

Still Speaking

Indeed, the word of God is living and active...
-Hebrews 4:12

December 2021

Christmas:

Opening Your Home, Yourself, to the Divine

Have you ever wondered why there are so many Christmas movies, songs, and specials about home? From "I'll Be Home for Christmas," to "Home Alone," to "Christmas in Hollis," home, the meaning of home, and the practice of hospitality weaves its way through much of our holiday lore.

This isn't just secular. It's also good theology, and it goes much deeper than our perennial disappointment that the innkeepers couldn't find room for Mary and Joseph at the inn.

Just as Mary and Joseph were looking for a place to spend the night, so, too, in Christmas we celebrate that God is looking for a place to dwell, seeking a place to be.

In Christmas, we remember Jesus' historical birth (though it probably wasn't on December 25, and a lot of our other holiday traditions aren't exactly historically accurate). But even more than Jesus' birthday, we celebrate that the divine is looking for a place to be born today. God is seeking a home. Not somewhere to pass through, but somewhere to become established, somewhere to grow and settle in.

And, as always with God, there's a catch.

When we extend hospitality and open the doors of our homes, our hearts, our church, there is great risk. Great risk, because when we open ourselves, our homes, our lives, we will never be the same.

The risk when we open our homes is that someone might spill their coffee or break grandma's vase, but when we practice hospitality in our hearts, the risk is that we will be stretched, maybe even broken. Opening our hearts sometimes scars us, and it almost always changes us. Opening our hearts changes what we care about. Broadens our horizons. Weaves our stories together with others' so that what they care about matters to us, too.

We live Christmas, we provide hospitality to the divine, when we open ourselves to those who need us, when our very beings are hospitable to God's

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The Inside Scoop

Newsletter Deadline

*Our next newsletter will be published
the week of **February 9, 2022.***

*The deadline for that newsletter is
Friday, **February 4, 2022.***

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Lectionary Readings**Dec. 19—4th Sunday of Advent**

Micah 5:2-5a; Luke 1:46b-55 or
Psalm 80:1-7
Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45, (46-55)

Dec. 24—Christmas Eve

Isaiah 62:6-12; Psalm 97
Titus 3:4-7; Luke 2:(1-7), 8-20

Dec. 25—Christmas Day

Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 96
Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14, (15-20)

Dec. 26—1st Sunday after Christmas

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26; Psalm 148
Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:41-52

Dec. 31 and Jan. 1**New Year's Eve and New Year's Day**

Ecclesiastes 3:1-13; Psalm 8
Revelation 21:1-6a; Matthew 25:31-46

Jan. 2—2nd Sunday after Christmas

Jeremiah 31:7-14 or Sirach 24:1-12
Psalm 147:12-20 or
Wisdom of Solomon 10:15-21
Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:(1-9), 10-18

Jan. 6—Epiphany

Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14
Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

Jan. 9—The Baptism of Christ

Isaiah 43:1-7; Psalm 29
Acts 8:14-17; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Jan. 16—2nd Sunday after Epiphany

Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 36:5-10
1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11

Jan. 23—3rd Sunday after Epiphany

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; Psalm 19
1 Corinthians 12:12-31a; Luke 4:14-21

Jan. 30—4th Sunday after Epiphany

Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm 71:1-6
1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Luke 4:21-30

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peace, joy, justice, and love, when our lives create a nest for mercy and compassion to cradle the vulnerable.

There's an Irish proverb that "God is closer than the door."

My prayer for all of us this Christmas is that God will come knocking on the doors of our hearts and find room at the inn, room not only to be born, but to flourish.

So, as you put the clean sheets on the guest bed later this month, when you donate the hats and scarves and mittens and socks as a part of your Reverse Advent Calendar, when you stop to help the person broken down at the side of the road, know that you are also swinging wide the doors for Christ.

May Christ make a home in your heart this Christmas, and may you know that this is "Good news of great joy for all the people."

Pastor Bridget Flad Daniels

Our Church Family

Christmas is often the season when we experience extraordinary joy: the joy of the birth of Christ, the joy of gatherings of loved ones, family and friends, the joy of giving and receiving, the joy of hospitality and celebrating God-With-Us.

