



# Community UCC

*We're worth our words*

Volume 56, Issue 11 - November 1, 2019

A Just Peace, Progressive, LGBTQ Open & Affirming Congregation

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### Deeply Rooted Capital Campaign



The Deeply Rooted Capital Campaign and 2020 Annual Stewardship Campaign 2-in-1 pledge card will be dedicated this Sunday, November 3, during worship. Please remember to bring your pledge card with you. Pledge cards will be available if you misplaced your card.

For those of you who have already turned in your pledge card, there will be an insert in the bulletin for you to place in the offering plate as a symbol of your commitment.

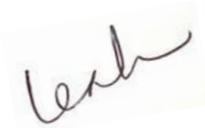
### Letter from Leah

Dear Community,

There's a picture that hangs in my studio at home. It's of tree roots, diving down deep underneath the Earth's surface. I look at it often, reminding myself that there is more to life than what we see above the surface, more that anchors us to a place and time than what we see above ground. There is more than what roots us as a church than our weekly worship service, education opportunities, and fellowship hour. There so much more than what we see on the surface: countless hours spent, endless effort given, hearts opened wide, and wider still, so that the love of God can pour out. These are our roots. Our history as a congregation committed to social justice as a lived expression of gospel love roots us as well. Our commitment to our Congregationalist ways, coupled with the work of the wider church, the United Church of Christ, and progressive Christians everywhere, root us when current events seem erode our very foundations. Lastly, we are rooted in the mystery of the holy, the one who created, redeems, and sustains us. The power of this mystery roots us in the very "ground of our being," as Paul Tillich called it.

We have so much to celebrate as a church. As our Deeply Rooted Capital Campaign and Annual Pledge Drive draw to a close this month, please be sure, if you have not already turned in a pledge card, that you do participate. We are all part of the body. Participation is paramount. Also, be sure to join us for our Thanksgiving celebration on the last Sunday of November. It will be a party you will not want to miss. Let's celebrate together -- together, we have a future with hope!

Blessings,



## Moderator Musings

In Matthew 18:20, Jesus proclaims that whenever “two or more are gathered in my name, I am there among them” if I get it on the schedule at least a month ahead of time and, by the by, did you send out a Doodle poll on that? This is obviously my translation of the ancient Greek, but it sure feels accurate, at least this month. October always seems to be THE month for meetings at my job and our continuing Deeply Rooted Capital Campaign (send in those pledge cards!) has meant plenty of extra meetings at church, to go with choir practice, CLB, consultation with Pastor Leah, and more.

I find it hard to imagine that God’s work requires human bureaucracy. We so often romanticize the purity of the early church and think of social justice work as courageous witness like the Children’s March at Birmingham in 1963. Yet Acts 15 narrates the Council of Jerusalem when Peter, Paul, and James, the brother of Jesus, sat down with many others to thrash out rules for the conversion of Gentiles. Taylor Branch’s magnificent trilogy narrating the civil rights movement tells of meeting after meeting. In fact, the Children’s March would never have occurred had not King, his aides, and other advisors come together for a three day retreat at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference’s center in Dorchester, Georgia. They prayed and planned, working out a blueprint for the Birmingham campaign named Project C, for Confrontation Birmingham. Social justice, it seems, requires meetings and minutes, binders and bureaucracy, patience and permits, cooperation and contention. The small, still speaking voice of God needs human institutions to do their part. So, when the call comes, learn the rules and schedule those meetings. And who knows? As your CLB recently learned, carrot cake may be your reward for attending another meeting. That, my friends, makes it all worthwhile.

Together in faith,

John

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## Dispatch from Director of Youth Ministries

Dear Community,

The youth had an exciting time this October. We had Sunday School, youth group and took a trip to one of the local escape rooms.

We went to "Rise of the Zombie Pets" Escape Room. It was a fun trip that was well attended (10 of us!) and the youth were great participants even though we technically didn't "escape" from the room. We were pretty close to getting out on time. We have some smart, brave young people in our congregation!

