

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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APRIL 2026

Notes from Rev. Torri Vande Zande

I received a small package in the mail a few years ago. I opened it up to find a wax ball with some type of plant in it. For those who know me, I do not have a "green thumb." I try to grow things, but I am very much a beginner. I looked at this waxy ball/plant and had no idea what I was looking at.

In situations where I am lacking information, I do what most people do; I ask someone who knows more than I do. There are several in our church who are amazing gardeners, so I asked around.

I came to find that this waxy ball was an amaryllis plant! I was told that I did not need to water it, just put it in the sun and it will grow and bloom into this beautiful plant. So I put it in my window and watched it for a few days. Its leaves began peeking out from the top of the bulb, and I was delighted.

After about a week, I began thinking about how this plant could survive without water. So, I went back to one of my horticulture friends and they said, "Well, the plant dies after it blooms." My heart sank. The plant dies? "Yes", my friend said, "If it is in the wax, it grows once and dies." Then I asked, "But can it be taken out of the wax and



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
Bell Choir Director	Heidi Hoppe
Musicians	Sheryl Kaubisch Kathleen Millberg

LEADERSHIP

Moderator	John Lindberg (Interim)
Vice Moderator	Stacy Hirschi (Interim)
Clerk	Connie Johnson-Schmitt
Board of Financial Stewardship	Don Hoppe

MINISTRY TEAMS

Adult Learning	Linnea Dietrich
Congregational Life	TBD
Justice Ministry Team	Marilyn McKnight
Worship	Heidi Hoppe
Women's Fellowship	Sherry Toenjes
Men's Fellowship	Mike Gulbrandson
Online Sales	Cindy Gulbrandson
Tech Team	Mike Schmitt
Outreach	Tammy Lindberg

BOARDS

Financial Board	Don Hoppe, Sheryl Kaubisch, Caryl Allan
Facilities Board	Mike Bohanon, Kerry Swenson
Personnel	Connie Johnson-Schmitt

Original Poem by Gracee Rudkin

"Look out the window and what do you find?

We've left the doldrums of winter behind!
The days are much warmer, March winds start to blow,
and sweet little crocuses peek through the snow.

The water is running and trickling down;
it runs from the rooftops and all over town.
At last we can say it: "Oh! Glorious spring!"
Bring with you warm weather; and birds on the wing.

Spring!! Come to greet us -- stay with us a while,
Renew us in spirit - then fade with a smile!"

APRIL BIRTHDAYS

April 5 **Ron Merritt**

April 14 **Ed Brown**

April 16 **Charles Bontrager**

April 29 **Karen Holle**

April 29 **Brian Wicker**

April 29 **Laura Baum-Parr**

Happy Birthday!



Continued from Page 1

planted so it can live?” My friend then went into a long explanation of how to repot an amaryllis. After her instructions, I was ready for the challenge.

I gently peeled off the outer wax shell. I was careful not to accidentally nick any of the plant’s bulb. I prepared a medium sized pot, filled it with dirt, and then gently planted the amaryllis with half of the bulb still exposed from the ground. I watered it periodically, made sure it had enough sun, and waited.

This plant grew! Long sword-like leaves shot out off the top of the bulb quickly. Then a stem appeared at the base. This was not another leaf... this was more stalk-like. I waited... and within a few weeks this plant sprang to life! Large red flowers bursted out of the peduncle. It was beautiful! I fell in love with it!

Then I had another question: What do I do after it is done blooming? I went back to the same horticulture friend and she said, “You cut it all off...Leaves and everything. And you cut it down to be just a bulb again. Then you put it in a dark room, do not water it, and let it sit there for 3 months. After that, you bring it back out and it will bloom all over again.” I hesitantly asked, “But what if I don’t cut it down or put it in a dark room?” She said, “It won’t bloom.”



I was sad to think this living thing needed to be cut down, be put in a dark room and not given water so that it could bloom again. It was as if it was going through not only a hibernation period, but a resurrection process.

This Easter we remember and celebrate Jesus’ resurrection, but we think less about the process He needed to go through to get to the resurrection. He was humiliated, beaten, and crucified on a cross. He died, was cut down from the cross, and placed in a dark tomb. And then three days later, the glorious blooming of a resurrected Savior! I may have to rename my plant “The Resurrection Amaryllis.”

