

The Open Door

July 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: An Invitation to Antiracist Education

Over the last several weeks, we have seen tremendous uprisings calling for racial justice and an end to police brutality and use of force throughout our nation and around the globe. And, for this I give thanks to God! As a result of such action, we are seeing changes in policy beginning to occur and white folks waking up to the reality of racial injustice that our white privilege has enabled us to ignore. In addition to these positive changes, I have also witnessed others (even members of my own family) focusing solely on the burning fires and the broken windows labeling all those who dare to rise for justice as "looters" and "rioters." I have witnessed white folks proclaiming "All Lives Matter" and "Blue Lives Matter." And, I have witnessed many white folks staying silent on racism and police brutality all together.

Our faith calls us to rise in solidarity with justice movements wherever they arise. Our faith calls us to declare that those who have been beaten down and brutalized by systems of injustice and oppression are beloved children of God too. Our faith calls us to challenge our own prejudices and to explore how we contribute to the degradation and oppression of others that we might work for freedom and justice for each and every member of God's creation. And so, I invite you and encourage you to do some study (whether through articles, books, or videos) regarding systemic racism in this country.

Through my own study of racism over the years, I have come to see it most fundamentally and harmfully as imbedded in the systems upon which this country was built. When I talk about racism, I am not talking about people who intentionally dislike others because of their race but a deeply-embedded system that in this country has resulted from white folks' collective prejudice backed by the power of legal authority and institutional control. I see that racist ideas (those that separate people into races and then deem one race superior and others inferior) are spread far and wide and deeply within our society. And, I believe that if we are not actively seeking to work against those systems (engaging in antiracist work) then we are maintaining and perpetuating them either through our silence or through our active participation (and thus participating in racist work).

In participating in this antiracist work, I am not in support of bashing, degrading, or demonizing other human beings. Rather I support calling out and holding others accountable for their actions or inaction and words (those spoken and those wrongly

withheld) when they either passively or actively, covertly or overtly support systems of oppression. I see the prophets of old and Jesus and his early followers doing this during their time. So much of the racism in the world today is perpetuated under nonracist terms; that is words related to one's race are not explicitly included. However, the impact of those policies, procedures, and actions show forth their racist foundations given how they disproportionately harm black and brown people.

I believe that an essential part of our work in establishing justice and peace and assuring the well-being of all God's people is to educate ourselves that we might better see and understand how our systems are functioning in this way. As we grow in our understanding of the problem, we can then better root it out and replace the systems with those that are just and faithful as they produce equitable results for each no matter what their race (or any other category we use to define people).

Don't know where to start? Well, the United Church of Christ has an entire section of its website dedicated to racial justice, so I suggest you visit there. Also, over the past weeks, countless folks have put out reading lists and film lists that explore racism; look one up! Or you might simply pick up and start reading "How to Be an Antiracist" by Ibram X. Kendi; this is the book the Racial Harmony & Justice book club was set to read and discuss before having to cancel our study because of the pandemic. I am glad to suggest other resources for you to explore. And, I welcome conversation with you about all of this.

Friends, I have wept over the fact that Martin and I will have to teach Jabali how to respond to the racism he will meet as he grows up even as I fear for Martin's safety and well-being as he simply lives his life in this country. And, so I ask, please, if not for your own edification and desire to live more faithfully, engage in this study because you love and care about me and my dear family. God be with you as you dare to step outside your comfort zones and engage in this life-changing and life-saving study.



Worship

From a Distance...

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 worshipping 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: 890 9706 1745 followed by #; there is no participant number so simply press # again when asked). 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. Please contact Rev. Petersen if you need a hard copy of the bulletin delivered to you.

We have experienced a number of "hiccups" and technical difficulties in offering an online and streaming worship at Congregational UCC and are working on smoothing these out as they come. 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

