

COUNTRYSIDE CURRENTS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF COUNTRYSIDE COMMUNITY CHURCH



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HEARTLAND PRIDE 2024

BOARD OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND OUTREACH

Join us at Heartland Pride Parade and Festival in downtown Omaha on Saturday, July 13, and show your support for the LGBTQ+ community!

Heartland Pride is a two-day celebration that takes place in downtown Omaha at the Capitol Street District and CHI Health Center Omaha arena. This year's theme, Queer 2 Stay, celebrates the LGBTQ+ community and pays tribute to its enduring spirit. It includes a parade and a festival with

food, music and entertainment.

More than 35,000 participants and festival-goers are expected to be on hand to watch more than 150 groups march or ride floats adorned with colors, flags, and messages of pride, celebrating love and equality.

The parade will kick off on Capital Ave. and wind its way through the heart of Omaha, culminating at the CHI Health Center Omaha arena where the

festivities continue. Enjoy live entertainment, food and drinks, engaging activities, and connect with fellow supporters of equality and inclusion.

By volunteering or walking with Countryside in the Pride Parade, you can help make a difference in the lives of LGBTQ+ people in our community and beyond. Our participation demonstrates our commitment to creating a safe and welcoming space for

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The Box: June

The Social Justice and Outreach Board has chosen I Be Black Girl as the recipient of our June Box donations.



I Be Black Girl is an Omaha non-profit collective for Black women, femmes and girls. The goal is to help them reach their full potential through autonomy, abundance and liberation. Their programs include advocacy for Economic Justice for Black people, support for Black Led Investment, and Power & Policy Building which drives change in the systems that affect reproductive care. Birth Justice aims to disrupt the systems that perpetuate incidences of maternal mobility and traumatic care experiences in Black birthing people. We can help I Be Black Girl with maternity and newborn supplies.

See the Amazon wish list or add to your shopping list:

- Infant toys
- Clothing
- Diapers/wipes
- Lotions/ bath supplies,
- Nursing supplies
- Sanitary pads



The Box: July

The Social Justice and Outreach Board has chosen the Intercultural Senior Center as the recipient of our July Box donations.



**Intercultural
SENIOR CENTER**

Many seniors in our community, in particular immigrants and refugees, have many unmet needs: physical and mental health, educational and emotional and legal. ISC welcomes people from many countries offering culturally sensitive services and programs. A full agenda of classes and activities, outings and one-on-one care fill the calendar. Through the Eastern Nebraska Office on Aging lunch and snacks are available. A pantry assures adequate food supplies in participant's homes.

The pantry needs non-perishable goods:

- Soups
- Boxed meals
- Laundry detergent and personal care items.

The art classes need:

- Coloring pencils/crayons,
- Tempura and acrylic paints
- Construction/drawing paper



The Box is located in the church entryway. Place your June/July donations there or send Amazon purchases to Countryside.

NEWS YOU CAN USE!

Visiting the Columbarium



Columbarium Hours

A columbarium is a serene and respectful structure specifically designed to house the cremated remains of loved ones. Typically located in a church or cemetery, it consists of a series of niches, each holding an urn. For members of Countryside Community Church, our columbarium offers a sacred space for reflection and remembrance, allowing families to honor their deceased in a peaceful and dignified setting. It provides a tangible connection to the church community, ensuring that the memory of those who have passed on remains a part of our spiritual home.

The Columbarium is open during normal office hours Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. - 4 p.m. and Sunday, 8 a.m. - 12 p.m. Outside of these times, the Columbarium is accessible 8 a.m. - 8 p.m. through the external door, located around the playground on the lower level. Contact the church office at office@countrysideucc.org for the external door access code.

Board of Congregational Life

Caring for Countrysiders

The Board of Congregational Life supports the many stages of Countryside members' lives – from visitor and member welcomes to fellowship events, and from gathering together as a community, to pastoral care in times of stress, hardship and in joy! We are looking for a few members to join this heartbeat Board of the church! No special talents required – just a joy for Countryside and an interest in supporting our community through love and care. We'd love to welcome you to our board! Please contact Board chair, Autumn Cox, 3riverskids@gmail.com to see how you can be involved!

