

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

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FEBRUARY 2024

Notes from Rev. Torri Vande Zande

Fox in a Box

I received a Christmas gift last year from some friends. It is a paint-by-numbers picture of a fox in a cornfield. When I first opened the gift, I was so tickled by the fact that they knew me so well. I love foxes and I love painting! But then I saw how tiny the numbers were on the canvas... and how small the brushes were that came in the box. The feeling of inadequacy swept over me. I said to myself, "I can't do this!"

The fox stayed in its box for about a week before I had the courage to take it out and attempt to paint it. I decided to start with the background. I thought, "If I mess up, at least it won't be noticed too much." So I sat down, picked up the brush, dipped it into a color, and I began to paint.

I quickly realized the numbers were too small. I couldn't see them. My brush glided outside of the lines on every stroke. In frustration, I put the fox back in the box, and it was stored under my bed for almost a year.

As winter set in this year, I decided to take the fox out again. I knew the numbers were small, so I began to brainstorm what I needed to do in order to see more clearly. I went into my bedroom and grabbed the lamp off my nightstand.

Continues on Page 3

Sunday Worship at 9:30 AM

Communion: First Sunday of Every Month

CHURCH STAFF

Pastor	Rev. Torri Vande Zande
Office Administrator	Linda Ottman
Secretary / Tech	Sabbastian Wilson-Webb
Financial Secretary	Don Hoppe
Treasurer	Sheryl Kaubisch
Bell Choir Director	Heidi Hoppe
Musicians	Sheryl Kaubisch
	Kathleen Millberg
	Barb Nish
	Dick Kimmel
	Sabbastian Wilson-Webb

CHURCH COUNCIL

Moderators	Marilyn McKnight & Steve Erickson
Vice Moderator	Gunder Austin
Clerk	Karen Holle
Board of Financial Stewardship	Don Hoppe
Ministry Teams:	
Congregational Life	Joni Kumpula
Facilities	Mike Bohanon & Kerry Swenson
Personnel	Connie Schmitt
Worship	Heidi Hoppe
Men's Fellowship	Stan Kumpula
Women's Fellowship	Joni Kumpula
Adult Learning	Linnea Dietrich
Tech Team	Mike Schmitt
Online Sales	Cindy Gulbrandson
Justice Ministry Team	Sue Kimmel

COMMUNITY LENT SERVICES

All services begin at 5:00 pm with a Soup Supper afterwards. The theme is "The Last Words of Jesus"

Feb. 14th — St. Paul's

Ash Wednesday Service

Feb. 21st — Union

"Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing."

Feb. 28th — St. Paul's

"Today you will be with me in paradise."

March 6th — Lighthouse

"Woman, here is your son. Here is your mother."

March 13th — St. Paul's

"My God why have you forsaken me?" and "I thirst"

March 20th — Union

"It is finished" and "Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit."

The Soup Supper will be at Union on March 6th after the service at Lighthouse.



FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

February 1	Terrence Larkin
February 10	Dave Bauer
February 12	Helen Howe
February 15	Beverly Peterson
February 16	Sarah Turnquist
February 18	Mary Martin
February 21	Dick Kimmel
February 22	Linnea Dietrich
February 24	Jane Odell
February 25	Elsa McNelis
February 26	Jim Allan
February 28	Stan Kumpula

Happy Birthday!



Karen Holle, Linda Ottman, and Sabbastian Wilson-Webb, Editors

Continued from Page 1

Then I went to the store and bought a pair of stronger reading glasses. I cleared the table, set up the lamp, put my glasses on and guess what? I could see the tiny numbers embedded in the canvas! And I started painting.

Sometimes in life there are situations that come up that seem impossible to deal with. Feelings of inadequacy, fear, and frustration often accompany those situations, and we say to ourselves, "I can't do this!"

