

# COUNTRYSIDE CURRENTS



THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF  
COUNTRYSIDE COMMUNITY CHURCH

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## You're Invited!

### Installation Service Set for Rev. Dr. Jennifer Shultz-Thomas

Sunday, May 5, 2 p.m.

You're invited to a special Installation Service for our new Senior Minister, Rev. Dr. Jennifer Shultz-Thomas. Join us on Sunday, May 5, at 2 p.m.

An Installation Service is a significant occasion where we officially welcome Rev. Dr. Shultz-Thomas into her role as our Senior Minister. It's a time of optimism, possibility and a deep sense of belonging for our congregation.

Rev. Dr. Shultz-Thomas brings a wealth of experience, vision and vitality to our community, and her selection was a carefully considered process involving the Countryside congregation, the Pastoral Search Committee and the Living Waters Association.

Rev. Dr. Jim Keck, Senior Minister for First-Plymouth United Church of Christ, will give the sermon. American Muslim Institute Board Member Abdul Mackie, Rabbi Benjamin Sharff from Temple Israel Omaha, and Rev. Dr. E. Scott Jones, Senior Minister of First Central Congregational Church will also join us. We're honored to have these distinguished guests to help us officially welcome her to Countryside.

This isn't just a formality—it's a genuine affirmation of Rev. Dr. Shultz-Thomas' calling to lead our community at this time. Your presence and support will make this occasion truly special.

Please save the date and join us on May 5 at 2 p.m. to mark the installation of Rev. Dr. Jennifer Shultz-Thomas. Looking forward to seeing you there!



#### WHAT'S IN THIS ISSUE?

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## The Box: April



The Social Justice and Outreach Board has selected Omaha ForUs as the recipient of Box donations for April.

Omaha ForUs supports the LGBTQ+ community in Nebraska and Iowa as the sole non-profit dedicated to this cause. The organization focuses on creating safe and supportive LGBTQ+ networks, offering counseling services, and providing programs that celebrate the unique stories of those they assist.

Omaha ForUs' Pride Pantry supplies food and hygiene products to individuals and families who face challenges accessing these essentials due to their identity. To contribute, please drop off donations in the designated box at the church entrance. Your support is greatly appreciated in helping Countryside's outreach efforts.

Consider picking up a few items during your grocery shopping or purchase online from [their Amazon Wish List](#):

- Canned goods like fruits, vegetables, soup, and proteins
- Shelf-stable groceries such as cereals, pastas, and boxed mixes
- Peanut or nut butter
- Razors and shaving cream
- Facial moisturizer
- Toothbrushes and toothpaste
- New cosmetics
- Shampoo and conditioner

## Common Grounds News

Common Grounds Coffee Shop baristas whip up new drinks every month. The menu board at right featured the drinks for March.

Engagement Coordinator and coffee house manager Diane Scott said April's drink menu will include the Easter Bunny (vanilla, marshmallow and espresso), the Chocolate Bunny (chocolate, caramel and espresso) and the Melting Bunny (hot chocolate with extra chocolate).



# Get Connected!

Countryside offers many opportunities to connect with one another and the community. Read the weekly C-10 for new and updated information on these and other groups, events, and programs. For more information on how to get involved, [email Diane](mailto:dianes@countrysideucc.org) at dianes@countrysideucc.org, scan the QR code to the right or text her at 402-707-1556.



**Social groups** meet for the sheer joy of connecting with friends old and new. Some gather at the same location each week, like Fellowship Arts and Music Etc. This group meets each Friday in Rahab for – you guessed it – activities that revolve around arts and music. Others, like the 9 to Dine groups, meet once a month at various venues. A devoted small group of young Dungeons and Dragons aficionados meets each Friday evening for gameplay. On Sundays, a small group of junior high school students meets just for the joy of fun and games!

**Journey Groups** meet weekly to discuss and discover what our Still-speaking God calls us to do in our lives, community, and the world. In the process, we form deep relationships offering support to one another through life's journey. Journey Groups meet in person, although some groups offer a hybrid Zoom option. Journey Groups are always being formed. If you're interested in joining a Journey Group, contact the church office.

**Study & Interest groups** meet to expand their horizons on topics of interest. Some move beyond to become involved in the greater community. Some of the existing purpose-driven groups that meet in person include the Sunday Morning Racial Justice Book Group, Banned Book Lovers Group (third Monday of each month), and Banned Books Small Group (Tuesdays at 6:30).

**Bible Study groups** focus on developing and deepening our understanding of what it means to be a Christian in today's world. Some meet on a regular schedule, others for a specific period of time. Rev. Don Sartor's extremely popular Bible Study group's most recent series was *Understanding Our Roots*. The study focused on Luke's work organizing the many oral and written accounts of Jesus.

