Friendship News, May 2020

First Congregational United Church of Christ, Brainerd

An Open and Affirming Congregation

Church office hours: Wednesday - Friday 8am 12:00pm

Office phone 218-829-2528 Office E-mail [uccbrainerd@gmail.com](mailto:uccbrainerd@gmail.com) Pastor’s E-mail: [pastorleslieucc@gmail.com](mailto:pastorleslieucc@gmail.com) Website: [www.uccbrainerd.org](http://www.uccbrainerd.org)

Schedule a Zoom 1 to 1 with Pastor Leslie: [www.calendly.com/pastorleslieucc/1to1](http://www.calendly.com/pastorleslieucc/1to1)

No matter who you are, or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here.

**Pastor’s Pen – The Big Rocks**

Have you heard the story about a professor who used rocks, sand, and water to demonstrate how to prioritize your life? You have some big rocks, some pebbles, some sand, and some water. The goal is to get as many things into the jar as possible and the trick is to put the BIG STUFF in first. If you put the water in and then the sand and then the pebbles and then the rocks it won’t work very well. But if you put in the rocks and THEN the pebbles (and give it a little shake-shake-shake) and then the sand (shake-shake-shake) and FINALLY the water…..well, the water runs down into the crevices and you can fit more in. The point is if you focus too much on the small stuff, you won’t have enough room in your life for the “big rocks,” for those things and people in our lives that really matter most.

One thing this pandemic seems to be teaching us is to focus on the big stuff. I’ve heard from a few of you that this time has resulted in an awareness that a lot the busy-ness we once considered so important, was actually getting in the way of what really matters. I have also heard from some of you that this time of social distancing has made you realize how much you value the connection of family and friends.

This is a time for each of us to focus on what really matters, as individuals, as families, as a church community, as a wider world. My colleague, the Rev. Caela Simmons Wood offers this idea: “I invite you to set aside 15-20 minutes sometime this week to have a Big Rocks chat with yourself and with God. Light a candle, center your breath. Find a quiet space where you can connect with God. And then start to think through the different roles you play in your life - your identity with family and friends, your professional or volunteer work. Don’t forget to make space for pondering what it means to be human and a Beloved Child of God. And then sit with God and ask for some clarity as you try to discern what the Big Rocks are. What are the absolute essentials? Write them down, tuck them away where you can find them later, and revise as needed. When you start to feel overwhelmed or like there’s not quite enough of you to go around, go back to the Big Rocks. Focus on only those. And know that God goes with you – sustaining you when you’re weary, picking you up off the floor when you have to get back up, showing you so much gentle grace when things don’t go as planned. You are not alone. You continue to do this very hard work of being human with God’s help, God’s grace, God’s love coursing through your veins.”

With Peace,

**Coronavirus/Covid-19 and Our Church - An Update from Pastor Leslie**

Dear church family,  
There has been a lot of talk in the news and from the White House about re-opening the economy. I know all of us are eager to get back to "normal life" and I will go into more detail about this in the monthly newsletter. It is important for us to be patient and be safe. The hard truth is that even once the stay at home order is lifted, it will likely still not be safe for us to gather together in person for quite some time and it will likely be longer than we ever anticipated. We don't really know. It is uncomfortable to be in this space of not knowing. It is a time of disorientation and anxiety. But I know that we are capable of doing hard things. We know that the church is much more than gathering in a building. Please continue to send cards, make phone calls, and check on your church family. Consider introducing yourself to someone new and offer to pray for them. We will get through this and we will do it together.  
  
The church office is still closed. Terri and I will be in the office occasionally for specific tasks, but the office will not be "open;" and the doors to the church will be locked. We are able to check voicemail and email remotely and will be doing so during our regular business hours of Wednesday - Friday between 8am - 12:00pm. You will get the voicemail when you call the office, but please leave a message and one of us will get back to as soon as we can.   
As usual, if you have a pastoral emergency, please call me on my cell phone. (The number is in the directory and on the outgoing voicemail message for the church office.)  
  
