

Hiram Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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Hiram, OH 44234



Hiram Christian Church

P.O. Box 937, 6868 Wakefield Rd., Hiram, Ohio 44234
330-569-7697 HiramChristianChurch.org
Ministers: All Who Serve Here Reverend Chris McCreight
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Hiram Christian Church is a spiritual and social center for the Hiram community.

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

February 2023

God Finds Entry in the Soft Heart

Matthew 5...

Blessed are the poor in spirit...

Blessed are those who mourn...

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...

It is a different blessing when we read and hear them without the adjoining promise. This is certainly not to remove the promise from the word of Christ, but it is perhaps a beneficial tool to call our attention to the real and present blessing. Christ blessed the people, the category, and the condition. And perhaps there too, it is nothing that Christ had to bless in order to make it "good" but something Christ had to name in order to call our attention to the vulnerability we may wish to evade.

There are two forms of the Beatitudes within the gospels. The Gospel Author of Luke (6.20) includes it within the "Sermon on the Plain" (Luke holds a theme of "lowliness" throughout) and there emphasizes a material state of the human body - poverty, hunger, exclusion. According to Luke, the divine pronouncements of the beatitudes stress the profound shift in theology that God would favor and bless the conditions of the physical body that the world identifies as weakness and unworthy, creating a profound shift in ecclesiology (matters of the community) and welcoming those that power had marginalized. The Gospel Author of Matthew reiterates the beatitudes with an emphasis on the condition of the heart: "poor in spirit," "mourn," "hunger and thirst for righteousness." These are conditions of the heart that are on the losing side according to the powers of the world - they are all indications and acknowledgments of weakness. And Christ blesses these hearts - the condition they are in and the people who hold them.

Blessed is the heart who knows of its belonging to God, but has not found a community to honor the same truth.

Blessed is the heart that has loved, accompanied, and hoped, and lost.

Blessed is the heart who understands the pains and sufferings of injustice and has offered itself to justice, only to encounter struggle.

These conditions of the heart... it's defeated in one perspective. But it's holy from the perspective of Christ. For the heart in every one of these named blessings has offered itself to great love. There is the blessing. We can honor the promises of what will come to every wounded heart, but let us not overlook the blessing made plain - that the vulnerable heart is named for it is the heart that is open to great love.

May we have the courage to offer our hearts to great love, and discover blessing upon blessing as we do.

Peace,
Rev. Chris McCreight

iALERT...If the weather is bad on Sunday mornings, please remember to check for church cancellations through the iALERT system. Find cancellations on Channel 3, at www.wky.com and on news radio WTAM 1100.

Worship Schedule: Sundays @ 11:00am – hybrid service

Bulletins and the newsletter are available on our website.
See the site's calendar page for up-to-date events and zoom links to events.

The Minister's schedule: Rev. Chris has resumed some office hours. Please connect with him at Chris@HiramChristianChurch.org or 330-977-7834.

COMING EVENTS:

Feb. 5 & Mar. 5: Potluck after worship, and Food Collection for the 4C's / NGCC

Feb. 28: Men serving breakfast, 6:30-9:30am in Fellowship Hall

Mar. 11: St. Joseph's in Mantua – free clothing giveaway 9am – 12pm

**Please note: Anyone wishing a hard copy of any of the board minutes should contact the church office at 330-569-7697 or secretary@hiramchristianchurch.org.

Stewardship: If you would like to financially support the ministries of Hiram Christian Church, please know that you can donate online from our website (HiramChristianChurch.org) or you can set regular contributions using BillPay from your bank. Thank you for being a part of Hiram Christian Church.

From our Moderator, Kristen Pool:

In 1931, librarian S. R. Ranganathan proposed five principles for operating a successful library system. Principles 2 and 3 are “Every reader his/her book” and “Every book its reader.” When I am ordering books for my library, I often think about these principles. I ask myself, “Will every reader in my diverse community come in and find a book that meets their educational, recreational, informational, and cultural needs? Will every book we purchase get checked out, read, and appreciated by a reader?”