**Educational small groups**, like Adult Forum, meet to hear about and discuss various topics of interest. Adult Forum meets each Sunday after worship. Some small group opportunities are less structured. Some groups have brought in outside experts to speak on specific topics like the impact of immigration on Nebraska's economy, the importance of birds of prey in the environment, and the history of women in Omaha.

## Volunteer Opportunities

Countryside has so many events and programs that offer volunteer opportunities, including office staffing, the Hope Garden, Countryside Pantry and special events such as baking for and assisting at funerals, the Ice Cream Festival, United We Walk, and Pride Parade. Contact the [office](#) at 402-391-0350, or check the weekly C-10 for the latest opportunities to get connected and make a difference!

## New to Countryside?

### Coffee with the Pastor

Sunday, April 21  
11:15 a.m.  
Chapel

[Register here!](#)

New to Countryside? Want to learn more about our congregation and how to get connected?

Join Pastor Jenny for coffee, tea, light snacks and lively informal conversation in the Chapel directly following our regular worship on the third Sunday of each month.

our next Coffee with the Pastor will be Sunday, April 21. [Registration](#) is greatly appreciated!



# Countryside: Where Art

Art has long been revered within the sacred confines of churches, serving as a conduit for spiritual reflection and communal connection.

Historically, churches have patronized the arts, commissioning and collecting pieces that depict religious narratives and themes. From elaborate stained-glass windows to modest statues, each artwork contributes to the rich tapestry of worship.

At Countryside, artistry and spirituality intertwine. Donated, created and loaned works of art, both grand and humble, carry profound significance and tangible benefits for the congregation.

Members and friends who donate art to Countryside, like Bonnie and Bob Buckland, continue this tradition, enhancing the spiritual journey of all who enter the sanctuary. The couple last year presented a beautiful bronze statue to Countryside.

The couple purchased *Cattail Rhapsody*, a bronze statue by Colorado artist Randy Rau, in 2001 at the Governor's Western & Wildlife Art Show & Sale in North Platte.

Bonnie and Bob co-chaired the art show event with another couple for six years, 1997-2002. When the couple decided to downsize to an apartment, they decided to find a new home for it. But they wanted it exhibited in a place with plenty of space and people to enjoy it. Countryside checked all the boxes.

Donating or loaning artwork fosters a sense of



Bonnie and Bob Buckland donated this bronze statue, *Cattail Rhapsody*, by Colorado artist Randy Rau, to Countryside.

community and stewardship among members. It is a tangible expression of their commitment to the church, as they collaborate to enhance the worship space for the benefit of all. Even small donations, such as a work of ceramic or a framed painting, play a vital role in beautifying the sanctuary and leaving a lasting legacy for future generations.

The tradition of donating or loaning artwork to a church reflects its members' dedication to faith, fellowship and the celebration of beauty. Whether through grand gestures or small contributions, each donation piece an indelible mark on the church, enriching the

spiritual journey of all who gather within its walls.

## Countryside Originals

Permanent or long-term loans of artwork to churches has a long history. But so does creating art specifically for a church.

Countryside is wealthy, indeed, when it comes to art generated within its walls. Members and groups of all ages and artistic background often collaborate to create original, meaningful art and curate art installations that enrich the Countryside worship experience.

# and Spirituality Meet



In 2023, an intergenerational effort culminated in a striking Pentecost installation in the Narthex. This collaborative project not only showcased the diverse talents and perspectives within the congregation but also served as a powerful visual representation of unity and faith.

Countryside's youth have also left an indelible mark on the church's artistic landscape, with their vibrant paintings and mixed-media pieces adorning the sanctuary walls. Their contributions infuse the space with youthful energy and creativity, inviting all to embrace the transformative power of art in worship.

**Enhancing Our Spiritual Journey Through Art** Art has a profound impact on our spiritual life and worship experience, enriching our connection to the divine and deepening our sense of reverence.

**Inspiration and Contemplation** Art invites us to pause, reflect, and meditate on the mysteries of faith. Whether through intricate paintings, serene landscapes, or captivating sculptures, artwork prompts us to explore the depths of our spirituality and seek meaning in the sacred.

**Visual Representation of Faith** Art provides a tangible expression of our beliefs and narratives,

offering visual cues that reinforce our understanding of scripture and tradition. From depictions of biblical scenes to symbols of hope

*Want to stretch your creative wings? Contact Alex at [alexr@countrysideucc.org](mailto:alexr@countrysideucc.org) to find out how you can get involved in an artistic event, project or group!*

and redemption, artwork serves as a visual language that speaks to the soul.

**Fostering Community and Connection** Art brings people together, fostering a sense of unity and belonging within the congregation. As we admire and discuss the artwork adorning our sanctuary, we form bonds with fellow worshippers, sharing in the collective experience of awe and wonder.



