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# Newaygo Congregational United Church of Christ

432 Quarterline Newaygo, MI 49337

231-652-6624 [www.newaygoucc.org](http://www.newaygoucc.org)

Rev. Jonathan Riedel, Pastor

## “THE CHURCHMOUSE”

December 2021

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Christmas 2021

“Mary committed these things to memory and considered them carefully.” Luke 2:19 CEB

And so it is Christmas again. The lights are strung between downtown streetlamps. Shoppers are either boasting about the wonderful deals they found online or are lamenting waiting far too long to start the search for the perfect gift. Coffee drinkers at the local snack counter are taking bets about how much snow we will have by Christmas Eve. Some folks will be heading off to warmer climates while others will consider waiting out the flu and Covid season securely in their homes, thankful for online options for their social lives. Still others will try to make up for lost family feast by overstocking groceries and inviting every friend and family member they can think of to a meal worthy of the angels or at least the wood sprites. Most of us will try to take stock of the year that is now almost past-lamenting those who have died, reflecting on friendship new and renewed, and discerning which possible new knowledge God has brought into our lives.

This has been a year of political protest and revolt. Of a planet overheating and stricken with tumultuous weather. Of inoculations and questioning of scientists. Of schools and public arenas opening and closing. Of surges and retreats. Of denial of what is happening and struggles to learn something so we can be better prepared the next time a disaster of this magnitude strikes. The tensions and the contradictions of this time have reminded me that I needed to keep some record of what I have noticed along this journey so I challenged myself to write two poems a day to mark out the news, national and emotional, of my day. I am sitting on a stockpile of a thousand short poems and I suspect there is yet more to be garnered from this ever-changing world.

And those are the things that I have committed to my memory and considered carefully during this year of dangling hope, contradictory dreams, and forced conversations about what it means to be a country, a community, and a person.

I get where Mary is coming from.

She is pregnant out of wedlock. She is forced to give birth on the road because her people are subject to the whims of an emperor a sea away. Her local leaders are beholden to that ruler so they are little protection against the endless slew of regime changes that the empire inflicts upon her people. Her people's money goes to pay for roads that only foreign armies can use safely. Her people are divided in their response-some just go with the Roman flow just to survive, others headed for the hills to build a pure, separate society, still others try to force more sacrifices in Jerusalem's temple just to force God to be more helpful. The most appealing options were the

most drastic or the most practical. The drastic was armed insurrection, temporarily so satisfying yet so likely to destroy everything Israel had. The more practical way was to learn their history of victory and defeat, worship their God, tend to their families, pursue justice and compassion locally, strengthen the bonds that held their villages together, and wait for this crisis to pass. This was certainly a boring and slow option. In the end, it was the only method that worked. Mary might have pondered that at some point in her life, but I suspect that she had more pressing concerns.

She had a child to take a care of. She had a husband to get used to. She had gained her strength back for the long journey back home. She had to deal with the gossip and the slighting that was part of being different in a small town. Now she had to understand, to comprehend, the strange news about her newborn child. What did it mean to be God's chosen? What kind of life does that lead to? What choices would be able to make? Which ones would be made for him? Would he live to be old? Would he die hard and at the mercy of his calling-the one who brings peace and good will which will be for all people? Maybe she was not thinking much about any of those things that night-she was tired after all and the shepherds had disturbed her as she tried to rest after a hard birth. So she stored these thoughts in her heart, turned them over and over again in her mind, as she walked the dusty roads along side her oldest child for as long as she could follow. It would be a long and challenging journey. Then again, that should have come as no surprise to her. Those born on the road far from home tend to stay on those roads, gathering the traveling blues and the traveling bliss as a way to stay truly alive.

Now her pondering, her consideration, has become our own. As we settle into this season, as we unpack decorations, wrap presents, and listen to songs and stories that remind us once again why we bother celebrating this time of year, we are invited to commit things to the forefront of our memories. Indeed, what child is this? Who has arrived? Is he the only of whom the angels sing or should we look somewhere else? Is his birth a cause for rejoicing or for the challenge of confrontation? Our answers to those questions make all the difference in the world so it is best to ruminate over them carefully.

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

### **Pastor Jon on Vacation**

Pastor Jon will be on vacation from December 25 thru January 1. If anyone has a pastoral care need during this time, please contact Dorothy or Ken.

