



Christian Challenger

Vol. 67

December 16, 2020

No. 25



Christmas Eve at First Christian Church

While Christmas Eve will be lovely and meaningful, it will also look a little different this year due to necessary safety measures. Note the new times for this year's celebrations.

- 4:30 pm - Nativity Experience with Live Animals (Front Lawn)
- 5:00 pm - *A Visit to the Christmas Crib* Service (Sanctuary)
- 8:00 pm - Traditional Christmas Eve Service (Sanctuary and Livestream)
- 11:00 pm - Traditional Christmas Eve Service (Sanctuary)

Silent Night by Candlelight – While maintaining all of our Christmas Eve traditions is challenging this year, one of the traditions we don't want to miss is singing *Silent Night* by candlelight.

At the conclusion of all three Christmas Eve services (5:00 pm, 8:00 pm, and 11:00 pm), you will be dismissed by rows to gather on the sidewalks and porch outside the Sanctuary (along Taft). As you depart the building, you will light your candle and then gather (with masks & social distance) to enjoy *Silent Night* together.

RSVP for Christmas Eve Services – So that we have the proper configuration of safe seating, we are asking you to RSVP on our website (www.firstchristian2020.com) for the Christmas Eve service you plan to attend in person and how many other family members will be joining you, as well as if you will need nursery care for your infant through three-year old child. Should your plans change, or your neighbor wants to join you for worship, we will have a limited number of seats available at each service to accommodate you and your family.



STEWARDSHIP 2021 CAMPAIGN UPDATE

Cards received as of 12/14/20	91= \$598,076
Previous Estimates still out	47= \$167,871
2020 Campaign Final Numbers	135= \$775,831

The fact that we have weathered the ups and downs of 2020 so well as a church is a testament to your generosity. Let's make what we do in 2021 speak even louder to the fact that God has resourced us and equipped us *to do immeasurably more than all we could ask or imagine* (Eph. 3:20)!

If you have not had the chance to turn in your 2021 Estimate of Giving card, we hope you will take a few minutes to do so. Tina Williams or Cheryl Appling will be happy to help you fill out your card over the phone.

Make Your Mark

Dr. Mark R. Bender
Senior Minister



Celebrations

Today just happens to be our wedding anniversary. Jodi and I are celebrating 20 years today. In some ways, it seems like it was yesterday when we were exchanging vows and beginning life together. And yet, there have been numerous markers that tell us we've experienced a multitude of adventures together. There have been six houses. There have been the challenges and celebrations associated with a Masters of Divinity (MDiv), a Doctor of Ministry (DMin), and a Doctor of Jurisprudence (J.D.). There have been two sets of braces. There have been 10,000 (or so) dance recitals and competitions. There have been two high school graduations and one college graduation. There have been the deaths of seven grandparents. And this only scratches the surface of the last 20 years.

From a sociological perspective, 20 years is considered to be "a generation." In talking about the characteristics of age cohorts into "generations," The Pew Research Center noted that:

An individual's age is one of the most common predictors of differences in attitudes and behaviors. On issues ranging from foreign affairs to social policy, age differences in attitudes can be some of the widest and most illuminating. Age denotes two important characteristics about an individual: their place in the life cycle - whether a young adult, middle-aged parent or retiree - and their membership in a cohort of individuals who were born at a similar time.

Jodi and I have experienced a generation of change since our wedding. Hopefully we have learned some things. Hopefully we have grown as individuals. Hopefully, we have become smarter and wiser in the ways we approach life as we move into the different stages of the life cycle.

While 2020 marks our 20th anniversary, 2020 also marks the 130th anniversary of The First Christian Church of Wichita Falls, Texas. As our Centennial book *Inherit the Joy, Continue the Quest*, noted:

In the late summer of 1890 Disciples of Christ missionary G.S. Kimberly visited Wichita Falls. In a letter to the State Board of Missions that September, he observed: "I have just closed my initial meeting...at Wichita Falls. We had a few scattered Disciples at this place, no organization, and no house. We had to move our meeting six times in 17 days and were rained out two Sundays."

