

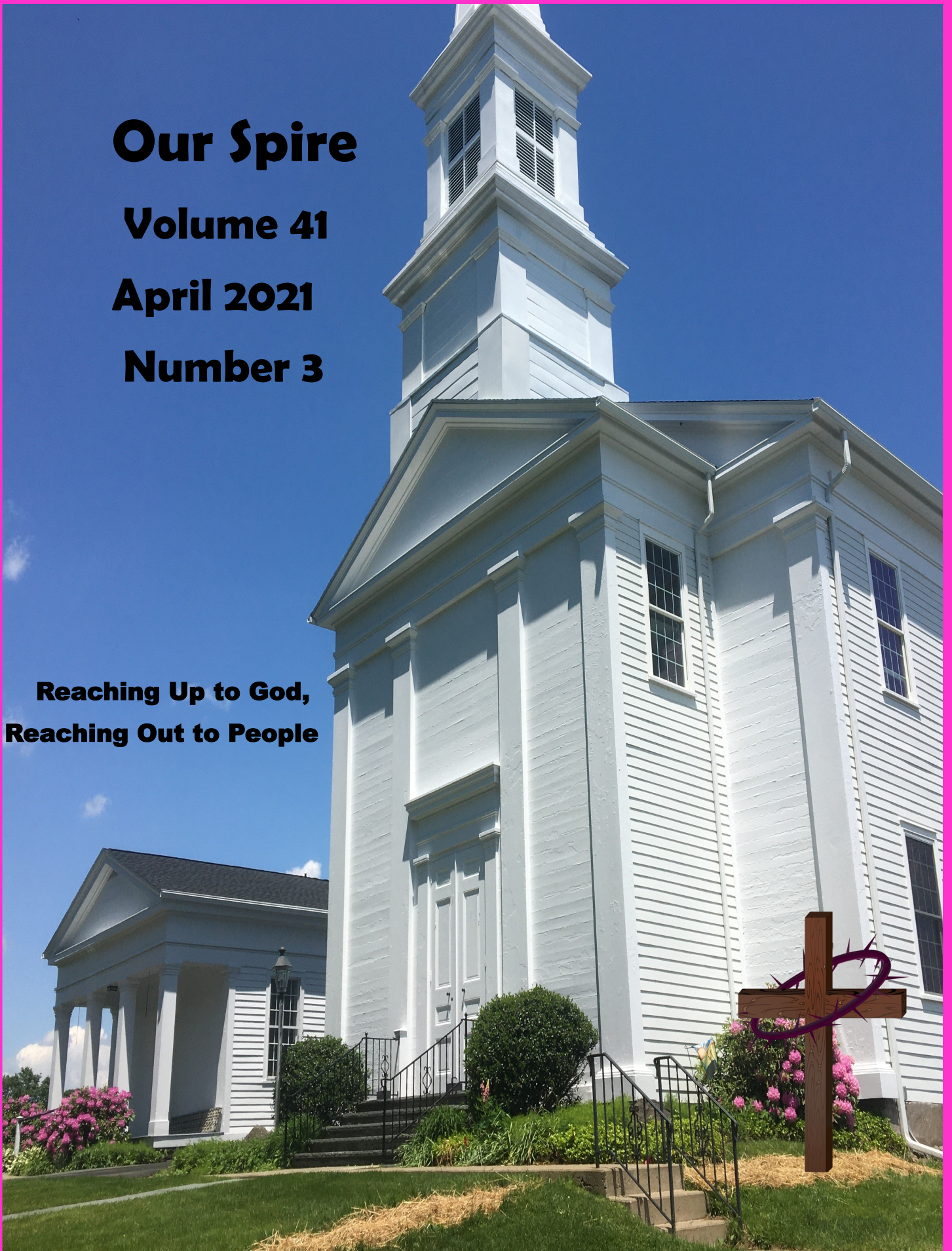
Our Spire

Volume 41

April 2021

Number 3

**Reaching Up to God,
Reaching Out to People**



“Take Up Your Cross”

Pastor John Shaffer -- Gibson Charge UMC



Mark 8:31-38 If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

I find for us, people of Christian faith, living in the advantage of “this side of Easter”, this text makes sense. We probably don’t even flinch at the thought of the cross. In the season of Lent we are, day by day, moving towards Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Keeping a focus on those events, this text has a clear meaning for us. And, I think it had the same clear meaning for Mark’s first literary audience: Just as Jesus bore his cross, the path of our lives of faith must be similar. We have our cross to bear, too. And when we bear that cross, we become more and more like the One who bore the cross on Calvary. And, that is the point of a life of faith.

However, just because we get it—and because Mark’s audience around 70 AD got it—does that mean that Jesus’ first listeners, the Disciples, got it? Did the people standing around hearing Jesus start to talk about his death and suffering have any clue that he would die on such a horrific instrument of punishing, tortuous death? Could they even conceive that this teacher, rabbi, healer, preacher, exorcist, and Godly man would meet such a grisly end? I boldly say, “Of course not.” And so, before the disciples could even begin to wrap their heads around his death, Jesus tells THEM that they have to “take up THEIR cross.” When Jesus says this here, well before Golgotha, these words would have had to sting and confuse the ears of his listeners. Take up our cross? What cross? Oh, you mean a cross of crucifixion? The Roman instrument of death for a slave?

Over the generations there have been some who clearly want to toss this passage in the “historical-Jesus-didn’t-say-this circular file.” They may be right. This verse would have been difficult for the Disciples to grasp pre-crucifixion. Yet, just imagine the sheer power his words held/hold for the listeners: For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.

When we make the choice to follow Jesus it means putting our own self-survival in the backseat. The first act of following Jesus totally re-orders our priorities and principles to the way of the Kingdom. My life focus is no longer about saving my life nor about preserving my style of life. Following Jesus means that our priority is to lose our life so Christ can structure our every step. What better way to talk about that than the Cross. It’s an ugly instrument not only condemning the condemned to a tortuous death but a dishonorable one. A slave’s death. A death that the Hebrew Bible calls “accursed.” On the cross you don’t just lose your life, but you do so in a wholly unpopular, unfashionable, pauper way. You lose everything. Life. Honor. Pride. But, Jesus says that in such a loss everything is, in fact, gained. And, just in case Jesus’ first audience didn’t get it—because they were scandalized at the thought of plummeting those last few rungs on the social ladder— Jesus himself follows this up with showing them and US how it’s done. How to lose! How to triumph. For God and His Kingdom. May it be so for us!

