

# 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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## Inside this issue:

Notes from Pastor Torri Vande Zande	1, 3
Birthdays	2
Worship Ministry	3
Council Minutes	4, 5
Celebrating the Past	5
Through Koda's Eyes	6
Moderator's Moment	6
The Christmas Fund	7
Women's Fellowship	8
Financial Stewardship	8
Adult Learning	9
Justice Ministry Team	9
Events	10
Calendar	11

# DECEMBER 2024

## Notes from Pastor Torri Vande Zande

### Noticing the Little Things

I spent the last three months on a sabbatical. I am very grateful to the church for that time away. I have been looking back and processing that experience for the last few weeks.

One of the many things I have learned (or relearned) has been to notice little things. I took several hikes with Koda through fields, woods and trails. Everything seemed to slow down when I was walking. I noticed different kinds of plants, leaves and yes...rocks.

One day when I was walking on a trail, I started feeling very anxious. I looked on the ground and saw this twig that was blown off of a large tree. I picked it up, held it between my fingers and felt the wood grain. I thought about how the twig used to be connected to a greater structure and was grounded by the roots of that big tree. And how that big tree was interwoven with root systems from other trees around it.

I then began to ask myself how I am grounded. What are my roots? And what are the other root systems that are around me that give me strength and support? I felt myself slowly centering and God's peace



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	Caryl Allan
Treasurer	Sheryl Kaubisch
Bell Choir Director	Heidi Hoppe
Musicians	Sheryl Kaubisch Kathleen Millberg Barb Nish Dick Kimmel

## BOARDS

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

## LEADERSHIP

Moderators	Marilyn McKnight & Steve Erickson
Vice Moderator	Gunder Austin
Clerk	Karen Holle
Board of Financial Stewardship	Don Hoppe

## MINISTRY TEAMS

Adult Learning	Linnea Dietrich
Congregational Life	Caryl Allan
Justice Ministry Team	Sue Kimmel
Worship	Heidi Hoppe
Women's Fellowship	Joni Kumpula
Men's Fellowship	Stan Kumpula
Online Sales	Cindy Gulbrandson
Tech Team	Mike Schmitt

## BIBLE STUDY

A new bible study will be offered starting Thursday, January 30<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 a.m. in the church library.



This bible study is for beginners! It will go over characters, major stories and help people understand the basics of the bible. It is an 11 week class led by Pastor Torri. No need to sign up, just show up that day!

## DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

December 10	Grace Noonan
December 12	Michael Small
December 14	Charles Green
December 15	Verlee Cline
December 17	Angie (Tauber) Danielson
December 21	Lois Bohanon Alan Christianson
December 27	Gordon Ford
December 28	Kathy Green
December 31	Mike Gulbrandson

*Happy Birthday!*



Continued from Page 1

began to move within me.

I have felt an anxiousness in the world over the past few months. It could be because of the changing weather, the results of the election, or maybe something happening within someone's family. I don't really know.... But I feel it.

I would like to take this time to remind everyone of the Advent season that is starting on December 1<sup>st</sup>. It is a time to settle ourselves, quiet our inner chaos, and maybe focus on the little things. Maybe this is a time where you might notice something, pick it up (either physically or metaphorically) and contemplate what God might be saying to you at that moment?

What are some things that represent hope to you? Is it a picture of a grandchild? Hearing the voice of your children? Watching your dog fetch a ball?

What are some things that represent peace to you? Is it a quilt that your mom made for you? Is it watching the snowfall on a cold winter day? Is it having the whole family under one roof?

What are some things that represent joy to you? Is it a child's laughter? Is it a kitten playing with a string? Is it finding the perfect rock on the ground?

What are some things that represent love to you? Is it a hug from someone you adore? Is it the soft fur of a beloved pet? Is it a card from someone who knew what you needed to hear at that moment?

Hope, joy, peace, and love can be found in this world if you take the time to notice it in the little things. May this Advent season be filled with little glimpses of God's extravagant love for you.