Above: *Community*, the custom-made blue bowl that graces the interior of our baptismal font was custom-made and donated to Countryside by Elkhorn artist Tyler Curnes. Below: Countryside youth getting creative with the 2023 Pentecostal Intergenerational Art Project.

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## Countryside: Where Art and Spirituality Meet

**Elevating Worship Spaces** Art transforms our worship spaces into sanctuaries of beauty and reverence, creating a sacred environment conducive to prayer and worship. Whether through vibrant stained-glass windows, intricately crafted altarpieces, or subtle embellishments, artwork elevates our worship experience and draws us closer to the divine.

**Inviting Encounter and Engagement** Art invites us into a deeper encounter with the sacred, sparking curiosity and inviting us to explore our faith in new and unexpected ways. Whether through interactive installations, immersive exhibits, or participatory experiences, artwork encourages active engagement and personal reflection.

In essence, artwork serves as a catalyst for spiritual growth and transformation, enriching our worship experience and nurturing our connection to God and community.

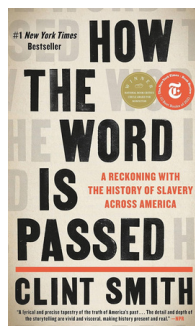
Through the efforts of Countryside artists and creatives, and generous contributions of art donors, Countryside continues to cultivate a sanctuary where beauty, faith and spirituality intersect, inspiring all who enter to embark on a journey of discovery and enlightenment. 🏡



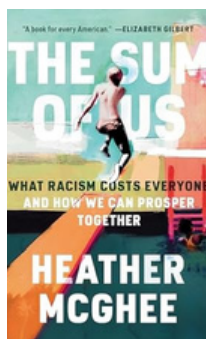
## Anti-Racist Designation Team Book Picks for April-May

The Anti-Racist Designation team is sponsoring two book discussions in April and May. The team recommends reading either (or both!) **How the Word is Passed** or **The Sum of Us**.

**Janelle Baber** will lead a 4-week discussion of *How the Word is Passed*, by *Clint Smith* on Tuesdays from 6-7 p.m., beginning April 9.



**Marcia Blum** will lead a 4-week discussion of *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together* by *Heather McGhee* on Mondays, April 8, 15, 22 and 29 from 7-8 p.m. For more information on this discussion group, [email Marcia Blum](mailto:Marcia Blum) at [mawblum@icloud.com](mailto:mawblum@icloud.com).



## Adult Forum *America's Founding Fathers*

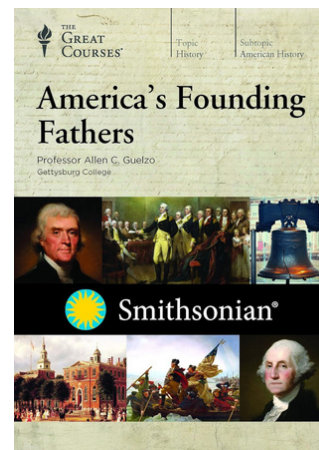
Now, more than ever, any well-informed citizen should understand how the Constitution lives, breathes, and endures.

The Adult Forum is beginning a new Great Courses series, *America's Founding Fathers*.

The Founders were flawed, contradictory people with their own radical views on what America's new government should look like. Through their lives, opinions, and deeds, one can see just how messy and rancorous a process was the formation of a "more perfect union."

You'll encounter fresh perspectives on familiar Founders including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Alexander Hamilton, and people not necessarily considered Founders, including John Adams' Secretary of War James McHenry; and Alexis de Tocqueville, author of *Democracy in America*.

By seeing the creation of the Constitution as a process fraught with controversy and compromise, you can better appreciate just how much a miracle of government the U.S. Constitution is, and why we're still arguing over it hundreds of years later. Join us Sundays at 11 a.m. in Deborah. If you can't join us in person, you'll find a Zoom link on the [church calendar](#).

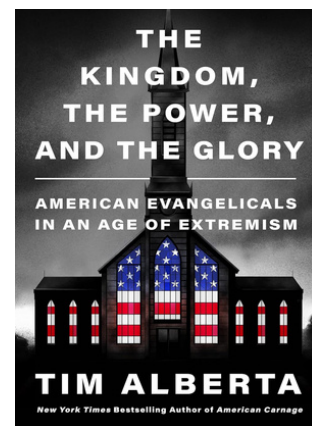


## Sunday Morning Racial Justice Book Group

***The Kingdom, The Power, and the Glory: American Evangelicals in an Age of Extremism***, Tim Alberta

During March and April the Sunday morning racial justice book group will read and discuss *The Kingdom, The Power, and the Glory: American Evangelicals in an Age of Extremism*.

Although the book is not focused specifically on racism, our discussions will explore the abuse of power as it relates to systemic racism in this country. Please join us Sundays at 8am via zoom. You can find the link on the church calendar.



