

The Open Door

August 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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Pastor Petersen's Perspective: On Sabbatical Leave

The need for rest and renewal is so essential to our well-being that our sacred stories say it was even included as one of the ten commandments Moses received from God on Mount Sinai. As a product of mainstream American society, I have at times struggled to stop, to rest, to play (and I know I'm not alone here!). Yet, our faith calls us to rest (and allow for the rest of creation to rest as well), to observe sabbath that we might give thanks for the many gifts God has bestowed upon us.

I am exceedingly grateful to have the opportunity to take six weeks for sabbath rest during August and September. With all that is going on with our congregation and the world—a transition in our Administrative Assistant position, moving to a half-time pastor on October 1st, and the continuing pandemic—I began to question the timing of this sabbatical leave-taking, and I thank our Church Council for supporting me in taking this time away for rest and renewal even with all that is going on.

When I first approached the Council with my request to use my sabbatical leave time (my call agreement states that I am eligible for six weeks of sabbatical after each five years of ministry), I had anticipated traveling to Kenya with Martin and Jabali. What a time of rest and renewal that would have been! However, the coronavirus has made it unsafe for us to travel at this time. So, rather than traveling to Kenya to spend time with Martin's family in his country of origin, I will be resting and renewing here in Newton.

Though I am doing my best to simply let my sabbatical time be what it will be, spending much time resting (read: sleeping), playing with Jabali, and enjoying down-time with Martin, I cannot help but to make some plans for the next eight weeks (I added two weeks of vacation to my six weeks of sabbatical). In addition to this unplanned/unscheduled time, I will be participating in two study groups. One group is offered by the Tri-Conference Ministries of the UCC (Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota) and is entitled "White Privilege: Clergy Let's Talk." For a six-week period, we are engaging with a UCC curriculum that invites and challenges us to reflect on and discuss how white privilege impacts our personal and communal lives. The second group is 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 awaken-

ing” (<https://valariekaur.com/see-no-stranger>). I am grateful to have a wonderful group of folks committed to changing the world with whom to read and discuss this powerful book.

In addition to these group learning opportunities, I also have aspirations of reading three books that have been on my “to read” list for sometime now: “Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America” by Ibram X. Kendi, “The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus” by John Dominic Crossan, and “A People’s History of the United States: 1492-Present” by Howard Zinn. I have been reading “Stamped from the Beginning” off and on since I purchased it a couple of years back, explored “The Birth of Christianity” in seminary and have wanted to reengage the material for several years now, and have made starts and stops with “A People’s History” since I purchased it back when I was in seminary. I realize that I have set my sights pretty high for six weeks of sabbatical (two weeks is supposed to be vacation after all) and will consider it a “win” if I make it through one of these three books by the end.

Finally, it occurred to Martin and me that this pandemic offered the perfect opportunity for us to get married! As many of you likely recall, we had been waiting to wed until after Martin became a citizen. As that was accomplished last December, the only thing standing in our way was picking a time, planning for the occasion, and doing it. However, having family spread across multiple continents is a difficult challenge to work through. I say the pandemic offered the “perfect” opportunity to get married because it has in effect leveled the playing field for our families. As it would be unsafe to invite a large gathering of people to celebrate at this time, we anticipate inviting our families to join us virtually (whenever we actually choose the date for the occasion), which can be done without visas and airfare. I am also a simple, practical person, so having a small gathering in our backyard with only the essential two witnesses and officiant in attendance sounds fantastic!

I thank you all for the opportunity to take this time for rest and renewal, and I hope and pray it will be such a time for you all as well. Be well!

Worship

Together from a Distance...

While Rev. Petersen is away on sabbatical and vacation leave, we will have the opportunity to join together in online worship with two of our neighboring UCC congregations: Grinnell United Church of Christ Congregational and Ames United Church of Christ. We will be worshipping virtually with Grinnell UCC on the following Sundays: August 2, 9, 16, and 23. And, we will be worshipping virtually with Ames UCC on these Sundays: August 30, September 6, 13, and 20.

You will receive an email each week sharing how to access the online worship service with Grinnell UCC. This email will have links to multiple YouTube videos, one for each component of the worship service. You will have the option to “choose your own adventure” by clicking on each individual link or to have the videos play automatically in sequence.

You can access the online worship service with Ames UCC through their Vimeo channel: <https://vimeo.com/user109668635>. You will simply need to click on the worship service for the appropriate date.