Yet, because of the very nature of the holiday, many people also encounter great pain at this time, especially around the death of a loved one. The source of our greatest joy can put us in touch with deep sadness.

As we celebrate Christmas, let us be particularly mindful of those who are grieving:

- Grief shared is grief diminished. Call, write notes, visit; invite them out for coffee, to take a walk, etc. Contact the church office if you need a fellow church member's address.
- Talk about the deceased. Many people erroneously think that this is painful for the bereaved. On the contrary, it is part of the healing process to talk about the loved one.
- Let the griever know that you are praying for them; invite them to go to church with you.

In a special way this month, we pray:

-

Thank You to On the Mark Dyslexia Clinic

Not only does On the Mark Dyslexia Clinic make a profound difference in the lives of children and families every day, they also have found a way within their budget to thank Union for graciously housing their fledgling clinic, donating \$1,000 to offset church expenses. Thank you!

January Sunday Morning Adult Education Opportunities

Plan to Zoom with us at 8:45 a.m.
most Sundays!

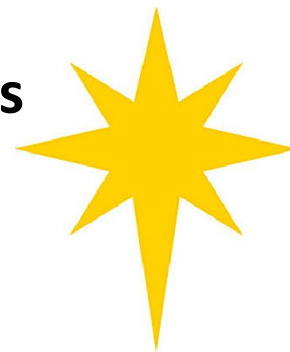
Sunday, January 9

Moravian pastor Rev. Greg Behrend with share with us about a new church he is starting here in Green Bay called You Belong which will seek to serve all, especially those living with disabilities and their loved ones and caregivers.

Sunday, January 16

Learn about the opportunities to help welcome the Afghan refugees who are settling here in the Green Bay area. Outreach Ministry will host a speaker from Catholic Charities, the organization which the Department of Homeland Security has tapped to coordinate these efforts in Brown County, and will look to put together a team to organize Union's efforts.

Advent and Christmas Worship



All services are available
in person (**except the pageant**) or online at
unionucc.com or on our Facebook page.

Sunday, December 19 Christmas Pageant

We tell the story of Jesus' birth in the drama
of the Christmas Pageant.

NO FAITH FORMATION CLASSES

We WILL NOT have worship in the sanctuary on this day.

This 10 a.m. service will **ONLY** be available on the church's Facebook
and YouTube channel.

Friday, December 24 Christmas Eve

3:00 p.m. — **Our early service** is more informal with special thought
given to children's attention spans.

8:00 p.m. — **Our later service** of scripture, carols, and candlelight is
preceded by **wonderful Christmas music starting at 7:40 p.m.**

**After our Christmas services conclude,
all are invited to sing carols in the courtyard.**

As Union continues to strive to love our neighbors as ourselves,
worshippers will be expected to wear masks and maintain
social distance between households. When we reach capacity for
appropriate social distancing in the sanctuary, worshippers will be
directed to overflow seating in our chapel and church hall.

Sunday, December 26 First Sunday after Christmas

We continue the celebration of Jesus' birth with reflections
on the meaning of Christmas by Lou Norsetter, Michael Lukens,
Michael Vinson and Phil Hauck in worship at 10 a.m.

NO FAITH FORMATION CLASSES

Church Library News

Contextual Theology and Reevaluating Prototypes

A program we are considering for the Pilgrim Fellowship Social Justice discussions is Colin in Black and White. The Netflix documentary highlights former 49ers QB Colin Kaepernick's development as a teenage athlete and young Black man.

One of the obstacles Kaepernick faced as a high school athlete was not fitting into his coach's idea of a quarterback "prototype." Kaepernick reasons that his white coach was looking for someone who more closely resembled himself and/or the majority of NFL quarterbacks.

Informed that Kaepernick has summer trained with a professional (white) QB coach, the varsity coach gives Kaepernick the green light. Kaepernick points out that it was the credential rather than his performance that gave him a boost.