Lately, I’ve been thinking about how Ranganathan’s principles could have an application for the Church. Could we say “Every member his/her ministry and Every ministry his/her member”?

What if everyone who engaged with Hiram Christian Church found a ministry that would not only meet their spiritual needs, but also serve the Kingdom of God? What if every opportunity for ministry that arose had someone to cultivate and grow it for a bountiful harvest?

At the Annual Meeting in November, we identified seven Teams: Church in the World, Hospitality, Stewards, Spiritual Formation, Finance, Memorials, and Personnel. Each of these Teams offers rich ministry opportunities; the Teams provide the framework for doing the good work we are called to by Jesus the Christ, and which he modeled during his life.

I would love to see every member and friend of the church actively engaged in a ministry that best suits his or her spiritual gifts. I would love to see ministries starting up from the roots, and members eagerly coming forward to tend to them.

The Team structure is a way for this to happen. Each Team provides opportunities for ministry and service--large and small, long and short term, established and still just potential. This year, the opportunities and the needs are especially important, as we act on our Vision: *To be partners in God’s healing work through a wide welcome of all, through cultivating relationship and beloved community, and by following Christ in the way of Love.*

What ministry will you focus on this year? What Good will you do in service of the Kingdom of God and our community?

I encourage you to consider this with prayer and discernment. If you feel God calling you to serve in some way, contact a Team Leader, Pastor Chris, Head Elder Marcia Muster, or myself. We’d be glad to discuss your calling or help you identify it.

In Love, Kristen

Words of gratitude:

Dear Church Family,
Thank you so much for the Christmas goodie bag. So many neat things in the bag. Your kindness was much appreciated. Joan and John Boyle

Dear Congregation,
Thank you so much for the beautiful gift bag we received for Christmas. It was such a nice surprise to see Ron Etling on our porch with the bag for us. Everything was so appreciated – the plant, homemade cookies, banana bread, candy and much more. It was so very thoughtful of all of you. We miss seeing everyone and hope to be able to attend church soon. Many thanks again, Dale & Nancy Lacan

Many thanks for all the prayers for my improved sight. Still not 100%, but better. Sandy Coffman.

Hospitality (cont.):

Prayers for Healing and Strength (cont.):

* Jamie’s Daughter, Elizabeth, fell and hurt her knee. Prayers for healing. * Damaris’ daughter-in-law, Hazel, has been injured (spinal) by two auto collisions recently. * Missy’s grandma was in the hospital. * Denny Ursick is being treated for leukemia. * David Peters had back surgery due to injuries from a past accident. Prayers for him as he recovers. * Robin asks for prayers for Lea, her brother’s wife. She has a health condition that needs treatments. * Laurie’s friend’s mom was in ICU. * Kathy’s brother, Chris was in the hospital. being treated for Guillain-Barre Syndrome, in which the immune system attacks the nerves causing muscle weakness & paralysis. There is no cure but IV treatments are relieving symptoms & he will need physical therapy to help him walk again. Please keep him in your prayers. * Robin asks for prayers for a friend who is receiving treatment. Prayers for healing. * Karen has friends who are leaving for Africa. May they experience safety, joy and adventure. * Prayers for Kathi Kidwell (cousin of Nancy and Jan). She has been re-admitted to the hospital after complications from heart surgery. She now has sepsis, and is struggling. Prayers for strength and healing. * Prayers for Lucy’s sister, JoAnn, who has entered hospice care.

