

“Following God through Jesus in work and word.”

IMMANUEL MESSENGER

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**IMMANUEL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
(EVANGELICAL & REFORMED)**

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Summer is over, and together we look toward the beginning of yet another program year at Immanuel UCC. It should be a time of excitement and hope, a time of energy, enthusiasm, and deep joy in all of the possibility that awaits. But, I must confess, it's difficult to feel enthusiastic and hopeful, it's hard to talk about God's love and the promise of new life when across our nation of late the voices of destruction, hatred, fear, and death have sought to drown out God's love song of peace on earth and goodwill to all (Luke 2:14).

Discussions about an epidemic of gun violence in the wake of the tragic shootings in El Paso, Texas and Dayton, Ohio, the rounding-up and detention of people at work, children separated from parents, references to immigrants and asylum-seekers as an invading infestation, and the rearing of white supremacy's ugly head in racist chants prompted by voices in the halls of power have dominated the headlines recently. It's hard not to be left reeling and feeling helpless and hopeless in the face of it all.

What is an appropriate Christian response to what is happening in our country and our communities? What does our faith have to say to people who have become desensitized by violence and destruction, who have been numbed by fear, and who've had their hearts hardened by hatred? How on earth are we to go about repairing the breach of the fault lines which have fractured our sense of community and cooperation?

As your pastor I find myself wishing I knew what to say that would make things better. I wish I could say something that would inspire change and help things make sense – something that would contain equal parts comfort and courage for you, my beloved congregation. I wish I knew the exact right thing that would be the healing balm needed to soothe the ache of people heartsick, people angry, people scared, people bewildered, people divided.

I do know that remaining silent or shying away from talking about what's going on in the world around us as if it's somehow irrelevant or too controversial for church is never the answer. We've learned from history that silence signals complicity and amounts to a neglect of moral responsibility.

The best I know to do is to look to Jesus – to the values he articulated, the values that define what it means to be a Christian, values that, for we who call ourselves followers of Jesus, should influence our choices in both our public and private lives. Our call is to take seriously his teachings by understanding that he actually meant what he said. He actually meant for people of faith to live what he taught. Perhaps the best place to begin, then, is by reminding ourselves of what Christian values actually are by recalling what Jesus himself taught.

Greatness: We must remain ever mindful that, for we who call ourselves Christians, no conversation about greatness can ignore what Jesus taught on the subject. Greatness, Jesus taught repeatedly, is measured in terms of service - service rendered most especially to the

lowly, the least, the little, and the last (Mark 10:42-45; Luke 22:24-27; Matthew 18:4). There are no two ways about it for Jesus; greatness requires putting others first. Enough said.

Welcome the stranger: This value is articulated, not just in the teachings of Jesus, but over and over again all throughout scripture. But for his part, Jesus knows well what it means to be a stranger turned away in a vulnerable and desperate moment. Just before his birth, his parents, who are far from home, are told there is no room for them and that they'd have to fend for themselves. Because his parents keep being turned away is why Jesus ends up being born in a barn (Luke 2:7). More than that, Jesus himself was a refugee who, as child with his parents, had to run for his life in order to escape a massacre in his homeland perpetrated by a corrupt and ruthless king (Matthew 2:13-21). We don't know what kind of welcome Jesus and his family received in Egypt when they crossed the border in search of safety. But at the very least we know he was not indefinitely separated from his parents, nor was his family sent back to where they had come from because Egypt didn't want to have to deal with them. It was Jesus, the refugee and the one for whom there was no room, who grew to teach that when we welcome strangers, it is as if we are welcoming Jesus in the flesh (Matthew 25:35). And when we turn strangers away, denying them hospitality for whatever reason, we may as well be turning away Jesus himself (Matthew 25:43-45).

Confront the powerful with truth. Jesus challenged the powerful with truth when they neglected the needs of the vulnerable (Luke 4:16-21; Luke 6:24-26; Luke 13:10-17; Luke 14:1-24; Matthew 19:13-15, 21-24; Mark 12:38-40; John 2:13-16; John 9:1-41; and many more). At every turn, Jesus stuck up for the poor and powerless. He called out anyone who would get ahead by cheating the vulnerable or by any other dishonest means. Time and again he warned against abuse of power and reminded anyone who would listen of the truth of God's special care for the poor and oppressed. I think, then, that means that as his followers we are expected to use our voices to call the powerful to account when they fail to uphold their moral responsibility to lead

with compassion and truth-telling, and we are expected to never make excuses for people of power who use their position to breathe lies aimed at cheating, belittling, and blaming the poor and powerless.

