



**First Central
Congregational**
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

The Congregationalist

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www.firstcentral.org

November 30, 2020

Prayers

Cheryl Novak Heller, now at home; *Yvette Polinsky* and family, on the death of her stepfather; *Val Himes*, on the death of her sister; *Rick Richards*, recently hospitalized following a heart attack; *Alma Jean Wotherspoon*, who died in Kearney recently; *Marlene Roberts*, recovering from knee surgery; the *Syster, Blazek*, and *Roche* families, on the death of *Cheryl Roche*.

Joys:

Bud Cassidy, now at home! *Jordan Acker Anderson & Josh Anderson*, celebrating the birth of *Isaac Beau Anderson*. – proud grandparents are *Janet & Andy Acker*.

Update

Due to high COVID19 rates, the office is temporarily closed to the public. Please call the office if you need to make arrangements to come in, or to make donations. Thanks!

Eves

Have a white-elephant gift you've been hanging on to for just the right occasion? It's time! Wrap it up, and join the Eves on Monday, **December 14th**, on Zoom, for the annual Eves Christmas Party! We will "exchange" our gifts online. Come and see some familiar faces!

Christmas Eve

After much discussion, it has been decided to have only one Christmas Eve service, at 8 p.m., on

YouTube. With the expected rise in COVID19 numbers in the next few weeks, the staff felt it just wasn't safe to gather in person.

Brrr It's Cold Outside!!

Congregational Outreach Ministry is collecting **NEW hats**, **NEW mittens/gloves** and **GENTLY USED coats** during the month of December. Items will be given to Siena Francis and the homeless they serve. The shelter is especially in need of adult men's items. Items may be placed in the "wrapped" boxes in the glass entry or narthex. Thank you for your help to keep our neighbors warm during the cold months of winter. Please contact *Susan Dolezal* with any questions.

The Christmas Fund

The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas "Thank You" gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees.

Over the past nine months, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the emergency financial needs of many who serve the church have increased dramatically.

These difficult times make the need for the Christmas Fund more urgent than ever. To donate directly, go to www.christmasfund.org, or send your check directly to the church, with "Christmas Fund" written in the memo line.

Scott's Column: Gratitude

Originally published November 18th

My sister ordered Sebastian an Advent calendar. He knows it has arrived but hasn't seen it yet. The other day he asked what day he could open it up and begin opening the doors. Now every day in November he's counting down to his Advent calendar. Which is pretty funny, I think.

Many people now practice a whole season of gratitude as we approach Thanksgiving. I like this idea—expanding beyond a day to a whole season of gratitude—but I personally don't have the discipline to post something I'm thankful for every day in November.

This year has, of course, been weird and calamitous. There's a lot *not* to be thankful for this year. But I have been wondering lately what I am thankful for during this strange season.

For me, much of the year has been viewed through the lens of how the pandemic and its ramifications have affected Sebastian, so when I think about what I'm grateful for (and not) this year, so much of it focuses on him. Here are a few memories from this year, related to the church.



On Halloween we didn't trick-or-treat like we usually do, but Sebastian got dressed up in his Darth Vader costume and we visited three neighbors by pre-arrangement. One was Nikki Zimmerman who came outside on that beautiful afternoon. There was this delightful moment I caught on camera (in the photo above) when Sebastian was playfully confronting Nikki with his light saber and she played along. I love moments like this.

The church's Trunk-or-Treat was also a fun way for our kids to see each other and get some experience of normality. I'm grateful to Katie for organizing and the various folk who volunteered to help.

I'm very grateful for the church staff who were incredible in the ways they helped Sebastian this year. When the quarantines first hit in March and his

preschool closed, Sebastian began coming to the office with me. We quickly developed a routine of spending a couple hours at the office each day. Soon the hallways and office spaces filled with toys, balls, and scooters. We quit putting them away because the building wasn't open and no one else was around. Staff began taking work breaks to play ball or ride scooters in the hallway.

Thanks to Stephen Bouma for showing Sebastian how the organ and harpischord worked. He liked to wander up to the sanctuary when Stephen was practicing.

At Easter, while we were having a staff meeting, Sebastian hid eggs and at the conclusion of the meeting, everyone hunted for them.

In late April, the staff threw him a fifth birthday party when he couldn't have a party with his friends. Kerrie brought balloons, everyone brought gifts. We discovered that if you placed the balloon just right in the airflow from the air conditioning unit in the office that it would float there. The "magic balloon trick" became a staple of office entertainment for months.

When volunteers began working in the office again this summer, Sebastian had a handful of new people to talk with and give demonstrations of his toys. Thank you to the office volunteers who endured hour long presentations on Super Wings, Transformers, etc.