But let me remind you of a few things:

1. I needed light to see the numbers on the canvas. Even though I may have been in a lighted room, I needed more light to shine down on a certain place for me to see what I needed to do. Jesus came into the world to be a Light in the world and to the world (John 1). When things get crazy and impossible... It is Jesus that gives us hope. He sheds light in the darkest places so we can see better in difficult situations.
2. I needed clarity to discern what numbers were represented on the canvas. I needed to purchase glasses that could help me clear up the fuzziness that lit up the numbers so I knew where to drop the paint. This is similar to the Holy Spirit working in our lives. The Spirit moves and brings us into clarity to discern what we need to do in different situations. The Spirit clears up the fuzziness!



My hope this winter season is that you bring light (Jesus Christ) and clarity (The Holy Spirit) into difficult situations that you face. And may you, Christ, and the Holy Spirit create beautiful pictures that tell your life-story.

Peace,

Pastor Torri

GREAT START FAMILY CHILDCARE

The Great Start Family Childcare is likely to open in February with an open house in the beginning of month. Formal written agreement has been reached between Ashley Hunter, Childcare Director, and Union Congregational Church concerning rental of the lower level for the childcare facilities. A final walkthrough of the childcare facility will be completed in the upcoming weeks. A non-profit Board with associated board of Directors has been established. The purpose of the Great Start Family Childcare non-profit Board and the associated board of directors is to:

Enlist the services of a Director that will deliver quality childcare for families in the community of Hackensack.

Serve as a representative and bridge of communication between the Director of the Childcare and Union Congregational Church-United Church of Christ.

Offer expertise and consult at the request of the Director to assist in creating an environment of care for children and families that use the services of the Childcare.

Solicit funding that will supplement the costs of providing services by seeking grants and other private donations.



COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

JANUARY 18, 2024

PRESENT: Connie Schmitt, Sue Kimmel, Cindy Gulbrandson, Heidi Hoppe, Stan Kumpula, Mary Parrish, Caryl Allan, Linnea Dietrich, Mike Schmitt, Gunder Austin, Marilyn McKnight Erickson, Don Hoppe, Karen Holle, Mike Bohanon, Pastor Torri Vande Zande, Steve Erickson (at end of meeting)

Today we walked into a newly updated Council meeting room. It looks wonderful! Thanks to Connie and Mike Schmitt and Kirin and Alan Christianson for their work!!

Marilyn called the meeting to order. The agenda was approved with one addition. The minutes were approved as written. Heidi/Connie

Pastor's Monthly Report: Pastor Torri submitted her report which covers the months of December and January. She emphasized how important the weekly service is to the people at Birchview Gardens next door. Fourteen people came to last week's service which is scheduled for 1:00 each Sunday. Caryl Allan coordinates volunteers to help with this service.

Facilities: Mike Bohanon reported that all the church fire extinguishers need checking before the Fire Marshal visits next week. Mike Schmitt will check our smoke detectors to make sure they are working. Pastor Torri asked if we could have a fire extinguisher in the sanctuary that is easy to access if needed.

Personnel: Connie talked about a new law in Minnesota regarding Sick and Safe Time for people who work in part-time jobs. Starting this year part-time employees earn 1 hour of sick time for every 30 hours of work. The hours may accumulate for a total of 80 hours. This cost to the church will be included in our 2024 budget.

Connie and Chris Swenson have updated the job descriptions for clerical staff and have also made a few changes to Pastor Torri's letter of call for the purpose of clarity.

Connie also is including in the new letter of call a list of the paid holidays that Pastor Torri can take off. If Torri needs to work on a holiday, she may take another day off when it works into her schedule.

Board of Financial Stewardship: Don reviewed the financial information for December. November and December were good months for the church financially. 47 pledges have come in with a total pledged of \$115,270.

The 2024 budget: Don added some money in the utilities budget because utility costs are going up, in part because of the child care POD. The main increase in the new budget is in the area of staff and pastor salaries. **Motion to approve an increase in office personnel salaries to \$18 per hour. Connie/Linnea.** We have two people doing office work for us, for a total of 21 hours a week.