Pastor Torri

## NEWS FROM THE WORSHIP MINISTRY TEAM

We are so happy to welcome back our dear Pastor Torri. The sabbatical time was fun, interesting, and informative, but I sure am happy to see Torri's smiling face each Sunday morning!

Advent, the season of waiting for the arrival of the Christ Child has begun. We're partnering with St. Paul's Lutheran Church again this year, and the services will highlight favorite hymns. You can find the schedule of weekly locations elsewhere in this newsletter. Each service will be followed by a soup and sandwich supper, and if you are unable to join us in person, be sure to tune in since the services will be streamed each week.

Our Christmas Eve service will be held at 5:00 p.m. this year, and will feature readings of the Christmas story, carols, and the traditional candle lighting as we sing "Silent Night." As always, everyone is welcome to attend. Bring your friends and neighbors for this heartwarming service.

Torri will be visiting her family the week after Christmas, and we will welcome our own Luise Forseth into the pulpit on December 29th.

Take care, and have a wonderful Christmas with friends and family.

Worship Ministry Team: Heidi Hoppe, Caryl Allan, Sheryl Kaubisch, Gracee Rudkin, and Mary Parrish.





# COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

NOVEMBER 21, 2024 DRAFT *(Not yet approved by council)*

**Present:** Pastor Torri, Heidi and Don Hoppe, Mike Bohanon, Steve Erickson, Caryl Allan, Joni Kumpula, Linnea Dietrich, Mike and Connie Schmitt (by zoom), Gunder Austin, Gary Dietrich, Karen Holle, and Judy Hoopman

Steve called the meeting to order. Torri offered a short prayer.

The agenda was approved with the addition of Gary Dietrich speaking on behalf of the Child Care Center. The minutes were approved as written. Gunder/Linnea

**Sabbatical Update:** Pastor Torri's sabbatical is complete and she has returned!!

**Child Care Update from Gary Dietrich:** Discussed: a recommendation from Gary to not raise the rent due to enrollment fluctuations, current low numbers, and Ashley's slow and intentional approach to make this facility a positive investment for our community. Discussed the need to increase publicity regarding availability of daycare openings in the community. Cindy Gulbrandson is on the Child Care Advisory Board, and the Council would like Cindy to attend Council meetings to represent Great Start Child Care. Motion: A recommendation was made to keep the current rate of rent (\$500/month) until August, which will be six months after the anniversary date of operations. It is recommended that the rent fee be reviewed in August. Sue/Heidi – motion approved.

**Pastor's Monthly Report:** Torri asked to hold a meeting on January 11<sup>th</sup> at 9:30 with Council, team members, and other interested members at large from the congregation for the purpose of planning a calendar of events, activities, etc. for the next 4 months as a starting point for future strategic planning. The intention is to improve communication and to firm up calendar events and activities.

**Board of Facilities:** Mike reported the repairs in the daycare area have been completed. The upper level bathrooms have been improved since the metal partitions were taken out.

**Personnel Board:** Connie has not spoken with Tammy yet as she was waiting for clarification about giving notice to the current cleaning business. They request a 45-day notice, which was given. Connie will discuss the new cleaning position with Tammy as per the recommendations discussed at the October meeting. The budget allows for Tammy to receive an hourly wage as an employee. Her start date will be 1-1-2025.

**Board of Financial Stewardship:** Don presented his report for the month of October. Total income for the month was \$12,426.00, and expenses were \$13,172.00, with both being lower than previously. We currently have a positive balance of \$11,001.49 for the year. Don submitted a report to the Council clarifying this. The 2025 Stewardship Moments have ended, and pledges have been behind as compared to this time last year. Don provided the council members with information about the church's investments with discussion about restricted or dedicated funds and funds that can be accessed if necessary. Don's financial report was accepted by the Council.

**Congregational Life:** Caryl gave a brief update on Burton W's recovery. She will be sending out Christmas cards to church members that are homebound. She will set up a box in the Friendship Hall for anyone who may have cards to donate to this cause.