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We are having great discussions on what it means to be community - loving God, our neighbors and ourselves. These youth are great young people and it is wonderful to see so many new sixth graders.

We would like to have CUCC youth (6th grade and up) participate in the National Youth Event (NYE) 2020. It will take place at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana July 22-25th. This event is centered around faith, leadership, service and social justice. The cost is \$325 per youth. More information can be found here: <http://www.uccpages.org/nye/>. Financial scholarships are also available. Registration is not yet needed but I invite parents/guardians to put this event on their calendars.

We are also looking for an adult male chaperone for NYE 2020. If you are interested, please email me at [jessica@community-ucc.org](mailto:jessica@community-ucc.org).

We are planning to have youth group following worship on Sunday, November 17th. More details to come!

Take care,  
Jessica



## Upcoming Events

Mark your calendars for these CUCC events!

**Thursday, October 31-Sunday, November 10 - CU Interfaith Exploration: Cultivating Hope in Anxious Times**

[go.illinois.edu/CultivatingHope](http://go.illinois.edu/CultivatingHope)

**Saturday, November 9 - Pre-Advent Retreat (Izaak Walton Cabin, Lake of the Woods)**

**Wednesday, November 13, 8:30am - Just for Fun Breakfast (Perkins Restaurant and Bakery)**

**Wednesday, November 13, 10am - Photography as a Contemplative Path (Mattis Park)**

**Saturday, November 16, 1:30pm-6:00pm - CUCC Solo Social Group Friendsgiving (Parlor)**

**Tuesday, November 19, 11:30am - Retiree's Lunch (TBA)**

**Sunday, November 24 - Deeply Rooted Capital Campaign Results Celebration (Coffee Hour)**

This will be in the Parlor right after church. We will have lots of hearty goodies as we celebrate CUCC and our Capital Campaign results. A FUTURE WITH HOPE...one where we can share the fruits of our faith with each other and the world. ALSO....right after we celebrate the capital campaign results and we are all together with our tummies full, we will **decorate the church for Christmas**. So you will want to plan to stay for both events and continue the celebration, fun and fellowship time with our CUCC family. Mark November 24th on your calendar and plan to share in the fun!

**Wednesday, December 4, 4:30pm-6pm - Christmas Carol Sing and Hot Chocolate Give Away**

Whether you have a great singing voice or not, we welcome everyone - all ages- to join us outside on the east steps of the church on Wednesday, December 4th, anytime between 4:30-6:00pm. We will be singing Christmas Carols and handing out cups of homemade hot chocolate to UI students and staff as they leave school/work for the day. This is a really fun way to spread holiday cheer from CUCC to our UI friends and neighbors. Hope you will join in!

**Sunday, December 8, after church - Pastor Leah's 10 Year Anniversary**

We will CELEBRATE Pastor Leah's 10 year anniversary as our pastor here at CUCC. Watch for more details soon.

**Wednesday, December 11, 3pm-4pm - Conversation and Communion (Simon Dining Room at Clark-Lindsey Village)**

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## Opportunities to Get Involved

Jubilee Café

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Jubilee Cafe at  
Community United  
Church of Christ

Jubilee Café continues to serve a free meal each Monday throughout the year, and we need you to volunteer! Sign up here, <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/4090e45a5ae2caa8-volunteer12>, or go to our Facebook page, Jubilee Café CUCC. Questions? Contact Johnell Bentz | [Johnell.bentz@gmail.com](mailto:Johnell.bentz@gmail.com) | 217-840-6483, call or text.

