

The Rev. Christopher McCloskey, Pastor

THE MESSENGER

From Pastor Christopher's Desk:

At the risk of sounding like a Grinch or a Scrooge, I have to admit that I am not a huge fan of Santa Claus or at least what he has become over the last century or so in America. In 1931, Santa Claus was first featured in a Coca Cola advertisement cementing the prevailing image of this jolly Christmas symbol in our contemporary cultural imagination. The red suit with white fur trim, the rosy red cheeks, the big round belly, the full white beard. The reason we all imagine Santa Claus this same way is because of Coca Cola. While Coca Cola did not invent these features of Santa Claus whole cloth, they simply defined that this was who Santa was for the average American.

Before this time, Santa Claus, St. Nicolas, or Chris Kringle was imagined in a variety of different ways by a variety of different cultures, some so diverse and even bizarre that they seem scarcely related. And so Coca Cola sampled the "best" of all these Christmas adjacent figures to create the quintessential American Santa Claus. In this process however, this American Santa Claus was stripped of all of its cultural and religious depth and turned into the patron saint of consumerism.

This however was only the beginning of the distortion of the ancient tradition of gift giving on or around Christmas. Soon came along the 'classic' Christmas song known as *Santa Claus is Coming to Town*, which mainstreamed a warped idea of gift giving on Christmas into a way to scare children into behaving well around the holidays.

Admittedly, my opinion may change if I am ever blessed with children of my own, but I am constantly disheartened when I hear parents threatening their children by telling them that if they do not behave Santa will not come. Giving presents on or around Christmas was never meant to be about good behavior! Instead, we ought to give Christmas gifts during this season as a sign of thanksgiving and gratitude to God. Gift giving as a Christmas tradition was inspired by the wisemen who brought gifts to Jesus, not because he was well behaved, but because his coming was a gift to them and the entire world.

Jesus was given to us not because we deserved him, or because God was rewarding us for good behavior, quite the opposite! Jesus came to us in order to save us, while we were still sinners! Jesus came as Immanuel, God with us, not because we earned God's presence, but because God so loved the world.

I believe we need to recapture the truth behind gift giving in this nation. We need to reclaim the truth that we give because we are inspired by God, the greatest giver of all. We need to stop treating Christmas presents as if they are contingent upon our behavior be it, good or bad. Or else we need to stop calling them Christmas gifts. Or else we need to stop pretending that gifts given in December have anything to do with faith and the example set for us by God.

Saint Nicholas was famous for giving gifts especially to the poor. It is said that he would put gold coins into a stocking and throw them into poor people's homes, usually through the chimney. There is no evidence that he did this only for 'good' families or 'good children'. He gave simply to those in need inspired by Christ command to care for the poor and the needy.

I wish the American Santa Claus was a lot more like some of the traditional Father Christmas figures that inspired his creation. A Santa Claus who simply gives, who does try to sell us anything, or scare 'naughty' children. A Santa Claus who is far more worried about the poor and who has no interest in the over indulgent excesses of holiday consumerism.

Christmas was never about getting stuff or things. Christmas has always been about receiving Jesus into our hearts and renewing our commitment to God who loves us despite everything. Christmas needs a lot less Santa, Rudolph, and Elf on the Shelf and a lot more Christ.

~ Pastor Christopher

Cookie Walk Results:

Our 7th Cookie Walk was held on Saturday, December 9. Over 400 pounds of delicious cookies were baked by members of our congregation, Trinity Presbyterian and church friends.

Shoppers were excited to be able to view the cookies, and select their favorites with the help of "Cookie Elves" explaining all of the goodies we had to choose from. We SOLD OUT in less than

an hour! We raised just over \$3,000 with all proceeds going to the Backpack Program for extra food distributions during school breaks. Thanks to all the bakers and volunteers.



Next year - We anticipate that we will need TWICE AS MANY COOKIES! So start thinking of what cookies you want to bake!!!

