

# COUNTRYSIDE CURRENTS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF  
COUNTRYSIDE COMMUNITY CHURCH

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## Guiding Light

### A Year of Intention and Reflection Through Star Words

If you attended worship a couple of weeks ago, you may have received a Star Word as part of Rev. Jenny's sermon. For those who missed the service—or for anyone still eager to find their Star Word—Countryside Community Church has created an online Star Word generator. With just a click, you can receive your guiding word for the year.

*But what exactly are Star Words, and why are they meaningful?*

#### A Brief History of Star Words

The practice of Star Words originated as a way to celebrate Epiphany, the day in the Christian calendar that marks the journey of the Magi to visit the Christ child. Just as the Star of Bethlehem guided the Magi, Star Words are meant to serve as a personal guiding light throughout the year. Churches across the country have embraced the tradition, finding that these simple words can open doors to reflection, growth, and new connections with God and others.

#### What Do Star Words Mean for Countrysiders?

At Countryside, Star Words resonate deeply with our mission of spiritual exploration and community connection. Each word serves as an invitation to notice where God's presence shows up in our daily lives. Whether it's a word like "compassion," "courage," or "rest," your Star Word may offer insight or inspiration in ways you don't expect.

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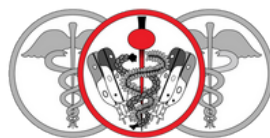
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## Social Justice and Outreach

### The Box ~ February



**NUIHC**  
NEBRASKA URBAN INDIAN HEALTH COALITION

This February, Countryside's Social Justice and Outreach Board invites you to make a difference by donating to the Nebraska Urban Indian Health Coalition (NUIHC), the recipient of this month's Box donations.

NUIHC is dedicated to elevating the health status of urban Indians and other underserved populations, providing essential healthcare, community outreach, and housing support. Their work includes transitional and permanent housing programs, ensuring stability for those in need.

You can help by donating cleaning supplies, personal care items, household necessities, and gently used clothing for all ages. Items can be placed in the Box in the entryway, or you can shop directly from their [Amazon Wish List](#) for easy giving.

Thank you for supporting this vital work and helping make a tangible impact in our community!

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## Social Justice & Outreach

### Fingerprints: A New Way to Make an Impact



The Board of Social Justice and Outreach is thrilled to launch Fingerprints, an existing ministry made new in a partnership with Together Omaha. Through this initiative, we'll help support a family (or families!) in need by providing essential household items.

For February, we're continuing the theme of LAUNDRY—detergent, fabric softener and more! Donations can be dropped off anytime on the counter or in the wicker basket behind the barista station in Common Grounds. On Sundays, look for the prominently displayed Fingerprints wicker basket. Questions? Contact Diane at [dianes@countrysideucc.org](mailto:dianes@countrysideucc.org). Let's leave our fingerprints on lives in need!

## COUNTRYSIDE ANTIRACISM COVENANT

# Living the Covenant: Embracing Antiracism Together

At Countryside Community Church, we believe faith is more than words—it's action. Our new antiracism covenant is a bold step in that direction, a commitment to live out our values by confronting racism in all its forms and striving for a world where love, dignity, equity, and justice flourish.

This covenant is more than a statement; it's a call to transformation. It challenges us to acknowledge the realities of racism, embrace moral courage, and allow God's love and justice to guide our steps. As individuals and as a community, we are invited to walk this journey with open hearts and a willingness to grow.

The full covenant was emailed to the congregation on January 29. On Sunday, February 2, we introduced this covenant to the congregation, affirming our shared commitment to racial justice. That morning, Sharon Royers led an Adult Education session exploring its significance, inviting us to reflect on how we, as individuals and as a church, can take meaningful action.

But making this commitment is just the beginning. Living into it requires intentional learning, self-examination, and action. It means listening to the voices of those who have been marginalized, challenging unjust systems, and fostering relationships rooted in empathy and solidarity. It asks us to recognize how racism manifests in our world—and within ourselves—so that we can be part of dismantling it.