May this Easter season be filled with moments of blooming. May we recognize beauty because we understand the process of how sometimes having a period of hibernation (or even some type of death) brings about new life. May this Easter give you hope for a beautiful future.

Peace,
Pastor Torri

CELEBRATING THE PAST: Early Years of Women's Fellowship

Myra Damm, Historian

The Ladies Aid Society was formed by the congregational women for the purpose of helping with church expenses. The needs of the early church were many, and money was needed to cover expenses. The women raised money in many ways. Food was the key to bring people in of course. There were Sunday fried chicken or roast beef dinners, Father & Son or Mother & Daughter Banquets (dishes & silver and white tablecloths were gathered up from all over town among members for these events), Summer Musicals by Mrs. Cole from Ten Mile Lake, along with much more. In 1958, the Minnesota Centennial year, Hackensack celebrated what is known as Paul Bunyan Sweetheart Days. Once a week on Thursday evening, the Indians held a pow-wow across the street from the Post Office. It drew a large crowd into town. The men built a booth, and the Ladies Aid sold pies, sandwiches or cake, coffee, and iced tea. This was a great fundraiser and lots of fun. More on the women's fundraisers next time.



COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

MARCH 19, 2026

Present: Pastor Torri, John Lindberg, Connie Schmitt, Don Hoppe, Mike Bohanon, Sherry Toenjes, Tammy Lindberg, Mike Schmitt, Heidi Hoppe, Stacy Hirschi, Mary Parrish, and Judy Hoopman.

Call to Order by Vice-Moderator John Lindberg and Pastor Torri led us in prayer.

Changes to the agenda: Added Capital Campaign Under Old Business, Added Executive Board changes under new business/Board reports, added Child Care update to New Business.

Approval of Agenda: Heidi made a motion to accept agenda as discussed, seconded by Don and approved by all.

March minutes were reviewed electronically by the Council and have been approved by email. An official copy has been submitted for the April newsletter.

Old Business

Training of Cooking Staff – Mike B reported no new information available; Kerry is still out of town. Don expects to contact Kerry regarding other business and will inquire about the training. Discussion included Stacy Hirschi informing the Board she has recently been recertified with Serve and Safe through an online program. John and Tammy are interested in becoming trained and may go to Brainerd for ServSafe training.

Sponsorship of Benefit Meals – Council has been informed that a community member, who wants to remain anonymous, has offered to sponsor the cost of the Community Meals, and arrangements are being made with Pastor Torri of how costs will be covered. Other discussions included: Sun & Fun, Jen from R J Acres, and Jeannette Dudley are all willing to help UCC purchase food at cost through the various businesses.

Capital Campaign - Don provided a handout outlining various options for funding The Raise the Roof Campaign to re-roof UCC. Discussion followed including suggestions for a two-year campaign, obtaining a line of credit, researching additional grant opportunities, bank loan or mortgage on the church as financial options for funding. The Church is waiting to see if grant monies are possible to have a better idea of funding needs. A letter will be going out to the congregation with clearer information about what the Council will recommend and/or decide. A motion was made by Connie for Don to follow up with the grant, for Mike B. to get a current update on bids, and for Don to wait until information is more accurate regarding sending out letters to the congregation. This motion was seconded by Sherry and approved.

New Business

Executive Board Changes: Due to personal reasons, Gunder has asked to leave his position as Moderator. Heidi made a motion that John Lindberg, Vice Moderator, fill the position of Moderator for the interim period until the annual meeting in July. Motion was seconded by Tammy and approved by all. John made a motion that Stacy Hirschi fill the interim position of Vice-Moderator, motion was seconded by Heidi and approved.

Child Care Update: Ashely Hunter has informed Connie that she will resign from her position effectively at the end of May. She has been hired as the director of a daycare center in Walker. Discussion followed that included refilling the position, what items she may take with her, what items have been purchased by grant monies, informing the Child Care Board of this change, and any responsibility to the Game Changers who were instrumental in recruiting Ashley. Cindy Gulbrandson, who is on the Day Care Board, will be contacted for clarification.

Board and Team Reports: Prior to this meeting team leaders and board members provided updates of their current work in written form for the packet that was prepared prior to this meeting. Connie reported for Personnel that final approval has been received with background checks for Kay Hanzel, Mike and Cindy Gulbrandson as Sunday school teachers. Heidi gave additional information that she learned about the tracking of viewing UCC services with Youtube of the number (237) of views for the month of February. Don motioned to accept all the reports and Stacy seconded, motion approved.

