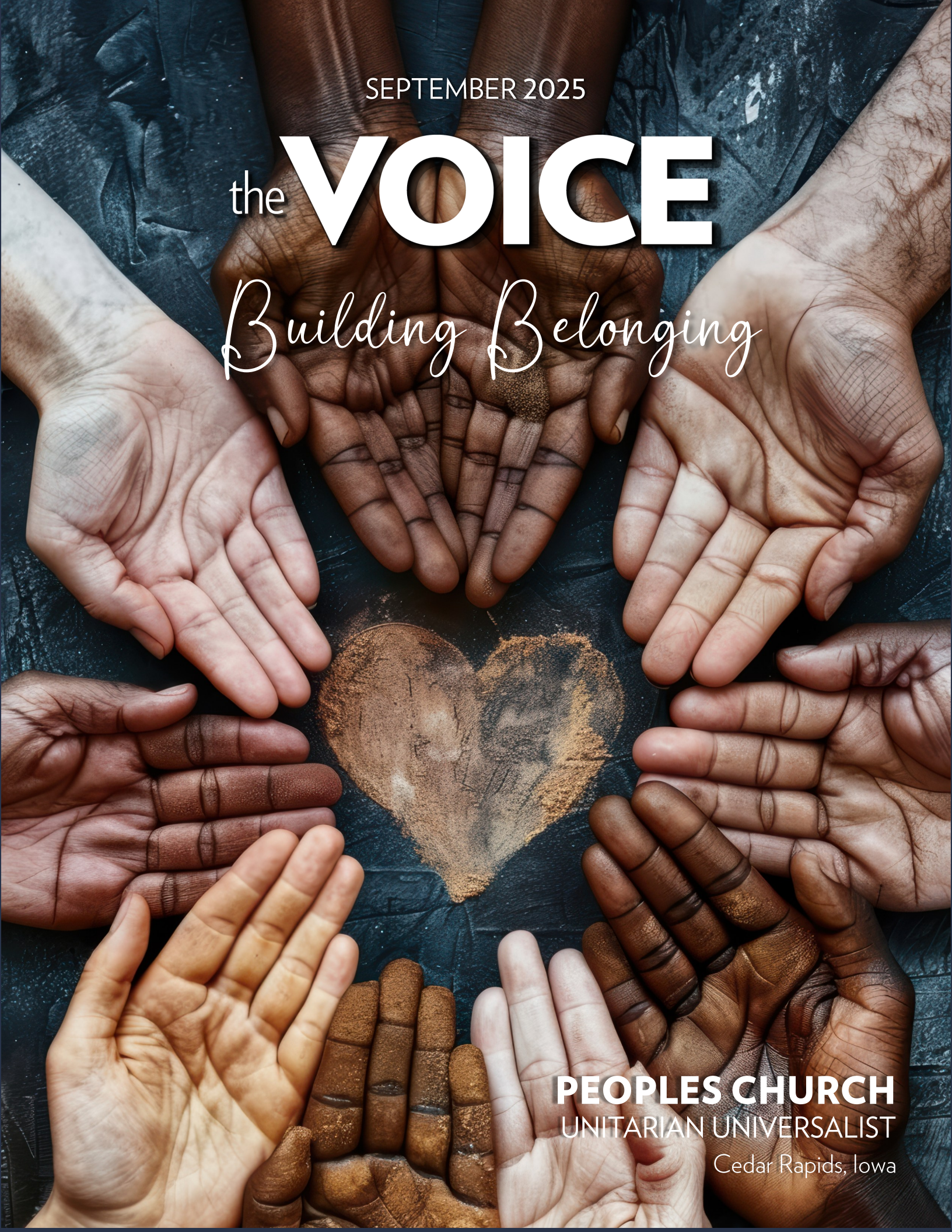




SEPTEMBER 2025

the **VOICE**

Building Belonging

PEOPLES CHURCH
UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

MINISTER MUSINGS



What is *your* earliest memory of belonging?

by Rev. Carin Bringelson

Some of my earliest memories of belonging were made at church.

