
Newaygo Congregational United Church of Christ

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Rev. Jonathan Riedel, Pastor

“THE CHURCHMOUSE”

July 2021

General Synod

“I pray that they will be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. I pray that they will be in us, so that the world will believe that you sent me.” John 17:22 CEB

The denomination I belong to is a mongrel of sorts. It is a mixture of European and American strands of the Christian faith. It is both one of the youngest and the oldest denominations in this country. Our roots go back to the Pilgrims and the Puritans. They include 19th century German immigrants who brought their Calvinist and Lutheran roots over when they settled along the Mississippi River valley and in Pennsylvania. Our ancestors also include one of the first attempts to bring all the Christian branches together: the Christian Church of the Cumberland Valley. The pieces began coming together during the middle of the 20th century as a variety of churches began open dialogue and discovered they had more in the common than their various worship styles and histories might indicate. First the Puritan/Congregational merged with the Christian Church in 1931 then the German Evangelical Church merged with the German Reformed Church in 1933. In 1957, after twenty years’ worth of negotiations and in the post-war spirit of economic and social optimism, the four became one. The United Church of Christ was born. I have a member for nearly 40 years, which at this point is a majority of its lifespan.

We are a strange mixture. We value the individuality of each local congregation. They alone decide who their minister will be and which missions and social justice issues they will take on. They make their own decisions about what kind of building they will use and how they will spend the money they collect. Yet they come together in associations, state-level conferences, and national offices to deal with theological snarls and societal problems which are too big for one church to handle. Yet any decision made by those collective bodies is not mandatory for the people in the pews. They have the final say in acceptance and rejection of whatever those wider voices might offer. What emerges is a constant state of negotiation and of conversation, tied together by something we call ‘covenant’. Covenant is a mutually binding set of promises, promises stronger than whatever argument or whatever whim might arise. Covenant is the abiding recognition of relationship, even when we would like to pretend that none exists. Covenant is what urges us to gather every two years, online and in person around the country, to take the temperature of our world and to make decisions of what challenges we want the local churches to take on for two years hence. I have been a delegate to the General Synod when it met in Milwaukee in 2019 and will be a visitor when it meets in July of this year.

General Synod is a heady and infuriating process. It cannot help but be so when you have people passionate in their love of God, their love for God's creation, and for how to make the world around us better, particularly when the thinking and the ideas that emerges from those passions often stand in direct conflict with one another. During our last Synod, we battled over the use of Styro-foam, whether to get rid of for-profit jails and prisons, how to be inclusive of transgender people, how to deal with predatory landlords, and how to make sure our language about God gives other faiths and those of no faith a voice. In the past, general synods have urged the ordination of women, backed the Civil Rights movement, approved the ministry of gays and lesbians, approved marriage covenants for gay and lesbian people, and recognized that our stewardship of our world is not one of taking what we want but one of caring and preserving what God has made. All of these decisions remain controversial in some circles and continue to provoke many discussions, some productive and some angry and divisive.

Most of these conversations happen on the local level. Church members gather to give their approval or disapproval of what each Synod has talked about. Sometimes they just ignore whatever proclamations emerged and carry on as they have before. In this day and age of mass communication, it is not so easy for churches to go that route anymore. I have had people read about what my denomination stands for and ask me about it. Sometimes they are aggressive in their disagreement; other times they want to learn more. Inevitably, they ask if my local church believe as the higher ups do. Well, sometimes we do and sometimes we don't. I then explain about how each congregation is individual in how it governs itself and how it chooses its priorities. This always encourages me to explain why my congregation might agree or disagree. Sometimes I even have to go to the people in the pews and start asking some difficult questions. As one of our ancestors once said, there is yet more truth and light to break forth from God's word and maybe God is calling us to do some more listening.

On the surface, my denomination looks like a wad of unspooled, tangled yarn. Some, who prefer a more top-down approach, wonder how we get anything done. Other, who value freedom above all, wonder if decisions of Synod interfere with the free movement of God's grace. While the results are far from perfect, I believe that the workings of my church ultimately knit themselves into the tapestry that is God's oneness. All the conversations, all the controversies, all the arguments, and all the fragile agreements are how we come together as one. Oneness is not the submission to the sameness, but rather it is willingness of different colors and strengths to lend themselves to the fabric. Each of us has a role to play and each role is enhances when we can work together, because of and despite our individual murmurs and celebrations. The richness of our tapestry, in the end, shows off the richness of its inspiration and its spirit, the love of God shown through Jesus the Christ. It is there on display for all to say, but you will have to look carefully. So I am glad we will keep arguing and discussing. I am glad we keep discerning and challenging each other. By that way only will we find our way to God.