Thanks to Jenny Pfeifer for keeping the candy jar stocked.

Now the staff says they miss seeing him every day and the energy and joy he brought during this difficult time.

Back in the spring Katie held Zoom Sunday school classes. Sebastian would often talk non-stop, a clear sign of missing his church friends. He would often cry on Sundays that he couldn't go to worship, and he was so excited the day he finally could.

And thanks to all the congregants who endured Sebastian zoom-bombing meetings, classes, daily reflection videos.

This has been a rough year. I've never been so stressed, anxious, or worried for the well-being of my child. But, it would have been so much worse without all these people who have loved my child and other children and done their best to help. Thank you.



Please check out our FIRSTKids YouTube Channel for our Quarantine series...

FIRSTKids CORNER

Join Pastor Katie every other Sunday for YouTube Sunday school, in which we will be discussing some classic and not-so-classic Bible stories and how they relate to our pandemic lives!

Virtual Advent Pageant

We cannot do our normal big production Advent Pageant, but we can do a virtual one... If you and your family would like to participate in the pageant, please contact Katie at the Church: Katie@firstcentral.org

Twice-A-Month FIRSTKids IN PERSON ON HOLD

Due to the virus rates in our community, our plans for in person Sunday school are on hold. We hope to be able to offer this in the new year, but it will depend on numbers. Keep an eye on your email and this space for more info.

*Note: As we begin to attempt some in-person activities, we are aware that different individual families are at different comfort levels with covid exposure. We will do our best to include online participants in all in-person activities. If you and your family aren't ready for in-person activities yet, we absolutely understand and will do our best to make sure all are included!

- Pastor Katie



During social distancing, the youths will be meeting on **Sundays @ 8 pm via Zoom** for games and fellowship and discussion, and are looking to add some more outdoor in-person gatherings.



December 3 @ 7 pm on Zoom:

The Depths of my Soul with Steve Jackson

First Central member Steve Jackson has had a book of poetry published! Get yourself some wine and cheese and join us on zoom where Steve will do some readings of his work and talk a bit about his process and how the book came about. Contact the church for the zoom link!

SAVE THE DATE

January 13th at 5:45 pm on Zoom:

Dangerous Religious Ideas

Rabbi Dr. Rachel Mikva

What makes a religious idea dangerous? What are our own dangerous religious ideas? Dr. Mikva will be joining us on zoom for a conversation about this and about her new book.

VESPERS

Wednesdays, 6:00 pm

On Facebook Live

Grab a cup of tea or hot chocolate and join Rev. Katie for a simple midweek service of song, prayer, scripture, and reflection.

Week of December 6

Sunday, December 6

YouTube online worship, 10:30 a.m.

Food Pantry Sunday

FirstYouth, 8 p.m., Zoom

Monday, December 7

Staff meeting, 1:30 p.m., Pastor's Study

Tuesday, December 8

Council, 7 p.m., Zoom

Wednesday, December 9

Choir, 7 p.m., Zoom

Vespers with Katie, 6 p.m., FaceBook Live

Thursday, December 10

Book Club, 7 p.m., Zoom

Week of December 13

Sunday, December 13

YouTube online worship, 10:30 a.m.

Adult Education, 5 p.m., Zoom

FirstYouth, 8 p.m., Zoom

Monday, December 14

Staff meeting, 1:30 p.m., Pastor's Study

Eves, 7 p.m., Zoom

Wednesday, December 16

Choir, 7 p.m., Zoom

Vespers with Katie, 6 p.m., FaceBook Live

Week of December 20

Sunday, December 20

YouTube online worship, 10:30 a.m.

Christmas Fund Offering

FirstYouth, 8 p.m., Zoom

Monday, December 21

Staff meeting, 1:30 p.m., Pastor's Study

Wednesday, December 23

Choir, 7 p.m., Zoom

Vespers with Katie, 6 p.m., FaceBook Live

Thursday, December 24

Christmas Eve, 6 and 11 p.m., in person /on Zoom.

Subject to change.

Friday, December 25

Christmas Day, office closed

Week of December 27

Sunday, December 27

YouTube online worship, 10:30 a.m.

FirstYouth, 8 p.m., Zoom

Monday, December 28

Staff meeting, 1:30 p.m., Pastor's Study

Wednesday, December 30

Choir, 7 p.m., Zoom

Vespers with Katie, 6 p.m., FaceBook Live

Thursday, December 31

Office closing at noon.

*Please send address changes to:
First Central Congregational Church
421 S. 36th St
Omaha, NE 68131.*