



The Open Door

March 2021



CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST

God is still speaking,

An Open and Affirming Congregation

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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.



Max and Evelyn Fuller Scholarships

It is scholarship time! Newton Congregational United Church of Christ is honored to administer the Fuller Scholarship Fund. Max and Evelyn Fuller were very dedicated to education and a bulk of their estate endowed an educational scholarship fund. Post-secondary education is often quite expensive. Every year it is gratifying to dispense Fuller Scholarships to help students furthering their education.

We are getting ready to accept applications for the 2021-2022 Fuller Scholarships.

The scholarships are awarded based on the student's intent to complete a post-secondary degree according to the following (listed in priority order): Baccalaureate/Bachelor's Degree; Associate Degrees; Certificate program; Diploma program; Trades program; and Advanced Degrees. Both full-time and part-time enrollments are eligible for scholarships.

In order to be eligible to receive a Fuller Scholarship, the applicant, and/or parent or grandparent of the applicant must be a member of the church.

Since the inception of these scholarships in 1996, a total of \$211,500 has been awarded. This year the Fuller Fund will award \$35,000 in scholarships.

Please email or contact the church office for an application. Applications are due April 15, 2021. (cont. on p. 2)

Max and Evelyn Fuller Scholarships (cont. from p. 1)



Here are some excerpts from the thank you letters of previous recipients:

“As I enter my final year....I will think of the church and what you all have done to help me receive my degree.thank you for playing a role in helping me achieve my dreams. Receiving this scholarship motivates me to finish my last year strong. Thank you for your confidence in me and willingness to help.”

“I was so excited to hear that I had been selected to receive the Fuller Scholarship. I am very appreciative of this special award.”

“I am sincerely honored to have been selected as a recipient of the Max and Evelyn Fuller Scholarship. As I work towards completing my education...I am very thankful for receiving your thoughtful gift. Because of this scholarship, you have lightened my financial burden which allows me to focus more on the most important aspect of school, learning. You have inspired me to help my community, as you have, one day in the future.”

“I cannot even begin to tell you how grateful I am for you guys to grant me such a generous scholarship in honor of Max and Evelyn Fuller. It was extremely nice of you to do that and will help so much...I hope everyone in the congregation is doing well during these unprecedented times. Thank you again so much for the scholarship....it means the world to my family and I.”

WHAT'S NEXT

Progress is being made towards resolving the issues affecting our church, although the bitter temperatures during much of February caused some delays.

First, another draft of the Profile has been submitted to the Conference Search and Call Pastor. We are hesitant to say it is finished; the editing committee thinks we are done every time it is sent off to the conference and it keeps coming back with suggestion after suggestion after suggestion for improvement. We shall persist! We are scheduled to have a ZOOM call with Reverend Houser, the conference minister with whom we are working, on Monday, March 1st. If this conversation is productive, we **may** have our profile posted in the near future.

Second, Council continues to explore options with nearby churches regarding possible cooperative relationships that would be mutually beneficial. We are not the only church in the area facing change. There are many different ways congregations can create “cooperative relationships.” Council will apprise the congregation of any new developments, should they occur. (cont. on p. 3)

WHAT'S NEXT (con t. from p. 2)

Third, we are exploring the possibility of offering a live virtual service from our sanctuary for Easter Sunday. It has been months since we had our own Sunday morning worship service; lots of pieces have to be arranged; lots of folks have to be lined up to help. Not all of the arrangement of pieces and aligning of people was completed by the Open Door deadline, but it is still an option. Watch the Weekly Updates for further news.

Finally, Council has moved the monitoring of the possibility of in-person worship back onto the agenda. We caution you to not get **too** excited. It isn't imminent, although it is coming. Our COVID-19 Response Team formulated guidelines that were introduced to the congregation in the July 2020 Open Door. Four criteria were outlined: local COVID-19 cases consistently declining for two months, widespread availability of testing, contact tracing taking place, and no shortages of personal protective equipment. At that time, a vaccine was only a hope and a prayer. Now we have three vaccines that have performed well during research trials and distribution is picking up every week. It looks so promising, you may be wondering if in-person worship is near.

