



The Union News

Union Congregational Church, United Church of Christ

401 Lake Avenue East, PO Box 10, Hackensack, MN 56452-0010

"No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey—you are welcome here"
An "Open and Affirming" Congregation



Church Office: (218) 675-6300
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DECEMBER 2019

Notes from
Rev. Torri Vande Zande

UNEXPECTED GIFTS

Several years ago, I was working at a church as a youth director. One of the members was a widow named Elayne and she had a cat named "Chewy". It was not in my job description, but every few months I would go to her home and clip Chewy's nails so he wouldn't rip up her furniture.

One winter, Elayne made a decision to go into a living assistance apartment. She needed to downsize her belongings and was having a hard time parting with certain items. It was near Christmas time, so she decided to gift some of her possessions to friends, neighbors and members of our church staff.

Elayne wanted to give me something special and close to her heart. She loved cats and thought it was nice of me to help her take care of Chewy. So, one day she walked into my office with a box that rattled and clanked. She was careful not to bend it and walked gingerly across the room to set it on a chair. She then said, "I wanted to thank you for taking such good care of Chewy. You are very special to me. I wish I could have wrapped this, but I didn't have any paper. It is your Christmas gift!"

She stuck her hand in the box and pulled out a mug... a cat mug! It stood about 4.5 inches high and held about 6-8 oz. Printed on the side was cleverly animated cats doing crazy cat-like things such as pouncing or hiding. The handle was sculpted like a cat tail and there was a theme written on the inside lip... "On the Prowl". It was cute.

I took the gift from her hand and thanked her for thinking of me. Then she said, "The rest of them or in the box! They are all for you!"

I tried not to look ungrateful or apprehensive, so I smiled and said, "The rest?"

"Yes!" She said, "There are 14 more!" I looked in the box and sure enough... there were 14 more cat mugs staring at me from the box. All different and unique with their own theme.

My first thought was, "What am I going to do with 15 cat mugs?" But my thoughts were interrupted by her next words, "These have been special to me and I wanted you to have them. Merry Christmas!"

I graciously accepted the box of cat mugs and thanked her for her generosity and kindness. I took the box home, unpacked the cat mugs and put them on one of my kitchen shelves. A few days later, I wanted to make myself a cup of hot chocolate. I thought of the cat mugs sitting in my cupboard and used one of them. Then the next week I wanted hot cider and I used another one, but this time I went through the themes and chose one that fit my mood. I found



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Sunday Worship at 9:30 A.M.

Communion: First Sunday each Month
Coffee and Fellowship Following Service at 10:30 A.M.

Church Staff

Pastor.....	Rev. Torri Vande Zande
Church Secretary.....	Sabbastian Wilson-Webb
Financial Secretary.....	Don Hoppe
Treasurer.....	Sheryl Kaubisch
Choir Director.....	Sheryl Kaubisch
Bell Choir Director.....	Heidi Hoppe
Organists.....	Sheryl Kaubisch
Pianist.....	Kathleen Millberg, Barb Nish
Custodian.....	Sue Johnson
"Morning Out".....	Sue Johnson

**Church Council**

Moderator.....	Joni Kumpula
Vice-Moderator.....	Tom Cox
Clerk.....	Karen Holle
Board of Financial Stewardship.....	Don Hoppe
Ministry Teams:	
Christian Learning.....	Jo Horak
Congregational Life.....	Margaret Zieffler
Facilities.....	Mike Bohanon and Ron Merritt
Personnel.....	Church Council
Worship.....	Heidi Hoppe
Men's Fellowship.....	Ron Merritt
Women's Fellowship.....	Linda Merritt



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myself going back to those cat mugs every time I wanted something to drink... and I thought of my friend Elayne and her cat Chewy.

Over the years, these quirky little mugs have brought me many smiles. I have used them on cold winter nights when I snuggled up with a cup of hot chocolate and a movie, I have used them during bonfire nights when I invited friends over, and I have used them when I have just a few friends over for dinner. They have become conversation pieces and a chance to share about my friend Elayne and her cat Chewy.

Elayne passed away this past year. Chewy passed away a few years earlier, but their memory and story have been engraved on my heart through 15 oddly creative cat mugs. They were an unexpected gift that has helped me remember my friends.

