

The Open Door

November 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 **serving** all of God's creation and **striving** for justice and peace throughout our community, our nation, and the world.

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Larry pledges.



April reacts—higher!



Larry tries again.

!!!!!!!!!!!!\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$!!!!!!

This month **Money Musings** takes front and center stage and YOU, the congregants, are the stars of the show.

This is where I explain how powerful you, the members of the congregation, are in the fiscal functioning of the church.

You were sent a provisional budget prior to the Annual Meeting. At the Annual Meeting on October 25th the provisional budget was approved.

This approval gave me, the treasurer, the ability to continue to pay our bills beginning January 1, 2021. Without this approval from you, I would have been able to receive pledges and non-pledge donations, but I wouldn't have been able to write checks to vendors. The approval was for a provisional budget because there are so many uncertainties at the present time. I will discuss those further below. After the new year starts and we have a better feel for our finances, a final budget will be presented to you for consideration. (cont.)



That's better!

The provisional budget is even more provisional than usual as we have had to make numerous assumptions concerning both income and expenses. Two major issues create the uncertainties: being closed due to the pandemic and transitioning to half time pastor compensation. Thus, on the income side, we have assumed our pledges for 2021 will match the pledges we received for 2020 (\$85,500). We are not there yet; we have received pledges totaling almost \$59,000. These pledges come from exactly 50% of the people who pledged last year. This is another place in the budget process where all the power resides with YOU, the congregants. We are hopeful that more pledges will continue to roll in.

In the provisional budget we have also assumed that in-person worship will resume in April. Non-pledge and loose change income are higher when we are worshipping in person, in the church building on Sunday. And finally, we assumed interest rates will rise from their current near zero rate. To give one example of the impact of interest rates on our finances, we were getting anywhere from \$35 - \$50 of interest each month on funds held by Edward Jones. Now we are getting between 37 and 50 CENTS!

Now let's look at the assumptions on the expense side. The largest assumption here is our ministerial compensation package. We have assumed a package that equals what we would have paid Jessica had she stayed with us. Perhaps you recall that the decision to move to a half-time pastor included offering that pastor compensation at the level of the conference guidelines. We had been striving to reach that level of pastoral compensation ever since Jessica came, but had never quite reached it. We have no idea exactly what compensation package we will negotiate with a new pastor, as that will need to take into account factors specific to the person, such as years of experience, need for health insurance and how many family members would be covered on said health insurance, housing needs, and so on. A more minor uncertainty on the expense side is utility costs; the longer we stay closed, the lower our electricity and heating/cooling bills.

The bottom line of the provisional budget is a 2021 deficit of \$4,103.56. It could be much higher or much lower (even in the black!), depending upon:

- a) the gap between our assumptions and reality, and
- b) the gap between assumed pledge income and actual pledges made.

In case you missed it along the way, the last factor resides entirely in the hands of YOU, the members of Newton Congregational UCC. Amen.

Larry Leitner, Treasurer

Annual Meeting, October 25, 2020

For the first time in the history of Newton Congregational UCC, the Annual Meeting was held over ZOOM. Twenty-one people were in attendance, constituting a quorum, as specified in the By-Laws. Jane Ann Cotton read her Moderator's report to start the meeting:

"The Church Council has focused on the many changes that have occurred since we had our previous annual meeting. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting challenges regarding in-person worship has impacted every aspect of our church life. We had live-streamed worship by our Pastor Jessica Petersen until the end of July through our Facebook page. August 1st was the beginning of Jessica's four week sabbatical followed by two weeks' vacation. It was during this time arrangements were made with Grinnell United Church of Christ to access their worship services through a link provided weekly.

On August 24, Jessica Petersen submitted her letter of resignation. As you know, due to our financial situation, we planned to switch to a half-time position October 1, 2020 and that plan impacted Jessica's decision to stay with us. Since that time, your Church Council has worked diligently and with extreme dedication to make the necessary decisions to formulate the plan for moving forward. Several committees have been formed to provide the needed information that will be forwarded to the UCC Conference offices. Sincere thanks are offered to those that are serving on the committees.

The Derecho that occurred August 10th caused significant damage that has required many hours' work with members following up with the necessary insurance contacts. Thanks to them for their dedication. The Church Council has had many Zoom meetings due to the challenges we continue to have, but the cooperation and commitment is strong.