We urge everyone to continue to stay home as much as possible. Consider ordering groceries and other necessities online or over the phone and either picking them up or have them delivered. We have a few folks in the church who have volunteered to make grocery runs for those who are in high risk groups or are not feeling well. **Please contact me if you need assistance.**

**How Long?**  
One of the big questions on everyone's mind is how long will in-person worship and other in-person gatherings be cancelled? I hesitate to give any sort of prediction because there is still so much unknown. I do know, that gathering in person will come toward the end of the "re-opening" phases. Due to the vulnerable nature of many of our parishioners, and our limitations around providing adequate social distancing, we will be very cautious about when we gather again for worship in-person. You may hear of other churches opening in the early stages of the process. This is not a one-size fits all process. You might remember that we suspended in-person worship earlier than some other churches in town. I whole-heartedly believe that was the right thing to do. I am in contact with many clergy in the Brainerd area, with the Minnesota Conference of the UCC, and colleagues around the country as we all continue to monitor the situation and determine how to protect our congregations and the communities in which we reside.

“Opening” will likely come in phases. Gathering for worship in our sanctuary will necessarily happen later than other activities of the church. It very well may be late summer or Fall or even later before we can gather as the full church body and when we do, we will need to have measures in place to reduce the likelihood of transmission. The fact is, we simply don’t know how this situation will progress, especially as tourist season gets into full swing and the area sees an increase in visitors from all over the state and the country.

As the situation continues to unfold, your Church Council and I will reassess what makes sense for our congregation and will keep you informed of any changes.

**How to watch Sunday worship**  
The worship service is **broadcasted on the church Facebook page and YouTube channel every Sunday at 10:00 am. The videos are archived and can be viewed at any time.**

To watch worship on Facebook, go to <https://www.facebook.com/uccbrainerd/live>  
To watch on YouTube, go to <https://www.youtube.com/firstcongregationaluccbrainerd>

**Worship Bulletins are available for download each week at** <https://tinyurl.com/uccbrainerdbulletins>**.**The bulletins will be ready for download first thing Sunday morning. They are available in both Word and PDF formats and are labeled by date. You can download the document and print it at home or follow along on your screen.

We can also send the manuscript of the sermon and a copy of the bulletin in the mail each week as we have been doing for some of our home-bound members. Just contact Terri in the office. We will also continue to upload sermon manuscripts to the church website.

Peace be with you,  
Pastor Leslie

**What about Giving to the Church during the Coronavirus?**

A significant portion of the church's financial support is received during worship on Sunday mornings. When we don't gather in person, our income takes a hit. We realize that for many of you, this is a time of financial uncertainty. If you are able to continue supporting the church with your financial gifts, we encourage you to do so. We may not be gathering in person right now, but we are continuing to Be the Church in new ways!   
We also understand if you need to reduce your giving right now. If you are signed up for electronic giving and need to reduce the amount you contribute, please contact Terri in the office. If you are able to increase your giving to help cover the decrease we are likely to see, please also contact Terri in the office to make that adjustment.  
  
**You can now donate to the church online!**We are now accepting your offerings and donations using **PayPal.** You do not need to have a PayPal account to make an online donation with a credit card. To contribute using PayPal, click here: <https://www.paypal.me/uccbrainerd>

**Sunday, May 24th Special Offering: Strengthen the Church**The Strengthen the Church (STC) Off­ering reflects the shared commitment of all settings of the United Church of Christ to cooperatively build up the UCC. Conferences and the national setting equally share the gifts given by members and friends through their local congregations. The funds raised support leadership development, new churches, youth ministry, and innovation in existing congregations. This off­ering embodies the wisdom, “together we grow stronger.” Your support of this offering will help the UCC fulfill on its commitment to creating a just world for all by investing in new ministries and practices that meet the emerging needs of local communities.

***~ Opportunities to Know and Share God’s Love ~***

**Helping our community**  
Your Church Council voted at the March Council Meeting to allow the Pastor's Discretionary Fund to be used to assist church members and others in the Brainerd area who are experiencing financial distress during this time. If you would like to make a donation to this fund, you can mail a check to the church and write "Discretionary Fund" in the memo line. Decisions about disbursement of funds will be handled by the Executive Committee.  
**>>> If you need assistance**, please do not hesitate to email, call, or text Pastor Leslie. Let her know what your situation is and how the church might be of help.

