

The Circuit Rider



First United Methodist Church, Harlan
Monroe Chapel United Methodist Church

NOVEMBER 2020

SIGN UP FOR THE ADVENT STUDY: "Incarnation"

Adam Hamilton's Advent study "Incarnation" will be offered Sunday evenings at 6:30pm via Zoom, November 29 through December 20. **Let us know by November 8th if you will be participating.**

Here is a description of the study: *His parents gave him the name Jesus, but the prophets, the shepherds, the wise men, and the angels addressed him by other names. They called him Lord, Messiah, Savior, Emmanuel, Light of the World, and Word Made Flesh. In Incarnation: Rediscovering the Significance of Christmas, author Adam Hamilton examines the names of Christ used by the gospel writers, exploring the historical and personal significance of his birth. Now more than ever, we invite you to reflect upon the significance of the Christ child - who brings us together, heals our hearts, and calls us to bring light into the darkness - for our lives and world today!*



HOLIDAY POINSETTIA SALE



Order your holiday poinsettias from the Senior High Youth. There are **3 sizes** available this year: 4.5" Pixie - \$8, 6" Medium - \$12, 8" Large - \$24, and plants will only come in red or white. **Place your order by November 13th by calling or emailing the church office.** Plants will be available December 3rd. *The Youth adopt kids through the Christmas Adopt-a-Family and use poinsettia proceeds to buy the gifts.*

You can also order a pixie poinsettia to be delivered to our nursing home residents and shut-in's.

ADVENT DECORATING



All are invited to help decorate the church for the Christmas season following worship on **Sunday, November 22nd**. Let the office know if you plan to help.



MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR THE COOKIE WALK

The UMW will have their annual Cookie Walk & Lunch this year Covid-style! It will be held **Wednesday, December 9th**, 11:00am-1:00pm with the theme "A Cheery Covid Christmas". There will be pre-boxed cookies to go (no walk), take out soup and dessert of your choice (no seated dining), and a walk-through craft cupboard. There will be hostesses to guide you through and masks will be required.



We are looking for cookies! Any person in our church may donate small festive holiday cookies. Twelve dozen is the suggested amount, but we appreciate whatever you give!

Tickets for lunch are \$8.00. Tickets for pre-boxed cookies are \$12.00 per box. You may pre-order your cookies by calling or emailing the church office.



ALSO - the women are looking for donations to be sold in their cabinet at the Cookie Walk Lunch. Items could include small crafts, canned goods, baked goods, crocheted items, etc. Let Sandy know at 744-3344 if you can donate.

COMMITMENT SUNDAY & SUNDAY SERMONS



We will finish up the sermon series on The Lord's Prayer on November 8th. **Sunday, November 15th** is the day we make our financial commitment to the 2021 mission and ministry of First United Methodist Church. You will receive a mailing with a pledge card, or if you attend worship you can turn in your pledge at the end of the service.

The Advent series "How Can I Celebrate When..." will begin November 29. We all have a mental image of the picture-perfect Christmas and feel pressure to produce the perfect holiday gathering. Unfortunately life gets messy, which makes the holidays hard. This is especially true this year with the pandemic. The series will talk about how we can celebrate when life just isn't working out the way we thought it would.



WEDNESDAY NIGHT UPDATE



Wednesday evening activities are underway, with all grades meeting each week. Groups alternate being in separate classrooms one week, then PreK-8th are in the Sanctuary and 9-12th in their room the next week.

The Wednesday night program is going through some transformations, aligning with the resources we have at this time. **You can still help!** You can donate toward meal supplies OR toward activity supplies. The weeks that PreK-8th are in the Sanctuary, there is a theme and the kids do a craft or activity, have a snack, and are sent home with a treat or trinket. Contact Ronda with any questions.



THANK YOU'S

❖ Thank you to all for your thoughts and prayers for my father Jack Hawn, who passed away peacefully on October 20th. We appreciate your support.

– Dan & Jan McElwain

❖ Thank you to my church family for the cards and calls following my surgery. – Judy Obrecht

❖ Thank you to Dan & Pat Kleinpaste for replacing and putting up the courtyard flags!

❖ Thank you to those who donated items for the Mitten Tree. Donations will be taken to the schools this month.

FIRST UMC FINANCES

As we go through this season of Thanksgiving and stewardship, please remember that it takes all of us to make a church and YOU are an important part of the church. Thank you for the support you have given to the mission and ministry of First United Methodist Church!



A MOMENT WITH MIKE

A couple of weeks ago, we asked the Harlan First congregation to fill out an online survey to measure how our congregation is engaging in worship, and the response was incredible! Thanks to all of you who took the time to fill out the survey. What we have learned is that most of you are engaging in worship, either in person or virtually. We have heard that for those who are not worshipping in person (either worshipping virtually or not at all) some of you are waiting until it is safer to attend, and some of you do not like the precautions that are in place. Then, there are some who are not engaging in worship at our church.

I understand that many of us in both Monroe Chapel and Harlan First have different opinions about how safe or unsafe it may be to worship in person and whether or not we should have precautions in place. As your pastor, it is my conviction and that of the Iowa Annual Conference that we need to keep our precautions in place in order to lower the risk of worshipping in person. We cannot guarantee safety, but we can decrease the chance of virus transmission. Thanks to all who dutifully follow the precautions. From the comments in the survey, I noticed some frequent themes and questions that came up, so I would like to address them here.

