



**Congregational  
UNITED CHURCH  
OF CHRIST**

# *The Open Door*

## January 2017

### 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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### Pastor Petersen's Perspective:

#### When God Is Revealed through an Infant

In Isaiah chapter 9, the prophet speaks of the birth of an infant and all that this little one will be: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Our traditional Christmas story from Matthew and Luke also tells of the birth of an infant: a baby who is announced as the savior of the world, a child in whose presence Mary, Joseph, shepherds, and magi experience the presence of the divine.

All this talk of babies got me thinking, "What does it say about God when we say we see the face of God in the face of an infant? What kind of God is it who is revealed through a baby?" There are four things I believe such an assertion tells us about God, four things that an infant and the God revealed to us through Jesus share in common.

First off, infants can be difficult to understand. Is the baby crying because they're hungry? Need a diaper change? Are they too hot? Too cold? Do they miss their parent? What do they need? What do they want? So too, it can be difficult to discern what it is God wants from us, what God asks of us.

However, I've heard that with time, with attention, with intentionality one can come to discern what it is their infant child wants and needs. It takes time; it takes study; it takes patience; it takes a listening and discerning ear. But, over time, one is able to better understand what it is their baby wants. I believe it is the same with God. If we take the time to study, to listen, to discern, we too can come to understand more clearly what it is God calls us to do, how it is that God calls us to live out of love, to spread justice, to proclaim joy, to work for peace, to be beacons of hope. When God is revealed through a child, we are called to listen, to learn that we might discern God's call to us.

Secondly, infants cannot do it on their own. They need others for survival. I have never heard of an infant popping out of the womb ready and able to feed themselves, clothe themselves, shelter themselves. Babies need others to survive and to thrive in this world, to grow into the people they will become, to realize their potential.

Like an infant, I believe that God cannot do it alone either. Now, you may disagree with me on this one saying, "But God is all-powerful." And I agree with that statement. However, I believe God's power is through love not force, coercion, or manipulation. Rather God seeks to persuade us, to encourage us through the power of love. So, God needs us; God calls us to partner with her and with one another to bring about the realm of God. It is our hands that feed the hungry, our voices that advocate for the poor, our votes that put leaders into office to make and enforce policies that ensure the well-being of all people. God needs us; God calls us to co-create the realm of hope, peace, joy, and love that Jesus proclaimed with his words and his deeds throughout his life. When God is revealed through a child, we are called to act.

Third, infants change everything. When a baby comes into your life nothing will ever be the same. I've already been wondering how it is Martin's and my life will change when our baby comes into our lives. I can't predict exactly what life will look like when our child arrives, but I am certain it will look different than it does now. Our priorities will shift when we have the responsibility of a little one in our care.

Just as life changes when an infant comes on the scene, so too does life change when God bursts in. God calls us, challenges us, and empowers us to live our lives in radically different ways with priorities that are drastically different than those of mainstream society. With God, we are challenged to love our neighbors as we love ourselves; to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. With God, we are called to live out of love rather than fear, joy rather than negativity, peace rather than anxiety, patience rather than irritability, kindness rather than criticalness, generosity rather than greed, faith rather than distrust, gentleness rather than harshness, self-control rather than reactivity. When God is revealed through a child, we are called to reprioritize and live transformed lives.

Lastly, infants love unconditionally. Babies don't care how much money you make, how many hours you work, how many prestigious schools you've attended, with whom you are friends, what language you speak, what your immigration status is, what faith you hold, what nation you are from, what color your skin is, how much you weigh or how tall you are, what music you listen to, what clothes you wear or car you drive. Babies just love. They love you for all that you are - faults, gifts, and all.

The God revealed to us through Jesus is one of unconditional love. God sees each and everyone of us as God's own beautiful, beloved child. There is nothing we can do that will make God stop loving us, stop caring about us. We matter, we are important to God no matter what. When God is revealed through a child, we are called to receive that love, to accept our belovedness. And, I believe we are called to love as boldly and unabashedly as God loves each of us.

May you experience the presence of God as you continue to celebrate the birth of this holy child. May you dare to live into all that that means.

## ... Education

### New Bible Study

You are encouraged to join in a new Bible study group beginning **Thursday, January 12<sup>th</sup>**. We will read and discuss the book "The Bible: A Biography" by Karen Armstrong, author of more than 20 books on faith and the major religions. Through the course of the book, Armstrong discusses the conception, gestation, and life of history's most powerful book.

The group will meet in the **Parish House** each Thursday at **5:00pm-6:00pm** with our final session on Thursday, March 16<sup>th</sup>. If you are interested in participating in this 10-week study, please purchase a copy of the book and read its "Introduction" prior to our first meeting. If you would rather purchase your book through the church, please contact the church office by **Sunday, January 1<sup>st</sup>**. Contact Rev. Petersen with any questions or concerns.

## MORNING CIRCLE

### Morning Circle

The next meeting of *Morning Circle* will be **Wednesday, January 18<sup>th</sup> at 9:30am** with April Faidley as hostess and giving devotions. The group is studying the book "Jesus: The Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary" by author Marcus J. Borg. During this meeting we will be studying Chapter 1 of the book.