Connie Schmitt, representing The Board of Personnel, talked about changes she would like to see in Pastor Torri's salary and housing allowance. Connie suggested that Torri's housing allowance should be increased from \$17,520 to \$19,110 to meet the guidelines set down by the Minnesota Conference. She also suggested that Torri's salary be increased from \$41,212 to \$46,340 which meets the guidelines from the Conference for pastors with Torri's experience (Step C) and a congregation of our size. **Motion: To accept Don's budget for 2024 for a total of \$209,981. Don/Marilyn/passed.** This budget will be taken to the semi-annual meeting on January 28.

Ministry Team Reports:

Congregational Life: There was some discussion today that the Community Meal program which is currently under Congregational Life should really be part of the Community Outreach program. People who attended the community meal yesterday indicated that many people who asked for food seemed pretty desperate for a good meal. Approximately 40 people are being served each night we have community meal.

During Lent, the Lutheran Church would like to have soup at their church on the days that the service is in their sanctuary. We decided that we would continue our meal program for people in the community who would probably not go over to St. Paul's church for food. Mike B., Gunder, Tammy, and Caryl will be part of the team to keep the meals available at Union.

Worship: Heidi reported that in the past 8 weeks, there has been an average of 37 in-house worshipers on Sunday, 11 households on line, and 10 people attending the Birchview service. In February, Laura Baum-Parr will preach for us on two occasions. During Torri's sabbatical many people at church have volunteered to preach in her absence.

Adult Learning: Linnea mentioned that between 9 and 14 people attend Lectio Divina on a weekly basis. She has submitted a grant for the local El Camino she would like to organize for this summer and should hear soon if she is awarded funds for it.

Women's Fellowship: The congregation enjoyed a wonderful luncheon in December sponsored by Women's Fellowship. There is no meeting in January.

Men's Fellowship: The Men's Fellowship is considering canceling their monthly meeting, and instead getting together to work on projects at church. Stan feels it is time for a new leader of Men's Fellowship.

Justice Ministry Team: Current projects include: Helping with Sunday services at Birchview Gardens and also helping on Saturdays with activities for the residents.

The Justice Ministry Team is also working with Mike Tauber to co-sponsor grants to improve drinking water quality. Sue is looking for a co-leader of JMT.

Fundraising: In Steve's absence, Karen talked about the Northwoods Arts Council's recent request to determine what their costs will be next August when they use space at the church for their art and book fair. **Motion: To approve the building request form/rental agreement that Steve presented in November, 2023. Karen/Connie/passed.**

Other thoughts regarding the Northwoods Arts Council event: Add into the cost of using our space a \$75 charge for janitorial services. We will have someone on site throughout the day and will make sure bathrooms are clean and stocked. The cost for the Friendship Hall includes tables and chairs. We also agree that only service dogs and the church dog are allowed in the building during the event.

Tech Team: The Friendship Hall now has only LED lights. They are very bright and do not all have to be turned on to have adequate light in the room.

A new mixer has been installed in the Sanctuary which allows for more microphones when we have special music and ease of control for the sound team. Thank you, Mike Schmitt, for all you have done to improve technology at our church!

Outreach: Torri reviewed the job description for the outreach team. Community Meal will be part of this program, and other projects will follow. This is a work in progress.

Moderator Moment: Marilyn has just finished chemotherapy and is grateful for the support she has received through this process. She feels that a lot is happening in the church that is having a positive effect on the Hackensack community.

Old Business:

Woock-Ness Property: The contract for the sale of this property has been signed, and the closing is scheduled for February 12. The congregation will vote at the semi-annual meeting to pass a resolution to go through with the sale. A 2/3 majority of those present at the special meeting must agree to the resolution for the sale to move forward.

Child Care Pod Update: An open house for the new child care pod is scheduled for February 5, and the program will open mid February.

New Business:

Church Constitution update: Karen and Torri are working on this, and it is going well.

Sabbatical Planning: The team involved with this will meet January 31 to plan for Pastor Torri's sabbatical which begins August 12, 2024.

Solar Panels: Don reported that this project will get back on track this year.

Meeting Adjourned: Next meeting is February 15. Clerk, Karen Holle

THROUGH KODA'S EYES

There is a Bird on our Deck!