Policy / Procedure Changes: Connie guided the Council on changes that are recommended regarding the content of several sections of the Policy & Procedures Handbook. Discussion of each section occurred for clarity and agreement. Motions made, seconded and accepted are as follows:

1. Table of Contents: Under “By-Laws” and section titled “Church Structure” along with clarification of other points, Heidi motioned to accept, seconded by Stacy and approved.
2. Article XI: Updated this article to include both “Special” and “Semi-Annual” meetings so both are in the same location within the document. This will need to go in front of the congregation in July for final approval. Connie entertained a motion to accept changes made by Tammy and seconded by Sherry, approved by all.
3. Church Structure language to replace “By Laws” and to clarify changes to Committees and work groups. Heidi made a motion to accept changes as discussed and seconded by Stacy, approved by all.
4. Executive Committee and Officers – some revisions made, added ministry team responsibilities, clarified work groups, appointments, leadership representation. A motion was made by Stacy and seconded by Sherry, all approved.
5. Use of Virtual Platforms – clarification provided by Connie on use of virtual platforms such as Zoom & Google Meet – motion to accept changes made by Sherry and seconded by Don, approved.
6. Retention Policy – clarification provided by Connie of requirements for retaining records and disposal of records. Motion made by Heidi and seconded by Stacy to accept language changes. A new policy will be added regarding election of officers to reflect the Constitution language.
7. Item #2 will be presented in July semi-annual meeting. The other changes and recommendations will be added to the current Policy and Procedure Handbook and reviewed in the future by the council.

Moderator Moment: John shared his working definition of “HOW,” H for honesty, O for openness, and W for willingness - this is how he feels about and views his position as moderator!!

Pastor Moment: Pastor Torri encouraged John in his new role and duties, that he is in the right place!!

Benediction by Torri was received, John adjourned the meeting at about 2:30.

Newsletter articles due March 24, 2026.

Next Council Meeting is April 16, 2026

Submitted by Judy Hoopman

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

One of the ministries of Congregational Life is something called, “**Called to Care.**” This is a small team of people who call, visit, and do hospital visits to people within our congregation. We are looking for a few more individuals who are willing to be part of this team. Below is an outline of what is expected.

1. First, **we do not have monthly meetings.**
2. Check with Pastor Torri or Linda to see who is on the “Called to Care” list and choose someone to visit or call.
3. Contact the individual you will be seeing. Call or go visit with that person or family. While visiting, ask them if they would like anything added to the prayer list for the church.
4. Pray with them. Encourage them. Listen to them.
5. Email or call the church office to make a short report (just a few sentences) about your call or visit. How are they doing? Is there anything we need to know? This is required so no one falls between the cracks and we can know for sure we are contacting those who need it. The information you share is **confidential** and will not be shared to the wider church.

If this is something you would like to do, but are hesitant to do it by yourself, you can join Pastor Torri on one of her visitations.

Please contact Pastor Torri at pastor.ucchackmn@gmail.com or call 563-320-5360 if you would like to be part of this ministry.

THROUGH KODA'S EYES

Hi! My name is Koda, and I am the Church Dog! It has been five years since I became the Church Dog! Can you believe it? Time goes so fast!

I would like to share some highlights from the past few years!

- Birchview Church - I get to visit and get petted by the people living in an assisted living center called Birchview. We go there a few times a week. We go on Wednesdays to play Bingo and on Sundays to have church! My job is to be a calming presence. In other words, I take naps.
- Zoomies in the Sanctuary - Since I go to work with my human every day, I sometimes have pent-up energy. When it is too cold out for a walk outside, we walk inside the church. Many times while walking I get the zoomies and run as fast as I can between the pews. My human tells me that I look like a Scooby Doo cartoon, but I do not know what that means.
- Sunday Church - I really like being at church on Sunday mornings. Sometimes I will nap under my human's desk, but sometimes I will join all the people in the big room where they all howl at their God. If I am joining the people, I will greet them, listen to the music, or just stare at them as they stare at my human while she speaks. I have to admit sometimes I just lay down and take a nap, but I see them napping sometimes too... so it's okay.
- Dog Park - My favorite place is the dog park! I have met so many dog friends there... and human friends too. There are so many things to sniff there. I always keep one eye (my blue one) on the door in case a new dog comes in. My human thinks it's a great place too because she meets so many new people from outside of the church.
- Becoming a Vacuum - I am really good at vacuuming! Every Monday I come into the church, my human lets me into the Friendship Hall and I get to eat all the crumbs from Sunday snack time! I have found so many good things!