Both of these congregations offer online worship in different ways than we have grown accustomed to and will certainly have a different feel. You are invited to view this 8-week period as a time of exploration and learning. Consider what you appreciate about each service offered by these congregations and what you appreciate about the worship experiences that have been offered by our congregation.

As you prepare to join in online worship, in addition to making whatever technical preparations you need to make, consider how to prepare your personal space for worship:

- Silence your phone and eliminate distractions
- Light a candle or some incense
- Open your Bible or browser to the scripture of the day
- Position your body in a posture for prayer and worship

Worship cont.

Musical Moments

Many have expressed appreciation for the opportunity to gather virtually in our sanctuary each Sunday morning for online worship. However, while Rev. Petersen is on leave, this will not be possible. While we continue to refrain from in-person gatherings and Rev. Petersen is away, you are invited to visit our beautiful sanctuary virtually each week and take a few minutes to center yourself aided by gorgeous musical offerings from Bev Thomas. 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

Emergency Pastoral Care

Our congregation is blessed to have Rev. David Raymond, Pastor Emeritus, offering emergency pastoral care once again while Rev. Petersen is away on leave (August 1st-September 26th). If you have a pastoral emergency, please do reach out to Rev. Raymond directly or through the church office (staffed Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:00am-3:00pm). Rev. Raymond can be reached at (641) 521-1506 or davidray@mediacombb.net. Thank you, Rev. Raymond, for your willingness to serve our congregation in this important way!

HAPPINESS IS



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

Caring Calling Crew

During our hiatus from in-person gatherings, we continue to intentionally stay connected and foster community and care through a ministry of phone calling. Members of our Caring Calling Crew continue to call our members and friends regularly to keep in touch throughout this uncertain time. If you would like to make a specific request for a call, you can do so by contacting the church office. Though we have instituted this new way of purposefully connecting with one another, you are also encouraged to continue calling and messaging each other on your own (contact the church office if you need contact information for any of our members and friends). We are blessed to have this faith community to help us through challenging and unprecedented times.



Prayers and Concerns

Please hold in prayer

- Tami Hood-Hayes, friend of Heidi Grandstaff-Fresh
- Allison Lanphier, friend of Heidi Grandstaff-Fresh
- Khloe Sassman, friend of the Pryke and Stonehocker families



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



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

Service and Outreach cont.

Food Pantry Donations

Though we will not be receiving our regular monthly collections for the Salvation Army food pantry. You are encouraged to consider continuing making donations to the food pantry during the pandemic as it continues to serve the most vulnerable in our community. Their updated wish list is: baked beans, stove top stuffing, and canned sweet potatoes (of course, other canned or packaged foods are always accepted).

Virtual Refreshment Time

Everyone is invited to join together after worship each Sunday at 11:30am for a time of conversation and refreshment via Zoom. Bring your own snack or even your lunch, and join together with church friends and family for conversation and connection.

While you are encouraged to join with video on a computer or smart device if possible (download the Zoom app for best results), you can also join via phone:

Join Zoom Meeting online: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89097061745>

Join via Phone: (312) 626-6799; Meeting ID: 890 9706 1745





Communications

Church Council Catch Up

In an effort to keep our congregation more informed regarding the various matters that impact our life together, notes from Church Council meetings are shared with our friends and members via this newsletter. Highlights from the June 10th Council meeting are below. Complete minutes of the meeting (which were approved by the Church Council during the July 8th meeting) are available in the church office; please contact Anne Gerken, Jennifer Pryke, or Rev. Petersen if you would like a copy.

