



Cherokee Park United Church

Fierce Justice ☀ Radical Love ☀ Abundant Grace

a Progressive Congregation

*Welcoming people of all ages, sexual orientations,
races, and ethnic origins*

Theological Elbow Room

Global Music

Community Connected

Kid Friendly

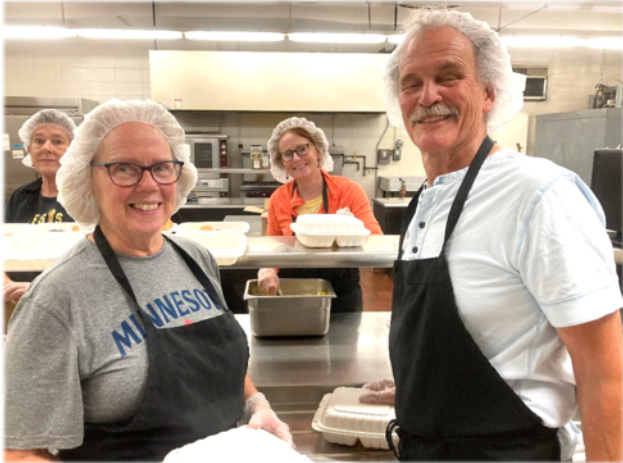
Newsletter August 2023

The Minneapolis Pride March
with a joyous UCC contingent
and West St. Paul Pride Day



SCORE!!

On July 6, 250 souls were fed with food and smiles by our members and friends of Cherokee Park United Church. Thanks to Wayne for continuing to coordinate the effort. Blessings all around!



Council Notes: No Report as No Meeting in July

Dear CPUC,

Country music has never been my thing. Part of this is the stereotype of it in my mind (e.g. trucks and dirt roads, mostly white and male); part of it is the music style itself doesn't appeal. However, it has been interesting to consider the contrast in the two most popular country songs this summer.



One is the racist anthem by Jason Aldean called "Try that in a small town," in which the lyrics dare city folk to try car-jacking or spitting on police or robbery in a small town and "see what happens." It is a threat of violence with the thinnest veneer of small-town pride. The racist history of our country, sadly, repeats events of white violence for imagined or fabricated infractions by outsiders, usually Black or people of color.

Further, the music video for the song features Aldean singing in front of a Tennessee country courthouse where a lynching of an 18-year-old Black man took place in 1927. This setting as the backdrop for a song laced with violent threats makes all too clear who the aim of racist intimidation and stoking the self-justified racism for the intended audience.

Meanwhile, the other country song to rocket up the charts has been Luke Combs cover of Tracy Chapman's "Fast Car." Chapman's song describes the heart-breaking struggle of trying to break cycles of poverty and trauma while finding the occasional moments of escape and joy.

While there may be a question of appropriation (Combs is white, Chapman is Black), Chapman has said she is glad for a new generation and audience to enjoy the song. Combs hews close to the original, even keeping the line "I work in the market as a checkout girl" as written rather than changing it to match his gender.

In covering "Fast Car," Combs pays homage to Chapman's song-writing genius, and his whiteness in singing about cycles of poverty brings a sense of solidarity as the poor get poorer. This doesn't discount that poverty has disproportionate impacts on people of color, but it does seek to build a sense of kin-ship in the struggle for a world that ends cycles of abuse and oppression. We are not enemies and we won't allow ourselves to be turned on each other. This is the subtext of Combs cover.

These are two very different visions of what is important and what we should value. The Gospel as Jesus proclaimed it was to be good news to the poor, release of the captives, and setting the oppressed free. His following drew a wide cast of people, all of whom were compelled by the kin-dom of God he described and embodied.

Reducing the world to two options would be reductionistic. Still, there is something telling about these two contrasting songs rising in cultural popularity at the same time. Which values we choose to lift and live by is up to us. May God steer us ever towards their kin-dom.