# Youth & Family Ministries

## Senior High Service Trip



*Countryside students on last year's Senior High Service Trip*

This past year, our Youth Group students have focused on Anti-Racism, and have spent time expanding their understanding of systemic racism and the impact that has on all of our lives. As the capstone to our year, but not our continued education of systemic racism, we'll head out on June 23 after our 10 a.m. worship service for a road trip to explore sites of significance in the Civil Rights Movement and Black History.

Our stops on the trip include Tulsa, Oklahoma; Little Rock, Arkansas; Montgomery, Alabama; and Memphis, Tennessee. While a number of these spots are short stops on our way, we'll spend a couple of days in Montgomery to participate in a Racial Healing Immersive Experience offered by Radical Optimist Collective. Facilitators from the collective will spend time preparing us for our visit to The Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice. We'll return to Omaha on Sunday, June 30.

## Anti-Racist Kids Camp

From July 15-20, our K-6 grade students are invited to Anti-Racist Kids Camp, an all-day educational camp at Countryside meant to expand our students' understanding of history to include the voices and experiences of Black and Indigenous people. Using lesson plans from Learning Justice, children's books, art activities and more, the camp offers a more complete picture of the events that shaped, and continue to shape, both our local and wider communities. Our days begin at 9 a.m. and include plenty of time for play, lunch and snacks, as well as our curriculum. Pick up is at 5 p.m. On Saturday, July 20, we'll have a family picnic day with food and fun and exhibits of our work from the week!

## Summer UCC Camps

Kamp Kaleo in Burwell, Nebraska, is a United Church of Christ/Disciples of Christ camp that offers a number of summer camps for grade school, junior high, and senior high students. This year's camping theme is Linked by Love.



Established in 1965, Kamp Kaleo is a place set aside to encounter God in nature and in community. The camping program is overseen by the Youth and Outdoor Ministries Committee (YOMC) of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ, DoC) in Nebraska and the Nebraska Conference of the United Church of Christ.

The YOMC mission statement is "Inspired by God's Spirit, we seek to create radically inclusive spaces and places for faith exploration."

*Kamp Kaleo is offering adult camps for 2024!  
For more information, see page 12.*

Last fall, we took a group of Jr. & Sr. high students to a weekend camp and can happily report that this camp was fun! It offers so many opportunities for students to interact with other kids their age, scripture and nature. In fact, one of the students we met that weekend now joins us for Dungeons and Dragons on Friday nights and Jr. High Youth Group on Sunday afternoons!

This summer, Kamp Kaleo is offering a Culinary Boot Camp for students in grades 9-12. According to the Kamp Kaleo website, "the bootcamp will be taught by culinary professions from around the country who bring their skills and talents to educate the next generation of chefs. The week-long camp will include demonstrations, structured workshops and lab time, field trips to local farms and restaurants, and will culminate with a final tasting menu created entirely by the campers and their mentors to be presented on the final day of camp."

Each camp does have a fee, but scholarships applications are available through the Kamp Kaleo [website](https://kampkaleo.com/camp-information/). For more detailed information the camps, visit <https://kampkaleo.com/camp-information/>.



# Youth & Family Ministries

[Rebecca Morello](#), Director of Youth & Family Ministries,  
rebeccam@countysideucc.org

[Emma Boyd](#), Youth & Family Ministries Program Coordinator,  
emmob@countysideucc.org, 402-884-8035



## Children's Ministries

Pre-K-6th grade

**Apr. 7:** Children's Church

**Apr. 14:** Community Worship

**Apr. 21:** Children's Church

**Apr. 28:** Community Worship

## Wednesday Wonderers, Core 56

Wednesdays, 6-7:30 p.m.

**Apr. 3:** St Teresa of Avila

**Apr. 10:** Ambassadors for Christ

**Apr. 17:** End of Semester Party!

**Apr. 24:** Family Game Night! 5-8 p.m. Food and fun!

## D&D group

Fridays, 5:30-8:30 p.m.

While our groups are full at the moment, please let us know if your student would like to be on the wait list for a new group!

Group 1: Emotional Damage

Group 2: Holy Rollers

Group 3: Chaos Campaigns

Group 4: One Group to Rule Them All

## Jr. High Youth Group

Sundays, 5-6 p.m. Youth Room.

**Apr. 7:** Movie night with Sr. High 5-8 p.m.

**Apr. 14:** Disney Shorts and Frisbee!

**Apr. 21:** Basketball and Turtle Patrol!

**Apr. 28:** No Group

## Confirmation

Sundays, 4-5 p.m.