Yet, this didn't discourage that early group of disciples. On December 6, 1890, the Christian Missionary Society (an organization that functioned much like our General Church Units do today) purchased a 50' x 150' lot at the southwest corner of Ninth and Lamar for the purpose of constructing the First Christian Church of Wichita Falls. And since that time, there have been various construction projects, a major location change, numerous lay leaders and clergy, the planting of several other Disciples congregations, thousands of lives changed by the mission and ministry of First Christian Church, and more.

More than six generations have called First Christian Church home over the last 130 years. And in the same way, each successive generation has built upon the witness of the

previous generations. Hopefully, we've learned some things. Hopefully we've grown spiritually, numerically, and in wisdom. Hopefully, we've become smarter and better stewards of the mission entrusted to us.

Over the years, I've shared an illustration with couples who are getting married. I ask them to imagine their 20th Wedding Anniversary with a large celebration, surrounded by friends and family. Then I ask them to envision a friend approaching, slapping the groom on the back, and saying, "Way to go! Married to the same woman for 20 years."

That seems reasonable enough. But then I tell the couple that while, in a sense, the friend is right, he is also dead wrong. The groom will not be married to the same woman for 20 years. Then I point out that the cells of our body die and are born again so rapidly that you are a new person every five to seven years. For the typical male, new cells replace the old every five years. For the typical female, cell replacement takes closer to seven years. What this means is that, today, on my 20th Wedding Anniversary, I will be about to start on my third wife and Jodi will be starting on her fifth husband.

While this is a humorous way to think about it, the concept is true. We change as individuals. We are different than we were twenty years ago. Our DNA is still the same, but hopefully we are a little smarter, a little wiser, a little more spiritually mature, a little more in touch with our feelings, and maybe even better off financially.

And this is true for our church, too. We've changed quite a bit as a congregation since 1890. Yet, that same DNA that characterized the eighteen determined men and women who were the charter members of First Christian Church still lives on today. *We are still a family of faith, bound together by [our] common commitment to Christ and [our] caring for one another. (Inherit the Joy...)*

I say all of this because next week, we will have another celebration. Next Thursday, we will celebrate again Christ's nativity. We will celebrate what God did for the world in Jesus Christ (John 3:16) and sing again the words "Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled."

But we can't let next week's celebration simply be the same as it was last year, or ten years ago, or 30 years ago. As we grow and change - as we move into the next stage of the life cycle - we also have the opportunity to hear the Christmas story again and be changed by it. With each passing year, we can understand even more fully what Christ's coming means for us. And with a deepening knowledge of this reality, we can recognize with greater clarity and assurance that God is Emmanuel - a God with us. A God who is faithful to every generation. (Psalm 107) Let's celebrate!

Mark



FCC MINISTRY NEWS AND CALENDAR HIGHLIGHTS



Join us on the East Parking lot Sunday mornings at 8:40 am for a Drive-In Communion service! This short service features hymns, prayers, a message, and communion. Come start your Sunday with this Onsite Worship Experience.

Save the Date to Rise Against Hunger

Mark your calendars for January 9, 2021. On that day, FCC will be partnering with Rise Against Hunger to pack more than 10,000 meals. Watch for registration information later this week.



The **Challenger** is biweekly, with the next publication on Jan. 6! FCC Ministry News is sent by email every Tuesday.

Pantry Sunday – You can continue to help keep the pantry shelves filled by: Donating items needed for Pantry Sunday in December or any type of food items directly anytime into the large box on the porch by the Chapel entrance. **The December collected item(s) will be: Macaroni and Cheese; and Ramen or Cup Noodles...both are needed!!**

If you would like to support Interfaith with a financial gift, you can mail your donation to Interfaith (1101 11th St., Wichita Falls, TX 76301), or you can donate on their [website](#).

Holiday Closings: **Children Come First** will be closed the week of December 21st-25th; will be open the week of December 28th-31st; and be closed on New Year's Day, Friday, January 1st. **Young Ages School** will be closed from December 21st until January 4th and classes will resume on Tuesday, January 5th. The **Church Office** will be closed Christmas Day, December 25th, and the week of December 28th to January 1st. Office Staff will be stopping by during that week to check the mail and messages.

Member News:

♥ **Hospitalized:** No one. Released and back home are Jeanette Showalter.

♥ Our sympathies are extended to Galen Wells & Family on learning of the death of his sister, Mary Sue, on December 5th.

