
Newaygo Congregational United Church of Christ

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Rev. Jonathan Riedel, Pastor

“THE CHURCHMOUSE”

November 2021

All Souls' Day

“This hope doesn't put us to shame because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” Romans 5:5 CEB

If there were any class I wish I had taken in divinity school, I would have enjoyed a class on the important holidays of the church year. My expectations for such a class would extend far beyond the usual suspects. Christmas, Epiphany, Good Friday, Easter and Pentecost are all vital days to a proper understanding of the Christian faith, but they do not capture the lived-in quality of our daily walk through our faith. I suspect that once I added all the important historical anniversaries, the saints' feasts, the secular holidays churches have borrowed, and the Sundays dedicated to important social causes, I would have a calendar scheduled throughout in rich, black ink.

Take the triad of days the end October and begin November: All Hallows' Eve, All Saints' Day, and All Souls' Day. I have written about the first two. They were borrowed from ancient Druid and Celtic European traditions and centered on the celebration of the spirits of our ancestors, who lived both within the walls of our churches and outside its hallowed grounds. All Souls' Day (November 2) has its origin in the Roman Catholic Church's puzzling over what to do with those souls who chose to live outside of those walls. Specifically, the theologians and the pastors involved were concerned with those who had confessed a faith in Jesus as the Christ but had died without a final blessing and/or without a final opportunity to confess any mortal or soul-destroying wrong-doings before they died. What happened to those people? Were they condemned forever to the absence of God? Over the years, those same thinkers developed the doctrine of purgatory, a place in between holy bliss and utter condemnation. A place where souls were placed in a sort of holding pattern, where they could work or sweat out their wrong-doings, with the help of the prayers of those left behind, so they could be free of their guilt and also free to ascend to God's complete and embracing love. The prayers (and, to be honest, the financial contributions-Luther had a few harsh words about this part) of the living would serve as a saving act, cooperating with the penitence of those stuck souls. This half-way step-not good enough to go to heaven, not bad enough to be rejected utterly-offered great appeal to many. After all, human beings are a confusing and conflicting mess. No one is a complete Saint and only a few give Adolf Hitler a run of the most evil title. This opportunity, so to speak, to purge, to get rid of the bad side by finally asking for forgiveness and working to make amends offers the comfort of second chances and satisfies our sense of fairness. Now, I know those of the Reformed persuasion might object to this shortening of the power of God, this embracing of a concept not particularly Biblical, and the diminishing of the imperatives of an either/or decision, I suspect that we might have gotten rid of purgatory much too quickly. We as Protestants failed to

see how it spoke to the wonders of God's healing and restoring Spirit, how it describes how God uses the love and compassion of those God has created to help out both the living and the dead. In this model, God's love becomes less an arrow moving up and down and more of circles drawing us all in.

Many non-Catholic Christians, Lutherans and Anglicans especially, include this holiday as part of their annual remembrance of those fellow Jesus followers who are no longer with us, though they have subtracted the purgatory element. Instead, these three days collectively become time well spent remembering the stories of those who have come before us, to learn from their trials and rejoicings, and to use their examples as models to lead us into the church of the future. Some churches are even more daring-they celebrate the worth of all lives who have gone before us, regardless of whether or not they ever professed even a faith in God. They do so because they see everyone, regardless of their faith religious or non-religious, as valued parts of God's creation. They see all of us as having something worthwhile to offer to the whole of humanity simply because they have come into being. Each being is a sign of hope-a sign of investment in a future, a sign of creativity still at work, and a sign of the continued goodness of what God has made. They can have this kind of hope because God has great and enduring love for each and every one of us, irrespective of our gender, our sexual orientation, our race, our place of origin, or where we fit in the economic bracket.

If I let this thought carry me, if I seriously believe in God's love for all souls, it alters how I practice my faith. So often I have seen my version of the Christian faith as something that I must convince everyone else to believe in simply because I believe that God loves me because of the rightness of what I believe about God. I needed them to be as right as I was so I could know that God truly understood and cared about me. So faith became a matter of argument, a matter of convincing others how wrong they were so that they could be open to the right way, which, of course, was my way.

But that is not where hope, love, and joy come from at all.

Love only comes when we can love others as God loves us. Hope comes only when we see in others the very possibilities God sees in us. And joy comes only when we treasure each and every part of God's creation just as God does. Yes, there is evil and destruction in this world. There are horrible choices and good people doing bad things. I am no pale-eyed optimist, but I am willing to take a chance of how much God loves all souls, all people, all creation, and wants us to help them realize the best of their potentials as they are. God did not place us here to make us all conform to my standards or my way of life or my Western Christian view of the world-that may be what God wants for me because that is where I am from, but others may have totally different perspectives and values and I can only see their worth by the fruit they produce in the ground where they are planted. I need to see how they flourish and flounder where they are living, not from where I am living. Truly loving people means loving them as best as I can for being all they can be, not for being all I wish them to be. Our areas of disagreement and divergence are best left to fierce discussion or to the grace of God, who alone can provide the healing balm human hands and minds cannot accomplish.

