



December 2023



*Join Us for
Christmas Eve
Service*

*Sunday
December 24
7:00 pm*

CONTACT US

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HOURS

Sunday Service 9:30 am

Monday-Thursday

9:00 am — 12:00 pm

Friday

1:00 pm — 3:00 pm

From Pastor Jay



Christmas Moment

My maternal grandfather, Harold Eugene Jones, died fifty years ago, and I think of him probably every day.

He died when he was sixty-six years old and he lived the final twenty years of his life as a widower. My grandmother Naomi, who died before I was born, met the man she would marry in grade school. Harold and Naomi's love was deep.

In her mid-forties she was diagnosed with a brain tumor and was dead within two weeks. I didn't know as a kid but I know it now – my grandfather functioned as best he could in grief for those twenty years.

During my childhood and teenage years Harold would drive to our house in Ohio – he lived in western Pennsylvania – to spend one weekend a month with us. My mother was an only child so my brother, sister and me were his only grandchildren.

He loved us so. And we adored him. He was a kind and gentle man. He worked as a freight clerk for the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie railroad. Every morning his breakfast consisted of black coffee, burnt toast, a hunk of cheddar cheese and a Pall Mall cigarette.

Every Christmas he arrived in his big white Pontiac Bonneville with the trunk of the car jammed with Christmas presents. He was not a rich man but he wasn't poor either – and he spared no expense on his grandchildren at Christmas.

Every Christmas Eve he always waited until we all were in bed before he spread our presents beneath the Christmas tree. But one year I tricked him. I tiptoed down the stairs, peeked around the corner into the living room, and saw him. He was alone, he was laying down love for his grandchildren, and he was smiling and humming a tune.

For decades now I have practiced a ritual. On Christmas Eve, when the house is quiet and all are in bed, I sneak down to the Christmas tree to see if my grandfather is there. He always is. It's my Christmas moment. It's like Jesus saying, which he did, "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

Blessings! - Pastor Jay

Christmas Services



*Join
Us!*

You'll want to be with us for our Christmas Eve Candle Lighting service. As always, this service will be a beautiful, stirring time of worship, music, reflection, and celebration for the birth of our Savior. The service begins at 7:00 pm, which will give you plenty of time to get home and wrap the rest of those gifts!

Sunday Morning December 24

On Sunday morning on December 24 at 9:30 am, we will have our traditional worship service, but with a Christmas flair!





There is a new Pharaoh running the empire, one that does not know Joseph (Exodus 1).

The exodus story begins by reciting the names of descendants of Joseph in Egypt. Joseph and all his brothers have died, but their children and grandchildren have grown in number and strength. The growth has not led to any economic security but has made the Israelites vulnerable to oppression, extraction, and exploitation.

It's in this biblical context that God calls a pair of midwives into a place where oppression is rampant. God calls them via their vocation as midwives. God calls us first to be stewards of who we are, not just we have. The midwives teach us that faithful stewardship has a nature: we offer what we have in ways that resist oppression and build community. Stewardship is an act of resistance, to resist a narrative that says we are not enough, that we don't have enough. Stewardship which centers people who appear to have little or no power to change things. In witnessing the midwives, they give us renewed energy to remember our call: when the ministry of women, when our very bodies, aren't safe at church, the streets or in our own country. God calls two women to act together through faithful stewardship of what they had and who they were. This act of stewardship in the face of an extraction economy and empire, they become midwives to liberation.

"The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, 'When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.' The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live." (Exodus 1: 15-17).

Shiphrah and Puah resist and refuse to obey the decree of the King in the inaugural act of liberation. Notice these two midwives act first, God acts later. This is critical insight on stewardship. Stewardship is the place we are called to partner with God. Is it possible that God needs something to work with, that God is not a magician, but needs choices, risks, possibilities, for our communities to do something concrete, to act decisively in the offering of our gifts, to be stewards, to create a new path of liberation! A new threat to liberation meets us in our time and place, and therefore a renewed call of stewardship. Yes, celebrate the liberative work we've already done in partnership with God and community. The victories and battles already won. The Lord God promises us that together as indispensable stewards of liberation, that indeed we are midwifing liberation. So go midwife liberation in the church, in the community with the people of God everywhere.

Stewardship 2024

Our pledging campaign has been well received in November. It is critical for us to know the amount of resources available to us so the budget will be as strong and accurate as possible.



If you have not yet sent your information to the office (or dropped it in the box in the sanctuary), please consider doing it as soon as possible. The Finance Committee will be meeting in a few days to create a balanced budget for Council's consideration with the final vote being taken at the Annual Meeting in January.

Kudos to Gretchen M.!



The *American Meteorological Society* has announced that Gretchen M. PhD is one of its new Fellows in 2024. AMS Fellows are elected by the AMS Council based on "outstanding contributions to the atmospheric or related oceanic or hydrologic sciences or their applications during a substantial period of years."

The 2024 recipients will receive their awards or honors at the 10th AMS Annual Meeting in Baltimore, Maryland, January 28 - February 1, 2024.

A graduate of Mount Vernon High School, Gretchen and her husband, Greg currently live in Colorado where she is a director at the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR).

In November, Gretchen also received a Distinguished Alumni Award from the Department of Earth Science at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Search Committee

I don't know about you, but this time of transition while we are waiting for a new settled pastor makes me feel a little, well, unsettled. A part of me wants to push the Search Committee to finish the Church Profile quickly. (Research those demographics! Fill in those blanks! Check those boxes!) Only once the Church Profile has been sent to the Conference Office and has been validated by them, can we begin receiving ministerial profiles.

