

# COUNTRYSIDE CURRENTS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF COUNTRYSIDE COMMUNITY CHURCH

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## LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS

### (WHILE THE WORLD SEEKS TO DIVIDE US)

This July at Countryside, we'll lean into the radical, relational call of Jesus to love our neighbors—especially in a world that so often seems determined to pull us apart.

Our special summer sermon series, Loving Our Neighbors While the World Seeks to Divide Us, invites four incredible, interfaith and

academic voices to share stories, insights, and reflections on what it truly means to be good neighbors. Together, we'll explore how love, relationships, and a shared sense of belonging can bridge divides and deepen the bonds that hold us together.

Each Sunday in July, we'll be inspired—and challenged—to live more justly,

compassionately, and lovingly, both within our own congregation and out in the broader world. From celebrating our common humanity to strengthening our community connections, this is a series you won't want to miss!

For the complete line-up and speaker bios, be sure to check out page 7! 🌱

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## Social Justice & Outreach Board

### The Box for June

## Center for Immigrant and Refugee Advancement

The Board has chosen the Center for Immigrant and Refugee Advancement (CIRA) as the recipient of our June Box.



CIRA provides refugee services, expert legal representation, and comprehensive social work to immigrants and refugees residing or arriving in Nebraska or Southwest Iowa. They are presently taking care of 13 immigrant families helping with rent, utilities, bus passes, etc. without any government support. Your gifts help ensure that CIRA can support our immigrant and refugee neighbors no matter what changes come. Donations may include adult and children's coats, notebooks, school supplies, twin bed sheets, and other linens, shampoo, toothbrushes, and other toiletries.

[Click here](#) to order from their curated Amazon Wishlist.

### The Box for July

## OmahaForUs



The Box 's donations for July go to OmahaForUs. This organization "believes that when LGBTQ+ individuals are empowered and informed we can best bridge gaps in care, culture, community, and service to our peers. Every day through place-based community development, we build intentional community and create equitable space, because there can be 'nothing about us, without us.'"

Helpful items that you can contribute to the Box include:

- Clothing; women's apparel especially XS & S; clean shoes sizes 10+ Women and 8+ Men.
- Toiletries: shampoo & conditioner, body wash, moisturizer, deodorant, body lotion, disposable razors, shave cream, and individually wrapped toilet paper.
- Food items: canned fruit, broth & vegetables; boxed cereal; applesauce cups/pouches; packaged dried potatoes; microwaveable mac & cheese cups; pancake mix; instant oatmeal or cream of wheat packets; and all purpose flour.

[Click here](#) to order from their curated Amazon Wishlist.

# Celebrating Shari Garder's 25 Years of Faithful Service



From left: Dan Loven-Crum, Heather Moran, Christine Kasel, Shari Garder, Diane Scott, Rev. Jenny Shultz-Thomas & Adam Witte.

On Tuesday, May 27, members of the Countryside staff and community gathered for a joyful reception honoring Shari Garder, our longtime Financial Secretary, who is retiring after nearly 25 years of dedicated service.

Though her work often took place quietly behind the scenes, Shari has been a steady and essential presence in the life of the church. Her careful stewardship of Countryside's financial records and processes has formed the foundation for all we do—supporting ministry, mission, and daily operations with unwavering precision and care.

At the reception, Finance, Administration and Operations Director Dan Loven-Crum presented Shari with a retirement gift on behalf of the church, thanking her for her years of commitment and integrity. The celebration was filled with warm conversation, laughter, and heartfelt gratitude—not just from colleagues, but also from Shari's children and grandchildren, who made a special trip to Omaha to be there for this milestone moment.

As Shari steps into retirement, she leaves behind not just well-kept books but a legacy of trust, excellence, and quiet strength. We are deeply grateful for her years of service and wish her joy, rest, and rich time with family in her next chapter.

## Fingerprints for June & July



Fingerprints is the Board of Social Justice and Outreach's collaborative program with Together Omaha that provides essential household items to specific families in need.