As we embark on this work, let's remember that we do not do it alone. Together, as a church community, we support and hold one another accountable. We remind each other that this is holy work—an expression of our faith in action. May we move forward with courage, guided by love, and committed to justice.



## ANNUAL MEETING & SOUP LUNCH

# From Hanging of the Greens to the Annual Meeting—Soup's On!

Get ready to enjoy a Soup Lunch featuring two award-winning soups from our annual Hanging of the Greens! From 11:15-11:45 before our Annual Meeting on Sunday, Feb. 9, volunteers from Congregational Life will serve up some unforgettable soups, including two of the crowd favorites—Pennsylvania Dutch Chicken Pot Pie and Zuppa Toscana. These comforting, flavorful soups stood out among the rest, and now you'll have another chance to savor them as we come together for good food and meaningful conversation. The recipes will be available at the Soup Lunch.

### Zuppa Toscana ~ Denny Clark

Denny Clark's entry of Zuppa Toscana (Tuscan soup) is a rich and hearty dish that blends Italian flavors with a creamy broth. Traditionally made with Italian sausage, potatoes, kale, garlic, and a touch of cream, this comforting soup balances savory, spicy, and slightly sweet flavors. Though inspired by Tuscan cuisine, the version most people know today gained popularity through American adaptations, particularly from restaurants like Olive Garden.

While the Americanized version leans into a richer, creamier texture, traditional Tuscan soups tend to be more rustic, often featuring beans and a lighter broth. Regardless of the variation, Zuppa Toscana remains a beloved dish, perfect for chilly days and cozy meals.

### Pennsylvania Dutch Chicken Pot Pie ~ Maggie Jones

Unlike a traditional pot pie, this Pennsylvania Dutch Chicken Pot Pie dish from Maggie Jones (a dish just like her great-grandmother used to make!) has no crust and is cooked in a pot rather than a pie pan, which can surprise those unfamiliar with the dish. Its origins trace back to German immigrants who settled in Pennsylvania in the 1700s and 1800s. Though called Pennsylvania "Dutch," the term actually comes from "Deutsch," meaning German.

These settlers brought with them a thick stew called "bot(t) boi," made with ingredients like potatoes, beans, and lentils. As they adapted to available resources in their new home, the dish evolved into what we now recognize as Pennsylvania Dutch chicken pot pie—a hearty, comforting meal rooted in history.

Our deepest gratitude to the Board of Congregational Life, numerous volunteers and Diane Scott for all their hard work (and love!) that went into making this happen!

### Annual Meeting

Sunday, February 9, 2025  
11:45 a.m.

### Soup Lunch

Sunday, February 9, 2025  
11-11:45 a.m.

Join us for a soup lunch featuring award-winning soups, rolls and dessert immediately after the 10 a.m. service, 11-11:45 a.m.

[Click here](https://countrysideucc.org/register) to register or visit [countrysideucc.org/register](https://countrysideucc.org/register).

# VILLAGE HOUSE & SMALL GROUP NEWS

## Book Study

### Social Justice for the Sensitive Soul

Thursdays in February | 6:30-7:30pm

Looking for a thoughtful, meaningful way to explore social justice? Join us for a Book Study on *Social Justice for the Sensitive Soul: How to Change the World in Quiet Ways* by Dorcas Cheng-Tozun, led by Rev. Sarah Rentzel Jones!

We're teaming up with Urban Abbey for this engaging conversation, and we'd love for you to be part of it! [Click here](#) to register! Let's learn, reflect, and grow together!

## Tri-Faith Team

### Experience Tri-Faith in Action!

You're invited to attend AMI/Temple Israel services alongside members of our Countryside Tri-Faith team. This is a great opportunity to learn more about our Tri-Faith partners and show your support. Many joined Countryside for our Tri-Faith commitment—this is your chance to take a first step toward deeper engagement. Looking forward to continuing this throughout 2025 and to building relationships with our Tri-Faith friends. Let's grow together in understanding and connection.