### **Goodie Bags for Our Campus Ministry Student to Help Them Through Finals**

We will once again this year give the campus ministry students goodie bags before finals start in December. If you would like to help with these goodie bags, here are a couple ways you can help:

- donate money (any amount will help) toward the bags. Each bag is generally about \$15
- donate gift cards to include in the bags
- donate baked goods to include in the bags
- help collate and put the bags together sometime during the 2nd week of December
- talk to Peg Wade for more details or to help with any of the above: call or text: 369-0474 email: [peg.wade@Comcast.net](mailto:peg.wade@Comcast.net)

### **Tenor and Alto Church Section Leader Positions Available**

Community United Church of Christ (CUCC) is seeking one tenor and one alto section leader for rehearsals and services from September 2019-May 2020. Full details can be found on CUCC's website at <http://community-ucc.org/section-leader-openings/>. Please contact Music Director Kathy Lee to schedule an audition or discuss the position further: [K.Kew.Lee@gmail.com](mailto:K.Kew.Lee@gmail.com), 203-605-3830.

### **FROM WORSHIP: Worship Team Looking for Sunday Greeters and Liturgists**

Please consider joining our team of greeters whose role it is to welcome people into our sanctuary each week. This is a great way to meet our church community members and give a moment of undivided attention to someone who might need a handshake, kind word, or hug Sunday morning. We are looking for people to help welcome at the door as well as at the "name tag trees".

We'd also love to hear new voices from the lectern. Please consider serving as liturgist one Sunday. Pastor Leah will train you and make sure you have readings ahead of the service. Contact Alison Anders ([amanders@illinois.edu](mailto:amanders@illinois.edu)) to be added to the

Greeter and Liturgist sign-up sheets or sign up using the links below:

**Greeters** - <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/20F0B4AADA823A0F94-cucc1>

**Liturgists** - <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/20F0B4AADA823A0F94-cucc>

**Carry the Banner** - <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/20F0B4AADA823A0F94-banner>

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### **New Social Group Is Forming at CUCC**

This is a group for members of our CUCC church family who currently live alone (for whatever reason). The group will provide a way to connect with others on a monthly basis, for fellowship and fun activities of the group's choosing.

Our first activity together will be a Friendsgiving potluck meal on Saturday, Nov. 16 in CUCC's Parlor from 1:30pm to 6pm. If you're interested in joining this group, or have any questions, please contact Linda Morgan, Faith Community Nurse at 217-352-6375 or [lindamorgan@sbcglobal.net](mailto:lindamorgan@sbcglobal.net).

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### **News and Notes**

Ken Gilbert is more than ½ way through his MDiv curriculum from Chicago Theological Seminary. This year he is engaged in his field experience with Westminster Presbyterian Church. This means that we won't be seeing much of him this year. Prayers and good thoughts are, of course, always welcome.

CUCC is co-sponsoring Kyle Lukoff's book tour stop in Champaign-Urbana. Kyle Lukoff is the author of multiple children's books, most notably *When Aidan Became a Brother*, a book which celebrates a transgender child as he gets ready to be a big

brother. Kyle will be in Champaign-Urbana the weekend of November 8th and presenting multiple events for children and adults. Save the dates and follow The UP Center of Champaign County for more details.

**11/08, 12:00pm:** Brown Bag Lunch at the Center for Children's Books

**11/08, 6:00pm:** Storytime Shabbat at UIUC Hillel

**11/09, 10:00am:** Reading at Champaign Public Library

**11/10, 2:00 pm:** Reading at Urbana Free Library

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## Photography as a Contemplative Path

Last month, a small group of us went to the Idea Garden one morning to take photos and talk about how those photos spoke to our hearts and spirits. We decided to go out together again this month. If this sounds intriguing to you, please come join us at Mattis Park in Champaign (just off Devonshire, between Neil and Prospect) Wednesday, November 13, around 10:00am or so. (Some of us will be coming from the monthly No Agenda, Just for Fun Breakfast at Perkins-- you're invited to join us for it, too, beginning at 8:30am.) We will plan to spend about an hour wandering the park, taking pictures, and sharing our work. If you do plan to come, you might text or email Pastor Connie, [connie@community-ucc.org](mailto:connie@community-ucc.org), so she can update you with alternate plans in case of bad weather. We'll look forward to seeing you there!

