

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



February 2024



Whose Story?

“Passing by Mysia, Paul and his companions went down to Troas instead.”

Acts 16: 8 CEB

One Good Friday, I was sitting in the gargantuan sanctuary of the Catholic cathedral in Hanoi, Vietnam. Seated next to me was one of my fellow adoptive fathers, whose deep piety showed through every response he made to the priest's words. I envied his knowledge of the missal because I understand nothing but the barest outlines of what was going on. About a mile away in a hotel room looking out over the city's crowded and industrious streets, my new son was resting in the care of my mother. As a person and as a pastor, I felt lost. I was in the early days of negotiating the transformation of going from being a single person to becoming a single parent and it was more work than I expected. And I was spending a sacred holiday away from my church and my calling. So when I was invited to a nighttime Mass, I eagerly accepted the invitation. The pieces unfamiliar to me overwhelmed the familiar. The language, the gestures that the people around me were accustomed to making, even the immensity of the crowd struck me as something I had to process. After all, this was a country where the free expression of religion was not encouraged. It came at a price of social reprisal and loss of employment opportunity. Yet this Cathedral was packed in way that I seldom saw Catholic churches in my home country filled even for the highest holidays. As my mind wandered through prayer and confusion that evening, I had time to consider how little I knew about the Asian variation of Christianity and even about Eastern religions themselves. Throughout my educational and professional career up to that point I learned fascinating and fragmented tidbits about Asia and its faiths that I thought could pass for wisdom. I knew that the largest Christian church in the world was in Seoul, South Korea. I also realized that there were two sizable Christian movements in China: one



sanctioned by the government and the other, thoroughly underground, that was growing at a rate unprecedented since the early days of the Apostles. I had met a fellow student from the official Chinese church in seminary, but the language barrier was so great we never had more than a three second conversation. As required to graduate with a religion major, I had two classes in comparative religion. I learned the bare minimum about Buddhism, Shintoism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Hinduism. I spent more time in seminary studying psychology and sociology than I did the other great faiths that share this planet with me. This was simply was not a priority for the curriculum; The Bible, the history of the church, preaching, theology, and church administration clearly took precedence and, in my mind, rightly so. Anything else was left to the discretion to the student searching for ways to fulfill his or her elective coursework.

As a preacher who has had, over the years, many serious conversations with people of different or no faith at all and as parent who overlooked the need to help his Asian-born son learn more about his ancestors and the history of his land of origin, I wonder if should have been less satisfied with my limited knowledge and more open about my curiosity. So I took some steps to rectify what I had overlooked before. I taught a series of classes on the religions of the world-both for my own congregation and for a congregation in a nearby town. To prepare for the class, I not only read some basic introductory texts but I also dug into some of the source writings of each faith so I could hear their prophets and priests tell me about themselves in their own words. I also shared videos that showed people who practiced each faith at worship and at work caring for the world around them. Later I invited speakers and teachers for each of the world's great faiths to come to share with us at our church. They answered questions, they brought talked about the fundamentals of their beliefs from the inside, and they demonstrated how they prayed, which tools they used to connect with the divine, and how they decorated their homes to keep their faith always before them. We took a field trip to visit the nearest Hindu temple. In the future we are organizing trips to explore a local mosque and a Buddhist retreat center. I do this not because I find my own Christian faith to be inadequate but because I understand my own beliefs better when I have something clear and potent to compare them to. I also believe this to be true of other varieties of Christianity not necessarily confined to the borders of Europe and North America. One of my classes focused on a movie that depicted a Korean-American family coping with building a farm in the American South. One of the resources the mother in the film utilized was her Korean Presbyterian faith. This prompted a discussion of how members of that huge and growing church put their own unique twist to the faith we share. I plan in the future to learn more about Christianity in its Chinese and Japanese expressions simply because I know they are key players on the world stage and because I also know many assumptions I make about them that are clearly wrong-headed. I also hope, at my now adult son's prompting, I discover the richness of how the people of his native land combined Catholicism and Buddhism. I know that the verse that begins this essay is a puzzle. It indicates that the church started traveling north and eastward almost from its very beginning. It reminds us that the Christian faith has much in common with people from Asia although we have mostly focused on its European expression. Perhaps we need to look in that direction and learn. To do so make help us grow in our faith and in our compassion and understanding. Nothing could be more valuable in our ever-connecting and intertwined world.