The Morning Circle is open to all ladies of our congregation. Want to participate? Join us on January 18<sup>th</sup> at the Parish House.

### ... Service



### Food Pantry Sundays

The first Sunday of each month we receive donations for the Salvation Army Food Pantry. On **Sunday, January 1<sup>st</sup>** a cart will be in the west entrance to receive gifts for the food pantry. The Salvation Army is in special need of tuna helper, spaghetti (12-16 ounce packages or 1 pound packages), canned fruits, spaghetti sauce, and macaroni & cheese. Of course, other canned or packaged foods are always accepted. They also need any kind of personal care items: such as diapers, bath soap, shampoo, deodorant, toothpaste, feminine hygiene products, and laundry soap.



### Jasper County Animal Rescue League

On the third Sunday of each month we collect items to help the Jasper County Animal Rescue League (JCARL). The next collection date will be **Sunday, January 15<sup>th</sup>**.

Their current wish list is: paper towels, garbage bags, raw hides (for big dogs and small), peanut butter, bleach, dish soap, Fabuloso (the purple kind), laundry soap, liquid hand soap, rubber gloves, kitty litter, canned shredded and filet cat food, canned dog food (Purina), dry dog food (Purina), and dry cat food (Indoor Purina).



### "Barking Good" Project

The Progress Industries partnership with UCC of making and baking dog treats in the church kitchen ended for 2016 on October 17<sup>th</sup>. It will resume again in April of 2017. Dozens of treats have been produced and shared with JCARL. Our church has helped PI move toward its target goal of getting out into the community setting which has provided a wonderful opportunity for all involved.

### Cleaning Project with Progress Industries

Our partnership with Progress Industries (PI) working with PI participants and staff for a church cleaning project ended for 2016 on November 22<sup>nd</sup>. It will resume again in March or April. Under the guidance of Carolyn and Duane Hobbs a small group from PI was doing some light cleaning and dusting in the sanctuary, library, and other areas of the church building.



## Prayers and Concerns

### Please hold in prayer

- ◆ Ann Raridon
- ◆ Larry Leitner
- ◆ Kayden, James & Jenny Jensen
- ◆ Carrie Osborne
- ◆ Sue Anderson
- ◆ Jim Lukefahr
- ◆ Jeanette & John Lowanse, friends of Sue Anderson
- ◆ Patricia Hybl
- ◆ Jo Austad



If you know someone in need of support – a visit, a call, a note, or prayer – please contact Rev. Jessica Petersen.



### Blood Pressure Monitoring

Carolyn Hobbs will offer blood pressure monitoring in the Nurse's Nook during Fellowship Time the second Sunday of each month. If you are curious about your blood pressure reading, stop in to see Carolyn on **Sunday, January 8<sup>th</sup>**.

## Community Meals Highlights

The Congregational UCC Christmas baking elves supplied cookies and candy for the December 21<sup>st</sup> Community Meal. Some were served for dessert while others were sent home in Christmas treat bags. Church volunteers served approximately 80 people, and without everyone's assistance this would not have been accomplished. So, thanks to all who made it a successful event. As someone stated, "We work like a well-oiled machine." Yes, we do, but unlike a machine we work as a warm and caring team.

The next Community Meal will be held **Wednesday, January 18<sup>th</sup>** at First United Methodist Church. Several church members have indicated a willingness to participate, but more are always needed and welcome to assist. A minimum of eight volunteers are needed that Wednesday between **5:00pm-7:00pm**, with the actual serving at 5:30pm. All volunteers have the opportunity to enjoy the meal available that evening.

Please contact one of the chairpersons if you are interested in joining in this worthwhile experience. The chairpersons are: Bev Edge—Menu Preparation; April Faidley—Desserts; and Marti Barker—Serving & Clean-Up. We appreciate any and all help.

## Opportunities to Serve

All volunteers/workers in the church are very much appreciated. Many of you are seen carrying on the work of the church and many things are done unseen, but just as appreciated. It takes many hands and minds to get everything done. Thank you so much for your willingness!

There are many different ways in the church to serve God and others. The more who help, the less work there is for each one. Signup sheets to provide flowers, greet, usher, and host fellowship time are located in the vestibule. Please help if you can.

If you are willing to be a greeter please contact Marti Barker. Additionally, there are a few members who may need transportation to worship and church activities. Please contact Duane Hobbs to volunteer.

The office has great volunteers who come in monthly to assemble and ready this newsletter for mailing. If you would like to help, just call the office.