**Worship:** Heidi reported that Worship in Torri's absence went very well, and there was some reflection from council members about the past three months and what this meant to our congregation. Heidi reported numbers of attendees at Sunday services have been lower; 34 in church, 9 households online, and 8-9 at Birchview. Heidi loaned some chimes to Community Church in Walker and has been discussing with them bell choir options for our congregation.

**Adult Learning:** Linnea informed the council that the Taize Service will happen after the first of the year. Lectio continues on Wednesdays and will start at 3:45 in December to accommodate the Advent services. Some of the grant money from the Hackensack Camino is still available and will be used for next year's Hackensack Camino.

**Women's Fellowship:** We will have the annual cookie and craft sale on December 8<sup>th</sup>. The annual Christmas dinner will be December 12<sup>th</sup> at noon, RSVP if interested. Men's Fellowship will join this dinner for their December event. December 13<sup>th</sup> is the Christmas concert with music by Sabbastian Wilson-Webb at 7:00. This is a community event so everyone is invited.

**Men's Fellowship:** They are working on the holiday food boxes for families, meeting Monday Nov 25 at 8:30 to pack boxes. On December 1<sup>st</sup> they will be setting up the church Christmas trees. The community fundraising dinners during the summer raised over \$1,400, which is enough for all the holiday food boxes – Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter.

**Justice Ministry:** Sue shared a brief summary of a meeting with Public Health in November and that JMT is forming a partnership with them by sharing resources, education about mental health and substance use/misuse and reporting suspicious activity. JMT book study will begin on January 7<sup>th</sup> by zoom, and the book selection is Poverty, by America by Matthew Desmond. JMT is planning a spring brunch and movie. JMT is looking for a co-leader/leader for the Neighbors Helping Neighbors community cleanup in May. Suggestion was made to discuss the need for leadership with the Lions.

**Fundraising:** Two community meals are being planned with benefits going to the church. One meal will be in March around the St. Patrick's holiday of a boiled dinner, and the other will be a fall harvest meal in October. Dates need to be coordinated with the Outreach team.

**Tech Team:** The focus is on the Advent and Christmas services. The rooms in the downstairs have been remodeled.

**Outreach:** Outreach provided a written report of what they have been planning. This included a mission statement and goal. The mission is to engage the community in UCC events, inviting people into our church family. A representative from this team is needed for council meetings.

**Moderator's Moment:** Steve read a thought-provoking piece for the Council as a prayer.

**Old business:** Karen's resignation and review of her duties have been discussed with the Executive committee, and they are making decisions on how to handle the responsibilities.

**New Business:** None      December newsletter deadline is Tuesday, November 26<sup>th</sup>.

Motion to adjourn meeting Joni/Linnea, approved. No council meeting in December. Next meeting is January 16<sup>th</sup>.  
Minutes written by Judy Hoopman

## Celebrating the Past: The Christmas Season

Myra Damm, Historian

The Christmas season in the church has been one of much celebration starting in the Advent season.

Plans were being made for the Children's Christmas program, with rehearsals, verses to memorize, costumes to be made, the nativity scene reenacted with Mary, Joseph, the baby, three wise men, shepherds and a few sheep, and also angels were a big part. The congregation looked forward to the pageant as the children usually put on a little performance of their own, but the message of the birth of Christ had so much meaning for us all that even as children, if we took part in the Christmas program, we felt the importance and the reverence of the event.

The Christmas tree was usually a very large tree that the men would go out into the woods to cut, bring it in and set up in the sanctuary where it would be decorated with ornaments made by the Sunday School children. Today we have a beautiful artificial tree, some assembly required, but still so lovely.

There was Christmas caroling done by the choir and others who would join in. In the old days it was done with horse and buggy, singers tucked under heavy blankets to keep warm.

They would go from place-to-place singing carols, being served hot chocolate or treats by recipients.