Prayers for Students, Nations, and Churches:

Emliss asks for prayers for our country as we heal from public discourse. * Blessings to the task force that is honoring saints and martyrs. * Prayers for the people in California as they are dealing with storms and flooding. Prayers for all experiencing natural disasters. * Chris asks for prayers for the Catholic church at the loss of Pope Benedict. Also, prayers for Ukraine and Russia. * Global Ministries sent a notification that the Congo River and the Ubangi River have flooded terribly and caused 170 fatalities. Prayers needed for the people of equatorial Africa. * Prayers for our nation as we honor Martin Luther King, Jr.’s vision for all of us. * Chris asks for prayers for ourselves to bring peace. Also, for our Jewish siblings for Anti-Semitism. May we find a connection with these brothers and sisters. * Marcia asks for prayers for all teachers- especially those in Akron who are facing challenging times. Also, prayers for family and friends of the Virginia teacher who was shot. * Prayers for those people affected by the recent snow storm, especially those in Buffalo. * Prayers for our siblings in Ukraine and Russia and neighboring countries who are providing a haven for citizens of Ukraine. * Prayers for Sandy’s brother Bill Hathaway who is home recovering from hip surgery. * Prayers for Dave Kilroy, one of the Lunch Bunch, who is healing at home after a hospital visit. * Please pray for John Boyle’s mother, Mary Ellon, who is undergoing surgery on her hip after a fall.

Blessings and Celebrations:

Thanks for the beauty of snow. * Great blessings and gratitude for Owen Andrew, born to Sean and Samantha Keefe. Tom and Shari are grandparents. * Prayers of gratitude for the generosity of the congregation in filling the Gift Bags. Comfort and prayers for the recipients. * Prayers of joy for a peaceful New Year. * Betsy gives gratitude for good, fun news from her granddaughter, who is in New Zealand. * Thanks and blessings to Rev. Elyse Berry for her inspiring message. * Blessings of birthdays - Damaris Peters-Pike and Jaci Swanda are both celebrating. * Gratitude for new friends and community in our congregation. Recent visitors: Marcia and daughter Gillian, Lean and Larry Lacivita, Scott and Kathy Maretka, Cathy Clavner, Pam Braden.

Cards and Caring Team has published a list of names and addresses for our friends who are unable to attend regularly or who “head south” for the winter. Please remember to send cards or call our friends and keep them in your prayers.

We Will Pray for You and Yours: Our prayer chain goes out to 40+ people over email. If you have a request, please contact Nancy Schauer (dnsofhiram@gmail.com or 330-569-7416). If you’d like to receive emails, we’d be happy to add you to the group (also, if you want to discontinue receiving, let us know).

Spiritual Formation:

p.8

We begin our study of the life of Jesus. Teacher Sadie Qualls has returned from winter break. Parents/friends are needed to assist in the classroom. Let Nancy know if you can help.

Kids have “enthusiastically” begun using the chimes. We will perform during worship soon.

We are hoping to enjoy some social gatherings outside of Sunday morning. Thanks to the McCreights for planning a hike/ or sledding gathering on February 5.

Hospitality:

Men Serving Breakfast:

It is with great excitement and hungry bellies that we once again come together to share fellowship and good food every 4th Tuesday from 6:30 - 9:30 am, with Men Serving Breakfast. Men make the breakfast, but everyone is invited to partake.

Starting Tuesday, January 24, enjoy a monthly chef-inspired, made to order hot breakfast and catch up with friends before starting your day. Just drop in when you can and stay as long as you like!

Breakfast is free, but donations to defray costs are welcome. For more information or to volunteer to help with this ministry from the Hospitality Team, contact head chef, Emliss Ricks.

In the Life of the Congregation:

Prayers of comfort:

Prayers for Trish and the Hoobler family at the passing of Mike Hoobler. * Jane asks for prayers for the family and friends of Tyler Davis who passed. Also, prayers for all who grieve. * Leah and Larry Lacivita are grieving with their family after the loss of their daughter, Stacy. Prayers of comfort. * Prayers for the Berkshire school community as one of their beloved teachers, Joseph Randall, was killed in an accident. Grateful for his many years of educating students.

