

The Open Door

April 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.

Inside This Issue

Pastor Petersen's Perspective	1-2
Worship	2
Education	3
Service & Outreach	3-4
Communications	5-6
Council Composition	7
Easter Lilies	8
Birthdays & Anniversaries	9
Worship Attendance & Take Note	9
Calendar	10
Worship Schedule	11
Homebound Members	11

Pastor Petersen's Perspective: On Church Amidst the Coronavirus Pandemic

Greetings, beloved! It is my deep hope and prayer that this newsletter finds you well in the midst of these challenging, changing, fearful times. As you likely are well aware, we have had to temporarily close our buildings in order to help ensure the health and safety of our congregation as well as our wider community. I encourage you all to remain in your homes as much as possible while going out only for necessities and clean air. I realize that staying home is not possible for all of you as some of you must continue to report to work being unable to work from home or are responsible for caring for others who are in great need of assistance during this time.

I am one who endeavors to see what positives can come out of difficult situations as I trust that God is creatively at work even in the most dire circumstances. I invite you, dear friends, to join me in this endeavor as many of you remain in your homes unable to participate in the variety of activities you engaged in prior to this health crisis. How might this be a time of opportunity for our faith to grow and us to spread the good news of God's love for each and all?

Perhaps you can develop your Bible reading habits or spend a few additional moments in prayer and meditation. It might be the perfect time to experiment with Centering Prayer (that is if you don't have a house full of children or fur-babies). Perhaps you and those with whom you resided could engage in some "old-fashioned" family circle time, with a scripture and a prayer. Perhaps you will sign up for a daily devotional; I encourage you to check out this one offered by the UCC: https://www.ucc.org/daily_devotional. I also encourage you to join us for worship online on our Facebook page (live Sunday mornings at 10:00am and available for viewing after) or our website (worship services are posted by noon on Sunday following the conclusion of each service).

Additionally, I encourage you to consider what it means to be church. During this time when we are not able to gather physically with one another, I invite you to reflect on what the essential pieces are, what is required for a community to be church. It seems to me that this moment of social distancing is giving us some unexpected perspective on that. What are the pieces of church life you are longing

for during this time? What are those pieces that you have found you can easily do without? What is necessary for us to consider ourselves “church” during this time and beyond?

Friends, throughout this difficult time, please pray for one another, for our church family, and for my family and me. Please pray for our world all of which is experiencing and seeking to respond to this pandemic. Let us pray especially for those who will be most negatively impacted by this health crisis—those who will get sick, those who will lose a loved one, those who will lose their job or source of income or were unemployed or underemployed prior to this crisis, those who are homeless, those who are uninsured or underinsured, those who struggle with fear and doubt. Let us pray for those who continue to go to work to ensure that we have health care, food, and other basic necessities, especially health care workers and hospital and clinic support staff (janitors, housekeepers, food service, etc.), those working in the food industry (groceries and restaurants), and those who make sure the items we rely on for everyday living are delivered to our homes and to our local stores. Let us also pray for our elected officials and those who are making decisions for our communities, our states, and our nations that they might heed the wisdom and guidance of our scientists and health professionals as they institute policies and procedures that will provide care and support for the most vulnerable among us.

Worship



Holy Week Worship

You are encouraged to join us for an online worship service on **Maundy Thursday, April 9th at 6:00pm** as we journey with Jesus through his final days as they are presented in the Gospel of Matthew. With scripture, prayer, and song, we will move from Jesus’s final meal with his earliest disciples all the way to the tomb. Please join us as we experience this powerful story of our faith.

Online Worship

Of course, there is nothing that compares to being physically present with one another in worship, and yet this is what we need to do to “love our neighbors” during the current national emergency. In an attempt to remain connected to our worshiping community during this season of social distancing, we are offering worship online. The worship service can be accessed live at 10:00am on Sunday mornings via our Facebook page (facebook.com/NewtonUCC) or phone (Dial: 312-626-6799; when prompted enter Meeting ID: 624 681 423 followed by #; there is no participant number so simply press # again when asked; for Maundy Thursday’s worship service use Meeting ID: 969 036 836). The full service will continue to be available for viewing on our Facebook page following the conclusion of worship; it will also be posted to our website (uccnewton.org) by noon each Sunday. A virtual bulletin is emailed out prior to each Sunday service and is available on our website (“Virtual Bulletins” under the “Worship” tab) on the Thursday before the service.

