

July 2023 Newsletter
First Congregational United Church of Christ
1000 Willson Avenue - Webster City, Iowa 50595
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(Ten years ago I wrote this piece for our monthly newsletter, and with our denomination's General Synod meeting this week in Indiana I thought it would be a good to revisit the challenging ideas it contains that resonate with many in the UCC.)

Years ago Bertrand Russell, a famous British philosopher and logician, gave a short address entitled "Why I am not a Christian." (If you've never read it, you can google it and take a look.) I've excerpted a few of his many comments:

"I cannot myself feel that either in the matter of wisdom or in the matter of virtue Christ stands quite as high as some other people known to history. I think I should put Buddha and Socrates above Him in those respects."

"I say quite deliberately that the Christian religion, as organized in its churches, has been and still is the principal enemy of moral progress in the world."

"The whole conception of God is a conception derived from the ancient Oriental despotisms. It is a conception quite unworthy of free men. When you hear people in church debasing themselves and saying that they are miserable sinners, and all the rest of it, it seems contemptible and not worthy of self-respecting human beings... A good world needs knowledge, kindness, and courage; it does not need a regretful hankering after the past or a fettering of the free intelligence by the words uttered long ago by ignorant men."

All of us who self-identify as Christians have reasons to do so, even if they are imperfectly understood or named...and my guess is that we also have, like Bertrand Russell, a list of reasons why we are "not Christians"—although for us this translates "I am not a Christian because...." rather than Bertrand's "I am not a Christian, because..." (the power of a *comma*—very UCC!) Perhaps you have never understood your faith in terms of what you don't believe, but for many of us in the UCC what we *don't* believe can be as compelling as what we *do* believe!

And so in response to Bertrand's address outlining his many objections to being a Christian, here is *my* short (and incomplete) list of why "I am not a Christian."

"I am not a Christian" because I believe in eternal punishment, aka Hell, Gehenna, Hades, etc. Some would say this dilutes or even blasphemes the truth of God, but it has become impossible for me to embrace the idea of a loving and merciful God inflicting a cruel and unjust punishment (eternal torment) on any human being, even the most twisted. To be a Christian because it offers "fire insurance" against eternal damnation seems to me to reduce the Gospel to a fear-based message about avoiding endless torture, rather than a life-giving message of love.

"I am not a Christian" because I believe in the inerrancy of scripture. Our denomination states it well in two ways: "We take the Bible seriously but not literally," and "God is Still Speaking," meaning we hold that the Bible contains both timeless and time-bound truths and therefore must be studied and interpreted in our time and place, rather than accepted verbatim uncritically. While the witness of the scriptures is a cornerstone of the Christian faith, to be a Christian simply because "The Bible tells me so," or more importantly, to proclaim and teach doctrines simply because "The Bible tells me so" requires us, as Bertrand observed, *to fetter our free intelligence by words uttered long ago*—long before modern science, psychology, sociology, medicine, the discovery of *four continents*, the human population explosion, the abolition of slavery, women getting the vote, etc.

"I am not a Christian" because of John 3:16, in part because of items #1 and #2 on my list above, and in part because "exclusive" truth claims by Christians and Christianity have created so much darkness and misery in the world, as well as light (Remember the Crusades and the Inquisition?) Being a student of world religions and modern spiritual movements I have found

profound truths and lofty moral teachings packaged without any references to Jesus; truths and teachings that stand on their own as windows and pathways to the Divine. In short, I am not a Christian because I believe there are no other legitimate pathways to God; to my mind that makes God not the God of Christians but instead a “Christian God” (you may want to reflect on the difference.)

“I am not a Christian” because of other Christians. Of course in one sense that isn’t true--if there was no transmission of the faith over the last 20 centuries by other Christians there would be no organized religion known as Christianity. Yet I put this item on my list because I have been repelled by Christianity, as well as attracted to it, because of its purported followers. Perhaps it’s unfair to judge the power or merits of any faith by those who identify with it, but I am certainly not a Christian because of the sanctification, or even congruence of belief and behavior, among Christians!