Hi! My name is Koda, and I am the Church Dog! I want to tell you about the bird on my deck! I have named him, "Bird"!

As many of you know, my human feeds the wild birds in the yard. It is very exciting because we have a whole bunch of them swoop in a big flock to devour all the seeds she puts out!

Last week, I noticed there was a little bird on the deck that could not fly well. In the daytime it would hang out with its friends, but at night it came on the deck and snuggled up in the corner to sleep. I found this little bird to be a dangerous intruder, so I alerted my human.

My human informed me that this little creature was not an intruder, but needed a bit of help. So I watched my human as she went to the garage to get some styrofoam, duct tape, and some felt. I don't know how she did it... (chalk it up to having thumbs), but she built this bird a little house it could go into! Then, she put seeds in it!

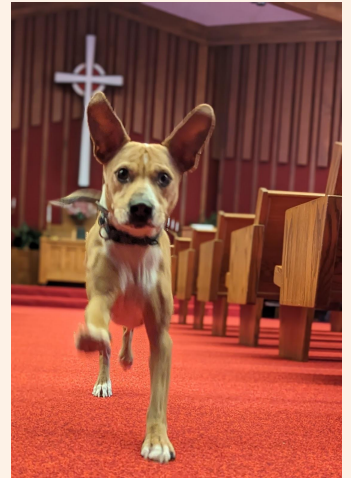


She set it outside on the deck. Within an hour the little bird came, jumped in the house and started eating. When it was bedtime, the bird did not stay in the house, but it hopped behind it to stay warm that night. I felt good that we were able to give "Bird" a warm place to stay safe.

I think everyone needs a warm place to be safe. Wouldn't it be great to have everyone work on creating spaces for

others to feel warm and safe too. It does not have to be just birds, but dogs can do that for other dogs... And humans can do that for other humans! I think about church and how church can be a warm and safe place for people. So... Can I ask you something? How do you make church warm and safe for others? After you answer that, please let me know because I want to make a warm and safe place for Bandit (the cat)... HE WILL LOVE IT!

That's how I see it through my eyes! Have a barky day!



Koda (the Church Dog)

Did You Know the Prayer List is on the Website?

If you want to stay up-to-date with the Union Prayer List, here are the steps for finding it on our church website.

1. Visit our website at <https://www.unioncchackensack.com/>
2. Move your cursor over "Contact Us" on the navigation bar found at the top of our website.
3. On the drop-down menu that appears, click on "Prayer List."
4. Type the password "UnionPrayers2020" in the box and click enter.
5. Click on the blue button that says "Prayer List."

If you have any difficulty accessing the list, call the church or email socialmedia.ucchackmn@gmail.com for assistance.



BOARD OF FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

Operating Income and Expenses

Giving Income - Dec	\$ 17,504.73	Year to Date 2023 Giving	\$142,127.73
Pre-paid 2024 pledge	\$ 0.00	Pre-paid 2024 pledge	\$8,100.00
Other Income* - Dec	\$ 558.00	YTD Other Income*	\$47,520.23
Total Income	\$ 18,062.73	YTD Total Income	\$197,747.96

Expenses – December	\$16,457.79	Year to Date Expenses	\$175,867.49
Balance - December	\$ 1,604.94	Balance - Year to Date	\$21,880.47

Prepaid & Carryover	\$ 6,941.00
Final Balance	\$28,821.47

* Other income includes Treasure Sale, Community Meal, fundraisers, building use, donations, and all other income sources except interest and dividends generated from restricted funds and specified donations or grants not going into operating funds.

Checking available: \$ 93,832.14 (includes a \$60,000 gift to B&G not yet moved to savings)
 Total Assets \$ 369,876.54

Summary

Income was good and expenses were high in December.

Giving and extra donations were very good this year, pledges mostly completed, and we finished the year with a good carryover to 2024. We also had \$14,000 in other donations that were used to pay for special facilities costs concerning the water connection to the church to avoid freeze-up problems.