Yours in the Spirit,
Pastor Matthias

Sign up for the Harvest Seasonal Steering Team!

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0C45AFA72AA1FFC16-harvest>

Our Garden Ministry year will soon turn to the “Harvest” season. This covers the months of October, November and December. The Seasonal Steering Team will share their leadership with the congregation as we round out 2023.

The Harvest SST will first meet in mid-August to listen to each other and dream about possibilities for the quarter. They will meet again in September to discuss and discern where the Spirit is calling at CPUC.

The SST will gather other volunteers from our church family to help in fulfilling the shared tasks of congregational life.

You can sign up using the link above.. Thank you for being part of the Seasonal Steering Team adventure at CPUC!



Newsletter

-submit articles by the 22nd
of preceding month
to editor - Susan, at
kellystrebig@comcast.net
-proofreaders Phyllis Clark
Mary Murphy
-collator Kathy Bergthold

August Birthdays & Celebrations

06 - Curt Fleming
07 - Kathy Farnell
06 - Bob Hop
08 - Mary Bren
11 - Parker Rafferty-Woods
13 - Kathy Bergthold
14 - Karen Shatek
15 - Ted Abdella
16 - Kandy Heiman
♥ 23 - Eric Jacobson & Jane
Peterson: 20th Anniversary!
30 - Jane Peterson

*(This list was compiled very
informally; please let editor
know if there are others that
we could add.)*

Gathering of CPUC and Dakota/Lakota Families

In July, Joy Sorensen-Navarre and Lon Navarre hosted a gathering in their beautiful back patio for our members (Pastor Matthias, Susan, Kelly, Maria, Jill, Kathy B., Sandy W., Deborah) who were interested in meeting some of the Dakota/Lakota people who may be involved helping build the inipi (sweat lodge) at Benner State Correctional Institution in Pennsylvania for the indigenous inmates there. One of the incarcerated men, Running River, had mounted a law suit against the Department of Corrections for not allowing this religious right, and won the law suit in 2019. However due to Covid precautions, and later, just authoritative avoidance by the prison officials, this has been much delayed. Efforts have been underway and plans made and cancelled twice by the prison; efforts are ongoing to get it built yet this year.

This comes at great sacrifice to many of those involved; it requires volunteers find ways to pay for their air travel and accommodations during the 3-4 days in Pennsylvania, as well as the stress of working under prison conditions and regulations. Detailed background checks were required by the prison, as well as inquiries as to other relationships with the prisoners (a friend in relationship to a prisoner is not allowed to be a volunteer). The expense of the build is also the responsibility of the incarcerated people or their friends; this can amount to \$10,000.

We shared a bountiful potluck, became acquainted with everyone present, and then were given the gift of many native songs, sung and explained, accompanied by drums. Questions about the significance and details of the inipi build were given by the Native America Chaplain at Benner SCI. (pictured wearing green shirt).



Church Hurt Happens by Kate Bowler

recommended by Sandy D., chaplain at St. Paul hospitals

Being hurt by the church is deeply painful. You may now be reimagining what your faith looks like. Or maybe you are having to recreate what your relationship to church should look like. You may feel the sting of unbelonging or you are grieving all that you've lost. I am so sorry for your pain, hurt, and grief. This is not what God intended the church to be.

Below you'll find [a link to a resource page](#) we put together and we hope that you will be reminded of the bigger truth: You, at your very core, are worth cherishing.

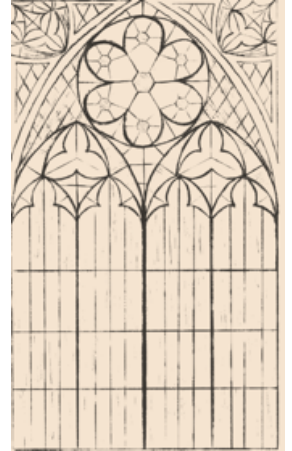
If you or someone you love has been hurt by the church, consider this:

1. Dear one, I know what happened to you was not fair and doesn't make sense. You don't have to explain or justify what happened to anyone else—just know that your pain is valid. And we are so sorry. This is not what God had intended for the church to be. How hard is it to separate your church experience from your experience of God?