### **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.

### **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#.

# What's Happening at NCUCC      December 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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We. 1: Prayer Time 7 pm (phone-in)

Th. 2: Joyce T. b'day  
Circles 6-8 pm

Fr. 3: Vicki P. b'day

Sa. 4: Ella Mae M. b'day

Su. 5: Worship w/Communion 10 am  
Luke 3: 1-6  
"Signs-Dead End"

Mo. 6:

Tu. 7: Noon class - "Christianity For The Rest  
of Us"/Reflection

We. 8: Prayer Time 7 pm (phone-in)

Th. 9: Worship & Pastoral Care 1 pm.  
Circles 6-8 pm

Fr. 10:

Sa. 11:

Su. 12: Worship 10 am  
Luke 3: 7-10  
"Signs-Detour"  
Pageant Rehearsal after worship

Mo. 13:

Tu. 14: Noon class - "Christianity For The Rest  
of Us"/Beauty

We. 15: Prayer Time 7 pm (phone-in)

Th. 16: Circles 6-8 pm

Fr. 17:

Sa. 18:

Su. 19: Worship 10 am  
Luke 1: 39-55

"Signs-Coming Attractions/Christmas  
Pageant"

Aaron P. b'day

Mo. 20: Dorothy B. b'day

Tu. 21: Noon class - "Christianity For The Rest  
of Us"/Transformation  
Wayne & Jane P. anniv.

We. 22: January Newsletter Deadline  
Prayer Time 7 pm (phone-in)

Th. 23: No Circles

Fr. 24: Christmas Eve Service 7 pm  
(in person and on ZOOM)

Sa. 25: Christmas Day  
Marilyn M. b'day

Su. 26: Carol Hymn Sing  
Luke 2: 41-52

Mo. 27:

Tu. 28: Marty L. b'day

We. 29: No Prayer Time

Th. 30: No Circles  
Jeanne L. b'day

Fr. 31: New Years Eve

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

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Deadline for information to be printed in the January newsletter is Wednesday, December 22.

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## **Tuesday Noon Class**

We will be concluding our study of Diana Butler Bass' CHRISTIANITY FOR THE REST OF US. Join us as we look again at what works in the modern church. We meet at 12 noon each Tuesday in the church entry area. Here is a list of what we are going to cover:

December 07-Reflection

December 14-Beauty

December 21-Transformation

## **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, Oct. 1-31=817, Nov. 1-24=919

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 Strohpaul

## **Christmas Message**

On Sunday, December 19, eight adults in the church will be presenting a Christmas message called "The Mess" during the sermon time. Hear first hand accounts of the major characters in the story of the birth of Jesus.

Invite a friend!

Cast members: our rehearsal is Sunday, December 12, after church.

We will be having a cast party potluck (for cast members only) after the performance on the 19th. Please bring a dish to pass and your own table service. Dessert will be provided.

## **Christmas Eve Service**

On December 24th, please join us for our 7 p.m. In Person and Zoom Celebration of the Birth of Christ. We will have special music, a story for children, and a selection of special readings as well as some of your favorite songs of the season. All are welcome.

## **Christmas Family**

Christian Ed has adopted a family of three for Christmas. The mother is 38 and is being treated for colon cancer. T. Is a 17 year old boy in his senior year, doing well in vocational school. His sister A. is 11.

The household needs:

A pot and pan set

Silverware

Bowls

Coffee cups

Drinking glasses

These items could be lightly used.

The children need socks, underwear, and full-sized bedding.

There will be a donation container for cash for the kids' needs located on the table in the narthex.

If you have any of the lightly used household items, please place them in the Sunday School room.

Thank you.

## **Christmas Cards**

Due to the Covid-19 virus, the usual Christmas Card Post Office will not be set up in the narthex this year. If you wish to distribute cards, please put them in the individual mailbox slots in the hall. Thank You!

## Treasurer's Report Oct 16 – Nov 15, 2021

### Income

Oct 17	\$2,301.00
Oct 24	\$2,180.00
Oct 31	\$ 589.00
Nov 7	\$2,944.00
Nov 14	<u>\$1,155.00</u>
Total	\$9,169.00

Expenses \$6,409.21

Difference \$2,759.79

Phillips Fund \$194,603.66

Family Fund \$83,614.34

As of today, we have \$490 gathered for the Feeding America Food Truck for True North for Christmas.

As we approach Thanksgiving, we give thanks to God for all our blessings and to all our church family for all we do for the community and for each other. We are truly blessed. We also give thanks to Pastor Jon for leading us, sustaining us, and challenging us to do all we are able to do for God's Kingdom.

Dawn Anderson Treasurer