
Newaygo Congregational United Church of Christ

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Rev. Jonathan Riedel, Pastor

“THE CHURCHMOUSE”

June 2022

Another Look At Pentecost

“You should observe the Festival of Weeks, for the early produce of the wheat harvest, and the Gathering Festival at the end of the year.” Exodus 34: 22 CEB

Many of the Christian holidays that we celebrate both inside and outside of the church are borrowed from the cultures that surrounded churches throughout the ages. This should not strike anyone as a surprise. After all, most faith traditions are magpies. We look for the shiny, the noticeable, then we dust it off and appropriate it into our apparel. We add our own meaning to our newest acquisition. Because our history is so long, it is hard to come with something completely original. Thus some of our greatest creativity is not something we have made out of nothing, but rather seeing and using something common in a novel way. I think of Picasso taking a bicycle seat and its handlebars and turning it into a metallic version of cattle skull you might find in lonely fields of Texas. Old objects seen in a strange way. A way that catches our attention and then becomes part of us.

This holiday began as a celebration of the first harvest of wheat, the harvest so longed for after the fallow time of the winter. Even the name of the festival day, Shavout, carries some of the longing. It means ‘festival of the weeks or the week of the weeks’. I can even imagine something marking down a calendar in anticipation of the day to come. As most holidays do, this harvest day took on new meanings. Its ethos of thankful longing transfigured into a celebration of God’s gift of the Torah, the words Moses received on Mt. Sinai. Celebrating seven weeks after Passover’s remembrance of God leading the people out of slavery in Pharaoh's Egypt, this day commemorates the laws and the stories that made the people of Israel a nation.

Many customs come with this festival. People gather in the morning to offer prayers of thanksgiving and to hear the story of Ruth—a tale filled with homecomings and finding your place among a community. The food shared during the day is all dairy—blintzes, cheese ravioli, cheese-filled pancakes accompanied by glasses of milk. This food is exempt from the kosher laws and is meant to remind of the time before they were a people. Milk also reminds us how God’s story is as sweet and nourishing for us as milk and honey. Houses are decorated in greenery—flowers, household plants, and fronds of palm draped into a canopy. This canopy closely resembles the marriage tent. One of the most common images of the day is that of the wedding between God and God’s people. The marriage contract is, of course, the Torah itself, ushering the people into the freshness of a newer, spring-filled, and greener day. The night is spent reading the Torah, sometimes alone and sometimes in study groups.

Questions and discussion are encouraged and all are urged to participate.

When Greek historians tabulated the holidays of the Hebrew people, they renamed Shavout “Pentecost”, because it came approximately fifty days after the Passover. The fact that these scribes bothered translating these traditions into a new language spoke to their popularity. As was the case of the High Holy Days and Passover, it is reasonable that this holiday was familiar to Jesus and his followers. Though the Gospels do not mention their sharing in the festivities, I can imagine him gathering them for study and the sharing of the food because he had much to say about proper offerings after the spring grain cutting. Times such as these that they spent stuck in their memories.

We know this because of another day that shares the name “Pentecost”. Traditionally celebrated as the birthday of the Christian church, this day follows the Day of Jesus’ Resurrection fifty days hence.

It too commemorates the forming of a new community. It honors a new word from God binding people the world around and across ethnic and racial lines. It is often a day often marked by careful study of the stories of both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, read through God’s love as revealed in the life, death and rebirth of Jesus of Nazareth. While we decorate our sanctuary in green instead of red and seem to eat our usual diets, Pentecost can rightly be seen as a day of re dedication, of encouraging new ideas and new reaching out into the greater community. It is a day of recognition of how God’s spirit is still at work in our world, bringing the fire of new life, of new growth, and of new possibilities because God is always at work transforming broken hearts in need of healing.