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 basket. Questions? Contact Diane at [dianes@countrysideucc.org](mailto:dianes@countrysideucc.org). Let's leave our fingerprints on lives in need!

### Fingerprints: June

## Pasta

Fingerprints is collecting **pasta for June**. And of course, you can't have pasta without sauce! Jars and cans are equally good.

### Fingerprints: July

## School Supplies

Fingerprints is collecting **school supplies in July**. Think backpacks, notebooks, pencils & pens, crayons or colored pencils, folders or binders, glue sticks or kid-safe scissors!

Let's Save Lives Together

Countryside Community Church  
**Blood Drive**  
**July 6, 2025**  
8 am - 2 pm

 **American Red Cross**

 **Countryside Community Church**



## Juneteenth at Countryside

# Welcoming Rev. Darryl Brown, Jr.

Countryside is honored to welcome Rev. Darryl Brown, Jr. as guest speaker on Sunday, June 15, in celebration of Juneteenth—a holiday commemorating the end of slavery in the United States.

While the Emancipation Proclamation was issued in 1863, it wasn't until June 19, 1865, that federal troops arrived in Galveston, Texas, to enforce the proclamation, effectively freeing the last remaining enslaved people. Juneteenth has since become a powerful symbol of Black freedom, resilience, and joy, and is now recognized as a federal holiday.



Rev. Brown is a dynamic pastor, author, sexual health educator, and nationally recognized advocate for justice. His work lives at the intersection of Black liberation, LGBTQ+ identities, public health, and spiritual healing. His memoir, *I'm Positive, I Forgive You (How I Forgave the Man That Gave Me HIV)*, shares his deeply personal journey through trauma, diagnosis, and ultimately, radical forgiveness. His ministry seeks to affirm the full humanity of every person and to help communities heal through love, justice, and authenticity.

Join us on June 15 as we celebrate Juneteenth, honor Black voices, and hear a message of hope from one of Omaha's most inspiring faith leaders.

## General Synod 2025: Into the Deep

# Why General Synod Matters to You



Members of the United Church of Christ gather periodically for General Synod—a vibrant celebration of worship, community, and the work of the wider church.

In July 2025, thousands will come together in Kansas City, Missouri, for General Synod 35, themed *Into the Deep* (Luke 5:4).

This national gathering matters to you because it shapes the shared mission of the UCC. Delegates will discern resolutions, celebrate our identity, and deepen

connections with one another, with global partners, and with God. It's an invitation to reflect on what it means to be the church today.

Whether you're new to the UCC or a longtime member, you're encouraged to tune in. A livestream will be available so all can experience the spirit-filled worship and important conversations from home.

Watch the upcoming C-10 for more details on how to connect and why this moment matters to Countryside and to you.





# Celebrating Freedom, Culture, and Black Joy

## *A curated selection from the Penguin Random House Juneteenth Reading List*

Juneteenth is both a solemn remembrance and a spirited celebration—a time to honor resilience, reflect on history, and uplift Black voices. Whether you're looking to deepen your understanding or join in the joy, this thoughtfully curated list offers stories that educate, inspire, and empower. [Click here](#) to explore the full Penguin Random House Juneteenth Reading List!

***Braided Heritage*** by Jessica B. Harris. A rich blend of memoir and cookbook that explores how African, Indigenous, and European culinary traditions merged to shape American food culture, featuring over 90 recipes.

***I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*** by Maya Angelou. Maya Angelou's lyrical memoir captures the pain and power of growing up Black and female in America with unforgettable honesty and grace.

***Rooted*** by Brea Baker. Part memoir, part manifesto, this book reveals the link between Black land loss and systemic inequality while celebrating the healing and freedom found in reconnecting with land and legacy.

***Magic Enuff*** by Tara M. Stringfellow. A vibrant collection of poems that explores survival, duality, and the sacred strength of Black womanhood.

***James*** by Percival Everett. A brilliant reimagining of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn told from the enslaved Jim's perspective, offering sharp wit and powerful insight.