I loved attending our congregation because I got to play with my friend Karen after Sunday School. We would run around the fellowship hall, giggle, drink red Kool-Aid, play on the stairs with the slippery railing, and do tricks (which likely would've made the adults cringe if they'd been watching). I'm sure we were loud, too; we were kids after all. No doubt about it though: Karen and I both belonged in that space at that time. We belonged to each other and to the congregation at large.

Belonging is a big reason why people choose Peoples Church. Sometimes, though, that feeling of belonging can be fleeting, especially if feelings get hurt or decisions don't go our way. It takes work to build a sense of belonging – it requires effort to keep showing up with our tender hearts and weary spirits. It takes vulnerability, persistence, and a real investment of our precious time. It requires us to center Love again and again, remembering that there is Something Greater than our individual selves.

Unitarian Universalist minister Rev. Dr. Mark Morrison-Reed has written: “*The central task of the religious community is to unveil the bonds that bind each to all. There is a connectedness, a relationship discovered amid the particulars of our own lives and the lives of others.*”

Morrison-Reed is talking about “building belonging” and is inviting us to consider:

- ✓ How are we connected to each other?
- ✓ How might you build belonging for yourself here at Peoples Church? Is there a new way you want to engage – and just maybe be transformed in the process?
- ✓ How might you help build belonging for others, be they newcomers or older timers?

In the process, what relationships might you discover among the particulars of your own life?

This month, may you know the deep joy of building belonging for yourself and those around you. And if you can't quite grasp how to best “unveil the bonds that bind each to all,” come again next Sunday. We'll figure it out together – or maybe we'll just run around the fellowship hall together, giggling.

Growing in Faith,

Rev. Carin



FAITH FORMATION

Do you just fit in, or do you truly belong?

by Interim Director of Faith Formation, Bridget Laflin

If you are anything like me, you have probably spent a lot of time in your life trying to fit in; at school, at work, in friend groups, in your neighborhood, maybe even in your family.

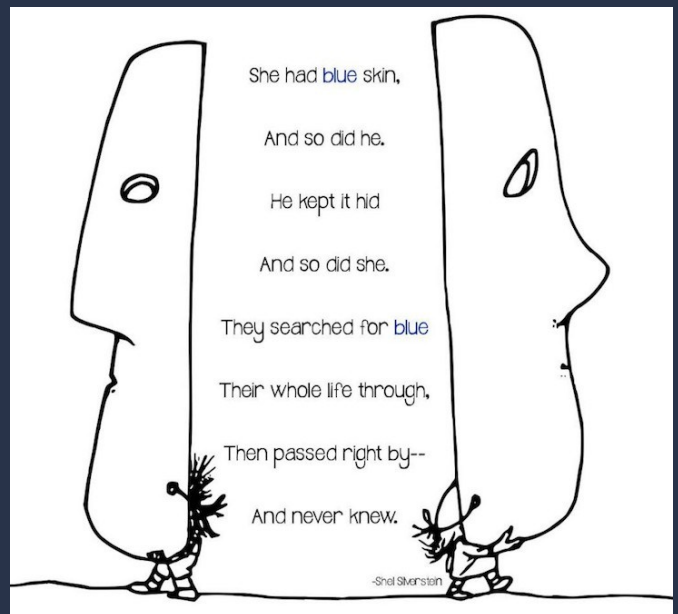
When we try to fit in, we change ourselves to conform to the expectations of a group. We might start dressing a certain way or speaking a certain way.

We might participate in activities that we don't really enjoy. We might start agreeing with the politics or opinions of the group, even if they aren't really in line with our own. But fitting in is not belonging.

