

**DECEMBER 2021  
CLARION CONNECTION  
FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
201 3<sup>RD</sup> AVENUE NE  
CLARION, IA 50525**

**Pastor: Rev. Mike Gudka  
Church Phone: 515-532-2845  
Pastor Mike's cell: 515-835-7847  
Email: [pastormikegudka@gmail.com](mailto:pastormikegudka@gmail.com)  
Website: [www.clarionumc.com](http://www.clarionumc.com)**

Secretary: Jodi Kraft  
Office Hours: Monday - Thursday 8:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon  
Email: [jodi@clarionumc.com](mailto:jodi@clarionumc.com)

Church Treasurer: Andy Young, Cody Ostendorf will take over in January  
Financial Secretary: Jodi Kraft  
Church Council Chair: Bud Young

Custodians: Carol Townsend and Juliet Gudka  
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**Keep up with Happenings in Our Church**

If you are a Facebook user, search for "[Clarion First United Methodist Church](https://www.facebook.com/ClarionFirstUnitedMethodistChurch)" and join our page. That way you will keep up with current happenings at our Church. In addition, check out our website at <https://www.clarionumc.com> (no "f") and look at past teachings, see what is on the Church calendar, and lots more.

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**Friendly Reminder from Staff Parish Relations Committee**

Please remember that Mondays are the one day a week that Pastor Mike tries to save for rest and recuperation. In the event that an emergency, Pastor Mike would still like for you to contact him.

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**NEW! Way to Worship!**

We now offer three ways to join your Church family in worship. And our prayers are that you will stay connected with your Church home and find the worship service that works best for your situation:

- **In-Person Worship:** 8:30 a.m. Traditional Service, 10:45 a.m. Contemporary Service
- **Recorded Worship:** This is available on our website by Tuesday of each Week at [www.clarionumc.com](http://www.clarionumc.com).
- **Live-Streaming Worship:** This is available on our website at [www.clarionumc.com](http://www.clarionumc.com)

Let's all stay connected. Let's lift each other up. And let's continue to be The Body of Christ!

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**Traditional Service is Now On-Line**

You can now view both the Traditional or Contemporary Services on the Church's website: [www.clarionumc.com](http://www.clarionumc.com). These are usually posted by Tuesday or Wednesday each week. So now you can watch the service that you enjoy the most.

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**Scholarship Enrollment time:** Iowa United Methodist Foundation offers thousands of dollars in scholarships every year to students who demonstrate academic and community excellence. Please visit the [iumf.org/scholarship](http://iumf.org/scholarship) website for more information. Scholarship applications are open December 1 – March 1.

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**Your Giving Makes a Difference**

Last week: \$3,459 (11-21-2021), Needed weekly: \$4,291  
Year-to-date: \$247,776, Needed year-to-date: \$201,693



**December 2021 Newsletter Article**

Merry Christmas!

Over past several months, as we have progressed through the pandemic, it seems that slowly but surely, some things are returning to normal (whatever normal is). We are worshiping in-person again, people are getting out and about and I have seen many of you at the grocery store, Pizza Ranch, at school functions, etc. And as I think back to last year's Christmas, I remember how we stood strong and made our way through a very different set of circumstances. But this year, things might be a little more like they used to be. And I am really, really, really looking forward to this Christmas.

As you think about getting ready for Christmas, please include on your "to-do" list to attend Church every Sunday of Advent. Advent is one of two preparation periods on the Christian calendar. And the reason for a longer preparation period, is because the event that follows the preparation period takes some time to get our minds and souls around.

And different people have different reactions during this preparation period.

Some have experienced loss or hardship over the previous year. So for them, it can be hard to feel the joy of the coming Christ-Child. And the feeling of loss is one of the reasons that God became flesh to become one of us. Please know that He has felt like you feel and He cries when you cry. He gets it. He understands just where you are coming from. So feel free to let Him carry your burden during Christmas and set you free from the hurt. Unburden yourself by placing your deepest hurts on God's huge shoulders. And know that God is big enough to take them all on.

Other people are ready to bust loose and have a joy-filled time. And Christ came to earth for you too. Christ loves to smile and laugh. It is living a life filled with Holy Spirit that allows us to catch a glimpse of just how beautiful our life as a follower of Christ can be. So remember, He understands just where you are coming from; so feel free to let Him lift your feelings of joy to the highest Heavens.

It is this third group of people that I worry about the most. And I call this group the "Getters and the Givers." This group seems to be more focused upon the "transaction" aspect of our secular Christmas traditions. People can run up thousands in expenses, during a time when Christ, the Lord God that made the entire universe, came into this world with nothing. If we stopped the giving and receiving of gifts during Christmas, this is the group that might stop getting engaged in the Christmas season and find something else to do. But don't worry, as Christ understands where you are coming from too. And He is not going to give up trying to show you the real meaning of Christmas. So, open your hearts and let the Holy Spirit in.

There are probably other groups that are impacted in different ways during the Christmas season, but to me, these three groups stand out the most.

As you move through these next few weeks, I want to encourage us all, regardless of where our hearts are at, to consider doing something. First, think about how you are feeling about your situation and about the coming of Christmas. And then read the Christmas story in Matthew 1:18-25, Luke 1:39-56, Luke 2:1-20. And Matthew 2:1-1-12. And as you read this recounting of what happened, see if you can find a person that is like you in this miraculous story. Then place yourself in that person's shoes and imagine what might have been going through their mind as this played out over time. And then imagine looking into the face of the Infant Son of God and see what stays the same in your life, and see how it changes your life as well.