And yet I know that to rush this process would be to do the church a disservice. There are weighty questions to consider – Who are we as a church? Where are we going? Who is God calling us to become? Who are we seeking to join us on this part of our church's faith journey? These are questions that require careful consideration and well-worded responses.

I am reminded that Advent is the church season of waiting – and preparation. The voice of John the Baptist rings in my head, "Prepare ye the way..." And that is what we as a congregation are about at this time. Waiting and preparation.

We are not alone in this process. We are blessed with the leadership of Pastor Jay. We have one another. And always we have the abiding love of God. Which will, I hope, make us all feel a little more settled.

Ann L., Search Committee Chair

History Event By Ron M.

January 10, 2024, 1:00 pm, Mount Vernon Library

Ron M. will give a talk called *Pioneer Family Story*—the history of his family here in Ohio. If you're a history buff, this is a great event for you to hear some local history, by one from our church. Mark it on your calendar!

Prayers and Homebound

Christmas

Prayers

For your Church
Family and Friends

Especially for those who have lost loved
ones. They may need extra prayer.



The Christmas season gives us a
wonderful opportunity to reach
out and be a blessing to our
homebound members and
friends. A visit would truly warm
their hearts!

Normal Church Schedule

December Things

WHAT	WHEN	WHERE
Regular Worship Service	Sundays 9:30 am	Sanctuary
Social Time	Sundays 10:30 am	Social Hall
Sunday School	Sundays 11:00 am	Social Hall
Adult Forum		Chapel
Health, Healing and Fitness Ministry	Saturdays 11:00 am	Sanctuary
Health, Healing and Fitness Karate	Thursdays 6:00 pm	Chapel
Hanging of the Greens	December 1 10:00 am	Sanctuary
Cello Recital by Caleb Z.	Saturday December 9 7:00 pm	Sanctuary Reception in Social Hall
Tree of Sharing Gift Drop Off Deadline	Sunday December 10	Sanctuary Tree or Church Office
Christmas Eve Candle Lighting Service	December 24 7:00 pm	Sanctuary
No Nursery during Christmas Eve Service	Nursery rooms but will be available for families to supervise children as need- ed. Take home busy bags will be availa- ble for children to use during service.	Nursery rooms will be available.
No Sunday School or Adult Forum	Sunday December 24 and Sunday December 31	
Church Family Gathering and Meal led by Susi Serrino	December 31	Social Hall

Christmas Cookies For Christmas Eve

Do you like to bake? We would love to give you the chance to bake some of your favorite Christmas cookies to share at our reception that will follow the Christmas Eve service.

If you would like to help, please sign up on the Volunteer bulletin board in the Social Hall. Cookies can be brought to the church kitchen a day or two before Christmas Eve. Please label them "Cookies
"Cookies for Christmas Eve" and please label your container if you would like it returned to you. Thank you! You're the BEST BAKERS!



Interchurch *Tree of Sharing*

Thanks to all who have taken names. We still need help. Names are on the bulletin board in the social hall. Gifts may be brought to church and put under the tree in the sanctuary on December 3rd and 10th. December 13th is the deadline to bring in gifts and donations. The distribution day is December 13th. Contact Charlotte W.



Recital New Date!



You are cordially invited to a solo recital
By Caleb Z.

Loirée Francaise

December 9th, 2023
7:00pm

First Congregational Church
200 N. Main Street
Mount Vernon, Ohio

Featuring cello music from France
Reception to follow
French desserts and conversation

Book Report

Making Friends (& Making Them Count)

By Em Griffin, Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois. 1987.

In these strange times, beset by natural catastrophes that seem unnatural, we read the news of new unwelcome insights into our social fabric. Nationally, we have drug overdoses, infant neglect, domestic violence, ugly divorce, random murders and rampant madness. And very sadly an epidemic of loneliness. For some of these conditions we have antidotes!

Friendship is an art that we can learn and practice! Em Griffin offers science and introspection in this friendly guide, illustrated with clever cartoons and self quizzes. Integrating his expertise in communication with his personal journey, he offers a guide to the path out of isolation and into deeper, stronger, lasting friendship.

It should come as no surprise to you that he is a serious Christian, and sees friendship and the building of social life as part of the mission of churches.

Griffin offers ten rules of interpersonal communication: It is a process, beginning with oneself. As people are aware of their motives for getting together, we communicate to reduce uncertainty. Meanings are with people, not words. People communicate whether they mean to, or not. We need to identify positively with our communication partners; and it takes a lot of courage to be open and honest. Communication cannot be reversed, or duplicated; it consists of “content + relationship.” So he works through each of these ideas, to a concluding chapter on the “friendship mandate.”

Jesus elevated his disciples to friends, (John 15:15). Griffin argues that our friends meet Jesus in us, and we meet him in them. He cites Fred Buechner, whose many writings advocate sacred relationships over profitmaking: “It was Jimmy who became my great friend, and it was through coming to know him that I discovered that perhaps I was not, as I had always suspected, alone in the universe and the only one of my kind. He was another who saw the world enough as I saw it to make me believe that maybe it was the way the world actually was.”

Not that it is always easy to develop and grow friendship. One is certain to be embarrassed. It takes time. One’s efforts can be rejected. Yet “An intimate friendship has a life of its own that is greater than the separate lives of the two friends.” Griffin concludes with a quote from Teilhard de Chardin: “Someday, after we have mastered the winds and the waves, the tides, and gravity, we will harness for God the energies of love, and then for the second time in the history of the world man will have discovered fire.”

Mr. Griffin is a retired professor of speech communication at Wheaton College, and a lifelong student of relationships. He wrote this book as a way to share his own research findings, and to encourage readers to practice the art of friendship (and, I suspect, to share his collection of cartoons).

