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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”

January 2022

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### Peculiar People Day

“Don’t be conformed to the set patterns of the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God’s will is-what is good and pleasing and mature.” Romans 12:2 CEB

The story began as a picture book filled with collected photos of peculiar children, children that were hollowed out, floating in the air, heavier than usual, half-invisible, or covered with coarse, unhuman hair. Then Ransom Riggs began to stitch them together with a story. This tale centered on Miss Peregrine, a shape shifter now frozen as a bird, who gathered these children together into a mansion where they were protected and cared for in a cruel and indifferent world. Five books, a film, and many adventures later, these unusual children finally found a safe place they could know as home.

While Riggs’ story itself is rather standard young adult fantasy, the pictures contained within each book haunt. Clearly our Victorian ancestors had a taste for the grotesque as well as for discovering the tricks you could play with the camera lens. This thirst for novelty edged very quickly into exploitation. I wonder if they paid their subjects and their care any mind after they got the perfect photo. I doubt that these rubbernecking snap shooters paid any attention to their hopes, their fears, and their pressing concerns. These people were simply freakish enough to notice, but to notice only for long enough for a sick thrill to set in.

I understand why we do this to our fellow creatures. We have a hunger for the odd. We also have ways of mixing pity and self-righteousness-we feel sorry for these poor victims but are also glad that we do not suffer as they do. For they surely must suffer because they are not like us. We approach the unusual as a way to reassure ourselves of our humanity. We can feel so we must be human. We are not freaks like these creatures are so we must be human. What a twisted mess humanity is.

The Bible, as is the case of all wise books, will have nothing to do with our self-delusion. Paul, in particular, calls this mess of contradictions ‘sin’ because it breaks relationships: with God, with others, and with the better side of ourselves. Try as we might, we cannot avoid a detoured life and we often make choices that make our ways ahead ever more difficult. We need something from outside of us-a kind word, an intervention, a map, a redesign-to break us out of habit and despondency and to turn us toward something healing and whole. In language so old we still find it surprising we call those moments ‘grace’.

But there is more. Maybe these odd photographs remind us of another truth about our faith. We are called to be peculiar people, people not conformed to the usual ways of doing things. People who are broken out of their

habits and their prejudices to think in new and more cohesive ways to build a society that reflected God's peace and justice. And if we get confused about those new and cohesive ways, we need only to look for what is good, pleasing, and mature-what focuses on care for others rather than only on care for ourselves. We are asked to pursue those new ways of doing things no matter how novel and odd they might appear to us

On an internet database for holidays in January, I notice a day to celebrate peculiar people. I think we as churches should appropriate the day. We are called to be peculiar people. People who do not fit into the usual ways of doing things. People who see the God in everyone, especially in those who society chooses to reject because of expedience and bias. People who insist that life is more valuable than money and stock dividends, that human dignity and choice is more important than profit.

People who look for the contents of others' hearts and of others' character, rather than their appearances, their abilities, and the depths of their wallets and purses. People who see the odd in all people and rightly celebrate that as the spark that God gave them. Because when we find that spark, we find what is good and pleasing and mature. In the end, it is all those aspects because that spark is the only thing can grow into lasting and true light.

We are called to be the people who, ages from now, when they see our images floating across the etherworld of whatever internet the future might bring to us, they will stand back for a minute, studying us carefully. And when they have finished their contemplation, may they murmur "That one was a peculiar one. Unusual. Not afraid to stick out like a broken thumb. Had more courage, more strength of character than I could ever muster though they probably wouldn't say that about themselves. They burned with a weird sort of light. A light so bright it still glows. It still helps see and understand my life better. Maybe I should take their memory with me as I walk those foggy paths ahead."

Peculiar people, full of light. That is something growing up to be.

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

### **Thank You**

Pastor Jon and Ben would like to thank everyone for their many kindnesses during this past Christmas season. It is a blessing to be among you.

### **Mission and Social Action Community Outreach**

Thank you for your support of the Feeding America Food Truck!

We continue to ask 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.

Mission and Social Action Commission

### **Prayer Requests During Worship**

Please remember that our worship services are being broadcast live on the internet on ZOOM and are also put on our website and Facebook page. So, when requesting prayers for someone, please respect their privacy and give only first names and do not say the reason for the prayers. Thank you for your understanding.