Of the four criteria we adopted, three have been substantially met and only the consistent decline in cases of COVID-19 for two months has not yet been reached. Nevertheless, the COVID Act Now site, on Sunday, February 28, put Jasper County in the Active Outbreak category, described as: "Jasper County is either actively experiencing an outbreak or is at extreme risk. COVID cases are exponentially growing and/or Jasper County's COVID preparedness is significantly below international standards." We share this level with 12 other counties. The figures for the state of Iowa as a whole are better. This points out the importance of knowing how **our** county is doing as we make decisions for **us**.

Service and Outreach

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” Matthew 25: 35-36

Last month's newsletter invited you to think about where you would like the church to be involved in mission. Our in-person engagement will remain curtailed as long as the COVID-19 infection rates are high and while vaccination distribution is in progress. That leaves us with donating the funds we have available. Each year our church donates \$4500 to Our Church's Wider Mission, which is administered by the Conference. We send our payments to that fund quarterly. In the past we had special offerings for some donations. Since we are not able to do that now, Council also authorized \$233 to Neighbors in Need and \$516 to The Christmas Fund, which benefits retired pastors.

Council also encourages all of us to adopt a regular practice of donating to help others, as we did when we designated Sundays every month for donations to the Salvation Army Food Pantry, the Jasper County Animal Rescue League, and the Body Shop. Here are the ideas we listed in last month's Open Door:

Neighbors Helping Neighbors

Salvation Army

Community boxes for food, clothing, etc. donations (at First Baptist and Christian Reform churches)

Black Lives Matter

The Poor People's Campaign

Another possibility is Discover Hope 517 Ministry, at 733 1st Ave. E. They are “a recovery community organization that seeks to help individuals find refuge from addiction through the power of Jesus Christ.” Each day they serve a free meal to those in need via the Bread of Life Meal Ministry. They offer a number of different faith-based support services in the evenings for those who are transitioning into recovery.

While we aren't gathering, we would like to be able to encourage one another in this practice. So, how about letting the newsletter know when you make a donation? It can be a donation of money or an in-kind donation, such as food to a food pantry. You can email the newsletter editor (aprilfaidley@gmail.com), the donation will be noted, your name will be discarded. Or you can drop off a piece of paper at the church office. In either case, simply say “_____ (how many?) donation(s) made to _____ (fill in the organization or project).”

Each month we will publish how our mission is growing by tallying the donations made to different organizations and projects. We won't be specifying amounts and we won't be saying who donated where. To start off, let us know if you made any donations during January and February. Then add your March donations. We will be aiming to get the April Open Door out by March 30th, so get those donations to us by March 26th, please.

If you would like to alert other church members of a particular need, let the office or April know. We will be happy to spread the word in the Open Door.



Join the Choir!

Hello church leaders!

I want to extend an invitation to you and your congregants to join the Joint Annual Meeting (JAM) virtual choirs! We are very excited to offer this opportunity as part of our programming and sincerely hope that you will participate. We will have both a youth choir and an adult choir, please extend this invitation to your congregations! Everyone is welcome regardless of previous musical experience. Information can be found on our JAM webpage (ucctcm.org/annualmeeting) and on the sign-up forms. Everyone must sign-up by March 14th, materials and instructions will be sent afterwards.



Adult Choir: <https://forms.gle/ZxtSgAqnEubZ83tK8>

Youth Choir: <https://forms.gle/RVwMhJHREbwynLbr9>

Aidan Spencer, Communications Specialist (Pronouns: she, her, hers) Email: aidan@ucctcm.org



- 3/1 Barb Holdsworth, Jeanne Hershey
- 3/4 Elizabeth Pearson, Leslie McNew
- 3/9 James Jensen, Bruce Nuzum, Sr.
- 3/10 Marilyn Deppe
- 3/11 Brad Penick
- 3/16 Lonnie Appleby
- 3/19 Kelly Mathes
- 3/20 Janie Kahn, Gayla Snook
- 3/24 Marilyn Planer, Cindy Tool
- 3/25 Dylan Yoder
- 3/30 Alexander Stonehocker



3/26 Pam & Johnny Wagnor

Prayer Requests

Stormy Storms



Last October, the congregation, in our zoom annual meeting, approved a tentative budget for 2021. The approved budget was subject to possibly substantial change. Below, I will sketch the changes we have made thus far.