Friday, February 21

AMI: 1:30pm at

Temple Israel: 6pm

Friday, March 14

Temple Israel: 6pm

AMI: No visit in March due to Ramadan conflicts

For details, contact Will at [reimer.will@outlook.com](mailto:reimer.will@outlook.com)

To register, click here!

<https://my.countrysideucc.org/OnlineReg/4471>

## Antiracist Designation

### Suggested Reading

In support of our Antiracist Covenant, the Antiracist Designation Team recommends Countryside's Village Houses and small groups read and discuss one of the following books:

- *How the Word is Passed: A Reckoning with the History of Slavery Across America* by Clint Smith
- *White Poverty: How Exposing Myths About Race and Class Can Reconstruct American Democracy* by Rev. Dr. William Barber II,
- *The Color of Compromise: The Truth About the American Church's Complicity in Racism* by Jemar Tisby
- *All That She Carried* by Tyia Miles
- *How to Fight Racism: Courageous Christianity in the Journey Toward Racial Justice* by Jemar Tisby

For more information, contact Sharon Royers, [sroyers26@gmail.com](mailto:sroyers26@gmail.com).

## Village Houses

### Find Your Place in the Village

Haven't joined a Village House yet? Now's the time! The Village at Countryside is a small group ministry inspired by the connection and purpose of traditional village life. Each group, called a Village House, offers a space to grow in faith, build relationships, and support one another. There's a place for everyone in The Village at Countryside. Join us and experience the joy of being part of a close-knit, supportive community! [Click here](#) to explore Village Houses and find your fit. Everyone's welcome—there's a place for you in The Village at Countryside!



# Lenten Devotional 2025: Everything In Between

This year, our Lenten devotional from A Sanctified Art invites us on a journey guided by the Gospel of Luke, beginning with Jesus setting his face toward Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). With stories like the Good Samaritan, Mary and Martha, the fruitless fig tree, the Lost Sheep, and Zacchaeus, we'll explore familiar scriptures that have shaped not just our faith, but also our culture and imagination.

These stories reveal the radical love of God, a love that disrupted the social, political and religious divides of Jesus' time. As we study them in their historical and cultural context, we can see how they mirror the divisions we experience today. Our theme, Everything In Between, encourages us to examine the polarities in our lives—faith and works, rest and growth, grief and hope—and to move beyond black-and-white thinking to embrace the spectrum of God's presence.

Each week, you'll explore these polarities through scripture, art, poetry, hymns and commentary. At the beginning of the week, you're invited to reflect on where you find yourself on the spectrum of values presented and to consider how God might be calling you to grow or change throughout the season.

This Lent, let's trust that God shows up not only in the extremes but in the spaces in between—shades of gray, rainbow hues, and everything beyond our expectations. Devotionals will be available Sunday, Feb. 23, for a suggested donation of \$5. We encourage you to engage at your own pace and use this as a tool for personal reflection or group conversation.

For those who would prefer the 2025 Pilgrim Press devotional, Into the Deep, visit <https://thepilgrimpress.com/products/into-the-deep-2025-lent-devotional>.

Let's navigate this Lenten season with faith, intention, and openness to transformation, trusting God to meet us wherever we are.

## Ash Wednesday

Wednesday, March 5, 2025

**Begin your Lenten journey with reflection and renewal. Stop by the church from noon to 1 p.m. for the Imposition of Ashes, a quiet time to receive ashes and offer a prayer. Then, join us for our Ash Wednesday Service at 7 p.m., a contemplative worship experience marking the beginning of this sacred season.**

**Everyone is invited!**

# Investing in Our Shared Future

## Imagine More at Countryside

As we look ahead, we invite you to join us in imagining more—more connection, compassion and impact in our community. Your financial commitment to Countryside Community Church enables us to strengthen the ministries that make this vision a reality.