- **Opening Devotions:** were offered by April Faidley.
- **Secretary's Report:** May 13 Regular Council Meeting Minutes and May 17 Special Council Meeting Minutes were sent electronically to Council members for review. Hard copies are in the book of minutes. After corrections, minutes were accepted.
- **Treasurer's Report:** Report was sent electronically to Council members for review along with a written summary of the report; report was accepted as read by consensus. A hard copy is in the book of minutes. Bids on insurance have been received and will be shared at a later date. We are presently at a surplus because of the Payroll Protection Plan loan, but as soon as we have spent that we will be looking at a deficit again. We have a \$100 donation for Jasper County Animal Rescue League; in light of JCARL closing, we will send this to them to help with their obligations as they close. We have a \$1,000 donation that was given specifically to use for youth; we will need to have further discussion about this. It was suggested and affirmed that these funds be added to the scholarship fund. We are updating the names on our Fidelity Funds.
- **Maintenance Report:** Report sent electronically to Council members. The office and main building use remains limited during the periods of closures and physical distancing. Cleaning and monitoring of all areas continues as required. Transition from heating to cooling season accomplished; air conditioning turned on (will be set at 85 degrees during non-use times; adjusted for when Anne will be in the office). Appreciation expressed for members who have mowed, applied fertilizer and handled weed control, and trimming around the perimeter, sidewalk and curb area. Arrangements being made for weed control around shrubs and flowers as well as edging along sidewalks and perimeter. Shrubs will be trimmed soon. There is some work to be done in the rock beds, too. Will be monitoring water infiltration after rainfall events. Any building and grounds issues you may become aware of should be reported to Church Office.
- **Special Congregational Vote:** We will have a Zoom meeting on Sunday, June 21, at 2:00pm to process results of congregational vote regarding remainder of 2020 budget and to start moving forward. Vote results will be announced during the service and, if the vote fails, we can develop an alternative plan and ask folks to authorize the Council to pay the bills as needed.
- **Develop core ideology:** It is important for us to establish a sense of who we are and what it is about us that is unchanging while all of this change in the church happens. We have a mission statement that gives a direction, and some feel very grounded in it. Does it include our essential value of relationships with each other? Rather than engaging in this conversation in a formalized way, we can converse organically about some of this during our Zoom Virtual Refreshments on Sundays by asking people what they miss most about in-person services. If we go through the search process, we will need to engage in some of this discernment as part of that.
- **Sabbatical/Vacation Coverage:** We need to develop a plan for worship given the likelihood that we will continue physically distancing and not meeting in person. One suggestion was to reach out to other churches asking if we can join them for some of those Sundays. To encourage cohesion in our church, we could use another online church service and have a Zoom meeting later that same day to discuss and stay in touch. We will be sure to talk to Bev Thomas (organist) as we develop plans. Suggested that we keep it simple and easy for folks to use. There will be a small group who will come up with ideas and propose them to Council in July. A proposal was made to have lunch Zoom meetings in July to see how they go. Passed by consensus.

Church Council Catch Up (cont.)

- **Plan for ministry with half-time pastor** (assuming vote is in favor): Must establish a committee that includes people not on the Council to help plan. Council agreed that we need to expand the input. Rev. Petersen stated that she will be in conversation with other churches, and we will need to establish a search committee soon. She suggested talking with First Presbyterian Church to see if they are interested in some sort of shared ministry. She plans on staying until she has another call. We need to think about whether we want an interim minister. We need to change our contractual agreement to renegotiate to the conference guidelines for 50% compensation; this needs to be done whether Rev. Petersen stays or not. Rev. Petersen is trying to give us enough notice and transparency to allow us to be in the best possible place we can be when Oct. 1 comes. She has considered not taking her two weeks of vacation in addition to six weeks of sabbatical, but that would put the church in the position of having to pay her for the two weeks of vacation owed to her. She will take the full eight weeks as planned. Her family will not be going to Kenya during her sabbatical as originally planned; this means that she might be available to discuss things with us if we need her. However, we should consider her to be on leave. After discussion the following plan was proposed: we wait for the vote; if the vote is positive, the next step would be to reach out to the conference and ask them to meet with us. Consensus was reached to use this plan.
- **Council Adjustments:** Lin Chapé will stay on Council as long as we are resolving next steps and then will step off for personal reasons involving family and some medical issues.
- **How we operate during the COVID-19 hiatus:** A proposal was made to continue suspension of in-person services at least through July 31. Agreed to by Consensus. We dearly miss one another, and the virus is still so new and there is still so much to learn about it. A COVID Response Team will be formed to create a proposal for Council to consider.
- **Temporary Shelter Proposal:** The idea to turn the Parish House into a temporary shelter and counseling center has been put on the back burner for now.
- **Clothing Closet:** There is a place for clothes set up upstairs in the middle classroom in the main church building; Heidi Grandstaff-Fresh is coordinating this effort.
- **Review of upcoming dates**
- **Closing prayer:** Prayer of St. Francis.

Church Council Composition

Due to personal and work commitments our Moderator Samantha Sledge has resigned from her position effective immediately. Jane Ann Cotton has graciously agreed to serve as our Interim Moderator through the end of 2020. Thank you, Sam, for your dedicated service in this role, and thank you, Jane Ann, for your willingness to serve in this capacity once again.

