

THE MESSENGER

FEBRUARY 2021



NEW COVENANT

COMMUNITY CHURCH

1587 W. EXCHANGE ST., AKRON, OH 44313

COVENANTAKRON.ORG

Preparing for Lent

Because it's not too early to think about it, I want to encourage you to think about what you are going to do during Lent (which begins on February 17). Lent is not only that time in the church year in which we are summoned to examine ourselves and our everyday preoccupations in order to take stock of the direction of our lives, but it also that time where we are invited to follow Jesus along the journey that took Him to the cross.

Due to events occurring in our country, this Lenten journey might be the most important one we have taken in quite some time, for as we follow Jesus during this liturgical season, we recognize that Jesus Christ endured the way of the cross in order to open a new future for all humanity. On His way to the cross, Jesus entered a world where sickness and disease were prevalent, where prophets had been murdered, where people were victimized, where political power was desired, and where inequality and injustice were commonplace. Yet, in that world, Jesus healed humanity... Jesus announced God's forgiveness of sinners... He welcomed the outcast and strangers... He proclaimed a new way of life characterized by the love of God and the love of our fellow human beings. Because the systems of violence that engulfed the world were threatened by the One who promoted peace, justice, and love, Jesus Himself became a victim of that violence.

However, Jesus did not endure the cross to demonstrate how cruel and evil people could be; on the contrary, Jesus endured the cross in order to put an end to all the crosses of history. (Continued on pg. 4)



When was the first Ash Wednesday celebrated? Monsignor Kevin Irwin, a liturgy specialist at Catholic University, says the practice started in the 10th century and became an official liturgy in the 13th century.

Aside from Roman Catholics, who else observes Ash Wednesday? United Methodists, Lutherans, Anglicans/Episcopalians, [Presbyterians] and other liturgical Protestants partake in receiving ashes. Historically, the practice is not common among evangelicals. Rev. Arne Panula, Director of the Catholic Information Center in Washington, D.C., also says Muslims, Jews and even some people who aren't religious honor the tradition as a reminder of man's shortcomings.

(From PCUSA.org, by Amanda Murphy)

"If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me."

Luke 9:23



From the Governing Board President

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christian Fellowship,

It is a great honor to have been installed as the president of New Covenant's Governing Board for the next year, and a distinct challenge as well. As we move into the second month of this year, we are getting closer to beginning a second year of quarantines, of staying at home, of missing our time together as a congregation. So it is also a pleasure to look back on the past year and see that we have managed to stay together as well as we have.

First of all, I want to express my gratitude to our Pastor Tom for his continued leadership. I suspect he never had a course in seminary on how to conduct a church where nobody was allowed to come. And no one else among us has had to do this either. And still we have managed. Also, huge thanks to the dedicated and talented team that have recorded our weekly worship services, edited them, and posted them on line. For as bad as it has been not to be able to meet together for Sunday worship, this taste of what could be, of what should be, has been such a welcome break in the tedium and loneliness of life on lock-down, and a strand helping to hold us together as a community.

I am also so grateful that we, the members of New Covenant, have been so patient and faithful. While the pandemic has been a serious strain on the national and world economy, New Covenant has held up financially. We received over 98% of our regularly pledged giving for 2020, and our reduced expenses, due to not meeting, more than made up the difference. We asked for a special pledge to resurface our parking lot, and received every penny promised. And our 2021 pledges are in line with last year. We finished last year with a surplus over \$18,000. At their January meeting, the governing board decided to devote half of this surplus to reducing the balance on our mortgage. A quarter will be spent in the near future to assist with the unusual level of hunger and homeless needs in the Akron area due to the pandemic. The remaining quarter is being held in reserve for possible additional relief for pandemic-related community needs in the coming months.

Since its founding, New Covenant has been committed to tithing as a congregation. Most years we have met that goal, and despite all the challenges, once again in 2020 we devoted more than one tenth of our annual spending to missions beyond our walls. We expect to do the same in 2021 as well.

(Continued on page 5)



(Preparing for Lent—continued) The cross of Jesus Christ proclaims that God has entered into solidarity with all the victimized upon the planet and has broken down the walls of hostility between us. Consequently, we too must realize that there is no such thing as reconciliation with God without reconciliation with our fellow human beings.