A time of great joy in the church! As we move into the New Year we are reminded again of the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you and yours!

## THROUGH KODA'S EYES

Hi! My name is Koda, and I am the Church Dog! Did you miss me? I sure missed you!

I was on an adventure with my human! We went to all sorts of places and saw a bunch of different things I've never seen before! We saw waterfalls and big areas of water. We saw a ton of trees and paths that led us deep into the woods! It was incredible!

But... if I have to be honest... I was pretty scared a few times. I've never experienced the areas we went to. I never knew where we were going or what we were going to do. I remember not wanting to get out of the car one time, but after some reassurance I slowly climbed out. I just had to trust my human to guide me through whatever we needed to do. And guess what? It was one of the best adventures we had!

Sometimes life can get pretty scary. So many things can make us fearful and not want to get out of the car. But when someone (who is bigger and stronger than us) reassures us that they will be with us and we can trust them, it makes all the difference in the world! It gives us strength and courage!

And that makes me wonder.... Who does my human trust when SHE does not want to get out of the car? Maybe it's her God that she talks to on the pathways through the woods? Maybe that is who she trusts to make sure we are safe? If it is, this God must be pretty incredible! And this God must love her (and me) a lot!

Well, that's how I see things through my eyes!

Have a barky day! And Merry Christmas!

Koda

P.S. Bandit (the cat) says he does not want to say "hi," but I know deep in his heart he wants to. So, "hi" from Bandit!



## MODERATOR'S MOMENT

'Tis the season of Peace, Love and Joy! On our first Christmas together (1968), our homemade Christmas card had outlines of three small cookie cutters of a heart, a star, and a Christmas tree on the outside of a small note card. They said it all – sharing peace, love, and joy to all in this celebration of the birth of the Son of God! Here we are Christmas 2024, with our secular world still in peril, yet we take time off from the news of wars, famine, and discontent and turn our attention to Christmas with joy, peace and love elevated from the perils of today's world and find so many wonderful ways to celebrate Jesus' birth. We look forward to sharing the peace, joy and love as you read this newsletter and join in the many wonderful Christmas gatherings at church. We look forward to sharing the peace of Christ with you and wish you a most joyous Christmas season!

# THE CHRISTMAS FUND — DECEMBER MISSION

by Karen Holle

In this season when we thank God for the great things that have been done through unlikely people and in unexpected ways, we give thanks that we, too, by God's Spirit, can do great things. We too, can lift up those who are laid low. We too, can fill the hungry with good things to eat. We too, through our generosity, can proclaim that nothing will be impossible with God's help.

We can do all of that and more by contributing to the United Church of Christ's Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross. Our gifts help retired clergy, church staff, and their surviving spouses to pay bills, maintain their health insurance, and meet emergency needs. These servants of the church have spent lifetimes baptizing and blessing, teaching and preaching, marrying and burying, comforting and empowering God's people. Now, through the Christmas Fund, we have the opportunity to sustain and empower them.

Our contributions tell our former servants of the church that they are not forgotten, that they are loved, that they and their ministries are appreciated and remembered.

In 2023, gifts to the Christmas Fund enabled:

Monthly pension supplementation for 210 retired clergy and lay employees (\$1,007,289)