**Apr. 5-7:** Confirmation Retreat offsite (8th graders only)

**Apr. 14:** Faith Stories and Interviews (8th graders only)

**Apr. 21:** Interviews (8th graders only)

**Apr. 28:** Confirmation! 10am

## Sr. High Youth Group

Sundays, 6-8 p.m., Youth Room

- 6 p.m. BYOD
- 6:30-8 p.m. programming & fellowship

**Apr. 7:** Movie Night! (Jr/Sr High) 5-8p.m.

**Apr. 14:** What does it mean to be Anti-Racist?/Sheet Ball Required Sunday

**Apr. 21:** Lego Flash Builds

**Apr. 28:** Field Trip! Learning to use the bus! 4-8p.m.





## Focus on Creation Justice

During April, we celebrate Earth Day and Arbor Day in the U.S. In honor of these two celebrations, we'll spotlight all the books we have on Creation Justice. Look for the table in the narthex and check out a book to learn how the Earth needs our help to remain a beautiful place for the future. Return the books to the table and cross your name off the list during April. In May, return them to our library.

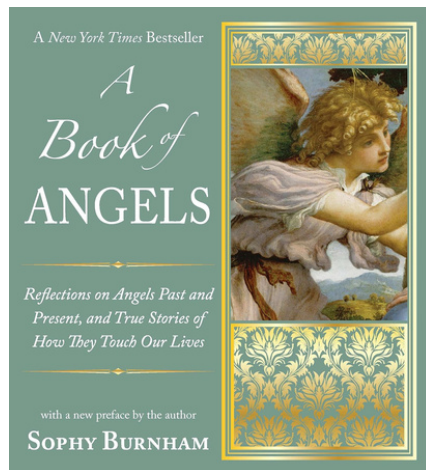
## Book Reviews

### **A Book of Angels: Reflections on Angels Past and Present, and True Stories on How They've Touched Our Lives**

by Sophy Burnham

What are angels? What do they look like? Whom do they choose to visit? Why do they appear sometimes and not others, and would you recognize one if it appeared before you? With great feeling, Burnham offers an eloquent report from the place where earth and heaven meet. A wondrous journey into

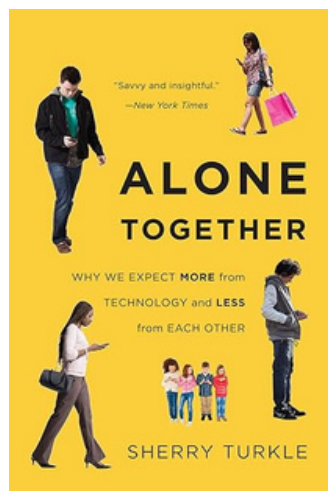
the world of angels, this book is a song of praise to life. (Christianity: 294.4. BUR)



### **Alone Together. Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other**

by Peter Malone & Rose Pacatte

MIT professor Sherry Turkle argues that as technology ramps up, our emotional lives ramp down. Based on hundreds of interviews and with a new introduction taking us to the present day, *Alone Together* describes changing, unsettling relationships between friends, lovers, and families. (Christianity: 303.48 TUR)



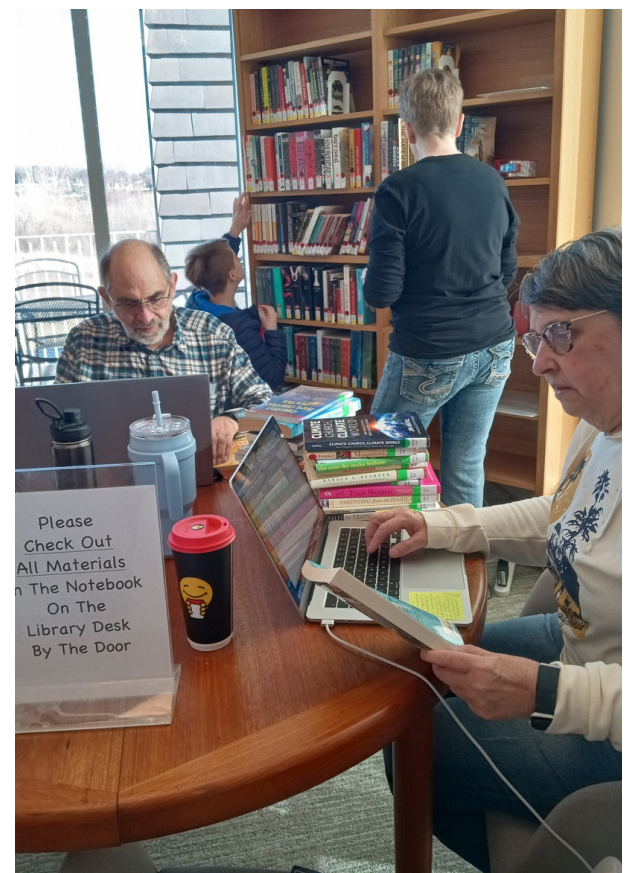
## Library rededication

Mark your calendars!

You're invited! Join us as we rededicate Countryside's James T. Hicks Memorial Library on **Sunday, April 14**, in the Common Grounds coffee house after our worship service.