Pastor John Shaffer Gibson Charge United Methodist Churches Gibson and South Gibson Appointed to the Gibson Charge July, 2020 I spent the first 18 years in pastoral ministry serving small country churches in Wyoming County. I attended Local Pastor Course of Study at Wesley Seminary in Washington, graduating in 2015. My wife and I reside in Tunkhannock and both work for Tunkhannock Area School District. Parents of four and grandparents of five, Donna and I lead busy lives between family, church, school and our involvement with Seven Loaves Soup Kitchen. I find the Gibson Charge appointment a wonderful experience; many caring, prayerful people of faith doing God’s work. I look forward to future involvement with the churches and pastors of the Route 11 Ministerium.

When it was evening, Jesus sat down at the table with the twelve disciples. While they were eating, he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me."

Greatly distressed, each one asked in turn, "Am I the one, Lord?"

He replied. "One of you who has just eaten from this bowl with me will betray me. For the Son of Man must die, as the Scriptures declared long ago. But how terrible it will be for the one who betrays him. It would be far better for that man if he had never been born!"

Judas, the one who would betray him, also asked. "Am I the one?"

And Jesus told him, "You have said it." Matthew 26:20-25, NLT (New Living Translation)



I always struggle with Judas, the destined bad guy. As we enter the halfway point of Lent this year, I realize Judas reminds me of Shane, a fellow grade school classmate of mine. Shane would often get into trouble—serious trouble. As a boy of eight, nine and ten, Shane was always “the other guy,” or “the bad guy.” Even though we were in the same room for several years in a row, he was far from me because I was one of the goody-goody kids who must have gotten into some trouble sometimes. But me? I was never Shane.

Now I realize I am like Shane. We are all like Shane. In turn, we are all like Judas. “Am I the one, Lord?” is a question we can all ask. Spoken further, our question sounds like this. “Am I the one who betrays you? Am I the bad one who gets it wrong, who sends you to the cross each year?”

I know the answer to these questions. Speaking for yourself, you know the answer, too.

Yes. We are all sinful. We all betray Jesus.

Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus’ polarity of language is stunning, striking, powerful and poignant. In this passage, he sets into juxtaposition the polarizing terms dying and being born. This is no accident. Each year, Lent speaks to our death so that we can live again—or live anew—in Christ, the redeemer of our sinful souls.

Being a betrayer is heavy. It’s ugly.

As I write this, I am in the slow, aching process of adopting five foster children who are full siblings. By court order, the children’s biological parents are granted visits with the children for an hour twice a month. I minimally interact with these two during the visits yet become unglued each time. Literally. Truly. Unglued.

This should not unglue me because I am not a super parent. Somehow however, at least for tiny windows of time, I think I am at least a *good* parent. Oh, sure, we have golden moments as a family. True, mountain-top experiences define us. The kids who are old enough to go to school have become exemplary students.

Just like with classmate Shane, I come off as so goody-goody in comparison to the two biological parents. Interestingly, most often this is my comparison.

It is incredible how far I am from perfect. Instead, I have to own the address my own glass house. None of us have it all together.

Like me, you have a place in this conversation. We can all ask, “Am I the one, Jesus?”

He will answer. “Yes, you are the one.”

I will think he means that I am the bad guy (because I am). However, in that word way of his, Jesus will mean that I am the one—I am the one he died for on the day the world forever changed. Perfect, blameless, and forever loving, Jesus is the one who took my sins away. Jesus is the one who takes my sins away.

Yes, each one of us betrays the Son of Man. Equally, and with a liberation we need to share more of each day, the one who rose from the grave and now sits forever at the right hand of God, the Father, rejoices. He beams.

“Yes, you are the one! You are the one I was thinking of on that cross, and you, [insert your name here], are the one I love!”

--Will Hagenbuch



Wednesday, March 24th, 2021

It was a warm spring night. The full moon placed shadows on the rocky landscape of a Palestinian garden. There he lay, his nose inhaling the scent of the dank moist earth. Splotches of moist red fluid blotted his sweat soaked shirt, and he was crying. This is what we see. What we hear is the voice of one in dialogue with none other than the Creator of the universe, his father. They had talked many times through the nights of his three year stint. But this was different. He was praying.

Praying, not for His beloved chicks to be brought under the wings of the hen.

Praying, not for the skill of being the Incarnation of God for the next day.

Praying, not for the oneness of his disciples.

He was praying for Himself. From the marrow of his youthful bones, he was invoking out of sheer sense of dread.

The fellowship and ritual of the Passover victory meal consumed a few hours ago was erased from his recollection. The friends he enlisted to accompany him were not there. All that could be seen was the horror of an assignment that at that point seemed unconquerable. Not even the motivation of a warrior angel could be heard in his ears.

All he saw was: that job.

All he heard was the shouts of mobs.

All he felt was searing pain soon to pounce on his emaciated body.

It was the dread that swallowed up his personality and spit out it out again. Maybe the terror thundered upon him, like a lightning bolt in a spring storm and it pierced his very soul. And there, in that darkness, there was only Him and His father...and He was crying. Unlike his accomplices whose choice was to “sleep off” the blackness of that moment, his taut facial muscles were planted into the ground.

What is it that you dread? Name a time in your life when the definition of the word “anticipation” was a consuming anxiety that choose never to leave you. As your constant companion, you just can’t stop thinking about it, you find no joy in no moment that you are awake. Because of it, your landscape is bare of any of life’s joys. Your attention is quite focused. It is only that task that you know you must face, and you wonder, worry, and obsess. Please, Lord, take this cup from me.

Then maybe you taste the wine in the cup. In spite of its bitterness, you are, for maybe only a fleeting moment, able to lift your head and see the plan, or at least the God who is the planner. And in the broader scene of your pilgrimage, you have learned to trust that cup bearer. You recall the great victories that He has given you in the past. You look anew at the victory that happened on that night on the Mt. of Olives, and your barbell is lightened, your horror is diminished, and you say it, just like He said it:

“It is enough; the hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going; ...

And go you will! And, like Him, you will drink it all in...in victory.

Rev. Kim E. Bode

Being the sole Lutheran Pastor in our county is not what is important. It is the honor of pastoring a congregation in Hop Bottom for the last three decades that constantly investigated how the Mission could be done. It is the strength of being surrounded by Pastors in our area who are looking to be Gospel bearers in their own niches. It is the joy of a loving wife, Anne, who has served along with me, all the while being a mother to our five grown/escaped children, and touching the lives of hundreds of first graders at Mt. View. It is the anticipation of what happens next in this corner of the state. God is good.

