



UNION UCC

Congregational Church

UnionNews

Fall Edition 2025

In This Issue

- 1-2. Pastor's Corner
2. Music Ministry
3. Faith Formation
4. Worship & Arts
5. Congregational Life
6. Trustees
7. History Museum
8. Save the Date

Pages

Pastor's Corner

Dear friends, this past season has been full. Together we've marked sacred milestones: new members welcomed, graduates honored, ministry teams celebrated, and guests embraced. Our worship has ranged from meditative to musical (can anyone say, Christmas in July?!), and our church grounds, belfry to backyard, have been lovingly tended by generous hands. With your gifts, our capital campaign has taken off, and the work of making our building safer and more sustainable is already underway.

Through it all, I've felt the quiet pull of a theme for the year ahead. One that speaks to where we've been, who we are, and what the world needs from communities like ours.

*"You shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in."
—Isaiah 58:12*

Repairers of the breach, that's the call. To mend what's been broken. To tend the sacred spaces where love has frayed, hope has thinned, and community has splintered. It's not work we do alone. And it's not always flashy. But it is holy.



Cont. Page 2

And I believe it's the kind of work our church is called to do if we truly want to live out our credo to sustain a faith community that inspires people to unite and create a peaceful and loving world.

This September, we'll celebrate homecoming to honor our history and plant seeds of tomorrow:

- Saturday, Sept. 13 at 7:00 p.m. – Theology of Broadway: An evening of story and song, where scripture and show tunes meet. It's playful, powerful, and packed with meaning. (And don't miss the dinner, games for kids, and silent auction starting at 5:00 p.m.!) This is a great opportunity to invite someone you miss seeing at church or someone new who needs a compassionate community in their life.
- Sunday, Sept. 14 at 10:00 a.m. – 150th Anniversary Homecoming Worship: A joyful, intergenerational celebration of where we've come from, who we've become, and the faith that carries us forward. Special guest Rev. Trish Greeves will come out of retirement to join me on the chancel and help lead prayers from former clergy and seminarians of Union UCC.

Plan to celebrate with us. And then, let's keep building, mending, and becoming the repairers this world woefully needs.

*With gratitude and grace,
Rev. Nora P. Elliott*

Music Ministry



Handbells and Choir are back for a new season in September! Starting up right after Labor Day, rehearsals began on Wednesday, September 3rd. Handbell rehearsals are every Wednesday from 6-7 P.M., and choir from 7:15-8:15 P.M.

Interested in checking out what the choirs are all about? All the handbell spots are currently full, but if you'd like to learn to ring the bells and are interested in being a "ringer," when one of our regulars is unavailable, please email me at music-director@elkriverucc.org.

Anyone interested in singing is welcome at choir anytime! All voice parts and high school age and older are welcome. Being able to read music is helpful, but there is room for all levels of experience — no auditions required!

Chat with me if you would like to make music with us or feel free just show up to a practice. I am looking forward to working with you this season!

*All the best,
Carson Schneider*

Faith Formation “Fresh opportunities for learning & spiritual growth for all ages.”

Godly Play – A New Sunday School Experience

This fall we're introducing a new (well returning for those who have been around a while) curriculum for our younger elementary kids: Godly Play. Our team has lovingly transformed the smaller room downstairs by the Sunday School into a beautiful, welcoming Godly Play space. During worship, children are invited to spend time in a small group with their peers, where they can get to know each other, hear a Bible story, wonder about it together, and enter into the story world through art and craft activities. Older elementary and youth are invited to help set the tone as leaders or remain with their parents in worship. We'll close each session with prayer while sharing a “feast” and awaiting parents to sign their child out.

Education Hour Returns

Following worship, Education Hour is back! We're starting a collaboration with Anoka UCC to offer Our Whole Lives (OWL) for our communities. With an age-appropriate, science-based human identity curriculum, created by the UCC and UUA, we will integrate faith values with learning about the many aspects of who we are as people.



Registration is open through September 21 for fall. Contact Pastor Nora to register. We're at work behind the scenes to pull together cohorts for any age and stage interested. So if you know someone who might be interested, let us know!

Opportunities for Adults

Older congregants are invited to share their own passions with the church community. If there's a topic you love and would like to teach, let us know, we'll help make it happen! Pastor Nora will also be offering a Bible Study this fall in November or December. Look for sign-ups coming soon, or reach out to let her know you'd like to join.