Prayers for Healing and Strength:

Charlene's grandson, Tyler, was in Children's hospital with an intestinal virus. Prayer for comfort and recovery. * Ann Patella's friend, Debbie in Arizona, thanks you for your prayers. They have been answered, with support coming from nearby family members who were previously estranged. The struggle continues. Debbie's husband Terry had a stroke and has been placed in hospice care. Please continue to keep the entire family in your prayers. They need faith and wisdom and courage at this difficult time. * Debbie Haylett has been diagnosed with stage 4 cancer. She has started chemo, so please keep her & her family in your prayers. * Richard Masters could still use prayers of comfort and healing as he recovers from surgeries. * Joan's friend, Jace, is still awaiting a kidney. He has dialysis 3 days a week. His sister Jama, is suffering from long term covid. She had to quit work so sad. * Rick asks for prayers for his son, Matthew, who is healing from a broken foot and the flu. * Margaret's friend, Patrice, had a second knee replacement. Prayers as she heals. * Please keep Kristen's parents, Connie and Jerry, in your prayers. On top of her bad hip and waiting to get an MRI to find out what else is going on with her, she also had the flu! She is waiting for news from her biopsy. Kristen's dad is still having difficulty walking from his fall on his knees in the summer. * Prayers for Mary Ann, Dawn's grandmother, who was in the hospital. * Prayers for Cathy, friend of Mary Bittance. She is ill and needs prayers for comfort and healing. * Sandy reports the good news that Carol Kilroy (lunch bunch friend) is home from the hospital/rehab and is doing well. * Sandy Coffman continues to recover from cataract surgery. Eyes are healing, but slowly. * Ken Pike's sister, Kay, had spinal surgery. It didn't go well and she needs it again. * Robin's Uncle Ken has been hospitalized- prayers for his comfort and healing and prayers for his doctors for answers and treatments.

Partners in Ministry:

p. 3

4Cs' Needs: For February – dishwashing soap, cookies, shampoo. Monetary donations can be sent to: The 4C's, P.O. Box 227, Mantua, OH 44255

Stewardship:

Do a Dollar - From your Church Treasurer:

We finished 2022 with a deficit far smaller than we had predicted! We had a balance of about \$22,600 to carry forward into the new year. However, our proposed budget for 2023 still calls for slightly more than that just to be in balance.



Our income for 2023 will need to increase by almost \$23,000 in order to meet budgeted expenses. We currently have about 65 households who contribute regularly to Hiram Christian Church. If each household would contribute just one more dollar for each day in 2023, we could avoid a deficit.

How about it? Is it worth a dollar a day from your household to balance our budget?

Can you “Do a Dollar?”

Worship:

New Bibles for the Pews:

Have you noticed the new Bibles in the pews of our sanctuary? On Christmas Eve, we began using 60 new Bibles. They are the New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition—the version recommended by Rev. Chris McCreight. They were funded entirely by generous donations from church members and friends. Each Bible has a front page naming the donor(s) and the person or people honored or remembered by the donation.

We now have thirteen additional Bibles (same edition)—again funded entirely by donations. They will be inscribed and placed in the pews soon—and there are plans also to provide donated magnifying bookmarks to help some of our older eyes as we read the scriptures.

Thank you to all who donated to provide Bibles, and thank you to all the writers who inscribed the dedication pages. We are blessed to have these Bibles available every Sunday.

Preparations and Plans for the Sabbatical:

Sabbatical is a generous and generative gift. It is a time of renewal for the clergy member, where one is invited into a rare season that may lead them into rhythms, ideas, and communities that are new and old. It is a time of renewal for the congregation as well, where they are visited by a new minister or ministers, who serve with their faithful gifts and graces. There is renewal within each body that leads to a generative gift in the return to partnership and service.

I am grateful that Hiram Christian Church has understood the benefit of sabbatical - having a history of including sabbatical within their letters of call with past ministers. I am grateful that the church has understood the need to set aside resources and prepare for the hiring of an interim minister as well. And I am grateful for the sabbatical team, who, among other things, has helped me to construct a framework for this upcoming season (April 17 - August 13).

(cont.)

Worship (cont.):

p. 5

Update from the Sabbatical Team:

The Sabbatical Team will be interviewing a candidate to serve as the interim minister (April 16-Aug 13) and will report back to the congregation about the progress. This search process has benefited from the connection and care from our Regional Minister, Rev. Allen Harris, and Regional Elder, Rev. Terry Bartlett. Please continue to be in prayer for the sabbatical team and congregation as we prepare for this exciting season within the life of the church.

