

Newaygo Congregational United Church of Christ

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Jonathan Riedel, Pastor

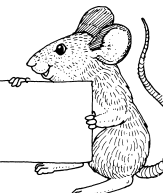
“An Open and Affirming Church”



*No matter who you are,
no matter where you are on life's journey,
you're welcome here!*



The Churchmouse



March 2023



What Works Together “But Jesus replied, ‘Don’t stop him because whoever isn’t against you is for you.’”

Luke 9:50 CEB

After I had toured the church she served, the pastor wheeled the cart her recovering foot was resting on and settled into her office seat. I had stopped by to visit her congregation because her area conference minister, the next higher up in my denomination's chain of command, has recommended its work in the community so highly. Its impact on the city around it was impressive. They had an elaborate and thorough food pantry that offers patrons three weekly times to receive food, their Sunday School rooms are used on weekdays by a daycare, and offers a worship service that is truly open to all-regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, and class status-in an area dominated by more exclusive congregations. They also opened a coffee shop within their fellowship hall and tend a community apple and peach orchard on their grounds adjacent to a city park they also sponsored. I enjoyed looking at their traditional, very gloriously stained glass sanctuary and silently translating the German inscriptions beneath the windows to myself. One of the benefits of my relatively unstructured sabbatical time was the chance to talk to church lay folk and pastor with some leisure. I was sensitive not to abuse my welcome, but I treasured hearing about their work and mourned with them over their struggles. Almost all were forthright and open-minded in their honesty. But I was especially impressed with the bluntness of this pastor's confession about how close she came to resigning as the pandemic edged into a doldrum. Her office assistant were not far behind in her fatigue and both wisely availed themselves of the area conference's help. She soon realized she had to establish a healthier set of ground rules for her church work. Her first rule caught me by surprise though. She was no longer willing to do any ministry, even worship, as a solo artist. Thus no program, no matter



how successful it had been in the past nor how desirable it was as a service to the community, would be sponsored by the church unless there was a committed group of volunteers behind it. I asked her if she had made any exceptions and she shook her head. Then she cited one example. They once offered a weekly meal for the neighbors. No one had stepped forward to take charge of organizing it since the pandemic had waned. Now the dinner was no longer, so to speak, on the menu. I thought about this for a while as I driving to my next destination. At first, it struck me as harsh. Someone's vision for the church, someone's expression of God's caring spirit was simply being dismantled due to a lack of interest. Then again, whatever inspired that person was clearly not inspiring anyone else. That lack of enthusiasm is very contagious.

I have served as a pastor long enough to discover many programs, many traditions, that have overstayed their welcome. Their participants were going through the motions and often wondering why people were no longer attending. I and many volunteers have exhausted much energy trying to prop up dying ministries only to face ever diminishing returns. Energy that could have been expended on something fresher, something more life-giving, but now was sadly frittered away. Having an enthusiastic team is not a guarantee of success, but it makes the attempt more fruitful and makes the learning process more enlivening. It is easier to fail as a group because you can brainstorm more readily and you can help each other shoulder the responsibility. You can also find yourself not so alone in your sadness over wrong directions. Collaboration also provides new ideas that would have never occurred to you. Imagination increases exponentially when you go beyond just your own dreams. I think that this why Jesus reminded his disciples that good deeds done in God's spirit, even if they weren't done by the explicit followers of Jesus, were still good deeds.

Those who are not against are indeed for us. The context is important here. Jesus' disciples discovered people healing people in Jesus' name. They put a stop to their activity because they were not card-carrying members of their group. They were rivals, not friends. Jesus suggested kindly that good is good. Helpful is helpful. People inclined to do good and helpful things are more likely to be assets rather than impediments. And they would likely to remain doing so if we do not go out of our way to stop them because they are not doing their good work under the right flag or with the correct approval. That is the heart of collaboration. Most churches have done this quite readily.