Some of the best gifts are unexpected. When I think about the Advent and Christmas season, I often think about how God gave us the unexpected gift of Jesus Christ. Who would have thought that the Messiah would be born from such humble beginnings? His family did not have money or prestige. He was part of a carpenter's family. But Jesus was unique. A special gift to this world to show us how to live.

My hope for you this Advent and Christmas season is to remember God's unexpected gift of Jesus. When you take the nativity set out of the box, remember Jesus' uniqueness. When you put that nativity on the shelf, think of it often as you snuggle up on cold winter nights with a cup of hot chocolate and a movie, or during a bonfire when you invite friends, or when you have just a few friends over for dinner. Thank you, God for such an unexpected gift!

May you and your family have a blessed Advent and a very Merry Christmas!

Pastor Torri

**DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS**

December 5	Kris Kayser
December 10	Grace Noonan
	Nathan Kalli
	Sandy Tauber
December 12	Michael Small
December 14	Charles Green
December 15	Verlee Cline
December 16	Kathy Adams
December 17	Angie (Tauber) Danielson
December 21	Lois Bohanon
December 22	Sandra (Zieffler) Kutscher
December 23	Dick Anderson
December 27	Gordon Ford
December 28	Kathy Green
December 30	Bev Patterson
December 31	Mike Gulbrandson



MODERATOR'S NOTES

Greetings and happy December!

This is definitely my favorite time of the year. I am a self-proclaimed Christmas girl. I love to decorate, both home and church. It's my total joy. I start at home in early November and have to wait until after Thanksgiving to do church. Garlands, wreaths, centerpieces, peanut brittle and cookies are all fabulous.

Along with the decorating, I love entertaining. A full table whether breakfast, lunch or dinner is my passion. Waiting for Thanksgiving to be done is very hard. Having our family for several days makes me giddy, and thought of my three grandkids gives me a high!

But along with all this joy comes the birth of our savior, Jesus. A time to slow down and think of the world over two thousand years ago with the stable, Mary and the journey she had taken while very pregnant with sore back and feet and of wise men following a star with gifts for a new King. It had to be a wondrous thing to be so important two thousand years later. It illustrates what a magnificent God we have to worship in this little church in Hackensack Minnesota. I do love this place!

Here's to you and yours having a wonderful Christmas and season no matter where you are. Do take time to fill yourselves with the wonders of our God who sent his son to teach us of his love and grace!

See you in church, Joni



Christmas Eve

Our Candle Light Service will be held at 4:00 on Christmas Eve.

Bring your family and friends and join us for scripture and song as we celebrate the Savior's birth.



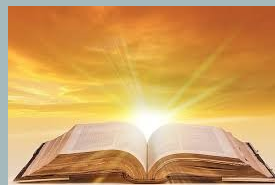
BIBLICAL TEXTS FOR DECEMBER

Dec. 8th – Kid's Program

Dec. 15th – I John 4:7-12

Dec. 22nd – John 1:1-18

Dec. 29th – Hymn Sing



In Memory
Dick Olsen

June 19th, 1948 –
November 20th, 2019

If you would like to send cards to Don and Dolly, their winter address is as follows:

Don and Dolly Olsen
411 Brookdale Dr.
League City, TX 77573

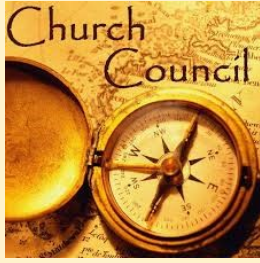
Holiday Hymn Sing and Our Move into the Friendship Hall

On December 29th, Pastor Torri will be on vacation with her family. As it is a 5th Sunday, our Worship service will be a Holiday Hymn Sing celebrating the scripture and songs of the season.

In addition, on that morning we will move our services into the Friendship Hall for the winter months.



Council Minutes – November 21, 2019



PRESENT: Sabbastian Wilson-Webb, Tom Cox, Mary Parrish, Heidi Hoppe, Don Hoppe, Mike Bohanon, Ron Merritt, Joni Kumpula, Karen Holle (Pastor Torri was ill today)

Joni called the meeting to order and offered a convening prayer.

The agenda was approved as written. Heidi/Mary. The minutes were approved as written. Ron/Tom.