In a nutshell, the same thesis drives indigenous theologian Richard Twiss's Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys. Twiss describes the often repeated tendency of missionary Christians to evangelize a culturally Western form of Christianity while protesting that they preach an unadulterated Gospel. Yet our white churches are rife with democratic and national "prototypes" integrated into the church and its choices.

Twiss's book is an interesting case for contextual theology as it relates to Native Christians. Liberation theologians such as James Cone and Gustavo Gutierrez and even the current Pope are better known proponents of a Christian Gospel married to the needs and cultures of the people concerned. Twiss's work shows how Native tribes have moved beyond the social and religious injustices of the past and are now infusing Christian observance into Native cultural practices.

—Cathy Putman



'Tis the Season

On Saturday, November 20, children and youth of Union Church gathered in the church courtyard and recorded the shepherds, animals and angels scene for the Christmas Pageant. The Christmas Tree lot was also open. At left, Jeff Carels talks trees with Jan Davis.



Did you know that Union has a “Visitation” Ministry?

As Pastor Bridget puts it, Union’s “Visitation Program” is a way for us to be “church to each other beyond the church walls.” It’s a way for Union to reach out to members who might benefit from a regular connection with someone else in the congregation. It’s a way to fulfill the promises we make at every baptism: “We promise our love, support and care [for our church family].”

How does it work?

First, **Pastor Bridget identifies potential “Visitees,”** people that she thinks might benefit from having a “Visitor.” This might include folks who are having trouble participating in church activities in person ... or who might be feeling isolated ... or who might be going through a tough time in some way ... or for some other reason perhaps need some extra personal outreach from our church family. This need has especially been growing because of the pandemic and the consequent need to avoid group settings! Individuals can also reach out to Pastor Bridget to indicate that they would like to be matched with a Visitor.

Potential “Visitees” are contacted to see if they are interested in being matched with a “Visitor.” If they think they would enjoy this kind of regular contact with a fellow church member, Pastor Bridget and the co-leaders of this ministry then match them with a Visitor. The Visitor gets in touch with his/her Visitee and together they decide how often they’d like to get together. This could be an in-person visit or via phone or video-conference, depending on what they decide. (Of course, they should discuss Covid precautions before meeting.)

During the visits, the focus is on the Visitee—whatever they want to talk about. Every Visitor understands the importance of confidentiality—the Visitee can trust that what they share is kept confidential. Visitors look for ways to “bring Union to the Visitee” — e.g. describe what’s going on at Union, bring a bulletin or newsletter with them, etc.

All Visitors are Union members who have volunteered for this ministry because they feel called to reach out to their church family. Before being matched with a Visitee, all Visitors receive coaching from Bridget about the program and what their role should be. In addition, Visitors meet regularly as a group with Pastor Bridget for ongoing coaching.

Misconceptions about the Program

Sometimes when we contact potential Visitees, we hear something along the lines of:

“That sounds nice, but I’m sure there are others who need it more”—thinking that this is a limited resource, some people feel they might be depriving others of a Visitor. Actually, so far we have had plenty of Visitor volunteers—so don’t let that misconception hold you back!

OR

“Oh I don’t think I need that”—the person may be thinking that being offered a Visitor is a commentary on their level of functioning. Although it’s true that most Visitees do have some barriers to in-person church participation, there is a wide spectrum of situations among our Visitees. Most Visitees are not your classic “shut-in.” Many are simply grateful for the additional personal, human, regularly dependable contact from their church family than they are currently experiencing.

Interested?

If you think you would enjoy being matched with a Visitor, contact one of the following:

Pastor Bridget: bridget@unionucc.com
or 920-437-9266

Church Office: office@unionucc.com
or 920-437-9266

Julie Harder: jblackharder@gmail.com
or 920-465-0752

Lou Norsetter: lnorset0629@gmail.com
or 920-497-4410



Welcome, Crystal!

On behalf of the Executive Committee, I am pleased to share with you that Crystal DeCleene has accepted the position as the Executive Director for EPH. Crystal will begin in her Executive Director role on January 3, 2022.

