



The Open Door

December 2020



CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

God is still speaking,

An Open and Affirming Congregation

Who We Are

We are a community of God's beloved dedicated to **following** the teachings of Jesus as we live our faith by **loving** and **servicing** all of God's creation and **striving** for justice and peace throughout our community, our nation, and the world.

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ADVENT AT CUCC 2021

ADVENT 2020: We added a meditation to Bev Thomas's Musical Moments and launched our first Musical Moments and Meditation (which has continued every week since then). After joining other churches for Sunday worship for many weeks, we were pleased to create the Christmas Eve service in our sanctuary and post it for viewing.

FAST FORWARD: Worship at Congregational United Church of Christ in Newton looks much different this Advent season. We are in the sanctuary every Sunday morning at 11 AM, with inspiring messages from supply pastors. We say prayers aloud together and sing hymns, all with masks on, of course. We will be lighting the Advent wreath.

Some seasonal decorations were visible for the November 28th service, the first Sunday in Advent. The seasonal adornment of the church was completed on November 30th.

This year, our traditional Christmas Eve service will be held in the sanctuary on Friday, December 24th at 7 PM. We will be joined by the Reverend Mark Holmes. As the Open Door is going to publication, the service is in planning and preparation. Come join us to experience the wonder and delight of the traditional Christmas story.



CARING FOR EACH OTHER

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other.

John 13:34

It is as we love and care for one another that we create a healthy, vibrant community. We can communicate with church members and friends who aren't as mobile as they once were. We can celebrate birthdays and anniversaries with one another because these are joyous occasions. We can pray for members, the families of members, and all of our friends, sometimes because they want and need our prayers and sometimes because we are overwhelmingly happy to have them in our lives and so grateful for them.

BIRTHDAYS

- 12/4 Suzanne Van Zandt
Dickie Teed
- 12/6 Daniel McPherran
- 12/10 Megan Pryke
- 12/11 Katie Schober-Ordenez
- 12/15 Pat Van Klompenburg
- 12/16 Caleb McGinley
- 12/20 Keiarra Hicks
- 12/21 Niall Grandstaff-Fresh
- 12/22 Cainan McGinley
- 12/24 Julie McPherran
- 12/27 Alayzha Hicks
- 12/30 Liam Grandstaff-Fresh

ANNIVERSARIES

- 12/24 Melissa & Gary Pearson

LESS ABLE TO BE OUT AND ABOUT

- Marilyn Currant
- Bev Edge
- Martha Ellsworth
- Betty Jean Hotchkin
- Norma (Jeannie) Johnson

Phone numbers, addresses, and, in many cases, email addresses for all of the folks listed above are in the 2021 Church Directory. If you do not find them under **Local Members & Friends**, check **Out of Town Members & Friends**, on p. 16.

Continued on p. 3

Prayers, Concerns, and Joys

Having another share our sorrow lightens the load. Having another share our happiness multiplies the joy.

Please hold in prayer:

| | | |
|--|------------------|------------------------|
| Don Deppe | Martha Ellsworth | Stormy Storms |
| Kelly Jo Zach | Brent Parker | Heidi Grandstaff-Fresh |
| Deb Swihart (Melissa Pearson's mother) | | |
| Alex Stonehocker (Jenni Pryke's grandson) | | |
| Kaleia & K Guthrie (April Faidley's grandchildren) | | |

If you know someone in need of support – a visit, a call, a note, or prayer – please contact the church office.

In the event of a pastoral emergency, please contact Rev. David Raymond, Pastor Emeritus, either directly at (641) 521-1506 or davidray@mediacombb.net. or through the church office at 792-3773 (staffed Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, 10:00am -3:00pm). Rev. Raymond is offering emergency pastoral care until we have secured a supply pastor or pastoral care assistance.

***Please remember that when expressing our Joys & Concerns **during the worship service** the information we are sharing is being recorded to the internet. It is therefore, IMPERATIVE when we share a name, that we remain sensitive to that individual's wishes regarding their comfort with public information versus anonymity. If you have any questions, please contact a member of the Church Council.

