
Newaygo Congregational United Church of Christ

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Rev. Jonathan Riedel, Pastor

“THE CHURCHMOUSE”

February 2022

Racial Justice Sunday

“Peter said, ‘I really am learning that God doesn’t show partiality to one group of people over another.’”

Acts 10: 34 CEB

I grew up south of Detroit in an era fraught by racial tensions. My parents remembered National Guardsmen marching through the main streets of my hometown for days after the 1967 riots. The creek that formed the northern border of my town separated the mostly white Wyandotte from the mostly black Ecorse. Though my parents never said anything about the bridge there, we knew we were not supposed to cross it unaccompanied. For many years, Wyandotte was a red-lined community. Black people simply were not allowed to buy houses within city limits. I am happy to report that that is not true today.

I can recall viscerally the first time I recognized that people had different skin hues. Until I entered grade school, I went to the local hospital for speech therapy. Mrs. Powell, my therapist, was a gentle and thorough soul, generous with candy when I did my work diligently-not an easy task for someone as hyperactive as I was. She always had a wide smile and had a true interest in helping the children in her care do well. One day, I was walking down the hall to meet her at her office door when I realized that she did not look like me. Her brown skin was a deep contrast to my pale skin. I stopped walking and stared. I shook myself, trying to rid myself of this strange fear that I felt. After all, she was kind and had candy-what wasn’t there to like? I know that she must have noticed my hesitation but she never said a word about it. We simply got down to business when I got to her office. To this day, I wish that I had apologized to her for letting that edge of prejudice wash over me. She certainly deserved better even though I am certain she had experienced far worse.

The lessons I learned about race in school were ones of fear and ignorance. We talked about black people as slaves and servants, then they disappeared from the history books along with Asians and Latinos. Martin Luther King Jr. was barely mentioned and I only read about the civil rights movement at the insistence of my mother. What I learned about blacks from my peers did nothing to build my trust in people different than myself-they were criminals, lazy, welfare cheats, and plainly dangerous. I realize now that many of the people who yelled these insults at me were poorer whites who could have fairly been described in the same harsh language though I was afraid to say so. I am sad to say that it was in my college classes that I had my first in-depth conversations with people of color and realized everything that I had learned before was not just wrong but contributed to the diminishment of whole groups of people because we did not share the same pigment of our epidermis.

If we follow Jesus, we need to expect to have our prejudices and our preconceived notions shaken until they break open. And that is what prompted Peter to comment on God's lack of particularity. In the early days of the new-born church, the disciples worked mainly within their own people. Familiarity, after all, is comfortable because you know the mores and the habits. In the middle of the night, he heard an urgent summons in a dream. Go to Cornelius, one of the Roman guards. Tell him about what God is doing. To say that he was reluctant to do so is an understatement. The Roman centurions represented the worst of Rome. He was one of the people who helped keep the Jewish people captive and subservient to the Roman Empire. He was a different race in the eyes of all the people Peter knew. He was to be feared and avoided. God certainly would not have anything good in mind for them.

To Peter's surprise, God did find Cornelius worth holding closely, worth offering a new way to live. So Peter went and found Cornelius' reception to be warm and transformative. Cornelius turned away from the Roman way of doing things and embraced the new way of Jesus. To do so must have come at considerable cost, social and financial, to him, but he did so anyway. For Peter, Cornelius was no longer some alien to be feared and despised, was no longer a subhuman creature who would never be part of God's sacred circle. Now, Peter stood before a brother, someone, who despite their cultural even racial differences, he had something in common with. He realized that God had no time for human prejudices and biases. God's only concern was the contents of the human heart and its effects on the individual's character. Everything else was surface gloss.

On Sunday, February 13th, my denomination celebrates Racial Justice Sunday. On that day, I will say a prayer for Mrs. Powell though I do not know if she is still with us in body. Somehow, though, I feel her spirit is. I will offer my thanks for her patience and persistence in helping me speak as clearly as possible. I will appreciate her willingness to work across racial and cultural lines to bring out the best with every child she worked with because each one is God's child. Mostly, I will pray for the strength to follow her example so that all of God's children, no matter their race or culture, see God's love shining through me. There is no better way to celebrate the day.