9 to Dine

New Group Forming!

Get ready for a delicious summer adventure! Our Nine to Dine group is gearing up for an exciting outing in July or August, where we'll be exploring a restaurant known for its flavorful yet economically priced dishes. With enticing restaurants like Finicky Frank's, Burrito Envy, Everett's, Smoking Jay's BBQ, Mantra Bar & Grill, and Dirty Bird's (and more!), there's something to satisfy every palate without breaking the bank. Watch the C-10 for more details on this mouthwatering event, and for further information, don't hesitate to contact Sheryl Lilley, sandhlilley@cox.net.

Board of Christian Education and Spiritual Formation

Let's Get Busy!

Do you have a special interest in the spiritual growth of Countryside's community? We have board involvement opportunities for members interested in imagining, creating and supporting children's programming, adult education opportunities, Countryside's lecture series, the church library, and more! Opportunities to imagine more for Countryside's spiritual growth are everywhere and we want you to imagine with us! Please contact Board chair, Kathy deBoer at kathydeboer2@gmail.com to learn more!

Board of Social Justice & Outreach

Juneteenth: Sunday, June 16

Juneteenth, celebrated each year on June 19, commemorates the emancipation of enslaved African Americans in 1865, marking the day Union troops announced freedom in Texas, two years after the Emancipation Proclamation.

Countryside will observe Juneteenth with activities in the narthex and Common Grounds immediately after the service on Sunday, June 16.

Explore educational information, volunteer opportunities, and engagement activities. Children will enjoy coloring pages and educational resources. There will be ample resources for learning more about Juneteenth, and a selection of antiracism books available for checkout. Enjoy a slice of Juneteenth's traditional Red Velvet Cake while engaging in meaningful discussions about this significant day.

Congregational Care

NEW MINISTER FOR COUNTRYSIDE!

SARAH RENTZEL JONES

Contact Pastor Sarah at
sarahrj@countysideucc.org



As we continue to "Imagine More" at Countryside, we are overjoyed to announce the hiring of Rev. Sarah Rentzel Jones as our full-time Minister for Congregational Care!

Before joining Countryside in March 2023 to serve as Pastoral Care Manager, she served as an Associate Conference Minister for the Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota Conferences of the United Church of Christ.

Rev. Sarah received her Master of Divinity from Lancaster Theological Seminary in 2006 and pastored in various positions for 11 years in Central Pennsylvania. She and her family moved to Hawaii in 2014. Sarah served as local church pastor on the island of Lana'i for three years and hospital chaplain on Kauai for four years.

When Rev. Dr. Jenny Shultz-Thomas arrived and began working with church leadership on strategic initiatives that would support Countryside's mission, it became clear that Sarah was the right leader to fill a new, fulltime position of Minister of Congregational Care.

Sarah officially began her work as Minister of Congregational Care on May 16, 2024. We hope you will join us in welcoming Sarah and her family as permanent partners in Countryside's ministry! You are invited to send cards of welcome and celebration of Sarah's ongoing ministry to the Church office or with Sarah directly.

Sarah and her family have made Omaha their home since 2021. Her husband, Don, teaches 7th grade math at McMillan Middle School. Together they have three children: Jack, Irene and Maggie. Sarah and Don joined Countryside in October 2022. Irene and Maggie have been active in Wednesday youth groups, and Jack now works with Countryside's audiovisual team.

Please extend the hand of fellowship to Rev. Sarah Rentzel Jones when you see her next. We're blessed to have her and the Rentzel Jones family in the Countryside family! 🌈



ON THE COMMONS

TRI-FAITH UNITY GARDENS AND HOPE ORCHARD UPDATE

Written by Kathy Beauchaine, Tri-Faith Unity Garden volunteer. Courtesy of *Glad Tidings* newsletter, Temple Israel

Spring brings the gardeners back to the Tri-Faith Unity Garden and Hope Orchard with hearts full of optimism and hands ready to work. Through the winter months, this year's plans were drafted and finalized. Many hours have been spent preparing the garden, calculating seed needs, rearranging the plots and irrigation lines, sharpening and cleaning tools, communicating with the USDA People's Garden staff, starting hundred of seeds in TEVA, meeting and building alliances with other "urban ag" folks in the community and receiving incredible gifts.