A Brief COVID update

Internationally: The Omicron Variant, first identified in South Africa and Botswana, has also been found in Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Israel, Germany, Denmark, the Czech Republic, and Australia. We do not yet know whether Omicron is more contagious, whether it causes more severe disease, or what its effects on vaccine efficacy may be. South African genomic scientists who are working with the variant are highly respected and trusted.

In the United States: On June 20th the recorded 7-day average of new cases was 11,133. On November 26th the recorded 7-day average of new cases was 74,946. Five states, Montana, Colorado, Minnesota, Michigan, and Pennsylvania, have had dramatic increases in cases, and there is currently no explanation for why this is happening.

In Iowa: On June 24th the recorded 7-day average of new cases was 66. On November 26th it was 1,508.

In Jasper County: On June 25th the 7-day average of new cases was 0. On November 26th it was 17.

The most effective steps individuals can take to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus is to keep a physical distance of at least 6 feet from others; wear a well-fitting mask; open windows to improve ventilation; avoid poorly ventilated or crowded spaces; keep hands clean; cough or sneeze into a bent elbow or tissue; and get vaccinated when it's your turn.



Money Musings

By Larry Leitner, Treasurer

As you know, the Congregation approved a provisional budget at the Annual Meeting in October, as we awaited the results of the stewardship campaign, informing us about pledges for next year. This provisional budget allows us to pay bills early in 2022, as we gain greater clarity in regard to our financial situation for the year.

One MAJOR assumption of that budget was that, for 2022, we would match the pledge income committed to us for the 2021 year. Our 2021 budget was based upon the expectation that the church will receive \$82,615 that was committed in pledges. So, a very important question for the financial future of the church would be: How much pledge income will people commit for 2022? As I write this Money Musings, I am pleased to report that we currently have \$84,130 pledged for 2022, \$1,515 OVER 2021. This is indeed great news for our finances, and somewhat of a surprise, since attendance at worship services is much lower than it used to be.

Please keep in mind that this good news does not erase our deficit for next year. The provisional budget has a 2022 deficit of \$12,369. The provisional budget also assumes that we collect \$9,100 in non-pledge and loose change offerings in 2022. That is a higher rate of collection than we have seen since we reopened. So, the budget situation, while better, contains some uncertainties, as it always does.

Finally, assuming no disaster like a new furnace/roof, etc. hits us in the next month, I can report that we should end the 2021 fiscal year without drawing anything from our reserves. This marks the second year in a row that we have not needed to draw down the reserves. While this sounds like it is good news for church finances, we need to keep in mind the reason for it. The major reason we do not need to draw on our endowment is we do not have a settled half-time pastor. The pastor's salary comes cheap when you don't actually have a pastor. We are all hoping for this to change. With no candidates responding to our posted profile, we are continuing our conversations with the Lutherans, working towards a joint profile in order to secure a shared fulltime pastor.

The Book Study group is currently reading *Re-Imagine the World: An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus.*, by Bernard Brandon Scott. We are finding this study intriguing, challenging, and an excellent generator of provocative discussions. The author begins: "For many . . . the parables are simple stories, illustrations for the common people. Such interpreters almost always end up with trite meanings for the parables . . . I have never found Jesus' parables simple. . . I am trying to understand what Jesus intended by the parables."

The study will conclude on December 16th.

Schedule:

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| December 2 | Chapters 10-11, Unforgiving Slave and Dinner Party, pp. 97-118 |
| December 9 | Chapter 12, Re-Imagining the World, pp. 119-140 |
| December 16 | Epilogue, Living in a Re-Imagined World, pp. 141-150 |

Anyone is welcome to participate in this study via ZOOM. We will need to know in advance if you plan to do so. Please contact the church office, April Faidley, or Jane Ann Cotton, so that we can be prepared with the necessary equipment for a ZOOM attendance.

EDUCATION



Communications

Church Council Catch Up

To keep the congregation informed about matters that impact our life together, we share notes from Church Council meetings here in the newsletter. The following notes are from the meeting held on November 10, 2021.

