

January 29, 2026

Dear Countryside Community,

I write to you with a heavy heart—and with a fierce, grounded hope. Not a naïve hope, but one rooted in the people of God who refuse to let fear, cruelty, or unchecked power dim our light.

First, an invitation.

As part of a growing coalition of Omaha congregations and faith leaders, we are planning a **peaceful Palm Sunday action on March 29**, on the lawn of **First United Methodist Church at 3 pm**. This will be a prayerful, public witness rooted in Matthew 25, as clergy and community members proclaim the Gospel's clear call to care for the vulnerable, singing songs of hope, and sharing messages of love.

Join us February 2 in preparation:

Clergy, lay leaders, and organizers will gather February 2, from 6–8:30 pm at **Countryside Community Church**, co-hosted by Countryside and Urban Abbey, for training, planning, prayer, and hopeful inspiration.

All are invited to join the training, make signs for March 29, and attend the closing prayer vigil from 7:30–8:30 pm in the Countryside sanctuary that evening.

Why this moment matters:

We serve a God who is light in the darkness—a God who calls the Church to be a beacon for those pushed to the margins. The Church is needed now more than ever: to tell the truth, to protect the vulnerable, and to shine light where shadows threaten to take hold.

Over the past year, we have witnessed profound harm caused by policies and practices that dehumanize our neighbors. In Minnesota, our siblings are living with fear, trauma, and loss. Innocent lives are being disrupted through the misuse of power. We cannot stand silently while dignity is stripped away.

Scripture calls the Church to **come and see**—and having seen, to speak truth and embody light. In Matthew 25, Jesus offers a clear measure of faithfulness. He tells of a King who says:

*“When I was hungry, you fed me.
When I was thirsty, you gave me drink.
When I was a stranger, you welcomed me.
When I was sick or imprisoned, you came and cared.”*

And when they ask, *"When did we see you like this?"* the King replies,
"Every time you cared for someone the world forgets, you cared for me."

Church, ***we are living in a Matthew 25 moment.***

In Minnesota, neighbors and strangers—clergy and community members—stood together in freezing temperatures to feed the hungry, shelter the vulnerable, and protect one another. We saw God's kingdom break through—on earth as it is in heaven.

We are called to do the same here in Omaha.
When the law is used unjustly, we offer care.
When harm comes to the least of these, we protect.
When fear and violence threaten God's children, we show up—together.

Not everyone can go to Minnesota. Not everyone should. But harm is happening here. In our own city, ICE has detained people unlawfully—often in plain clothes, in courthouses, before scheduled hearings. Our Black and brown immigrant neighbors are bearing the weight of this harm.

The call of the Church is clear:

Welcome the stranger.
Bind up the brokenhearted.
Give sight to the blind.
Set free the captives.
Protect the vulnerable.
Feed, clothe, and house our neighbors.

As we raise our voices—contacting elected officials, writing letters, and bearing public witness—we are also called to act together.

Our Associate General Minister of the United Church of Christ and Co-Executive of Global Ministries, **Rev. Shari Prestemon** (former UCC Conference Minister in Minnesota), has shared a comprehensive resource for organizations doing vital work on the ground. We invite you to support them as you are able.

[Clearing House of Mutual Aid for Our Neighbors](#)

Rev. Dr. Jenny Shultz-Thomas
Senior Minister, Countryside Community Church
#ICEoutLOVEin

And, what we all need, "[Streets of Minneapolis](#)," a lovely protest song from The Boss.