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

Tuesday Noon Class

We will meet in the church entry area to continue 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:

2/1-Gender

2/8-Sexuality

2/15-Failure

2/22-Success

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 February 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#

Tu. 1: Noon class - "How To Be An Anti-Racist"/Gender	We. 16: Prayer Time 7 pm (phone-in)
We. 2: Prayer Time 7 pm (phone-in)	Th. 17:
Th. 3: Circles 6-8 pm	Fr. 18:
Fr. 4:	Sa. 19:
Sa. 5:	Su. 20: Worship 10 am
Su. 6: Worship 10 am w/Communion	Luke 6:27-38
Luke 5:1-11	"Love Your Enemies"
"What A Catch"	Mo. 21:
Mo. 7:	Tu. 22: Noon class - "How To Be An Anti-Racist"/Success
Tu. 8: Noon class - "How To Be An Anti-Racist"/Sexuality	We. 23: Deadline for March newsletter articles
We. 9: Prayer Time 7 pm (phone-in)	Prayer Time 7 pm (phone-in)
Th. 10: Worship & Pastoral Care 1 pm (phone in)	Th. 24:
Fr. 11:	Fr. 25:
Sa. 12:	Sa. 26:
Su. 13: Worship 10 am	Su. 27: Worship 10 am
Luke 6:17-26	Transformation Sunday
"Ask A Question Sunday"	Luke 9:28-43
Mo. 14:	"Astounding Glory"
Tu. 15: Noon class - "How To Be An Anti-Racist"/Failure	Mo. 28:

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

Deadline for information to be printed in the February newsletter is Wednesday, February 23.

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. The following is a list of reported cases per month in Newaygo County:

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. 1-31=939, Jan. 1-28=1,423

Total cases: 9,726 Recovered: 8,023 as of 1/24 Active cases: 1,240 as of 1/24 Deaths: 129

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.

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.

This and other information is available on local health department website: <https://www.dhd10.org>

Thank you for your cooperation.

Confidentiality and Privacy

Please remember that our worship services are being broadcast live on the internet on ZOOM and are also being put on our website and Facebook page following worship. Because of this you are asked to please keep the following in mind:

- When requesting prayers for someone, please respect their privacy and give only first names and do not say the reason for the prayers.
- The camera being used during worship services is primarily focused on the main center aisle and zoomed in close to the front of the sanctuary. If for whatever reason you do not wish to be seen on camera while either coming in and out of the sanctuary or sitting in the pews, it is advised that you stay towards the back and away from the center aisle.

Also, if you hear something about someone's health or other personal concerns, please do not pass that information along to others without the permission of the involved person(s). Even though the information may be passed along with the best of intentions, it may not have been meant to be public information. Thank you for your understanding.

Mission and Social Action Community Outreach

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

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.

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.

The following two books and website are good resources of information:

"A Time to Embrace: Same-Gender Relationships in Religion, Law, and Politics"-William Stacy Johnson-a good overview of the issues from a mainline Presbyterian Perspective

"God and the Gay Christian"-Matthew Vines-an excellent overview of the issue from a more conservative Evangelical perspective. Vines has also prepared some excellent filmed lectures on the topic which can be accessed by typing his name into the YouTube search engine.

www.welcomingresources.org/welcoming

Christmas Families

Thank you to everyone who donated money or gifts to our two Christmas families this past December.

The first family said that the children would not have had any Christmas at all this year If it hadn't been for the fire department and our church. The five children really enjoyed the books and games, as well as other gifts.

The mother of the second family sent this text:

Thank you all so very much for everything you did for my children and I it means so much to us it's been a very tough year and it meant so much you all are amazing and so kind for everything you do for the many families you help every year thank you all so very much ❤️

I love you

Treasurer's Report Dec. 16, 2021 – Jan. 15, 2022

Income

Dec 20	\$1,193.00
Dec 27	\$440.00
Jan 11	<u>\$4,180.00</u>
Total	\$5,773.00

Expenses \$7,001.53

Difference (\$1,228.53)

Phillips Fund \$199,305.9

Family Fund \$ 85,069.79

We collected \$274 for Veterans of the Cross

We gave True North \$1,340.00 for a food truck delivery. This amount of food feeds 200 families for the month.

We awarded two scholarships to Newaygo students for \$1,500 each for furthering their education.

God has blessed us and we are truly supporting our community in many ways. Thank you all.

Dawn Anderson, Treasurer