On this All Souls' Day I will remember those I have loved who have died before me. I will remember those who have guided my faith. And I will remember those who have gone before me who can still teach me something, even if it might appear we have little in common. Thus if I can learn from the dead who are stranger, surely I can turn this lesson to the living. Maybe then the best way to celebrate this day is to be open to the lessons that all of us can teach each other, no matter where they come from and what our deepest thoughts might be. Perhaps then we will truly hear God speaking.

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

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#.

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.

Christmas Message/Program

Anyone interested in helping create a Christmas Message/Program for Sunday, Dec. 19, please join Jane and Jeanne in the narthex for a meeting after church, Sunday, Nov. 14.

Thank You

My mom and I would like to thank everyone for their phone calls, prayers, and gifts of food with my dad's illness and passing. A special thanks to Pastor Jon for the beautiful memorial service and all of the visits, It meant so much to both of us. Also to Ken and everyone that helped after the service. We are blessed with such a great church family.

Holly, Marilyn and Don

Daylight Saving Time Ends

Remember to turn your clocks BACK 1 hour before going to bed Saturday night November 6.

Treasurer's Report Sept 16 – Oct 15, 2021

Income

Sept. 20	\$1,049.00
Sept. 26	\$539.00
Oct. 3	\$4,849.00
Oct. 10	<u>\$359.00</u>
Total	\$6,796.00

Expenses \$7,153.43

Difference (\$357.43)

Phillips Fund \$186,204.33

Family Fund \$ 80,745.28

Thank you to everyone who makes this church program represent our church values and traditions.

Dawn Anderson Treasurer

What's Happening at NCUCC November 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#

Mo. 1:

Tu. 2: Noon class - "Christianity For The Rest
of Us"/Contemplation

We. 3: Prayer Time 7 pm (phone-in)

Th. 4: Administration 1 pm
Circles 6-8 pm

Fr. 5:

Sa. 6: Time Change Tonight (back 1 hr.)
Nancy M. b'day

Su. 7: Worship w/Communion 10 am
Mark 12: 38-44
"Risk and Restoration"

Mo. 8:

Tu. 9: Noon class - "Christianity For The Rest
of Us"/Testimony
Worship & Pastoral Care 2 pm.

We. 10: Prayer Time 7 pm (phone-in)

Th. 11: Circles 6-8 pm

Fr. 12: Jose & Nancy H, anniv.

Sa. 13: Don H. b'day

Su. 14: Worship 10 am
Stewardship Sunday
Ask A Question Sunday
Mark 13: 1-8
Christmas Program Meeting
Marcia P. b'day

Mo. 15:

Tu. 16: Noon class - "Christianity For The Rest
of Us"/Diversity

We. 17: Prayer Time 7 pm (phone-in)
Aidan P. b'day

Th. 18: Council 10 am
Circles 6-8 pm

Fr. 19: Jim S. b'day

Sa. 20:

Su. 21: Worship 10 am
Reign of Christ/Thanksgiving Sunday
John 10: 33-37
"Guiding Wisely"

Mo. 22:

Tu. 23: Noon class - "Christianity For The Rest
of Us"/Justice
Thanksgiving Eve Service 7 pm
"The Thanksgiving Basket"

We. 24: Deadline for Dec. newsletter articles
Prayer Time 7 pm (phone-in)

Th. 25: Thanksgiving (office closed)

Fr. 26:

Sa. 27:

Su. 28: Worship 10 am
First Advent-Candle-Lighting
Luke 21: 25-36
"Signs-Road Directions"

Mo. 29:

Tu. 30: Noon class - "Christianity For The Rest
of Us"/Worship

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

Deadline for information to be printed in the December newsletter is Wednesday, November 24.

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.

November 02-Contemplation

November 09-Testimony

November 16-Diversity

November 23-Justice

November 30-Worship

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. 1–29 = 670, Oct. 1-28 = 756

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.

Mission and Social Action Community Outreach

At our last meeting, the Mission and Social Action Commission decided not to pick families for Christmas gifts this year. If anyone would like to do that on their own, names can be obtained from True North.

Instead of the Christmas gifts, it was felt that there is a greater need for food in the county and have chosen to collect money for a Feeding America food truck through True North.

Our goal is to collect \$1,340 which will purchase 10,000 pounds of food and feed 200 families. Last year we collected \$1,395 for True North's Power Pack Lunch Program.

We also are looking for input from you, the congregation, on outreach missions that may interest you and would help fill a need in the community. Please give your ideas to any M&SA Commission member.

Thank you for your support!

Mission and Social Action Commission:

Linnea Godfrey, Sue Johnson, Ann Passage, Joyce Twining, Miriam Strohpaal