Pastor's Monthly Report: Don reported that he and Torri had purchased a phone that could be used as the church's emergency phone, but that he planned to return it and use an old smart phone which would save us money. Joni indicated that she has an old phone she would donate. This phone would be used for church emergencies when Torri is not available. In Torri's monthly report she talked about meetings she has attended, people she has met and the results of our first Trivia Night. Eight teams participated in Trivia Night and a total of \$640 was earned for men's and women's fellowship outreach projects. Torri also mentioned that the technical aspect of the church service has become a bit more complicated due to the projection and video camera. **We are looking for people who are willing to push buttons. There is minimal or no technical experience necessary to help with this.**

Pastor Torri also wanted the Council to know how important she feels the Community meal is on Wednesday evenings. These meals are important opportunities for relationships to develop as we get to know people in our local community.

Torri also wanted people to be aware of a recent article from the Open and Affirming Coalition of the United Church of Christ. This article talks about the growth that has occurred in some ONA churches, specifically the ones that integrate its ONA commitment into its vision, identity and priorities. Karen will send the article to all members of Council who would like to read it.

Financial Stewardship: Don reported that as of the end of October 2019 church income is \$139,036 and expenses are \$119,039 leaving a balance of \$19,513. However we just learned that we owe the MN. Conference for Torri's annuity \$6,860. Once this bill is paid we will have a positive balance of \$12,653.

Don's team has been working on the 2020 budget. At this time the projected income for 2020 is not as high as the projected expenses. The team has more work to do to get these numbers finalized. The budget will be presented to Council at the January meeting and our semi-annual congregational meeting will be January 26, 2020.

Facilities Board: Ron reported that Advantage Heating recently looked at all our furnaces – 4 of which are 20 years old. One furnace is starting to rust out and will probably be the next to be replaced. A new furnace costs about \$8,000.

Council members signed a card for Julie Rono and made donations to a gift for her in thanks for her years of service to the church.

Ministry teams: Congregational Life: Karen reported that at our last Congregational Life meeting the team decided that we don't want to hire a parish nurse at this time. We feel we are capable of calling on and transporting our members that need assistance. **If you would like to call people or would like to be called please let Pastor Torri or Karen know.** Don indicated that he does not feel we have up-to-date emergency contact information in the Church Windows program. We will begin asking for this information in order to get our records more accurate in case of an emergency.

Worship: Heidi mentioned that we are scheduled to worship in the Sanctuary until the last Sunday of December when we will meet in the Friendship Hall for a hymn sing Sunday service. We will stay in the Friendship Hall for most of the winter. Heidi is scheduling both Cheri Westphal and Sheri Ford to speak about Food Shelf needs sometime this winter.

Women's Fellowship: The Christmas dinner is scheduled for Dec. 5 this year and is open to all members and friends of the church. The meal will be catered by Birchwood Char House. Please sign up if you want to participate in this event. On December 8 there will be a Christmas cookie sale after church to benefit the Women's Fellowship. All 6" plates of goodies sell for \$1.50! This is a real bargain so bring your checkbooks!

Men's Fellowship: The men are working on the Thanksgiving food boxes on Monday, Nov. 25. On December 3 the men will set up the church Christmas trees. Come and help with either project if you are able.

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Christian Learning: Jo reported that on December 8 the youth will perform a Christmas program for us called The Heart of Christmas. They will also be serving cookies that they will bake on Dec. 7. Come and help with the baking if you have time on Saturday. Special musicians will be part of the program on the 8th.

Scholarship ministry team: Jo is requesting applicants for our 2020 youth scholarship program. She also will be scheduling the 2019 recipients to speak at a worship service this winter about their college adventures and to thank the church for the scholarships they received.

Jo is interested in having some of her volunteers trained in CPR this winter so there is always someone around that knows how to treat a child injury in case of an accident.

The Community meal is cancelled for the Christmas season, except for December 11 when we will have a turkey dinner at the church. The program will re-start in January.

Moderator Moment: Joni mentioned that we still need our service time added to each of our new church signs. She also mentioned that the Solstice Concert will be at the church December 19 and will be part concert and part sing along. Free will offerings will be accepted. The church will do the printing for the concert at no cost.

Caesar's Tales

Hi, my name is Caesar and I am the church dog!



