
Newaygo Congregational United Church of Christ

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Rev. Jonathan Riedel, Pastor

“THE CHURCHMOUSE”

October 2021

The Feast Day of St. Francis

“God saw everything God had made; it was supremely good. There was evening and there was morning: the sixth day.” Genesis 1: 31 CEB

I grew up in a predominantly Catholic town; at one point in time there were seven parishes scattered throughout the neighborhoods I peddled my bike through. Plaster of Paris statues of Francis stood guard in many backyards often surrounded by peony bushes and low-lying scrubs. Some were sheltered under what looked like old bathtubs half-buried in the rich Midwestern dirt; others bore the marks of bird and animal droppings. My devoutly Baptist grandmother had a prayer by St. Francis on her kitchen wall. It had been a gift from one of her students and it spoke to the importance that serving others played in her life. Yet it was not until I entered seminary that I came to appreciate more fully this Italian saint for the radical rebel he truly was.

Francis was a child of wealth yet he rejected his father’s money and prestige the same he walked away from the rich clothing his father gave him. He sought out and talked to Muslim leaders even though the Vatican’s troops were always in the midst of another crusade. He took care of the victims of epidemic and plague even while they were often being driven from town to town. He found ways to educate the unschooled about the glories of the Bible’s stories in a time when the church hoarded knowledge as its own private domain. The nativity scene and the passion plays were something he popularized. He extolled the wonders and beauties of God’s creation in an era of land exploitation. He preached to the animals and to the birds and saw God at work in the weather and the turnings and the twistings of the earth itself. It does not surprise me that this man, though he was very much a medieval mystic, has transcended his time to speak directly and clearly to us today.

Francis died in 1226 in his mid-forties. Though there is some dispute over the exact day of his death, the Catholic and the Anglican churches have dedicated October 4th as a day set aside to celebrate his life. One of the most common ceremonies during that day is the blessing of the animals. This service varies from place to place, but most often includes inviting church members and their friends to bring their household pets and livestock to be prayed over and blessed. From time to time, I have conducted these liturgies in the backyards of some of the churches I have served. Though I have pastored a few decidedly rural congregations, I have never had the opportunity to bless any livestock, to sprinkle, say, a cow, a horse, or a goat. Mostly, I have anointed cats and dogs and I have a few scars to prove it. Most of these ceremonies were attended sparsely and the animals mostly got along with each other. The only exception was the occasion when Bob the older and very muscular cat

decided to put a litter of overly zealous Golden Retriever puppies in their places. I am certain the other cats present were cheering Bob on and the puppies were docile for the rest of our time together.

I haven't had a blessing of the animals for several years and I must admit I miss doing that. It was an opportunity to see my parishioners at their most unguarded and playful moments. Our pets allow us to be soft, sensitive, and openly nurturing that seems safe and understandable. They allow us to feel connected to our natural world, a world so often obscured and obliterated by our machines, our technology, and our tendency to turn the things around into objects to be used rather than creations to be appreciated. Our pets do not care to be treated as objects. They will make sure we pay attention to them, one way or another. I suspect that this is one of the reasons why parents buy puppies and kittens for their children. It is one way to teach responsibility. Often those same creatures provide comfort and purpose for older people. They keep them grounded in the present so they don't become lost in memories or in worries about what the future might bring. I know this every morning as I feed my cat. Pouring out food and making sure that she has enough water reminds me that I am here to care for the world around me at least as much as I care for myself.

Perhaps this St. Francis Feast Day I might find a new way to celebrate. I could put bread out for the birds and the squirrels. I could donate some much needed cash to a wildlife preservation society. I could take the time and enjoy the changing colors of the leaves. I could take the time to ponder how all of God's creation is interconnected and then pick up some of the litter that a passing motorist has thrown into the church's front yard. In all these ways, I will hear the same song that Francis heard some many years ago-a song of celebration of the glory of God's grandeur as seen in all that God has made.

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

Worship

Since returning to in person worship, some parts of the worship service have remained the same and some things have changed. Now that we are using new technology to reach all who wish to worship with us, hopefully the changes have made worship services better. Whether you worship with us in person or on ZOOM (either phone in or by internet) we hope your worship experiences are good ones. If anyone has any ideas that you think might improve worship services, please let Pastor Jon or Ken know. We are open to your ideas and will look into them.

Pastor Jon on Vacation

Pastor Jon will be on vacation from September 17 thru October 8. If anyone has a pastoral care concern during this time, please contact either Dorothy or Ken.

Children In Worship

The Christian Education teachers are looking for children ages 3-10 to participate in their Sunday morning Children In Worship Sunday School program. The program is from 10-11 am each Sunday and will consist of the following format: Sing to prepare for story of God.

- Hear and watch the story.
- Read story from children's Bible
- Respond to story with art.
- Have a simple feast.
- Prayer time.

If you know anyone with children in this age group, please invite them to be a part of this program.