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## Pub Theology Update

On Monday, November 4, Pub Theology will begin reading and discussing a new book, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* by Yuval Noah Harari. "From a renowned historian comes a groundbreaking narrative of humanity's creation and evolution - a number one international best seller - that explores the ways in which biology and history have defined us and enhanced our understanding of what it means to be 'human'."

We meet on Mondays at 7:15pm in the Parlor for about 75 minutes. Get a copy of the book and come join us. Any questions can be directed to Tom Ward.

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## Advent Evening Prayer

Join Pastor Connie in the A.J. Good Library at 6pm Wednesday evenings in Advent-- December 4, 11, and 18-- for a brief time of quiet reflection and prayer in the midst of a hectic season. The space will be open around 5:30pm so that you can come relax and enjoy a cup of tea or hot chocolate before our simple liturgy begins. The time will include a short scripture reading, time for reflection, and sharing of concerns and joys before we close with prayer, ending around 6:30-40pm.

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## Inviting Intentionality: Mapping a Meaningful Path through the Holidays

a retreat from The John Bandy Center for Spirituality and Faith

"John, do you know why the bluebird finds worms? Because that's what it looks for."

--John Pavlovitz, *Low: An Honest Advent Devotional*

November 9, 2019

Check-in, 8:30am

Retreat, 9am-3pm

The Izaak Walton Cabin at Lake of the Woods, Mahomet

COST: \$15, lunch included

Before the holidays begin...

    Before the rush of too much to do takes over...

        Before the expectations threaten to overtake you...

Come, reflect on what you want to look for this holiday season so that you can experience hope, peace and joy. This retreat will help you set an intentional design and anchor points for yourself as you think about the things that help ground you and

give meaning to your days—ways to help you remember just what it is that you’re looking for in the midst of all the busy-ness.

Retreat leaders Rev. Connie Tapp Bandy and Rev. Leah Robberts-Mosser have drawn inspiration for this retreat from the book *Low: An Honest Advent Devotional* by John Pavlovitz, which will also be the basis for our Advent worship series at CUCC. Books will be available for purchase at the retreat for \$6.

### **Sunday, November 3, is the last day to sign up for the retreat.**

Please place checks or cash in an envelope in the offering plate, marked “Advent Retreat.” Financial assistance is available.

This retreat is limited to 20 people.



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### **All Church Adult Mission Trip -- Save the Date!**

August 1-8, all CUCC adults are invited to travel to Biloxi, Mississippi to spend a week working at the United Church of Christ’s historic Back Bay Mission. Mission trips at Back Bay Mission are some of the best service-learning experiences in the United States. During our week on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, we’ll have the chance to serve in three of the Mission’s ministries, learn about the work Back Bay does on the Coast, explore how we can deepen the work we do in our community, and grow in both faith and fellowship. We are still determining cost, but think the trip will be in the \$350 range with individuals paying for 4 meals out of pocket. (Financial assistance is available, see Pastor Leah.) You can reserve a spot by signing up in the Parlor and paying a \$50 non-refundable registration fee. Place a check in the offering plate and mark “Back Bay mission trip” in the memo line. We can take up to 30 people on this trip. It will be a life changer. Save the date today!

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### **Get Your New CUCC Travel Mug!**

Take your love of CUCC on the go with a shiny new "We're worth our words" logo travel mug for only \$10. You can pay by cash or check in the offering plate or directly to the office (please clearly mark that your payment is for the mug) and then take your new mug from the display in the old entryway across from the Parlor door.

Hungry? We're selling our "Recipes for Success" cookbooks for \$10 as well--you can pay in the same way.

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### **Check out CUCC’s Library Inventory from the Comfort of Your Own Couch!**



Our library is catalogued online at Library Thing-- [www.librarything.com](http://www.librarything.com). Our username is Community-UCC (or community-ucc-- capitalization doesn't seem to matter). Our password is NB2016cucc. Or stop by the library in person and see what we have to offer!

