

# APRIL 2020



CoYo Zoom Meeting, March 2020

## WE ARE "CONNECTED!"

The new "CONNECT" call team has been busy calling Countryside families to check in with them during this difficult time. Although we began this effort because of our inability to physically gather together at the church, we're beginning to realize that God may have bigger plans for this concept. Thank you to each of the 58 callers and to everyone who's been picking up the phone or answering an email in response. Our community will become stronger in ways which we could not have foreseen. Contact Jan Brown ([janb@countrysideucc.org](mailto:janb@countrysideucc.org)) or Rev. Dr. Chris Alexander ([chrisa@countrysideucc.org](mailto:chrisa@countrysideucc.org)) for more information or questions. Here are some quotes from CONNECT callers:

- "Thanks again for your outreach. Tell the church we value it so much and I'm certain others will, too, at a time like this."
- "I made some more calls today and have just reached a woman who's suffered a big loss. I find the timing of my call to be a God thing."
- "When I called, we realized that we liked the same books, and she needed reading materials since the library is closed. We were able to get her some books and some much-needed groceries, and the deacons delivered it all to her doorstep."

- "I've had some lovely conversations through the Connect program with people I don't think I've ever met, and we kind of made a commitment to find each other at a future service to put a face with a name. There are also a couple people on my list that I did know, and it was nice touching base. Just thought I'd share."

Countryside is connecting in other ways, even as "the church has left the building." Prayer groups have formed as we pray together, twice every day, simultaneously, through a text message notification. This has been expanding within each group as they form bonds with conversation and prayers requests. The intention is to pray, as a collective, even though we each pray in our own way, with our own content and duration. People are finding these groups to be a bright spot in their days and are uplifted by the new and expanded relationships that are developing.

Folks, at a time when many are fearful, we need each other more than ever. We need to have a safe place to express fears and needs as they arise. If you wish to be a part of a texting prayer group, email Diane Scott at [Twang56@aol.com](mailto:Twang56@aol.com), with your name and phone number.

**We Are The Church.**



### WISDOM OF THE AGES FOR APRIL, MADI HORNACEK

Madi Hornacek, a 7th grader at Kiewit Middle School, is a cheerful, active girl who enjoys friends, running, music, and art. Until Confirmation Classes, though, she wasn't really "into the church thing. But now I am! Because Anji makes it really interesting." Anji Stanek, the confirmation teacher, has brought in speakers from all over the church, and they've done lots of fun activities, including dancing! Madi's favorite memory so far, though, was a visit to Skinny Bones, the pumpkin patch. They started going into scary maze, "but I totally chickened out and went and bought fudge and hot chocolate" instead! "I'll always remember it."

see page 5 for more about the Pastoral Care Board's Wisdom of the Ages



# PASTORAL LETTER, MARCH 27, 2020

Dear Countryside friends,

First off, I want to express my deep appreciation for all the love and support you have shown the entire Countryside staff – and each other – in the last couple of weeks. Countryside's staff and lay leaders are working extremely hard, in less than ideal conditions, to create new yet meaningful ways to keep the congregation connected and protected during this pandemic.

I am particularly impressed by your instant, overwhelming response to the **CONNECT Callers** initiative, helping ensure that every member of our congregation receives a regular check-in from another member. I am grateful, too, for the generosity of spirit you have shown me personally in response to my last pastoral letter. Your support and encouragement means a lot to me and my family. It is a privilege and honor to serve you in this difficult time.

I am writing now to make you aware of recent efforts to stay a few steps ahead of the curve of this virus. Every effort is being made to ensure our members' greatest physical well-being, financial security, and spiritual resilience.

**Physical Well-Being:** All Countryside staff have adopted a **"Shelter in Place"** posture for the foreseeable future. We strongly encourage you to do the same, in so far as you are able. This means, except where absolutely necessary, we work from home. We only leave home to seek, or provide, essential services. While our state and local governments have not yet adopted this policy, we feel that we are best able to protect our congregation – especially the most vulnerable among us – by standing firmly on the side of caution.