A different Lent, a new Easter

Michael Hopkins, pastor in Surrey, England, wrote the following on February 17, 2021. “At the best of times, and 2021 is far from the best of times, I’ve always felt that boiling down a spiritual season to giving up chocolate or booze is the best example there is of totally missing the point. It doesn’t adequately embrace the nature and meaning of Lent, and as is typical in the highly individualistic culture of 21st century Britain, it shifts the focus of Lent to a “me and God” experience based on what I am doing for God.”

Hopkins continues. “What I mean is that we run the risk of engaging with Lent by saying: ‘I can suffer like Jesus by giving up chocolate or Facebook or coffee so I can be more like Jesus!’ No self-deprivation will place us in the same universe with the experience of Jesus, much less in the same room with Jesus. The ultimate irony is that our spiritual ancestors of the Protestant Reformation repudiated the practices of the time precisely because such practices focused on personal self-justification and not on the grace of God. Nothing is supposed to be about us working to ensure our well-being or salvation with God. If you think you need to give up chocolate or Facebook or booze or coffee, by all means give them up, but don’t do it for forty days and then take them up again, thinking it will somehow earn God’s pleasure.”

Without negating Hopkins’ theological stance here, I do admire those connected to the church here in Harford who have taken on the ritualistic practice of taking something away during the forty days. This Lenten practice is significant to those who practice self-sacrifice because it draws them closer to Christ, which is, after all, the essence of Lent. The Lenten hymn, “Draw Me Nearer,” is intended to do just that—draw us nearer. How does this happen if we do not understand, at least partially, the sufferings of Christ? The point needs to be made that it is Christ who suffered, not us. By his wounds we are healed, not our own.

I share Hopkins’ thoughts for two reasons. First, any Lenten practice that draws us closer to Christ can be extended throughout the year. These practices, which we will most likely fail at doing AT LEAST a couple times in a single year, do draw us ever more closely to the theology of grace.

Second, I am drawn to his understanding of Lent, 2021. In the same writing I quoted from, Hopkins shares that, “In the last year we have given up more than we ever wished for longer than we would have wished.” He speaks to the overwhelming loss of people and the loss of how we have lived our lives. Consider our once common, typical, everyday interactions that, if not gone for good, won’t come back as they did before the pandemic. Aligning with Hopkins here, I suggest that maybe this past year has been 365 days of Lent.

Enough Lent. Enough loss. The point of Lent is to draw us through our own forty days of being in the wilderness with a new understanding—and a new appreciation—for what, exactly, Easter is.

Let’s begin to live a new Easter, an Easter like everyone in the thick of this pandemic can, in fact, imagine. This Easter, this heaven-touched earth euphoria, looks at a glance like the Easter secular marketers sell. Easter is actually the Easter we are all supposed to have. It’s the Easter where we know we are alive after an isolation like Jesus had with Satan in the desert.

I am not saying we are skipping into our spring and summer months scot-free, or that the pandemic will be over. We may have many more months ahead of us that have been like the months just behind us. But in this Easter, we will be reminded again that life is good, life is valuable, and the connections we had with people pre-virus make post-virus life all the more meaningful and all the more sacred.

We are going to live an Easter, a new Easter, because Easter 2021, unlike any Easter any of us have ever experienced in the past, makes new life—resurrected life—not just understandable, but amazing and wonderful. We will know what it feels like to have that stone rolled away because seemingly similar stones have been in our way. Our Jesus is with us! Our, once dead for our sins, Jesus is alive! He is alive!

Truly a resurrection, why Harford First Congregational celebrates Easter with in-person worship

Everyone who has experienced even a mild rough patch in their marriage knows what work it takes to be in a relationship. We, the Harford First Congregational Church are in a relationship with each other. The shepherd in me came out during our last deacon's meeting when the top discussion point was to reopen the sanctuary during Easter or, because of Covid and its limitations, to close completely and move to virtual only. The protector in me came out. The guardian. The host. The question, "What if..." kept rolling in my mind, only each time it did something changed. "What if we get someone sick?" "What if we miss a safety step?" "What if someone wanting to worship arrives without a mask and a self-proclaimed need to not wear one?" "What if, as blessed as we have been in safely worshipping so far we go too far, and the very worst part of the pandemic unknowingly enters the double glass doors this Easter at 10 AM and actually causes great and lasting harm?"

Some of you are likely thinking I am making too big a deal of this. If so, let me ask you, are you willing to put any guest of yours at risk for any reason?

As we deacons considered safety and options carefully and slowly, words came out of my mouth that aren't mine. Vigilant and thoughtful, the protector in me was well beyond present at this meeting. Why? My answer is clear. When you are in worship, I want you to do just that—*worship!* I don't want anyone at any time during any service to stop and think, "Well, gee, *this* doesn't seem safe." We come to God to glorify, not be scared, concerned, or distracted.

Given the challenges our postal system is experiencing, I am not sure if you'll be reading this ahead of Easter, April 4th, or after. If this is after, **please keep in mind that your goal in worship is not your comfort; it is your relationship with God. And because we are also in a relationship with each other, the comfort—and, above all, the safety—of those around you.** As you have seen if you're in house or online, Craig Stout is now demonstrating how to wear our masks *over* our noses. Yes, more and more of us are getting vaccinated, and yes, the choir in its current formation will sing with their masks on, so Easter 2021 has a meaning all its own. So, what is the meaning of Easter 2021, you ask?

The Easter meaning never changes, though the years do. As we live into the Easter message on and beyond April 4th, we carry ourselves in the hope of a resurrected Christ who, by His death and His life, promises us not death but eternal life. The cross, the stone in front of the tomb, and the grave empty are our poignant, unquestionable signs that there is no condemnation for those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Christ has risen! We who follow Him will rise, too!

I keep seeing the year 2021 in print. I like these four numbers in sequence because I see 20 and then 21. It's an order. It's a moving forward. The year 2021 as moving us from one place, the pandemic, to the next place, life beyond the pandemic. As Christians, we are in relationship with each other and with the world around us. Relationships, as you remember from the top of this page, take work. This work can seem burdensome, perhaps even overwhelming at times. But the work of glorifying our God through His Son, Jesus Christ, is the **ONLY** work we should be doing. **Yes, we may be employed or busy as grandparents (or somewhere in between), but our work—our ultimate work—is drawing others to Christ.** As better, brighter days are ahead of us at some point, our congregation, through your presence near and far, has this amazing potential: to become better and brighter. We can love more. Feed more. Care more. Pray more. Laugh more. Listen more. Trust more. Reach more. Touch more. Encourage more. We can be more not in ourselves but in our service to, and our love of, the Giver of Life Himself, our resurrected Lord and Savior.