Crystal joins us in our ministry from Freedom House where she currently serves as vice president. She brings to EPH experience in managing the daily operations of the 16-unit family shelter and the annual direct mail campaign, grant writing and servant leadership. Most importantly, she brings her passion for making a difference in the lives of people struggling with poverty and experiencing homelessness.

We are also excited for Crystal to continue to build on the collaboration between Freedom House, one of our primary referral sources, and EPH. We believe this collaboration will allow us to find more opportunities to better serve our families on their path to self-sufficiency.

We are grateful to have Crystal join our team and grateful for our partnership churches!

—Lisa Maas, EPH President

Seminary Secrets Miniseries: The Gospel of John

Leader: Julie Harder: jblackharder@gmail.com or 920-465-0752

Factoids about John's Gospel:

- It was the last Gospel to be written
- It was the last Gospel to be widely accepted as authoritative (during the early centuries of Christianity)
- It is profoundly different from the other three Gospels—in story line, in portrayal of Jesus, in “what’s important” for Christian life, and yet . . .
- It was profoundly influential on the development of church doctrine and creeds
- Further, its theology often colors how the other three Gospels are interpreted

For these reasons, **it's valuable for Christians to understand this Gospel** on more than a superficial level, and this is what Seminary Secrets will do. In January, we'll:

- Closely analyze John, from a scholarly standpoint, so we can understand the author's original message
- Compare its main message to that found in the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, Luke)
- Consider how it influenced church dogma about Jesus
- Think about this: Has John's inclusion in the Canon been a net positive or a net negative for Christianity?

VENUE: Zoom

DATES AND TIME: Wednesdays, Jan. 12, 19, 26, and Feb. 2 (6:15 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.)

PREP: Handouts and Bible passages to be read prior to each class

TO SIGN UP: Contact Julie. She will send readings and a link to the Zoom session.

Julie has been leading these classes at Union since 2013 (not counting the break for the pandemic). She holds a master's degree in theology/biblical studies and has taught religious studies at St. Norbert College. The focus of Seminary Secrets is on learning to interpret the Bible using standard tools that biblical scholars employ. If you want to know more about Julie's journey and why she calls her classes “Seminary Secrets,” she'd be happy to send you a longer explanation!

Our Attendance

| November | *2021 | 2019 |
|----------------|-------------|--------------|
| 1st Sunday | 87 | 160 |
| 2nd Sunday | 56 | 138 |
| 3rd Sunday | 72 | 170 |
| 4th Sunday | 56 | 144 |
| Totals | 271 | 612 |
| Average | 67.8 | 153.0 |

*Attendance figures for 2021 do not include numbers for those who streamed our worship services online.

Thanks for Using Amazon Smile!

Thanks to all who chose Union Church as your Amazon Smile charity. This quarter, we raised \$37.17 through your purchases.

To participate in this easy fundraiser, go to smile.amazon.com, log in with your regular Amazon credentials, and designate Union Congregational United Church of Christ (Green Bay) as your charity of choice. Then, when you shop via Amazon, be sure to log in to smile.amazon.com, and we will receive 0.5% from every purchase you make!

Union Church Calendar

December 19, 2021—February 13, 2022

December 19 4th Sunday of Advent
CHRISTMAS PAGEANT
 NO FAITH FORMATION
 NO IN-PERSON WORSHIP

Our Christmas Pageant (10 a.m.) will ONLY be available on the church's Facebook and YouTube channel.

December 21 Tuesday
 NO BIBLE STUDY

December 22 Wednesday
 NO YOUTH GROUPS

December 24 Friday
CHRISTMAS EVE
 CHURCH OFFICE CLOSSES at NOON
 3:00 p.m. Early Worship Service
 7:40 p.m. The Music of Christmas
 8:00 p.m. Late Worship Service

December 26 Sunday
 NO FAITH FORMATION
 10:00 a.m. Worship

December 27-28 Monday-Tuesday
 CHURCH OFFICE is CLOSED

December 30-31 Thursday-Friday
 CHURCH OFFICE is CLOSED

January 2 Sunday
 9:00 a.m. Faith Formation
 10:00 a.m. Worship
 with Holy Communion

