office by the deadline. The Endowment Committee will review the applications and award grants based on need and the availability of funds. Awards may be made in any amount from \$100 up to \$1,000 depending on what funds are available. Contact the church office or Pastor Mike for an application.

## Hospital/Home visits still restricted

Please keep in mind that most hospitals and care homes are still not allowing clergy visits. We appreciate and rely on individuals and families letting us know when someone is in the hospital. We strive to cover people in prayer during those times. While home visits are not specifically restricted, the pastor will not be making home visits unless specifically requested.



**Gina will be out of the office on  
vacation January 2-10**

# Sew 'N Sews Bless Others During 2020

Although it has been a very unusual, challenging, and confusing year we've been able to see God's mercies and protection in our lives and the lives of others. The caring ladies of the Sew 'N Sews have been able to get together safely and carry on their services to our church and community.

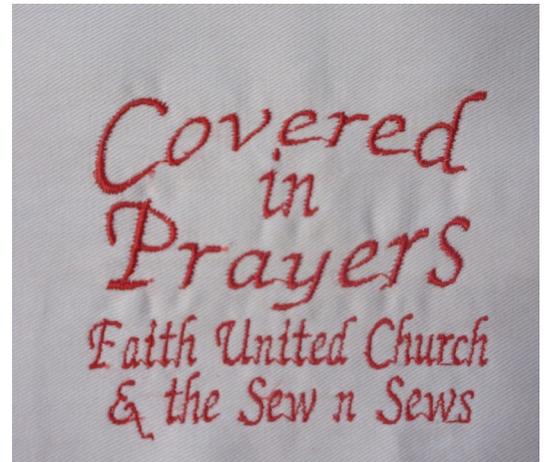
They made over 400 pies and many, many quilts. We were able to help the Gibbon School with 750 mask for a very generous donation.

Our "Bazaar" this year was a great day. Although we couldn't visit with coffee and rolls, we had a good turn out. As always our community and church families were very generous.

All and all it's been a good year!! We have been able to support many local organizations.

Give where you live - Free Pantry.	\$1500.00
Giving tree in our church.	500.00
Care Portal.	1000.00
Community Assistance Fund.	1000.00
GHS / FCA (help with a supper meal).	25.00
GHS Discretionary Fund.	1000.00
School Supplies (through our church).	200.00

We also help with the snack program for our Deputies...  
Don't mean to "toot" our own horn...just share the many ways  
God has blessed us and used us to bless others.



In His Love and Service  
Bobbie Cline



On behalf of the Kearney / North Platte Royal Family KIDS Chapter, Thank you so much for your regular, continued giving to support this ministry! Your generosity allowed us to serve nearly 100 foster children during our annual summer camp. We also grew our school year mentoring club from 12 kids to just over 50 this year. We are so grateful to you for supporting these children so near and dear to God's heart.

Blessings,  
Haley (RFK volunteer)

Wendy, Gabe, Nate and I wanted to say thank you again to everyone for the holiday wishes, cards and gifts this Christmas season. We feel so blessed and loved by our church family. And we look forward to starting a new (and hopefully less stressful) year of ministry together! Blessings!

In Christ,  
Pastor Mike



H A P P Y N E W Y E A R !