20...21... And 2022 is a year of even more life, resurrected life, as we reach through the church into the close and the wider communities God keeps calling us to serve not meekly but triumphantly, not in our spirit but His!

Council Minutes

Financial Report: To make every month expenses we need \$12,895.83.

February 2020

Income: \$11,759.50

Expense: \$ 9,619.93

Total: \$ 2,139.57

February 2021

Income: \$7,973.50

Expense: \$9,482.85

Total: -\$1,509.35

Deacon Minutes—3-15-2021

Officers: Holli Chichester - Chairperson
Lisa Hahn - Vice Chairperson
Katherine Masters - secretary
Ginny Ahearn - Card representative

The Council representative was not discussed at this meeting

Karen Jones will be asked if she is still willing to find ushers and greeters.

Good Friday Service: The outdoor service will begin at 7:30am April 2, 2021 by the Memorial Garden. If need be, the Lecture Hall will be the back-up location. Ginny and Leanne will be readers

Easter Service: We discussed the Pros and Cons of having the Easter service since the number of people attending would probably be larger than we are used to. The general consensus was that we should have the service but that we need to increase safety protocols for the additional people attending.

Easter Procedures:

All enter through the Double Doors maintaining social distance.

Temperature will be taken at the door with forehead thermometer (temperatures over 100.4 degrees will not be permitted to attend and will be encouraged to watch via live-stream) – Bonnie

Two persons will take one name from each party with contact phone number for COVID tracking if necessary. (Bill Chichester and Kay Gow)

Four Ushers will seat people entering the Sanctuary via the door by the organ and exit via the door by the choir. (Holli, Ginny, Leanne, and one other TBD).

When the service is over, the ushers will dismiss by rows to the double doors. Will will be located in the grassy areas at the bottom of the double door stairs for meeting people.

Sunday School will not be held on Easter.

The Easter procedures will be discussed in announcements every Sunday preceding Easter along with the proper way to wear a mask. There will be three options for worship on Easter: Sun Rise service at 7:30am, Worship at 10:00 and Live stream worship online. We hope these increased safety procedures will decrease chance of COVID and help our congregants feel safe.

Beginning Sunday, April 21, 2021. An usher will get one of the choir microphones for prayers and concerns time. When someone wishes to share a joy or ask for prayer, the usher will go to that person with the microphone. The usher will hold the microphone for the speaker and sanitize it after each speaker and then return the microphone to the choir.

Next meeting: Monday, March 29, 2021 zoom at 7:30 pm

Sunday, April 11, 2021 live at 5:00 pm church.

Missionary Group 3-17-2021

Treasurer's Report: Balance Maureen Warren Donated \$3859 in 2020 to Nicaraguan CHE

* see article on page 19 for 2020 CHE ministry summary

Least Coin: Looked at a Historical Least Coin Article from 1988 on El Salvador: Smallest Centra American country with 5 million people. 80% are poor with long working hours and no benefits. Felt that they deserved poor treatment and would be rewarded in Heaven. After Biblical education, people realized that God wasn't causing their misfortune and rebelled. They faced torture, prison and loss of their homes.

Emergency Food Program – Hop Bottom: Still collecting food. Planning meeting at Hop Bottom Methodist Church Thursday, March 18, 2021 at 6:30.

Yard Sale: We plan to hold a yard sale either Fair Week or Labor Day Friday/Saturday. Details are yet to be determined. Collecting items now.

Youth and Outreach: Chili and French Bread Carry out free dinner for the community. April 17, 2021

Tech Team: Discussed upcoming technical changes for live-stream worship.

Disaster Kits: The collection Depots are finally opening. We will deliver the Hygiene and Clean-Up Kits April 26 at 10:00am. \$236 will be sent to CWS to cover processing Costs. Holli, Karen and Ginny will deliver kits. 73 Hygiene Kits and 30 Clean-up Buckets.

Correspondence: Letter from Community Health Evangelism/Partnership in Hope.

Next Meeting: April 20 at 1:00.

Stewardship—March 18th at 6:30

All committees are still within their budgets and most haven't spent any or very little of their budgets.

Free Chili Dinner with bread on April 17th. This will be a drive-by pickup of the meal. The dinner is going to be sponsored by Youth and Outreach as a way to let the community know we as a church are here for them and appreciate their continuing support of all our events.

The annual Golf Tournament on June 12th. Holli Chichester, the chairperson for this event has asked for help in getting sponsors and the Stewardship Committee has agreed to assist with this.

The Spring/Summer Clothing drive will take place this year. The bin for clothes will be placed in the Gathering Room shortly after Easter. Peg and Kay will take the clothes to Interfaith on a regular basis.

A joint yard/craft sale (possibly with a meal) will be held (Possibly September 3rd and 4th). The proceeds from this will be split between the Missionary Society and Willing Workers. If you have any items in your closet not being used Holli will come and get them or you can bring them to the church.

Will presented the idea of having a Stewardship moment every Sunday during worship. More to come on this at the next meeting. Many ideas about this moment were discussed. For example: Perhaps we could let the congregation know what we are thinking about, how we might create opportunities for people who care so they can participate more and more in worship. Also perhaps see what residents in nursing facilities may need or what might be the best thing to give them.

The idea of a Stewardship campaign was also discussed. The first of these campaigns might begin in May. A tentative idea for this campaign was the word Legacy and what it means, how it might touch, move, or inspire our congregation to reach out to others around them and also perhaps even begin to think of how they might help the church continue after they have gone....

The next meeting is April 15th @ 6:30 in the Lecture Hall.

Trustee Meeting Minutes—March 8, 2021

Old Business:

- Gary installed a hook to hold open the gathering room door. People should stop using the broken concrete block to hold open the door as it is damaging the door.
- Kandy will bring up the flooring issues in the vestibule to Willing Workers to gauge their interest in helping cover the costs of any potential fixes.
- Council approved the cost of the new lampposts in front of the church. Council would like to have the spotlight on the front of the church repaired and has authorized the funds to do so.
- The cost to do the driveway and additional parking areas in Roller Compacted Concrete will be cost prohibitive. Trustees will review other options.