♥ Congratulations to Keith & Ivonne Wineinger & Family on learning that their business "The Burn Shop" won the BBB's "Torch Awards for Ethics – Medium Category"!

Let's Stay Connected...



Christmas Offering 2020



This year the Christian Church in the Southwest has chosen "Hopeful Path" as our Christmas Offering theme and Romans 5:1-5 as the biblical foundation. This passage foreshadowed what this year has proven--that hope doesn't happen by accident. The image of a path symbolizes the work of crafting hope. Paths are not so-much

found as made. Hope like a path is built. Hope is built from God, and to God, and most importantly with God.

"...hope does not disappoint..." These four words come in the middle of the first five verses of Romans 5. It is a promise for the CCSW to claim during the closing months of 2020 and the opening months of 2021. Hope is not wishful thinking, helpless anticipation, or blind optimism. Hope is the gritty determination to remain faithful in the midst of difficulty and hardship. To see a hopeful path and go together along that path in devotion to God our Creator and Sustainer.

We invite you to join us on the Hopeful Path, and we ask you to prayerfully consider your contribution to the ministry of the CCSW on Sunday, December 20, through your checks to "FCC" and designated as "DMF: Christmas Offering" or through the Region's online giving platform at www.ccsw.org/donate. One-hundred percent of your contribution to the Disciples Mission Fund (DMF) Christmas Offering goes to support our Region.

FOR THE RECORD...

CGRM: (Tues., Dec. 8)	28
Neighborhood (Wed., Dec. 9).....	23
Sunday School (Sun. Dec. 13)	47
Worship (Dec. 13): 8:40am Drive In Worship Service .. Did not meet	
10:45am Worship Service	215
Total Worship.	238
Sunday Receipts Needed Per Week	\$18,362.35
Sunday Receipts for 12/13/20	\$9,872.00
Through Dec. 14: Income \$854,843.69	Expenses \$888,634.03

This Sunday:

"Nothing is Impossible"
Luke 1:26-38
Dr. Mark R. Bender

OPPORTUNITIES

Sunday, December 20, 2020

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT / CHRISTMAS OFFERING

8:40 Drive In Worship Service (East Parking Lot)

9:30 Sunday School (In Person & Zoom)

10:45 Worship (Sanctuary or Watch the Livestream on YouTube or Facebook.com/FCCWF)

5:00 Youth (Grades 6-12) (Rm 403/Gym)

6:00 Young Disciples (Grades K-5) (Rm 402)

Monday, December 21, 2020

Children Come First Closed This Week

Young Ages Preschool Closed This Week

7:30 Boy Scouts Troop 15 (Fellowship Hall)

Tuesday, December 22, 2020

9:30 FCC Staff Meeting / Worship Planning (Rm 310/Zoom)

12:00 FCC Staff Christmas Lunch (Fellowship Hall)

NO Common Ground Recovery Ministries Support Groups

Wednesday, December 23, 2020

7:00 Elders' Breakfast (Fellowship Hall)

NO Wednesday Evening Activities

Thursday, December 24, 2020

4:30 Nativity Experience (Front Lawn)

5:00 *A Visit to the Christmas Crib* Service (Sanctuary)

8:00 Traditional Christmas Eve Service (Sanctuary or Watch the Livestream on YouTube or Facebook.com/FCCWF)

11:00 Traditional Christmas Eve Service (Sanctuary)

Friday, December 25, 2020 CHRISTMAS

Church Building, Offices & All Programs Closed

Sunday, December 27, 2020

8:40 Drive In Worship Service (East Parking Lot)

9:30 Sunday School (In Person & Zoom)

10:45 Worship (Sanctuary or Watch the Livestream on YouTube or Facebook.com/FCCWF)

NO Sunday Evening Activities

Monday, December 28, 2020

Church Office Closed This Week

Young Ages Preschool Closed This Week

7:30-6:00 Children Come First (M-F)

8:55-10:30 CCF Music (Rm 220)

9:00-9:30 CCF Chapel (Chapel)

7:30 Boy Scouts Troop 15 (Fellowship Hall)

Tuesday, December 29, 2020

NO Common Ground Recovery Ministries Support Groups

Wednesday, December 30, 2020

7:00 Elders' Breakfast (Fellowship Hall)