The James T. Hicks Memorial Library was established in the late 50s by James' mother, longtime Countryside member Alice Hicks, following his death in a car accident. James had just graduated from Westside High School and had planned on starting college that fall.

John and Debbie Hicks, James' brother and sister-in-law and their family will be in attendance that morning. Please join us after the service in Common Grounds for a short rededication and meet-and-greet with the Hicks family. And please visit the library during this open house.



# Go Green! April Means Celebrating (& doing!) Arbor Day & Earth Day

Arbor Day is a cherished tradition in the United States and holds deep significance for communities like Countryside. Originating in the 19th century, Arbor Day was conceived by J. Sterling Morton, a Nebraska journalist and later Secretary of Agriculture, as a day to celebrate and promote the planting of trees. His vision was not only to beautify the landscape but also to recognize the vital role trees play in sustaining the environment.

For Countryside, Arbor Day offers us a way to reflect on our commitment to environmental stewardship and responsibility. In the spirit of Arbor Day, may you foster a deeper connection with nature and a shared responsibility for the planet's well-being. Trees embody the values of care, sustainability and community that Arbor Day embodies and Countryside holds dear.

Arbor Day, celebrated annually on the last Friday in April, stands as a testament to the importance of trees and environmental stewardship. This year, in 2024, Arbor Day will be held on Friday, April 26.

*See the article on page 13 on how you can help the Social Justice and Outreach Board recycle Expandable Polystyrene (EPS) Styrofoam, April 14-28.*

In contrast, Earth Day, observed globally on April 22, serves as a broader platform to raise awareness and advocate for environmental protection and sustainability in its entirety. While Arbor Day focuses specifically on the planting and care of trees, Earth Day encompasses a wider range of environmental issues, including climate change, pollution, and conservation efforts. Both occasions hold significance for Countryside, as they underscore the interconnectedness of humanity and nature while promoting actions to safeguard our planet for future generations. Here are four ways to celebrate and take part in Arbor Day and Earth Day.

## 5 EASY WAYS FOR COUNTRYSIDERS TO BECOME MORE SUSTAINABLE



### Reduce, reuse, and recycle

Embrace the mantra: reduce consumption, reuse what you can, and recycle diligently. Together, let's preserve Earth's beauty for generations to come!

### Get out and garden!

If you don't have room to plant a tree, how about a bush or prairie perennial? If you don't have the space, consider volunteering at the Tri-Faith Gardens and Hope Orchard.



### Earth Day Summit

Join the UCC Earth Day Summit featuring Bill McKibben! This online event will take place on Saturday, April 20 at 2 p.m. (CDT). This two and a half hour summit will also feature a panel on plastics and environmental justice along with much more. [Register now!](#)



### Cut down on plastic

Ditch plastic for a cleaner world. Opt for reusable alternatives, reduce waste, and protect marine life. Every small change counts towards a brighter, more sustainable future. Make the switch today!



### Make a noise! Get involved!

The Social Justice Board has many ways to become involved or make sure your voice is heard. Reach out to Diane at [dianes@countysideucc.org](mailto:dianes@countysideucc.org) or stop by the Social Justice table after Sunday worship.



*It is our collective and individual responsibility to preserve and tend to the environment in which we all live. ~ Dalai Lama*

## Adult Education

# Kamp Kaleo Adult Camps

Kamp Kaleo is offering adult camps in August.

Adult Kamp, Aug. 1-5: Adult campers will have daily opportunities to grow in their faith through small group discussions, games, activities, and nightly vespers services around the campfire. This camp will also give campers the opportunity to enjoy a time of self-reflection or faith exploration.

Culinary Kamp for Adults, Aug. 8-11: This weekend culinary intensive camp is designed for adults with a passion for cooking. The camp will be taught by a culinary professional with more than 20 years of culinary experience and include demonstrations, structured workshops and lab time. The camp will culminate with a final tasting menu created entirely by the campers. Campers will receive a chef jacket, set of knives and recipes.

Quilt Kamp, Aug. 15-18: Novice and skilled quilters will, Quilt Kamp is the perfect place to hone your skills, learn new techniques from fellow quilters, challenge yourself with a new pattern, or just finish that project that's been sitting for too long in your craft room. There's no better place to grow as a quilter than at Quilt Kamp. If you're new to sewing, don't worry. Lots of campers learned to quilt for the first time at Quilt Kamp.

For more information or to register for one or more of the [Kamp Kaleo](https://kampkaleo.com/events-calendar/category/camp-dates/list/) adult camps, visit the Kamp Kaleo website at <https://kampkaleo.com/events-calendar/category/camp-dates/list/>.

## Congregational Life

# Save the Date for New Web of Care Program

Beginning in the Fall of 2024, Countryside will move to utilizing a program called *Web of Care* to provide congregational care to our members.