New Business:

- The Church Spring Clean Up Day will be set for April 17th with a rain date of the 24th as an alternative.
- The weather stripping needs to be replaced on the front door of the lecture hall needs to be replaced.
- Gary will bring the old Building Inspection list to review. Trustees will consider using this list or updating it for the future.
- Gary has shopped around for a better price on electricity avoiding an increase while lowering our electricity payment.
- Gary also changed our propane provider from Keystone to Hellers.

Willing Worker Big Group Meeting—March 2, 2021

The treasurer's report was presented and approved. The new cupboards in the gathering room cost \$2684 plus \$1350 for installation. Lou Galambos installed them. The existing countertop had to be removed because it wasn't base cupboard height and reinstalled. He also had to work around a wall that wasn't plumb. Doorpulls will be \$55. The cupboards look nice. A committee (Connie, Wendy, Ellen, Ivie) was formed to move large items up into new cupboards.

OLD BUSINESS:

Harford Fair plans and questions led to lots and lots of discussion. Sharon Kinney had received a form saying our deposit from last year had been moved to this year. We had reserved 2 bays. The form neglected to say size or price for bays. There was a debate on amount of space needed versus price for rent. Kandy made a motion that we would rent two 10x10 spaces on the outside of the new building. 2nd by Ivie. Passed. The form said we could contact them to discuss other options. We would prefer a larger space that we could leave a fridge in. Kandy will act as a contact person. She will contact Matt Holbrook (or someone) to see about other options.

Discussion on what to sell in the 2 bays. In looking at the most profitable things at the fair, attic treasures were the least. So...The missionary group is planning a yard sale (date undetermined but hopefully to be held in the lecture hall) at which we could sell attic treasures. This led to a decision that if there is a Fair, the missionary/willing worker yard and attic sale will be during fair week. If there is no fair then the yard/attic treasure sale plus crafts, bake sale, cookies will be on Labor Day weekend. Perhaps some kind of meal will be sold as the pulled pork meal did well. Gift baskets were another idea. More thought and discussion at the May meeting. We could advertise as the Old Log Cabin of Harford Church. We do have 2 cash registers.

Ellen made a motion that we not advertise in the Fair book (if we are asked). 2nd by Kandy. Passed. Last year we had decided that with the sign in front of the church, Facebook, and church email we probably could advertise our Fair participation that way.

GROUP REPORTS: all helped at roast beef dinner and made pies.

Kingsley: 5 present –held 2 meetings, cleaned freezer, made crafts. Donated to Interfaith, My Brother's Keeper, Weinberg. Held a soup sale.

Harford: 1 present-worked at Alyssa's wedding

North Harford: 4 present-worked at Alyssa's wedding

Next meeting is Wednesday, May 5, 2021 at 7:00PM in the Lecture Hall.

Pastor's Report

- Presided at Betty Vietri's funeral
- Have begun in person pastor visits in hospitals again
- Attended a PNEC continuing education webinar on group safety
- Continue the 40-days of Lent Daily Devotionals
- Look forward to the 7:30 AM Easter Sunrise Service
- Have planned the Easter 10 AM sermon
- Met privately with Peg Empet, our new Stewardship Chair, to discuss the future of the gifts our congregations receives and gives
- Have met a few times with Holli Chichester, our new Deacon Chair, to discuss how God is leading us forward as a congregation
- Am a part of the newly formed tech team and hold inspiring visions for our congregation's future
- Report that we have 365 Facebook members and reassess whether our church page should remain a closed group
- Started something new in that I send an email out after worship called "worship in review and worship ahead" which summarizes the sermon and sends the updated prayer chain
- Attended the Lancaster Theological Seminary Doctoral of Ministry symposium via ZOOM as many of my 2020 classmates defended their dissertations and will graduate in 2021
- Continue the local weekly newspaper columns in *The Susquehanna County Independent*
- Am inspired by the number of seniors who faithfully participate with worship online
- Have had both of my COVID vaccinations
- Am grateful all five of my foster children are now in Sunday school
- Send prayers near and far to those in our immediate and further-reaching church community for a blessed Easter
- Remind us all to love our neighbor and seek the wisdom of scripture first

Choir

All are welcome to read and poem or scripture during Special Music. Talk to Robert Fisher.

Cradle Roll

One child received a Christian Book and invitation to Sunday School.

Historian

An average of 36 are attending worship each week in-house and many more via Live-Stream Online Worship.

Our Church Wider Mission

Our congregation gave \$2848 to OCWM in 2020.

*****The next Council Meeting will be April 22, 2021 at a new time 6:00pm.**

New Members Class

The pastoral relations team met in January and want to announce that a new membership class will be taking place as soon as it is safe enough for many people to gather.

Stay tuned for details!





Spire Sponsor
Lois Gibson

Soup Ministry

Know someone that is shut-in or feeling down or sick? Take them a quart of home-made soup. It's in the large freezer by the church mailboxes. Just sign the paper on the door to let us know who received the soup.



Red Cross Blood Drive

Friday April 23rd noon - 5:00

Harford Fire Hall



Appointments can be made online at redcrossblood.org and walk-ins can also be accommodated. Thanks so much for your help in spreading the word.

Youth and Outreach

Harford First Congregational Church will be hosting a FREE Community Chili and bread drive thru meal Saturday, April 17 from 3:30-5:30.

We need:

**Kidney Beans,
Chili Beans,
Tomato sauce,
Crushed tomatoes....**

Do you have extras??

We can use them!

Please drop off any cans you may have on the kitchen island at the church.

*Your part in helping to serve our wider community is greatly appreciated!
Thank you!*



Emergency Food Distribution

Hop Bottom Fire Hall

Paula Smith, the Summer Lunchbox CEO, noticed that some of the extra Summer Lunchbox food would expire before summer 2021. She got with her church's food pantry (Hop Bottom United Methodist Church) and offered a food distribution in December 2020, once a week, on Wednesday. The first few weeks 25-30 families were served. The last week in December over 100 families came for relief food.

The employment situation and food situation continue to grow worse here in the MountainView School District. The Missionary Group is asking the congregation to join them in collecting food items for this food distribution. Many of the people served by the Summer Lunch Program are coming asking for help.

The food items are different than the Weinberg Food Bank. The items are selected specifically to meet the needs of school age children. The list of needed items are below. The Peanut Butter collection barrel will be set on the porch by the double glass doors for food drop off every day that weather permits.