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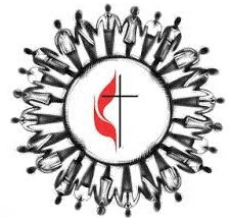
SHARE YOUR TALENTS!



Do you have a musical talent you would like to share? As a way to remain connected during this time, we are going to have what we call **Music Mondays**. On Music Mondays, we will post a video of someone from our church displaying a musical talent on our Facebook page and website. Use your phone or whatever device you prefer to record a video of yourself singing or playing your instrument and then send the video to michael.agnew@iaumc.net.

MISSION INGATHERING

Ingathering began in 1980 as a way for Iowa United Methodists to address humanitarian problems of hunger, poverty, and disaster. Every year the Ingathering collects kits for distribution and gathers together. Due to the current situation, there will be no gathering together for the bake sale, auction, speakers, music, and lunch. Kits will be dropped off at the Greenfield UMC on November 7th and we will hope things can return to normal next year.



This year Monroe Chapel donated 35 Health Kits, 49 School Kits, fund for kit shipping, and a monetary donation. Special thanks to members for the donations, sewing bags, and help assembling the kits.

First UMC donated 10 Health Kits, 30 School Kits, funds for kit shipping, and a monetary donation.

Thank you to ALL for your generosity this year.

Question: Why is it necessary to wear a mask when we are already social distancing?

Answer: Although we sometimes hear that we should wear a mask when it is impossible to social distance, which is true, that does not mean we do not need masks if we are social distancing. Studies have shown that although most larger droplets caused by coughing and sneezing usually fall to the ground within six feet, smaller aerosols can remain suspended in the air and travel quite farther than six feet. Therefore, sitting six feet apart lowers your risk, but it is not a guarantee. Masks also lower the risk but are not a guarantee. Together, they represent the most we can do to protect one another for those who choose to worship in person.

Question: Why is it o.k. for singers and the pastor to take their masks off, but not the congregation?

Answer: Those of us leading worship are allowed to take our masks off when singing or speaking because we are able to maintain a distance of at least fifteen feet between us and the congregation. Conference guidelines give this distance as the distance required to allow the leaders to unmask. Nonetheless, I instruct our worship leaders to wear their masks when not speaking or singing. At Monroe Chapel, since the building is smaller, I keep my mask on for the entire service, including the sermon.

Question: Could we have a certain section of the sanctuary dedicated for those who would like to take off their masks?

Answer: Although this may seem like a viable option, the problem with this is that worship consists of a large group of people in an enclosed space for a long period of time. Having a certain section in the sanctuary where people can unmask would be similar to what restaurants tried to do when they would have smoking and non-smoking sections. It didn't really work, because the smoke would end up circulating outside of the smoking area, and you would especially notice it if you were unfortunate enough to be seated right at the edge of the non-smoking section. Just as smoke can circulate through the air, the simple act of breathing is shown in studies to circulate the virus in the air through small droplets called aerosols. Masks do not completely stop this, but they help.

Question: Why do we have precautions in place when some churches in town are operating without them?

Answer: As I have spoken with many of the pastors in town, I find that some churches are operating without precautions, some are operating with similar precautions, and some have not yet met indoors for worship. Each church makes decisions based on their own context and thoughts on the matter, but I am primarily concerned with our congregation and not with what other churches are doing.

Thought: Worship is not as welcoming as it used to be. It feels cold and depressing. We are missing fellowship.

Answer: I understand and sympathize with the fact that we are missing what used to be. We are missing the familiar, the connections, and the sense of fellowship. We are doing what we can to foster connection through small group studies and some Zoom fellowship events we had in the past. We will try to schedule more of those, and we will try out some new ways to foster connection virtually, but I understand that these are not the same as what used to be. Unfortunately, the reality is that worshipping in a church is considered to be one of the higher risk activities a person can engage in. There is not a safe way to get the same feeling of connection when worshipping in church as there used to be, which is one reason why we waited to resume in person worship. With the necessary precautions, worship will feel less than ideal. That is why some are choosing to worship virtually. They can leave the mask off and sing. I know neither option feels like it used to, but until this pandemic is over, what used to be will not be safe.

Thought: If we keep precautions in place, we may lose people, and it may be hard to recover.

Answer: We may indeed have some rebuilding to do after the pandemic is over. It saddens me to think that some would choose to leave their church because they feel we are being too cautious in our attempts to safeguard the health and well-being of our congregation. Nonetheless, having precautions in place is the right thing to do.

I know this is hard. I know that wearing masks and distancing is not fun, and not being able to sing takes away from our worship experience. Nonetheless, I believe we need to worship in ways that are deemed to be as safe as possible for all who may want to attend, including the most vulnerable in our midst. Jesus was clear on multiple occasions about the need to care for the vulnerable, and the reality is that with this virus, we are all vulnerable. We can remain strong through all of this. As Christians and as caring citizens of our world, we are currently being called to sacrifice our "normal" life until we get through this. This pandemic will not last forever. Until then, we must persevere, knowing that this pandemic is not the end of the story. Thanks be to God!

Pastor Mike