We try to fit in because we have a strong desire to belong. What we don't realize is that we don't truly belong unless we can show up as our true, authentic selves and be loved and fully included. In fact, when we belong, our beloveds know us well enough to point out when we are bending ourselves out of shape to fit in with others.

It may be counterintuitive, but the only way to find the people with whom we truly belong is to let the world see us as the unique, weird, amazing people that we are.

It is scary, but I believe that when we live with integrity and have the courage to live fully into our own truth, we will find others who not only appreciate us but love us and rejoice in our uniqueness.





BOARD PRESIDENT

How might our vision for the future be shaped by those who don't yet feel they belong?

by Robyn Miessler-Kubanek

Creating community in our liberal faith tradition calls us to be intentional, not only in welcoming those who are here, but in asking who's not here, and why.

Some people visit, linger a bit, and then quietly drift away. That's a natural part of life. But if we're serious about being a welcoming community, we must ask: what might they have needed that we didn't provide? And what might they have shared that would have enriched us?

Belonging isn't just about comfort; it's about the relational space we shape together—how we interact, connect, and grow as a community. So maybe the deeper question is: who are we making space for in our shared life? Are we here to be with people who are just like us, or are we here to grow and learn from new voices, new ideas, and new ways of being together?

For example, how might we enrich our welcome for those who long to connect faith

with action, and who seek a community that will show up in the world with them? Many people find their way to Peoples through a passion for social justice. That's a rich invitation to reflect on how our commitments shape our welcome.

Where else in our church life—worship, learning, or caregiving—might different voices and fresh approaches open new pathways for participation? What questions should we be asking ourselves so we can identify the folks we most want to reach?

Belonging is a gift we can commit to sharing widely, with intention and purpose. What kind of a church might we become if we let that commitment guide how we welcome, connect, and grow together?

Let's keep imagining what belonging could become.



BOARD PRESIDENT

What responsibilities come with belonging to a community like ours, and how do we support one another in living them out?

by Robyn Miessler-Kubanek

Creating community in our liberal faith tradition calls us to be intentional—not only in how we gather, but in how we show up for one another.

Belonging isn't passive; it's a practice of paying attention to the needs of others and the whole community alongside our own. It requires listening with care, speaking with thoughtfulness, and trusting in one another's good intentions.

Our Covenant of Right Relations reminds us that community is nurtured through small acts of connection—in how we speak, listen, and respond to one another. Within our walls, this connection invites us into shared ministry rooted in mutual care. Beyond our walls, it calls us to live our values out loud in service of the world we hope to build.

In both settings, we're asked to show up, to offer our time and talents, and to support one another in our spiritual growth.

So what might it look like to gently encourage one another to stretch into roles or practices that may feel unfamiliar or uncomfortable at first—like joining a team, speaking up in a meeting, or offering a hand in a new role? How might we create a culture where we recognize invitation as a form of love?

Belonging is a gift, but also a call to live out our promises and support each other in doing the same. When we choose to participate with intention, we help shape a community rooted in care, courage, and commitment where we all can feel at home.

Let's keep imagining what it means to show up for Peoples Church.

SOCIAL JUSTICE



How is clean drinking water part of building belonging?