We are new to online and streaming worship at Congregational UCC and still working on smoothing out a few “hiccups” and technical difficulties. We apologize in advance for any problems that you may encounter in connecting to the service and welcome your feedback on how to improve the virtual worship experience over the coming weeks when we will not be able to worship in our sanctuary.

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

- *For Communion Sundays only:* Prepare a piece of bread or a cracker and a small glass of grape juice or wine (if you do not have these items on hand, you may use whatever “nibble” and “sip” you have available at home)
- Silence your phone and eliminate distractions
- Light a candle or some incense
- Open your Bible or browser to the scripture of the day

Education

Bible Study: The Gospel of Mark

Our regular Thursday evening Bible study is continuing to **meet via Zoom** (some online with video and others via phone with audio only) as we continue a 12-week study of the Gospel of Mark. All are invited to this virtual gathering on **Thursday evenings, 5:00pm-6:00pm**, to explore this earliest written and shortest gospel included in the New Testament. Study materials in addition to the gospel text from “Mark: A Listen Up! Bible Study” will be provided throughout the course of our study together.

Participants should be prepared to discuss any thoughts, questions, and curiosities spurred by the weekly reading. The March meeting and reading schedule is as follows: April 2nd—Mark 5 (Legions of Demons, Blood, Death, and Healing); April 9th—no meeting, Maundy Thursday; April 16th—Mark 6-7 (True Power); April 23rd—Mark 8 (Who is this Guy?); April 30th—Mark 9-10 (On the Way).

If you are interested in participating, contact Rev. Petersen to receive the call-in information and supplemental readings.



Service and Outreach

Caring Calling Crew

HAPPINESS IS



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

During our hiatus from in-person gatherings, we are intentionally staying connected and fostering community and care through a ministry of phone calling. Members of our newly formed Caring Calling Crew are calling 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 Rev. Petersen. Though we are instituting this new way of purposefully connecting with one another, you are also encouraged to continue calling and messaging each other on your own (contact Rev. Petersen 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.

Pandemic Prayer Partners

Praying for another and knowing someone is praying for you can have a powerful impact on one's life. Once again during the season of social distancing, you are encouraged to begin a new prayer practice, namely to join with a partner in prayer.

How does this work?

You and your prayer partner talk on the phone or via video call (no texting! no email!) once a week for fifteen minutes. You talk confidentially about things that really matter, and tell what you'd like your prayer partner to pray for you that week. Then you actually pray together, if both of you are comfortable doing that, or you covenant to pray individually later for your partner.

Contact Rev. Petersen by **Wednesday, April 15th** so that she can partner you with another interested prayerer.





Prayers and Concerns

Please hold in prayer

- Meredith Caves, granddaughter of David & Dorothy Raymond
- Deanne, friend of Heidi Grandstaff-Fresh
- Khloe Sassman, friend of the Pryke and Stonehocker families
- Patricia Castline
- Stormy Storms



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



Homemade Face Masks

Thank you to those of you who generously responded to Progress Industries' request for donated homemade face masks. As you are likely aware, social distancing is not possible when working with folks with certain disabilities. These masks will be used to help keep PI staff and clients as safe as possible during this pandemic. Thank you again for your generosity!

Food Assistance

Though these times are trying for all of us, our neighbors who are poor and those who are homeless are the most deeply impacted by the restrictions being put in place to slow the spread of this virus. A few of our members are working together to prepare meals for community members who are in need of additional food sources with a number of the free community meals now being cancelled. If you would like to help provide food to folks in need of meals during this time, you are invited to make a special donation to the church and mail it to the church office; write "food assistance" on the memo line of your check. These funds will be used to purchase food, and a couple of our members will prepare and deliver the meals.



One Great Hour of Sharing

The date for our One Great Hour of Sharing special offering has been postponed until further notice. The new date will be decided once we are able physically gather together again for worship.

The 2020 One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) theme is "Invest in Futures." The scripture reference is 1 Corinthians 3:5–9. It tells us we are servants in the service of God, one planting, one watering, and God being the one who grows and nurtures it all. When

we participate in the OGHS offering, we provide valuable support. Our church reaches people who suffer from emergencies, chronic poverty, and violence worldwide. Among the support we give, water, sanitation and adequate nutrition top the list of resources needed. Assets such as irrigation systems, wells, latrines and wash houses change peoples' lives in amazing ways. Clean water and adequate facilities improve health and gives dignity to people at the same time. Clean water is also provided to grow better gardens. A combination of water, seeds, tools, and training on modern farming techniques produce a great harvest—leaving more money for families to live on. Lives are changed when health improves. Lives are changed when communities thrive. With water, sanitation, and adequate food, children are more likely to attend school, and women, no longer searching for water, are able to earn money to contribute to their families' well-being and overall health.