So you now may be wondering “Why is Craig a Christian?” or even “Is this guy a Christian at all?” While there isn’t space here to go into the details, the short answer to that question would be: culture of birth, upbringing, my life experiences, sense of Call, Scripture, Jesus, the Church...and of course the single best answer would be “God” –whose hand I sense being present in the midst of all of these other “answers.”

So enough about me... why are YOU a Christian? Why did you join—and why do you remain--in this centuries- old faith? I suspect we all have unique answers to that question, and I suspect our answers have changed over the course of our lives. But regardless of how you answer that question today, I hope you count these as some of the reasons you are a Christian—at least of the UCC variety.

“I am a Christian” because our faith proclaims:

The Good News that all are invited to have a living encounter with the Still -Speaking God;

The Good news that following Jesus is a call to humility, love, and service, not a reason for arrogance and judgment;

The Good News that *the testimonies of our ancestors’ faith are not the test of ours;*

The Good News that “No matter who you are, or where you are at in life’s journey, you are welcome here!”

In a religion that purports to have “Good News”—doesn’t that sound like Good News to you?

That’s why I’m a Christian! –Pastor Craig

CHURCH OFFICE HOURS

M 8 am - 1 pm
T 9 am – 1 pm
W 8 am – 4:30 pm
Th 8 am – 4:30 pm
F 9 am – 1 pm

Church Staff

Rev. Craig Blaufuss, Pastor
Office: 832-2232 Cell 297-4316
Pastor’s email: revcraigblaufuss@gmail.com
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Dale Olson: Stephen Ministry Ldr 839-5619
Melissa Hindt: Organist 712-351-1074
Curt/Lorraine McCoskey: Cust’s. 832-5341
Tracy Wehrhan: Church Treasurer 297-0370
Dale Olson: Financial Secretary 839-5619



JULY BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO:

- 1 - Katie Short
- 5 - Dale Olson
- 6 - Jacob Dean Rohmiller
- 7 - Susie Brim
- 8 - Duane Vavroch
- 9 - Erica Pawletzki
- 11 - Dylan McCoskey
- 11 - Melissa Hindt
- 18 - Cindy Henning
- 20 - Luke Rohmiller

21 - Candy Butz
23 - Mike McKee
23 - Nate Lahr
24 - Donald Royster
25 - Landen Ploeger
25 - Alex Swanson
28 - Brenden Ploeger

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY TO:

16 - Jennie & Zach Williams
22 - Clark & Jean Mowry
26 - Todd & Katie Sonsalla
29 - Colby & Candy Butz

Parish Nurse News

Words of wisdom from Thomas Jefferson

- Never put off for tomorrow what you can do today.
- Never trouble another for what you can do yourself.
- Never spend your money before you have it.
- Never buy what you do not want because it is cheap; it'll never be dear to you.
- Pride costs us more than hunger, thirst, and cold.
- Never repent of having eaten too little.
- Don't let the evils which have never happened cost you pain.
- When angry, count to 10 before you speak; if very angry count to 100.

Webster City Food Packing Event

You will notice the pickle jar is out during this month of July for donations for this packing event. Asbury is spearheading this event, similar to the Kids Against Hunger packing our church has done in the past. The packing is scheduled for Saturday September 16, but their lofty goal of raising \$9000.00 has to be met by August 7. Mission Board made the decision to try and contribute to this goal and decided our infamous pickle jar would be the way to do that. Please give generously to help feed the hungry internationally, and look for a volunteer sign-up sheet to help pack meals on September 16! Thank you for your help.

Scholarship Sunday

The Finance Board will be awarding scholarships on Sunday, July 23. Join us in church to congratulate our scholarship recipients.