Should you have any questions regarding the work of the Council, you are encouraged to contact a member of the Church Council. The current members of the Church Council are as follows:

Interim Moderator:	Jane Ann Cotton
Assistant Moderator:	April Faidley
Secretary:	Jennifer Pryke
Treasurer:	Larry Leitner
At-Large:	Lin Chapé
At-Large:	Heidi Grandstaff-Fresh
At-Large:	Norm Van Klompenburg
Pastor:	Rev. Jessica Petersen

Good-bye, Hello!

Barbara Vasquez reluctantly submitted her resignation effective July 31st. Our congregation was blessed to have Barbara return to serve as our Administrative Assistant last January, and we will be sorry to see her go. She provided a welcoming word and a warm smile to all who visited or contacted the church office. If you have not already done so, please do consider sharing a word of appreciation for Barbara's time of faithful service with us.

As we bid Barbara farewell, we also have the joy of welcoming Anne Gerken to the church staff! Some of you are well acquainted with her already as Anne is a member of Congregational UCC (though her previous work schedule had kept her from worshipping with us as regularly as she would have liked). Anne brings a love of our congregation, strong experience in working with a variety of personalities, and extensive financial knowledge with her to the position of Administrative Assistant. Please take a moment to send a note or give a call to welcome Anne to this new role. She will be working in the church office Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:00am-3:00pm each week.



Birthdays to Celebrate in August

- 6-Ron Marvelli, Carolyn Hobbs, Megan Kahn,
Mollie Kahn, Don Deppe
- 7-Kay Hagedorn
- 12-Jenessa Koedam
- 14-Cienna Christenson-Baker, Jane Johnson
- 15-Jane Ann Cotton
- 17-Kenny Caves
- 18-Kathy Currant



Anniversaries to Celebrate in August

- 1-Clarence & Marilyn Planer
- 13-Katie & Steven Stonehocker
- 15-Samantha & Sonia Sledge
- 16-Gary & Jane Johnson

Take note...

Response to COVID-19

The COVID-19 Response Team, an ad hoc committee authorized by Council, has begun an in-depth exploration of when and under what circumstances our congregation will allow in-person meetings to begin again. The group (consisting of Jane Ann Cotton, Carolyn Hobbs, Jenni Pryke, and Rev. Petersen) has met virtually to discuss a proposal for re-opening our doors for Council's consideration and approval. Though this group has not yet shared its thoughts with the full Council, they thought it important to share their thinking with the broader congregation in a timely manner.

While the members of the group appreciate that most, if not all, of our congregation longs to worship and fellowship with one another again in person, we are also very aware of the continued danger posed to our members and broader community as COVID-19 continues to spread with no reliable treatment or vaccine yet available. Given that our faith calls us to love one another, the group suggests that our congregation continue to refrain from in-person meetings until the number of local COVID-19 cases is consistently declining for two months, there is widespread availability of testing, contact tracing is taking place, and there are no shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE). The group plans to continue monitoring these four factors and any news of a reliable therapeutic or vaccine and make additional suggestions as appropriate. However, presently, we do not anticipate these conditions will be realized anytime soon and encourage folks to prepare for this break from in-person gatherings to continue through the end of the year.

The group encourages all those who are a part of our congregation to participate in the various ways we are continuing to offer ministry during this time and to continue making extra efforts to reach out to one another in safe, physically-distanced ways. You are welcome to share your thoughts with a member of this group or the Church Council for ways in which our congregation can deepen our connections with one another as our hiatus from in-person gatherings continues.



Sundays

10:00am Online Worship

11:30am Zoom

Refreshments

August



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Online Worship w/ Grinnell UCC						
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Online Worship w/ Grinnell UCC			6:00pm Church Council via Zoom			
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
Online Worship w/ Grinnell UCC						
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
Online Worship w/ Grinnell UCC						
30	31					
Online Worship w/ Ames UCC						

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

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

xxx

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.

Pastor	Rev. Jessica Petersen	792-3773 (Office) 641-840-2672 (Cell)	revjessicapetersen@gmail.com
Administrative Assistant	Anne Gerken	792-3773 (Office)	uccnewton@windstream.net
Organist	Bev Thomas	792-6465	thomasb@iowatelecom.net
Custodian	Jim Christenson	792-3773 (Office) 641-781-0596 (Cell)	uccnewton@windstream.net
Health Ministry	Carolyn Hobbs	792-2687	cdhobbs@iowatelecom.net
Interim Moderator	Jane Ann Cotton		
Pastor Emeritus	Rev. David Raymond		

Office hours: 10:00am to 3:00pm Tuesdays and Thursdays; not open to the public



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Newton Congregational UCC: www.uccnewton.org