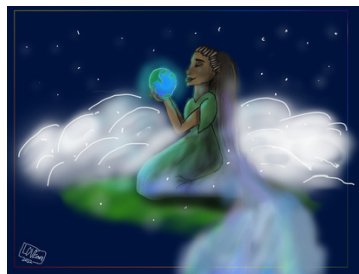
Please mark your calendars for an April 21 information session to learn more about the program. We'll meet after worship from 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.

### What is Web of Care & How Does it Work?

The Web of Care ministry is an intentional, congregation-wide network of care that focuses on maintaining regular contact with all resident members of the congregation in order to build our beloved community. Regular contact will provide a means for sharing information as well as strengthening connections, many of which already exist informally.

This ministry is unique because it provides a flexible structure of holistic care so that all of us have someone in the congregation who will be consistently reaching out and connecting with us over time and throughout our various life cycles, to see how we are doing and facilitating support where it is needed. Even Web of Care Coordinators, staff & ministers will be assigned to other Web of Care Coordinators so they and their families are also receiving care, so that no one gets left out of our beloved community.

# UCC Vote for Climate Change Art Contest



April Cox' artwork was recognized in the 2023 UCC art contest.

The United Church of Christ is conducting a Vote for Climate Hope Art Contest. UCC children and youth are invited to draw, paint, or color about the world and the environment in which they want to live.

UCC will accept art submissions through April 16. An online award ceremony for finalists will be held on May 4, and the winning art will be featured on "Climate Hope Voter Pledge Cards" that church members throughout the UCC will collect during the summer and fall before Election Day.

Registrants will receive a printable "Vote for Climate Hope" art template; a link to a video promoting the art contest; Regular updates and resources about the "Vote for Climate Hope" campaign.

Violet Cox, daughter of Autumn and Matt Cox, was recognized in the 2023 contest to raise awareness about the climate crisis. The Climate Hope Cards Art Contest was open to all kids up to age 18 within the UCC. The goal of the contest was to encourage senators and representatives in Washington D.C. to take action on climate change and environmental protections. Her work was amazing, said Director of Youth & Family Ministries Rebecca Morello. "Well done, Violet!" More than 800 young people participated in last year's contest.



[Register Now!](#)

## 2024 UCC Annual Earth Summit

The UCC's second annual Earth Summit on April 20 will feature celebrated author and activist **Bill McKibben** delivering the Jim Antal Keynote Lecture with the title, *Energy from Heaven or Energy from Hell?* The following panel of award-winning activists will also speak about the multi-national struggle against the pollution of Formosa Plastics, one of the world's largest plastics producers.

This event will be both in-person and live streamed via Zoom. Along with The Church of Christ at Dartmouth College, cohosts include the UCC's Council for Climate Justice, the National Setting of the UCC, and the New Hampshire Conference of the UCC. Even if you can't make the event at its scheduled time, all those who register will receive a link to a recording of the event.

## National Faith + Climate Forum

April 16, 2024  
11 am – 4:15 p.m. CDT

Changes in our climate are increasingly impacting congregations, and clergy and lay leaders are searching for ways to be part of the solution. Deepen your understanding on how to engage our congregation in creation care, work toward just and equitable solutions, and connect with other faith leaders locally and nationally.

This free event is streamed live, showcasing national faith leaders. If you believe in the moral responsibility to care for creation for the sake of our faith, our congregations, our families, communities

[Register Now!](#)

and future generations, join Blessed Tomorrow's National Faith + Climate Forum on April 16, 2024. [Register now!](#)

United Church of Christ is partnered with Blessed Tomorrow, a **national initiative of faith leaders that works to advance climate solutions through faith**. Its coalition of religious partners work to inspire communities to take action. Blessed Tomorrow partners with major faith denominations, like the UCC, to provide resources, guidance, training, and strategy tailored to each faith tradition.

### *Social Justice and Outreach Board*

## EPS Recycling Campaign in Time for Earth Day

The Social Justice Board is holding a recycling event, April 14-28, for Expandable Polystyrene (EPS) Styrofoam, the hard white packing foam used to transport goods like TVs, breakable items and perishables. The collection site will be located on the lower level of Countryside near the south double doors. Drop-off times are 8-4 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Drive up and access the recycling container by ringing the buzzer at the outdoor entrance. You can also walk in through the main upper-level doors. **Remember!!** If it **bends**, it's not our friend! Please don't drop off flexible items like tape, labels, flexible foam, food containers, packing peanuts or foam sheets. For more info, email Ann Duey, [ddueyster@gmail.com](mailto:ddueyster@gmail.com). 