Revivals, Vacation Bible Schools, feeding and clothing those who are needy always work better when we work together. The church I visited worked not only with churches but with social service and fraternal organizations as well. They did fun fairs with the local schools. It made their ministry less lonely and more creative. Another church I visited saw a need that they could not meet alone. Many gay and lesbian members of their local community wanted to come to worship but had been so rejected by their former church homes that they did not want to come to a regular worship service. The pastor offered to design and lead a worship that addressed the dilemmas and the pain as well as the gifts they had to offer. He realized quickly that he could not do this by himself. So he reached out to another open and affirming United Church of Christ nearby. They welcomed the opportunity by offering volunteers and refreshments. Now twice a month on a Sunday evening the two churches offer a special service of healing and thanksgiving.

In a society bent on fragmentation, one gift the church can offer is the gift of collaboration. We can forgo the egocentricity and the competitiveness of our world by working together. We can show people how to let the non-essentials slide while we work on the essentials. We can demonstrate that those who are not against generally for us if we welcome them in. I think that is what Jesus had in mind before all the denominations and the divisions got in the way. Perhaps that is what God is calling us to do now.

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



The Transfiguration

While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" Matthew 17:5 (NIV)

Based on Matthew 17:1-9



D Q E A A R J Z X Y V T H D M
G P Y C S L P P J O H N E Y Y
X P O J A F X B D Y Y C M R D
J T K F H E H F M U I I I Q K
T S V G W A W J U O C Y U C R
U V I J J H E N V M M G E G N
D H D I A V I J B O O L O T T
G X L A O M O T Y U S A W O Z
S E S L Y X E V E N E U D F D
Q M Y G J S Z S O T S I I R M
A P P E A R E D D A S G E X S
Q Q Q Z V O R S G I K T X C C
B R V W H T Q V L N E D B X H
R O S I X K D L Q P I G R K V
N U L W I T P G C L O T H E S

SIX	PETER	CLOTHES	VOICE	JOHN
LOVE	MOSES	GOOD	WHITE	ELIJAH
JAMES	DAYS	APPEARED	MOUNTAIN	HIGH

Special Meeting of the Congregation

In an email to the Board of Directors, Jeanne and Jane of the Christian Education Commission have asked, "Might the church consider an amount of money to match the donations of the congregation from the free-will offering meals for the Museba Church/ School Project?"

As stated in the By-Laws, any money to be taken from the Phillips Fund that is not in the approved annual budget, must be voted on by the congregation.

The last fundraiser meal will be Sunday, May 7 following worship.

There will be a special meeting of the congregation immediately following worship on Sunday, May 21 to vote whether or not to use Phillips Fund money for this project. Please plan to attend this meeting



Treasurer's Report

January 16, 2023 to
February 15, 2023

	Income	Total Exp.
January 16	\$553.00	
January 22	1,155.00	
January 30	930.00	
February 5	3,003.00	
February 12	1,184.00	
Total	\$6,825.00	\$6,017.15

Difference	807.85
Phillips Fund	\$169,439.82

Family Fund	\$ 72,917.26
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Thank goodness for five giving Sundays
So far the year has started off well.

Thank you for all your giving

Dawn Anderson Treasurer

Deadline for the April Churchmouse

Please send any information or articles you would like included in the **April Churchmouse** to the office by **Wednesday, March 29.**

You may e-mail information to:
Churchmouse@newaygoucc.org
or leave a hard copy in the office.

Museba, Congo, Church/School Project

Christian Education has received permission to start a fund-raiser to help build a school/church in rural Congo in a village called Museba. Here is the connection to this project:

When Bill and I lived in Des Moines, we attended a Methodist church in Norwalk Iowa, pastored by Reverent Kiboko Kiboko. Pastor Kiboko and his family came from the Congo in the 60's, fleeing violence, and he is part of a large family of Kiboko's dedicated to ministry.