Money Musings

Larry Leitner, Treasurer

The most significant change is due to an assumption made when constructing the budget that simply did not occur. The budget was based on having a half-time pastor as of January 1, 2021; we still do not have such a person. Council is finalizing our Profile. Once it is revised and posted, it will help us connect with potential candidates for the position; none of us know how long the search process will take.

Accordingly, the revised budget assumes that it will be April 1, 2021 before we have a half-time pastor. That assumption may also prove unduly optimistic. Nevertheless, the revised budget has zeroed out expenses for a pastor for the first quarter of 2021. Because we still are not meeting in person, the revised budget has reduced our non-pledge and loose offerings for 2021. Finally, our pledge campaign from late last fall fell slightly short of what we had budgeted for 2021, so pledge income for the year has been reduced in the revised budget.

To be more specific, the revised budget now assumes that we will spend \$10,631 less on pastoral expenses than the budget the congregation approved. It also assumes that we collect \$2,885 less in pledge income (\$82,615 versus \$85,500), \$878 less in non-pledge giving (\$7,022 versus \$7,900), and \$600 less in loose offerings (\$600 versus \$1,200). These assumptions lead us to a projected income for the year of \$93,407, a \$4,362.78 decrease from the previously approved budget. The net effect of these changes to the budget approved in October, is the revised budget projects a surplus of \$2,165, rather than a deficit of \$4,104.

I will keep you informed of any further changes in the budget. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me (lmleitner@gmail.com or 515-478-6473).



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
(515) 299-1845

Betty Hotchkin
Park Centre #40
500 1st St. N.
Newton, IA 50208
(641) 791-4687

Norma "Jeannie" Johnson
200 S. 8th Ave E.
Newton, IA 50208
(641) 275-5393



Communications

Church Council Catch Up

In an effort to keep our congregation 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.

February 10, 2021 Council Meeting

Present: Jane Ann Cotton, Jennifer Pryke, April Faidley, Larry Leitner, Norm Van Klompenburg, Les Morgan

Maintenance Report: There are some concerns with one of the sanctuary furnaces. It is functioning currently; Jim and Norm are frequently checking it.

Jim is doing the snow removal as a volunteer because he is spending less time working inside the church (due to the church closure). We have saved about \$600 thanks to Jim.

Norm will be keeping an eye on the roof as the ice thaws to watch for roof and gutter damage.

Lin and Marti will do a walkthrough to identify cleaning/storage/organizing projects the church needs. After the jobs have been identified, people may sign up to complete them to give congregants the opportunity to contribute and do something in the building.

Norm and Larry will be reviewing the insurance settlement. The projects we set out to complete after the storm damage have been largely completed. The sign is completed, and we will be putting messages on the board such as "Be a Blessing," and "Pray Often."

Treasurer's Report: A question was raised about when we would send a donation, with a letter of appreciation to Grinnell UCC. Larry will write the check; Norm and Jane Ann will compose the letter and see that it is sent.

Moderator's Report: Jane Ann received two unexpected phone calls within a week. A call came from a church in town; they would like to speak with us about sharing their minister. A similar call came from another nearby church; their idea is to share a pastor and have separate services in our own sanctuaries each Sunday. If we are interested in discussing it, their governing body will approve such discussion on Feb. 11.

The Council held a lengthy discussion about exploring the options and possibilities with these churches. There are many options for how to share a pastor and/or ministry. Norm suggested that we keep our profile in mind as a guide for our future. We also discussed considerations of identity and affiliation. We will go ahead with preliminary meetings with these churches. Jenni proposed that we form a temporary committee of Jane Ann, April, Norm, and Larry to explore options with both churches if we hear from them after their own meetings. In the future we may add to, or change members of, this committee. This is strictly an exploratory committee and no decision making power has been authorized by the council. Consensus was reached.

Profile: April, Norm, and Jane Ann will meet to respond to Rev. Houser's most recent letter concerning our profile. April would like to address the letter point by point, send the newly edited version to Rev. Houser and then arrange a Zoom meeting with her.