Talent Show: Come one, come all, to "Scotia's Got Talent!" On Saturday February 3, 2024, Fellowship Council will be hosting a talent show! If you like to sing, dance, tell stories, read poetry, play an instrument, do magic tricks, or have any other talents to share, we'd love to have you perform! Sign up sheets will go up the first week in January for any of you who would like to be a part of the show! Stay tuned for more information in the church bulletin and Constant Contact.



Community Meal: We had a wonderful community meal on December 16. Kristen Shave and the Lasagna Love organization made the main dish and the meal was delicious. Thank you to all the wonderful cooks who made a pan of lasagna for this event.

Each guest was able to pick out new socks and a nail care kit. The guests also received a present of two new bath towels, two hand towels, and 2 washcloths. These were wrapped and sent home with our guests.

The giving table had clothing, house wares and Christmas decorations to choose from. We had a plethora of pie and guests had their choice of many pieces or whole pies to take with them.

We had a celebration of Linda Naumowicz. She has guided the Missions council through 3 years and has truly been an inspiration to us. She is truly a blessed soul who walks with Jesus.

I would also like to thank Kristen Shave who supported the community meal for the past five years. From ordering supplies to giving advice about meals, to making signs and notices to making wonderful lasagna, Kristen has always been there to help. You will be greatly missed.

We had 90 meals go out in December with our total at 4,934. Thank you for your support.

~Mark Holley

Renew Advent/Christmas Bible Study: The group, which meets Tuesday 12:00-1:15pm, is finishing up their readings Watch for the Light: Readings for Advent and Christmas through January 9. After that the group is planning on using an Upper Room resource through February 6. There will be no class February 13. For the Zoom link, contact Sunny Baldwin at 518-320-4562 or csunnyb@nycap.rr.com.

January is Kids Hope mentor appreciation month!

Join Miss Diana in thanking all our mentors who meet with a child every week. They make a huge difference in their child's life! And thank you to their prayer partner who prays and stands by their mentors side and encourages them. If you see them thank them!

Mentors - Diana Ackner, Carol Ahl, Diury Alvarado, Jill Busman, Marty Gilgore, Vicki Hayner, Linda Lewis, Laurel-Le Lipski, Sheryl Pelkey, Bill Shave, Diane Skibinski, Cindy Tygert.

Prayer Partners - Spike Ahl, Richard Doyle, Amanda Faulkner, Heather Kramer, Patty Marre, Christopher McCloskey, Joyce Murray, Nancy Passer, Sue Pitts, Kristen Shave, Pam Walsh, Karen Wentworth.



Changes to the Mission Giving in 2024:

In 2024 there will be some changes to the way our congregation collects mission funds for distribution to both internal mission programs and outside charitable organizations. In previous years, there were two opportunities every month for worshippers to offer restricted gifts for mission activities - the Mission of the Month and the Communion Offering. Through both of these programs as well as holiday special offerings, the Mission Council supported a total of 22 programs and organizations.

However, there was a growing concern that having so many collections and supporting so many programs and organizations, that we were spreading ourselves too thin. The Missions Council spent much time reflecting and praying about how to best maximize our churches impact, while asking the congregation fewer times a month for contributions.

Given that Consistory was planning to adjust the church’s communion schedule in 2024, the Mission Council requested that the Consistory grant them permission to retire the Communion Offering. This request was granted and so in 2024 the congregation will focus its energy and attention on a single program or organization every month through the Mission of the Month program. The plan is to have a brief Minute for Mission during worship on the first Sunday of every month to share a little bit about the program or organization being supported that month. It is the Missions Councils hope by focusing on a single program or organization and talking about them in worship that the congregation will feel like they are better connected to the missions our congregation supports.

Given however that there are only 12 months in a year, it became necessary to reduce the number of programs and charities we supported as 22 just felt like far too many. The Missions Council decided to discontinue congregational support for 4 organizations. This is not because these organizations are bad or deficient in any way, conversely it was felt that these charities were already high profile and received robust financial support from numerous places.