Last year, the Tri-Faith Unity Garden and Hope Orchard donated a few

This project is about more than filling food pantries. It is also about building community on the Commons and beyond.

Volunteers come from the Tri-Faith Commons community and the Omaha community at large.

pounds shy of four tons (8,000 pounds) of produce to the Omaha community pantries. The retail value of this was estimated at \$26,000. This was possible thanks to more than 2600 hours of volunteer effort, donations of goods, and funding from donors and grants. Also thanks to Temple Israel for use of the the land and water.

This project is about more than filling food pantries. It is also about building community on the Commons and beyond. Volunteers come from the Tri-Faith Commons community and the Omaha community at large.

As we look to the coming growing season please consider joining in on this fun, and sometimes muddy, adventure. Green thumbs welcome but not required! For more information, visit Tri-Faith's website at trifaith.org/ourwork/tri-faith-unity-garden-n-hope-orchard/.

If you can't volunteer your time, but still want to help out the garden, check out the Amazon wishlist at <https://amzn.to/3TPPMmP> or scan the QR code at right.



EID-AL AHA

**BEGINS ON THE EVENING OF SATURDAY, JUNE 15
AND ENDS ON THE EVENING OF SUNDAY, JUNE 16**

Eid al-Adha commemorates the sacrifice of Abraham and Ishmael. In Abrahamic traditions, Abraham is told by God to sacrifice his son. When Abraham is about to sacrifice his son, a miracle occurs and a lamb is provided instead. In Islamic tradition, this son is Ishmael as he is the first born and eldest.

Eid al-Adha is also the beginning of the end of the Hajj حج, or pilgrimage. Sharing of meat is important as a commemoration of the lamb that was provided in the place of Ishmael. Fresh meat is shared with family, friends, and the poor. This is one of the two most observed holidays in Islam. Visiting and sharing food with extended family is important during this holiday, as are community events, prayers, and acts of charity. (Info courtesy of the Tri-Faith Initiative.)

SHAVOUT

BEGINS AT SUNDOWN ON TUESDAY, JUNE 11

Shavuot, a celebration of the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, takes place seven weeks after the second Passover seder. Shavuot, meaning the "festival of weeks", is the second of the three major festivals celebrated by Jewish communities along with Passover and Sukkot.

Visiting the Synagogue and studying Jewish texts late into the night is a common tradition amongst Jewish families. This tradition is called a Tikkun Leil Shavuot. A common text that is read and studied during Shavuot is the Book of Ruth.

Some communities may decorate their houses or synagogues and eat dairy based foods to celebrate Shavuot as well. Cheesecake is a popular dessert for this holiday! Info taken from myjewishlearning.com

Open Doors and Sacred Spaces

The Importance of Countryside Hosting Outside Groups



In a world where unity and understanding seem to be withering away, churches like Countryside hold a unique position as centers for community engagement and inclusivity. While the primary purpose of a church is spiritual, Countryside's physical space serves a multitude of purposes beyond religious activities, transforming the traditional perception of a church from a closed-off religious facility to a vibrant community center.

By actively engaging with the broader community and offering our resources for various activities and events, Countryside is becoming a focal point for social interaction, learning and support.

Families find a venue for gatherings, local organizations like home owner associations and Alcoholics Anonymous discover a reliable meeting place, and individuals seeking assistance or companionship encounter a welcoming environment. This shift not only expands Countryside's reach and impact but also reinforces our role as a dynamic hub where people from all backgrounds can come together, collaborate and thrive.

Who Walks Our Halls With Us?

As the boundaries between religious and secular space blur, Countryside is emerging as a multifaceted institution that nourishes the spirit and enriches the fabric of community life.

"Hosting outside groups catalyzes Countryside's transformation of 'just a church' into a true community center," said Countryside's Senior Minister, Rev. Dr. Jenny Smith-Thomas. "It embodies the inclusive spirit and commitment to service that lie at the heart of our mission."