You are encouraged to join with UCC congregations by lending a hand through support to the OGHS offering. Your financial assistance will directly help people and communities affected by disaster, violence and poverty. Your financial assistance will be an investment into the lives of people and communities who need it most. Together, we are co-workers in God's service, planting and watering seeds for God to nurture. Thank you on behalf of the individuals and communities who will benefit directly from your support.



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 February 12th regular Council meeting and March 1st special Council meeting are below. Highlights from the March 8th Special Congregational Meeting are included as well. Complete minutes of each meeting (which were approved by the Church Council during the March 11th meeting) are available in the church office; please contact Barbara Vasquez, Jennifer Pryke, or Rev. Petersen if you would like a copy.

February 12th Regular Council Meeting

- Meeting began with opening devotions.
- Secretary's Report: Minutes were approved as read.
- Treasurer's Report: Report was distributed electronically prior the meeting. There is a problem with the pension payment for Rev. Petersen and is being resolved. An issue with employee 2018 taxes was discovered; the issue is being resolved. In order to prevent future issues, the Treasurer will review payroll filings as will the Financial Review Committee.
- Maintenance Report: Problems with the furnace fixed without outside help. Projects on the "To Do" list include doors. Previous "grounds keepers" will be contacted to see if they are willing to continue this year. Additional volunteers are welcome.
- Scouting Committee Update/Discussion: Suggestion to move to a half-time pastor on or before Oct. 1, 2020. Discussion took place about whether there are other alternatives to present to the congregation. Consensus reached to suggest to the congregation that we move to a half-time pastor no later than Oct. 1 regardless of what happens with any other congregation (though it is expected that Bethany UCC will approve going to a half-time minister within the next week or two). Special congregational meeting set for March 8. Council reached consensus on 2020 budget with 50% Compensation Guidelines for our pastor beginning no later than October 1, 2020 with other budget items remaining as offered during the October 20, 2019 Annual Meeting.
- Evaluations: Congregational Evaluation of the Pastor and the Pastor's Self Evaluation to be distributed on February 16, 2020. A survey to determine the most highly valued pastoral tasks as we consider what a half-time pastor job description will include will also be distributed to the congregation.
- New Video Recorder: A new video recorder is needed to record Sunday sermons. Research will be done, and one will be purchased.
- Old Business: Discussion of these items was deferred to a later date: Brochure holders, Emergency Response Training, Point People for various ministries
- Sabbatical: Rev. Petersen's sabbatical (6 weeks plus 2 weeks of vacation) is planned to begin the second Sunday in July and continue throughout August. She will create a list of what needs to be done while she's away, and Council will determine how to fill those needs. A total of eight Sundays will need to be covered. Exact dates have not yet been determined, and these dates may change.
- Homeless Outreach: Multiple members are taking steps to assist the homeless during the cold weather. Council approved request to provide four casseroles every month to be served at Connections. Rev. Petersen has been talking with the Ministerial Association to encourage more involvement in caring for this group of people in our community and to bring pressure on our town and county to help provide for the homeless.

March 1st Special Council Meeting

- Sabbatical: Approved Rev. Petersen's request move her sabbatical from July-August to August-September due to an issue with Martin's employer. Discussion was had regarding the handling of Rev. Petersen's untaken leave if we move to a half-time pastor in October as she will have 4 weeks of untaken vacation. Contract requires that we must compensate her. Further discussion will take place at a future date.
- Discussion about Oct. 1 Half-Time: Council had received word that Bethany UCC is not interested in a 50-50 shared pastor, and some members had reservations about our previous consensus. Discussion was had regarding Council's previous decision to suggest to the congregation that we move to a half-time minister no later than Oct. 1, 2020. Though concerns were raised regarding leadership if Rev. Petersen is no longer our pastor, given our financial hardships and our duty to serve as responsible stewards of our church's resources and to respect the people who gave to the endowments, Council agreed to present our original consensual recommendation to go to a half-time pastor no later than October 1, 2020. Rev. Petersen shared her deeply appreciation for how much we value her as a person and our pastor and reminded us, "The pastor is not the church" and that pastoral transitions is a natural part of a congregation's life. It was determined that the issue should be decided by the congregation using a simple majority vote using written ballots rather than a show of hands or consensus. All were encouraged to read the book being used in the study group at this time, "Small on Purpose: Life in a Significant Church" by Lewis A. Parks as it is extremely relevant to what we are facing now.
- Budget: Two budgets will be prepared for the March 8 special congregational meeting: one that would apply if the congregation votes to have a half-time minister no later than Oct. 1, and one that reflects rejection of this proposal and continuation of a full-time pastor. Handouts will be prepared for congregation members.
- Presentation: "Talking points" will be prepared and presented to the congregation during the meeting.
- Consensus was reached regarding this situation: "This all sucks!"