If you wish to make a monetary donation, please make the check out to Harford First Congregational Church and put "Hop Bottom Food" in the memo spot.

Food Items Needed

Boxed Cereal (Child Friendly Types)

Pasta (all)

Ramen Noodles

Pasta Sauce (all)

Canned Soup (all)

Canned Tuna (water packed)

Peanut Butter

Jelly

Macaroni & Cheese

Mayonnaise

Pancake Mix

Syrup

Popcorn (microwave type)

Canned Fruit (Peaches, Pears, Fruit Cocktail, Applesauce)

Canned Vegetables (Green Beans, Peas, Corn, Mixed Vegetables)



Seven boxes of food were collected in February/March and delivered to Hop bottom Fire Hall for distribution.

Thank you First Church!!!!

Missionary Group

Home Bound

The Carey Family

Barbara Pease

Martha Jenkins

Dorothy Greene

Joan Benson



Prayer Concerns

-We pray for our nation to be blessed and that our nation seeks its blessings

-We pray our national and local leaders

-All school districts—this includes school board members, administration, faculty, staff, parents and students

-Craig Stout and Family

-We pray for Connie and David Schulte's son (Phil)

-for those with medical issues large and small

-for those affected in anyway by the COVID virus

-David and Brandy

-Those with Alzheimer's and their families

-Gary and Wendy Phillips

-the Carey family

-Ray Frederick

-those experiencing financial pressures

-those fighting addiction

-Joan Benson & Lois Gibson and all those in nursing homes along with their families

-Will's five foster kids

-Evan Clarkson and all those faithfully serving in the military

-MaryJane Genneken

-Marlene & Larry Dean

-Rich Masters

-Sandy Zupanovich

-UCC churches in Japan

-Greg Symuleski

-Mark Gregory

-health or loss of family pets

-Pat Evans

-Nancy Marr

-Jim Shaw

-Lance Tabaca

-Walter Poxon & sister Lois Terrance and Angie

-Kandy's friend Mary Keihl (ALS)

-Rose Williams

-Family of John Beaver

-Brian Estabrook

-Family of Harry Phillips

-Jessica Miller's grandfather (Bill Brooks)

-Healing for Jacob Lucas

-Marilynn & Richard (Marylou Swank)

-Small businesses struggling

-Patrick Simons

-Doris Holtsmaster Schenck

-George Zack

-Joe Megivern

-Family of Laura (cousin of Teresa Lamberson)

-family of Julian Williams

-Ed Jones

-Paula Adams

-family of Josh Manzer

-mother of Sandy Green

-Makel Silfee

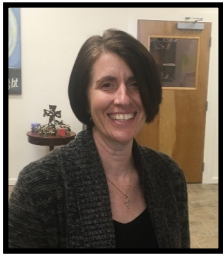
-Family of John Michaels

-Phil Thompkins

-Joan Thompkins

- Katherine Masters Doolittle 's mother-in-law, Karen Doolittle





Weinberg Food Bank

Harford First Congregational Church
The 4th Friday of each month



Please contact Tammy if you have registered but do not pick up.

Next distribution April 23, 2021 from 4:30-5:30

Any income can apply, complete the form online firstchurchharford.com or call Tammy @ 570-396-7081.

Day of Distribution please bring with you a photo ID and a current household bill with your current Susquehanna County address.

Facebook First Church Chopped

Have you ever watched the reality show “Chopped” and thought, “Wow! This looks like fun!”? Have you ever picked up your Weinberg Food Pantry box and said “Wow! What do you do with a cabbage the size of a Volkswagen?” Here’s where reality TV meets reality!



We would like to welcome you to join our NEW Facebook group “**First Church Chopped**”. This is a Facebook group dedicated to fully appreciating our food boxes, distributed monthly by Weinberg Foodbank. During these difficult times, food boxes are a reminder that we are not alone and isolated. Our church and the community along with Weinberg are here to help and support us. We encourage you to search for “**First Church Chopped**” on Facebook and join us for a fun way to connect with others to find recipes, as well share your own creative ways you have found to use the foods you have received from Weinberg!

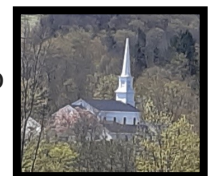
We look forward to sharing with you! Patti Vietri and Tammy Stout

Attention! The worship service will be livestreamed live at 10:00 am each Sunday.

We have been eager to worship together again. We are now meeting in groups with masks, distance, and additional sanitizing.

We would like to invite those who feel ready to worship in groups to come to the livestreaming of our worship at 10:00 am. Masks are mandatory. We must keep our distance. We will not use the hymnals and Bibles or have bulletins. All needed text will be projected for you.

For those who feel it is best to stay at home and continue online worship, please know our council supports and appreciates your participation. Safety first is a key to our wellbeing.



We look forward to worshipping with you online or in person each Sunday at 10 am.

Correspondence

Dear Congregation,

Just a short note thanking you all for the nice surprise at Christmas.

The \$10.00 gift card to Weis Markets was a great way to start the year!!

It was very thoughtful and generous of you all.

I work at Mountain View School District and I heard many people say how it was very kind of your church to do that.

Thanks again

In Christ, MaryLynne Twinning

Church Spring Clean Up Day

April 17th 9:00am
***rain date April 24th



A Use for Canceled US Postage stamps

Grace Lutheran, our fellow Rt 11/81 Ministerium church collects used postage stamps. The stamps are sent to the Canadian Bible Society. This organization purchases Bibles for prisoners.

Instead of putting the envelope with the canceled postage stamp in the garbage, would you please be able to save the used stamps and bring them to the Gathering Room and deposit in the box that will be there. Please leave at least ¼ inch of envelope around the stamp if possible.

Thank you very much for every little stamp that is saved.



Directory Update

Vietri, Joe & Patti
700 West Main Street
Susquehanna
PA 18847



June Goodrich
PO Box 367
Montrose
PA 18801

Susan and Buddy Green
3468 Upper Podunk Road
New Milford, PA 18834
PA 1-908-812-6007

Memorial Plaque Information

Are you interested in having a plaque attached to the memorial stone in the memorial garden? One may have a plaque ordered by doing the following:

Cost--\$25.00

Send check (made out to First Congregational-UCC) along with name of person and the year of birth and the year they passed away to the office.

The office will then proceed to order the plaque and have it placed on the stone.
Thank you.