Pastor Kiboko maintained close contact with Bill through Bill's cancer journey. Since we last saw the family, Kiboko's wife Betty has also become a pastor of her own church in Iowa.

The first part of December, Kiboko sent me this text: (Kiboko's first language is French):

By faith, Betty and I decided to give a chance to the kids of the Museba Village in rural Congo to go to school. This village did not have any school. These kids have been learning for about 4 weeks now. We could only afford two grades (1st and 2nd). There are 175 first graders. We now have 3 teachers. We are paying them \$120/teacher/month. I just learned that there are 75 kids without uniforms. One uniform costs \$9.00. Could you please ask your church if they would be in mission with the people of Museba Village? You would receive monthly reports.

The church building is being used during the weeks as school. This church needs a wooden pulpit and a communion table (\$100).

The people of this village live under severe poverty. The Chinese have dumped radioactive materials in the rivers around. The villagers rely now on the well that we dug for them. We have been using a student pastor. Betty and I are sponsoring her to go to Seminary.

Pastor Nanette is the first one in her family to have a college degree. Her family lives in another village. I just spoke with her. The sanctuary needs four chairs in the chancel area. Cost per chair is \$50.

It is interesting to watch where God is leading us. Two years ago Museba Village did not have potable water. Now they do. We are planning to dig two more wells. They did not have a church building, now they have...

What next? School building and a clinic.

Blessings!!!

Kiboko

And another text when I asked for pictures of the children and the school (see them in the narthex on a bulletin board):

We are flying this plane as we are building it! We still need 4 more buckets for the kids to wash their hands after using the bathroom. We are finishing up building 4 bathrooms. We need 3 more desks. Blessings!!! Kiboko

Christian Ed would like to partner with Museba Village through husband and wife, Kiboko Kiboko, pastor of Storm Lake Methodist, Iowa, and Betty Kiboko, pastor of Lakes United Methodist in Iowa, to better the lives in a small village in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

We have three meals planned to serve after church for free-will offering:

March 19 - soup, salad, dessert

April 16 - hotdog picnic food, dessert

May 7 - Mexican fare, dessert

Dinner music provided by flautist Sophia Wilder, NHS.

Linnea will be explaining more about the project during church May 5. Expect short updates about Museba at each meal. A goal thermometer will be displayed in the narthex.

We hope you consider seeing where God might lead us in this project.

Sincerely,

Christian Education

P.S. Just by sharing some news about this project, we have already received \$70 for this project!

Thank you.

March 2023



ZOOM Information

Worship is in person and on ZOOM

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84864699096>
or phone 1-312-626-6799 ID: 8423 2973
1057

Pastor Jon's Tuesday noon class in person
& on ZOOM

Wednesday Night Prayer Time, 7:00 pm
Call 978-990-5000 then 283560#

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.

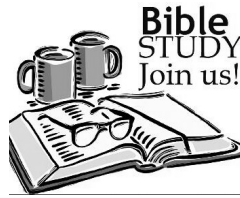
♦
If you would like to access the services on your own schedule, they are added to our website www.newaygoucc.org and Facebook page following each service.

Links to Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Thanksgiving and Christmas Eve services are provided as needed.

Prayer Room/Chapel

Anyone who wishes to have a small quiet place to pray or meditate is welcome to use the room across from the nursery to do so.

The room is open during the secretary's office hours and on Sunday morning.