The words of our mission statement are a constant reminder of who we are as a congregation: 'We are a community of God's beloved dedicated to following the teachings of Jesus as we live our faith by loving and serving all of God's creation and striving for justice and peace through our community, our nation, and the world.'"

The meeting then turned to the Interim Treasurer's Report which had been distributed electronically prior to the meeting. Because no one had questions or objections, the report was accepted as written. As a part of the report, the Congregation approved the request to eliminate the Edward Jones Choir, Worship and Music, Service and Outreach, and Flower funds and use the money for general operating expenses.

We then considered the Preliminary Budget for 2021. There were some questions about the many assumptions that had to be made to prepare the budget (e.g., we will collect as much in Pledge Income in 2021 as we did in 2020, using what we would have paid Jessica as the basis of our half time pastor compensation package, hoping for in person worship beginning in April). However, the consensus was these assumptions were reasonable. Larry proposed that we accept the budget for the first three months. Council will be authorized to approve minor changes to the budget, but if major ones are needed, we will come back to the Congregation. Hopefully, during the first quarter of 2021, we will get a clearer idea of potential expenses and income. We then can present a more accurate budget to the Congregation for the remainder of the year. Consensus was reached about this proposal.

Norm summarized his Maintenance Report and the progress on Derecho damage. His report was accepted. Bev Thomas summarized the Fuller Scholarship Report. All the scholarships have been paid for the academic year with the exception of one student's who will receive the scholarship in January. The Church Profile and Ministerial Leadership Report was accepted as written.

Jane Ann read the Nominating Committee's recommendations for leadership positions. The Congregation accepted Council's recommendation that Les Morgan and Norm Van Klompenburg serve as members-at-large through 2023. The Financial Review Committee will be Pat Van Klompenburg (2022), Tom Turk (2023), and Brent Parker (2023). The Nominating Committee will be Duane Hobbs, Marti Barker, and James Jensen (all 2021). Dorothy Raymond will serve on the Personnel Committee through 2023.

Worship

Together from a Distance...

In her book *The Lost Art of Scripture*, Karen Armstrong describes the view of the temple in the ancient Near East: “When the people . . . entered [the] temple, they felt that they were once again in communion with the sacred rhythms of life that were obscured in the everyday world.” Perhaps we commune with the sacred rhythms of life best in our own “temple.” To that end Council is exploring ways that we can attend virtual worship in our own sanctuary. The Profile and Ministerial Leadership Options task force has extended a request to Grinnell UCC to record a weekly service for us in our own sanctuary; we are awaiting their response. If they are not available, we will be asking the same of Susan Woods, the Interim Pastor of the First Christian Church.

For the moment, we will continue to suggest you join Grinnell UCC for their virtual worship service on Sunday morning. You will receive an email each week sharing how to access this online worship service with Grinnell UCC. The Grinnell recorded service consists of multiple YouTube videos, one for each component of the worship service. You will have the option to choose which portions you want to view by clicking on each individual link or to have the videos play automatically in sequence.

And Remember: Everyone is invited to a time of virtual fellowship each Sunday at 11:30am via Zoom. BYOC (Bring Your Own Coffee) and join church friends for conversation and connection. Over the last several weeks a group of about 10 regulars have been gathering and chatting. We would love to be surprised by any of the rest of you joining us.

Zoom on-line: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81700676234?pwd=ZEhuU2lUNW5iMGZlanBINm5RMEd4dz09>
Passcode: 562812

Zoom via Phone: (312) 626-6799; Meeting ID: 817 0067 6234

Musical Moments

Another way you can experience our own beautiful, sacred space is to join Bev Thomas as she plays for us. Videos containing views of the church sanctuary accompanied by Bev on the piano or organ will be posted to the church Facebook page each Wednesday at 2:00pm and subsequently shared on our church website.



Service and Outreach

Pastoral Care

If you read the “Together from a Distance” article on page 4, you know we are exploring ways to have virtual worship in our own sanctuary. We have spoken with Grinnell UCC, to ask if they might record a service each week in our sanctuary. We have also asked for pastoral care services. If Grinnell UCC is unavailable to fulfill these needs, we will be talking with Susan Woods, the Interim Pastor at First Christian Church next door. We look forward to relieving Rev. David Raymond of his emergency pastoral care duties, as we have presumed upon him for far too long. Nevertheless, if you have a pastoral emergency in the near future, please do reach out to Rev. Raymond directly or through the church office (staffed Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, 10:00am-3:00pm). Rev. Raymond can be reached at (641) 521-1506 or davidray@mediacombb.net. Thank you, David, for blessing us with care for us.