I found out what I am getting for Christmas! I am not supposed to know, but I need to tell you! It is a new bed! I am very excited because I've not always had a warm bed.

Three years ago I was in a shelter. The humans there treated me well, but what I really wanted to have was my own toys and my own bed. But honestly, what I really wanted was a family that loved me. I wanted my own human.

Then one day my human friend, Tami (who worked at the shelter) took me for a car ride. I love car rides! She drove for a long time. We went to a little house with a fenced in yard. It was there I met a human who seemed very interested in me and asked Tami a lot of questions. Then I met another dog and some boys. Then I met two cats. It was very overwhelming for me.

All the humans visited for a few hours and they seemed to be talking about me. I knew this because they looked at me a lot. I liked the attention!

Later that day Tami got up to leave, so I got up too because I thought I was leaving and going back to the shelter. But Tami left me there and drove away! I was scared and confused. I didn't know what was happening.

But then this human who they left me with, calmly talked to me. She showed me a bed and some toys. It took me a few weeks, but I finally understood that this was my new home! I had my own bed, my own toys and my very own human! I got adopted! And I was thankful! It was the best gift ever!

Even though I am very excited about my new bed, I will always be most excited about the love I get from my human, other human friends, and dog friends. I have a few cat friends, but I don't get very excited about them... they have razor blades on their paws!

I just wanted to say Merry Christmas and I hope you all get new warm beds this year!

Have a barky holiday season!

Caesar "The Church Dog"



FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

The Church has begun working on our 2020 budget. The preliminary council, board, and ministry team requests are in, and we have calculated the expected revenue. The Board of Financial Stewardship presented their preliminary figures to the Church Council at their November meeting, and at this point proposed expenses are over \$4000 more than expected revenue.

Thank you to everyone who has made a pledge to our 2020 Stewardship Campaign. If you haven't yet pledged, we ask that you get it in as soon as possible so that we have the best estimates of our expected revenue for 2020. If you have misplaced or did not receive pledging information, please contact the Financial Secretary by mail to the Union Church address, email to finsec.ucc@gmail.com, or call 218-839-4341. We will be happy to send information out to you or answer your questions.

Our current position of revenue versus expenses for 2019 is very good, and we are expecting to have a good carryover of funds into 2020. This carryover is included in our 2020 revenue calculation; therefore, it is extremely important that persons complete their 2019 pledges by the end of the year so that we can finish off 2019 in a good financial position and have the expected carryover for next year.

As I write this message we are approaching Thanksgiving. Please take time to consider what Union Church means to you and the wider community. Please, prayerfully consider a special year-end gift or an increase in your pledge or giving for next year.

Don Hoppe, Chair of the Board of Financial Stewardship

Advent Services

Join us as we again experience the haunting beauty of the Holden Evening Prayer Service on Wednesday evenings during Advent. The services begin at 5:30, and a meal follows.

December 4th — Held at St Paul's Lutheran Church

December 11th — Held at Union Congregational UCC

December 18th — Held at St. Paul's Lutheran Church



Celebrating the Past – Myra Damm, historian

As I was going through the annual report for this past year it seemed like this has been a very good year! So I will put this year in our history report. As of November 1st, Torre Vande Zande, our pastor celebrated her first year with us. She has built new relationships, she has connected with the other young pastors from our local churches, working together for Advent and Lent Services. She has become involved in community activities, Treasure Sale, VBS, taking part in the Minnesota Conference, and General Synod in Milwaukee.

We now have an official “church dog” named Caesar. Caesar is very good in connecting with people! He carries communion to Birchview in his backpack for his monthly visits, bringing joy and accepting petting and hugs from residents there. He also was a presence at VBS, and makes people feel welcome every time he is in the office, or in church, or just walking around town with Torri.

Another good thing that has happened is the Decluttering Team, who have been cleaning out lots of spaces that may not have been cleaned for a spell. Many files, records, and boxes full of “stuff” ended up in the history area to be sorted looking for the treasures that belong in the history file.

Kokoro Music School also opened this year and is being held in the lower level of the church with different instruments being taught, along with other programs. The music school has been in the planning stages, and became a reality this year.

You will see posters around church, and ask for more information on the school. (Much more information than I am able to cover here)

We are active and a valuable presence in the community, We are grateful for the past year and look forward to 2020.

WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP NEWS

On December 8th the Women's Fellowship will have their annual Christmas Cookie sale. All 6" plates of cookies or other goodies sell for \$1.50. Bring your folding cash or your check books that Sunday so you can stock up on Christmas goodies!!

The Christmas luncheon on December 5th for members and friends of the church takes the place of the regular monthly Women's Fellowship meeting.

We will be working on blankets some time in December. More news to come on the date for that event!



Bible Study

Monday mornings

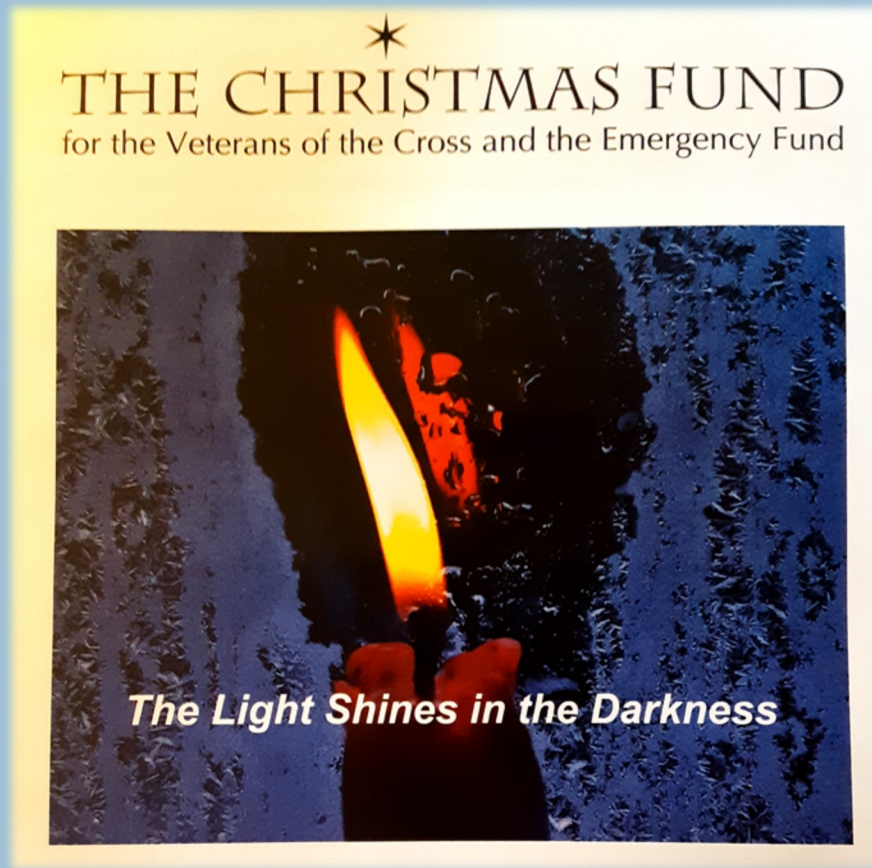
10:00 coffee and conversation

10:30 to 11:30 education and enquiry using the Upper Room study material.



GAME NIGHTS

Join us on
December 1st, 15th, and 29th
at 5:30 p.m.
Bring a dish to share.



For over 100 years, “The Christmas Fund” has been a way to ensure that the light of love and hope will always shine for faithful servants of the United Church of Christ who find themselves facing unforeseen financial need.

We are grateful for the generosity individuals who contributed to the 2018 offering. It has enabled the UCC to provide Pension Supplementation, special grants for emergencies, and Christmas “Thank You” Gift Checks to over 1,000 individuals and families in need.

Through the month of December (including Christmas Eve), Union Congregational will be accepting financial gifts designated to “The Christmas Fund”. There will be special envelopes in the pews at church or you can also send checks to the church with “The Christmas Fund” noted in the memo.

Thank you for your generosity!

Pastor Torri

CHRISTIAN LEARNING

Winter Wonderland is really here! Those of you who enjoy snow and the related activities may celebrate. For others, we are glad we have three more seasons to look forward to.

Our Christian Learning Team met to review December activities:

The Magic of Cookie Baking

A fun time for cookie baking will take place Saturday, December 7th, at Noon. Older kids and adults of all ages are encouraged to join us. Please contact Sue Johnson for more details. Tasters welcome!