I say this not to suggest that one Pentecost is better than the other. I respect the wisdom of both. God is always about the business of renewal-whether that renewal comes from a commitment to the guiding voice of the Torah, the origin of much of what is good and fair in our modern legal codes and the author of the concept of loving our neighbors and the needy as much as we love ourselves, or by allowing to be captivated by a vision of God’s love and mercy that knows no boundaries of language, skin color, gender, sexual orientation, or culture does not give me a second of hesitation. I say this because I see, in this dual celebration, the working of God coaxing new life out of often tired and dried soil, watering and fertilizing until sprouts of green find their way of the renewed soil. Shading my eyes in the brilliance of God’s light, I will proudly wear clothing of green and red for all the life they offer.

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

Ways to Worship with Us

Here is a reminder of the different ways that our worship services are available to you.

- Everyone is welcome to attend our services in-person every Sunday at 10 am.
- You can also access a live audio/visual broadcast using ZOOM on your computer or smart phone by using the following link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84864699096>
Those without internet access can call the following phone number and Meeting ID:
1-312-626-6799 Meeting ID: 848 6469 9096.
- If you would like to access the services on your own schedule, they are added to our website www.newaygoucc.org and Facebook page following each service.
- Links to Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Thanksgiving and Christmas Eve services are provided as needed.

Sabbatical

I will be on sabbatical from June 1 thru August 31. This time away is a time for rest and renewal. It is also a time for serious study and thoughtful reflection on the work ahead for smaller churches in the United Church of Christ. Throughout the months of June and July I will be visiting smaller churches in a variety of settings in Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Virginia, and Tennessee. Many of these churches are Open and Affirming and most have pursued active local missions that address the dilemmas and challenges in their communities. It is my intention from time to time to post on the church's and my Facebook page a running travelogue of what I have discovered along the way. Please take the time to consider some of the mission outreaches I have encountered and ask yourself some of the questions I will be looking closely at as I go from church to church. For the first two weeks of August, I will be pursuing a long time dream of traveling from Barcelona to Madrid in Spain. I am looking forward to exploring the work of Picasso and Gaudi, enjoying the fine art of Spanish cooking, and immersing myself in the deep history of Christian-Muslim relations. I am also curious to see how much of my high school and college Spanish I can recall. The later part of August will likely be devoted to a tour of some churches in Illinois if I am not exhausted from my time overseas.

From time to time, I will be between travels and staying at the parsonage. I will, however, not be available for visits and will not be taking phone calls. This is not a personal slight. It is a recognition that if I take one phone call, I will have to take them all because I do not want to hurt anyone's feelings. I have arranged for the pulpit to be filled by talented preachers and for pastors to be available for funerals and emergency hospitalizations. Gloria, Ken, and Dorothy have a list of those ministers and will gladly get a hold of those on call if a need arises. I look forward to worshipping with you on the first Sunday of September. I will also be resuming the Tuesday Noon Forum when I return. Blessings to all of you.

Pastor Jon

Noon Forum

There will be no Tuesday noon classes for the next three months while Pastor Jon is on his sabbatical. Classes will resume Tuesday, September 6.

Evening Prayer

On Wednesdays at 8:15 pm we will join over the phone for a time of meditation and prayers for ourselves and others. To join us, dial 1- 978-990-5000 then 283560#.

The prayer service will continue as scheduled during Pastor Jon's sabbatical.

What's Happening at NCUCC June 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 8:15 pm. Call 978-990-5000 then 283560#

We. 1: Pastor Jon on sabbatical thru Aug. 31
Prayer Time 8:15 pm (phone-in)

Th. 2: Circles 6-8 pm

Fr. 3: Dick & Gloria W. anniv.

Sa. 4:

Su. 5: Worship w/Communion 10 am

Pentecost

Guest pastor: Forrest Hoppe

Deb B. b'day

Salle H. b'day

Mo. 6:

Tu. 7:

We. 8: Prayer Time 8:15 pm (phone-in)

Th. 9:

Fr. 10: Don & Miriam S. anniv.