**Sharing Bread Soup Kitchen** is no longer serving daily meals. Instead, they have teamed up with **Operation Sandwich** to put together bags of food for the guests at the Soup Kitchen. Every Thursday the bags are handed out from 5:30-6:00 p.m. at the Soup Kitchen location. If someone can't make it during that time, they can contact Operation Sandwich 218-829-2619 or Bridges of Hope at 218-297-4223 to make other arrangements. While this is not ideal, it has been decided that it is going to be best to keep the guests and volunteers as safe as possible.

**Habitat for Humanity Faith Build Update**  
From Cathy Wells at Habitat for Humanity:  
We are excited to share with an update the work underway on Dale and Katie Johnson’s home at 14802 Lynwood Drive in Baxter! Through their Faith Build partnership with Lakes Area Habitat for Humanity and Thrivent, the Johnson’s dream of home ownership is becoming a reality. Site preparation has begun! The concrete will be poured once road restrictions are lifted. That means we could be scheduling volunteers to help with the build by mid-May.  
   
At this point, the following churches have agreed to partner with us:*First Congregational United Church of Christ, Brainerd, Church of the Nazarene, Brainerd, St. Andrew’s / St. Mathias Catholic Churches, Brainerd, Trinity Lutheran Church, Brainerd, Lakewood Evangelical Free Church, Baxter, First Lutheran Church, Brainerd, First Baptist Church, Baxter, St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Brainerd*  
Thank you! Your partnership is so important to the success of the Faith Build. Please continue praying, fundraising, and recruiting volunteers for the build. If you know that a specific date works best for your volunteers, please let us know. If your volunteers have a certain area they wish to work on (flooring, windows, siding, etc.), let us know, and we will try to schedule them when the need arises.  
    
Of course, with the recent developments regarding COVID-19, all of this is subject to change. We will continue to monitor CDC & government recommendations/orders. We will do our best to keep you updated as the project moves forward.  
  
God Bless,  
Cathy Wells, Support Staff  
Lakes Area Habitat For Humanity  
  
**Thank you Ellie Burkett for organizing our church to participate in this Faith Build!**

**May Birthdays**

Joe Freeman May 2

Maya Kuehn May 3

Ellen Pishko May 3

Terri Chidester May 5

Lance James May 5

Sue Hadland May 9

Emily Jones May 10

Kai Lukanen May 14

Laura Raedeke May 16

Morgan Twamley May 16

Carla Benjamin May 17

Shon Bowman May 22

Janice Morton May 22

Max Ferrie May 23

Jean Widmark May 24

Nancy Waller May 25

Preston Newgord May 26

Anthony Newgord May 29

Charlotte Goedsche May 30

Kathy Ogden May 30

**Highlights from the Council Meeting, April 15th 2020 7:00 pm (via Zoom Conference)**

Moderator: Mike North Trustees : Deb Griffith Members at Large

Asst. Moderator: Tracy Lyons Stewardship: Judy W., Gale L. Claire Steen

Clerk: Barb Stokke Christian Ministry: Marina G./Sue H. Alvin Velsvaag

Treasurer: Bobbie Gorron Christian Education: Lowell Johnson Cassie Lyons

Pastor: Leslie Moughty

Present: Mike North, Tracy Lyons, Barb Stokke, Bobbie Gorron, Deb Griffith, Judy Whiteman, Marina Grabowski, Lowell Johnson, Claire Steen, Alvin Velsvaag, Cassie Lyons, Terri Chidester, Rev. Leslie Moughty.

Report Updates:

* **Pastor:** Shifted Sunday worship, Prayer Circle, Lenten Bible Study, and Maundy Thursday and Good Friday services to an online format and created new private Facebook Group for First Congregational members. Community Engagement– Continue to meet via Zoom with regional UCC Clergy Cluster and UCCMN Clergy. Pastoral Care– Sent notes to individuals/households with a picture of Prayer Circle, letting them know they are in our hearts and prayers. Checking in with people by text, phone call, Facebook messenger and email.
* **Treasurer:** Giving to the church have been relatively good. Work on the March financial reporting is done. January and February reports are nearing completion. Bobbie and Admin. Asst. Terri Chidester continue to work on the 2019 Year End Financial report to be ready for May meeting.
* **Christian Ministry:** CM has received samples of fabric and foam for the pew cushions. The meeting in May with a company representative may be cancelled.
* **Members at Large:** New Creation Care Team asked Council to consider hanging mug racks in the Fellowship Hall to facilitate more sanitary conditions. Council encouraged the team to look into this further.
* Safe Church Policy committee has not met since the stay at home order was put in place.