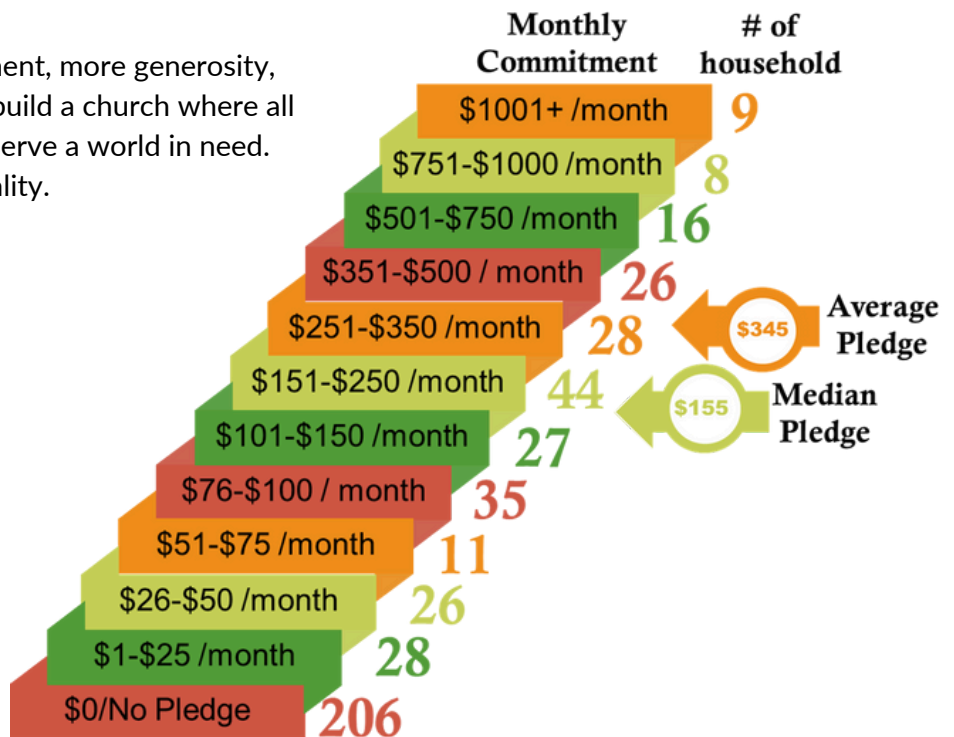
The Stewardship Committee’s *Imagine More!* campaign was ambitious, with a goal of raising \$1.5 million. We hoped for 100 percent participation by the congregation. As of Dec. 31, 2024, \$1,083,533 was raised, representing 61 percent of the campaign goal, with 72 percent of Countryside’s households pledging.

### How did you and your neighbor give in 2024?

The accompanying graph illustrates the breadth of generosity within our congregation. Each commitment—no matter the level—plays a vital role in sustaining the mission and work of Countryside. The number of households pledging at each level reflects the collective spirit of giving, while the average and median pledge amounts offer insight into the overall financial support that fuels our ministries.

The stewardship committee is committed to deepening this culture of generosity in 2025. Key initiatives include transitioning to a year-round stewardship campaign, increasing participation by encouraging all households to pledge, exploring new revenue-generating opportunities, and expanding our focus on planned giving and legacy gifts.

By imagining more—more engagement, more generosity, and more impact—we continue to build a church where all are welcomed and empowered to serve a world in need. Together, we make this vision a reality.



\*data based on 2025 pledges

# ON THE COMMONS



## Race Religion and Social Justice Conference 2025

Food has the power to foster understanding and unity, and our annual Race, Religion, and Social Justice (RRSJ) Conference, June 11, 2025, will explore how it serves as a catalyst for social justice movements. This year's theme is *Fueling the Work*.

Whether you're an experienced speaker or a first-timer, we invite you to submit a proposal. The deadline has been extended to February 20. For more details or to submit, email [info@trifaith.org](mailto:info@trifaith.org).

## Dr. Hamza Haqqi Joins Tri-Faith Team

Hamza Haqqi, Ed.D, has joined Tri-Faith Initiative as part-time Director of Development. Dr. Haqqi has expertise in curriculum development, program design, and grant writing, and has worked with local nonprofits like the Business Ethics Alliance, Aksarben Foundation, and No More Empty Pots. Passionate about ethics, education, and community development, Dr. Haqqi is dedicated to empowering individuals through innovative initiatives and fostering interfaith dialogue and cross-cultural understanding.

