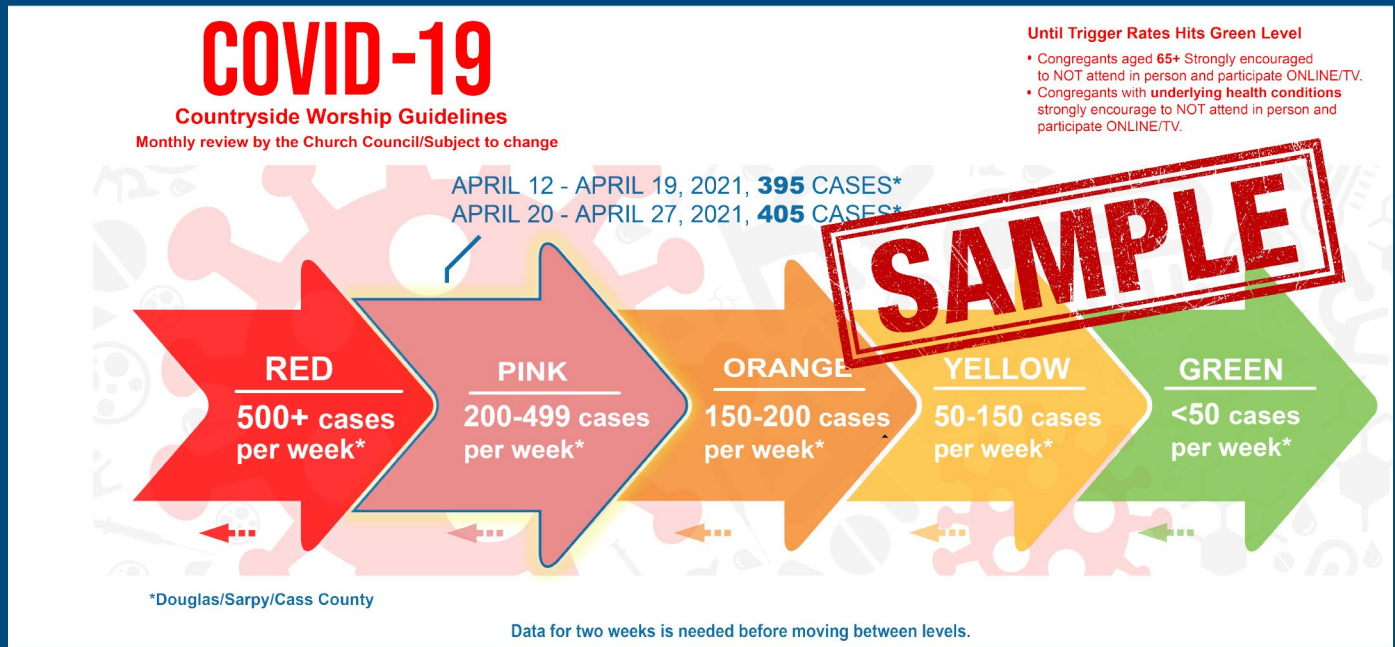


DECEMBER 2020



TASK FORCE ADDS PINK LEVEL TO REOPENING GUIDELINES

As 2021 approaches and we are dealing with record cases of coronavirus, we wanted to focus on some positive news. New, more rapid tests are being developed that will help identify people with the virus faster. A vaccine is now in front of the FDA seeking emergency use authorization with another one close at hand and still others in the last phase of clinical trials. Most health experts agree the vaccine(s), if approved, will not be ready for widespread use until spring of 2021 but the speed at which these vaccines have been developed is remarkable and truly something to celebrate.

When infection levels were at lower levels in the Omaha metro back in September (around 600 infections per week) the task force started to discuss the possibility of reopening Countryside at levels higher than those that we had established back in June. The reasons we looked at this were many, but primarily we looked at how other organizations had begun limited reopening and what the health experts were saying about prevention protocols, including mask wearing, social distancing, and sanitizing processes that were preventing the spread of infections in public areas.

As a result of these observations, the task force has decided to add another level to our reopening guidelines. We will raise the level of NO In-person services to an infection level of 500+ per week in the counties of Douglas and Sarpy combined. A new level, Pink, will be added to the chart. The Pink level will be in place when infections are between 499-200 for the two consecutive weeks. The other levels and procedures will remain as they currently stand. At the Pink level, the capacity of the sanctuary will be capped at 25%, there will only be one service to start, (we will revisit if demand indicates). Reservations must be made in advance via a web sign-up to allow tracking if someone does become infected. Masks will be absolutely required, prescreening will occur when entering, and seating is only allowed in designated areas. To find out more about the Pink level go to countrysideucc.org/covid19.