Update from the Worship Team:

The worship team met Sunday, January 29, to review the service and begin to imagine the upcoming season of Lent, which begins on February 22nd with Ash Wednesday.

Our theme for the season will be, *Everything (and Everyone) Belongs*.

As it comes to Lent, it is nearly an "Anti-Lent" thematic. For while common practice has invited us to reflect upon our lives and consider what one thing we'd like to give up for the season to draw us closer to God, this will proceed another direction and ask us to reflect upon those elements of our being that we may wish to give up and forfeit (and spend great deals of energy and time trying to deny ourselves) and seek to acknowledge, honor, and perhaps even love that part of the self.

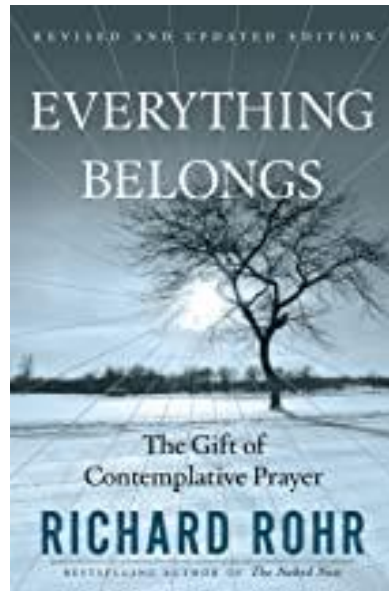
It is the hope that this season will lead us to embrace ourselves as beloved children of God (the whole self) and lead us to more deeply love ourselves. This, in turn, is to cultivate a broader and deeper love that we may offer others.

As our visioning process has led us to identify three priorities for this season: discipleship/tradition, belonging, and loving justice in our communities - I think that this Lenten theme will engage the wisdom and grace of our tradition, cultivate a stronger sense of our belonging to God and self, and lead us in stepping into our homes and communities with a transforming love and vision for our time.

Lenten Study:

Rev. Chris will be leading a Lenten study on Friar Richard Rohr's work, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer*

The schedule of the meeting will be determined by those interested in attending. So please inform Rev. Chris of your interest and if you will need a book, and we'll go from there!



Lenten Schedule

p. 6

Ash Wednesday, February 22

12pm at Hiram College:

Father Conoboy from Aurora (Our Lady of Perpetual Help) will lead an Ash Wednesday service at the Fisher All-Faith Chapel and Meeting House.

7pm at Mantua Center:

Our shared season of worship begins with an Ash Wednesday service at MCCC.

Maundy Thursday, April 6

7pm at Hiram Christian Church:

We will be hosting a Tenebrae service for our communities and congregations.

Good Friday, April 7

12pm at Hiram Christian Church:

We will be hosting a Good Friday service for our communities and congregations.

The prayer vigil will begin following the Good Friday service and continue until noon of Saturday, April 8th.

Easter Sunday, April 9

Sunrise at Derthick's Farm: (6am-ish)

The Derthick family will be hosting the annual sunrise service on Easter Sunday.

11am at Hiram Christian Church:

Easter Celebration

(from p. 3)

p. 4

I am pleased to share the framework with you here:

I have identified the following intentions for this sabbatical: contemplative practice, reading, worship, and deep rest.

I will participate in coursework with the Center for Action and Contemplation, and then take retreat at the Gethsemani Abbey to continue to learn and engage this practice. My hope is that I may more deeply understand contemplative prayer and practice, that I may be able to guide others in the approach and beginning practice.

I have amassed a wonderful library of books of poetry, practice, theology, management, etc and engage it sparingly due to time and energy. I would like to incorporate a practice of reading daily, establishing a new rhythm to continue upon return.