(cont. on p. 8)

Council Catch Up (cont. from p. 7)

Our Church's Wider Mission: Should we donate to a mission project of some kind? We could contribute to the meal program being run by the Methodist and Lutheran churches. Jane Ann will find out where to send the funds. April will keep track in the newsletter of contributions people are making to local organizations so we can see what we are doing as a congregation since we can't meet to work on projects together. We have money in the budget to contribute to the special offerings, so Larry will determine the averages usually contributed to Neighbors in Need, Christmas Fund, and One Great Hour of Sharing and send contributions to these special funds.

Importance of Yearbook Reporting: Anne Gerken is compiling the information, and she will complete this report. It is important because it is necessary to maintain our nonprofit status. The deadline is March 3rd.

Update of criteria for reopening: We will reconvene the Covid Committee in order to discuss changing the criteria for reopening before Feb. 26. The committee is comprised of Carolyn Hobbs, Jenni Pryke, and Jane Ann Cotton.

Church Council Composition

Moderator: Jane Ann Cotton

Assistant Moderator: April Faidley

Secretary: Jennifer Pryke

Treasurer: Larry Leitner

Members-At-Large: Les Morgan, Heidi Grandstaff-Fresh, Norm Van Klompenburg

Musical Moments

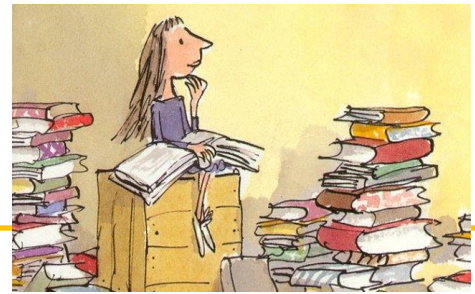
Throughout the pandemic, while the church has been closed to in-person worship, our keyboardist, Bev Thomas, has brought us into the sanctuary and played for us, through videos posted on the church Facebook page and the church website. We have added a devotion to these videos to expand our outreach to viewers (and to satisfy the requirements of our license to use the musical pieces). Each Tuesday a volunteer from



the congregation meets with Bev and, while appropriately maintaining social distance, creates the video for the week. We have had 70 - 100 views of each of the videos on Facebook, which shows they are, indeed, reaching an interested audience.

We appreciate and thank every one of our members who have volunteered to give a devotion, a poem, a meditation, a song, or a reflection. We invite more of you to participate! A variety of faces and voices will entertain our viewers and present a cross section of our membership to them. If you are willing to participate but don't have any idea what you might present, Jane Ann Cotton has a devotional book that she particularly likes and would be happy to share with you. Jane Ann has volunteered to handle the scheduling; reach her at 521-3547 or jacotton@pcpartner.net.

EDUCATION



The Last Week Book Study

The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus's Final Days in Jerusalem launches as our book study on March 4th. The authors, Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan, are familiar, as we have studied one of their books before. This quote from the preface introduces the study:

“‘Passion’ is from the Latin noun *passio*, meaning ‘suffering.’ But in everyday English we use ‘passion’ for any consuming interest, dedicated enthusiasm, or concentrated commitment. In this sense, a person’s passion is what she or he is passionate about. In this book we are deliberately playing those two meanings against one another. The first passion of Jesus was the kingdom of God, namely, to incarnate the justice of God by demanding for all a fair share of a world belonging to and ruled by the covenantal God of Israel. It was that first passion for God’s distributive justice that led inevitably to the second passion of Pilates’s punitive justice. Before Jesus, after Jesus, and, for Christians, archetypically in Jesus, those who live for nonviolent justice die all too often from violent injustice. And so in this book we focus on ‘what Jesus was passionate about’ as a way of understanding why his life ended in the passion of Good Friday. To narrow the passion of Jesus to his last twelve hours—arrest, trial, torture, and crucifixion—is to ignore the connection between his life and his death.”

Book club meets on Thursdays from 5:30pm to 6:30pm. Here is our February schedule:

March 4: Chapter 1: Palm Sunday

March 11: Chapter 2: Monday

March 18: Chapter 3: Tuesday

March 25: Chapter 4: Wednesday

The study will continue in April, concluding on April 22nd.