**New Business:**

* **The Congregational Annual Meeting has been postponed** until either we can meet safely in-person or until a reasonable online option is determined. This could possibly take place in mid-June or later.
* Mike North brought the US Cares Act to the attention of the Council which provides forgivable loans to small businesses, including churches, “to keep staff on the payroll at a time the coronavirus is causing nationwide shutdowns. The Council **passed a motion** to have Pastor Leslie and Terri investigate applying for a US Cares Act Loan and to initiate the application process through the appropriate channels.

**Old Business:**

* The WISE resolution submitted by First Congregational was to be debated during the MN Conference Annual Meeting in June, but the Annual Meeting has been cancelled due to COVID-19. Council agreed to withdraw the resolution for vote this year but discussed two recommendations to be made to the Conference Board: 1. Encourage the Board to look at the part of the resolution that suggests the 2020-2021 MN Conference Annual Meeting theme be around mental health. 2. Encourage the Board to send the resolution out to the churches so they have a chance to look at it before the 2020-2021 Annual Meeting.
* Council is looking for people to volunteer for Assistant Moderator and as committee members Christian Ed, Christian Ministry, Trustees, Stewardship, and Memorial committees.
* Mike reminded Council to submit their yearly committee reports for the Annual Election Meeting to Terri in the next few weeks.

The next Council meeting via Zoom will be May 20 at 7:00 pm.

**Online Gathering Opportunities**

We may not be gathering in person, but that doesn't mean we can't get together! Check out these opportunities to connect with your church throughout the week. Changes or additions may be made to these as the weeks progress, so stay tuned!   
  
**"Daily Bread" with Pastor Leslie on Facebook Live**: Tune in at Noon Wednesday - Friday for a short time of prayer, pause, and reflection via Live stream on Pastor Leslie's Facebook page. Click here at noon each day to participate live or to view recorded videos at any time: <https://www.facebook.com/revleslieucc>

**"Story Time" with Pastor Leslie on Facebook Live:** Tune in at 4:00 pm Wednesdays-Fridays for a short story time on Pastor Leslie's Facebook page. Click here to participate live or to view recorded videos any time: <https://www.facebook.com/revleslieucc>

**Fellowship Hour via Zoom:** We are trying something new! – Fellowship by Zoom. Starting immediately after worship, hop on to Zoom and say hello!

To join by computer or smartphone, go to <https://tinyurl.com/fellowshipzoom> Password: 56401

The full URL is <https://zoom.us/j/93846591823?pwd=Snl6NTBqL0RjRkUxTEh6RzR0dlZBdz09>

**Prayer Circle via Zoom**: Join our prayer circle for a time of fellowship, conversation, and prayer from 10:00 am - 11:30 am every Wednesday. Click here to participate: https://zoom.us/j/143352001  
You can also participate by phone! Call 1-312-626-6799 and enter meeting code: 143-352-001 and you will be connected!

First Congregational UCC News & Updates

**THANK YOU VOLUNTEERS!** All of the folks that do volunteer activities in our UCC church and the community are **very much** appreciated for what they do.  Just think of the impact this has had! In a usual spring, the Stewardship Committee serves a thank you meal to honor these folks. **Well!!** This year there will be a delayed event to recognize their volunteer service.  Watch for further information.



Our church advocates Reuse, Recycle and Repurpose practices. Terri, our Administrative Assistant made a wreath out of the unused Palms that were purchased for Palm Sunday. The wreath will be displayed in the parking lot back entrance. Here is a picture to view until it may be seen when the church re-opens for worship.

Visit this website for great DYI Projects: <https://www.boredpanda.com/creative-reuse-upcycling-repurposing-ideas>

**Weaving Community** - The community loom project of the Lakes Area Guys Network, hopes to be building and distributing looms to community host sites during May. Donations of materials to be weaved are needed. We are looking for strips of cloth, ribbon, yarn, men's neckties, or anything visually interesting that could be weaved into the looms. Please designate a box or bag at your home to place items into, and when our church re-opens they can be bought in as "seed" materials for the looms and host sites. For more information contact Lowell Johnson at 218-820-5290 or [johnsonlowells@gmail.com](mailto:johnsonlowells@gmail.com).