Youth & Young Adults – Fire & Ice Trip

Mark your calendars because plans are underway to send a group of youth and young adults to the Boundary Waters over Martin Luther King Jr. weekend in January for the Fire & Ice camping trip. More details will be available this fall, but it will be for 7th grade and up (or 6th with a parent). Young adults 18+ are more than welcome to attend as mentors for the youth!

This is an exciting time for our church family to learn, grow, and explore faith together, whether in the warmth of a Godly Play circle, in deep conversation during OWL, around an adult ed table, or under the winter stars up north.

Worship & Arts

“Hello from the Liturgical Arts team!”



Summer is winding down, and we have been busy planning for fall and Advent. We are excited to build on the work of others in this role and look forward to contributing our ideas to the mix! Our focus when planning is to bring a sense of wonder and creativity to the spaces where we gather. We hope to try some new ideas and create a fresh feel for how our church looks, and how it welcomes us when we come together.

Last Saturday, we took a short road trip to New Ulm and had a great time! We heard it's the fabric panel headquarters of Minnesota, and it exceeded our expectations. We found beautiful images that we will use to create new wall hangings for our church and expand our collection throughout the year. We're also going to create décor for specialty services that are currently underrepresented, such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals.

In the near future, we will also clean out and organize the Liturgical Arts storage closet and expand the existing printed portfolio that lays out the decor we have on hand for each season and specific events. This tool has been helpful to us, as we are both new to this work, and we know it will continue to be a valuable resource for future members. We will also post a wish list of small/multipurpose items in the Narthex. If you have any items on the list that are sitting unused in a closet and you'd like to donate them, or if you have questions about the items on the list, please let one of us know.

Be on the lookout as we work with what we have in new ways, and even shake up some tried-and-true seasonal displays. If you think this sounds like too much fun, you're absolutely right. We believe we're a hoot to work with, and we'd love to have you join us!

– Ann and Heidi, Liturgical Arts Team

Upcoming Special Services & Communion

September 7, Rally Sunday - Communion

September 14, Homecoming Sunday- Special guest
Rev. Trish Greeves

October 5 - World Communion Day

October 12, National Coming Out Day

November 2, All Saints - Communion & photos of
loved ones who have passed

November 23, Hanging of the Greens - After worship

November 30, Advent Begins

December 7 - Communion

December 24, Christmas Eve

4:00pm (Family Friendly Lessons & Carols)

7:00pm (Contemplative).



Congregational Life “Keeping busy this summer!”

The Inner Church group has been honing in on how to solve our hospitality volunteer shortage and our new system has been going terrific! With only 5 open spots left for the 2025 year, we are hopeful that we can get them filled by you and your family. Don't have enough people in your family and feel overwhelmed by the idea of taking on hospitality by yourself? Reach out and we will connect you with 1-2 additional folks to work with. Looking ahead, we are planning some fun games and activities for the 150th Anniversary Dinner taking place Saturday, September 13th 2025.



The Wider Community Team was busy in July preparing for the 3rd Annual Wright Sherburne Pride where we had a great turn out! We met so many lovely people and can't wait to return next year. August we will be working with Prism, a twin cities organization who looks at what is needed in communities to better support LGBTQ+ folks. They hosted a community conversation over dinner

in the fellowship hall Tuesday, August 26th from 6-8pm that saw about 20 people in attendance. We are also looking forward to assisting the Inner Church team with games and activities at the 150th Anniversary Dinner, September 13th.

We added another “branch” to our team! In June, we welcomed Giuliana Beckwith to the team to help lead an Environmental Justice group under Congregational Life. She has been hard at work organizing yet another plastic drive for Union to have a second bench out front. Do you have non recyclable plastic lying around your house? Take a look at the plastic collection bins in our entry way to see if it qualifies to be donated. Interested in volunteering for Environmental Justice initiatives? Talk to Giuliana about how to help.

As always, a huge thank you to our Congregational Care team for the cards and prayer shawls given out to our members and visitors over these last couple months. Whether you are needing to be lifted up in prayer or have something joyous on your heart and mind, our Congregational Care ladies are there to make sure you are reminded that the church is thinking of you.

Interested in joining the team? We are always looking for new members or volunteers. Talk to me about meeting information, my email is rylie.erynn@gmail.com.