Tuesday Noon Forum Prayer Workshop

GRATEFUL-AN ADULT FORUM STUDY

What difference does gratitude make? How does it change us? How does it change our society? Join us as we discuss Diana Butler Bass' book GRATEFUL during our Tuesday Noon Forum. We meet in the main Sunday School classroom for discussion. Here is a list of topics:

March 07-Intentional Practice

March 14-Grateful Together

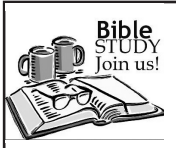
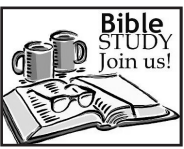
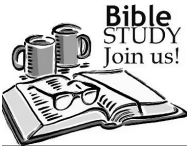

March 21-Thankful and Festive

March 28-The Grateful Society

Wednesday Night Prayer

Wednesday Night Prayer Time 7 pm. Call 978-990-5000 then 283560#

March, 2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 7:00 Prayer	2 6:30 Meal Served to NA Group	3	4
5 Worship Svc. 10 am Communion phone & Zoom	6	7 Noon Class 	8 7 pm Prayer	9	10	11
12 Worship Svc. 10 am by phone & Zoom ZOOM	13 Worship & Pastoral Care 10 am in Pastor Jon's Office	14 Noon Class 	15 7:00 Prayer	16	17	18
19 Worship Svc. 10 am by phone & ZOOM	20	21 Noon Class 	22 7:00 Prayer	23	24	25
26 Worship Svc. 10 am by phone & ZOOM	27	28 Noon Class 	29	30	31	

Our Community Service Continues

For the past 6 years our church has supported the Circles Group as part of our Community Service.

The Circles Group ended their program the end of December. Our faithful group of workers who had cooked and served this group were sorry to see it end, as we had dedicated ourselves to this program, and miss it.

Our Group decided we wanted to continue our Community Service, so we have chosen to adopt the Narcotics Anonymous Group as our next Community Service. They meet at our church twice a week on Tuesday and Thursday. We will be preparing and serving a meal to this group on the First Thursday of each month. If you wish to help us with this Community Service, we can always use money donations to help purchase the food, donate food needed for each meal or help serve the food.

If you have any questions, please ask Gloria or Dorothy, we will be glad to answer your questions.

Thank You
Gloria



Mission Survey

A Mission Survey has been put in your boxes at church and will also be mailed to our Shut-ins.

We would appreciate having you fill out this survey and place it in the box at church, which is next to the Offering Box in the sanctuary.

Your input is very important to us, so we have your opinion on how you would like our mission dollars be best spent.

Please give the Mission Survey some prayerful thought and fill it out and place it in the Survey Box.

Thank You
Mission & Social Action Commission

Smile Awhile. . .

What did the surgeon say to the patient who insisted on closing up their own incision? Suture self.

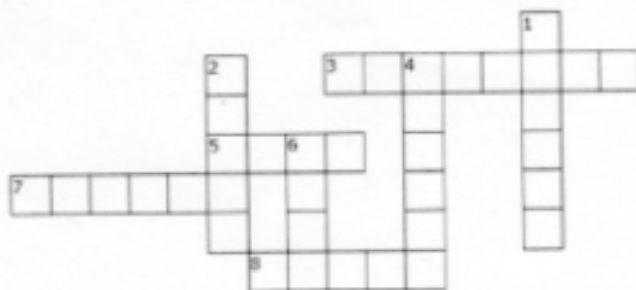
I've started telling everyone about the benefits of eating dried grapes. It's all about raisin awareness.



Birthdays in March

1 Don Strohpaal.
Linda Shively

Crossword Puzzle



ACROSS

- 3. To decide if a person is guilty or innocent
- 5. A present that is given to another person
- 7. Killing of a person by another person

DOWN

- 1. A group of human beings (men or women or children)
- 2. To be furious
- 4. To be at risk of being injured or harmed
- 6. A person who lacks good sense

March Worship Schedule on ZOOM

Worship is in person and on ZOOM at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84864699096> or phone 1-312-626-6799 ID: 848 6469 9096

March 05 - Second Sunday of Lent

Communion

Matthew 17:1-9

Songs of the Season

March 12 - Third Sunday of Lent

John 4:5-42

Songs of the Season

March 19 - Fourth Sunday of Lent

John 4:5-42

Songs of the Season

March 26 - Fifth Sunday of Lent

John 11:1-45

Songs of the Season