2024 Stewardship Campaign: As of December 31, we had received 47 pledges; 42 are current pledging units (with a 5.9% increase), and 5 are new. Total pledged is \$115,270 or 92% of the \$125,000 goal.

The 2024 budget was reviewed by the Executive Committee and presented to the Council. It was slightly modified and will be presented to the congregation, with a recommendation from the Church Council for approval, at the Semi-Annual Meeting on Sunday, January 28.

Celebrating the Past: Formation of Faith in Action

Myra Damm, Historian

Last newsletter I submitted an article regarding the beginning of Faith in Action. It was quite lengthy, so I did it in two parts.

Faith is central to the work of Faith in Action for many reasons. While we all experience faith in many different ways, many share a common belief that community and the world in which we live can look different.

There are Faith In Action organizations across America.

In 1972, Fr. John Bavman began an organization in Chicago and California called a "Pico" network; Pacific Institute for Community Organization.

Many years ago a woman from Hackensack area was moving permanently to another state, and an arrangement was established with a FIA organization to "kick in" when she arrived. Luann served until 2005.

It is because of her enthusiastic service, a strong foundation for service to all residents of Cass Co. The leadership has continued. The dedication of the many volunteers and the leadership of talented, selfless directors continues for the success of the "Faith in Action" for Cass County. Our current director is Theresa Eclov, with the offices right here in Hackensack.

NEWS FROM THE WORSHIP MINISTRY TEAM

Greetings, friends. It has been an amazing winter. There were many weeks of relatively warm weather and rain; it was so warm that Ten Mile Lake didn't freeze up completely till January 8th - a new record. Of course, then we had a very cold stretch. It was amazing that well over 100 people (adults and children) came out for the Deep Portage Winter Rendezvous and participated in the fun outdoor activities. And the week before, Back to Hack was a success as well. We're a hardy bunch!

The hustle and bustle of the Christmas Season has passed, and Union has returned to our normal busy-ness, hosting Bone Builders, AA, the exercise group Fit2Move, Lectio Divina, Community Meals, Mens and Womens Fellowships, to name just a few activities. Oh, and we are planning a Soup-er Bowl Party on the 11th as well. We are an active and important part of our community!

Our streaming services continue. Mike Schmitt is constantly upgrading our tech equipment, and we are very fortunate to have him in our community! If you watch the services online, please send a thank you to Mike Schmitt and Don Hoppe who trade off the streaming duties. Pastor Torri has begun a series taking us through the book of Luke with her usual interesting, informative, and thought-provoking sermons. We are so blessed to have her with us! I hope you are able to attend or can watch the services online. However, one Sunday in February both Mike and Don will be out of town, so our friend, Laura Baum-Parr will be preaching and Torri will be directing the streaming. Actually, Laura will be preaching 2 Sundays - one while Torri is working on the streaming, and one while Torri is on vacation. I'm looking forward to hearing her messages!

We move into the season of Lent this month, and we will be worshiping with our sisters and brothers from St. Paul's Lutheran Church again this year (and perhaps with our friends and neighbors from Sacred Heart and from The Lighthouse). The final schedule of services has not been finalized but will be available on our website calendar and in our Sunday bulletins as soon as it is ready.

Stay warm and safe and healthy. We look forward to seeing everyone later this year.

Heidi Hoppe, Team Leader,

Sheryl Kaubisch, Caryl Allan, Mary Parrish, Gunder Austin, and Gracee Rudkin



MEN'S FELLOWSHIP

We met on the second Tuesday of January, all 4 of us. The 4 are kind of regulars at our meetings, and we discussed the merits of having regular meetings each month. The proposal we came up with is to not meet on a regular basis but to bring up a topic at the coffee hour in the Friendship Hall after the Sunday worship service. Also, if someone wants to email the rest of us with an idea or an event, we could then meet at the Sunday morning coffee hour to discuss further and possibly arrange a special time to do it.

If anyone has comments about the above statement, I would like to hear from you, as we seem to be in limbo about Men's Fellowship.