2. For many of us, there are questions that have yet to be answered. In scripture, we find that Jesus and the Jewish teachers loved (and still do) to teach their students by answering a question with a question. For example: "What is the church supposed to be?" A teacher might answer with "What is love?" What questions do you need to ask to go deeper in your faith even if they don't have ready answers? What question might God ask you in response to your question?

3. We know when we have been hurt by church it can be difficult to trust people again or to venture into another faith community. And yet, we need people and community to support us, encourage us, carry us, and celebrate with us. How can you acknowledge what is holding you back from community? What small steps could you take to find people to be church to you? Can you write your fears in a journal? Could you pray to God to show you to a new place of belonging? Can you ask someone out to coffee and get to know more about their faith journey? Can you visit a new church or look on the internet at some options?

You who don't give up wrestling.
Who have eyes to see something new
being rebuilt on top of what was.
Blessed are you who walk away
wounded, yes. But changed.
You are not the bad thing.
You are a gift.
And we love every bit of you.



Reparations? why

(You may note that the state of Pennsylvania is underlined; it is a reminder that the indigenous imprisoned men we are helping are incarcerated in that state, which punishes much more unfairly than most states.)

One area of Reparations greatly needing attention is the **re-thinking and redesigning of the justice system**, because it targets people with no power, with the largest percentage being black and indigenous people. This is not the same as the police pursuing people because they can see that their skin color is not white (although plenty of that goes on) but refers to the fact that people who are low income are many times more susceptible to their lives being irreversibly traumatized after being detained. And because of the history of this country keeping non-white people in oppressed situations, with less opportunity, the justice system affects them adversely in greater numbers than usual percentages would predict. They cannot afford bail. They cannot afford a lawyer. They have few friends who have any authority or power or "pull." So they can end up sitting in jail for months, losing jobs, losing housing, throwing families and children into being hungry and often homeless. While their wealthier counterparts who commit the same offense, are home in a matter of hours.

Tough on Crime?

On the other hand there will be speeches from those who think a tougher sentence and worse prison conditions will deter crime. Some claim they have accomplished this, such as Ron DeSantis who claimed "In Florida, our crime rate is at a 50-year low." The Marshall Project tells us "But his claims rest on incomplete crime data. More than 40% of the state's population are missing from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement's state-level figures. And Florida's participation in the federal crime database is the lowest among all states... Nationally, roughly one-third of police departments were missing from the FBI's 2022 crime data collection. While agencies in Florida have the lowest participation rate, crime data from states like Pennsylvania and New York are also patchy. Numbers from many of the largest police departments, like the NYPD and the LAPD, are still missing." This also hides the fact of unjust incarceration rates of non-white people.

So What Can We Do?

Of course this is all part of the politics of who has power and who has the majority to get their way. Legislation seems to be the way to change; a tough ask with many areas of the country split between conservatives and liberals, (or whatever words you chose to describe these opposite philosophies). But to achieve justice we must persist to influence all law-makers to see that what has been done, is not effective, and actually making things worse than if nothing were done.

Information on efforts to **right these wrongs** can be found through many projects, including:
(continued next page)

The **Marshall Project**: (sign up for email stories at "themarshallproject.org" and select newsletters.)