## Spring's Promise: Celebrations Await!

*Chag Sameach to our friends celebrating the Jewish holiday, Tu b'Shvat!*



Tu b'Shevat, the 15th of Shevat on the Jewish calendar—celebrated this year on Thursday, Feb. 13, 2025—is comparable in ways to Arbor Day, although it's broader in that it's

about trees, fruits and new growth. It marks the season when the earliest-blooming trees in the Land of Israel wake from winter and begin a new fruit-bearing cycle.

Traditionally, people plant trees, though in Nebraska's February (brrrr!), that's not so practical. Instead, many celebrate with a special Tu b'Shevat seder, eating through the "four fruits" and sipping wine or grape juice in between, focusing on the Torah's praise of the Holy Land's bounty—grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates.

It's also a time to reflect on the idea that "man is a tree of the field," growing, changing and rooted in something greater. Although there's no official greeting for the holiday, the standard greeting of Chag Sameach works!



# Common Grounds: Barista on Board

## The Perfect Place for Your Next Meetup

Looking for a cozy spot to host your next meeting or catch up with friends? Look no further than Common Grounds Coffee Shop during Barista on Board, happening every Tuesday morning from 9–11:30 a.m.

Let Pam, our friendly barista, treat you to a delicious coffee or specialty drink while you enjoy the warm and inviting atmosphere. Whether you're planning a casual get-together, brainstorming a project, or simply want a change of scenery for your workday, Common Grounds is the perfect setting, and Barista on Board is the perfect time.



Why not schedule your next meeting here? It's a great way to connect, collaborate, and enjoy some of the best coffee around. Come alone or bring your group and let the conversation flow—see you Tuesday!

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## Star Words

Countrysiders have shared how their Star Words have guided them through challenges, illuminated opportunities, or served as a reminder to stay grounded in faith. A word like "patience," for example, might come into focus during a difficult situation, encouraging calm and perspective. Meanwhile, a word like "joy" might remind someone to savor life's simple pleasures.

### How to Use Your Star Word

**Reflect** Spend some quiet time contemplating your Star Word. What does it mean to you? Does it evoke a particular memory, goal, or hope?

**Display It** Write your word on a card, bookmark, or sticky note, and place it where you'll see it often—on your mirror, in your car, or as a screensaver.

**Pray with It** Incorporate your Star Word into your prayer life. Ask God for guidance in understanding how this word might shape your year.

**Journal** Keep a notebook or digital journal to track how your word shows up in your life. Reflect on its relevance as the year unfolds.

**Share It** Discuss your Star Word with family, friends, or your small group at Countryside. Hearing how others interpret and use their words can offer new perspectives.

### Get Your Star Word

If you haven't yet received a Star Word, we encourage you to use our online Star Word generator. [Click here](#) to discover your word and begin your journey.

# Meeting John Again for the First Time

An adult ed series with Rev. Don Sarton

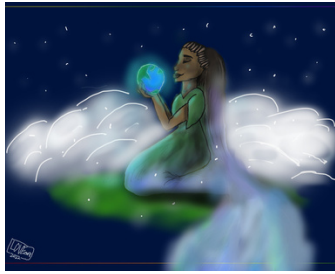
Feb. 4, Session #5  
Feb. 11, Final Session

# YOUTH MINISTRIES

## 2025 Climate Hope Art Contest

### Calling All Young Countryside Artists!

Join the UCC's 2025 Climate Hope Art Contest! This year's theme is *Planting Seeds of Hope*. Submissions are open from February 2 – March 14. Winners will be selected by age group, with an overall



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

winner receiving a trip to Washington, D.C.! Violet Cox, daughter of Autumn and Matt Cox, was recognized in the 2023 contest to raise awareness about the climate crisis. An online award ceremony will be held on April 5 to celebrate the finalists, with winners recognized across different age groups. The overall winner will receive an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, DC, where they will meet with congressional offices, tour the Capitol, and explore ways to bring their faith values to life in the halls of power. Additionally, the winning artwork will be featured as the official logo for UCC Climate Hope advocacy throughout 2025.