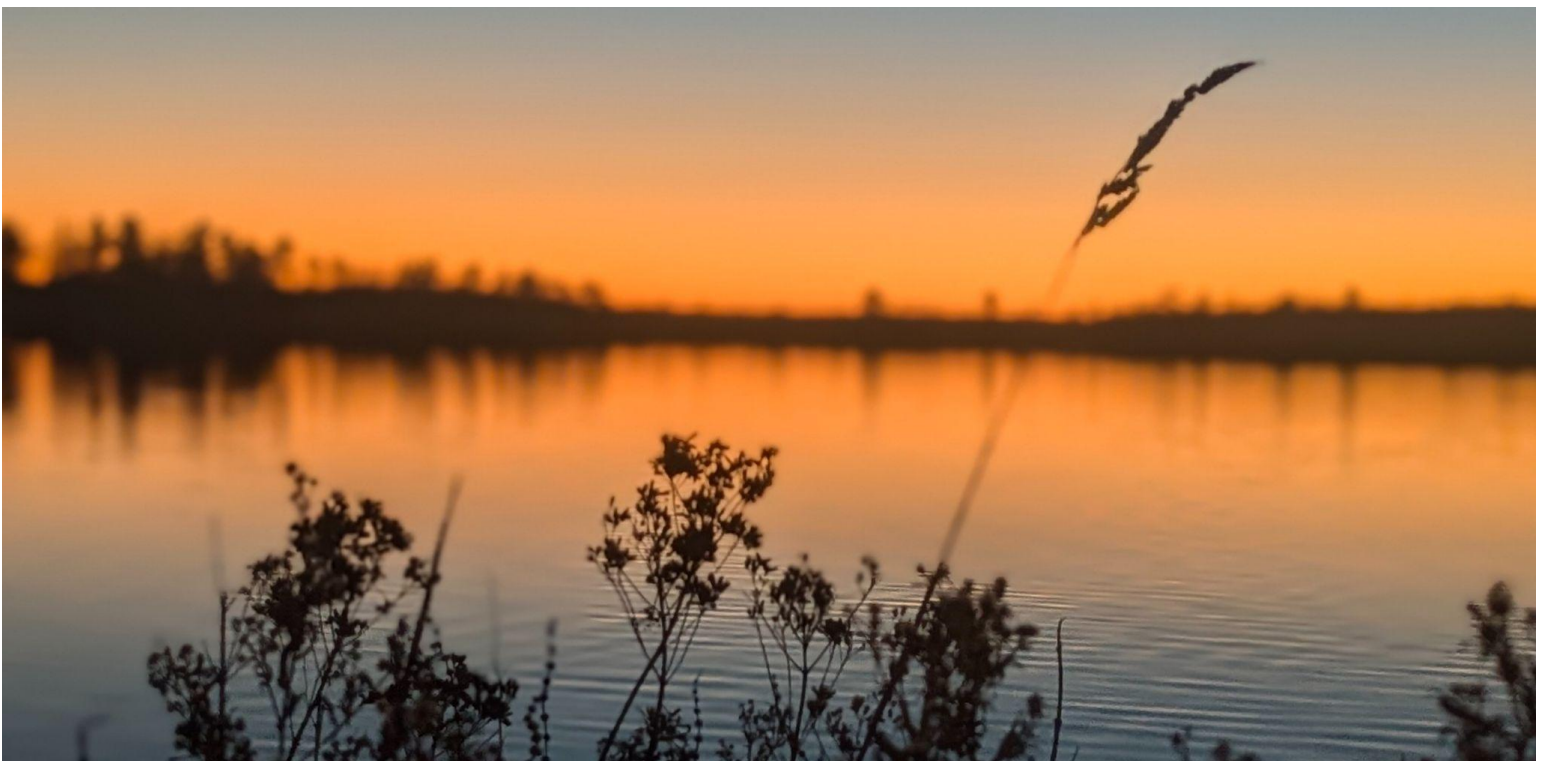
Health benefits supplementation for 82 retired clergy and lay employees (\$173,745).

Emergency grants for 67 individuals and families (\$155,992).

Monthly supplementation grant to 74 retired clergy (\$351,344).

Christmas "thank you" gift checks to 511 retired clergy and lay employees (\$255,500).

Please give as generously as you are able this year! Checks can be sent to Union Church with a note in the memo line that the money is for the Christmas Fund. Thank you!



## WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP

Greetings and Merry Christmas and wonderful holidays! Wow it's December and so much is happening. First the Cookie and Craft Sale is after church on the 8th. Same as always - bring cookies to sell, labeled, six on a 7-inch paper plate. Then, buy at \$2 a plate. Bring the crafts, and we'll help set them up on separate tables.