It might be some time before our city gets back down to these levels, but we will get there. Until then, please stay safe, wear your mask, wash your hands, and social distance.

FOLLOW THE STAR CHRISTMAS EVE, 6:00 - 9:00 PM

On Christmas Eve, Countryside Community Church will be open for people to safely walk through and participate in a Follow the Star Christmas event. Stars will line the floor and guide you through stations set up around the church. The walk will include a visit through the columbarium to light a candle, a luminary walk and Christmas carols playing at different points throughout.

This will be a socially distanced event and will require registration. Planning is currently ongoing so be watching for information in the C-10 this month, as well as links for registration. We will also be keeping you updated on social media. There is a plan to video the walk and place it on our YouTube channel for those who cannot join us. We look forward to making this possible for our members. As always, plans may change because of the ever changing coronavirus numbers in our community.





SUNDAY WORSHIP

COVID-19 CASES IN OMAHA ON THE RISE, WORSHIP REMAINS ONLINE

COVID-19 cases have been rapidly increasing throughout the month of November keeping Countryside squarely in the RED phase of the Countryside Worship Guidelines reopening set forth by the Countryside Re-Start Task Force and the Church Council. The church does not move to the next phase (PINK) until new cases are below 200 for two consecutive weeks. For a detailed explanation of our five-phase approach you can check the website at countrysideucc.org/covid19.

WORSHIP ONLINE AT KMTV CHANNEL 3 AT 10:30 AM

Through December there are two ways to catch Countryside Community Church on Sunday mornings. The first is online through Youtube live which you can connect with at countrysideucc.org/live or on KMTV Channel 3. Both will begin at 10:30 AM.

ADVENT WORSHIP SERIES, NOVEMBER 29 - DECEMBER 24

Advent carries the feeling of excitement and/or nervousness that comes from being in that in-between place of "waiting/preparing"; "the already/not yet"; "the seen/unseen"; "the steadfastness/uncertainty". Can you feel it? It seems as if everything is on hold right now: With COVID-19 directing our activities and Countryside itself in a discernment period regarding new leadership models and pastors, and our world standing by post-election, the possibilities are bursting at the seams, and we are collectively holding our breath.

Psalm 80 cries to the Lord Stir Up your Strength and Come... Help us. Like the Psalmist, we too are crying out for God's strength and compassion to help us reorder our practices and priorities that we might be "reopened" to a new way of being in the world. We need to be actively clearing out things that are standing in the way of God's presence with us, so that we might better experience God's voice guiding and leading us to fullness and grace. Let us journey together through this in-between time, embracing our community and the Love of God that connects us all.



ZOOM OFFERINGS SUNDAY MORNINGS IN DECEMBER

We will still be offering this Zoom three-part lineup running through December:

- 10-10:20 AM, coffee hour with Diane Scott and Bill Bolte
- 10-10:20 AM, Meditation and Community Prayer with Dan Loven-Crum
- 10:25 AM Prelude (musical offering)
- 10:30, Worship only for 30 minutes. This is via KMTV or online (countrysideucc.org/live)
- 11:00 Conversations with Jan Brown

Go to countrysideucc.org/calendar for zoom links. Password is 13130.

Ministers

Rev. Dr. Chris Alexander
Associate Minister, ext. 230
chrisa@countrysideucc.org

Staff

Jan Brown
Pastoral Care Coordinator, ext. 234
janb@countrysideucc.org

Bonnie Buckland
Church Clerk
bonnieb@countrysideucc.org

Will Carnazzo
Building Coordinator, ext. 206
willc@countrysideucc.org

Dan Loven-Crum
Dir. of Admin. & Communication, ext. 226
danl@countrysideucc.org

Shari Garder
Financial Secretary, ext. 223
sharig@countrysideucc.org

Steve Gomez
Administrative Assistant, ext. 222
steveg@countrysideucc.org

Kris Hill
Administrative Assistant, ext. 221
krish@countrysideucc.org

Robyn Hubbard
Executive Administrative Asst., ext. 224
robynh@countrysideucc.org

Rebecca Morello
Director of Youth and Family Ministries, ext. 230
rebeccam@countrysideucc.org