**Why All of Us Should Shelter In Place:** As this newsletter was being created, confirmed cases of coronavirus in the U.S. have just surpassed even China and Italy, making the U.S. the center of the global pandemic. We need to prepare for developments to happen very quickly now. Bear in mind that when Dr. Elnes stepped off the plane from Spain just two short weeks ago, Spain wasn't even on the "hot" list for the COVID-19 virus. Yet last week Madrid's convention center was turned into a field hospital and their hockey rink became a morgue. One of the best ways that we as a church can remain safe – and send fewer people to an overwhelmed hospital system – is by sheltering in place until after we are on the other side of the curve.

**Financial Security:** Recognizing that finances have already become extremely tight for many, Countryside has established a Community Assistance Fund. Through this fund we will do our level best to assist any Countryside member who is experiencing financial crisis so long as there are funds available.

Of course, the church itself continues to rely on your pledged commitments as well, to maintain the building, pay the staff, and provide services that are needed now more than ever. If you should find yourself unable to meet your commitment, please let us know and we'll adjust our income expectations. If you are not in a financial crisis, we hope you will maintain your commitment, as it is crucial that our community remains in a position of strength and service to the community.

## Seeking, and Providing, Financial Assistance During the Pandemic:

If you find yourself in such a crisis in the coming weeks, please contact the church office at 402.391.0350 or email [office@countrysideucc.org](mailto:office@countrysideucc.org) and we'll do our best to help, given the funds available. If you find yourself in a position to give to this fund, please know that your money will be directly helping people in our congregation who are in crisis. Just make a donation online at [www.countrysideucc.org](http://www.countrysideucc.org) or mail a check with Community Assistance Fund in the memo line. Any leftover funds when the pandemic abates will be reserved to help meet future crises.

## Church Office

13130 Faith Plaza, Omaha NE 68144  
Phone - 402-391-0350  
Email - [office@countrysideucc.org](mailto:office@countrysideucc.org)  
Website - [www.countrysideucc.org](http://www.countrysideucc.org)  
Facebook - [www.facebook.com/CountrysideOmaha/](https://www.facebook.com/CountrysideOmaha/)

## Program Staff

Contact information for program staff can be found on individual ministry pages.

## Ministers

**Rev. Eric Elnes, Ph.D.**  
Senior Minister, ext. 231  
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**Rev. Dr. Chris Alexander**  
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## Minister of Spiritual Direction

**Rita Otis**  
Minister of Spiritual Direction  
[rmotis@outlook.com](mailto:rmotis@outlook.com)





**Spiritual Resilience:** Recognizing that there is no lasting or meaningful material security without spiritual well-being and resilience, enormous energy is being expended to provide expanded and enhanced opportunities for online worship, study, fellowship, and service to the community.

In addition to re-fashioning worship to meet the needs of participants in their home environment, we are providing our small group leaders, COYO and confirmation leaders, board chairs, and Stephen Ministry and pantry leaders with **Zoom Business accounts** and training to enable their groups to meet face-to-face, only in a 2D environment rather than 3D. We are also experimenting with new uses of FaceBook live, FaceBook “watch parties,” LiveStream, YouTube, and other social connectivity media.

Countryside has also revamped and re-purposed resources like the **Converging Paths Podcast**, which now posts twice-a-week, providing our members concrete tools for meeting specific challenges this pandemic poses. Subjects include “Four Spiritual Practices for a Global Pandemic,” “How to Home-school Your Children (and Grandchildren) During a Pandemic without Going Crazy,” and “Keeping the Peace at Home When Chaos Comes Knocking” – an interview with our own Linda Coats, who just retired after 29 years as a counselor and family therapist.

In this vein, Countryside is also making it easier than ever to access and make use of the largest, single-source collection of progressive, streaming and downloadable Christian educational resources in the nation. Did you realize that WE created it? It’s called **Darkwood Brew** ([www.darkwoodbrew.org](http://www.darkwoodbrew.org)). See page 5 for more information about how to utilize this subscription-based library and it will remain free so long as you’re a Countryside member.