So, during this Lenten season, let's consider not just what we will **give up**, but what we will **give**. In addition to giving up a desire for retaliation and revenge, let's also give our unique creativity and our most inspired efforts in working to secure "peace on earth and goodwill among all people." In addition to giving up our favorite food or beverage, let's also give our resources in order to ensure that even during a pandemic, no human being will ever die of hunger. In addition to giving up a few comforts from our exceptionally comfortable lives, let us also during this time of political division give a renewed commitment in taking up the cross daily and following Jesus by doing risky things such as loving your enemies, and advocating equality for all people everywhere, and serving our sisters and brothers in our community and around the world.

So, during this Lenten season, let's consider not just what we will **give up**, but what we will **give**. In addition to giving up a desire for retaliation and revenge, let's also give our unique creativity and our most inspired efforts in working to secure "peace on earth and goodwill among all people." In addition to giving up our favorite food or beverage, let's also give our resources in order to ensure that even during a pandemic, no human being will ever die of hunger. In addition to giving up a few comforts from our exceptionally comfortable lives, let us also during this time of political division give a renewed commitment in taking up the cross daily and following Jesus by doing risky things such as loving your enemies, and advocating equality for all people everywhere, and serving our sisters and brothers in our community and around the world.

Accordingly, because it's not too early to think about it, I want to encourage you to think about what you are going to do during Lent. After all, what God leads you to do for Lent just might change your life, and it just might help to change the world.

Blessings,
tom

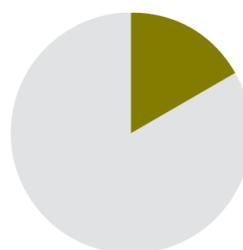
CHILD FOOD INSECURITY RATE



26.2%

of Summit County's population, or 30,270 children

FOOD INSECURITY RATE



17.3%

of Summit County's population, or 93,660 individuals

FACTS
FROM
AKRON-
CANTON
FOODBANK

Next week, we should all receive a copy of the 2021 budget, approved by the governing board at its last meeting. Then we will have a congregational meeting via Zoom to discuss the budget and other questions or concerns you may have for the governing board.

We have a lot of good things to look forward to in the coming year. At the top of my list, and I imagine pretty much everybody's list, is to get to the time when we can meet together safely and be a community and the body of Christ in person, face to face, in each other's company. Until then, let's do what we can to support each other at the distances we must keep for now, bear one another up, and maintain our witness to Christ in our part of the world. I will continue to repeat the prayer and benediction I learned from Miss McKee, my third grade Sunday school teacher: "May the Lord watch between me and thee, while we are absent one from the other."

Tim Meyer, 2021 Governing Board President

AAIC & Social Justice

I invite any of you who may be interested to join the February 2nd AAIC Zoom meeting at noon. The meeting usually lasts about an hour or so. No need to pre-register.



Meeting ID is: 830 8387 4088. Passcode is: 035331.

The reason for the invite is to let you hear what the new Interfaith Social Justice group has to say and what their work entails. There are three parts to the group—Prayer Presence and Partnership
Minority Affairs Accountability
and the Summit Co. Sheriff Committee

Maybe some of you will become interested and just maybe a spark for our own NCCC MISSION project might be ignited. Reesá will send out the link and agenda on February 1st.

By way of announcements, "Prayers for the Pandemic" that occurred on January 17th can be accessed on the AAIC website (akroninterfaith.org/calendar-2/), Facebook page (facebook.com/AkronInterfaith) or on YouTube (youtube.com/watch?v=QQzj4VQUPEg). The extremely well-done and put together, "Prayers for the Pandemic" neatly tied together Lament of Loss & Injustice, the Case for Interfaith Work, A Calming Meditation for the Work Ahead, and Healing & Hope. The Benediction, "A Covid 19 Song" was beautifully performed by Nimo Parel with Empty Hands Mission. (I'd love to use this during a Sunday morning service!)

So...eat your lunch before, during or after the 12:00 p.m. meeting next Tuesday, February 2nd and join in.

Nancy Williams