Next our Congregational Thank You Luncheon is the 12th (our usual meeting day) at noon. Reservations are due by the 8th. COME and enjoy lunch and fun! No cost, provided by Women's Fellowship. This is for all men and women, members and friends of Union.

Next, on Friday the 13th at 7 PM is our fabulous Christmas concert. We hope to fill the sanctuary to overflowing. This will be so special! Come and bring friends. This is free will offering or no charge. We all know and love our own local Sabbastian!!!

Wow! After all that, we will be ready to celebrate the season. Join us for Advent and all the events. After this we will take a break in January with no meeting.

See you in church! Joni and our great team  
Sarah, Sherry, Cindy and Caryl

## BOARD OF FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

### Operating Income and Expenses

Giving Income - October	\$ 10,572.00	Year to Date 2024 Giving	\$118,136.00
Other Income* - October	\$ 1,854.00	YTD Other Income*	\$ 14,267.63
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$ 12,426.00</b>	<b>YTD Total Income</b>	<b>\$ 132,403.63</b>
Expenses - October	\$ 13,172.00	Year to Date Expenses	\$ 154,613.38
Balance - October	<b>-\$ 746.00</b>	Balance - Year to Date	<b>\$ -22,210.08</b>
		FY 2024 Prepaid Pledges	\$ 8,100.00
		Previous FY Carryover	\$ 25,111.57
		<b>Final Balance</b>	<b>\$ 11,001.49</b>

\* Other income includes, building use, donations, online sales, Community Meals, fundraisers and all other income sources except interest and dividends generated from restricted funds and specified donations or grants not going into operating funds. The Year to Date Giving does not include \$5,500 of 2025 prepaid pledges

### Summary

Both October income and expenses were lower than normal. At this point, our income balance for the year and our ability to meet our operating budget remains questionable. We are looking more closely at our expenses, especially regarding facilities, which are greater than expected and budgeted. Also, giving has been less than expected. Good giving and completion of pledges continues to be needed to have a balanced 2024 budget.

The 2025 Stewardship campaign is quite a lot behind, compared to last year at this time. As of November 20, we have received 40 pledges for a total of \$108,560. In 2023 we had received 46 pledges for a total of \$111,270. If you haven't yet made a pledge, please do so as soon as possible. We expect the 2025 budget will be very challenging, and as we enter the budget process, we would like to calculate our revenue sources as accurately as possible.



## ADULT LEARNING

### by Linnea Dietrich

Adult Education has some **very** exciting offerings coming in January that we would like to invite you to attend.

- (1) Lectio Divina continues weekly in the library. We will be meeting at 3 PM rather than 4 PM in January. Please join us for this meaningful contemplative prayer practice.
- (2) Pastor Torri is offering an 11-week overview of the Bible starting Thursday, January 30 from 10 to 11 AM. All levels of Bible knowledge are welcome. This will be a time of learning, sharing, and creating community.
- (3) Taize Prayer Service, Wednesday, January 22 at 6 PM.

Wait...what??? What is a Taize Prayer Service?

Taizé Prayer is a simple, contemplative form of prayer practiced by all Christian faiths often held during the darkest time of the year. This prayer combines chant, scripture readings, and periods of silence in a candlelit environment. Taize Prayer is a distinctive style of prayer developed by an ecumenical community of monks in rural France during WWII. The purpose of this prayer is to focus on Christ's presence and to foster peace and reconciliation among people.

We live in a noisy, distracted, chaotic world which competes for our attention 24 hours a day. Taize Prayer is fostered in silence and stillness. The music provides just enough distraction from the noises of the world to help us to approach interior silence and stillness and to practice the presence of God.

This promises to be a beautiful peace-filled evening of prayer. Please join us on this interior adventure! To learn more, feel free to do a little research on this prayer form on the internet.

## JUSTICE MINISTRY TEAM – by Sue Kimmel

When the weather turns cold, the Justice Ministry Team spends more time inside, generally with people that are like-minded but also keeping in mind that Justice Ministry does not end during the cold season. We acknowledge that God is the tender nurturer of all of us. The Spirit of God moves us to better understand people and situations that are of concern in our community, county, and state.