## Worship Attendance

<u>December Attendance</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>2016</u>
First Sunday	39	39
Second Sunday	39	29
Third Sunday	61	**
Fourth Sunday	26	20
Christmas Eve	90	113

\*\* Canceled due to weather conditions



## BIRTHDAYS to Celebrate in January

- 2-Reece Caves, Larry Leitner
- 4-Ardelle Morgan
- 7-Robert Ramsey, Jr.
- 8-Betty Jean Hotchkin
- 9-Laura Parker
- 12-William Shump
- 16-Jan Turk
- 17-Bob Van Drimmelen
- 21-Jim Christenson
- 22-Melissa Pearson, Stormy Storms
- 24-Linda Wormley, Eileen Gerken
- 27-Joy Faidley-Leitner
- 28-Diane Marvelli
- 31-Charlotte Ross

## Congratulations to James & Jenny Jansen

James and Jenny Jensen welcomed Kayden Lee into the world on Thursday, December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016 at 9:07pm. He's a big boy coming in at 8lbs. 11oz. and 21 3/4 inches long! Mom, Dad, and baby are all doing well.

Congratulations to James and Jenny on the birth of their first child! And, welcome, Kayden! Your church family looks forward to meeting you soon!



## **Take note...**

### Inclement Weather Policy

As we are all aware, Iowa weather is always unpredictable. In the event of inclement weather, please check television stations KCCI and WHO or radio station KCOB to learn of any cancellations of worship services or other church events.

### Emergency Pastoral Care

While Rev. Petersen is away, (January 3<sup>rd</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup>), Rev. David Raymond will be available to provide pastoral care in the case of an emergency. You may contact him at 641-521-1506. Thank you, Rev. Raymond, for serving our church in this important way!

### Congregational Annual Meeting

The annual Congregational meeting will be held following the worship service on **Sunday, January 22<sup>nd</sup>**. By attending you will receive reports from various church committees, the 2016 year-end financial report, and be able to vote on the 2017 proposed church budget.

There will be a church potluck following the meeting. A main dish, drinks, and table service will be provided. Please bring a side dish or dessert to share.

Note: Board and Committee Chairpersons should submit, to the church office, their reports by January 11<sup>th</sup>.

### Taking Down the Christmas Decorations

Removal of the Christmas decorations will take place **Thursday, January 5<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 pm**. Please join us to help. Many hands make less work!

Thanks in advance. Jan Turk

## Worship Schedule for January

Date	January 1	January 8	January 15	January 22	January 29
Christian Calendar Date	Epiphany Sunday	Baptism of Christ	Second Sunday after Epiphany	Third Sunday after Epiphany	Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
Special Events	Communion	Blood Pressure Monitoring		Annual Meeting	
Special Offerings	Food Pantry Donations		JCARL Collection		
Greeters	Bev Edge	Julie Schmidt	Jan & Tom Turk	Cindy Pollard & Gayla Snook	Donna McCoy
Ushers	David & Dorothy Raymond	Jim Christenson, Tom Turk	Duane Hobbs, Art Anderson	Brent Parker, Jim Pryke	Cindy Pollard & Gayla Snook
Lay Readers	Carolyn Hobbs	Jane Ann Cotton	Les Morgan	Brent Parker	TBD
Scripture	Matthew 2:1-12	Matthew 3:13-17	Isaiah 40:1-7	Matthew 4:12-23	Micah 6:1-8
Worship Color	White	White	Green	Green	Green

**Green** is the color of growth. It symbolizes the renewal of vegetation and the promise of new life.

**White** symbolizes purity, holiness, and virtue, as well as respect and reverence.

**We continue to remember our homebound members.**

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

Marilyn Currant  
Park Center #1  
500 1<sup>st</sup> St. N.  
Newton, IA 50208

Betty Hotchkin  
Park Centre #66  
500 1<sup>st</sup> St. N.  
Newton, IA 50208

Scott Kingery  
Careage of Newton  
2130 W. 18<sup>th</sup> St. S.  
Newton, IA 50208

Steven McGinley  
1003 E. 15<sup>th</sup> St. S.  
Newton, IA 50208

Jim Lukefahr  
Newton Village #14  
110 N. 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. W.  
Newton, IA 50208

Carol Robinson  
Newton Village #206A  
110 N. 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. W.  
Newton, IA 50208

Jean Townsend  
1310 S. 10<sup>th</sup> Ave. E.  
Newton, IA 50208

Pat Hybl  
Newton Village #114  
110 N. 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. W.  
Newton, IA 50208

**Sundays**

**10:00am Worship**

**11:15am Fellowship Time**

# JANUARY 2017



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
01 New Year's Day! Communion Food Pantry Donations	02	03	04	05 6:00pm Take Down Christmas Decorations	06 Festival of the Epiphany	07
08 Blood Pressure Checks Jessica away	09	10 5:00pm Worship & Music 6:00pm Racial Justice Group	11 6:00pm Facilities & Finance 7:15pm Church Council	12 5:00pm Bible Study	13	14
15 JCARL Collection 11:45am Service & Outreach Mtg.	16 Martin Luther King Jr. Day	17	18 9:30am Morning Circle 5:30pm Community Meal	19 5:00pm Bible Study	20 Inauguration Day	21
22 11:30am Annual Meeting and Church Potluck	23	24	25	26 5:00pm Bible Study	27	28
29	30	31	01	02 5:00pm Bible Study	03	04

