

# The Messenger

NEW COVENANT

# COMMUNITY CHURCH

A WEST AKRON NEIGHBORHOOD CHURCH

*The  
Pastor's Post*  
Open Minds

*January  
2024*

As the New  
Year approaches,

I find myself both excited and horrified. I'm excited because of all the new possibilities the year holds (all 366 days of it), and I'm especially excited for the Summer Olympics in Paris. The opening ceremony, the excitement of watching the best of the best from around the world compete in one place, the togetherness we as a nation feel when we root on our country's best to "bring home the gold;" there's nothing like it. At the same time, though, almost as if it is the "yin" to the Olympics' "yang," we have the Presidential Election season and all the divisiveness that creates within our country. However, I realize that I am not innocent in the furthering of this divisiveness.

Now, mind you, I consider myself a very open-minded and accepting person... that is, except when it comes to politics. If I'm being honest, I'm like any good United States citizen. I am stubborn to a fault when it comes to my political views, and you can't convince me one iota to change sides or see the other side's perspective. That being said, there are politicians I love to hate on, parties I love to bash, voters I find myself confounded to understand how they could possibly vote the way they do. With the next Presidential Election season

ramping up for next year, the political divisiveness

I (like a good chunk of the populace) find myself feeling will find itself far more in the limelight than non-election years. Thus, I have decided that one of my New Year's resolutions will be to be more open-minded, and this is a resolution I feel we could all add to our list, regardless of how open-minded and accepting we view ourselves as being.

The divisiveness from politics in our country has heightened to the point where what used to be simple differences in opinion is now "us vs. them" an (debatably) legitimate enmity. The political parties feel far less like competing-yet-equal thoughts than they do enemies at war, entities whose words and actions cause us to feel threatened. Well, if the other party (whichever party that may be for you) is your enemy, then I would encourage you to consider how then you are to respond to those enemies. There's no denying that one of the hardest commands we are given in the Bible is to love our enemies. Mind you, though, this command doesn't say we have to agree with them. Truth be told, so long as they are not promoting intolerance, there is space for us to tolerate them and their views. However, as much as we disagree with them, we must (*Open cont. on page 2*)

(Open cont. from page 1) honor and respect them. In the end, we are all in this together. We are all facing the same problems, hunting for solutions to the same problems. Where we get hung up is when our ego starts chiming in, saying our answers, our opinions, are the only valid ones; essentially, that there is a “right” and “wrong” answers to the problems we are facing as a country. So long as we let our egos do the talking, we will be unable to love those who think differently than we do, and the fire of this political divisiveness will only grow.

This is why it's so important that we all resolve in this new year to open our minds further, to loving more and hating less. If we are all in this together, if we're all seeing the same problems and finding different answers, we should be listening to each other more, not less. Only when we come together and start to collaborate more will we solve the problems we face. To do that though, we must lay aside our egos, put down what defenses we have put up against our “enemies,” and open our minds to other points of view. - Brad Rito, Pastor

It was December 2021 that I agreed to be President of Governing Board for 2022. A few weeks later Tom Ulrich announced he would be retiring in February of 2023. We spent the next year preparing, with the help of Holy Cow Consulting, to understand who we were, our strengths, and our areas needing improvement. Under Ken Williams' capable leadership we launched our Pastoral Nominating Committee early, and they worked diligently to find Brad Rito.

I was fortunate during both of my years as President to have capable, eager, faithful, convivial board members who showed up, did the work they promised to do, and supported me no matter how bumbling my leadership.

Reesá was, and continues to be, the rock that held us all together (especially me) during these transition years. She is a gift that never stops giving.

So, here we are, a new year, 2024, a new Board President, Hal Horton, two new board members, Jenny Bryson and Joan Lannoch, and a new pastor settling in. I know you will support and pray for them just as you did for me these past two years.

We are a small congregation with great affection for each other. We find our strength magnified when we partner with likeminded organizations that share our goals. Witness partnering with Let's Grow Akron to expand the ability of our Mission Garden to put food on the tables of needy families and the Hunger Walk to help fund the Akron Canton Regional Foodbank's on-going mission. I applaud with unending praise your determination to, in our own small way, do the unending work to make the community we live in a better, safer, more loving world.