## Did you miss worship?

Don't fret if you missed worship last week, or even a month ago! Sermons are recorded live each Sunday and can be found at: [www.youtube.com/communityucc](http://www.youtube.com/communityucc). Just give us a couple of days to get the previous Sunday uploaded.

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## Yes! We went to Synod! Installment #3

Update from Ken and Ruth Gilbert

Minneapolis UCC Synod 2019



The first installment in this series was about the people who show up at Synod. The second installment was about the action of the Synod. This third installment is more about how we as non-voting participants were changed.

There are so many ways that Synod impacts you that it's hard to pin them down with language. One of the important ones is beginning to understand "church" in a bigger context than Sunday morning worship in Champaign, Illinois. We heard from people who are daily confronting the powers of the immigration system and calling those policies out publicly in a way that does not allow the government to ignore or conceal the damage that is being done.

The KeyNote Speaker was Matthew Desmond, sociologist and author of the really important book *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* which presents a searing commentary on frequency of evictions for poor families, the impact on the education of the children, the instability of poor neighborhoods, and the cause of misery and illness. It says a lot about our denomination that this is the person chosen as keynote speaker. And by the way, get the book yourself. You will not be able to get his images out of your mind.

There was a whole very public conversation about whether or not Rev John Dorhauer should be re-elected as our president and senior pastor of the denomination. There was a big push to have a woman elected. Dorhauer's campaign talk was a remarkably honest and humble examination of what he had managed to achieve in the past two years and what was wanting in the past two years. Did you know that he spent weeks protesting the construction of the oil pipeline just above the Standing Rock reservation's traditional fishing and clamming grounds? Dorhauer was re-elected for a second term. His book *Beyond Resistance* was a good purchase for us. In it he envisions a time in the near future of a church that operates without formally designated worship spaces, without formally ordained ministry, and without formally acknowledged creeds. We read his book straight through on the Amtrak Ride home and it was a lot of challenging ideas to take in all at once.

In many ways, Synod is a sort of family reunion – especially for people who have gone through seminary together. There were both organized times of announced get together (mostly catered meals in the Conference Center) and more informal ways of getting together (mostly in the evening hours around the beverage that Milwaukee is so justly famous for producing). Regional caucuses of delegates got together to discuss the implications of resolutions for their location and I

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saw people earnestly heading off to their caucus meeting at 6:30 in the morning where they expected to have bagels and coffee to sustain them. I think that these caucus meetings do an immense job of connecting our people within a conference and figuring out intra-church cooperation.

Remember that once the resolutions have been formally introduced, they get assigned to a committee of delegates who spend hours listening to expert advice, trying to figure out both the intended benefit and the potential downsides to each resolution. They bring their recommendation for an up or down vote to the Synod Conference. This brings on floor debate when any delegate can speak for or against it. Most, but not all of the resolutions are voted as per the committee's recommendation. More contentious ones produce passionate statements. One can watch the workings of idealism over against wisdom as the group tries to get to a sense of the larger community. The Synod creates a space for serious dialogue and we were proud to know that is happening even if we were not voting delegates. Each of these moments had its own kind of impact. We came away proud to be part of this group operating in our world today.

The next UCC Synod is scheduled for July 16 – 20th, 2021 in Kansas City. You could go!!

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## **New Members' Statements of Faith**

### **New Member Group – October 27, 2019**

#### **Anna Barnes**

My father was a member of a rural church in Hope, Illinois. He converted to Catholicism for my mother and promised to raise his children as Catholics. From eighth grade on, I spent significant parts of Sunday school debating Sister Alice. "Why does the church not support euthanasia when Jesus spent his life taking away suffering? And, "Why does the Pope tell people in developing countries with open sewers and high infant mortality rates that birth control is a sin?" To say my questioning wasn't welcomed would be an understatement. I stayed as long as I did because the church was actively doing work in the community: resettling refugees, raising funds for low-income children to attend the church school, partnering with other organizations to address the city's racial divide. In college, I realized that the church I grew up in was the exception rather than the rule, and drifted away.