Notice: Please send all material for May to be included in the Spire to:

Firstchurchspire@gmail.com

by the 15th of April 2021!

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Spire Sponsors

We **need Sponsors** to help us cover the cost of printing and mailing the Spire. Please let us know if you can help. The sponsorship can be in Memory or in Honor of someone or just a donation.

Mailing costs approximately \$75/month. Please send to: Harford First Congregational Church—UCC

PO Box 217

Harford, PA 18823

Ugly Quilts

We are now meeting for Ugly Quilts in the lecture hall on Tuesdays at 9:30.

We will sit far apart. Bring your mask and lunch if you can stay until 12:00 so that we may dine together. Ellen has some tops completed and I have been working on making stuffing during the summer. Bring a friend.

Come at 9:30 and stay until after lunch or come at 10:30 and leave whenever.

Looking forward to seeing you. Thank you, Judy



April Birthdays

April 2 Roxanne Love
April 3 Jenn (Simons) Frantz
April 4 Alex Empet
April 7 Will Hagenbuch
Lynnette Millard
Dot Simons
April 8 Shirley Masters
April 10 Carol Oakley
Dale Empet
April 11 Edward James Zick
April 12 Travis Bridgeman
Elissa (Muller) Deverny
Lou Zimmerman
April 15 Grace Ann Graf
April 17 Brooke Zupanovich



April 19 Ron Phillips
April 21 Jackie Schulte
April 22 Katie Brown
April 23 Irv Needham
April 25 Lauren Mitchell

The Website is up and running.

We have worked hard, but we realize that important things may not have been included. We are still adding and changing things so if you have suggestions, please email Holli Chichester at hollischichester@gmail.com or call 301-643-1775. Please check it out at

www.firstchurchharford.com





FREE COMMUNITY DRIVE-THRU CHILI AND BREAD MEAL

Saturday,
April 17th
3:30-5:30

Pre-orders
preferred

Salad and a Cookie too!

Contact Tammy @ 570-396-7081
before April 10th to order

It's Time to Spring Clean!!!!

The Missionary Group is sponsoring a yard sale, date TBA.

We will be collecting anything to be sold in a yard sale:

New Clothing, shoes, bedding, electrical appliances, lighting, TVs, furniture, household items, kitchen items, tools, yard stuff, toys, baby items, bikes, decorations etc.

Please bring any items to the lecture hall and label them "Yard Sale".

If you would like a pick up, please call or text Holli at 301-643-1775 or 570-851-5109 or email at hollischichester@gmail.com.

Thank you, Missionary Group



Community Health Evangelism (CHE) Update

Missionary Group and Harford First Congregational Church support this mission

- 1) We distributed 1240 food packets in 26 communities to 1240 families impacted by the hurricanes also to 7440 people in the surrounding areas.
- 2) 20,000 reusable masks were made by CHE women and distributed to people.
- 3) Contribution to the widows of pastors who have died as a result of the pandemic. 50 widows were offered pastoral counseling and consolation, with a food packet, worth \$150. This impacted 200 people.
- 4) The International prayer ministry Wake Up Deborah, gave 6 workshops last year, using Zoom, so they were open to the nation. Topics were Good Stewardship, Conflict Resolution, Addiction, and Cyber Bullying, Family Violence, Walking with Christ, and Why Evangelize. These reached 200 women.
- 5) Distribution of seeds, corn, beans, and sorghum, to 70 families in the areas affected by the hurricanes in the northern Caribbean region. This is an agricultural area. 20 lbs of each seed type was given to 20 families. This will help to resolve some of the food problems in the area.
- 6) Attention to the Children's CHE ministry through Children's Canteens, with academic support: 1100 nutritional food packets were distributed to lower the levels of child malnutrition in the communities, benefitting 10 communities on the national level, who serve 1800 children 3 times a week.
- 7) Distribution of construction materials - 1200 sheets of zinc and 240 lbs of nails - to 120 families who lost their roofs during the hurricane. Each family received 10 sheets of zinc (corrugated iron) and 2 lbs of nails. This helped a total of 720 people in these families.
- 8) We partnered with World Vision in Nicaragua to distribute 530 packets which included clothes, backpacks, and school materials, to be distributed to 530 families, thus impacting a total of 3,180 people.
- 9) Distribution of ceramic floor tiles for churches, as part of our relationship with churches, we were able to deliver 1000 meters of flooring to be installed in 2 child canteens, as well as 3 churches.
- 10) Distribution of 70 rolls of fabric to make masks, purses, and other crafts in the CHE communities and churches involved in the CHE ministry.
- 11) Distribution of household goods to 520 families who lost everything in their homes (saucepans, silverware, dishes etc) because of the hurricanes in the northern Atlantic area.
- 12) 6 half scholarships were awarded to 6 CHE leaders, which gave them \$27.50 monthly, for a total of \$2000 annually, as part of wholistic support for the individual growth of community leaders.
- 13) The Evangelism and Discipleship program in the Children's CHE ministry served 1100 children, who also received the Samaritan's Purse Christmas boxes.
- 14) We redesigned all the files of CHE lessons, and contextualized the material for presentations in workshops in the communities and institutions who are working with CHE on the national level.

In spite of the pandemic, the Lord, by His infinite mercy, enabled us to accomplish all of the activities we have described. In addition, we were able to establish relationships with pastors of different denominations, with whom we were praying week after week for national and world crisis. We thank God for the hard work by each member of the CHE board team, as well as each one of the community members, and donors. Your offerings for this wholistic ministry have been invested for the purposes for which they were donated, and we have managed to impact people in different communities and churches.

**Chicken BBQ, Bake Sale
& Chinese Auction**

Chicken BBQ



Saturday, May 22, 2021

Noon – 5:00 p.m.

Location:

VFW Post 8488 Kingsley, PA

\$11.00 per Dinner

Benefits

Summer Lunch Box



Jesus has Risen!
He has Risen
Indeed!

Spire Sponsor
Paula Adams

Harford First Congregational Church
Golf Tournament

Saturday, June 12, 2021 9 am



\$90/person- includes 18 holes with cart,
prizes and Steak Dinner

Prizes: Closest to the pin, Longest drive, Closest
to the Cooler, Basket Raffle, 50/50,
Goodie Bag and more!!!