All the best,

*Nancy Clem,*

Governing Board President

## 2024 GOVERNING BOARD

### PRESIDENT

Hal Horton (2024)

### MEMBERS

Jenny Bryson (2026)

Ken Heischman (2025)

Joan Lannoch (2026)

Jackie Roth (2024)

Nancy Williams (2025)

### EX-OFFICIO OFFICERS

Rev. Brad Rito—Pastor

Reesá Banks-Mathews—Secretary

John Sezna—Treasurer

## FELLOWSHIP COMMITTEE LOOKING BACK, THEN MOVING FORWARD

This past January and February proved to be our committee's busiest months ever. This followed a very active 2022, complete with a play at Porthouse, a late summer Caribbean party featuring the leader of the University of Akron Steel Drum band and his son, a Christmas party with entertainer Mark Alan Wade on the hammered dulcimer.

But back to January and February—

The big event was the planning and carrying off a farewell luncheon for Pastor Tom Ulrich and his wife, Cathy, at the O'Neil House on February 19. Reesá Mathews crafted and mailed the invitations in early January. People had to choose their entree and pay by the end of the month, no easy task! In addition, a brief program was presented and a photo look-back at Tom's 5+ years with us was displayed. Tim Mathews, Reesá's husband, photographed the event, then she and I selected the pictures for an album, which Reesá put together and mailed to Tom in Albuquerque.



Earlier in the month Fellowship Committee put together a reception for Cathy Ulrich, who was the retiring Eastminster Executive Presbyter.

When February was over, our small, but mighty committee, "collapsed" momentarily, and I "retired" as chair.

But we recovered... and put together what has become an annual event, attending a play at Porthouse Theater in June. In 2023, a record 22 members and guests came out to enjoy A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to The Forum and a potluck before the play. Shortly after that the committee was hard at work coordinating a reception to welcome our new pastor, Rev. Brad Rito, and his wife, Katie.



During the fall we had our annual hot dog roast. That event was followed by a Blessing Service, which was held the first Sunday in October. Then in December we held our annual Christmas party with a guest appearance from St. Nicholas, who cheerfully interacted with Heidi and Ken's grandchildren. Then the grandchildren took on the task of passing out treats to our Christmas Bingo winners. Ken H. led us in singing several Christmas



songs. In addition to the party, we were able to procure 15 tickets, literally at the last minute, to see Brad and Katie in Elf: The Musical, at Weathervane on November 30.

So, where do we go in 2024? Well, a Soup Lunch on Jan. 21 will usher in our new Governing Board and Nominating Committee members, a lunch out somewhere is planned for Feb. 18, a return of the Easter Breakfast on March 31, and no doubt a play at Porthouse in June. No committee chair, just 5 of us wanting to have fun and fellowship with our church friends.



Nancy Williams

## **FAITH INNOVATION TEAM (FIT) 2024 NEIGHBORHOOD COLLABORATIONS**

Your Faith Innovation Team has developed a program of volunteer opportunities designed to strengthen our relationships in the neighborhood for 2024 and beyond. Our target relationships are within a one and one-half mile radius of the NCCC building.

Watch the weekly announcements and [The Messenger](#) for details and updates about these events.

### **Here is the FIT Event Calendar for 2024:**

March 23 – *Hop-A-Long the Bunny Trail Storybook Walk at NW Family Recreation Center.* Volunteers are needed to serve refreshments, help with an egg hunt, staff the Storybook stations and more.

May (7pm on last Friday in May) - *Annual Dance Recital at Firestone High School Auditorium.* Volunteers are needed to collect tickets and serve as ushers.

June 30 – *Fifth Sunday Collection for the Christ Woodland Food Pantry* located at 444 N. Hawkins. The food pantry serves approximately 70 households per month. Watch for details about the items to be collected.

July – *Arts Expo at Hardesty Park.* Volunteers needed for various activities on both days of the event.

August (2nd Tuesday in August) – *Night Out Against Crime at NW Family Recreation Center.* Volunteers are needed to serve beverages and distribute informational materials.

September 29 – *Fifth Sunday Collection for the Christ Woodland Food Pantry.* Watch for details about the items to be collected.

October—*Fall Fest at NW Family Recreation Center.* Volunteers are needed to help with the trick or treat Storybook Walk, scavenger hunt, pumpkin decorating, games and serving refreshments. Volunteers are encouraged to come in costume!

December (on the Saturday a week before Christmas) – *Winter Wonderland at the NW Family Recreation Center.* Volunteers are needed to serve refreshments and assist with games and other activities. (If you are not able to participate in the Christmas Basket delivery, please consider this activity).