# Climate Change can be Contentious. Can our Faith Help Lower the Temperature?

*At a recent [Tri-Faith event on climate change and faith](#), Wendy Goldberg, executive director and co-founder of Tri-Faith Initiative, said complex conversations, such as those regarding faith and climate change, require a willingness to listen and space to respectfully disagree. In those situations, Goldberg said she often asks “help me understand how you came to that.”*

**RYAN HOFFMAN**  
FLATWATER FREE PRESS

Tamir Ayad’s earliest lessons in environmental stewardship came in Islamic Sunday school growing up in Rhode Island. Cliff Fleener learned about international sustainability goals through teaching Sunday school in a Methodist church.

Two different men, two different faiths, a shared belief: be good stewards of the planet.

Common ground was a consistent theme recently during a [discussion on faith and climate change](#) hosted at



Photo by Abigail Sosoko for the Flatwater Free Press

Tamir Ayad said shortly after moving to Omaha from Colorado, he found community at Tri-Faith and forged lasting friendships with people from different faiths. “It was just so refreshing,” he said.

Omaha’s Tri-Faith Initiative. The sprawling talk ranged from how to engage with communities skeptical of climate change to the energy demands of large data centers sprouting up in eastern Nebraska.

It also involved some difficult acknowledgements.

Wendy Goldberg, executive director and co-founder of Tri-Faith Initiative, alluded to the geopolitical challenges of the moment.

About 1,200 people were killed

and 250 hostages were taken in the Oct. 7 attack on Israel by Hamas. In the months since, more than 30,000 Palestinians in Gaza have reportedly been killed in Israel’s military response. Aid groups and international organizations have described the situation as a deepening humanitarian crisis.

In the U.S., advocacy organizations have reported alarming jumps in incidents against both Jews and Muslims – two of the three faiths that have a house of worship on Tri-Faith’s West

## TOPIC: CREATION JUSTICE

Omaha campus.

“It is a pretty hard time,” said Goldberg, the event’s moderator.

Another acknowledgment: the politicization of climate change.

Some faith leaders are reluctant to talk about climate change, said Kenneth Winston, executive director of Nebraska Interfaith Power and Light, a non-sectarian organization focused on addressing climate change. That’s especially true in shrinking congregations where pastors feel they can’t afford to risk alienating any remaining members, he said.

Individual members must take it upon themselves to be the driving force for environmental and climate causes in their faith communities, Winston said. It can start with small-scale actions, such as recycling or composting, he said.

To make progress on climate change, Fleener, OPPD’s vice president of sustainability and environmental affairs, said



said people need to listen to one another and engage in respectful dialogue.

“We can’t solve our problems if we’re calling each other names,” he said.

Ayad, a chemical engineer who previously worked in the semiconductor industry, said he believes there is plenty of common ground when it comes to climate. He called back to his days in Sunday school when he learned to “tread lightly” and leave a small footprint.

“This is all God’s creation and we’re part of that creation,” he said.


Steve Hultman of Crescent, Iowa, said Tuesday’s discussion left him feeling positive. Hultman, a volunteer with the Omaha chapter of the Citizens’ Climate Lobby, came

eager to learn what other groups are doing to advocate for climate policies.

He appreciated the emphasis on listening and establishing common ground. He also felt encouraged by the crowd of roughly 40 people in attendance.

Jeanne Miller of Douglas County, one of those fellow attendees, said she wished even more people were present to hear some of the important messages shared Tuesday.

“Try and be open to something that maybe you’re not 100% into,” she said. “It’s not going to hurt you.”

The Flatwater Free Press is Nebraska’s first independent, nonprofit newsroom focused on investigations and feature stories that matter. 

## Beyond Abraham’s Bridge: Care, Act, Reach

One of the most beautiful values our three congregations share is the importance of charitable service to our community. If you’d like to add a little more service to your life, come join the **Care, Act, Reach**

pantry delivery project on Friday April 5 (shopping) or Saturday April 6 (loading and delivering), bringing food from Countryside’s monthly food pantry for OPS families who are hungry but can’t pick it up.

Oh—did we mention that it’s fun?! [Click here](#) to sign up. Questions, contact [Shari Hess](#) 402-290-0122, slhess45@mac.com or [Jenn Vinton](#), 402-202-7478, jenniferfitchett@yahoo.com.

# Countryside Fellowship Gallery ~ March

Fellowship after services at Countryside is important in building community, deepening relationships, and fostering a sense of belonging among members and visitors. It's a vital aspect of the church's mission and values, and a tangible expression of our commitment to creating a welcoming and inclusive space for all.

Members and visitors gather together in the Sanctuary, Narthex and Common Grounds for coffee and conversation. It allows informal interactions and connections to be made and provides an opportunity for members to get to know each other on a more personal level.

Fellowship isn't just a social activity. It reflects a commitment to building a welcoming and inclusive community. It is a tangible expression of our belief in the power of connection and relationship-building, and a testament to the transformative potential of shared experiences and shared values.