Stan Kumpula

JUSTICE MINISTRY TEAM

The Justice Ministry Team met on 12/11/23 via Zoom

Our priorities for winter include:

Community Outreach at Birchview Gardens Assisted Living. JMT will assist with Sunday Services and we are meeting with Christine, Activities Director, to plan activities for Saturdays.

Neighbor Helping Neighbor Community Clean-Up will be May 17 & May 18 – 9:00-4:00 p.m.

We are thinking about adding community pickup of appliances and electronics.

Welcoming and Affirming to Our LGBTQ+ Neighbors

Sue will contact Eleanor to see what Brainerd UCC is exploring for 2024. JMT is considering a forum with Arnold J Dahl-Wooley, Two Spirit Public Speaker, sometime in June.

Supporting the Well-Being of Our Anishinaabe Neighbors

Book Study Everything You Wanted To Know About Indians But Were Afraid To Ask ended on Jan 9th. We are considering another book study for the winter.

Taking Regenerative Care of Our Environment

Update on Rural Organizing Project – Various meetings were set up in January to discuss childcare, democracy, climate, clean water, health care, and housing.

Justice Ministry Team will send a letter to Gov. Walz concerning BUG school PFAS. A letter to Cass County Soil and Water Conservation District will be sent thanking them for county preservation of our water resources.

Mike Tauber is seeking grant funding for bioremediation of chemically contaminated ground water through the Reg. Sustainable Dev. Partnership. The UCC Justice Ministry Team has been listed as a sponsor of this grant.

Sue is seeking church council support to add another person as JMT leader. This person will be a co-leader so events/attendance continues when Sue is unable to participate in activities.



Soup-er Bowl Sunday

February 11, 2024

Gather at 5:00 pm, kickoff at 5:30

Bring a snack to share - Soup will be provided.

All are welcome!



WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP

Happy February! Since we did not meet in January, I hope you had a wonderful Christmas and nice quiet January. If only we could keep those 20-degree days and a bit more snow! No matter what the weather we need a good meeting in February to do some planning. I have asked many of you to think of meaningful fun things to do. We all realize that if it's not fun, attendance is poor. So, please come for some fun and planning for the next few months. We always have fellowship and great treats. Let's get 2024 off and running!

See you in church, Joni

ASH WEDNESDAY

February 14th

5:00 pm Ash Wednesday Service will be at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Hackensack.

Ashes will be given throughout the day at Union Congregational UCC from **8:00 am - 4:00 pm** if people cannot make the service.



SOUP NEEDED for February 21st

February 21st we will be hosting a Community Lent Service at Union. St. Paul's Lutheran and Lighthouse Church will be joining us. After the service there will be a soup supper. We are looking for several people to make a crockpot of their favorite soup and bring it that night. If you are willing to do that, please call or email the office to let us know what you will be bringing.



COMMUNITY MEALS IN DECEMBER



Every Wednesday 5:00 - 6:30 pm Friendship Hall
All meals will have a veggie side, salad and a dessert



Community Meal Menu

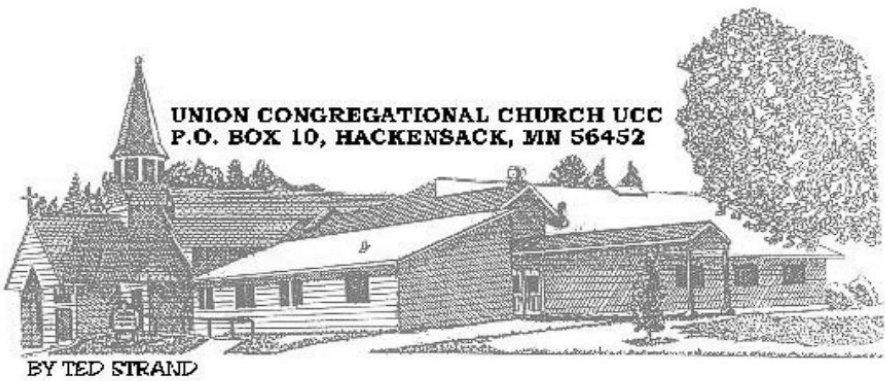
- February 7th** — Lasagna
- February 14th** — Chicken Milanese w/ Roasted Potatoes
- February 21st** — Soup (Several Kinds)
- February 28th** — Tater Tot Hotdish