When I moved back to Champaign-Urbana, I met many people who were content not to believe in God. But not being able to prove something exists also means not being able to disprove its existence. Science can't explain the seemingly irrational behavior of people who have next to nothing but who share what they have with those who have less.

I am still questioning, but I am at last in a place where questioning is welcomed. And my friends who are gay are welcomed. And, people who need a meal are welcomed. And I think back upon my father's church, the one that was surrounded by the field we weeded during the summer, the one where he still helped his friends with fish fries even after he was no longer a member. My father died when I was 22. I didn't realize until a few months ago that his church was a United Church of Christ. So many years I spent looking for something that was right under my nose. And, now to be joining not just my father's church, but my Father's church—a church not only of words but of action, a church of people who are not perfect, but who day after day still try. Thank you all for welcoming me home.

#### **Erin Ewoldt**

I grew up in the evangelical church in the 80s and 90s; the peak of "harvest festivals" and "kissing dating goodbye". While I look back on that upbringing with new eyes focused on seeing injustice and exclusivity, I also remember the music, the plays, and the Bible verse memorization with fondness. Those experiences and verses taught me about Jesus' radical life and love. The churches, camps, and retreats were the spaces where I felt the Spirit move. I'm also thankful for the relationship those leaders taught me to build with God, where I could wrestle as I fell away from their points of view. God remained as I left them, and while that could have been a crisis of faith, instead my view of God grew to realize there's more room for all of creation.

I very much connect to the United Church of Christ's statements and practices. In late 2016 I decided if I was going to be a member of any church at all, it would be one that radically stood for and with marginalized groups in our community, country, and world. I am so happy to have found you all, and am honored to do good work in Jesus' name with you all.

### **Randy Ewoldt**

I was adopted at birth, which lead me to know from an early age that life is fragile. Consciousness is precious. The world is mysterious. Gratitude has been a consistent backdrop for my life.

I was baptized and raised in the Catholic Church, which I embraced all the way through to my confirmation. As an adult, I connected to several different Protestant churches. As time went on, and my worldview broadened, I grew to learn that my faith was broader, more inclusive, and less restrictive. I believe that by admitting our ignorance we gain incredible power. This fueled the scientific revolution, and it fuels my progressive theology.

I believe I've found a community here at CUCC that values pursuing truth while admiring the mystery, keeping a broad view of inclusivity, and serving those in need. I am so grateful for you, and honored to be a part of this community.

### **Matthew Hart**

The word "Faith" is not a noun. The word "Faith" is a verb.

I was raised in several different denominations of the Protestant church. I started out as a Baptist, moved on to become Dutch Reformed, and was part of the Episcopal Church at age 17 when my father passed away at the young age of 42. Being a willful teenager I then became an Atheist – after all, if there was a God, how could He have let this happen to my father?

When I married my wonderful wife at the age of 28 we talked it over and decided that since we would be having kids some day we should probably return to church. When we first went back to church we went to a non-denominational church and then when we moved to rural Georgia we became United Methodists. I had always felt that something was missing in my church life.

While attending a service at Mountain View United Methodist in Cottonwood, Arizona my eyes were opened by a group of our church's youth that were putting on a skit for us. The skit involved a young teen that was playing the part of a homeless person. She asked a group of teens that were playing the part of a group of adults from our church for help. The answer to her from the adults was "We Love You". Her answer to that was – "But, I'm hungry – can't you please help me?". Their answer was – "But We Love You – isn't that enough?".