Brainerd Lakes Area Information

**Update from the Sharing Bread Soup Kitchen**  
We have decided that in order to further protect our volunteers and guests we need to change what we are currently doing. Guests still need food, but we need to limit the amount of contact that is taking place between volunteers and guests, especially with the “Shelter in Place” that began on Friday, March 27th. We will be giving our guests a bag of food.

**Want to help?** We would love for you to partner with us in helping get food out to the people in our community. We are welcoming any non-perishable (non-expired) food items. These items can be dropped off at the soup kitchen (218-829-4203), Operation Sandwich (Bethlehem Lutheran) or Bridges of Hope. If you would like to make a monetary donation, to help cover the cost for these bags of food, you can go to these places to make a donation:  
[www.sharingbread.com](https://uccbrainerd.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7358d6fe5c26410d29dfb93f0&id=63df5b7723&e=5e2c6f93e6) or [www.bridgesofhopemn.org/donate](https://uccbrainerd.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=7358d6fe5c26410d29dfb93f0&id=008c32cb3f&e=5e2c6f93e6)  (Please indicate that you would like your donation to go to Operation Sandwich)

**Pickup days for the guests are every Thursday from 5:30-6:00pm.** We are not open for meals at all the rest of the week. Guests that do not make it to the soup kitchen during the Thursday time slot can contact Operation Sandwich or Bridges of Hope to set up alternative ways to get the food

**Summer Youth Events**

**The physical gatherings for youth such as the National Youth Event and the Minnesota Conference Camp have been canceled. The conference is working on new possibilities for our youth over the next few months so stay tuned!**

******Butterfly Parade! Thank you for creating beautiful butterflies and sharing a little Easter joy with your neighbors.**

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| Church Calendar May 2020 |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|  | Office Closed on Mondays | Office Closed on Tuesdays | Office Closed until further notice | Office Closed until further notice | Office Closed until further notice |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | . |  |  | 10:30 Book Group- 1  Cancelled | 2 |
| 8:30 Choir Practice-Cancelled 3  10:00 Worship & Communion-Virtual  Fellowship Hour-Virtual | 4:00 Girl Scouts- #373 4  6:00 Tai Chi -Cancelled  7:00 BACP - Canceled | 5  2:00 Emotions Anon.- Cancelled  5:30 Overeaters Anon. Cancelled | 6  10:00 Prayer Circle on Zoom  12:00 Men’s Group-Canceled  7:00 AA | 7  4:00 Girl Scouts #43 | 8  10:30 Book Group-Cancelled | 9 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 10  8:30 Choir Practice- Cancelled  9:00 Brainerd Friends  10:00 Worship-Online  Fellowship Hour- Zoom | 11 | 12  2:00 Emotions Anon.- Postponed  5:30 Overeaters Anon. | 9:30 Prayer Circle- 13 Virtual  12:00 Men’s Group- Postponed  7:00 AA | 3:00 Trustees-Virtual 14  5:00 Stewardship- Virtual  6:30 BLUE (Brainerd Lakers United for Envrnt.)  7:00 AA | 15  10:30 Book Group-Cancelled | 16 |
| 8:30 Choir Practice- Cancelled 17  9:00 Brainerd Friends  10:00 Worship- Online  Fellowship Hour- Zoom  Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon Postponed | 18  4:00 Girl Scouts- #373 | 19  2:00 Emotions Anon.- Postponed  5:30 Overeaters Anon. | 9:30 Prayer Circle- 20 Virtual  12:00 Men’s Group- Postponed  7:00 Council Meeting-Virtual  7:00 AA | 3:00 The Shop- 21 Cancelled  4:00 Girl Scouts #43  7:00 AA | 22  10:30 Book Group-Cancelled  4:00 Soup Kitchen-Cancelled | 23 |
| 24  9:00 Brainerd Friends 10:00 Worship- Online  & Special Offering  Fellowship Hour- Zoom  \*\*\*Newsletter Deadline | 25  5:30 AAUW | 26  2:00 Emotions Anon.-Postponed  5:30 Overeaters Anon. | 9:30 Prayer Circle 27  12:00 Men’s Group- Postponed  7:00 AA | 28 | 29  10:30 Book Group-Cancelled | 30 |
| 9:00 Brainerd Friends 31  10:00 Worship-Virtual  Fellowship Hour-Zoom |  |  |  |  |  |  |