Below is the list of the four charities that did not find a place in our new mission fund collection program going forward. We encourage you to give to these organizations independently if you are so inclined to do so. They are:

Bethesda House of Schenectady
834 State Street
Schenectady, New York 12307

Habitat For Humanity of Schenectady County, INC.
115 Broadway
Schenectady, New York 12305

Classis Student Care
Schenectady Classis
C/O Vicki Hayner
158 Westside Drive
Ballston Lake, New York 12019

Things Of My Very Own, INC.
249 Green Street
Schenectady, New York 12305

In order to accommodate the remaining 18 programs and organizations. The Missions Council created a two year rotation, which you will find below.

| | Year A: | Year B: |
|-----------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| January | Kid’s Hope USA | Kid’s Hope USA |
| February | Over the Bridge Ministry | Over the Bridge Ministry |
| March | Fowler Ministries | Camp Fowler Ministries |
| April | Community Lunch | Community Lunch |
| May | FRCS Emergency Food | FRCS Emergency Food |
| June | Summer Lunch - SICM | SICM |
| July | Joan Nicole Prince House | Joan Nicole Prince House |
| August | SG Food Pantry | SG Food Pantry |
| September | Scotia High School Food Pantry | Scotia High School Food Pantry |
| October | BackPack Program | BackPack Program |
| November | Deacon’s Fund | Deacon’s Fund |
| December | Scotia Relief | Concerned for the Hungry |
| Christmas | Regional Food Bank (5 Local) | Samaritan Care Fund |

Are you looking for a new way to serve your church in 2024?

We are looking for skilled and dedicated individuals to be a part of the church's Councils and Committees in 2024. Our Councils and Committees are how much of the work of the church is done and we are looking for people with fresh ideas and energy to help make our church even better in the year to come. Below is a list of the Council and Committees that could benefit from your involvement.

- Building & Grounds Council – is responsible for the care and maintenance of the church's building and grounds.
- Christian Education Council – is responsible for all of the church's educational programming for both youth and adults.
- Fellowship Council – is responsible for planning intergenerational programs and welcoming visitors and new members.
- Missions Council – is responsible for ministering to the needs of our surrounding community especially caring for the poor and the hungry.
- Worship Council – is responsible for supporting every aspect of worship including its music and liturgy and advising the pastor as worship leader.
- Communications Committee – is responsible for ensuring effective communication both internally and externally.
- Fundraising Committee – is responsible for brainstorming, planning and leading fundraising efforts for the church for both its general fund and special programs and events.
- Stewardship Committee – is responsible for brainstorming, planning and leading our annual stewardship campaign.

Do you have gifts that might benefit one or more of these Councils and Committees? Are you excited for an opportunity to give back to your church and help guide it into the future? If so you are invited to reach out by emailing office@firstreformedscotia.org and let us know where you want to serve. Please use the subject line "Ready to Serve" for your email. Thank you!

Sunday School News:

Thank you to all those who participated in the Christmas eve service! You made it a very special night. K-6th graders will start off the year with an epiphany lesson then some old testament lessons. 7-12th graders' theme for January will be *I Resolve*. Come find out what it's all about!



Youth Group - January calendar

Monday January 15, 4:30pm-6:30pm - Serve dinner at the City Mission. PLEASE let Miss Diana know if you can come by 1/7. If we don't have enough volunteers we need to contact the City Mission so they can get the volunteers they need.

Sunday January 28 at 11:30am - Make soup for the Valentine's luncheon that will take place on 2/11.



Women's retreat - Jan 12-14 - Last call

We'll be joining together in the comfort of Chi Rho Lodge at Camp Fowler **Friday dinner through Sunday morning**. The cost for 2024 is **\$160*** per person and includes meals, room & board. Sign up, first come first serve. We'll provide a program including faith focused discussions, games, crafts, fun and more! If you are interested please contact Miss Diana by January 2. Fowler needs to plan for the number of women going.