I would like to think that I am a very good Church Dog. I like my job. I hope you think so too.

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

Koda (The Church Dog)



BOARD OF FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

Operating Income and Expenses

Income – February	\$ 6,707.00	Year to Date 2026 Giving	\$ 22,592.00
Other Income*- February	<u>\$ 1,377.51</u>	YTD Other Income*	\$ 2,749.16
Total Income - February	\$ 8,084.51	YTD Total Income	\$ 25,341.16
Expenses - February	\$11,490.66	Year to Date Expenses	\$ 21,061.00
Balance - February	\$- 3,406.15	Balance - Year to Date	\$ 4,280.16
		 Prepaid Carryover	 \$ 10,800.00
		Final Balance	\$ 15,080.16

* Other income includes Treasure Sale, 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:	\$ 38,366
Reserve Saving	\$ 38,247
CD's	\$ 184,994
Investments	<u>\$ 198,523</u>
Total Assets	\$ 464,945

Summary - Income for February was low, and expenses were average to low. We do not have a carryover listed for 2025, but \$10,800 in prepaid 2026 pledges expand our positive operating budget balance at the end of January. The 2025 year-end financial report has been rerun and there may be a carryover being shown in next month's report.

Raise the Roof Capital Campaign information was handed out and discussed at the Council meeting. Letters and information will be mailed to members and friends of Union Church.

Tax-free RMD or other donations from your retirement funds can be used to support Union Church or the Raise the Roof Capital Fund. Planned gifts also create a legacy that will ensure the ministry and work of Union Church will continue for years to come. A planned gift is a way to leave assets through your will, beneficiary designations, or estate plan.

Thank you for donations made through Union Church for the Hackensack Area Food Shelf during the March Food Shelf Month campaign.

The Outreach Team Update

By Tammy Lindberg

Mark your calendar!!! Our community benefit meals are set to resume Wednesday, May 6th, from 5:00 to 6:30 PM. We are absolutely humbled by the opportunity to serve you. Get ready to indulge in a delectable Taco Bar Extravaganza, generously supporting the Family Safety Network!!!



WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP


by Sherry Toenjes

We had a very productive March meeting with 9 of us ladies present. We made Easter tabletop decorations and delivered them to each resident at Birchview. It was great fun creating them and also delivering and bringing smiles to their faces as we wished them a Happy Easter!

We had decided on and have now completed two donations in the amount of \$250 each from Women's Fellowship of UCC to our UCC Special Missions Offerings to Neighbors in Need, and the other to the Emergency Grant Program. We all agreed these areas are definitely in need, and we are happy our group was able to help some.

Next month (on April 9th) we'll be having some fun and learning a bit about rug hooking with our own Judy Hoopman. We will also start getting some plans in place for our Spring Plant Sale. Please watch for more information on that and help support our Women's Fellowship of UCC!

Also coming on Wednesday, June 17th is our Fashion Show and luncheon. Please mark your calendars as this is going to be a very fun event, and you won't want to miss it!!



JUSTICE MINISTRY TEAM UPDATE

Almighty God, grant us grace fearlessly to contend against evil, and to make no peace with oppression; and, that we may reverently use our freedom, help us to employ it in the maintenance of justice among people and nations.

■ Adapted from The Book of Common Prayer

The Justice Ministry Team was primarily a purveyor of information this last month. Our primary concern was to keep everyone informed about the presence of ICE in the Cities and in Cass County. We have informed members of the opportunities to demonstrate against ICE in Brainerd where ICE has incarcerated people they have arrested.

JMT Members present at the February meeting decided to change the book we had chosen to another one to be decided at one of the next meetings. We also have interrupted our focus on the LGBTQ issues and will discuss our commitment to them at our next meeting. That is also true of water and environmental issues.

Our next meeting on March 5th will re-evaluate our areas of commitment and our schedule. Our year has been focused on the things that are happening around us while we were making other plans on other topics.