Beacon of Hope Meal

Our next Beacon of Hope meal will be July 24. The meal will be taco tater tot casserole, green beans, coleslaw, bread and butter, and bars. There are a few ingredients needing to be donated, please stop by the table in Fellowship Hall and check it out! Thanks to Andrea Mosbach for organizing and leading the cooking of our Beacon of Hope meals!

Baked Bean Pyramid to Support the Angel Tree Ride

The American Tap is making a huge commitment to support the WCMA's Angel Tree Christmas Gift Program by holding an "Angel Tree Ride", to be held Saturday, August 26. They hope to raise \$10,000 to sponsor 100 Christmas Angels! Part of their fundraising plan is to host a community dinner after the ride, and they are asking Webster City churches to help with this event by donating pans of dessert bars and baked beans. The Mission Board has chosen to donate a roaster of baked beans, and they are asking the congregation to build a baked bean "pyramid" with their donations. They are requesting Bush baked beans—any size and any flavor. Volunteers will make up the roaster of baked beans on Friday, August 25, and transport it to the American Tap on the 26th. Any excess donations of beans will be given to local food pantries.

Faith At the Fair Sunday, July 30

The Webster City Ministerial Association is again organizing a "Faith at the Fair" worship service, to be held in the green space of the Hamilton County Fairgrounds on Sunday, July 30. Coffee and fellowship time will begin at 9 a.m., and the ecumenical worship service will begin at 9:30am. The focus of the service is how we are blessed by God to be a blessing in the world! First Congregational is holding its Saturday evening worship service on July 29, and there will be no Sunday worship at our church. So...come out to the fair and be a part of "Faith at the Fair!"

Clean Up

The parks dept. has put 2 garbage cans on the Boone River trail, and we will check them and get them emptied on a weekly basis. The garbage cans will be located at the canoe access at City Park and by the dam off the

White Fox Rd. There is a sign-up sheet for volunteers to help check and empty these, taking the full bags to the dumpster at the church.

Graduation Sunday

Shelby Brim and Chesney Fuller were our two High School graduates recognized on Graduation Sunday, June 18. Congratulations, Shelby and Chesney!



Summer Worship Hours and Saturday Service Dates

Our summer worship hours will remain at 10:00 a.m., and during the summer months we will hold 2 more Saturday evening services: July 29, and August 26. Saturday services will begin at 5 p.m., and as has been our past practice, following our Saturday services there will be no Sunday morning worship service that weekend. We will hold these Saturday services indoors; please look for more details in the coming months.

Thank You!

Dear Friends,
Thank you for helping me celebrate my birthday!! How great it was- it made it so very special. It was wonderful to be in church with all of you. I have really missed being there. And thank you for the cards. I would have thanked you all personally but the tears were there.
Lovingly, Ginnie

Drive-Through "Brownie Sundae"

The Brownie Sundae Drive-Thru organized by the Mission Board raised \$867! This sum will be matched dollar for dollar by the Enhance Hamilton County Foundation's Food Pantry Challenge, and the proceeds will be given to local food pantries. Thanks to everyone who baked brownies, donated ice cream and toppings, and stopped by to support this good cause.



Picnic

The Worship Board sponsored an "indoor potluck picnic" which was held after our first summer Saturday service on June 24. It was an enjoyable event-- ants and all!



Treasurer's Report

INCOME	May	YEAR TO DATE
Pledges and Offerings	\$12,049.00	\$84,542.33
Other Income	0.00	.00
TOTAL INCOME	\$12,049.00	\$84,542.33
EXPENSES		
Outreach and Mission	1,416.67	\$7,482.31
Pastoral Services	10,808.54	44,479.07
Maintenance and Repairs	4,770.40	20,564.54
Church Office	3,337.27	15,464.53
Music Ministry	558.33	2,341.65
Christian Education	71.54	190.64
Local Ministry	0.00	16.26
Misc. Expenses	30.00	800.47
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$20,992.75	\$91,339.47

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Address Service Requested

God is still speaking
to everyone in the home of:

