



UNION UCC

Congregational Church

UnionNews

Winter Edition

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Pastor's Corner

Beloved community, the past few months have been a rollercoaster. From celebrating our 150th anniversary, to Dreaming God's Dream in Advent then awaking to a Minnesotan nightmare in Jan. I am once again grateful to be in sacred community with you here, at Union Congregational Church.

As we continue to navigate the challenges around us and get creative to find new ways to follow our gospel call to love our neighbors, I am encouraged by what I have witnessed around the state: folks showing up to care about each other. We remember that Christ told his followers to turn their swords to plowshares and not react to violence with violence. To that end, I share this picture of over 600 people gathering to learn hymns of welcome and peace for immigrant neighbors, before walking through the neighborhoods around where Nicole Good's life was taken. When it seems we can do nothing, let us seek out and invest in communal actions, for we will endure and come out the other side a stronger community and nation.

- Pastor Nora



Music Ministry

Our choirs are back after a holiday break and gearing up for another year of musical offerings!

Bell Choir is currently full, but welcomes “ringers” to come learn how it’s done and have the chance to fill in if one of our regulars are unable to attend worship on a day when they are playing. Bell Choir meets each Wednesday in the choir room (upstairs at the end of the hall) at 6:00 PM.

Vocal Choir welcomes all levels, ranges, and abilities. If you’re interested in singing with our crew, all you have to do is show up to rehearsal! We meet each Wednesday in the choir room at 7:15 PM.

Please contact Carson Schneider, Director of Music, if you’d like more information about our choirs or getting involved with the music ministry in another way. Her email is: Music-Director@ElkRiverUCC.org



Thank you to the Sherper Rohs family for providing special music on Christmas Eve.



Our Bell Choir and Vocal Choirs will each bring music to worship at least once a month, through May

At Union UCC, Faith Formation is taking on new life this year, weaving together curiosity, creativity, and community across generations.

One exciting change is in Sunday School, where parents are now invited to take an active role in story time. Each month, families can sign up to lead a story, with lessons thoughtfully provided by Pastor Nora. "It's wonderful to see parents sharing scripture with their kids in their own voice," says Pastor Nora. Meanwhile, Ruth Johnson continues to lead weekly craft activities, creating hands-on opportunities for children to explore their faith. She encourages anyone interested to join in, whether to guide a craft, read a story, or simply support our growing children's ministry.



Our Whole Lives returns with a Middle School cohort

Feb 22 - Mar 29, Sunday afternoons
12:15 PM to 2:15 PM

When OWL is not running, our Youth Room downstairs is available to youth of all ages after worship until 3pm for a study hall. Connect with Pastor Nora if you have any questions.

From Sunday School crafts to adult cohorts, and from youth camping trips to thoughtful Bible study, Faith Formation at Union UCC is all about growing together, learning, exploring, and nurturing faith at every stage of life.

Laura Elliott



Worship & Arts

MEALS ON WHEELS...THE MINISTRY

If you are anything like me, you ask yourself, "What can I do to further give back?" Well, though I would always say I don't do enough, one avenue of giving back I have found very satisfying is volunteering for Meals on Wheels. Afterall, I am delivering food and social contact to people yearning for both. It might just be an outreach you would enjoy too. A number of you, at our church are already engaged in Meals on Wheels, and know the ropes better than I do. But if you are curious, let me tell you all about it.

Our church does a route for an entire month, every third month. We deliver Monday through Friday, on a volunteer basis. Generally, we do the same route, the blue route, every time. Though some of the names change, most remain the same. That is nice, as we can develop rapport with those we serve, a bond, if you will. We pick up our meals at the back door (it's marked Meals on Wheels) Guardian Angels, on Evans, off of Main Street about 10:30. Generally, we deliver 6-10 meals, and it takes about an hour.

There are hot and cold bags. We have a directory with addresses. I use my GPS on my phone or my car dashboard to help me find directions and go about my route. They must have a slick program for routing us, as goes in a logical manner. When you have delivered all of your meals drop your bags back off. Simple as that.

An added benefit is that you might find someone who would like to ride along with you. Pastor Nora rode along with me last week and we had a great time, and our clients loved meeting her. It is a great time to get to know someone better, and that is always a good deal. I deliver every month our church is assigned. If anyone would like to ride along with me to get to know what it is all about, I would be happy to pick you up at the church for a ride along. If you do Meals on Wheels, your clients smile is thanks enough. If you haven't tried it, you should.

Meals on Wheels signups are available in the Narthex Volunteer Corner or by emailing ChurchOffice@ElkRiverUCC.org.



Pastor Nora, Dave Foley, and Meals on Wheels Director Carol Myher

Dave Foley

Congregational Life

Gathering, Giving, and Growing: Highlights from Congregational Life

We've had a recent spark of inspiration: what if we could take food that might otherwise go to waste and turn it into nourishment for our neighbors? With SNAP benefits reduced for many in our community, Congregational Life has begun imagining ways Union UCC could respond. From partnering with local restaurants to exploring a recurring community meal, the discussion has been full of energy and hope, a reminder that service and fellowship are intertwined. Research will begin to connect with local businesses, explore safe redistribution of perishable food, and envision the next steps in supporting those who are hungry or marginalized.



Jingle Bingo, brought a festive luncheon of pasta, salads, desserts, and laughter, with M&Ms for bingo markers and holiday prizes generously donated by the congregation.