I was floored by what the youth of our church thought about our church and Christianity in general. What really got to me was that they were right! I had always felt that there was something missing in my faith journey and this was what it was. James 2:14-17 states it exactly the way I was feeling: **<sup>14</sup>What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? <sup>15</sup>If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, <sup>16</sup>and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? <sup>17</sup>So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.**

I needed to be doing more. Ever since that Sunday morning and those insightful youth, I have tried to look for opportunities to make my faith into a verb. If I have the ability to help – I will help. I have been pleased to see similar attitudes throughout the congregation at Community UCC – whether we are talking about Jubilee Café, mission work, campus ministries, or the many other potential activities that I hope to take part in.

Remember, "Faith" is not a noun, "Faith" is a verb!

### **Amy Hinze-Pifer**

This is the first time in my adult life I have joined a church. I came from a family of high-church Methodists and Baptists with a scattering of ministers and preacher's wives. I learned that participation in a religious community was an important social obligation. I enjoyed singing in the youth choir, and I endured participating in the youth fellowship.

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At age 16, I came out of the closet and into a world of judgment, scorn, and fear.

In the midst of this situation, I had a formative experience at the Youth Theology Institute at Emory's Candler School of Theology. This was a four-week summer program of theological exploration and social justice work with seventy other high school juniors of different religious backgrounds. I was introduced to a loving community of faith, a transformative social experience, and a conception of God that asked more of me and that I found deeply meaningful.

I was not able to find a religious community like that afterwards, anywhere. I tried repeatedly to practice as a Christian in whatever setting seemed possible, but I was not able to find a community where I could be around Christians without sacrificing my integrity in the process. I concluded that a relationship with God was just not something I would be able to have as a queer person.

My wife was raised in the Religious Society of Friends, and we tried participating in our local Quaker Meeting for several years. I appreciated the strong commitment to social justice and peace work, but I did not find the explicitly religious experience of talking about God with like-minded people that I craved. (I also found that I am far too fidgety to endure silent, un-programmed worship week after week!) I made other visits to progressive Christian denominations through the years, but I was not able to find a faith community that felt like home.

We moved to Champaign-Urbana last year, and with two small children it felt even more important to resume the search for a church community that was both welcoming and worthwhile. More than one person recommended Community UCC ("the one with the hot dogs"), and I put it first on my list of churches to visit. That Sunday the children's message was about the Armor of God, and it memorably involved a Nerf crossbow and shields made of poster board. I knew I had found a church that approaches religious life with joy, that lets children act like children so they can grow in the love of God, and that welcomes everyone for exactly who God made them to be. I found a church that talks quite a lot about God, and Christ, and faith, and I found a church that shows the love of God to everyone they meet.

### **Megan Krejci**

I fell in love with Jesus back in 1990. He filled me with love, hope, peace, and purpose. But it's really hard to trust God when bad things happen. Walking into CUCC, I was reminded that Jesus loves me, and that we can make the world a better place for everyone. And so here I am. I am empty and sad on my own without the Spirit filling me, and without community and support. I don't want to be empty anymore. I want to be full. And so I keep coming. And so this is where I want to plant my roots deep down.

### **Brittany Mahannah**

I grew up with an inconsistent church life. I went to catholic school until 4th grade, then sporadically attended a handful of other churches for the rest of my childhood. In college, church and religion were far from my mind. It wasn't until Kyle and I had Owen, our now 13 year old, that I began to think we "should" attend a church.

We found a church in our town that friends and some family attended and started going. I never really felt a sense of belonging there, but I thought maybe that would come with time. We spent 10 years going off and on, and these feelings only strengthened. At that point, we stopped going to church and I felt like maybe we just never would.

Then, we attended the Pride Parade and someone handed us a rainbow heart. In the weeks following the parade, I researched all the churches that had involvement at Pride. I couldn't really articulate all of my feelings about what I was looking for at the time, but after reading about CUCC online, what I was needing started to come together in my mind. "A Just-Peace, Progressive, LGBTQ Open & Affirming Congregation". I had no idea this type of church existed!