Questions? Contact Heather Moran here [heatherm@countrysideucc.org](mailto:heatherm@countrysideucc.org). Let's see Countryside's creativity shine!

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## Wednesday Night Programming

### Cooking Up Connections with the House of Bah

We have an exciting opportunity for 5 to 12-year-olds as part of our Wednesday Night Programming!

Countryside is teaming up with the House of Bah to offer a special cooking series called *Eat N Talk*. This hands-on series will run from 6–7pm on the following Wednesdays: February 19, March 19, April 16 and May 21. Kids will enjoy learning new cooking skills while engaging in meaningful conversations.

## Kamp Kaleo

### Summer's Calling!!!



The weather outside may be frightful, but the 2025 summer camping season is just around

the corner. Whether you're a first-time camper or a Kaleo veteran, this summer promises to be unforgettable. Don't wait—secure your spot today at [kampkaleo.com](http://kampkaleo.com)!

**Junior Kamp** (June 8-12), 3rd-5th grades.

**Little Kampers** (June 13-15), for children entering kindergarten, 1st and 2nd grades.

**Junior High/Senior High Kamp** (June 15-20).

**AGAPE Kamp** (June 26-30) Come to camp on your own terms and for your own purpose!

**Robotics Kamp** (July 6-9) No prior knowledge of coding or robotics is needed to come have fun and learn.

**Creative Arts Kamp** (July 6-11), formerly FaFA. Where campers can combine their love for the arts and the beauty and wonder of nature with their love for God.

**Adventures in Community** (August 1-3), designed for adults with developmental disabilities.

The Omaha nonprofit House of Bah is dedicated to uplifting the African diaspora, refugees, and immigrants through culinary training and workforce development. By blending education, economic opportunity, and advocacy, The House of Bah is working to bridge cultural food gaps, promote diversity in the hospitality industry, and create sustainable growth for minority-owned businesses.

If you know of a 5 to 12-year-old who would like to join, please contact Heather at [HeatherM@countrysideucc.org](mailto:HeatherM@countrysideucc.org).

## COMMUNITY SHARING

# A Message from Los Chavalitos: Gratitude and Hope

At Countryside, we're proud to support meaningful outreach efforts that make a lasting impact both locally and globally. One such initiative is our partnership with Los Chavalitos Clinic, a non-profit in Managua, Nicaragua dedicated to improving the lives of at-risk children. Through your generosity, we're able to contribute to their vital work, providing educational support, healthcare and community development to children and families who need it most.

We recently received a heartfelt thank-you letter from Dr. Francisco (Frank) Rodriguez, a Nicaraguan pediatrician and one of the founders of Los Chavalitos Clinic. Dr. Rodriguez, though no longer living in Managua, remains an active board member of APUSAN and keeps close contact with the clinic's director, Dr. Patricia Largaespada. Below is an English translation of Dr. Rodriguez's message, originally sent to Sara Pirtle from the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC):

*"May Almighty God bless you always. I want to thank you personally, and on behalf of the clinic, for the love that you have for our community. ... May God bless you always."*

Dr. Rodriguez's words reflect the profound impact your support has on the lives of those served by Los



Chavalitos maternal and child health clinic. Despite the immense challenges faced in Nicaragua—with international aid diminishing and government restrictions on active support—the clinic continues to provide a ray of sunshine to its community, thanks in part to your generosity.

Dr. Largaespada, the clinic director, also extends her gratitude. Last spring, she organized a small celebration for the Casa Base women leaders in honor of Mother's Day, a moment of joy captured in photos shared with us. Such celebrations, though modest, are reminders of the resilience and hope that endure in these difficult times.



## The Spirit of Nebraska

An adult ed series with Rich Mannel

Feb. 16: The Capitol

Feb. 23: The People



## Countryside Fellowship Gallery

# Looking back - Christmas Eve!

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.