Prayers and Concerns

Please hold in prayer

- Bart & Dickie Teed
- Richard Hagedorn

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

HAPPINESS IS



*...When an old friend calls
to see how you are.*

CONNECTING

While it is certainly true that “Happiness is when an old friend calls to see how you are,” it is equally true that happiness can be when practically ANYONE

calls to see how you are. Especially during this pandemic and especially if you live alone. All of us can be a part of the ministry to reach out to others. So call or message or write a note. It will lift the spirits of the recipient and most likely your own as well. We are blessed to have our faith community to help us through challenging and unprecedented times.

Food Pantry Donations

The Salvation Army food pantry is one of the ways we carry out our mission to support programs that assist the marginalized and vulnerable citizens of our community. Right now, due to the pandemic, we aren’t able to receive our regular monthly collections for the food pantry.

Please consider making donations individually if you can. Their updated wish list is: green beans, baked beans, stove top stuffing, and canned sweet potatoes.

As you drop off your donations, imagine the good meal you are giving someone and their pleasure in putting it on their table.

We continue to remember our local homebound members.

You are missed and continue to be cared for and held in our heartfelt prayers.

Marilyn Currant
Park Centre #1
500 1st St. N.
Newton, IA 50208

Bev Edge
Village Assisted Living
2571 Guthrie Ave, Apt. 1402
Des Moines, IA 50317

Betty Hotchkin
Park Centre #40
500 1st St. N.
Newton, IA 50208





Communications

Church Council Catch Up

Here we usually summarize the most recent Council meeting. However, since the last Open Door Council has met three times. You will find below summaries of two special meetings and the October regular meeting.

September 30, 2020 Special Meeting

Maintenance Report: Norm Van Klompenburg summarized where we are with repairs following the derecho. We discovered that the copier sustained damage in the storm. We are in communication with our insurance company about our coverage of the copier. In regard to our sign, which was demolished when the tree fell on it, we have verbal assurance from Grinnell Mutual that they will cover the actual cost of the sign repair rather than the amount previously estimated.

Committee on Profile and Ministerial Leadership Options: This committee has been meeting weekly working on creating a draft of our profile for Council to review. The Committee also recommended that we contact the Grinnell UCC, the First Christian Church in Newton, and the First Presbyterian Church in Newton to ascertain their interest in providing pastoral care (weddings, funerals, visiting sick members, etc.) until we have a more permanent option. For now, we will continue using the Grinnell UCC for providing us with Sunday worship.

Where we are: There are some changes with Council. Jane Ann Cotton has agreed to continue as Moderator until the end of Samantha Sledge's term, December 31, 2021. Les Morgan has agreed to complete the remainder of Lin Chapé's term, December 31, 2020.

Council has been wrestling with how to manage our electronic presence (FaceBook, ZOOM, website, and so on). We decided to employ Annie Gerken for an extra five hours/week to handle these tasks. Beginning November 1, Annie will be working 15 hours/week instead of 10.

Stewardship Campaign: The stewardship letter, under Jane Ann's signature, will be sent out as soon as possible. It will include a notice that the Annual Meeting will be held October 25, 2020 via ZOOM at 11:30.

October 14, 2020 Monthly Council Meeting

Maintenance Report: Derecho damage items were discussed. Jensen Masonry will do the brickwork for the sign repair. Sign Pro will do the actual sign. Norm Van Klompenburg also mentioned that Grinnell Mutual has agreed to pay for the total repair of the stained glass window as estimates are coming in higher than the amount they authorized. (The stained glass window has a bow in it.) Grinnell Mutual also has agreed to reimburse us for the cost of a new copier. Council decided to purchase the copier that Forbes Office Solutions bid as the replacement.

Committee on Profile and Ministerial Leadership Options: The profile is getting into shape and should be ready for Council to review by mid-November. The committee has also been exploring interim ministerial options. Jane Ann contacted Sue Woods (interim minister at the First Christian Church) as well as Meghan Davis-Brass (pastor at First Presbyterian). Both are willing to provide pastoral care if needed. Meghan Davis-Brass told Jane Ann that they have an interest in a long term relationship with us. Norm spoke with Jessica Schirm from Grinnell UCC. Her board has indicated that they are willing to explore with us exactly what we need.

Church Council Catch Up (cont.)

Annual Meeting, October 25: Jane Ann shared her concerns about how to disseminate the necessary reports for the annual meeting. The consensus was these reports would be emailed ahead of time.