Where We Are: Larry Leitner, Treasurer, reported that pledges for next year are about \$23,000 less than anticipated. He suggested sending an email reminder to those who pledged this year, to encourage them to pledge again. Approved by consensus. [For further information, see Money Musings on p. 4.]

Norm Van Klompenburg reported that the tuck pointing repair is underway and will be completed shortly. The parking sign that had been laying in the yard has been reinstalled. Volunteers have worked on clearing up the landscape beds, and the lawn has been edged. The appearance of the landscaping is much improved by the work of volunteers.

After discussion, the schedule for supply pastors and suggested advent wreath candle lighters was approved, pending confirmation from individuals. Supply pastors: Linda Curtis-Stolper for December 12 and 19. Mark Holmes for Dec. 5, 26, and Jan. 2. Advent wreath: Nov. 28– Jenni Pryke; Dec. 5– Les Morgan; Dec. 12– Dorothy & David Raymond; Dec. 19– Jane Ann Cotton & Lin Chape; Dec. 24– Heidi Grandstaff-Fresh and family. Rev. Holmes is willing to the Christmas Eve service and Jenni Pryke volunteered to be the liturgist.

The sanctuary will be decorated Tuesday, November 30, at 10:30 AM.

We need liturgists for Sunday morning services. Jenni Pryke volunteered to do every Sunday through December. After that we will need liturgists from January 5th to February 15th, while Jenni is gone.

Changing the congregation’s active participation in worship was discussed. Council decided the congregation will sing the interlude and closing hymns and recite the prayers while wearing masks. We will put this in the weekly update and announce it from the pulpit.

Dorothy Raymond brought up a concern that David Raymond had shared about what we say during Joys and Concerns on Sunday morning, since the service is now broadcast over the internet. Discussion ensued. It was decided that due to the internet broadcast we will no longer give specific information and only ask that people be included in prayers. The liturgist will announce this during the Sunday services. Specific information can be included in the Open Door.

Where God is Leading Us: The Search Committee will meet Nov. 12 to analyze CUCC and Lutheran profiles; on Nov. 16 a meeting will be held with the Lutheran committee to jointly discuss merging the profiles to achieve a single profile that will request a fulltime pastor shared between our congregations.

Council Composition

Should you have any questions regarding the work of the Council, you are encouraged to contact a Council member:

Moderator: Jane Ann Cotton
Secretary: Jennifer Pryke
Treasurer: Larry Leitner

Assistant Moderator: April Faidley
At-Large: Norm Van Klompenburg
At-Large: Les Morgan

A Revery from the Editor

Church attendance in mainline Protestant denominations in the United States has been declining for the last several decades. The “nones,” the religiously unaffiliated, have grown from about 5% in the early 1970s to at least 30% in 2020. Here at CUCC Council has been watching our attendance figures. Anne Gerken, our Admin Assistant, created some graphs for us comparing attendance in 2019 with attendance in 2021. These graphs clearly illustrate that our in-person drop is around 50%, although we have some “attendance” through our Facebook postings of the services.

There are numerous contributions to our decline, not the least of which are the pandemic and the lack of a pastor. Those two factors are, we hopefully expect, temporary. Yet we also note fewer people available to carry on the work of the church and keep the doors open, fewer (or no) volunteers to be ushers, liturgists, speakers for Musical Moments and Meditation. Council needs to keep an eye on questions like “When should we be alarmed?” and “Are we still viable as a congregation?” In this climate of caution and maybe even dread about the future, it was a very pleasant surprise that the stewardship campaign ended with a slight increase in pledge income for the coming year!! It doesn’t look as bleak as we thought it might be.

I wonder what it is that prompts folks to come to church and participate? What prompts folks to give money to the ongoing activity of the church? What prompts folks to stop doing these things? Those are difficult questions and perhaps we cannot even devise a way to ferret out answers that might be helpful in turning around the trend. So . . . what DO we DO?