Love one another (John 15:12), and love your neighbor (Mark 12:31). Love for others, according to Jesus, is absolutely paramount. Along with love for God, love for our neighbors is our highest calling. In the story of the good Samaritan, Jesus tells us what it looks like to be a loving neighbor – to give of ourselves and to go out of our way to see to it that those in need have those needs fulfilled. The Samaritan even goes so far as to pay for the injured man’s healthcare without any expectation of repayment (Luke 10:35). More than that, by telling a story which depicts a Samaritan (one whom Jesus’ original audience considered to be an ethnic and religious outsider and historic enemy) as the hero, Jesus is illustrating that there isn’t anyone whom we shouldn’t consider our neighbor. Even the ones we’ve been told to suspect and to loathe and exclude because they’re just too different. That means that treatment, or even talk, of anyone which serves to belittle, humiliate, or demonize another, no matter who they are, or for whatever reason, is utterly unacceptable. Period. There is simply no excuse for hating others. Christians are those who love their neighbors – all of them – and Christians are those who understand that to love another is to want that other to flourish and to be willing to give of oneself in order to make that happen.

Nonviolence: Jesus is no fan of weapon-wielding. Not only does he inspire would-be stone-throwers to put down their stones when they have them poised to throw at a woman who’s been presumed guilty (John 8:1-11), but also when the disciples ask whether they should strike with the sword, and they go ahead and do it without waiting for an answer, Jesus scolds them, saying “no more of this,” and he heals the man who has been hurt (Luke 22:49-51). In the gospel of John’s telling, Jesus says “put your sword [or your assault weapon] back” (John 18:11). Further, Jesus points out the senselessness in resorting to “an eye for any eye,” calling his followers to instead turn the other cheek and show love to enemies (Matthew 5:38-47). I don’t think it’s

outside the realm of reason, then, to suggest that these teachings imply a call to do whatever we can to curtail senseless violence. According to Jesus, we are not to arm ourselves to the gills against our neighbors; we are to love them – even the ones we call enemy. Nowhere in Jesus' teachings is there any suggestion that there might be a good reason for an average person to be in possession of a devastating weapon of war. Instead, disciples are permitted nothing more than a simple staff for defending themselves (Mark 6:8) and are called to remember that it is the peacemakers who are blessed as children of God (Matthew 5:9).

Humility: Jesus has a lot to say on the subject of humility, but more than just talking about humility, he shows his followers what it looks like by washing his disciples' feet, serving them at the table, and bringing little children in from the margins to the center of community (John 13:4-17; Matthew 18:4; Luke 14:11). Humility involves a willingness to listen and learn, a willingness to put others first, and a willingness to take the voices and ideas of others into consideration without concluding we already have all the answers and therefore have no need to pay attention. Humility also requires a willingness to examine ourselves – our actions, our language, our assumptions, and the ways we participate in a system in which some profit at the expense of others. To be humble is to possess the grace to change when confronted by our own wrong-headedness.

In a world where all too often self-interest, falsehood, and fear seek to claim our allegiance, the values taught by Jesus are the values we cannot betray, the values that make us who we are as Christians. I'll say it again, because I don't think we can be reminded enough: Jesus actually meant what he said. He actually meant for ordinary people like you and me to live according to his teachings. The ideas of greatness (as defined by Jesus), love of neighbor, welcome to the stranger, non-violence, truthful challenge to the powerful, and humility are not merely suggestions of things that would be nice to try in an ideal world if we weren't so busy or imperfect or ordinary. Jesus seems to believe that we are actually capable of such things, imperfect and

ordinary as we may be. And because he seems to believe us capable, he lays out the living of these values as nothing less than expectations.

One of my heroes in the field of Christian ethics, Reinhold Niebuhr, who was very much a stalwart voice within our tradition of German Reformed theology, wrote about the moral courage Christians must summon in the effort to live by the values espoused by Jesus. “The hope of the perfect realization” of these values, Niebuhr wrote, should “generate a sublime madness in the soul. Nothing but such madness will do battle with malignant power in high places.”¹ May the hope of which Niebuhr speaks fill our hearts and our minds as we begin a new program year and as we continue to work together to serve the church of Jesus.

~Rev. Laura

“We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister* in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action....Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.

~1 John 3:16-18; 4:7-8

“The church is the church only when it exists for others...not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men [and women] of every calling what it means to live for Christ, to exist for others.”

~Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison

Reminder: On **Sunday, September 8th** we will begin our new program year. Sunday School will kick-off with a breakfast and parent meeting at 8:45 am in the fellowship hall. That morning we will return to our 10:00am worship schedule with 2nd graders and 7th graders being

¹ Reinhold Niebuhr in *Immoral Man & Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics*. 1932.

presented with Bibles during the service. We will also celebrate the sacrament of infant baptism for Mia Arnhoelter.

Confirmation Orientation Dessert Buffet
Wednesday, September 4, 2019 at 6:30p.m.

in the church fellowship hall

All 7th and 8th Graders along with their families and an adult mentor of their choosing are invited to an orientation session to learn about plans for the upcoming Confirmation year at Immanuel UCC.

Rev. Laura will provide a dessert buffet.

No need to bring anything just come and enjoy!

Regular Wednesday evening confirmation classes will begin on
Wednesday, September 11th.

Other Confirmation-related dates to remember:

- Wednesday, September 25th at 7:00p.m. is Confirmation Day at Lakeland University.

(Parents, mentors, and friends are encouraged to attend this event along with their confirmand.) We will meet at church that evening and walk to Lakeland together.

- On Sunday, October 6th the 7th & 8th graders will participate in the 10:00am worship service. Please plan on attending.
- Wednesday, October 16th at 6:00pm will be a joint activity and meal with youth from Bethel UCC and Bethlehem UCC.

You are invited to an Oktoberfest celebration

Saturday, September 21 from 4-8pm

hosted by St. Peter's UCC, Kiel at the Kiel City Park

417 Pain Street, Kiel, WI

Come enjoy Essen, Trinken, und Musik (food drinks, and music) complete with Hammerschlagen and beer tasting.

This is an eco-friendly event, so please bring your own beer stein.



Immanuel is off to the Races

Saturday, September 28th



We will be selling concessions at the stock car races in Plymouth
Meet at the Sheboygan County Fairgrounds in Plymouth at 4:15pm

We need 28 volunteers in order to receive \$1,000 for our church

There is a sign-up sheet located at the rear of the sanctuary

*Many thanks for Karl Knoener for organizing this effort on our behalf!

Special Mission Offering to be collected this Fall:

We will be collecting gifts for the annual **Neighbors in Need Special Mission Offering** of the United Church of Christ from **Sunday, October 6th through Sunday, October 27th**. Neighbors in Need supports ministries of justice and compassion throughout the United States. One-third of Neighbors in Need funds support the Council for American Indian Ministry(CAIM). Two-thirds of the offering is used by the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries(JWM) to support a variety of justice initiatives, advocacy efforts, and direct service projects through grants. Neighbors in Need grants are awarded to churches and organizations doing justice work in their communities. These grants fund projects whose work ranges from direct service to community organizing and advocacy to address systemic injustice. Thank you for your generous support of this mission of our wider church!

The Annual Rural Church Fellowship CROP Walk is coming up on Sunday, October 13th. CROP Walks are community-wide events to raise funds to end hunger at home and around the world. Envelopes for fundraising are available from Carol Knoener. Please consider fundraising, donating, and walking with us. Registration for the CROP Walk is at 12:30pm on October 13th at Memorial Park in Howards Grove, with the walk set to begin at 12:45pm. There are two-mile and four-mile options for walking around town as we seek to end hunger one step at a time. All ages are welcome to participate!

Steeple Project Update

On Sunday, August 8th we held an information session regarding our church steeple. The damage sustained by the steeple was discussed as well as three potential options for addressing the situation:

OPTION ALPHA:

Steeple replacement roof:	\$70,000
Flat roofing in the belfry:	\$8,800
Mason repairs to exterior:	\$48,500
New aluminum louvers:	\$36,000
Replacement of rotten wood:	\$14,500
Replacement of rotten windows:	\$16,600
Aerial lift rental:	\$16,000

TOTAL: \$210,400

OPTION BRAVO:

Steeple replacement roof:	\$70,000
Flat roofing in the belfry:	\$8,800
Mason repairs to exterior:	\$54,300
New aluminum louvers:	\$34,300
Budget for rotten wood:	\$16,850
(can go up)	
scaffolding:	\$33,900

TOTAL: \$218,150

(Does NOT include replacement of rotted windows)

OPTION CHARLIE:

Cut the steeple off above the roofline capstones above the south facing doorway

Removal of steeple:	\$99,500
Roof framing:	\$25,900
Aerial lift rental (minimum):	\$16,000

TOTAL (MINIMUM): \$141,400

(Does NOT include engineering needed for structure revamping or the approval process/fees for the State of WI to change the structure in this manner)

The Consistory continues to work on this project – researching and compiling a variety of financing options.