8:55-10:30 CCF Chapel (Chapel)

9:00-9:30 CCF Music (Rm 220)

NO Wednesday Evening Activities

Thursday, December 31, 2020

9:00-9:30 CCF Music (Rm 220)

5:00 CCF Closing Early

Friday, January 1, 2021 NEW YEAR'S DAY

Church Building, Offices & All Programs Closed

Sunday, January 3, 2021 PANTRY SUNDAY

8:40 Drive In Worship Service (East Parking Lot)

9:30 Sunday School (In Person & Zoom)

10:45 Worship (Sanctuary or Watch the Livestream on YouTube or Facebook.com/FCCWF)

4:00 Chancel Choir (High School-Adults) (Sanctuary)

5:00 Youth (Grades 6-12) (Rm 403/Gym)

6:00 Young Disciples (Grades K-5) (Rm 402)

Monday, January 4, 2021

7:30-6:00 Children Come First (M-F)

8:55-10:30 CCF Music (Rm 220)

9:00-9:30 CCF Chapel (Chapel)

9:00 YAS Teacher In-Service

7:30 Boy Scouts Troop 15 (Fellowship Hall)

Tuesday, January 5, 2021

9:00-12:00 Young Ages School "YAS" (T-F)

9:30 FCC Staff Meeting / Worship Planning (Rm 310/Zoom)

11:00 Whirlwind Cluster Ministers Meeting

6:30 CGRM Support Groups (Rm 304-308)

Wednesday, January 6, 2021

7:00 Elders' Breakfast (Fellowship Hall)

8:55-10:30 CCF Chapel (Chapel)

9:00-9:30 CCF Music (Rm 220)

5:30 Brown Bag Fellowship (Fellowship Hall)

6:00 Neighborhood Worship (Fellowship Hall)

6:00 First Kidz (PreK-5th) (Rm 402)

7:00 Youth (Grades 6-12) (Rm 403/Gym)

7:00 Chancel Ringers (High School-Adults) (Stratten Hall)

Thursday, January 7, 2021

9:00-9:30 CCF Music (Rm 220)

10:00-10:30 YAS Chapel (Chapel)

6:00 College Bible Study (Rapid Fire)

Friday, January 8, 2021

8:55-10:30 CCF Music (Rm 220)

10:00-10:30 YAS Chapel (Chapel)

Saturday, January 9, 2021

9:00-3:00 Rise Against Hunger (Fellowship Hall & Gym)

SERVING SUNDAY

ELDERS

12/20: Emily Wilson, Gary Ballard; Cheryl Smiley, Presiding

12/24, 8:00: Ricky Scales, Linda C. Carr; Cindy Hernandez, Presiding

12/24, 11:00: Linda Cook, Jerry Johnson; Howard Morris, Presiding

12/27: Kathleen Lauck, Richard Phillips; Ricky Scales, Presiding

DECEMBER DIACONATE SERVERS

Dave Clark, Captain

Ashley & Kyle Burross, Linda Gipson, Ann Kable, Curtis Sullivan, Brandi Brannon,

Fred Gentry, Margaret Phillips, Fred & Jane Ridenour, Jodi Bender, Leann Elder,

Robert Hastings, Stacey Lingbeek, Ashley Warton, Abby Bender.

THE CHURCH STAFF...

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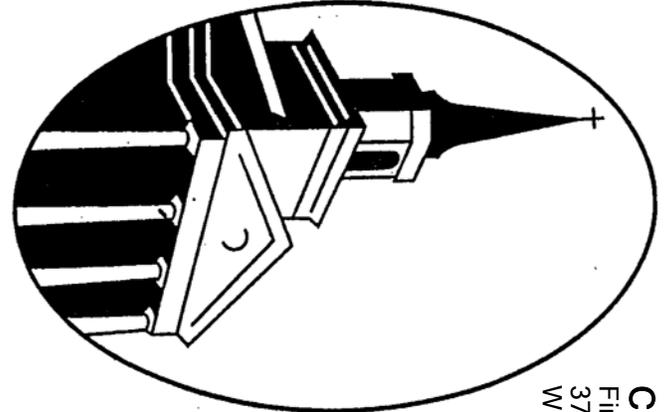
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