***Four Hundred Souls*** edited by Ibram X. Kendi and Keisha N. Blain. A collaborative, chronologically structured narrative of 400 years of Black American history, written by 90 leading Black writers.

***Black Food*** edited by Bryant Terry. An evocative anthology that celebrates Black culinary excellence through recipes, essays, and artwork from across the African diaspora.

***The Warmth of Other Suns*** by Isabel Wilkerson. This sweeping narrative traces the Great Migration of Black Americans out of the South and its profound impact on the fabric of American life.

***woke up no light*** by Leila Mottley. A striking debut poetry collection from a former Youth Poet Laureate, exploring personal and political themes with vivid emotional clarity.

***Night Flyer*** by Tiya Miles. A luminous biography of Harriet Tubman that weaves together ecology, spirituality, and resistance in a reimagining of her life's journey.

***The Black Book*** edited by Middleton A. Harris et al. A treasure trove of archival material documenting centuries of Black life in America, newly updated and introduced by Toni Morrison.

***The 1619 Project*** created by Nikole Hannah-Jones and The New York Times Magazine. A landmark collection of essays and creative works that center slavery and its legacy in American history and present-day life.





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*Rev. Wozny's calm presence, depth of experience, and genuine heart for others will be a gift to us all during this season of transition.*

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## INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CONGREGATIONAL CARE

# Welcome Rev. Charlene Wozny!

**W**e're excited to share some good news: Rev. Charlene Wozny is joining the Countryside staff as our Interim Minister for Congregational Care on June 3.

For many in our community, Charlene is already a familiar face. Her connection to Countryside goes way back—she first joined the church shortly after moving to Omaha from Kansas in 1970. Not long after, she met her husband, Jim, and the two were married right here in our Chapel nearly 50 years ago. That deep history and her lifelong spirit of compassion and service make her a perfect fit for this role.

didn't follow a straight line—it unfolded slowly, with care and grace. She began her career as a nurse, earned a Master's in Counseling, and served as the Coordinator of the Adult Day Treatment Program at Immanuel Mental Health Center. Later, she followed a calling to ministry, completing her Master of Divinity at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities in 2000. Since then, she's served in many ways—from preaching in churches across Nebraska to leading Clergy Boundary Training Workshops. Even in retirement, she's stayed deeply connected to ministry life, including time on Countryside's worship planning committee.

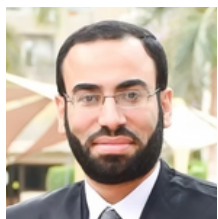
In her part-time role with us, Charlene

Charlene's journey to ordained ministry

*Continued on next page*

# LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS

## (WHILE THE WORLD SEEKS TO DIVIDE US)



July 6 – Imam Ibrahim Ashour, American Muslim Institute (AMI). Imam Ibrahim Ashour joined AMI in April 2024. A graduate of Al-Azhar University with a master's in Linguistics from Ain Shams, he previously served as Imam of Masjid al-Noor in Cairo. Passionate about interfaith dialogue, he's taught, spoken, and hosted programs in Arabic and English. At AMI, he fosters community, spirituality, and respectful understanding.



July 13 – Rev. Juniper Meadows, Minister, Second Unitarian Church of Omaha. Rev. Meadows is a passionate preacher, musician, and spiritual guide. She brings deep roots in Unitarian Universalism, a background in philosophy and theater, and a heartfelt commitment to justice, creativity, and community-centered faith.



July 20 – Rabbi Ben Sharff, Senior Rabbi, Temple Israel. Rabbi Sharff joined Temple Israel in 2023 and has served congregations in Arizona, Maryland, and New York. Ordained in 2004 by Hebrew Union College, he's a Brickner Fellow and passionate advocate for social justice, dedicated to helping others explore and deepen their unique Jewish journeys.