The **Innocence Project**: However, they often limit their efforts towards people on death row and with innocence that can be proved through DNA. And these cases do take years, sometimes decades, to reverse. <https://innocenceproject.org>

The **Vera Institute of Justice**: is focused on prevention of mass incarceration often with a special concern for children. At their website you will read true stories of children whose parents had no option but to let them go into a locked institution, only to be subjected to tortuous, inhumane conditions. As with adults, if they ever get out, they have little chance of being functioning human beings, a privilege we take for granted for most of the children and younger relatives of all of us reading this newsletter. www.vera.org

Have you ever watched the implosion of a huge building being demolished? In contrast, if you could see a video of its construction, you could draw a correlation that

Destruction of lives by sentencing only takes minutes, but re-construction takes years or decades, if at all. Prevention is always better, quicker, less costly, than a



cure for any social ill. If you have experienced the pain of loss of a loved one or a tragic debilitating accident, you might understand what everlasting devastation incarceration causes to family and extended family units. "Losing your freedom, even for just a few days, can mean losing your job, housing, and even children." from the Vera Institute.



Excerpt from The Marshall Project: something to ponder

Half the people serving life without parole are locked up just in five states: California, Florida, Louisiana, Michigan and Pennsylvania. Only Alaska doesn't permit this punishment.

Save the Date: Installation of Okogyeamon as Pastor of St. Paul's UCC Church, Ellsworth WI
Saturday September 30, 2 p.m. All invited. If interested in singing in the choir please contact Sandy W. or Jim/Karen asap.

On a Brighter Note:

Rainbow Fellowship

On July 23 the potluck snacks were arranged in Rainbow color order. Either VIBGYOR or ROYGBIV, depending upon which side of the table you were standing! And a new rainbow heart mosaic is now found on the wall to the left of the refreshments. You are invited to add your prayers to the Post-It-Notes Heart. Seems someone we know is very knowledgeable about 3-M products. Hmmmm. Could it be Shannon? Thanks to Pastor Matthias for posting his photos on FaceBook.



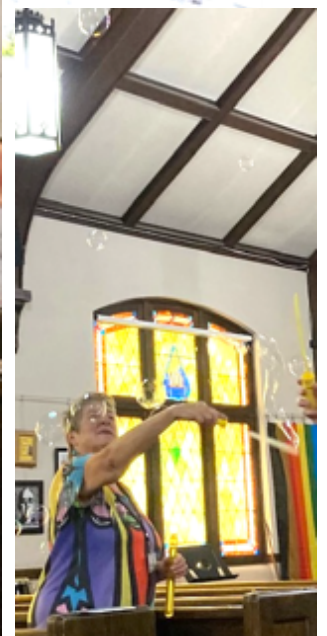
Note:

August 13th potluck theme is
"anything that can be eaten on a toothpick."

Bubble Blessings: What? How? When? Why?

While not a usual part of the UCC or Presbyterian liturgies, it seems to now be permanent at CPUC.

This started when one Sunday, mysteriously, small bubbles emanated from behind the lector's pulpit. Coincidentally, Carly was the liturgist that day. All having enjoyed that, she felt encouraged to bring many, many small bubble containers and passed them out to children. Pastor Matthias emphasized it even more by blowing bubbles during the recessional/postlude. Then came Covid and we were not supposed to be blowing any of our breath into the air. So Carly found a battery-operated bubble wand for the pastor to use. Then with a gradual ending of Covid precautions, we were back to breath bubbles...and passing them out, inviting all the children to use at that time. But wait!! Here's an idea. Let's use those huge wands to make huge bubbles. And hey, let's buy LOTS of them so EVERYONE can do this. We're now hearing that we will not need to use soap to shampoo the carpets in the future, as enough soap is now settled on them. Bubbles are especially fun when the overhead fans are on, carrying them upward. And also, as noted on July 16, are great outside at our annual Worship in the Park. It was discovered that they also last a long time when landing on the wet pathways.



A Youtube bubbles video from Stefan, from our Worship in the Park
<https://youtu.be/jG6j08-Q0UU>

Cherokee Park United Church
United Church of Christ/Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Open & Affirming, Multicultural, Antiracist
371 W. Baker Street
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Sunday Worship 9:30 a.m. (summer hours), online and in person
<https://www.facebook.com/cherokeeparkchurch/live>
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*Friendship is the only cement
that will hold the world together.*

Edward Everett Hale