Alex Ritter
Music and Artistic Director, ext. 215
willc@countrysideucc.org

Diane Scott
Common Grounds Coffee House Manager
dianes@countrysideucc.org

Debbie Vihstadt
Communication Assistant, ext. 225
debbiev@countrysideucc.org

COUNTRYSIDE CONNECTED



RACIAL JUSTICE BOOK CLUB STARTS A NEW BOOK

The Racial Justice Book group meets on Sunday mornings from 9 -10 AM. They are starting *Caste: The Origin of our Discontents*, by Isabel Wilkerson. From Amazon review: "This book explores basic preference from its start in America as a Caste system enabling advantage and fanaticism. The order of position isn't about sentiments or ethical quality. It is about Power—which tribes have it and which don't. A direct look at three of the most remarkable standing systems to ever exist; India, Nazi Germany, and America."

The Zoom link for this group can be found at countrysideucc.org/calendar and the password is 13130. All are welcome to join at any time.

RABBI ARYEH AZRIEL CONTINUES CLASSES IN DECEMBER AND JANUARY

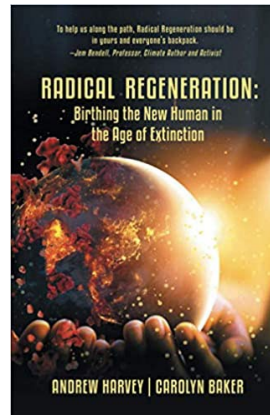
Rabbi Aryeh Azriel will continue his classes on Monday Mornings between 10:00-11:30AM. Classes will be only on Zoom. The link can be accessed through our church calendar and the password is 13130. He will be continuing with his Sermons For life: a view of Jewish life and tradition from the sermons of Rabbi Aryeh Azriel while serving the Congregation of Temple Israel in Omaha, Nebraska. For more information, please contact Chris Alexander at chrisa@countrysideucc.org. There will be no classes on December 21 or December 28.

MINDFUL MEDITATION SITS WITH CARLOS, WEDNESDAYS AT 6 PM

Mindful Meditation Sits with Carlos Figueroa are continuing Wednesday Evenings from 6:00-7:00 PM via Zoom. You can access these sits through the zoom link on the church calendar. If you have any questions or would like more information about these opportunities, please contact Chris Alexander at chrisa@countrysideucc.org.

CENTER FOR FAITH STUDIES EVENT, DECEMBER 14, 7 - 8:30 PM - ZOOM

Center for Faith Studies and the Sacred Activism Community of Omaha will host a zoom event on Monday, December 14, 7:00-8:30 PM. Link will be on church calendar at countrysideucc.org/calendar. Authors, Andrew Harvey and Carolyn Baker, will offer their vision at the heart of their new book, **Radical Regeneration**. As we endure a definitive evolutionary crisis, life demands of us an unparalleled response, both of deep inner work, and of focused sacred activism. Andrew Harvey will be our Featured Speaker for Center for Faith Studies in March, and this zoom event will be a terrific opportunity to get an introduction into his work with Sacred Activism. Please join us. For more information contact Rev. Dr. Chris Alexander chrisa@countrysideucc.org or Dr. Cynthia Lindenmeyer at cynthia@sacredactivismtoday.org.



DECEMBER MARKS 10 YEAR ANNIVERSARY FOR REV. DR. CHRIS ALEXANDER AND COUNTRYSIDE.

December 5 gives us pause to celebrate another milestone at Countryside, it is the 10 year anniversary of Rev. Dr. Chris Alexander! We wish we could have everyone here to acknowledge this memorable occasion but you can make this special by dropping Chris an email at chrisa@countrysideucc.org or sending well wishes through mail: 13130 Faith Plaza, Omaha, NE 68144. Either way, she would love to hear from you!



COUNTRYSIDE COMMUNITY COLLECTS OVER 800 CANS OF FOOD

Countryside Community answered the call to participate in the Thrivent Financial Give Thanks and Give Back contest. The majority of cans collected were chicken and tuna which is an urgent need for our Community Cupboard. Now volunteers, led by Jim Gilbert, will stack the cans into a design and send a picture into Thrivent for a chance to win \$500 for the Community Cupboard. Either way, we have already won with all of the essential cans of food we have collected! Thank you to our wonderful church community and we will keep you updated on the contest. A picture of the canned creation will also be published when it is done!



Community Cupboard volunteers

TRI-FAITH INITIATIVE



TRI-FAITH GARDEN AND ORCHARD

Our Garden and Orchard Team is hard at work year-round planning, prepping, planting, and tending! Go to www.trifaith.org/garden-volunteer to volunteer.