March 8th Special Congregational Meeting

- Proposal: Moderator Samantha Sledge gave an explanation of the financial situation that led to the decision by the Council to recommend that we go to a half-time minister no later than Oct. 1, 2020. She addressed previous discussions on the matter, explained the savings to the church by implementing this change, and emphasized that this action would put the church's finances just barely into the black, and that, although this was a difficult choice, it was the one with the most positive effect on the financial situation.
- Discussion: Several congregation members spoke in favor of maintaining a full-time pastor and finding other alternatives to solve the revenue problem. Concerns over losing Rev. Petersen as our pastor were expressed. Council members and Rev. Petersen explained that the vote today was not about her or Bethany UCC in Baxter but about what is best for our church at this time. Council members answered questions and explained the reasoning behind the proposal. Some members of the congregation felt that they would like more information and time to consider this proposed change.
- Vote by paper ballot: 12 in favor of the proposal to go to half-time; 13 opposed to the proposal to go to half-time. Proposal failed.
- Budget: Larry Leitner, Treasurer, presented the budget for a full-time minister through the end of the year as a handout during the previous discussion and pointed out the deficit and the amount of money that would be taken from endowments in order to meet the budgeted expenditures. He also projected that the church could continue on our current course for approximately three years if there was no major recession or major maintenance expense. The congregation had previously approved the budget through March, and we now needed to approve it for the rest of the year. A member of the congregation suggested that we approve the budget through June, and plan to have another congregational meeting before the end of June allowing the church to continue paying its expenses while setting a time frame for people to present their ideas. The budget was approved through June 30 by consensus with three standing aside.

Church Council Composition

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:

Moderator:	Samantha Sledge
Assistant Moderator:	April Faidley
Secretary:	Jennifer Pryke
Treasurer:	Larry Leitner
At-Large:	Lin Chapé
At-Large:	Heidi Grandstaff-Fresh
At-Large:	Norm Van Klompenburg

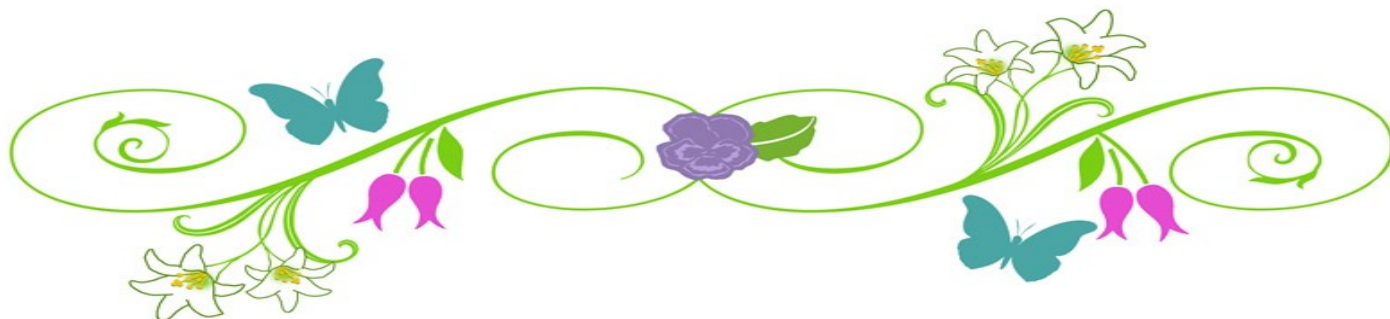
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Easter Lilies

As we will not be worshipping with one another in person on Easter Sunday, we will only purchase a limited number of lilies to adorn the sanctuary. The Flower Fund will be used to purchase this small number of lilies. However, you are still encouraged and invited to remember and honor your loved one(s) at

this time. Attached, please find a donation form that may be mailed to or dropped off at the church office. Please return forms no later than **Tuesday, April 7th**. Your name(s) and the name(s) of the person(s) you are remembering or honoring will be shared via email, on our Facebook page, and in our virtual bulletin on Easter Sunday, April 12th. Alternatively, you may provide the information requested below in an email to the church office (uccnewton@windstream.net).