The Rev. Jonathan D. Riedel-Pastor, Newaygo Congregational United Church of Christ

New Format for "The Churchmouse"

As you can see, there is a new format for the newsletter. In addition to the new format, those who receive the newsletter by email will also be receiving a weekly "What's Happening at NCUCC" page the beginning of each week so you will be kept up to date of any changes or additions. Those without email will find a copy in your church mailbox each Sunday. Hopefully everyone will like these changes.

What's Happening at NCUCC July 2021

Events, Anniversaries and Birthdays

Worship is in person and on ZOOM at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84864699096>
or phone 1-312-626-6799 ID: 848 6469 9096

Pastor Jon's Tuesday noon class is in person. Will also be on ZOOM by request
or due to bad weather. <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84229731057>
or phone 1-312-626-6799 ID: 842 2973 1057

Wednesday Night Prayer Time 7 pm. Call 978-990-5000 then 283560#

Th. 1: Admin. Mtg. 10 am in sanctuary & ZOOM

Fr. 2: Stan & Ella M. anniv.

Sa. 3:

Su. 4: Worship 10 am w/ Communion
"Women of the Bible-Deborah"
Scripture: Judges 5

Mo. 5: Office closed for holiday

Tu. 6: Noon Class : "Definitions"

We. 7: Prayer Time 7 pm.

Th. 8: W&PC 10 am on phone

Fr. 9:

Sa. 10: Maxine P. b'day

Su. 11: Worship 10 am
"Women of the Bible-Ruth"
Scripture: Ruth 1

Mo. 12:

Tu. 13: Noon Class: "Dueling Consciousness"

We. 14: Prayer Time 7 pm.

Th. 15: Council 10 am in sanctuary & ZOOM
Holly S. b'day

Fr. 16: Jean S. b'day

Sa. 17:

Su. 18: Worship 10 am
"Women of the Bible-Bath-Sheba"
Scripture: 1 Kings 2: 12-34

Mo. 19: George & Ann P. anniv.

Tu. 20: Noon Class: "Power"

We. 21: Prayer Time 7 pm.
Paul E. b'day

Th. 22:

Fr. 23: Linnea G. b'day

Sa. 24:

Su. 25: Worship 10 am
"Women of the Bible-Esther"
Scripture: Esther 5

Mo. 26:

Tu. 27: Noon Class: "Biology"

We. 28: DEADLINE for Aug. newsletter info.
Prayer Time 7 pm.
Fred V. b'day

Th. 29:

Fr. 30:

Sa. 31:

Members and friends in need of Prayers:

Bill B.

Bud S.

Gloria W.

Deadline for information to be printed in the August newsletter is Wednesday July 28.

Evening Prayer

On Wednesdays at 7 p.m.-we will join over the phone for a time of meditation and prayers for ourselves and others. To join us, dial 978-990-5000 then 283560#.

Tuesday Noon Class

We will be meeting in person in the church's front room for this gathering. We will be looking closely at Ibram Kendi's book "How To Be An Anti-Racist", a challenging chance to look at our presumptions about how our society works and how to improve relationships between people of many cultures and colors. Join us for an enlightening conversation so relevant to our current lives and for our future as a nation. Here is a schedule of topics:

7/06-Definitions

7/13-Dueling Consciousness

7/20-Power

7/27-Biology

THANK YOU!

Dear Scholarship Donors,

I am sincerely honored to be selected as the recipient of the scholarship in honor of Bill Leaver. Thank you so much for your generous financial support towards helping further my education. This gift will help with many expenses for college, including books and tuition.

I truly appreciate your kind hearts and I hope to help students one day like you all have helped me. God bless!

Thank you,
Rachel Karrip

Treasurer's Report May 16 – Jun 15, 2021

Income:

May 26 \$475.00

May 28 \$2,165.00

Jun 2 \$4,095.00

Jun 14 \$928.00

Total \$7,663.00

Expenses \$7,359.63

Difference \$313.37

Phillips Fund \$184,986.16

Family Fund \$ 81,697.69

Blessings to everyone for their generosity and faithfulness. Our church is continuing to share our blessings in our many programs.

Dawn Anderson Treasurer