Want more information contact Miss Diana education@firstreformedscotia.org

Health & Wellness Note: In recent years, you may have heard the term “Dry January.” In an article by Matthew Solan, Executive Editor of Harvard Men’s Health Watch, he stated that Dry January refers to people who choose to start the new year on a healthy note by joining millions of others who abstain from alcohol for the month. While drinking a moderate amount of alcohol can have health benefits for some people, studies show that alcohol use in Americans has increased and is causing health problems.

A recent study reported participants drank alcohol on 12.2 days and consumed almost 27 alcoholic drinks during that time. More than one-third reported engaging in binge drinking (consuming five or more drinks for men and four or more drinks for women in about two hours). Increased alcohol intake causes an increase in physical and mental problems, which can include heart and liver damage, a higher cancer risk, a weakened immune system, memory issues, and mood disorders.

So if you recognize your own behavior in this survey or you just want to begin the year fresh, Dry January is a resolution you may want to make, by choosing not to drink beer, wine or spirits for the month. The benefits after thirty days could include: better sleep, more energy, weight loss, lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels, and reduced cancer-related proteins in their blood. What do you have to lose?

Tips for a successful Dry January:

- **Find a substitute non-alcoholic drink.** For social situations, or when you crave a cocktail, reach for alcohol-free beverages like sparkling water, soda, or mocktails. Non-alcoholic beer or wine also is an option, but some brands still contain up to 0.5% alcohol by volume, so check the label. "Sugar is often added to these beverages to improve the taste, so try to choose ones that are low in sugar," says Dawn Sugarman, a research psychologist at Harvard-affiliated McLean Hospital in the division of alcohol, drugs, and addiction.
- **Avoid temptations.** Keep alcohol out of your house. When you are invited to someone’s home, bring your non-alcoholic drinks with you.
- **Create a support group.** Let friends and family know about your intentions and encourage them to keep you accountable. Better yet, enlist someone to do the challenge with you.
- **Use the Try Dry app.** This free app helps you track your drinking, set personal goals, and offers motivational information like calories and money saved from not drinking. It’s aimed at cutting back on or cutting out alcohol, depending on your choices.
- **Don’t give up.** If you slip up, don't feel guilty. Just begin again the next day.

Wishing you a Blessed and Healthy New Year!

Giving:

Each month we report our giving.
Here is how we gave so far this year:

| (*Giving is through 12/20/23) | | | | |
|--|---------------|------------|---------------|-------------------|
| | Annual Budget | YTD Budget | Total to Date | Over/Under Budget |
| Congregational Giving* | \$294,000 | \$294,000 | \$242,005 | -17% |
| Other Giving includes draws from Fenimore & Christian Heritage | \$255,110 | \$217,970 | \$301,422 | 38% |
| Total Income | \$549,110 | \$511,970 | \$543,427 | 6% |
| Total Expense** | \$557,110 | \$511,970 | \$507,658 | 0% |

BackPack Program:

Just wanted to share this email that shows the incredible community and congregational support for working families in Scotia-Glenville! I am so proud of the support we have received from the Scotia community that I want to share some of the ways we have been helped;

- We raised over \$3,000.00 with our Coolie Walk on Saturday 12/9! We sold out in one hour!
- Our congregation donated over 60 boxes of kid-friendly large boxes of cereal for our distribution
- A local hair salon collected additional 20+ boxes of cereal
- Buhrmaster Farms donated apples, potatoes, and onions (it filled a pick-up truck)!
- The Glenville Hannaford is donated 20 - 3lb. bags of clementines (60 pounds)
- The Glenville Rotary is giving us a grant for use for additional milk and egg cards from Stewarts.
- A family in our congregation had a dinner party as a fund raiser and raised over \$1,000.00
- A member of our congregation held 2 craft classes to make an Old-Fashioned Santa and raised almost \$500.00
- A member of our congregation made a recent donation of \$1,000.00
- Our Missions Council purchased \$1,100.00 worth of gift cards for families in the BackPack program that needed help with Christmas (coordinated with the school social workers).
- A local fire station has pledged money for 4-5 bags for students at an elementary school in their district.
- A member of our congregation coordinated a luncheon for a local Rotary and raised money for the High School families participating in the High School Food Pantry.
- The staff working at Dr. Coppola's dental office, here in Scotia, made a generous donation to the Backpack program in his honor, as a Christmas present to him.