Sa. 11:

Su. 12: Worship 10 am

Guest pastor: Barb Huitema

Carolyn S. b'day

Mo. 13: W&PC 10 am

Tu. 14:

We. 15: Prayer Time 8:15 pm (phone-in)

Th. 16: Deb F. b'day

Fr. 17:

Sa. 18:

Su. 19: Worship 10 am

Guest pastor: Barb Huitema

Mo. 20: Betty B. b'day

Tu. 21: Sandy P. b'day

We. 22: Prayer Time 8:15 pm (phone-in)

Th. 23:

Fr. 24:

Sa. 25: Klaus & Deb W. anniv.

Su. 26: Worship 10 am

Guest pastor: Barb Huitema

ANNUAL MEETING

Mo. 27: *JULY NEWSLETTER DEADLINE*

Tu. 28:

We. 29: Prayer Time 8:15 pm (phone-in)

Th. 30: Circles 6-8 pm

Members and friends in need of Prayers: Joyce J., Allen R., Dorothy R., Ed R., Marilyn S., Carolyn S., Fred V., Karen V., Gloria W.

*****Deadline for information to be printed in the July newsletter is Monday, June 27*****

Annual Meeting Information

The Annual Meeting will be held in the sanctuary Sunday, June 26 following the worship service. Members will have the opportunity to vote on several important items that are important to the future of the church. Everyone is encouraged to attend the meeting in person. Those who are not able to attend in person may attend via ZOOM using the regular Sunday worship link. Those not able to attend in person, but wish to vote by proxy, may request a proxy ballot by contacting the church.

The following items to be voted on:

- The Slate of Nomination for officers, commission and committee members
- The Proposed By-Laws revisions
- The Proposed 2022-2023 Annual Budget
- The Discontinuation of the Housing Project
- The Open and Affirming Covenant and becoming a designated Open and Affirming church.
- The use of up to \$5,000 in matching funds from the Phillips Fund to be sent to World Central Kitchen for Ukrainian Refugee relief.

The Annual Reports will be available the first week in June. All items will be in the Annual Report except for the Treasurer's Report. The Treasurer's Report will be made available in mid June after the investment statements are received and the books are audited.

Ukrainian Refugee Relief Update

At a recent meeting, the Mission and Social Action Commission agreed to implement a special mission project to aid Ukrainian refugees.

They have chosen World Central Kitchen as the recipient of the donations. They will also be asking the congregation at the June 26 Annual Meeting to approve up to \$5,000 in matching funds to be taken from the Phillips Fund.

Anyone who wishes to donate to this project may do so by writing "Ukraine" on their check or envelope. Donations will be collected thru July 15.

Amount donated to date: \$2,198.00

Scholarships

On May 5th, at the Ed Grodus Scholarship Banquet, NCUCC presented two \$1500 scholarships to two Newaygo High School seniors.

Justin Boverhof received one scholarship. He is the valedictorian of the senior class and interested in pursuing computer science or robotics engineering at the University of Michigan. Justin plays trombone and is part of the marching band.

One project that he is most proud of is the Attendance Project. He coded a robot and gave it the ability to take attendance using facial recognition. He has been admitted to both University of Michigan and Michigan State University.

Parker Christiansen is the student who received the NCUCC scholarship in memory of Bill Leaver. He plans to attend Central Michigan University. Parker's school activities include football, baseball, and basketball.

He is inspired to go into the field of cardiology from witnessing a family member go through the trials of heart disease.

Best wishes to both of these young men!

Treasurer's Report Apr. 16, 2022 – May 15, 2022

Income:

Apr 17	\$788.00
Apr 24	\$1,073.00
May 1	\$5,584.00
May 9	\$909.00
May 15	<u>\$734.00</u>
Total	\$9,088.00

Expenses: \$5,053.34

Difference: \$4,034.66

Phillips Fund: \$172,205.63 (Down \$12,515.00 this month)

Family Fund: \$76,135.29 (Down \$4,802.14 this month)

Ukraine Relief Fund \$2,198.00

Thank you for your consistent and generous giving.

Dawn Anderson Treasurer