As I thought about that question, I was reminded of a line from *Fiddler on the Roof*: “Rabbi, we’ve been waiting for the Messiah all our lives, wouldn’t now be a good time for him to come?” The *Fiddler on the Roof* was a highly successful musical, garnering 3 Oscars and a Golden Globe for Best Motion Picture-Comedy or Musical in 1972. Despite some lighthearted comedy and rousing songs, it was different from the typical happy-ending musical. It was a sober reflection on history, ending with all the Jewish families in a small village in Russia in the early 1900s being forced by a pogrom to leave their homes.

And then I thought of Christmas—a birth—a Messiah—the Holy come to dwell among us. We are reminded year after year as we reflect upon the traditional stories of the birth of Jesus, that we follow a path that is hopeful, loving, and peaceful and that we do not walk alone. Yes, now IS a good time. God is here with us. What do we do? We walk our path, day after day, in faith, that as we support, encourage, and love others, as we pursue peace and work for justice, we are doing what there is to do. And those who want to join us will do so.

God go with you in all that is gentle.

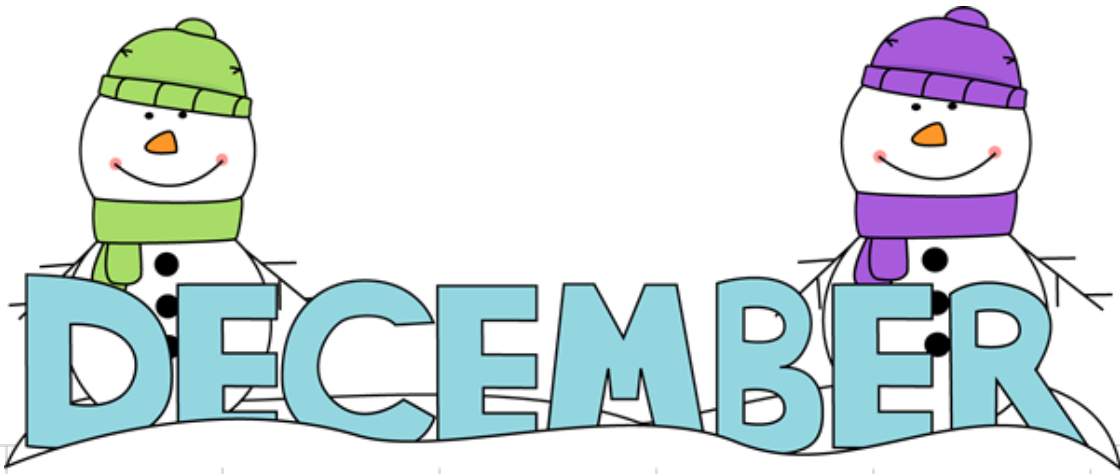
Christ go with you in all that is brave.

And the spirit go with you in all that is free.

Go now in peace, to love and serve our God. Amen*

Shalom.

*from the Christian Council of Asia



| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|---|---|--|------------------------|---|--|----------------------|
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| | | | | 5:00 pm <i>Re-Imagine the World</i> book study Parish House | International Day of Persons with Disabilities | |
| 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
| Second Advent Sunday 11am Worship with Rev. Mark Holmes | Last Day of Hanukkah | 10 am Video taping of Meditation and Musical Moments | 6:00 pm Church Council | 5:00 pm <i>Re-Imagine the World</i> book study Parish House | | |
| 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 |
| Third Advent Sunday 11am Worship with Linda Curtis -Stolper | | 10 am Video taping of Meditation and Musical Moments | | 5:00 pm <i>Re-Imagine the World</i> book study Parish House | | |
| 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 |
| Fourth Advent Sunday 11am Worship with Linda Curtis -Stolper | | 10 am Video taping of Meditation and Musical Moments | | | 7 pm Christmas Eve Service in the sanctuary | Christmas Day |
| 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | |
| 11am Worship with Rev. Mark Holmes | Deadline for Submissions to the Open Door | | | | New Year's Eve | |

Congregational United Church of Christ
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The Open Door is a newsletter for the members and friends of Congregational United Church of Christ.

Submissions are welcome. Deadline for submission is the date indicated on the Calendar.

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Office hours: 10:00am to 3:00pm Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday



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