At our November zoom, Jamie Richter, RN, Cass County Planner, explained the Cass County Assessment and the two priorities for County focus. The two priorities are 1) Mental Health and Well-Being, and 2) Substance Use and Misuse.

Cass County Strategies include: Reducing Stigma, Increasing Awareness, Timely service and resources, and Resilience training across life spans.

The Justice Ministry Team will be a partner in Community Health by sharing resources, educating ourselves on Mental Health and Substance Use and Misuse, and being more aware so we can report suspicious activity.

The JMT is sponsoring a book study, [Poverty, By America](#) by Matthew Desmond. The book study will begin Tuesday, Jan 7th at 7:00 pm. and will continue for five consecutive Tuesdays ending on February 4. This will be a zoom only book study. Please join us!

We are still looking for a co-leader/leader for the Neighbors Helping Neighbors Community Clean-up in May. Please contact Sue Kimmel [suejkimmel@gmail.com](mailto:suejkimmel@gmail.com) if you are interested in leading/co-leading this important community event.

Lastly, may we celebrate with gratitude God's wisdom and the chorus our diverse voices raise together.

# SPECIAL EVENTS

## Cookie & Crafts Sale



**December 8<sup>th</sup>  
Before & after  
worship**



Buy some cookies & crafts for the holidays!



## Congregational Thank You Luncheon

Provided by Women's Fellowship

**THURSDAY, DEC 12<sup>th</sup>  
12:00 PM**

Join us for music,  
food, and friendship!



**Reservations required before  
December 8<sup>th</sup>.**

Please sign up in the Friendship  
Hall hallway or by calling the  
office.

## CHRISTMAS CONCERT

**FRIDAY, DEC 13<sup>th</sup>  
7:00 PM**

Union Congregational Church  
401 Lake Avenue  
Hackensack

Feat.

**Sabbastian Wilson-Webb**

Come enjoy some holiday  
cheer, winter moods, and  
a nostalgic sing-along  
with all your  
favorites!



## Advent Services -

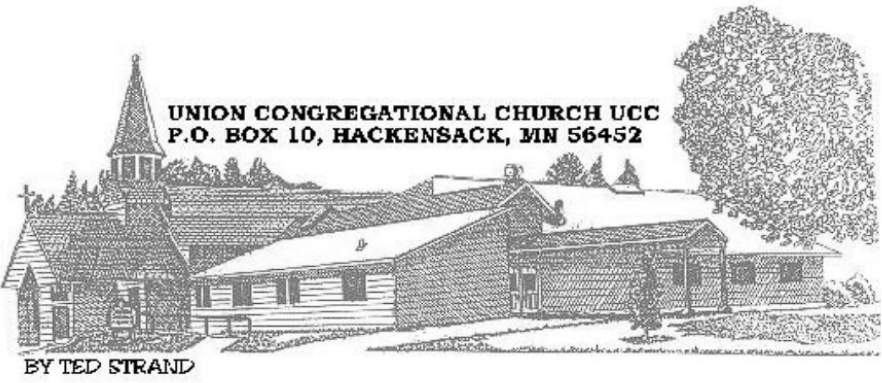
**Wednesday, Dec. 4 at  
St. Paul's Lutheran, 5 PM**

**Wednesday, Dec. 11 at  
Union Church, 5 PM**

**Wednesday, Dec. 18 at  
St. Paul's Lutheran, 5 PM**

**Soup & Sandwich Supper to  
follow all services! Join us!**





UNION CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH UCC  
P.O. BOX 10, HACKENSACK, MN 56452

BY TED STRAND

**FORWARD SERVICE REQUESTED**



**DECEMBER**

**2024**

**Don't miss our  
Congregational Thank You  
Luncheon! Signup by Dec. 8**



**THE UNION NEWS**