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



Noon Forum on Tuesdays

The Five Streams of the United Church of Christ and What's With All the Hymnals?

Recently our denomination, the United Church of Christ, corrected an oversight that was long overdue in its correction. We have spoken for years how our church was born from the heart of the ecumenical movement, the coming together of the various parts of the Christian faith. We brought together the Congregational, the Southern Christian, the German Evangelical, and the German Reformed Churches. A fifth stream, both Southern and African American played a hefty but ignored role in that merger as well: the Afro-Christian Churches. I myself never really knew about that part of our traditions and I want to share what I have learned with you. We will be meeting in the prayer room on Tuesdays at noon to review the four streams and to add the history of the fifth to our geography. We will also take a look at why we have so many hymnals.

Here is a schedule of our classes:

February 06-The German Evangelical Church

February 13-The German Reformed Church

February 20-The Congregationalists

February 27-The Christian Church

March 05-The Afro-Christian Churches

March 12-The History of our Hymnals

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.

Wednesday Night Prayer

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

Ash Wednesday Service February 14th.

At 3 p.m.(please note the time) we will start the season of Lent with our Ash Wednesday service. Lent is a time of reflection and thoughtful prayer as well follow Jesus' journey to his death and to the hope he gives us in his rebirth. The Ash Wednesday service will include space for us to share communion, confess and heal from the broken parts of our lives, and prepare ourselves for the work that God has placed before us. So please plan to join us in the sanctuary at 3 p.m. on the 14th.

Here is the link for the Ash Wednesday Service:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84889527286>





Treasurer's Report

December 16, 2023 to
January 15, 2024

	Income	Total Exp.
December 12	\$4,533.00	
December 24	619.00	
December 31	839.00	
January 8	1,764.00	
Total	\$7,755.14	\$6,039.14
Difference		1,716.00
Phillips Fund*		\$169,439.82
Family Fund		\$ 78,709.07
Christmas Project Veterans Home		560.00
Veterans of the Cross (Christmas Fund)		\$550.00

*We transferred \$21,000 to the budget to use \$6,000 for Mission & Social Action and \$15,000 to General Fund to return us to a positive balance. As the end of 2023 we have \$168,958.35 so we went down \$481.47 which is 3% for the year. We have a positive balance now and the Fund rebuilt almost the entire \$21,000 we needed to use. How thankful we are for the growth in the Phillips Fund (up 12%) to allow us to meet all the increasing costs at this time and still be able to maintain our Healthy Fund.

Thank you for the wonderful gifts given for this Christmas season.

Dawn Anderson Treasurer

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/184864699096>
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.



February Worship Schedule on ZOOM

Worship is in person and on ZOOM at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/184864699096> or phone 1-312-626-6799 ID: 848 6469 9096

February 4 Communion

Mark 1:29-30

Strength of My Life

February 11 - Transfiguration

Mark 9:2-9

Mark Rothko - Religion for the Age

February 18

The First Sunday of Lent

Mark 1:9-15

Giving up Comfort





February 25 - The Second Sunday of Lent

Mark 8:8:31-38

Giving up Guarantees



February, 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3
4 Worship Svc. 10 am In person, phone & Zoom	5	6 Noon Class 	7 Mission & Social Action 4:15 pm 7 pm Prayer	8	9	10
11 Worship Svc. 10 am In person, phone & Zoom	12 Worship & Pas- toral Care 10 pm in Pastor's Office	13 Noon Class 	14 Ash Wednes- day Service 3:00 pm	15 Council - 1 pm Main Sunday School Room	16	17
18 Worship Svc. 10 am In person, phone & Zoom	19	20 Noon Class 	21 7:00 Prayer	22	23	24
25 Worship Svc. 10 am In person, phone & Zoom Annual Meeting	26	27 Noon Class 	28 7:00 Prayer	29		