Holli Chichester: hollischichester@gmail.com

570-851-5109 or 301-643-1775

To benefit First Congregational Church

Business Sponsor



March 25, 2021

Dear Friend,

The First Congregational Church of Harford is hosting our 11th annual Golf Tournament on Saturday, June 12, 2021 at the Tall Pines Players Club in Friendship, PA. All money raised will benefit First Congregational Church. Your generous donations have made our church projects (such as Food Bank, Community Dinners, Gift Cards for Teachers and Staff, Christmas Tree Lighting, Coaches against Cancer, Online Worship) possible in the past. Your donation is tax deductible and our tax-exempt number is 75139758.

You can help by: You can help by:

- 1) Sponsoring a golf hole (\$200, \$100, \$50) a sign will be placed on a green at the tournament advertising your business. See enclosed sponsorship form.
- 2) Prizes - any items that we could give away to golfers who have the longest drive, closest to the pin, general door prizes, etc. Your business name will be announced during the prize giveaways. Gift certificates from area businesses make great prizes and generate traffic back to you.
- 3) Putting a team together to golf in the tournament.
- 4) Posting our Golf Tournament advertisement in your place of business.

Thank you for your time and consideration! Please contact me anytime with any questions, etc.

Contact / Mail to:
Holli Chichester
1814 Tingley Lake Rd
New Milford, PA 18834
570-851-5109 or
301-643-1775
hollischichester@gmail.com

Business Sponsor



March 25, 2021

Dear Friend,

The First Congregational Church of Harford is hosting our 11th annual Golf Tournament on Saturday, June 12, 2021 at the Tall Pines Players Club in Friendship, PA. All money raised will benefit First Congregational Church. Your generous donations have made our church projects (such as Food Bank, Community Dinners, Gift Cards for Teachers and Staff, Christmas Tree Lighting, Coaches against Cancer, Online Worship) possible in the past. Your donation is tax deductible and our tax-exempt number is 75139758.

You can help by: You can help by:

- 1) Sponsoring a golf hole (\$200, \$100, \$50) a sign will be placed on a green at the tournament advertising your business. See enclosed sponsorship form.
- 2) Prizes - any items that we could give away to golfers who have the longest drive, closest to the pin, general door prizes, etc. Your business name will be announced during the prize giveaways. Gift certificates from area businesses make great prizes and generate traffic back to you.
- 3) Putting a team together to golf in the tournament.
- 4) Posting our Golf Tournament advertisement in your place of business.

Thank you for your time and consideration! Please contact me anytime with any questions, etc.

Contact / Mail to:
Holli Chichester
1814 Tingley Lake Rd
New Milford, PA 18834
570-851-5109 or
301-643-1775
hollischichester@gmail.com



**11th Annual Harford Congregational Church
Golf Tournament**

Saturday June 12, 2021 9am shotgun start



Hole Sponsor/Memorial Level:

GOLD-\$200

SILVER-\$100

BRONZE-\$50

Your Name _____

Address _____

Information for the Sign _____

Email _____

Phone _____

****Make checks payable to First Congregational UCC**

Contact/Mail to: Holli Chichester
1814 Tingley Lake Rd
New Milford, PA 18834
570-851-5109 or 301-643-1775 or hollischichester@gmail.com

**WE WOULD LOVE TO HAVE YOU ENTER A TEAM AND
JOIN US FOR A DAY OF FUN**



**11th Annual Harford Congregational Church
Golf Tournament**

Saturday June 12, 2021 9am shotgun start



Golf Team Registration

Team Captain _____

Address _____

Email _____

Phone _____

Team Players: _____

****Make checks payable to First Congregational UCC**

Contact/Mail to: Holli Chichester

1814 Tingley Lake Rd

New Milford, PA 18834

570-851-5109 or 301-643-1775 or hollischichester@gmail.com

**WE WOULD LOVE TO HAVE YOU ENTER A TEAM AND
JOIN US FOR A DAY OF FUN
\$90 per Golfer = \$360 per Team**

Payable in Advance or at the course day of the Tournament



April 2021

April 2021

May 2021

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Mar 28	29	30	31	Apr 1	2	3
7:30am Sunrise Service (Outside) 10:00am Service (sanctuary) 7:00pm Boy Scouts (LH)	9:30am Quarterback mtg (Zoom)	9:30am Ugly Quilts (LH)	6:00pm Harford Baseball mtg (LH)	10:00am Pastor in office	6:30pm Good Friday Service (Sanctuary)	
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10:00am Service (sanctuary) 5:00pm Deacons (LH) 7:00pm Boy Scouts (LH)	9:30am Quarterback mtg (Zoom)	9:30am Ugly Quilts (LH)	6:00pm Harford Baseball mtg (LH)	7:00am Historical mtg (LH) 10:00am Pastor in office		
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
10:00am Service (sanctuary) 5:00pm Deacons (LH) 7:00pm Boy Scouts (LH)	9:30am Quarterback mtg (Zoom) 7:00pm Trustees (PO)	9:30am Ugly Quilts (LH)		10:00am Pastor in office 6:30pm Stewardship (LH)		9:00am Spring Clean up (outside) 3:30pm Free Meal (pick up take out)
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
10:00am Service (sanctuary) 7:00pm Boy Scouts (LH)	9:30am Quarterback mtg (Zoom)	9:30am Ugly Quilts (LH) 1:00pm Missionary (LH)		10:00am Pastor in office 6:30pm Council (LH)	12:00pm BLOOD DRIVE (Firehall) 4:30pm Weinberg-pick up	9:00am Clean Up rain date (Outside) 10:00am Baby shower (LH)
25	26	27	28	29	30	May 1
10:00am Service (sanctuary) 7:00pm Boy Scouts (LH)	9:30am Quarterback mtg (Zoom)	9:30am Ugly Quilts (LH)		10:00am Pastor in office		



Non-Profit Organization

US Postage Paid

PERMIT—#20

Montrose, PA 18801

Harford First Congregational Church –UCC
5016 Creek Road
PO Box 217
Harford, PA 18823
Tel. 570-434-2260
Email: firstch@nep.net
Spire email: firstchurchspire@gmail.com
Web URL: www.firstchurchharford.com

.....the people in darkness have seen a great light

Isaiah 9:2

Join Us Each Sunday!!

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

DATED MAIL

PLEASE DO NOT DELAY



Harford First Congregational Church—UCC

Rev. Dr. William Hagenbuch –Pastor
Home Phone: 570-434-7729
Email: wrh@nep.net
Office Hours: Thurs. 10-12:00

Judy Mitchell –Sec
Hours: Tuesday 1:00-5:00
Friday 1:00-5:00