"Hosting outside groups catalyzes Countryside's transformation of 'just a church' into a true community center. It embodies the inclusive spirit and commitment to service that lie at the heart of our mission." ~ Countryside Senior Minister, Rev. Dr. Jenny Smith-Thomas.

Secular Engagement Using church spaces for non-religious activities promotes engagement and outreach. It provides an opportunity for Countryside to connect with people who may not typically attend religious services but are still seeking a sense of belonging and community involvement. Visitors may get to know our members, values and mission.

When groups like the Omaha Japanese School, Heartland Karate, Resonance, Sing Omaha, and the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus choose to hold their events at Countryside, the church becomes a canvas upon which to imagine a tapestry of diverse experiences.

Each gathering brings a unique hue and texture to the space. The audience can envision a community where cultural exchange, learning and celebration intertwine.

The importance of hosting outside groups in our spaces can't be overstated. When we open our doors to diverse organizations and activities, we foster inclusivity, strengthen community ties and demonstrate our commitment to service and outreach. We help enrich the lives of individuals and also fulfill our broader mission of spreading love, compassion and understanding in the world.

HEARTLAND PRIDE 2024

QUEER 2 STAY

Continued from page 1

all, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, and helps raise awareness about the importance of inclusivity and tolerance.

"Embracing Heartland Pride is a testament to our unwavering commitment within our faith community," remarked Countryside Engagement Coordinator Diane Scott. "It affirms our steadfast embrace of every individual within the LGBTQ+ community, without exception or reservation."

Assuring the community that Countryside provides an inclusive, accepting, and safe environment is especially important to younger members of the LGBTQ+.

Countryside's commitment to fostering an environment of inclusivity, acceptance and safety is especially significant for the younger members of the LGBTQ+ community.

"Our presence at Pride shows young people that there really is a place where they are safe and accepted for who they are.



Our presence at Pride shows young people that there really is a place where they are safe and accepted for who they are ... that they are loved beyond their wildest imaginations.



"Taking part in the Heartland Pride Parade and Festival each year provides us an opportunity to show these young people that they are loved beyond their wildest imaginations."

The event is also a great opportunity to connect with other members of the community, make new friends, and have fun! Let's come together and celebrate diversity, equality, and love. Will you join us?

To take part in the Parade, register here. To participate in the Festival, click here! For more information email Diane Scott (dianes@countrysideucc.org), or text her at 402-707-1556. 📍



Tig Notaro, Adore Delano, Amanda Lepore and Princess Nokia are scheduled to appear at this year's Heartland PRIDE Festival.

Antiracist Designation Team Seeks Volunteers

For years Countrysiders have participated in antiracist projects and book discussions. Over time, those talks developed into the idea that Countryside should become an Antiracist Designated church: "A public, collective commitment to the continual and on-going work to actively understand, identify, and dismantle racism wherever they find it."

In April 2023 a Countryside group, including staff, council members, moderators and the Antiracist Designation Team took part in an antiracism workshop with Rev. Dr. Velda Love. In the fall of last year the team initiated an all-church book read of Ibram Kendi's *How to be an Antiracist*.

Our youth and their parents also participated with an age-appropriate version. In January this year, we took part in a joint viewing and discussion of *A Time for Burning* with our faith partners, AMI and Temple Israel. For the past year, our youth have focused on antiracism, and will culminate that focus with their upcoming summer service trip.

But our job isn't done! As part of our on-going work, we'll create a congregational covenant that reflects who we are as a Christian, antiracist community. If you are interested in serving on a task force to help write the covenant, please contact Sharon Royers at sroyers@centurylink.net or text her at 402-319-2272. 📍

BOARD OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION & SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION



James T. Hicks Memorial Library Library Corner



Your library catalog is now almost completely online. You'll be able to access the library database or catalog from your home and put books on hold so you can pick them up at your convenience.

You can also come to the library and check out the book yourself.

Library cards will be issued by family unit, one card per family. Anyone from your family may check out books from your card.

You will have a card to carry with you. We will also keep a card on file at the library in case you forget your copy. There will be training sessions on how to access and use

the library catalog in May, July and August.

Please feel free to attend any of the sessions. Come discover the riches that await you at your library!