In the coming days and weeks, you’ll find a host of other spiritual resources made available to you: **prayer and meditation opportunities, online counseling, a congregational Bible study and worship series, and more meet-ups for fellowship and fun.**

And, of course, we’ll soon be entering **Holy Week and Easter** – the highest holiday period of the Christian year. On page 5, you’ll find how we are reimagining our Holy Week and Easter offerings to meet you where you are. Where we all are. Together.

Together, we’re not only going to face down this crisis, but emerge on the other side of it stronger than ever.

Grace and peace,  
Eric

**PICTURES FROM MARY JO AND LARRY'S GOOD-BYE PARTY**



Picture from March 8, 11 AM service

# HOLY WEEK, EASTER AND WORSHIP



## CONVERGING PATHS PODCASTS

The Darkwood Brew website ([www.darkwoodbrew.org](http://www.darkwoodbrew.org)) is now open to the public and there are many, resources there for viewing and group discussions: including the Converging Paths Podcast with NEW daily content from Eric Elnes. You can reach this podcast from the Darkwood Brew website or from any other podcast platform, just type in "Converging Paths Podcast" and then share the link with your friends. Lots of stuff to access here while you are home looking for new ways to connect. Perhaps you might host a "watch party" for watching the video of Sunday's worship or one of the Darkwood Brew episodes. If you need help connecting or finding a specific link, please contact Chris Alexander at [chrisa@countrysideucc.org](mailto:chrisa@countrysideucc.org)



## HOLY WEEK TENEBRAE: A HOME-BASED DEVOTIONAL

To meet the needs for home-based worship this year, Countryside is not only producing unique streaming worship opportunities, but is providing a high-quality, downloadable devotional guide produced by the SALT Project – a Mainline Christian resource producer that has the unique distinction of winning three Emmy Awards. Just download the guide, or view it through their provided e-reader. Use the guide to create simple, but meaningful worship in your own home, suitable for all ages. Download your e-reader at [countrysideucc.org/easter/](http://countrysideucc.org/easter/)

## PALM SUNDAY, APRIL 5: ONLINE WORSHIP WITH COMMUNION, 10 AM

Why not spread some fresh flowers around or lay jackets on the floor as a nod to the palms and cloaks laid before Jesus as he rode down the Mount of Olives on Palm Sunday? And don't forget the Communion elements!

## MAUNDY THURSDAY, APRIL 9: ONLINE WORSHIP WITH COMMUNION, 7 PM

Dr. Elnes's message will focus on the powerful insights one gains into the nature of Communion when one is aware of its connection to the Last Supper, which was a Passover Seder. We are hoping that Rabbi Aryeh Azriel can join us for this exploration. His participation will be confirmed later.

## GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 10: ONLINE WORSHIP AND PRAYER VIGIL, 7 PM - MIDNIGHT

The evening will start with music and a brief reflection by Dr. Elnes on Christ's crucifixion and the special meaning it takes on in our day. Afterwards, the focus will be on the Christ Candle in the sanctuary until midnight. You are invited to post prayers and prayer requests on the Livestream chat.

## EASTER SUNRISE, APRIL 12, 6:48 AM HOME WORSHIP

Since we cannot gather as a group outside, you and your household are encouraged to find a quiet place in your backyard or other outdoor location to pray, and read Luke's version of the Easter account in Luke 24. Alternatively, use the SALT Project Devotional Guide, which focuses on Matthew 28:1-10.

## EASTER WORSHIP: ONLINE WORSHIP WITH COMMUNION, 10 AM

Easter Sunday is typically a time when churches like ours pull out all the stops (literally, organ stops!), with massive choir pieces and brass bands. During this pandemic, we're simplifying – thereby drawing a little closer to the original Easter, where just a few people experienced something extraordinary. Don't lower your expectations! Just prepare to experience Easter a little more "up close and personal." Jesus is leaving the Tomb and entering your living room!

