



February 2021



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

DATE	USHERS	SCRIPTURE READER	CHILDREN'S TIME	AUDIO
7-Feb	Barb Summers	Barb Summers	Pastor Mike	Holcomb
	Charlotte Burr			
14-Feb	Kathy Pierce	Cindy Peabody	Amy Holcomb	Rockefeller
	Cindy Peabody			
21-Feb	Barb Summers	Barb Summers	Carol McGregor	Christensen
	Charlotte Burr			
28-Feb	Kathy Pierce	Kathy Pierce	Kathy Pierce	Miller
	Cindy Peabody			



01– Lane Brown

02– Bob Morris

02– Bret Wiseman

04– Ken Bentley

04– Brett Mayo

04– Nesha Yockey

05– Linda Brodine

07– Delbert Christensen

07– Kinsley Middleswart

08– Terri Smith

08– Collin Johansen

13– Olivia Oliver

15– Stephanie Leisinger

16– Mary Ann Eatherton

16– Lorri Mayo

16– Kent Kegley

17– Craig Holcomb

18– George Bailey

18– Travis Frew

18– Leah Danielson

19– Janice McGregor

19– Dave Grimes

21– Kyla McGregor

21– Mikala Catlin

21– River Fries

23– Brenda Kenkel

24– Payton Linden

25– Kelli Fries

25– Dalton Smith

26– Jason Middleswart

26– Zachary Fries

26– Miracle Kenkel

27– Kylee McKeon

28– Kay Reed

28– Regina Christensen

28– Quentin Rockefeller

29– Dianna Frew

Debates turned to hate hurting Christian witness

At 42, I'm still considered a "youngster" to some, and yet earned the nickname "old man" from my youngest son. Our perspective definitely changes what we see. Of course, the problem throughout time has been when our perspective becomes the only perspective. It's only natural that we think our opinion is right. If we didn't, we'd change our opinion! But when our view causes us to reject every other view, then we miss so much.

As a nation, 2020 was filled with so much heated debate which seemed to turn into hate. Politics, a pandemic, and racial tensions all exploded last year. Each one a powder keg that was ignited. It's nothing new for people to disagree. But it seems this past year, anyone with whom you disagree has been branded as an enemy.

I've always considered myself a moderate – politically and theologically. I really strive to learn from others' perspectives. And generally I can find valid points towards both ends of most debates. For some, being a moderate is really just a fancy name for being a "fence-sitter." I've been accused before of not taking a stand for anything, but never like it has been this past year.

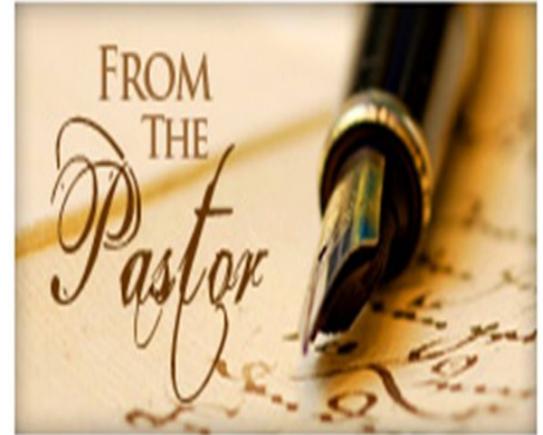
I used to think that most of the angry rhetoric you'd hear on hot-button issues was the 5% vocal minority on the extremes, but this year I'm not so sure. Civil disagreements certainly aren't what we witness on the news or social media right now. I used to see Facebook as a place I could learn of other people's perspectives and even challenge people to see an issue from a different point of view. This year voicing my views makes me a racist to some, a socialist to others, a science-denying moron on one day, and part of the ignorant sheeple on another.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not suggesting people shouldn't stand up for what they believe. I know people who have stopped attending church because of something we've said or done. I have friends who have blocked me on Facebook this year because they didn't like what I had to say. It hurts my heart, but it's a better solution than we sometimes see. Society seems to have moved beyond people supporting their positions to attacking anyone who sees it differently.

Only, maybe it's not as new as we want to make it. Just 12 months ago conversation in United Methodist circles seemed to revolve around a split over the LGTBQIA+ issues and sharing your opinion could cost you friends. In college I had people decide we couldn't be friends because of differing opinions on abortion. Think of the protests and political divides our nation faced during Vietnam. Throughout history there have been debates that have morphed into hatred.