- Rylie Priolo, Congregational Life Chair

Trustees – Buildings & Grounds

**“Safe, Sacred, and Strong –
Progress is Underway!”**

Thanks to your generosity, Union’s capital campaign is off to a strong start! As of this printing, we’ve raised \$12,601 toward our campaign goal, with \$10,920 in total pledges. Of the gifts received so far, \$4,720 came from pledged contributions, and \$7,881 from unpledged gifts. Every dollar makes a difference, and we’re putting it to work as we zero in on our first milestone, \$17,000!

Much of the early giving has supported our bat mitigation and removal project, a long-overdue effort to lovingly evict some uninvited guests from our church belfry. The work has already begun: bat removal vents have been installed, and we’re well on our way to securing a cleaner, safer space for our building and its ministries.

Meanwhile, the Trustees continue to be good stewards of our church property. With all the heavy rain this summer, we’ve been focused on preventing flooding in the parsonage basement, exploring long-term solutions to protect the space from future water damage.

We also want to give a special shout out to our tenant, who generously helped weed and clean up the backyard gardens, and to the faithful folks keeping our church grounds looking beautiful week after week: Joan & Keith Stevens, Arlo Shultz, Jim Petters, and Karen & Madelynn Sherper Rohls; thank you for your steady hands and green thumbs!

Together, we are tending this sacred space, one bat and blade of grass at a time.



Union Church has many stories in its 150-year history. Stories of faith and leadership, of those who have been part of it, of those touched by its ministry, and of those who still have stories to write and experience.

Recent Church History to Date

As with most any decade, between our 140th and 150th anniversary, there were challenges and changes. For most of this decade, Rev. Robin Raudabaugh was our minister and leader. When she retired, Rev. Sheri Nelson became our bridge pastor, as we searched for a settled pastor. As the result of our search, Rev. Nora P. Elliott answered our call and continues as our settled Pastor.

Maybe the most significant event for our church came from outside of our walls. Our world was plunged into the global pandemic, Covid-19. Our world had not seen such an event since the influenza of 1918. Globally, we wrestled with the fear of the unknown. Our country essentially shut down, including businesses, schools, and of course, our Union Church. This was completely new and foreign territory. How would we be spiritually nourished? The question was answered by our staff, and maybe most crucially, our Church Administrator, Giulianna Beckwith. We would go virtual! Our services were recorded and sent out on Facebook. We could watch our church from the privacy and safety of our own homes. Those were frightening days. Church on Facebook left us a little less uncertain, and a little was a lot. To make lemonade out of lemons, we continue to this day to be on Facebook, and have expanded to YouTube & live-streaming on our own website, ElkRiverUCC.org.



This was also a time of great change for our physical plant. The first challenge was the replacement of our aging boiler. That was even more difficult and expensive than it sounds! Secondly, during this time frame, our church was reroofed and resided. Finally, with an eye to a future social justice use. The parsonage was renovated and is currently being rented, with an eye to a future social justice use. Stay tuned...

Over the past ten years, some have moved on, while others have joined us in this sacred space. We look to the future with optimism. Our church exterior is updated, we are not worried about the heat, and we may have a new social justice initiative in the near future...

For more history, information, and fun reading, pick up a history book at the church on September 13 & 14 for our 150th Anniversary Homecoming. You won't want to miss it!

- 150th Anniversary Task Force

Union UCC Calendar

Upcoming Events

September 7

Rally Sunday after worship! Join us in the parking lot for a bounce house, a tie-dye booth with free shirts for kids, music, games, and lots of fun!

September 13 & 14

Homecoming Weekend! Join us on September 13th, for Gathering and games: 4:30 - 5:30 pm, Silent Auction: 4:30 - 7 pm, Dinner served in fellowship hall: 5:30 - 6:30 pm, Theology of Broadway: 7 - 8 pm, with donations supporting the Safe, Sacred, & Strong Capital Campaign. Join us on September 14th for a special day of worship.

September 21

Special Guest, Cindy Ley, executive director with Open Doors for Youth will be with us to share an update. She will stick around after her worship update for fellowship hour.

Save The Date

November 2

All Saints worship

November 23

Hanging of the Greens after worship

November 28

Advent begins

December 24

Christmas Eve

4:00 PM

Lesson & Carols

7:00 PM

Contemplative

UNION UCC
Congregational Church



1118 4th St. NW
Elk River, MN 55330