## HOPE: A PESSIMIST'S GUIDE - A WORSHIP SERIES, A BIBLE STUDY, AND A BOOK STUDY, APRIL 19-JUNE 7

**Worship Series:** Easter is about HOPE. A Global Pandemic fosters DOUBT. What happens when HOPE and DOUBT have a conversation? You get a new worship series and congregational Bible study called "Hope: A Pessimist's Guide"! If the name sounds familiar, Countryside originally produced this series in 2011, only we're totally updating it to allow it to speak powerfully to our day.

**Bible Study:** Concurrent with our worship series, you are invited to participate in, or lead, a small group Bible study! We'll be using video resources produced by Darkwood Brew, which are available at [www.darkwoodbrew.org](http://www.darkwoodbrew.org). Dr. Elnes will lead one of these studies online. Others will be led by small group leaders (perhaps you?) who will be trained in how to use Zoom or Facebook to stream the video to their group, accompanied by lively conversation. No biblical or theological experience is necessary. Pause points and suggested questions are all provided! All you need to do is hit Play and Pause to lead an invigorating conversation about finding hope in troubled times.

Darkwood Brew videos feature exclusive interviews with acclaimed author, Scott Russell Sanders, whose book, *Hunting for Hope*, inspired this series. Dr. Elnes taped these interviews in Sanders's home in Bloomington, Indiana. Other Darkwood Brew guests include Richard Foster, Phyllis Tickle, Carrie Newcomer and Bob Ravenscroft. Contact Rev. Dr. Chris Alexander for more information on becoming a small group leader.

**Book Study:** You can further enrich your experience of this series by reading Scott Russell Sanders's book *Hunting for Hope*, which inspired this series. If you'd like to form a book group to read this book in community with others, contact Rev. Dr. Chris Alexander.

# CARING AND LEARNING TOGETHER



## IN MEMORIAM

**Syntha Essex**, age 88, a formerly active Countryside member, died on February 29, 2020, and her memorial service was held on March 6 at a funeral home in Omaha.

**Elizabeth (Carlos) Figueroa's** mother Joy Perez passed away peacefully on March 9, 2020, surrounded by her children.

**Kris Calhoun**, 82, passed away on March 13, 2020. She's survived by her husband **Dick**, her daughter Karen Easterling, her son Eddie, and their families. There is no funeral planned at this time.

**Ann Luther's** sister Joy passed away unexpectedly in Lincoln on March 22, 2020.

## BOARD OF PASTORAL CARE'S NEW FEATURE: "WISDOM OF THE AGES"

For the next year, the Communications Committee of our board will be featuring two people from different age groups; we'll be asking them to respond to the same question. This month, we hope you enjoy their responses when we asked them to share their Confirmation thoughts and memories. Let's hear from De Schmierer:

In De's small church in Litchfield, Nebraska, Confirmation comprised a combination of Sunday school classes and baptism when you were old enough to consent. "I remember the baptism. It was complete immersion," says De. "It felt like a cleansing of anything that had happened." Years later, when faced with serious illness in her family, De's faith was further confirmed. "I was in Stephen Ministry training when my son and his wife were diagnosed with cancer. That's when I felt closest to the church. It got me through a bleak time."

*Madi Hornacek is featured on page 1.*



## ADULT EDUCATION AND SMALL GROUPS

Adult Education and small groups are still available to everyone but through ZOOM teleconferencing via our church calendar. If your group would like to continue meeting but is not sure how to set it up or how to connect via the calendar, please reach out to Chris Alexander at [chrisa@countrysideucc.org](mailto:chrisa@countrysideucc.org) and she will set you up!

## ZOOM MEETINGS ON THE CALENDAR

Zoom Meetings have been set up and connected to the dates and times of your usual meetings on the Church Calendar. To join your meeting or small group just find your event listed on the church calendar, at [countrysideucc.org/calendar](http://countrysideucc.org/calendar), click on it, and then click on the zoom meeting link. If you would like to send instructions for joining to others in your group you can find written instructions under "Zoom Resources" on the homepage of Countryside's website, [countrysideucc.org](http://countrysideucc.org).