Union Congregational Church, UCC, Hackensack MN

February 2024

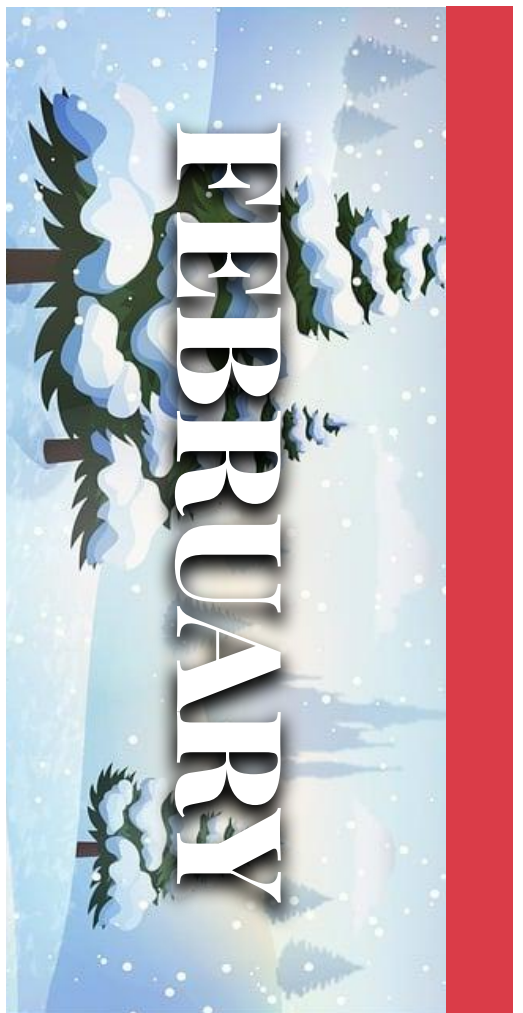
* Community event

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
4 9:30 am Worship Service 10:30 am Coffee Hour 1:00 pm Birchview Church	5 1:30 pm Bone Builders* 6:00 pm AA Open Meeting*	6 9:00 am Tech Team Meeting	7 4:00 pm Lectio Divina 5:00-6:30 pm Community Meal	8 1:00 pm Women's Fellowship	9 Office Closed 1:30 pm Bone Builders*	10
11 9:30 am Worship Service 10:30 am Coffee Hour 1:00 pm Birchview Church 5:00 pm Soup-er Bowl Sunday	12 1:30 pm Bone Builders* 6:00 pm AA Open Meeting*	13	14 4:00 pm Lectio Divina 5:00 pm Ash Wednesday Service SPLC 5:00-6:30 pm Community Meal	15 1:00-3:00 pm Council Meeting	16 Office Closed 1:30 pm Bone Builders*	17
18 9:30 am Worship Service 10:30 am Coffee Hour 1:00 pm Birchview Church	19 1:30 pm Bone Builders* 6:00 pm AA Open Meeting*	20 9:00 am Tech Team Meeting	21 4:00 pm Lectio Divina 5:00 pm Lenten Service UCC 5:00-6:30 pm Community Meal/ Soup Supper	22 1:00-3:00 pm Fiber Arts*	23 Office Closed 1:30 pm Bone Builders*	24
25 9:30 am Worship Service 10:30 am Coffee Hour 1:00 pm Birchview Church	26 1:30 pm Bone Builders* 6:00 pm AA Open Meeting*	27 9:00 am Tech Team Meeting	28 4:00 pm Lectio Divina 5:00 pm Lenten Service SPLC 5:00-6:30 pm Community Meal	29		



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FORWARD SERVICE REQUESTED



2024

Ash Wednesday Service
February 14th 5:00 pm
At St. Paul's Lutheran



THE UNION NEWS