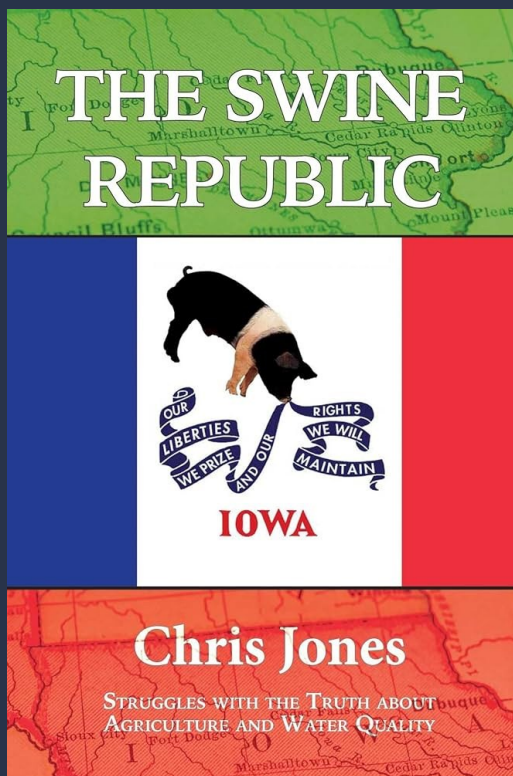
Water sustains every part of our lives — from drinking and cooking to cleaning, bathing, and growing food. Because water touches us all, access to safe and clean water is one of the most basic ways we build belonging. When some communities are denied this access, belonging is broken. Marginalized communities — including low-income families, Indigenous nations, and people of color — are often the first to face contaminated water, toxic waste sites, polluted air, and forced displacement. Think of Flint, Michigan, and the communities across Iowa where poor water quality continues to erode health, safety, and well-being.

As Unitarian Universalists, we affirm the interconnectedness of all things — including the water itself. The water belongs to us, and we belong to it. Building belonging means not only protecting the water that sustains us, but also standing in solidarity with those most impacted by environmental harm. To belong with one another is to share responsibility for clean, healthy water that nourishes every community.

In the coming months, our congregation will deepen this work by learning more about Iowa's water quality and engaging in actions that can make a difference. Together, we'll read *The*

Swine Republic by Iowa author Chris Jones, whose voice has called attention to our state's urgent water issues and the forces resisting change.

If you have wisdom, skills, or recommendations to share about how we can address water concerns, we invite you to be part of this circle of belonging. Please reach out to us at pcusocialjustice@gmail.com.



SACRED LISTENING



How can we listen in ways that create space for others to feel seen, heard, and valued?

by Laura McGraw, Chair of Sacred Listening

As we wrap up Phase 1 of our Sacred Listening Project, we reflect on how many connections have been made and, even more importantly, the quality of those connections.

We will soon be embarking on the next phase of this project, where we take an in-depth look at what we've heard and see how that information might inform how we move forward, both within our church and in our community.

Our listeners and story-tellers have reported very positive experiences. Listeners received training on how to truly take in what the other person is saying, without judgement, without giving advice, without blaming. They practiced listening without adding their own information or opinions.

By providing such an open, accepting environment, people felt that their stories were heard and had value. The simple act of taking time to sit down and ask meaningful questions is an act of caring and connecting.

The first phase of our listening project has already deepened the sense of belonging for many Peoples people. It is our hope that deep connection will become part of our practice.

BUILDING & GROUNDS

How is accessibility inextricably connected to building belonging?

by Bob Butikofer

When considering the title of our spiritual theme for the month, “Building Belonging”, I can easily see multiple interpretations, some of which are directly related to the Building and Grounds efforts that the team has been working hard on for the last couple months.

I’m sure that the intended interpretation involves building connectedness between the people of our congregation, both members and friends. How do we learn about one another, develop relationships with one another, truly understand one another, become friends with one another, and ultimately lean on one another in those times when we need support? I’ll leave the answers to those questions for Sunday morning services.

But now, thinking of this from a Building & Grounds perspective, how do we create “belonging” to our “building” here on Gordon Avenue? We probably all have a personal residence that we think of and care for as our home. I’d suggest that, as we think of our shared Gordon Ave. building and our fellow congregants, we consider this building to be our spiritual home, accessible to all.

Every relationship has “give and take”. Just as the building offers us shelter and support, we need to each play a role in supporting or caring for our building. When you see a property-related problem, take action: pick it up, clean it up, straighten it out, or report it to Building & Grounds!

We’ll be “building belonging” with one another as we “build belonging with our building!”