Heart Of Christmas

Sunday, December 8th during our 9:30 service is our special Heart of Christmas program. Youth and families will offer a program of songs, drama, and Signs of Christmas. A Cookie Feast will be hosted in the Friendship Hall by the Christian Learning Team and Youth. Families and friends very encouraged to attend this special day.

Union Community Meals

Our usual community meals will not be held in Lower Level during December. Instead, we will offer an Advent Meal Wednesday, December 11th in Friendship Hall. Service at 5:30 PM. Turkey and fixings served at 6:00 PM.

Breakfast with Santa

December 20th preschool kids can enjoy Breakfast with Santa. Pancakes and sausage served. Kids welcome in Lower Level around 9:30 AM for playtime. Santa arrives about 11:00 AM. Photos possible. All are welcome for breakfast.

As these events have not yet happened more details will be in our January report. No Movie Day in December but Monday Morning Bible Study meets unless otherwise noted. Library at 10:00 AM coffee and conversation, Bible Study 10:30 AM-11:30 AM. All welcome.

Notes of gratitude to all those who serve in special ways to make God's World a better place. Happy Advent Season to you and yours!

The Christian Learning Team



kokoro **CORNER**

Please join us for the Eleventh Annual Peace Concert & Singalong on Thursday evening, December 19th. Concert & Singalong at 7pm.



Doors open at 6:30 pm.

Happy Holidays from all of us at Kokoro! -Kiki




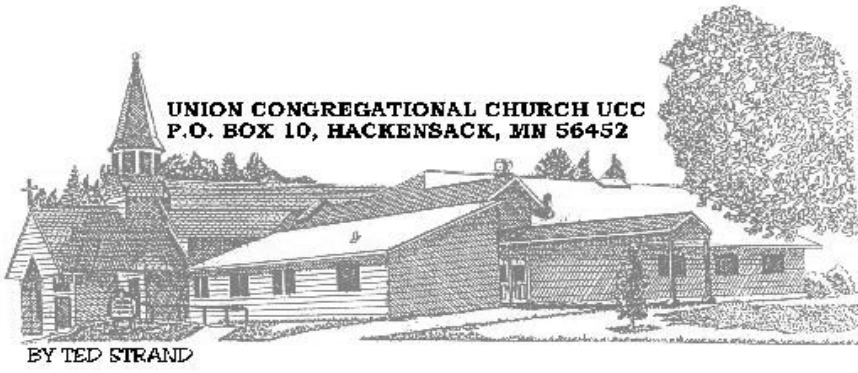
Eleventh Annual

Peace Concert & Sing-along
401 Lake Ave East - Hackensack
Doors open at 6:30pm
free-will offering

Thurs DEC 19 7pm

DECEMBER 2019

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1 Worship 9:30am Communion Fellowship 10:30am 5:30pm Game Night	2	3	4 3:30pm—5:30pm Heart of Christmas Rehearsal 5:30pm Advent Service (St. Paul's)	5 12:00pm Christmas Dinner	6 9:00am—12:00pm Morning Out	7 12:00pm The Magic of Cookie Baking
8 Worship 9:30am Fellowship 10:30am 10:30am Bake Sale	9 10:00am—11:30am Upper Room Bible Study	10	11 5:30pm Advent Service	12	13 9:00am—12:00pm Morning Out	14
15 Worship 9:30am Fellowship 10:30am 5:30pm Game Night	16 10:00am—11:30am Upper Room Bible Study	17	18 5:30pm Advent Service (St. Paul's)	19 7:00pm Kokoro Peace Concert	20 9:00am—12:00pm Morning Out 11:00am Breakfast with Santa	21 12:00pm Yule Drum Circle
22 Worship 9:30am Fellowship 10:30am	23 10:00am—11:30am Upper Room Bible Study	24 Christmas Eve 4:00pm Candlelight Service	25 Christmas Day 	26	27 9:00am—12:00pm Morning Out	28
29 Worship 9:30am Fellowship 10:30am 10:30am Christian Learning Team Meeting 5:30pm Game Night	30 10:00am—11:30am Upper Room Bible Study	31 New Year's Eve				



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Join us at 5:30pm on December 4th
and 18th at St. Paul's, and at Union on
December 11th for Advent.
Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays!

2019