January 4 Tuesday
 12:00 p.m. Bible Study (Zoom)
 3:30 p.m. Education Ministry (Zoom)
 4:30 p.m. Outreach Ministry (Zoom)
 5:30 p.m. Worship Ministry (Zoom)

January 5 Wednesday
 6:15 p.m. Youth Groups

January 9 Sunday
 8:45 a.m. Adult Education:
 You Belong Church
 (Zoom)

9:00 a.m. Faith Formation
 10:00 a.m. Worship

January 11 Tuesday
 12:00 p.m. Bible Study (Zoom)
 5:00 p.m. Stewardship Ministry
 (Zoom)
 6:30 p.m. Adult Gay-Straight
 Alliance

January 12 Wednesday
 6:15 p.m. Youth Groups
 6:15 p.m. Seminary Secrets (Zoom)

January 13 Thursday
 5:00 p.m. Membership and Inreach
 Ministry (Zoom)
 6:00 p.m. Common Ministry (Zoom)

January 16 Sunday
 8:45 a.m. Adult Education:
 Catholic Charities helping
 Afghan refugees (Zoom)
 9:00 a.m. Faith Formation
 10:00 a.m. Worship

January 18 Tuesday
 12:00 p.m. Bible Study (Zoom)

January 19 Wednesday
 6:15 p.m. Youth Groups
 6:15 p.m. Seminary Secrets (Zoom)

January 23 Sunday
 9:00 a.m. Faith Formation
 10:00 a.m. Worship

January 25 Tuesday
 12:00 p.m. Bible Study (Zoom)
 3:45 p.m. Reopening Task Force

January 26 Wednesday
 6:15 p.m. Youth Groups
 6:15 p.m. Seminary Secrets (Zoom)

January 30 Sunday
 186th ANNUAL MEETING
 9:00 a.m. Faith Formation
 10:00 a.m. Worship
 11:30 a.m. Annual Meeting
 (Zoom)

February 1 Tuesday
 12:00 p.m. Bible Study (Zoom)
 3:30 p.m. Education Ministry (Zoom)
 4:30 p.m. Outreach Ministry (Zoom)
 5:30 p.m. Worship Ministry (Zoom)

February 2 Wednesday
 6:15 p.m. Youth Groups
 6:15 p.m. Seminary Secrets (Zoom)

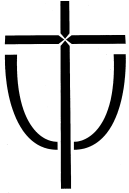
February 6 Sunday
 9:00 a.m. Faith Formation
 10:00 a.m. Worship
 with Holy Communion

February 8 Tuesday
 12:00 p.m. Bible Study (Zoom)
 5:00 p.m. Stewardship Ministry
 (Zoom)
 6:30 p.m. Adult Gay-Straight
 Alliance

February 9 Wednesday
 6:15 p.m. Youth Groups

February 10 Thursday
 5:00 p.m. Membership and Inreach
 Ministry (Zoom)
 6:00 p.m. Common Ministry (Zoom)

February 13 Sunday
 9:00 a.m. Faith Formation
 10:00 a.m. Worship



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ANNUAL MEETING

Call to the 186th Annual Meeting

The 186th Annual Meeting of Union Congregational United Church of Christ will convene via Zoom on Sunday, January 30 at 11:30 a.m. We will conduct our business meeting and share a time of fellowship after our agenda is concluded. Reports concerning the ministry of Union Church in 2021 will be presented, outgoing ministry chairs and vice-chairs will be recognized, elections will be held for new leaders, and a budget for the ministry of Union Church in 2022 will be adopted. Our annual report will be emailed to all households on our mailing list. Contact the church office if you would like a paper copy mailed to you.

Union Congregational United Church of Christ

716 S. Madison Street
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e-mail: office@unionucc.com
(920) 437-9266

Bridget M. Flad Daniels

Senior Minister

Tim Harder, M.D.

Moderator

Church Office Hours

Mon.-Fri. 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

For more information about us,
visit our web page
at <http://www.unionucc.com>