What's Happening at NCUCC October 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#

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| Fr. 1: | Sa. 16: Annual Meeting of the Michigan Conference-10 am (ZOOM) |
| Sa. 2: | Su. 17: Worship 10 am
Children's Sabbath Sunday
"Happy Service"
Mark 10:35-45 |
| Su. 3: Worship 10 am w/Communion
Guest Pastor: Rev. Rebekah Rathman-Wingrove "A Meal Like No Other"
Exodus 12:1-14
Ethaniel T. b'day | Mo. 18: Marcia S. b'day |
| Mo. 4: | Tu. 19: Noon class - "Christianity For The Rest of Us"/ Discernment |
| Tu. 5: No Noon Class
Nancy H. b'day | We. 20: Prayer Time 7 pm (phone-in) |
| We. 6: No Prayer Time | Th. 21: Circles 6-8 pm |
| Th. 7: Circles 6-8 pm | Fr. 22: |
| Fr. 8: Dick W. b'day | Sa. 23: Pastor Jon. b'day |
| Sa. 9: Rosemary S. b'day | Su. 24: Worship 10 am
Pick A Topic Sunday
Mark 10:46-52 |
| Su. 10: Worship 10 am
Access Sunday
"A Good Question"
Mark 10:17-31 | Mo. 25: Sue C. b'day |
| Mo. 11: | Tu. 26: Dave & Joyce T. anniv. |
| Tu. 12: Noon class - "Christianity For The Rest of Us"/ Hospitality
Mission & Social Action 4 pm. | We. 27: Prayer Time 7 pm (phone-in) |
| We. 13: Prayer Time 7 pm (phone-in) | Th. 28: Circles 6-8 pm |
| Th. 14: Worship & Pastoral Care 1 pm. (phone)
Circles 6-8 pm | Fr. 29: Ed R. b'day |
| Fr. 15: | Sa. 30: |
| | Su. 31: Worship 10 am
Reformation Sunday
"Forever Reforming"
Mark 12: 28-34
Trunk or Treat 6-8 pm |

Members and friends in need of Prayers: Julie O., Carolyn S., Fred V., Gloria W.

Deadline for information to be printed in the November newsletter is Thursday, October 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

Tuesday Noon Classes-"Christianity For The Rest of Us"

The church has been changing more and more rapidly in the past decades. Truths that used to seem so solid have shifted and many no longer trust what the church truly stands for. Change is inevitable but the Gospel remains. What does that look like? How can we be the church today? Join us for a discussion of historian Diana Butler-Bass' book CHRISTIANITY FOR THE REST OF US, an examination of the qualities of our faith that allow churches to prosper despite all the transitions of the modern era. We meet on Tuesday at noon in the church narthex. Here is a schedule of topics for the month.

October 12-Hospitality

October 19-Discernment

October 26-Healing

School Supplies

Due to a surplus of supplies caused by most of last year's classes being online, we will not be collecting backpacks and school supplies for kids this year. After talking to educators we found there is a greater need for clothing items. The clothes will be kept at the school for emergency use. The following is a list of needed items: Both girls and boys sweat pants and underwear sizes 5-6, 7-8 & 10-12

(Also some 14-16 sweat pants occasionally needed)

Socks (youth large white to be gender neutral)

Crocs (no name brand in neutral colors)

There is a box in the hall near the mailboxes where you can put the items you have purchased.

You may also make a monetary donation and the items will be purchased for you. Please note "school clothes" on your check or envelope so the money goes to the right place.

Thank you for your support of this project.

Mission and Social Action

Trunk or Treat

We will be hosting Trunk or Treat again this year on Sunday, October 31 from 6-8 pm. Your donations of candy will be very much appreciated. Please drop off your donated candy at the office. Thank you!

Covid -19 Update

Due to the continued increase in the number of Covid-19 cases, Newaygo County remains at a High Risk of spread of the virus.

June 1–June 30 = 62 cases, July 1–31 = 41, Aug. 1–Aug. 31 = 178, Sept. 1–30 = 670

The area health department is recommending that everyone wear a mask indoors. At this time, we are not mandating the use of masks, but we are strongly recommending we all do our part in slowing the spread by voluntarily wearing a mask while inside the church building.

Although most of the congregation has been vaccinated and our risk of serious illness is low, any one of us could become infected and spread the virus to those who have not been or are not able to be vaccinated. Let's be good stewards of the community and do our part in protecting those who are the most vulnerable.

Also, until further notice, you are welcome to stay and visit during fellowship time, but refreshments will not be served. Mask wearing is encouraged during this time.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Treasurers Report Aug 16 – Sept 15, 2021

Income

Aug 23	\$ 814.00
Aug 31	\$1,249.00
Sept 5	\$3,369.00
Sept 12	<u>\$1,072.00</u>
Total	\$6,504.00
Expenses	\$6,163.18
Difference	\$ 340.82

Phillips Fund \$192,353.09

Family Fund \$ 83,526.94

As we enter this fall season, we are truly blessed by God's Bounty. Happy Fall to all.

Dawn Anderson Treasurer