Have a very merry Christmas,  
Pastor Mike

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**December Liturgist:** Jeff Farwell

**December Hosts, December 5, 12 and 19:** 8:30 a.m. – Cindy Riley and Mary Mechem  
10:45 a.m. – Todd Sorensen

**December 26 Hosts for 10:00 a.m. Service:** Cindy Riley and Mary Mechem

**Christmas Eve 3:00 p.m. Hosts:** Cindy and Doug Riley

**Christmas Eve 7:00 p.m. Hosts:** Cathy and Jeff Farwell

**A Christmas invitation to all Women –**

Enjoy the start of the Christmas Season with a night of worship, songs, delicious food and friends.

You are invited to the annual Church Christmas Dinner Celebration on Wednesday, December 1 in the basement Fellowship Hall. Conversation and socializing at 6:15 p.m. followed by a free dinner at 6:30 p.m. So many have worked hard this past year to serve our church and community that we feel this celebration is a great way to prepare our hearts and minds for the busy season ahead. Please join us for this up-lifting, fun filled evening.

Please make reservations with Jodi in the church office (532-2845) or sign-up on the clipboard at the back of the sanctuary by noon on Monday, November 29.

We are asking each person to make a White Offering (monetary gift in white envelope) for Riverside Bidwell Child Development Center in Des Moines to help further their mission to help families and children.

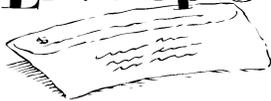
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**"Restored"**

A couple of years ago we held a monthly gathering called "Beginnings." We have made some changes to this program and we are now calling it "Restored." We will meet on the first Sunday of each month beginning on December 5 at 5:00 PM. You are invited to bring a snack or other food item to share. We will meet at Judy Watne's home at 210 6th Ave NE, Clarion. And it is perfectly okay to bring your children. During our time together we will have a time of worship, a time of deep prayer, and a time to be stirred by God's Word. Everyone is invited to come!

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**Offering Envelopes**



**Offering Envelopes** - This year boxes of Offering Envelopes will be available at the back of the Sanctuary, starting December 5. Please take a box if you are in need of them. Please write your name on the list next to the number that corresponds with the box you take. In order for you to receive credit on your contribution statements, I need these numbers from the list and the box to match up, otherwise someone else may receive credit for your contribution. Another way to be sure your contribution is recorded correctly, is to write your name each time you make a contribution on the Offering Envelope. You may also call the church office 532-2845 to get a box. Thank you!

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**Supporting the Beacon of Hope**

For many years we have actively supported The Beacon of Hope. This is a men's shelter in Fort Dodge.

We are planning to go to The Beacon of Hope to prepare and serve the dinner meal. This will take place on Saturday, December 11. If you want to drive down together, we will be leaving the Church at Noon. Or you can drive down at a different time and help out.

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**We Need Desserts on December 11**

We need desserts for about 50 people when we send a team to The Beacon of Hope in Fort Dodge to make them dinner. If you can provide a dessert, please place it in the Church kitchen on Saturday, December 11 between 9:00 AM and Noon.

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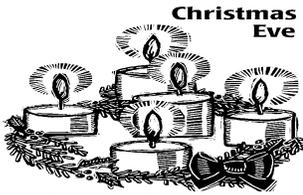
**"HERE WE COME R-CAROLING!"**

**Let's Go Caroling!**

Join this caroling group from our Church on December 12. They will meet at the Church at 4:00 PM and head out to sing at several homes and to the people at The Meadows.

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**Christmas Eve Services**

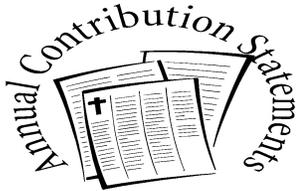
We will have two Christmas Eve services and both will be the same. The first will be at 3:00 PM and the second will be at 7:00 PM.

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**One Service at 10:00 AM on December 26 and January 2**

The 10:00 AM service on December 26 will be a traditional style with a Christmas hymn sing. The 10:00 AM service on January 2 will be a Contemporary style service. And there will not be Sunday any Sunday school while the kids are out on Christmas break.

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End of year deposits for giving – Remember the end of the year is Friday, December 31<sup>st</sup>, the church office is closed on Friday's. Thank you for planning in advance your year-end totals.

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**Weather-Related Church Closings**

Here is some information regarding the possibility of Church closings, due to winter weather. During the week, if the school is not transporting students, then the Church office will be closed. If we need to close on a Sunday, you can go the following places to see if the Church is closed: 1. The Church's Website ([www.clarionumc.com](http://www.clarionumc.com)), 2. The Church's Facebook Page (@ClarionFirstUnitedMethodistChurch), or you can call the Church office and if we are closed, you will hear the announcement on the Church's answering machine (515-532-2845).

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**The Ten Commandments for Christmas**

The following item appeared in a church newsletter and contains some good advice that will help us keep selfishness in check this Christmas:

- Thou shalt not leave "Christ" out of Christmas, making it "Xmas." To some, "X" is unknown.
- Thou shalt not prepare thy soul for Christmas. Spend not so much on gifts that thy soul is forgotten.
- Thou shalt not let Santa Claus replace Christ, thus robbing the day of its spiritual reality.
- Thou shalt not burden the shop girl, the mailman, and the merchant with complaints and demands.
- Thou shalt give thyself with thy gift. This will increase its value a hundred fold, and he who receiveth it shall treasure it forever.
- Thou shalt not value gifts received by their cost. Even the least expensive may signify love, and that is more priceless than silver and gold.
- Thou shalt not neglect the needy. Share thy blessings with many who will go hungry and cold unless thou are generous.
- Thou shalt not neglect thy church. Its services highlight the true meaning of the season.
- Thou shalt be as a little child. Not until thou has become in spirit as a little one thou ready to enter into the kingdom of Heaven.
- Thou shalt give thy heart to Christ. Let Him be at the top of thy Christmas list.