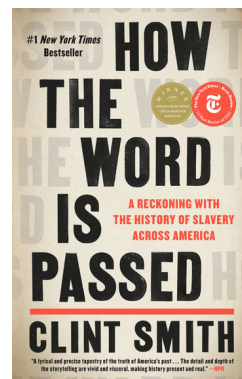
To request your library card, sign up in the Narthex or online, contact the church office or librarian.



The Bluest Eye, Toni Morrison (Review from Amazon.com)

National Bestseller * A Parade Best Book of All Time. From the acclaimed Nobel Prize winner—a powerful examination of our obsession with beauty and conformity that asks questions about race, class, and gender with characteristic subtlety and grace.

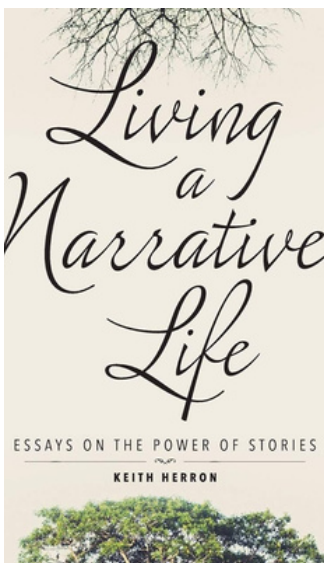
In Morrison's acclaimed first novel, an 11-year-old Black girl in an America whose love for its blond, blue-eyed children can devastate all others—prays for her eyes to turn blue: so that she will be beautiful, so that people will look at her, so that her world will be different. This is the story of the nightmare at the heart of her yearning, and the tragedy of its fulfillment.



How the Word is Passed, Clint Smith (review from Amazon.com)

This compelling #1 New York Times bestseller examines the legacy of slavery in America—and how both history and memory continue to shape our everyday lives. Beginning in his hometown

of New Orleans, Clint Smith leads the reader on an unforgettable tour of monuments and landmarks—those that are honest about the past and those that are not—that offer an intergenerational story of how slavery has been central in shaping our nation's collective history, and ourselves.



Living a Narrative Life: Essays on the Power of Stories, Keith Herron (review from Amazon.com)

Living a Narrative Life is an exploration of our vault of stories assembled along the arc of life. Our stories are sources of self-understanding, and if we draw guidance from those stories, each has something valuable to offer. *Living a Narrative Life* explores our vault of stories assembled along the arc of life. "This is the richness of life: to know your own stories, to value and understand them, and to share them with others. In doing so, we are all enriched," said Herron. By making sense of our stories, by mining them for their shades of meaning, and by sharing them in community with others, we deepen our understanding not only of ourselves but also of our place in our families and world. Herron (former Interim Pastor for Countryside) lives in St. Louis, where he teaches and writes at the intersection of spirituality and psychology. He has degrees in business, religion, education, and a doctorate in pastoral counseling and psychotherapy. He has served as a campus minister and as a pastor in the local church, where seeking the right questions is at least as important as finding the right answers.

All-Church Events at a Glance

June/July 2024

It might be summer break with vacations and days at the pool, but Countryside will be busy with all-church activities!

Past Event Photos

Did you get snapped at our last event? Check out the photos below and also our social media to see if you were snapped!



"Get involved. You don't want to look back on your life and realize that you successfully managed to stay out of it." ~ Robert Breault



June

Adult Education Series: *Destiny Café: Who We Are and What We Serve*

June 9, 11:15-12:15 - led by Joan Allen with goodies prepared and served by Destiny Café students and teacher. Choir Room.

Juneteenth Celebration

June 16 - Education opportunities in the Narthex.

Social Justice Summer Screening, *Common Ground*, June 19. Saving the planet, one acre at a time. Winner of the 2023 Tribeca Human/Nature Award. With Jason Momoa, Rosario Dawson, Laura Dern, Donald Glover & Woody Harrelson. (The July 17 film is TBA. Watch the C-10 for updates!)

Adult Education Series: *History of Israel-Palestine Relations*

June 23 & 30, 11:15-12:15, Choir Room. Led by Jeremy Fricke, vice president for Tri-Faith Initiative's Mission Advancement.