# **What's Happening at NCUCC      January 2022**

## **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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| Sa. 1: New Year's Day<br>Dorothy R. b'day  | Sa. 15: Nancy C. b'day<br>George P. b'day   |
| Su. 2: Worship 10 am w/Communion<br>Epiphany<br>Matthew 2: 1-12 and John 1: 1-18<br>"Many Lights"<br>Dave T. b'day<br>Jacob H. b'day | Su. 16: Worship 10 am<br>Third Epiphany<br>John 2: 1-12<br>"Wasted Miracles"<br>Anna P. b'day |
| Mo. 3:   | Mo. 17:   |
| Tu. 4: Noon class - "How To Be An Anti-Racist"/Culture<br>Judy C. b'day<br>Kathy M-V. b'day  | Tu. 18: Noon class - "How To Be An Anti-Racist"/Black   |
| We. 5: Prayer Time 7 pm (phone-in)   | We. 19: Prayer Time 7 pm (phone-in)   |
| Th. 6: Administration Meeting 10 am<br>Circles 6-8 pm  | Th. 20: Council Meeting 10 am   |
| Fr. 7:   | Fr. 21:   |
| Sa. 8:   | Sa. 22:   |
| Su. 9: Worship 10 am<br>Baptism of Christ<br>Luke 3: 15-17, 21-22<br>Ask A Question Sunday<br>Joyce M. b'day                         | Su. 23: Ecumenical Sunday<br>Luke 4: 14-21<br>"Good News, Good Ways"<br>Deb W. b'day          |
| Mo. 10:  | Mo. 24:   |
| Tu. 11: Noon class - "How To Be An Anti-Racist"/White  | Tu. 25: Noon class - "How To Be An Anti-Racist"/Space   |
| We. 12: Prayer Time 7 pm (phone-in)<br>Mack A. b'day   | We. 26: Deadline for Feb. newsletter articles<br>Prayer Time 7 pm (phone-in)<br>Don M. b'day  |
| Th. 13: Worship & Pastoral Care 1 pm (phone)   | Th. 27: Klaus W. b'day<br>Fred & Karen V. anniv.  |
| Fr. 14:  | Fr. 28:   |
|  | Sa. 29:   |
|  | Su. 30: Health and Human Service Sunday<br>Luke 4:22-30<br>"On The Edge"                      |
|  | Mo. 31:   |

**Members and friends in need of Prayers: Family of Doroth F., Linnea G., Allen R., Carolyn S., Fred V., Gloria W.**

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**Deadline for information to be printed in the February newsletter is Wednesday, January 26.**

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### **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 meet in the church entry area to resume our discussion of Ibram X. Kendi's book HOW TO BE AN ANTI-RACIST. This essay challenges us to examine how racist thinking influences how we act and what we can do to change so we can build better conversation and better communities. We meet at noon on Tuesdays. Here is a schedule of topics:

1/4-Culture

1/11-White

1/18-Black

1/25-Space

### **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 1-30=62 cases, July 1-31=41, Aug. 1-31=178, Sept. 1-30=670, Oct. 1-31=817, Nov. 1-30=1,103, Dec. 1-30=894

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.

### **Donation Receipts**

If you would like a receipt for the donations you made to the church during 2021, please let Dawn know and she will see that you get yours after the first of the year.

## **Open and Affirming**

The church leadership and the Open and Affirming Committee will be starting the New Year by moving forward with the Open and Affirming certification process.

Sunday, January 9 will be Ask A Question Sunday. Questions will be limited to Open and Affirming. If you have a question that you would like answered, you may ask it during worship or contact Pastor Jon before that Sunday. Those who are using a computer on ZOOM can also ask a question using the "chat" option during the service.

On Sunday March 6 Rev. Salvatore Sapienza, pastor of Douglas UCC, will give a sermon on living as an Open and Affirming Church. He will talk about the affects becoming a certified Open and Affirming church had on the Douglas church.

Please plan to attend these two informative worship services. Both services will be on ZOOM for those not able to attend in person.

## **Treasurer's Report Nov. 16 – Dec. 15, 2021**

### **Income**

Nov 23	\$1,634.00
Nov 29	\$1550.00
Dec 6	\$2,726.00
Dec 12	<u>\$1,302.00</u>
Total	\$7,212.00

Expenses \$6,601.15

Difference \$610.85

Phillips Fund \$ 191,252.10

Family Fund \$81,779.78

We have gathered \$1,365.00 for our True North Food Truck. The goal was \$1,340.00.

Our Blessings during this Advent season are countless and we thank God for all he shares with us.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Dawn Anderson Treasurer

## Pictures from the December 19 Christmas Program