We were proud to support and engage in the ICE OUT – LOVE IN event on February 15th, led by our former chair, Sue Kimmel and hope it will be the first of such gatherings that encourages peace and love among neighbors in our community.

Marilyn McKnight, Chair



ADULT LEARNING – by Linnea Dietrich

The dates for Living Deeply, Dying Well are now set. The class will be held on Tuesdays, June 2, 9, and 23, from 6:00–7:30 p.m.

Laurel Riedel of Minneapolis will lead the sessions via Zoom, guiding participants through the process of writing their healthcare directives while providing valuable information and support.

We will gather in the council room on the lower level of the church to participate together, as we've found great value in discussing the material as a group. A Zoom option is also available for those who are unable to attend in person.

The class is limited to 10 participants, and 5 spots are already filled. The cost is \$75 per person.

If you are interested, please contact Linda in the office. Linda has taken the class herself and is happy to answer any questions you may have.

Lectio Divina continues in the library on Wednesday afternoons at 4 PM. If you have questions about this prayer practice please reach out to Linnea Dietrich or any of the attendees. It is a wonderful time of “going deep” and listening to God and each other with our hearts.

Planning for Camino Hackensack is underway! The dates are Wednesday, October 7-Sunday, October 11. There is plenty of time to train for this walking spiritual retreat. If you are interested, please sign up with Linda in the office. More information will be coming.

NEWS FROM THE WORSHIP MINISTRY TEAM

Spring is on the way! As we drove to Brainerd yesterday, we noticed that the ice on area lakes is looking very gray and “punk.” In addition, we've recently seen eagles and crows sitting on the ice, a sure sign Spring is just around the corner. Much of the snow has melted and driveways are beginning to firm up after mud season, another sign of Spring.

As we enter Holy Week, we are thankful for the wonderful community in which we live, the joy of worshiping every Wednesday with our friends from St. Paul's and The Lighthouse, and the delicious soup and sandwich suppers which follow when we can get to know our neighbors and friends a bit better.

On Maundy Thursday Union will again host a Seder, the ritual feast celebrating the Hebrew people's exodus from Egypt. As in years past, Pastor Michael and Pastor Torri will narrate the service and lead us through the symbolism of the meal remembering an ancient people's flight from slavery and oppression.

On Sunday, April 5 we celebrate Easter and the joy and wonder of the Risen Christ. Hallelujah, He's alive!

After the hustle and bustle of the Lenten Season, the Seder, and Easter, Pastor Torri is going on a much-needed vacation for a week. We will welcome Rev. Sheila Hunter to the pulpit on April 12.

Enjoy the Spring season wherever you are, and if you are returning to the Lake Country, safe travels. We look forward to your return!

Many thanks to Mary Parrish and Gracee Rudkin who faithfully served on the team for many years. Enjoy your retirement, ladies! If anyone would like to join the Worship team, please let us know.

Worship Ministry Team: Heidi Hoppe, Sheryl Kaubisch, Caryl Allan.