Please save the date for a formal congregational meeting to be held on Sunday, November 3rd after worship. At this meeting we will decide about moving forward with our proposed steeple repair project and we will consider financing options. Please plan on attending to add your voice to the continued work of our church. **A steeple fund has been set up for gifts to the project.** Please continue to keep our church in mind when considering extra mile monetary gifts, and please keep our church in your prayers.

SAVE THE DATE

Rural Church Fellowship Mission Trip To Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, Mississippi

June 13-21, 2020

\$250 per person

(We are asking for a \$50 commitment fee to be submitted to the Rural Church Fellowship by December 1st, 2019.)

A couple of Rural Church Fellowship fundraisers have already been scheduled to help cover the cost of transportation, food, & housing:

- Brat Fry and bake sale at the Piggly Wiggly in Plymouth in April, 2020
- Chili Cook Off at Laack's Hall on Sunday, November 17th at 12:30pm (\$20 entry fee)

*Please note, you must be at least 14 years old to participate, and for every 4 "unskilled" volunteers, we need 1 "skilled" volunteer.

Rural Church Fellowship has several events scheduled.

CROP Walk is scheduled for October 13th. There will be 2 & 4 mile routes to walk. Please get your donation packet from Carol Knoener

Stock Car Race Volunteering Opportunity

We will be working the concession stands at the Plymouth Stockcar races on Sept 28th. Please help earn \$1000 for church. There is a sign-up sheet on the table in the back of church. If you have any questions - ask Karl & Carol Knoener.

Women's Fellowship

The Women's Fellowship in collaboration with Vacation Bible School is again collecting school supplies.

There will be no September Women's Fellowship meeting.

We will meet on October 7 2019 at 6:30 P.M. At this meeting there will be an interactive discussion as to the future and direction of the Women's Fellowship. We will look at some opportunities and challenges to better service the needs of Immanuel and the community. The Immanuel Women's Fellowship has a history of over 100 years in service to Immanuel. We encourage anyone with some resourceful and innovative ideas to attend the October meeting.

Items for the Calendar:

September Calendar of Events

Every Tuesday at 9:30 am the Daytime Fellowship and Study group meets

(except for Tuesday, September 17th)

Every Sunday – worship at 10am (except for Sept. 1st it is still at 9:00)

Every Thursday- Senior Choir Practice at 7pm

Sunday, September 1st – Christian Education Committee meeting, 8:00am

Wednesday, September 4th – confirmation orientation, 6:30pm

Sunday, September 8th – Kick-off Sunday!

Sunday School breakfast and parent meeting at 8:45am, Worship at 10am

Monday, September 9th – Visiting Team, Consistory meets at 7:00pm, Women's Fellowship meets at 6:30pm

Wednesday, September 11th – Confirmation class
Sunday, September 15th – Sunday School 8:45, worship 10am,
German trip presentation with fellowship time to follow after worship
Wednesday, September 18th – Confirmation class
Saturday, September 21st – Oktoberfest in Kiel 4-8pm
Sunday, September 22nd – Sunday School 8:45am, worship at 10am
Wednesday, September 25th – Confirmation Day at Lakeland
University 7:00pm
Saturday, September 28th – concessions at the races 4:15pm
Sunday, September 29th - Sunday School 8:45, worship at 10 am

October Calendar of Events

**Every Tuesday at 9:30 am the Daytime Fellowship and Study
group meets**

**Every Sunday – worship at 10am (except for Sept. 1st it is still at
9:00)**

Every Thursday- Senior Choir Practice at 7pm

Wednesday, October 2nd – Confirmation Class

Sunday, October 6th – Sunday School 8:45 am, worship at 10am
(World Communion Sunday), begin collecting for Neighbors in Need

Wednesday, October 9th – confirmation class

Sunday, October 13th – Sunday School 8:45am, Worship at 10am,
CROP Walk at 12:30

Monday, October 14th - Visiting Team, Consistory at 7pm

Wednesday, October 17th – confirmation meal 6:00pm

Sunday, October 20th – Sunday School 8:45am, worship at 10am

Wednesday, October 23rd – Confirmation class, Newsletter items due
into the church office

Sunday, October 27th – Sunday School at 8:45am, worship at 10am

Wednesday, October 30th – Confirmation class