I will visit and attend worship throughout the sabbatical season. It is my intention to not only attend worship at neighboring churches, but to attend worship at Synagogues and Mosques as well. My desire in this is to not only engage in the practice of worship, but to learn how other communities of faith create their services, and to establish a sense of relationship with clergy in Northeast Ohio.

And, I plan to rest well. It is common practice for new clergy to engage more fully with the congregation in the first year of call - listening, learning, and creating relationships. I am unsure if the nature of a bi-vocational call leads this intense engagement to be a bi-annual process, or if my excitement led me to over-extend myself in ways, but I found this to be the case - a situation I was pleased with and content with. Of course, right about the time I saw a sense of "balance" come into view, the pandemic entered the landscape and that has brought its own disruption to everyone. I am eager to use this time to rest well and also establish a rhythm of rest that can continue upon and after my return, because we know from our tradition and experience that regular practices of rest are holy all by itself, and they have the added gift of leading us to live and serve better.

Restoration and Learning:

I am interested in attending various communities of faith and organizations of sacred practice to participate in services of worship as appropriate, to learn how others lead/organize/teach practices, and to develop some familiarity if not relationship with clergy and leaders in Northeast Ohio.

- I would like to visit and attend The Hive in Cincinnati for 3-4 days.
 - This is the organization that was co-created by a friend of mine years ago. It is not a community of a particular faith, but a community of people engaged in sacred practices and shared service. I think that there is something to learn from here that may serve our Hiram community well.
- I would like to visit and attend worship at Temples, Mosques, and Churches in Northeast Ohio.
 - This would serve my soul while also provide exposure to learn how other clergy lead worship, engage the congregation, and serve their communities.
 - I would plan to spend approximately six weekends attending services.

Peace,
Rev. Chris

Church in the World:

p. 7

The Church in the World team is looking for those who wish to engage in local projects as well as wider-reaching projects. At this point, 2 proposals are: plastic bag recycling, possibly with the Harner boys (more info coming soon); and "Hugs from HiramCC", a prayer shawl ministry to comfort those in need, showing that they are supported in times of crisis or just through sad times. For this, we are looking for people to create shawls or scarves to gift as well as those who might need a hug. Shawls can be whatever material (fleece, knitted or crocheted, sewn). We will gather them and bless them and give to those in need. If you would like to participate in this community ministry, contact Margaret Green-Masters. Marggreen0601@gmail.com.

I have other ideas and would like to brainstorm with you, as well. I'm reserving a table at the next potluck on February 5th, if you would care to join me.

Food collection returns on the first Sunday of each month:

Beginning February 5th, the children will collect items from the congregation, and volunteers will deliver the items to the 4C's and NGCC food pantries. Food cupboards accept most any non-perishable food items, no expired use by dates. They also take basic hygiene items, toothpaste, single roll toilet paper and such. Cash donations on these Sundays is also appreciated.

Growing Hope Globally: Maple Tapping

It may be snowy midwinter, but nature pushes on to spring, and it is time to start preparing for our sap collection for our maple syrup season. Collecting bags and jugs have been ordered. Last year, despite our setbacks with defective collecting bags,

we still produced and sold enough syrup to send \$1,430 to Growing Hope Globally to support the Guatemala Nebaj Quetzaltenango program.

Families in the western highlands of Guatemala have been victims of climate change and the dangers of political corruption, drug cartels and assassinations. Families have chosen to migrate north in search of safety, food and employment. Several from this region were among the dead migrants found in a tractor-trailer outside of San Antonio, TX.

We can help during this crisis by providing seeds and training for families to grow their own food, yielding enough for family sustenance and even surplus to sell at market. This means they can stay in their home communities with their families.

You can help

1. **Preparing the bags**
2. **Tapping and collecting sap**
3. **Bottling the syrup**
4. **Tagging bottles for sale**
5. **Purchasing syrup to gift to friends or enjoy at your table.**

We look forward to collaborating again this year with Nathan Goodell, and with the Hiram College Field Station students and staff on this exciting project.

If you are able to help this year, contact Jon Moody (jandjmoody@msn.com) 330-527-2837, or call the church office 330-569-7697.