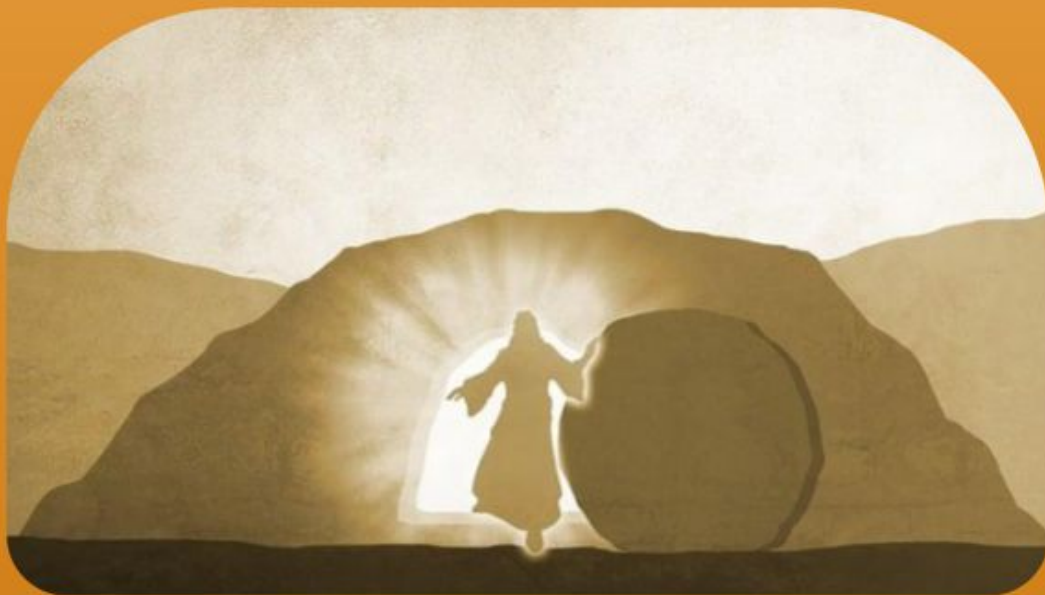


EASTER SUNDAY

APRIL 5TH @ 9:30 AM

UNION CONGREGATIONAL UCC
401 LAKE AVE E
HACKENSACK, MN

ALL ARE WELCOME

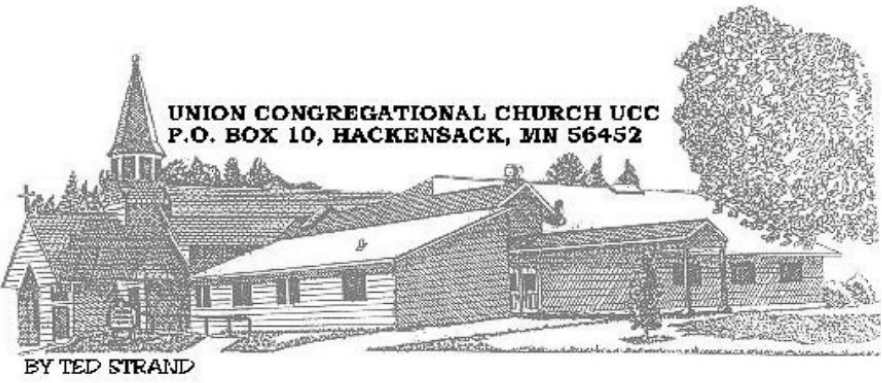


Union Congregational Church, UCC, Hackensack MN

APRIL 2026

* Community event

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	1 WEDNESDAY	2 THURSDAY	3 FRIDAY	4 SATURDAY
5 <i>Easter Sunday</i> 9:30 am Worship Service 10:30 am Coffee Hour 1:00 pm Birchview Church	6 <i>Easter Monday</i> 6:00 pm AA Open Meeting*	7 9:00 am Tech Team Meeting	8 10:00 am Fit2Move 4:00 pm Lectio Divina 7:30 pm Justice Ministry Team Meeting	129 1:00 pm Women's Fellowship	10 Office Closed 10:00 am Fit2Move 1:30 pm Bone Builders*	11
12 9:30 am Worship Service 9:45 am Sunday School 10:30 am Coffee Hour 1:00 pm Birchview Church	13 9:00 am Men's Fellowship 1:30 pm Bone Builders* 6:00 pm AA Open Meeting*	14 9:00 am Tech Team Meeting 10:00 am Executive Committee Meeting	15 <i>Tax Day</i> 10:00 am Fit2Move 4:00 pm Lectio Divina	16 1:00 pm Council Meeting	17 Office Closed 10:00 am Fit2Move 1:30 pm Bone Builders*	18
19 9:30 am Worship Service 10:30 am Coffee Hour 1:00 pm Birchview Church	20 1:30 pm Bone Builders* 6:00 pm AA Open Meeting*	21 9:00 am Tech Team Meeting	22 <i>Earth Day</i> 10:00 am Fit2Move 4:00 pm Lectio Divina	23 1:00 pm Fiber Arts*	24 Office Closed 10:00 am Fit2Move 1:30 pm Bone Builders*	25
26 9:30 am Worship Service 9:45 am Sunday School 10:30 am Coffee Hour 1:00 pm Birchview Church	27 1:30 pm Bone Builders* 6:00 pm AA Open Meeting*	28 9:00 am Tech Team Meeting	29 10:00 am Fit2Move 4:00 pm Lectio Divina	30 8:30 am FIA Volunteer Training*		



FORWARD SERVICE REQUESTED



2026

**EASTER SUNDAY
APRIL 5TH, 9:30 AM
ALL ARE WELCOME!**



THE UNION NEWS