Join the Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83595726192?pwd=cm9FTXkrVlhrQmkvalEwVitGZW9nZz09>

Meeting ID: 835 9572 6192

Passcode: 377178

If you need assistance, contact Jane Ann Cotton or April Faidley.

This study is a laity-generated educational program. The participants choose the books studied and (as the spirit moves them) research additional material to add to the discussion. We want the study to have a broad appeal; we do not want it to simply serve the interests of those who currently attend. If you are thinking, “Well, I would join that program, but the book they are studying doesn’t really interest me,” think that no more! Please let us know, through the church office, what book or books you would be enthused about studying. We can put them on our list and would be most happy to welcome you into our study!

Editor's Revery

Since August, the newsletter has included articles about our sign. It was thoroughly destroyed by the derecho, a very visible representation of the damage done to our church by the storm. During that time, in the back of my head, as I wrote the newsletter articles, I was featuring just that, the restoration of our sign. Then the sign was completed, restored and it was time to decide what it would say. I did not take that particularly seriously. I thought, "Well, somebody needs to figure that out, but not me." It just didn't seem terribly significant.

That changed for me when the insurrectionists stormed the Capital building. Watching live footage and then the videos as they were broadcast on television, drove home how significant outward signs and symbols can be. It did matter, a great deal, what they were wearing (military vests, helmets, riot gear), what they were carrying (zip ties, guns, bludgeons), what flags they brandished (Confederate, Trump), what logos they sported on their t-shirt (Camp Auschwitz, 6MWE, standing for 6 million [Jews murdered in the Holocaust] Wasn't Enough, QAnon). Those were not quiet statements about what they were there for and what they intended to do. Those were LOUD declarations, ANGRY shouts, about what they were there for and what they intended to do. Our sign, also, can be a loud declaration of the gospel, of what we are here for and what we intend to do.

At the same time, our book club/Bible study recently finished *The Truth is Marching On*, Jon Meacham's recreation of the Civil Rights Movement through the life of John Lewis. Week after week, what we are reading illustrates that LOVE can shout as loudly as HATE and LOVE can move mountains even in the face of HATE. Every time we meet part of the discussion has centered on persistence. How could John Lewis continue to put himself in situations where he was beaten, hospitalized, denigrated, arrested, jailed, imprisoned? How could he and his compatriots persist in their nonviolent resistance in the face of hatred that was backed by governors, mayors, and law enforcement officers? Yet, it was persistence that moved the mountain. Our sign can also help move the mountain.

These are some of the messages our sign will carry over the next several months.



We can insist on the paramount significance of these acts.

We can persist in our pursuit of justice and peace, the kingdom realized on earth.

Sundays

Online Worship—viewed at your convenience

11:30am Zoom Refreshments



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	First Day of Women's History Month			5:30pm <i>The Last Week</i> book study via Zoom	National Cheese Doodle Day	
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Online Worship w/ Grinnell UCC Super Bowl			6:00pm Church Council via Zoom	5:30pm <i>The Last Week</i> book study via Zoom		National Open an Umbrella Indoors Day
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Daylight Saving Time Online Worship w/ Grinnell UCC			St. Patrick's Day	5:30pm <i>The Last Week</i> book study via Zoom		
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
Online Worship w/ Grinnell UCC	Deadline for submissions to newsletter			5:30pm <i>The Last Week</i> book study via Zoom		Passover
28	29	30	31			
Palm Sunday Online Worship w/ Grinnell UCC	Holi*	National Take a Walk in the Park Day	Manatee Appreciation Day			

*Holi is a popular ancient Hindu festival, also known as the "festival of spring," the "festival of colors," and the "festival of love." The festival signifies the triumph of good over evil.

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.
Submissions are welcome. Deadline for submission is the date indicated on the Calendar.

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
Moderator	Jane Ann Cotton	521-3547 (Cell)	jacotton@pcpartner.net
Pastor Emeritus & Emergency Pastoral Care	Rev. David Raymond	521-1506 (Cell)	davidray@mediacombb.net

Office hours: 10:00am to 3:00pm Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday; not open to the public



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