January Birthdays

| | | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| 1 Jim Light | 9 Chris Grumbling | Benton North | 25 Cindy Taft |
| 2 Kevin Beauchemin | 12 Barret Germain | Sue Pitts | 26 Claudia Garrison |
| 5 June Coryer | Brittney Schaefer | 20 David Gonyea | Duane VanPatten, Jr. |
| 6 Jacob Crisci | 13 Alexandra Bicknell | 21 Bob Grumbling | 27 Matthew Miller |
| Jessica Crisci | 16 Connor Kilgallen | 22 Lucy Trbovich | 28 Tom Bodden |
| MaryLynne Davidson | 17 Sunny Baldwin | 23 Bradley Coryer | Rebecca Penn |
| Naomi Faulkner | 18 Tom Lansing | 24 Sally Knutson | |

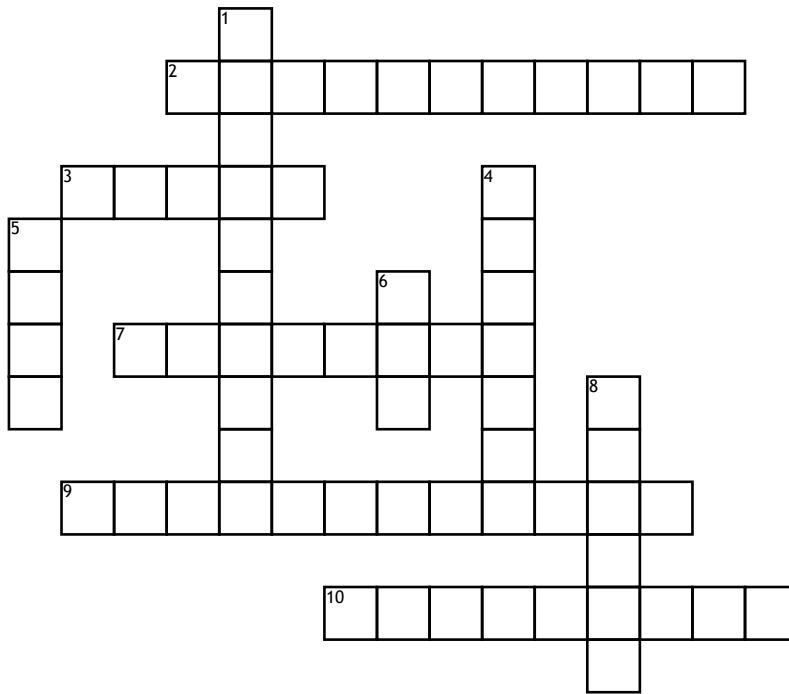
January Anniversaries



| | |
|---------------------------|----|
| Joe and Cathy Deamer | 1 |
| Wayne and Susan Penn | 15 |
| Mike and Susan Torelli | 22 |
| Kirk and Linda Willoughby | 30 |

Please note: We list the birthdays and anniversaries of our church's local active members and friends. If we missed yours, please call the church office, (518) 370-4751. Thank you.

Winter Crossword Puzzle



Across

- 2. 11 letters to describe a sweet treat with hints of ginger and cinnammon
- 3. 5 letters to describe what you wear to keep your feet warm when shoveling snow
- 7. 8 letters to describe a liquid that tastes even better with marshmallows on top
- 9. 12 letters to describe a type of rainfall that when cold enough can freeze bridges, roads and vehicles

- 10. 9 letters to describe what you can sit in front of to keep warm inside your home

Down

- 1. 10 letters to describe what starts on December 21st
- 4. 7 letters to describe a top you wear to keep warm
- 5. 4 letters to describe what falls from the sky when it is below 32 degrees
- 6. 3 letters to describe something that makes the road slippery
- 8. 6 letters to describe what you feel when it is cold outside

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Address Service Requested