Get in on the ground level for the 2021 Tri-Faith garden and volunteer today!

Abraham's Whiteboard: Us and Them - Fundamentalism and What We Can Do About It **Thursday, December 3, 6:30 PM- 8:00 PM, via Zoom**

Fundamentalist ideas and movements affect us all in a variety of ways. How does fundamentalism work? How does the rise of fundamentalism impact our work for social justice? Join Educator Director Jeremy Fricke for this exploration of this rising phenomenon through the lens of religion and psychology.

Abraham's Whiteboard is a monthly educational class led by Education Director, Jeremy Fricke, on a wide variety of religious topics, from world religions like Hinduism and Buddhism to special topics like how definitions of religion impact our own religious identities. All Abraham's Whiteboard sessions are open to all people regardless of background, but will connect the content to Judaism, Christianity, and/or Islam.

(Registration required - go to Tri-Faith web page at trifaith.org/events or find the link on Tri-Faith Facebook page, facebook.com/TriFaithInitiative.)

Making the Familiar Strange: Hagar **Tuesday, December 8 at 12 PM - 1 PM**

As we continue through Abrahamic stories, we will be discussing Hagar from multiple perspectives. Amal will provide some background on Muslim perspectives on Hagar and we will have discussion on Jewish and Christian perspectives as well.

Making the Familiar Strange is an opportunity for interfaith dialogue that inspires people of different religious and nonreligious backgrounds to read the same text together. Rather than providing answers, creating arguments, or shutting down conversation, Making the Familiar Strange gives attendees an opportunity to investigate and share different perspectives on the same texts.

While not required, the program is best if you have access to the texts in question, which can be a physical copy or online copy of a Bible, Tanakh, Quran, or other text that addresses the stories in the biblical book of Genesis.

(Registration required - go to Tri-Faith web page at trifaith.org/events or find the link on Tri-Faith Facebook page, facebook.com/TriFaithInitiative.)

Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Conversations: Year-End Update **Thursday, December 10 at 12 PM**

Join Tri-Faith staff and supporters to celebrate all we have accomplished, and to dream about all we have to look forward to in 2021

(Registration required - go to Tri-Faith web page at trifaith.org/events or find the link on Tri-Faith Facebook page, facebook.com/TriFaithInitiative.)



The Tri-Faith Center's Reflection Room offers a quiet space of contemplation, along with views of Countryside Community Church, Congregation of Temple Israel, and American Muslim Institute - AMI.

CARING TOGETHER



MARRIAGES

Barry Larson and Barbara Webster were married on November 28, at St. Andrews Methodist Church where Barbara is a member.

Kate Bean and Tyler Huhmann were married December 5, at Countryside, with Rev. Dr. Chris Alexander as officiant.

BIRTHS

Lindsey and Cody Haner are happy to announce the birth of their son Tobin Daniel on November 12, 2020.

Katie and Joel Martin welcomed the birth of their son Cameron, born November 12, 2020. Former members Mary and Greg Haskins, now of Fremont, Nebraska, are Cameron's grandparents.

STEPHEN MINISTRY

December 1 - 5:30 PM, Stephen Ministry Leadership Team via Zoom. See church calendar for link.

December 1 - 6:00 PM, Peer Support via Zoom. See church calendar for link.

The traditional holiday gathering for all Stephen Ministers and the members of the Board of Pastoral Care has been postponed. We hope to have a wonderful celebration in the spring or early summer!

New Stephen Ministers Have Been Commissioned

Countryside, we made Stephen Ministry history this week by commissioning 13 new Stephen Ministers via Zoom! Thank you to Rev. Dr. Chris Alexander for helping Knolan Hudson, Linda Bannister and Jan Brown with the Commissioning liturgy on November 18. You can view it by watching Countryside's You Tube or on-line worship service for November 29. Thank you, Countryside, for supporting this program over the years. Our new Stephen Ministers from Countryside: Guy Evans, Marcia Free, Tasha Guzman, Joni Hensley, Michaela Mast, Linda Schaefer Coats, Ardith Stultz, Leslie Summers-Day, Debbie Vihstadt, and Roxanne Wiles. From Temple Israel: Wendy Goldberg and Gail Knapp. From the TriFaith Initiative: Jeremy Fricke.

COVID CALLERS

We will do our best to prepare for a potentially long winter of increased numbers of cases. Let Jan Brown know if you're willing to volunteer as a "Covid Caller" for anyone in our faith community who has been impacted by the virus.