July

Adult Education Series: LGBTQ+allyship Training

July 7 & 14, 11:15-12:15
Led by Joni Watke, attorney and member of the Social Justice Board

Pride Parade & Festival

July 14. See pages 1 & 7 for details.

Sermon Talk Back

July 21, 11:15-12:15 in Sanctuary. Q&A with guest pastor Juan Carlos Huertas, Minister of Proclamation and Practice of Justice at First Plymouth UCC in Lincoln.



"Imagination is the beginning of creation." – George Bernard Shaw

Youth & Family Ministries

[Rebecca Morello](mailto:rebeccam@countrysideucc.org), Director of Youth & Family Ministries, rebeccam@countrysideucc.org

Summer Programming

Transitioning can be tough. So our summer programming is designed to help ease the anxiety of moving into a new age group at church. As our students move from one grader to another, say, from 4th to 5th grade, they're welcome to attend both the programming they are leaving AND the programming they're moving to in August. For example, a Core 56 student can come on Wednesday nights and to Jr. High youth group on Sunday afternoons. If you have a student who is in one of these transition periods, you will see more emails this summer to keep you updated on their activity options.

Children's Ministries

Pre-K-6th grade

June 2: Children's Church/Communion

June 9: Community Worship

June 16: Children's Church/Communion

June 23: Community Worship

June 30: Children's Church

Wednesday Wonderers, Core 56

Wednesdays, 6-7:30 p.m. If our activity is offsite, it is also the Core 56 activity for that evening.

June 5: Nature Art

June 12: Elmwood Park Picnic 4-8pm:
Grilling starts at 6pm (veg and non-veg options)

June 19: Break Part 1

June 26: Break Part 2. See you next week!

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!

We will not meet on June 21 or 28.

Group 1: Emotional Damage

Group 2: Holy Rollers

Group 3: Chaos Campaigns

Group 4: One Group to Rule Them All

JUNE

Jr. High Youth Group

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

June 2: ART! Let's make something amazing.

June 9: Scavenger Hunt & a teeny tiny bit of service.

June 16: Honoring Juneteenth and Who's in Charge Here?

June 23: Sr High Service trip send off after Sunday worship. No evening Jr High Youth Group.

June 30: Sr High Service trip returns around noon. No evening Youth Group

Sr. High Youth Group

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

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

June 2: Trip Itinerary and Expectations/ Cornhole Tournament!—**Required Sunday**

June 9: ART! and Superfight!

June 16: Juneteenth Education—**Required Sunday**

June 23: Sr. High Service trip send off 11:30ish (after Sunday worship). No evening Youth Group.

June 30: Sr. High Service trip returns! 12:00pm. No evening Youth Group





Children's Ministries
Pre-K thru 6th grade

- July 7:** Community Worship/Communion
- July 14:** Children's Church
- July 21:** Community Worship/Communion
- July 28:** Children's Church

Wednesday Family Activities and Core 56
Wednesdays, 6-7:30 p.m.

- July 3:** Taco Night!
- July 10:** Drag Queen Story Hour
- July 17:** Let's head to the Old Market (yes, I know it's hot.) Meet at 6 and hang around until we melt!
- July 24:** Game Night!
- July 31:** Movie Night...at a theater (location and film tba)

D&D group
Fridays, 5:30-8:30 p.m.

- Group 1: Emotional Damage
- Group 2: Holy Rollers
- Group 3: Chaos Campaigns
- Group 4: One Group to Rule Them All

JULY

Jr. High Youth Group

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

- July 7:** Hide and Seek
- July 13:** Pride Parade
- July 14:** Lego Flash Builds and Superfight
- July 21:** Mafia and Meme Battle
- July 28:** Field Trip to ACX Cinema/Bowling/Arcade (with Sr high, extended hours 4-8)

Sr. High Youth Group

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

- July 7:** Learn about our focus for next year and Name that Tune: Video Game Edition
- July 13:** Pride Parade
- July 14:** Let's cook!
- July 21:** Playdough Flash Creation
- July 28:** Field Trip to ACX Cinema/Bowling/Arcade (with Jr high, extended hours 4-8)

Countryside Fellowship Gallery ~ Installation

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.