I love this church. I love the people in this building. I love what we stand for. I love the hope it has brought me. And I'm excited and proud to be able to say I'm a member.

### **Kyle Mahannah**

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I grew up in a Christian home. Church every Sunday, Wednesday night, and any other day when an event was happening at church. My grandpa was a founding member at our church, and was also the emergency handyman if any repairs or work needed to be done there. He would even let me help sometimes, or at least, carry some tools around.

I learned a lot about the Bible and faith through Sunday school and church camp every summer. My family always prayed together before dinner and things seemed great. Then, my parents divorced and the church treated my mom very poorly. That, combined with a bad youth group experience left me feeling angry and disappointed.

It was a long time after high school before I went to church again, like got married and had kids, long time. My wife and I went to a church for a while with our kids. It never seemed like we belonged there. One Sunday a pastor made it clear that certain people didn't belong. We knew for sure it was time to move on. It took us a little while to find the right place for us. My wife is masterful with her research, and found CUCC. After just a couple of visits, it just felt right. I feel that everyone is valued here, regardless.

### **Susan Pawlicki**

I believe in a Presence that pulls us to recognize the divine within each being—human, animal, plant, or earthen--and act on that recognition by seeking unity rather than division. I believe we are intelligent, flawed creatures who too often choose to ignore the promptings of Spirit and the example of Christ in favor of the expectations of society (family, friends, church, or workplace). I believe no human can entirely comprehend the reach of God and should not try to limit God to one belief system's views. I believe the Creator is in active conversation with beings on earth today and possesses limitless ways of communicating; thus, the Divine presence may be revealed to me in one manner and to another in an entirely different way.

### **Jeff Stovall**

"Whether we take what is written in the Bible as fact, metaphor, myth, or story, listen to these words now, for the meaning they might hold for us on this day". That sentence is incredibly liberating. I look forward to seeing it in the bulletin each Sunday as a reminder that it's OK to interpret scripture more than one way.

I think my faith is like a 1964 Triumph Bonneville motorcycle. It's rugged and beautiful. It's also 55 years old, a little rusty, periodically neglected and parked in the corner of life's garage, but when it's given a proper tune-up and a fresh tank of fuel, there's no better vehicle for the exhilarating journey into the mystery of God.

### **Tina Stovall**

Throughout my life, I haven't really talked to God much. I'm not sure why. I guess I just didn't feel a need. I was fortunate to grow up in a loving and connected family who shared daily conversation, generally at the dinner table. While I don't remember us talking about God or the Bible, I do remember us sharing stories of love and kindness and learning the importance of valuing and supporting others and working to make a positive difference in the world. I observed my mother living those beliefs through her commitment to her family, the children she taught, and many neighbors and friends.

I later chose a career that provided daily opportunities for me to build relationships with others and to act on the beliefs I had established as a child.

I believe that we become who we are in life through our interactions with others and that our becoming is a continuous journey of learning, adapting and evolving. I am immeasurably fortunate and grateful to experience this lifelong process of becoming with Jeff, my husband. I love our long conversations about many different aspects of life. Our conversations about faith have often focused on our uncertainties and questions about God, the Bible, organized religion- what it all means for us and others in our world. Often, we haven't felt a fit between our personal beliefs and what we see happening around us. About a year ago, Jeff and I began learning about the United Church of Christ. It didn't take much initial study for us to agree that we wanted to learn more and we identified CUCC as the place to begin. Since our first visit, I have felt welcome at CUCC. I have felt a fit between my personal beliefs and what I see happening around me. I feel CUCC has helped me add a piece to my life that I didn't even realize was missing.

I have come to believe that even though I haven't really spoken to God much in the past, He has always been speaking to me. And I think I have been hearing him, and following his guidance, even when I didn't recognize his voice. It is with God's guidance that I have found the CUCC community. And, for guiding me, and Jeff, so that we may continue to evolve on this journey of spiritual becoming together, I say, "THANKS BE TO GOD"!

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