Callers: Thank you to those who've volunteered already; let Jan or Chris know of any concerns that you may have, and we'll follow up with more pastoral care.

Congregation: Please let Jan know if you'd like to receive a regular call.

BOARD OF PASTORAL CARE'S WINTER WISDOM OF THE AGES

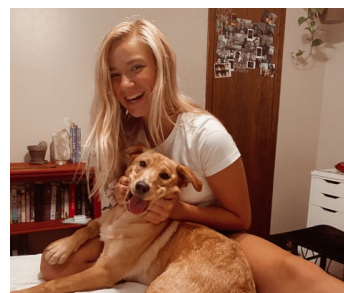
CHRISTMAS: WHEN LOVE FINDS US

A second love bloomed for long-time Countryside member **Jean Stewart** at Christmastime. She'd been a widow for five years and hadn't been on a date with anyone but her husband for 50! But her friend Brownie finally persuaded Jean to meet Gaylen. Gaylen was a widower, a retired Naval officer who lived in Bellevue. They met at lunch, chaperoned by their friends. "He was just the nicest man!" Jean said. They had such a good time, they met again - unchaperoned - at the Joslyn, then at the zoo. With each meeting they discovered more that they had in common. Then Gaylen invited Jean to the Nutcracker. "I'd always wanted to see the Nutcracker!" He followed that up with a delivery of Christmas-themed flowers, and that was that. They dated for fifteen years, until Gaylen's death last year. "I miss him every day," says Jean. "We were very much in love."



Jean Stewart

For **Jessie Vihstadt**, Christmas love means family. The Millard North sophomore is looking forward to huddling up with her mom, dad, and brother this Christmas and "forgetting all the craziness that's happening right now." But one of her favorite holiday memories is when she got to share the holiday with extended family. Many years ago, her great grandma and great uncle, who live in Colorado, came to celebrate with them. To commemorate the occasion, her uncle was trying to take a family photo using the timer on his camera. But the camera kept snapping the photo before he was able to get in the picture, so her uncle was running back and forth, and everyone was in stitches! Being able to be totally yourself and be accepted - even when you look silly or foolish - is what family is to Jessie, and it's why Christmas is so special to her.



Jessie Vihstadt

THE BOX FOR DECEMBER, TOGETHER

The December Box is to aid Together at this time of the year that is seeing many families in need of assistance. Together is also our BOCO Christmas offering. We share their concern for those in need. Unemployment is up and even those employed have had hours reduced drastically. Families are experiencing food insecurity and we can help. Together needs shelf stable foods and has requested cereals and soups. These are items that families always need and request. It would be helpful if the soups included some protein. Cereal bars are also family favorites as they are ready to go. All cereals will be utilized though. Thank you for your continuing generosity to the Box as we try to help meet some of the needs of those who struggle to meet basic food needs for their families. Thank you for sharing your Christmas spirit with those who are hungry. It is greatly appreciated.



Advent Activities

Sunday Morning Schedule

10 - 10:20 AM

Meditation & Community Prayer

Dan Loven-Crum

10 - 10:20 AM

Coffee Talk

Diane Scott & Bill Bolte

10:25 AM

Prelude

Holiday Music

Countryside is providing a cozy way for you to gather your family, get some warm drinks and listen to the sounds of the holiday season, safe in your own home.

Sunday, December 6, 4 PM

Christmas Carol Sing Along

Sing along as loud as you want to classic Christmas carols!

Friday, December 11, 7 PM

Jazz Coffeehouse

Make your favorite Christmas beverage and watch as Countryside Jazz plays your favorite Christmas Carols - a Countryside tradition!

Sunday, December 13, 4 PM

River City Ringers

River City Ringers is a dedicated group of performance ringers who provide cultural enrichment by ringing music.

Meditations

Wednesdays,

December 2, 9 and 16,

4 PM

Join us for inspiring scripture, poetry and uplifting music.

10:30 AM

Worship,

online and on KMTV 3

11 AM

Conversations with Jan

Jan Brown

Links can be found on the church calendar at:

countrysideucc.org/calendar

Friday, December 18, 7 PM

Christmas Organ Showcase

Get the family together to hear Christmas music from our beautiful new Buzard Opus 47 pipe organ.

Sunday, December 20, 4 PM

Lessons and Carols featuring our new Buzard Opus 47 pipe organ.

Concerts can be viewed at:

countrysideucc.org/concerts

December 16 will feature

music with Countryside Jazz and our new Buzard Opus 47 pipe organ.