Where God is leading us: Marti Barker has suggested we might send postcards to members as a way of staying in touch. She has agreed to do that and Council was supportive of her willingness to serve in this way. Council also decided that we need to make sure that there are duplicate lists of passwords that people would have access to when needed.

Special Meeting, October 21, 2020

Annual Meeting Issues: The first item of business was conducting the annual meeting by way of ZOOM. All reports will be emailed out in advance. In addition, Jane Ann will read her Moderator's Report to provide a start to the meeting. When we go through individual reports, the procedure will be to ask if there are any questions or objections to the report as received by the members. If none, the report will be accepted as having reached consensus. These reports will be Treasurer's Report, Proposed Budget, Maintenance Report, Fuller Scholarship Committee Report, Church Leadership Nominations, and the Pastor's Report on her Sabbatical (also included in this edition of The Open Door).

Committee on Profile and Ministerial Leadership Options: This committee brought several recommendations to Council. First, there is a UCC pastor retiring soon and probably moving to the Greater Des Moines area. For the committee, Norm contacted this person, and he is willing to talk with us about what we are looking for in a half-time pastor. If this option comes to fruition, it won't be until after the first of the year.

The Committee also discussed the need to get someone to hold virtual services in our sanctuary as a way of helping members maintain some connection to the church. We would provide the music and the pastor would do the remainder of the service. The Committee recommended that we first contact Grinnell UCC to ascertain if one of their pastors might be interested. The pastor, in addition to Sunday services, would be available for the pastoral care issues we may need. If Grinnell UCC could not do this, we would approach First Christian Church in Newton with the same request. Prior to this Council meeting, Norm spoke with Jessica Schirm in Grinnell and there may be interest there. Council was supportive of this option.

Other: Norm circulated a mockup of the new sign and got everyone's approval. Larry reported that, as of October 20, we had just over \$50,000 in pledges for 2021. We need \$85,500 to meet our budget assumptions. Our password for electronically withholding some taxes to the state expired and Annie can't make a new password as she is not authorized to sign the forms. No one knows who might be authorized. Les and Larry will try to get to the bottom of this. Until then, we will be filing these forms through snail mail.

Jane Ann mentioned Stormy had contacted her about bell ringing for the Salvation Army as well as the nursing home gift giving program. We agreed that we would not be sponsoring these events this year due to the pandemic. If any member wants to get involved, we encourage them to contact Salvation Army or the nursing home and volunteer.

Church Council Composition

Moderator:	Jane Ann Cotton
Assistant Moderator:	April Faidley
Secretary:	Jennifer Pryke
Treasurer:	Larry Leitner
At-Large:	Les Morgan, Heidi Grandstaff-Fresh, Norm Van Klompenburg



Birthdays to Celebrate in November

- 2-Brent Parker
- 3-Ginger Dack
- 5-Martha Ellsworth, Dorothy Raymond, Gary Kahn
- 7-Brad Johnson
- 8-Richard Hagedorn
- 9-Jennifer Pryke
- 12-Jennie Johnston, Adam Holdsworth
- 17-Lin Chapé
- 18-Macey Caves
- 23-Steve Holdsworth
- 30-Brandon Pickard



Anniversaries to Celebrate in November

- 11-Sarah & Brad Penick
- 25-Ed & Suzanne Van Zandt

Looking Ahead: COVID-19 and Worship

The date of return to in-person worship recedes as the coronavirus rages across the country. Graphs of new cases in Iowa continue to rise. Jasper County currently has 1117 cases. Daily totals of individuals testing positive fluctuate quite a lot, as you might expect. It can look like a downward trend and then pop up again. Here is a sampling:

Oct. 15	13
Oct. 16	7
Oct. 17	1
Oct. 18	1
Oct. 19	17
Oct. 20	16
Oct. 23	15

On October 21 Jasper County was determined to be at risk of an outbreak, with cases increasing at a rate likely to overwhelm hospitals. Thus, we have not met the first criteria of our guidelines, the consistent decline of cases for two months.

61% of the recent positive cases in Jasper County were in the Adult and Middle Age groups, spanning 18–60 years old. 29% were in the Older Adult & Elderly groups, between 61 and over 80 years old.

Since October 23 the numbers have been going down. We will continue to watch these figures. If you would like to watch them yourself, here is a guide: Go to coronavirus.iowa.gov, click on Summary Statistics, click on Positive Case Analysis, scroll down to the map, and click on Jasper County.