But, as Christians I think we're called to live differently. We're called to love people we disagree with, and try to find common ground to connect on. We're called to hear people out and not just listen to the words they say (or the angry tone of voice they say it in) but figure out where they're coming from. We're called to seek the lost, not shun them for believing differently. And that means, at times, recognizing we might be lost too – or at least that we might have wandered off course.

As we start 2021, there are still plenty of topics people will disagree on. But how we disagree, well, that can make all the difference in the world. And as Christians, we'll once again need to lead by example, and let the way we live speak louder than the words we say.



Ash Wednesday starts season of reflection

Throughout the Bible, God's people have seen ashes as a symbol of repentance. Thankfully we don't still feel the need to go sit in a pile of ash to show we are sorry for our sins, but the meaning of the ashes remains. Today, we mark ourselves with the ashes in the shape of a cross to remind us both that we are sinners in need of repentance and that we are saved by the work of Christ. What better way to begin our time of Lent and this season of preparation for Easter than remembering our need for Christ.



Join us for our Ash Wednesday service on February 17th at 6:30pm (note an earlier time than past years) as we begin the Lenten season and look toward the gift of Easter. This service offers us a chance to focus on our repentance and God's forgiveness.

COVID policies for church adjusted again



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. This week statewide hospitalizations dropped below 400 for the first time since October. Weekly totals for Buffalo County match numbers from September. As a church, 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 were made to our church policies. Some of those changes include:

- 1) Children's Time will resume in worship, and Kids Sunday School resumed last Sunday.
- 2) Communion will be available in worship starting in February, with safety precautions of course. Communion is always optional for those who worship with us.

- 3) Fellowship snack time after worship, and other food service in the church can resume, with restrictions (i.e. seating spacing, group size, masks for those serving and enhanced sanitation). For Sunday snacks, we will have a signup sheet. If people sign up for a Sunday, we'll have that available. If no one signs up, there will not be a snack. The staff will not "recruit" people to fill those slots.

- 4) Masks remain a requirement for entering, exiting, and singing* or anytime you can't maintain 6 feet between groups. As before, once seated and socially distanced, masks are optional. (*As before, speakers and worship leaders can unmask if their social distancing is 15 feet or greater)

Five things to know about our 2020 giving

There's no doubt 2020 was a crazy year. Our country saw unprecedented turmoil from a pandemic as well as political and racial division. We've seen the number of people in need jump in our community as many lost jobs or lost income from a quarantine or hours being cut. As expected, this has impacted our finances. Here's a quick breakdown:

Budgetary giving – UP 3% or \$75 a week from 2019

It's incredible in a year like this to see any giving increases. On top of this, the church also received funds from the Small Business Association as part of the COVID relief package. That \$14,900 helped cover staff costs early on, and allowed for giving to help supplement the loss of income from our building being shut down to groups including the Hispanic Church, weddings, showers, and funding ministries beyond the budget to aid families in need in our community.

Overall giving – DOWN 25%, or \$65,000 down from 2019

This isn't surprising. It was a rough year for many, and we had fewer special fundraising campaigns. While a few people still gave to the parsonage loan, there was no big "ask" of the congregation. We did not have special offerings for Easter or Christmas, no special ministry visitors from Royal Family Kids Camp or Gideon's, and no capital campaign for the facility.

Number of givers: Down 15 (75 in 2020 from 90 in 2019)

Again, it's not surprising. When visitors join us for worship, or family comes to visit for the holidays, it's common to see one-time gifts from these people. With COVID, we didn't see that this year. But those one-time gifts add up!

Some more, some less:

Roughly half of "returning" givers gave more, and half gave less. This isn't uncommon, but how it breaks down warrants caution. This year only 8 families gave \$5,000 or more (versus 10 in 2019 and 11 in 2018). Those top givers averaged \$500 more than the previous year (in both 2019 and 2020). It's a blessing, but one that comes with consequences. Some just couldn't give as much this year and thankfully those who could, did. But as more of our giving is "tied" to fewer families, our financial stability is at risk. One family unit moving away or passing away could mean a huge hit to the ministry. Every year we lose 2-3 top givers, and if new families don't fill that gap, our financial security gets shaky.

So, what's our plan?