cut on along the dotted line

Easter Lilies Form



If you would like to help decorate the sanctuary with lilies on Easter Sunday by giving a gift to the Flower Fund in the memory or in honor of a loved one(s), please complete this form and mail it to the church office (308 E. 2nd St. N., Newton, IA 50208) to be received by **Tuesday, April 7th**. Your name(s) and the name(s) of the person(s) you are remembering or honoring will be shared via email, on our Facebook page, and in our virtual bulletin on Easter Sunday, April 12th. Thank you.

Your name(s): _____

In remembrance of / In honor of (circle one) _____

(name(s) of loved one(s))



Worship Attendance

<u>March Attendance</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>
First Sunday	27	27
Second Sunday	22	33
Third Sunday	32	N/A
Fourth Sunday	35	N/A
Fifth Sunday	##	N/A



Birthdays to Celebrate in April

3-Marilyn Currant, Kelly Zach
 4-Lora Caves
 8-Diane Babcock, David Raymond
 9-Aaron Wilson
 12-Karen Dont
 13-Larry Richardson
 19-Cindy Pollard
 21-Karen Petersen
 23-Alicia Mitchell, Brent Deppe, Kendall Morgan
 26-April Faidley
 28-Jon Turk



Anniversaries to Celebrate in April

4-Rick & Leslie McNew
 13-Heidi & Neva Grandstaff-Fresh
 15-Norm & Pat Van Klompenburg
 21-Brent & Suzanne Parker

Take note...

Communion Offering

Our Communion Offering (received on the first Sunday of each month) is now being used to offer financial support to our members and friends who are facing monetary struggles. You are invited to mail your contribution to this special offering to the church office; be sure to write "Communion" on the memo line or include a note with your offering so your donation goes to the correct fund. Previously these funds were used to fund our Worship & Music and Service & Outreach efforts; these expenditures are now included in the regular budget (funds previously collected will be used for their assigned purpose until those funds are exhausted). Please contact Larry Leitner, our Treasurer, or Rev. Petersen with any questions.

Church Council Meeting

The Church Council will meet on **Wednesday, April 8th at 6:00pm via Zoom**. Please contact Sam Sledge, our Moderator, with any matters you wish for the Council to consider as they meet. The Council meets regularly at 6:00pm on the second Wednesday of each month.

Donation Wish Lists

Though we will not be receiving our regular monthly collections for the Salvation Army food pantry and the Jasper County Animal Rescue League. You are encouraged to consider continuing making donations to both organizations during the pandemic as they continue to serve the most vulnerable in our community. Here are their wish lists:

Food Pantry: tuna helper (not hamburger), pasta sauce, canned soups, cereal, and boxed macaroni & cheese (of course, other canned or packaged foods are always accepted)

JCARL: 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).

HE IS RISEN

Sundays

10:00am Online
Worship

April



Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

			1	2	3	4
5 Communion 	6	7	8 6:00pm Church Council via Zoom	9 6:00pm Maundy Thursday Online Worship	10	11
12 	13	14	15	16 5:00pm Bible Study via Zoom	17	18
19	20	21	22	23 5:00pm Bible Study via Zoom	24	25
26	27	28	29	30 5:00pm Bible Study via Zoom		

Worship Schedule for April

Date	April 5	April 9	April 12	April 19	April 26
Christian Calendar Date	Palm Sunday	Maundy Thursday	Easter Sunday	Second Sunday of Easter	Third Sunday of Easter
Special Events	Communion				
Scriptures	Matthew 4:1-11	Multiple texts	Matthew 28:1-10	John 20:19-31	Luke 24:13-35
Worship Color	White	White	Gold	Gold	Gold

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

Gold is a color of celebration and symbolizes joy in the light of day.



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

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

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.

Pastor	Rev. Jessica Petersen	792-3773 (Office) 641-840-2672 (Cell)	revjessicapetersen@gmail.com
Administrative Assistant	Barbara Vasquez	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
Moderator	Samantha Sledge		
Pastor Emeritus	Rev. David Raymond		

Office hours: 10:00am to 3:00pm Thursdays only (until further notice); not open to the public



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United Church of Christ: www.ucc.org — Iowa Conference: www.ucciaconf.org

Newton Congregational UCC: www.uccnewton.org