Meditations can be viewed at:

countrysideucc.org/concerts

Center for Faith Studies Event

December 14

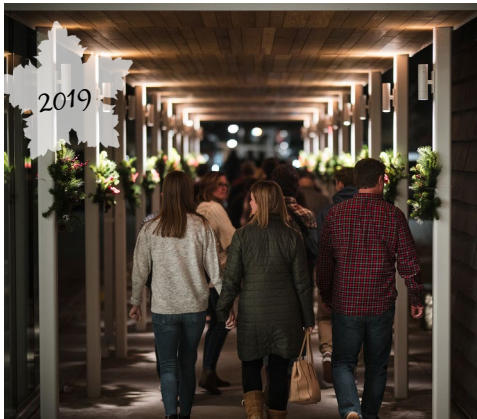
7- 8:30 PM

Center for Faith Studies and the Sacred Activism Community of Omaha will host a zoom event with authors, Andrew Harvey and Carolyn Baker. They will offer their vision at the heart of their new book, Radical Regeneration. For more information contact Rev. Dr. Chris Alexander chrisa@countrysideucc.org

Advent Devotional

An Advent Devotional was recently mailed out to the congregation. If you did not receive yours, or need another copy you can download one at countrysideucc.org/advent. You may always email the office@countrysideucc.org if you want a paper one mailed out.

Christmas Memories



Warm Wishes

Countryside Community Church



Christmas Eve

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES

December 24

5:00 PM

Online at countrysideuc.org/live

10 PM

KMTV Channel 3

FOLLOW THE STAR - CHRISTMAS EVE WALK THROUGH

at Countryside Community Church

6 - 9:00 PM

by reservation only

More information will be sent out as plans are finalized.

Read more about it on the front page of this newsletter.

TRANSITION LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE UPDATE

Transition Leadership Committee, the Interim leadership group appointed by Church Council, posted our updated Countryside profile and job description, as approved by Church Council, three weeks ago with the UCC. We continue to work on the approved Interim Collaborative Leadership Model implementation, and are entering the phase of accepting applications and conducting interviews for our open Interim Associate Minister of Worship and Congregational Care position. TLC prays daily for our Countryside community and congregation in our transition period, as we engage and move forward together. We ask that you also continue to offer prayers of support and encouragement to our Countryside leadership, as we ask for guidance in bringing us leadership that nurtures our community, and as we envision the future of Countryside during transition and beyond. We are grateful for all of the support we feel and have received, and will continue to keep you up to date on our progress.

SANCTUARY WILL STAY OPEN FOR DAILY PRAYER

Countryside's Sanctuary is now open for prayer, sitting in silence, reading the bible or other devotional readings. It is really up to you, how you would like to use your time. You will be buzzed in by the office then you will need to fill out a Covid 19 Health Screen form that is located on a table right inside the door. The hours are Monday - Friday, 8 AM - 4 PM through the month of December. Please wear your mask at all times and keep socially distanced from anyone else in the building and while using the sanctuary. There may be times you will be directed to the Chapel if the sanctuary is in use. Please email the office if you have any questions office@countrysideucc.org.



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YOUTH CORNER

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

A big thanks to everyone who participated in our box collections for Pine Ridge! We are steady on Zoom for the winter. **Faith Singers** meets at 5:15 PM and **COYO** meets at 6:30 PM on Sundays. Zoom links are sent weekly over email and through Remind. If you would like to be added to either of these lists, let us know!

YOUTH

Our Sunday School lessons this month focus on two different stories associated with Advent: the story of Elizabeth and Zechariah and the story of the Magnificent.

In our first story, we follow Zechariah and Elizabeth as an angel delivers exciting news—they'll soon welcome a baby! Now, this was totally unexpected as Zechariah and Elizabeth were quite elderly but we follow them as they respond to the message from angel Gabriel. Our second story pulls us into the joy that Elizabeth and Mary share as they greet one another and celebrate their happiness in following God's guidance.

Sunday School for the Spring 2021 semester will start in February. During January, we'll be preparing and delivering a new kit for the spring lessons.

Core 56 will meet on Wednesday through December 16. We'll take a break for a couple of weeks and return January 6.

Our last small group **Confirmation** classes of the semester are Tuesday Dec. 9, Wednesday December 10, and Monday December 14. We will have a meeting for all 8th grade Confirmation students on Wednesday, December 16 at 7:45 PM to discuss Faith Stories.



Toy collection piling up in the office at Countryside. Thank you!