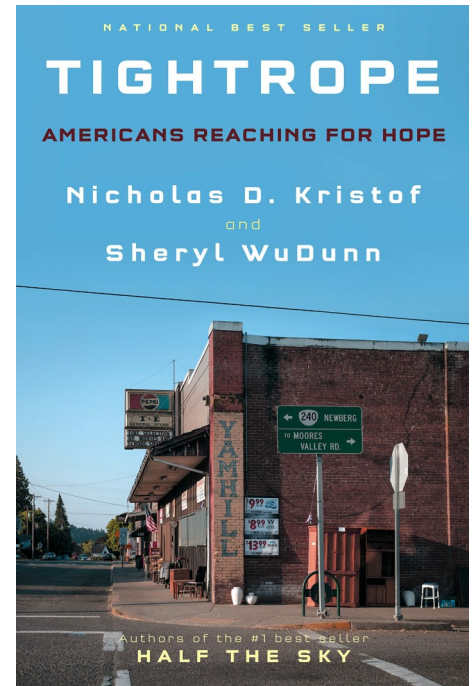
Education

Study “Tightrope” Walking

During the month of July, we will continue and conclude our Thursday evening study of “Tightrope: Americans Reaching for Hope” by Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn. We will continue **meeting via Zoom** (some online with video and others via phone with audio only) as we continue a nine-week study of this thought-provoking book. All are invited to this virtual gathering on **Thursday evenings, 5:00pm-6:00pm**, to explore this newly published work by the Pulitzer Prize-winning authors of the acclaimed, best-selling *Half the Sky* (read by Morning Circle participants some time ago) as they now issue a plea—deeply personal and told through the lives of real Americans—to address the crisis in working-class America, while focusing on solutions to mend a half century of governmental failure (from Amazon.com).

Participants should purchase a book and be prepared to discuss any thoughts, questions, and curiosities spurred by the weekly reading. The June meeting and reading schedule is as follows: July 2nd—Chapters 9-10 (Deaths of Despair; Interventions That Work); July 9th—Chapters 11-12 (Universal Health Care: One Day, One Town; Homeless in a Rich Nation); July 16th—Chapters 13-15 (The Escape Artists; A Shot in the Face; God Save the Family); July 23rd—Chapters 16-18 (The Marriage of True Minds; We Eat Our Young; Raising Troubled Kids); July 30th—Chapters 19-20 & Appendix (Creating More Escape Artists; America Regained; Ten Steps You Can Take in the Next Ten Minutes to Make a Difference)

If you are interested in participating, contact Rev. Petersen to receive the call-in information and if you need any assistance purchasing a book.



Service and Outreach

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 Rev. Petersen. 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 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.



Prayers and Concerns

Please hold in prayer

- Tami Hood-Hayes, friend of Heidi Grandstaff-Fresh
- Allison Lanphier, friend of Heidi Grandstaff-Fresh
- Meredith Caves, granddaughter of David & Dorothy Raymond
- Khloe Sassman, friend of the Pryke and Stonehocker families
- Stormy Storms • Larry Leitner



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

Donation Wish List

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

Our regular collection for the Jasper County Animal Rescue League has been discontinued due to the closing of this organization.

Virtual Refreshment Time

Everyone is invited to join together after worship each Sunday in July (approx. 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 (if you join via phone for worship, you can simply stay on the line)





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 April 8th Council meeting are below. Complete minutes of the meeting (which were approved by the Church Council during the June 10th meeting) are available in the church office; please contact Barbara Vasquez, Jennifer Pryke, or Rev. Petersen if you would like a copy.

- **Opening Devotions:** Everyone shared how they are doing during this time of limited contact and what they are missing about church as we continue our hiatus from in-person gatherings.
- **Secretary's Report:** April 8 Council Minutes were sent electronically to Council members for review. A hard copy is in the book of minutes. After corrections, minutes were accepted.
- **Treasurer's Report:** Report electronically to Council members for review along with a written summary of the report. A hard copy is in the book of minutes. We have \$1500 less in revenues this month. The PPP loan grant was approved, and the funds were received on May 4. All of this money must be used within eight weeks of our receiving it for payroll and utilities. Discussed inviting Barbara (Administrative Assistant) back to 10 hours/week rather than the 5 hours/week she has been working.
- **Maintenance Report:** Report sent electronically to Council members. The plant and flower areas have been trimmed and cleaned, lawn mowing is being done, an electrical problem in an outlet in the Parish House has been addressed and will be monitored. All non-urgent previously identified projects are on hold.
- **Association Business:** We are looking for two volunteers to participate in the Association vote due by May 15. Jenni Pryke and Norm Van Klompenburg volunteered to vote and participate in the ZOOM ecclesiastical council on May 17th at 2:00 pm. Rev. Petersen will also be participating in both of these.
- **Continuation of Online Services:** The Council agreed by consensus that the wisest course of action at this time is to continue our online church services through June. There is concern for the well-being of our congregation if we return to services in the church building too soon.
- **2020 Budget Proposal and Presentation:** At the last congregational meeting, the budget was approved through June. We must have a meeting to allow the treasurer to pay bills after June 30. The Council is recommending a budget that will require a move to decreasing the minister's compensation package by half using the UCC guidelines. Much discussion was given to creating a plan to obtain approval for the budget for the rest of this year. **MOTION:** In light of the extraordinary times created by the presence of COVID-19, the Council declares an emergency situation in which we may hold a congregational meeting using unconventional methods. This may include, but not be limited to, mailings, emails, phone calls, electronic ZOOM meetings with the congregation, and mail-in ballots. Consensus was reached. After much productive discussion, a plan was formed.
- **Sabbatical and PTO:** Rev. Petersen is still planning on taking time (6 weeks of sabbatical, 2 weeks of vacation) for the months of August and September. Travel to Kenya is still a hoped-for possibility.
- **Transform Parish House:** Suggestion made to transform the Parish House into a temporary shelter and counseling center for people experiencing homelessness. A grant is available through the county with an application deadline of May 30. Suggestion to form a coalition with other organizations that provide services. Questions about financial and legal issues that need to be addressed to create a proposal for the council to consider. No action taken; we will revisit this down the road.
- **Clothing Closet:** Request to use an empty classroom as a clothing closet. Concerns about people going in and out of the church building were expressed. Heidi Grandstaff-Fresh would be the only one entering and retrieving clothes for those in need. Request approved.
- **Reviewed upcoming dates**
- **Closing Prayer and Adjournment**