July 27 – Dr. Leah Georges, Creighton University / Countryside Vice-Moderator, Dr. Georges is an associate professor and program director in Creighton University's Interdisciplinary Leadership doctoral program. With a Ph.D. in social psychology, she researches leadership through a social psychological lens. She's an advocate for inclusive leadership and serves as Co-Moderator at Countryside.

Whether you're new to Countryside or a longtime member, this series is a meaningful opportunity to grow together in love, courage, and community. Let's show the world that radical neighborliness is alive and well. We hope to see you on Sundays in July!

*Continued from page 6*

## *Welcome Rev. Charlene Wozny!*

will offer spiritual and emotional support to the congregation—visiting with those in need, walking alongside folks through life's harder seasons, and helping us live more fully into our call to care for one another. She'll be in the office on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and in worship twice a month. If you'd like to meet with Charlene call the church office.

Outside of ministry, Charlene and Jim enjoy time with their family—especially their great-grandchildren—

and love exploring the outdoors whenever they can sneak away.

We're so glad to welcome Charlene back into ministry life here at Countryside. Her calm presence, depth of experience, and genuine heart for others will be a gift to us all during this season of transition. Make sure to say hello when you see her around—she's looking forward to reconnecting and walking with us through this next chapter.





# Hoops Installed in Activity Center



## A Slam Dunk for Countryside Youth

When Ryan Hunter first joined the Countryside staff as Interim Director of Youth Ministries, he had no idea that a gym—our Activity Center—even existed. But as a seasoned basketball coach with 20 years of player development experience, the moment he stepped into the space, he saw incredible potential.

Not long after, Ryan came across a unique opportunity: One Gym, a high-level player development center in Elkhorn, was closing its doors and selling off its equipment. He acted quickly—securing two in-ground hoops and one portable hoop from Bison, one of the top manufacturers of professional basketball gear in the country.

Based in Lincoln, Nebraska, Bison supplies equipment to major sports arenas throughout the Midwest and beyond. Their hoops are considered the Cadillac of industrial-grade systems. These particular models are adjustable to multiple heights, making them ideal for young

children just learning to shoot, as well as for high school athletes and adult players.

Bison's regional partner for Iowa and Nebraska, Riser, Inc., handled the installation. The company's owner traveled from Des Moines with his crew to complete the installation, anchoring the hoops to both the floor and wall for maximum safety and durability.

This vision—born from a serendipitous discovery and brought to life with Ryan's creativity and connections—has already begun transforming the Activity Center into a dynamic space for youth to grow, connect, and play. With high-quality equipment and a renewed sense of energy, we're excited about what this means for Countryside's youth ministry.

Whether it's pickup games, structured training, or community events, the Activity Center is now better than ever—ready to be a place where joy, teamwork, and belonging thrive. 🎯

# Celebrate with Countryside at Heartland Pride 2025!



Join us for the Heartland Pride Parade and Festival on Saturday, July 12, and show your support for the LGBTQ+ community! The Pride Parade begins at 9:30 am in downtown Omaha, winding through the Capitol District and ending at the CHI Health Center Omaha arena, where the festival runs from noon to 10 pm.

With more than 150 entries and over 35,000 attendees expected, the day is filled with vibrant celebration, connection, and joy. Enjoy food, music, and community as we come together in the spirit of love and equality.

Countryside will walk in the parade again this year, standing proudly with our LGBTQ+ siblings. "Our presence at Pride shows them there's a place where they are safe and accepted," says Engagement Coordinator Diane Scott.

The celebration continues Sunday, July 13, with Pride Sunday. We'll welcome Rev. Juniper Meadows, Minister of Second Unitarian Church of Omaha, as our guest preacher. Following the service, join us for Pride Lunch in Common Grounds.

To walk in the parade or volunteer at the festival, email Diane, [dianes@countrysideucc.org](mailto:dianes@countrysideucc.org) or text 402-707-1556. All are welcome!





# June/July 2025

Summer's here!



## June

### June 4

Children & Family Special Event, 6-7 pm

### June 8

Pentecost Sunday - Wear Red!!!