Awareness is key. We know giving is a very personal form of worship. No one should feel guilty into giving. God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7) and so do we. But as we grow in our faith, hopefully we can grow our investment in the ministry. Gibbon Faith United hasn't historically asked people to "pledge" what they expect to give each year. But, we do encourage people to give **regularly** and **intentionally**, which means prayerful planning. What did you give in 2020 and how can you match or increase that? What can you plan to give weekly or monthly? Can you set up bill pay, online giving, or mail a check each month on your payday rather than just giving when you're able to attend worship? If your income increased, can your giving? And remember it's not about the dollar amount, but how we can keep growing in our discipleship. Giving is a part of that. Or, if you're not able to give more financially, can you volunteer more? Not only does our service touch lives, it can lead to savings for the church as well! So, what's our plan? It's really your plan. The more we work together, the more ways we can continue to serve our church family, our community, and our world.

Pantry pressure eases, but help always needed



1,491. That's how many individuals were served by the Gibbon Free Pantry in 2020. Some families came nearly every week. Others may have only needed help once or twice all year. But as we wrapped up an unprecedented year, we are so thankful for the incredible support and volunteers who make this ministry possible.

Thankfully the intense need we were seeing in November and December seems to have eased. At our peak we had 53 families come in a single night, and nearly 120 different families come in a single month. Now we're back down to an average of 25-30 a night. As COVID numbers ease, we plan to stop doing the prepackaged boxes off the front porch and again allow people to shop inside.

Last month's newsletter highlighted some of the incredible donations we received to make this ministry a reality. But it's also important to acknowledge the volunteers who have made it possible as well. Some of our "regular" volunteers include Kathy Pierce, Betty Jacques, Mel Murr, Fran Murr, Sandy Sell, Marlene Kriha, Kay Reed, Janee Montgomery, Kim Wadkins, Lowell Jaeger, Kevin McGregor, Kyla McGregor, Cody McGregor, Dan Rockefeller, Laci Bentley, Derrick Clevenger, Susan Webster, Lee Power, Vickie Power. These individuals help with stocking, packing boxes, distribution, unloading trucks, and cleaning. Others such as Kelly Murr, Brooklyn Murr, Lannie Murr, Amy Hardy, Amy Holcomb, Maddie Holcomb, Craig Holcomb, Emma Christensen, Wendy Evans, Gabe Evans, Nate Evans, and certainly several others I'm forgetting have substituted for us as well. It takes roughly 30 hours each week to accomplish all the tasks of making this pantry a possibility. But together, we can change lives!

Conference offers Incredible online event for YOU

The Laity Summit will take place on Saturday, March 20, 2021 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. virtually! This one-day training and fellowship event helps our churches continue to grow and lead in a changing world. And, our own Kathy Pierce is on the conference planning team!

The event is completely online and costs just \$10. Even better, Faith United will reimburse you for that cost! We simply want as many people to participate as can. You can watch from home, or if a group are interested in participating together, we can set it up at the church! Register online at www.greatplainsumc.org and simply search for Laity Summit.



Pastoral Time off already on the calendar

Pastor Mike has put some vacation time on the calendar for the coming months. Currently there are no set office hours, but the pastor is available to meet by appointment. But, please keep these dates in mind. **February 22-24 – March 15-19 – April 12-16**

There are also dates Pastor Mike will be busy participating in meetings for the District, Conference, or other ecumenical ministries:

February 2-3, and 13, March 13 and 20, April 10 and 17.



Saturday potluck / meal on hold a little longer

Due to our current church COVID policies, and in an abundance of caution, we have not scheduled a Saturday night meal for February. We know this is such a great tool for ministry and we want to see this form of fellowship resume as soon as those planning the meal feel it's safe.

The church leadership strives to put the decision-making power on such events in the hands of those leading the event. Keep an eye on our Facebook page or listen for announcements in worship as February progresses.



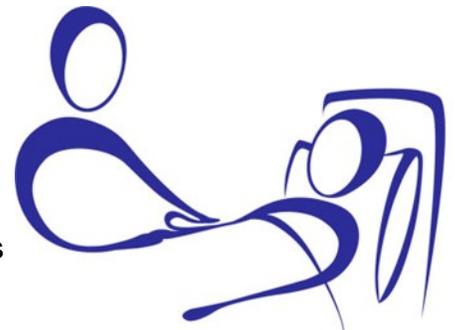
Sign-up open for Sunday Fellowship time



It's amazing how cookies and a cup of coffee can make connecting easier. At Faith United we want everyone who worships with us to feel welcome and our snack time is one of the ways to do that. We are working to fill our calendar with more people who would help prepare and serve the snack. Go together with another family or two and sign up. Even helping just once a year makes a difference. The signup sheet is in the kitchen if you're willing. On weeks we don't have someone sign up, we won't have a snack, but people are still welcome to Fellowship as they wish.

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 requested.



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. Since her retirement, we have been 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 for more information.