In regard to the availability of testing, we now have a testing site in Newton, at the Express Clinic in Hy-Vee.

The efficacy of contact tracing is difficult, if not impossible to assess (as much research turned up very little information). The Iowa Department of Public Health does contact tracing. There is concern that the contact tracing is uneven and inadequate.

Stay tuned. Council is continually monitoring how the reality aligns with our guidelines.

We all want to get back ASAP!



A Sabbatical Report from Rev. Petersen-Mutai

As I shared in the August 2020 newsletter, it was my intent to let my sabbatical time be what it would be, spending much time resting, playing with Jabali, and enjoying downtime with Martin. In addition to this free-flowing/unscheduled time, I engaged in intentional study focusing primarily on antiracism by participating in two study groups and engaging in independent study.

One study group was offered by the Tri-Conference Ministries of the UCC (Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota) and was entitled “White Privilege: Clergy Let’s Talk.” For a six-week period, we engaged with a UCC curriculum that invites and challenges participants to reflect on and discuss how white privilege impacts our personal and communal lives. I found this study to be thought-provoking as it challenged me to think about how race impacts my life as a white person rather than thinking that racism is at work only when people of color are overtly involved. We had a final seventh Zoom meeting with everyone who participated in these small-group studies to share ideas for moving forward. The second study group was one I initiated to read and discuss Valerie Kaur’s recent book “See No Stranger: A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love.” According to Kaur’s own website, “*See No Stranger* is a practical guide to changing the world, a synthesis of wisdom, a chronicle of personal and communal history – all joined together by a story of awakening” (<https://valariekaur.com/see-no-stranger>). I was grateful to have a wonderful group of folks committed to changing the world with whom to read and discuss this powerful book. I was particularly struck by Kaur’s metaphor of revolutionary love as labor as it brought back memories of my experience of childbirth over three years ago.

In addition to these group learning opportunities, I also continued my own individual antiracist education by finishing “How to Be an Antiracist” by Ibram X. Kendi, beginning and finishing “I’m Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness” by Austin Channing Brown, watching all available episodes of “United Shades of America” with W. Kamau Bell and the Netflix series entitled “Who Killed Malcolm X?”, and listening to interviews and lectures by Malcolm X, Angela Davis, and Jane Elliott. I also nearly completed reading “Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America” by Ibram X. Kendi and made significant progress in reading “The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus” by John Dominic Crossan.

My sabbatical also ended up being a time to complete my process of search and call (necessitated by the congregation’s decision to move to a half-time pastor’s compensation package) as I received and accepted a call to serve First United Church in Bloomington, IN on August 23. Due to this transition occurring, my sabbatical was atypical in that I continued to be in touch with members of the Church Council as well as Anne Gerken in the office in order to prepare for the end of my pastorate with Congregational UCC.

Finally, Martin and I did get married on Saturday, August 29 during a simple ceremony in our backyard with only the essential two witnesses and officiant in attendance.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to take six weeks for sabbath rest during August and September. I am thankful to the Church Council for supporting me in taking this time away for rest and renewal even with all that was going on in the life of the church and the broader community.

Sundays

Online Worship—viewed at your convenience

11:30am Zoom Refreshments



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Online Worship w/ Grinnell UCC Daylight Savings ends		Election Day VOTE		5:30pm <i>How to be an Antiracist</i> book study via Zoom	International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict	
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Online Worship w/ Grinnell UCC			6:00pm Church Council via Zoom VETERANS DAY	5:30pm <i>How to be an Antiracist</i> book study via Zoom	World Kindness Day	DIWALE*
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Online Worship w/ Grinnell UCC		National Take-a-Hike Day		5:30pm Conclusion: <i>How to be an Antiracist</i> book study via Zoom		
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
Online Worship w/ Grinnell UCC				THANKSGIVING		National French Toast Day
29	30					
Online Worship w/ Grinnell UCC						

*Diwali is important to Hindus and also is celebrated among Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs. The tradition of lighting oil lamps on Diwali symbolizes the victory of good over evil and freedom from spiritual darkness. A traditional Diwali greeting is to say, “Wishing you a Diwali that brings happiness, prosperity and joy to you and all your family.”

Congregational United Church of Christ
308 E. 2nd St. N.
Newton, IA 50208

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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The Open Door is a newsletter for the members and friends of Congregational United Church of Christ. Suggestions and 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; not open to the public



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