### June 11

Tri-Faith Race, Religion & Social Justice Conference, 8 am - 5:30 pm

### June 11

Documentary Premiere: *Abraham's Bridge*, 5:30 - 7:30 pm

### June 15

Juneteenth, Guest Preacher Rev. Darryl Brown, Jr.

### June 25

Family Bowling Night, 6-7 pm

### June 27

Ministry Architects, Open Session, 6-9 pm

### June 29

Open & Affirming Sunday

### June 29

Climate Change Panel & Discussion, 4-5 pm

## July

### July 4

Office Closed - Fourth of July

### July 6

Guest Speaker, Imam Ibrahim Ashour

### July 6

Blood Drive, 8 am - 1:30 pm

### July 12

Pride Parade and Festival, 9:30 am - 10 pm

### July 13

Pride Sunday, Guest Speaker Rev. Juniper Meadows

### July 16

Family Movie Night, 6-7 pm

### July 20

Guest Speaker Rabbi Ben Sharff

### July 27

Laity Sunday, Guest Speaker Dr. Leah Georges

For more events & information,  
check out the church calendar!



# RISE Volunteers Bring Hope to the Garden



## Tri-Faith Unity Garden

In May, volunteers from RISE Reentry Program spent a day in the Hope Orchard, clearing invasive thistles, picking up trash, and mowing the entire area. After their hard work, the RISE team invited the garden volunteers to join them for lunch. According to Marcia Blum, the conversations and connections shared over that meal were just as meaningful as the physical labor in the orchard.

The energy and dedication of the day offered a powerful reminder of transformation—both in the land and in life. RISE is Nebraska's largest nonprofit dedicated solely to prison habilitation\* and reentry. They walk alongside individuals transitioning from incarceration back into the community, offering a holistic model that includes character development, job readiness, entrepreneurship, and family support.

Efforts like this don't just nourish the soil—they help rebuild lives and foster the kind of deep connection that makes lasting change possible. 🌱

*\*Habilitation refers to the process of acquiring the skills, support, and confidence needed to live independently and successfully—often for the first time—after incarceration.*



## Tri-Faith Garden: Meet the Scientists

# Climate Conversations at Countryside



You're invited! Join us Sunday, June 29 at 4 pm in the Chapel for a compelling climate change presentation and Q&A with Nathaniel Tarshish, HUCE Environmental Fellow at Harvard University, along with fellow climate scientists affiliated with Cornell, NOAA, and Princeton.

Tarshish is a climate scientist with broad interests in understanding historical and committed global warming. He received his Ph.D. in Earth and Planetary Science from

UC Berkeley in 2024 and earned a B.Sc. in Mathematical Physics from Brown University. His research has uncovered surprising insights into where global warming comes from and where it is going. As a founding member of Climate Up Close, he and several colleagues engage the public through tours and discussions about climate change (more information at [climateupclose.org](https://climateupclose.org)).

This panel of climate experts will explore key climate questions about our changing world: Where is the boundary of climate knowledge? How has climate change influenced extreme weather? What does the future hold? This free event is sponsored by the Tri-Faith Unity Garden.

**STRENGTHENING  
ABRAHAM'S  
BRIDGE**

A TRI-FAITH  
FUNDRIASER

JUNE 11TH 2025

FROM AWARD WINNING  
DIRECTOR:  
ELLIE PIERCE

Book  
Ticket  
Now!

Best Nebraska Film  
Iowa-Nebraska  
Heartland Film  
Festival  
2025

Official Selection  
Bridge of Peace  
International Film  
Festival  
2025

Official Selection  
Cedar Rapids  
Independent Film  
Festival  
2025

Official Selection  
Culture of Encounter  
Ideas Festival  
2025

Winner  
Wilbur Award  
2025

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## Countryside Community Church Blood Drive

**July 6, 2025**

8 am - 2 pm

*Let's Save  
Lives  
Together*



**American  
Red Cross**