## UPCOMING TRI-FAITH EVENTS

### OPEN HEARTS, OPEN MINDS, OPEN CONVERSATION, FRIDAYS AT NOON

Grab your lunch and join Executive Director Wendy Goldberg and the rest of the Tri-Faith Initiative staff for a weekly online Zoom discussion every Friday at 12:00 pm CST.

Join the conversation at: <https://zoom.us/j/333098683>

Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Conversation will pose a new question each week. Follow Tri-Faith Initiative for each week's topic!

### GATHERING TOGETHER WHILE APART WITH PRIYA PARKER

Fridays, April 3, 10, 17 and 24 - 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM,

Online Gathering Registration: <https://www.trifaith.org/gathering-together-apart/>

Featuring acclaimed author and facilitator Priya Parker, "Gathering Together While Apart" will discuss our sudden shift away from in-person gatherings, exploring how we can create intimate, meaningful opportunities for connection during this unpredictable time.

### MAKING THE FAMILIAR STRANGE: READING EDEN TOGETHER

Tuesday, April 14, 2020 at 12 PM - 1 PM

Online Zoom Event: <https://zoom.us/j/4029342955>

#### Topic 1: Grow

Making the Familiar Strange is an opportunity for interfaith dialogue that inspires people of different religious and nonreligious backgrounds to read the same text together. Rather than providing answers, creating arguments, or shutting down conversation, Making the Familiar Strange gives attendees an opportunity to investigate and share different perspectives on the same texts.

## CHECKING IN WITH CCC MEMBERS: FRANCE BLANCHARD

I am quite bored at home, I do not get to interact with my kids or grandkids which is really hard. It is, however, not as hard as us making each other sick. We have no desire to expose anyone at all. We do stay in contact and that helps. We can connect by Zoom, send photos, up messaging, etc.

It helps so much. I worry about all those who are out of work from all this and are vulnerable. I worry about medical personnel and the dangers that they are up against and their families who are also affected. I have no answers. We are fortunate to have church and choir friends who check in on us and have maintained contact. That personal contact is everything. It just keeps you going. It is the caring and kindness constantly practiced within our church family. It is larger than that though. Our family has been outstanding; our church family has been there, but best are the complete strangers who are willing to help responsibly and go out of there way to make sure we are ok. They are everywhere and are willing to help for no other reason than that it is the right thing to do. That has been a special upside to this virus. I hope my experience has been, or will be, yours also.

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-France Blanchard





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**"FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS"**

Finding and serving **GOD**  
in the midst of a **PANDEMIC**

Worship live at 10 AM, [countrysideucc.org/live](http://countrysideucc.org/live)

## COUNTRYSIDE CHILDREN AND YOUTH

**Core 56** - On Wednesdays, Rebecca will be offering a Zoom meetings at the regular time (6:30pm) for our Core 56 friends so that we can see one another and do activities together. Because our safety policy extends into the virtual world, the meeting will be password protected. Core 56 parents will be getting an email with the link, and are more than welcome to join us for our Zoom activities. Contact Rebecca at [rebeccam@countrysideucc.org](mailto:rebeccam@countrysideucc.org) if you have trouble connecting.

**Confirmation:** I hope this finds you well, and beginning to adjust to the "new normal" we will experience for the next month or so. I also want to let you know (in this time of activity cancellations) Countryside still plans to recognize our 8th grade Confirmands. We are looking at a few options and will talk with the students about ideas as well. Confirmation will still meet remotely via Zoom so please check your emails for the meeting ID numbers. - Anji

**COYO Jr/Sr High and Faith Singers:** Meeting remotely via Zoom (6:30 - 7:30 Sunday nights) check your emails for the meeting ID numbers. If anyone has trouble connecting or wants information to attend contact Anji Stanek at [anjistanek1@gmail.com](mailto:anjistanek1@gmail.com).

More pictures from Youth Sunday and the Mystery Bus Tour



Mystery Bus Tour 2020!



Youth Sunday in February