Take note...

Budget Vote Results

In late May, the Council recommended for the consideration and approval of the congregation a budget for the remainder of 2020 via mail. This budget proposal included a change to the pastor's compensation package beginning October 1st, 2020 to 50 percent of the Conference Guidelines for a full-time pastor. In order for the proposed budget to be approved a 2/3 vote was required because funding the proposal would require withdrawal from our endowment funds in excess of \$5000. Ballots were mailed to our membership and returned or postmarked by June 17th. The results of the vote were 51 in favor of the motion and 2 opposed to the motion. (An additional ballot postmarked June 17th was received following the announcement made on Sunday, June 21st.) The motion received the required 2/3 affirmative vote required for adoption.

The Church Council is now working on renegotiation of the terms of employment with the Pastor which is required by the adoption of this budget. You are welcome and encouraged to reach out to members of the Council to share your thoughts and ideas as we make this shift.

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
Pastor:	Rev. Jessica Petersen

Response to COVID-19

During their June meeting, the Church Council agreed to continue our suspension of in-person gatherings at least through the month of July.

Additionally, a COVID-19 Response Team has been formed to consider when and under what circumstances our congregation will allow in-person meetings to begin again. This ad hoc committee will embark on an in-depth exploration of the matter and develop a proposal for re-opening our doors for Council's consideration and approval.



Birthdays to Celebrate in July

- 2-Mady McKim, Marti Barker, Judy Brassfield
- 3-Sherry Bachman
- 6-Lauren Fresh, Rob Kahn
- 7-Brenda Wilson
- 8-Summer Margritz, Debbie Carter
- 11-Talbot Mastio
- 14-Katy Fresh, Mason Pryke, Lindsay Wilson
- 15-Mark O. Babcock
- 20-Hilary Montalvo
- 29-Jenny Jensen



Anniversaries to Celebrate in July

- 10-Jennifer & Jim Pryke;
Jim & Linda Christenson
- 11-Les & Teresa Morgan
- 18-James & Jenny Jensen

Sundays

10:00am Online Worship

11:30am Zoom

Refreshments

July



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2	3	4
				5:00pm <i>Tightrope Study</i> via Zoom		Independence Day
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Communion 			6:00pm Church Council via Zoom	5:00pm <i>Tightrope Study</i> via Zoom		
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
				5:00pm <i>Tightrope Study</i> via Zoom		
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
				5:00pm <i>Tightrope Study</i> via Zoom		
26	27	28	29	30	31	
				5:00pm <i>Tightrope Study</i> via Zoom		

Worship Schedule for July

Date	July 5	July 12	July 19	July 26
Christian Calendar Date	Fifth Sunday after Pentecost	Sixth Sunday after Pentecost	Seventh Sunday after Pentecost	Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
Special Events	Communion			
Scriptures	Zechariah 9:9-12	Isaiah 55:10-13	Isaiah 44:6-8	1 Kings 3:5-12
Worship Color	White	Green	Green	Green

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

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



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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Newton Congregational UCC: www.uccnewton.org