Congregational Life is planning spring events and ongoing service opportunities. A Spring Garage Sale on March 21 will invite neighbors to linger at our church, while monthly volunteer sessions at CAER will provide hands-on support to children in need.

Inside the church, the rollout of updated name tags is in the works, to ensure that everyone can display their name and pronouns if they wish, as well as including our new church logo, helping to reinforce our commitment to welcome and inclusion.

**First Name
Last Name**

pronouns

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Caring for each other is at the heart of our work. Whether coordinating a meal, organizing a holiday event, or preparing to serve the wider community, these efforts reflect a living faith. A faith that values hospitality, service, and connection. In Congregational Life, small acts of planning, generosity, and collaboration ripple outward, shaping a community that is compassionate, joyful, and ready to meet the world with open hands.

Adapted from meeting notes taken by Desi Stumo

New Members are welcomed into our community at least twice a year. If you are interested in learning more about what membership at Union UCC entails, please contact

Pastor Nora - RevNora@ElkRiverUCC.org

Trustees – Buildings & Grounds

Housing for Homeless Youth: Open Doors and Union Church Parsonage

The Housing Implementation team of Open Doors has been meeting at Union since September to plan for the July (hopefully) opening of the parsonage as a residence for homeless youth, 18-24 years old. Each member of the team has generated a list of tasks to be carried out in the coming months. This task list can be viewed on the wall of the Chorister room downstairs in the church. In October, a meeting with neighborhood residents addressed plans and concerns, allowing neighbors to ask questions and become more informed about the project. Since then, meetings of the Implementation team have centered on discussions of core values and goals for the project, staffing schedules, and plans for donations. Much more work has yet to be done, but there is much excitement mixed with the strong desire to make this project succeed.



Capital Campaign Update

Capital Campaign funds raised for accessibility improvements: as of 1/9/26

Unpledged giving: \$22,411

Pledged: \$17,692 (collected \$12,232)

Total is now: \$40,103 with unpledged and pledge amounts combined!

That's almost half of our 3-year goal in 6 months! Thank you!!!



History – 150th Anniversary

Theology of Broadway

Special guest singers and a talented pianist brought our anniversary theme Honoring the Past, Celebrating the Present, and Embracing the Future to life during the Theology of Broadway performance, delighting audiences with show-stopping numbers and meaningful homiletics from Pastor Nora.

Dinner

A feel-good chicken dinner provided a warm, communal atmosphere, with fun and fellowship for all ages as friends and neighbors gathered to celebrate together.

Silent Auction

Our silent auction featured a variety of donated items, all of which found new homes, raising over \$2,000 to support the church's capital campaign.

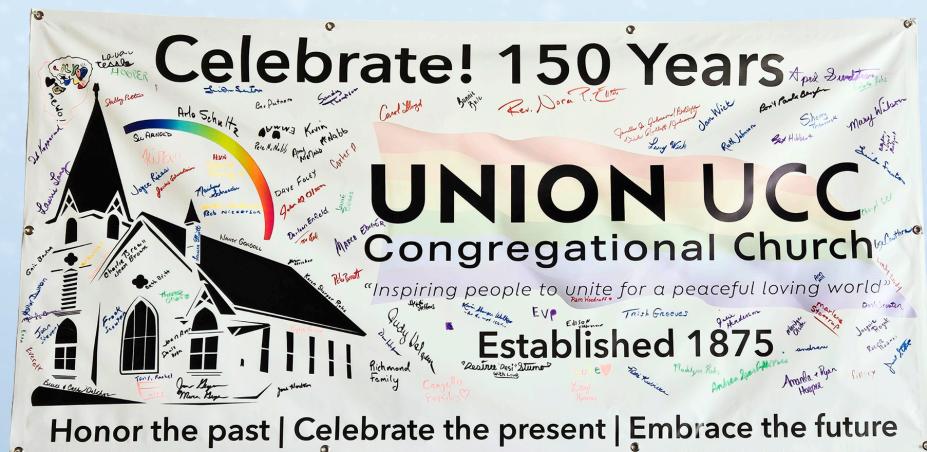


Sunday Worship

Rev. Trish Greeves returned after 20 years to co-officiate communion with Pastor Nora, creating a memorable and meaningful worship experience for all who attended.

Banner

Members of the congregation and community signed a commemorative banner, adding their names to the living history of Union UCC and honoring our shared journey.



Union UCC Calendar

Jan 29 - Caring Support Group
Feb 12 - Council Meeting
Feb 18 - Ash Wednesday Soup
Crawl & Worship Service
Lent - The Work of Community
Feb 26 - Caring Support Group
March 8 - Daylight Saving

March 12 - Council Meeting
March 21 - Church Garage Sale
March 26 - Caring Support Group
April 2 - Maundy Thursday *Last Supper Communion Service*
April 3 - Joint Good Friday Service
April 5 - Easter Sunday

We, the people of Union Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, with our faith based in the life and ministry of Christ Jesus, choose to be in community with one another knowing that there is value in the connection between us. We recognize that being in this faith-based community brings greater joy and meaning to our lives, and brings the gifts and challenges of differing perspectives, opinions, personalities and priorities. We recognize that each one of us has value and deserves to speak and be heard. We also recognize that each of us is imperfect and deserves compassion, comfort and grace. We pledge to demonstrate our love for each other in how we listen, speak, and act, welcoming disagreement as a vehicle for growth and deeper understanding. Just as we seek peace and justice in the broader world, we also strive for it within our faith community, with the help of God.

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