Other – Volunteer for Anne T. Case CLC PTA – Volunteers are requested for various events. Volunteer opportunities will be reported in [The Messenger](#).

–Shelley Koutnik

## **NEW INITIATIVES**

An interesting group, not a committee really, that developed about 5 years ago, first with the purpose of getting others through the door, and then a group that became more involved in the interfaith community with opportunities for engagement in social action outside of our church. Everyone is a member of this group and can give ideas. Anything is on the table for discussion.

We have been and will be strong advocates for the Hunger Walk in May, Mitzvah Day in early June, and other AAIC and AIIA collections and events. While all of the activities are mission-oriented they go beyond the activities the Mission Committee currently has in place.

The vision for 2024 is of course, to continue our congregation's great participation in these events:

- Hunger Walk on May 5 (sponsored by AAIC)
- Mitzvah Day June 1 & 2,
- and to become more involved in programs our interfaith community.

In closing, my commitment is to see how FIT, Missions, Worship, and New Initiatives can offer a collaborative direction in the coming year and to get input from Pastor Brad.

- Nancy Williams

## REFLECTIONS ON OUR MISSION GARDEN

In 2014, our first year, we asked Genessaret what vegetables they would most like to feed hungry and homeless. They suggested: tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, zucchini, and green beans. Those became the foundation for NCCC's Mission Garden. After that, they requested herbs, garlic, potatoes, collards, more green beans, and possibly spinach and lettuce. We have tried to give as much as possible!

I wish I had a count of all that came out of that small garden over the years, but we didn't start recording it until several years after starting. We tried to provide the congregation with weekly updates with photos and counts after that.

It has been a labor of love for those of us who found ourselves at weekly "garden parties", weeding, planting, harvesting, watering, etc. We used donated garden tools from members of the congregation, some that Marty Pastor found at yard sales, and tools we brought from our homes. Betsy Davis and Beverly Cinovec shopped Dunkler's Farm Market for plant starts. Bev supplied seeds to get the growing started. Betsy spearheaded the Monarch Way Station project. It took several years to get the milkweed started, but now it and all the flowers surrounding the milkweed, support the butterflies and bees needed for pollinating.

Ken Williams Jim Strandberg, and Ken Heischman raised the fencing from 4 ft. to 8 ft., after the deer discovered us. Then we added chicken wire around the fencing to deter those rascally rabbits from digging under it to get to the green beans. We even installed covered hoops in an effort to keep the squash bugs from killing our zucchini. (They found their way in in spite of our efforts!)

Every summer Saturday, Betsy Davis and Nancy Clem delivered our produce to Genessaret or arranged help from others when they weren't available.

Sadly, our gardeners, Nancy, Betsy, Marty, Ken W., Betty Miller, John Miller, and Bev have gradually found it more and more difficult to manage our little garden. We are thrilled to have discovered Let's Grow Akron as a means to continue our mission of providing fresh food to those in need, and 2024 will be our pilot year to work with this organization and work out all the details (find new gardeners, etc.).

A big "thank you" to the Mission Committee and the whole congregation for all their support and help over the years!

- Bev Cinovec





## AAIC News

Do you have questions about the Akron Area Interfaith Council? Come to the Mustard Seed Tuesday, January 2, at noon. Instead of having a regular meeting, the organization is having a social gathering with a short look to the coming months. If you wish to attend, speak with Nancy W.

Here's a brief recap of the Community Conversations event that AAIC held on December 3 at The Remedy Church in Akron, for the purpose of discovering what various faith communities can accomplish with Mayor-Elect Shammus Malik's administration. A hugely diverse group of 200 discussed three questions, moving to a different table after each question. The questions were:

1. How has violence affected your life?
2. What factors make life really difficult in Akron?
3. How can we move forward toward peace?

Each table host gave a summary of the discussions. The summaries and worksheets from each table will be studied and summarized for the Akron community. But, one of the "nuggets" that came from the discussions helped to frame the importance of the event. It was simply, "Interfaith is the language of peace."

Candlelight Vigil for Peace Throughout the World, held on Dec. 21, at the Unitarian Universalist Church.

A very moving, peaceful, and contemplative service featuring several local clergy plus a musical group, coming together on the darkest day of the year to pray for peace and hope during the coming year.

Nancy W.