SERVICES & FORUMS

Sunday, September 7, 2025

- ✓ **Forum: Death Café at 9:15 a.m. in the Ely Room**
Together, we'll eat cake and talk about death. Join us for this open-ended roundtable discussion hosted by Dawn Stephens and Robyn Miessler-Kubaneck.
- ✓ **"Meeting the Waves" at 11:00 a.m. in the Sanctuary**
Led by Rev. Carin Bringelson — On this Water Communion Sunday, in-person participants are invited to bring a small amount of water from a place that is special. At-home participants are invited to prepare a glass of water and an empty vessel. Sometimes the waves of life bowl us over; other times, we can learn how to ride the waves. Today we'll gather together for the start of our church year, remembering to meet the waves with one another.

Sunday, September 14, 2025

- ✓ **"Belonging to the Moment and to One Another" at 11:00 a.m. in the Sanctuary**
Led by Rev. Carin Bringelson — In this age of an "Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation," we humans long to be connected to our best selves, to one another, and to something larger. As Unitarian Universalists, we come with different perspectives and understandings about the current moment we are living in. Let's intentionally and lovingly grapple with reality as we place Love at the center and practice belonging with and to one another.

Sunday, September 21, 2025

- ✓ **Forum: Social Change Now at 9:45 a.m. in the Ely Room**
Are you feeling called to deepen your commitment to justice, but unsure where to begin — or how to sustain your spirit along the way? Join us for a discussion series on the Unitarian Universalist Association's common read for 2025-2026, *Social Change Now: A Guide for Reflection and Connection*, by activist and strategist Deepa Iyer. All are welcome!
- ✓ **"New Year, New Needs, New Opportunities" at 11:00 a.m. in the Sanctuary**
Led by Rev. Carin Bringelson — As we continue to build belonging and the Jewish New Year approaches, we'll pause to reflect on where we've missed the mark in the last 12 months — and what might make the new year sweet. What will get us all free?

Sunday, September 28, 2025

- ✓ **"Stay With Me" at 11:00 a.m. in the Sanctuary**
Led by Rev. Luke Stevens-Royer — In these precarious days, for our souls and our communities, part of our spiritual work is to find points of resilience and light in the swirl of chaos and fear. Who, or what, are you finding at the thresholds, from ancestors to everyday strangers, lighting lamps of hope? Rev. Luke is the minister of First Unitarian Universalist Church of Rochester, MN.

September 2025

- 3 Faith Formation Leader Training at 7:00 p.m.
- 4 Membership Team at 4:00 p.m.
- 5 Jim Scott Concert at 7:00 p.m.
- 6 Board Retreat (offsite) at 9:00 a.m.
Kathleen Marsh Celebration of Life
At St. Paul's UMC at 4:30 p.m.
CUUPS Moon Ritual at 6:30 p.m.
- 7 Death Café at 9:15 a.m.
Faith Formation at 9:45 a.m.
Worship at 11:00 a.m.
- 9 Archives Committee at 10:00 a.m.
- 10 Shared Ministry Team at 10:00 a.m.
- 11 Worship Arts Team at 6:30 p.m.
- 13 Jerry Oydgard Celebration of Life at 10:00 a.m.
- 14 Faith Formation at 9:45 a.m.
Forum: Iowa Environmental Council at 9:45 a.m.
Worship at 11:00 a.m.
CUUPS at 12:30 p.m.
- 16 Social Justice Team at 7:00 p.m.
(All Congregants Invited)
Finance Team at 7:00 p.m.
- 21 Faith Formation at 9:45 a.m.
Forum: Social Change Now at 9:45 a.m.
Worship at 11:00 a.m.
- 25 PCUU Monthly Board Meeting at 6:30 p.m.
- 28 Faith Formation at 9:45 a.m.
Worship at 11:00 a.m.



PEOPLES CHURCH

MISSION STATEMENT

“Leading compassionate lives through spiritual growth and just action.”

BOARD of TRUSTEES

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