



Friendship News

First Congregational United Church of Christ, Brainerd
An Open and Affirming Church

The church office hours are 8am-12pm, Monday – Friday.

Our Pastor, Leslie Moughty is also available at other times by appointment.

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uccbrainerd.org

April 2016

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

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Pastor's Pen – An Either/Or Faith

I was inspired to write this piece after a thought-provoking session of Living the Questions with David Crum after church. The theme of the session was the resurrection of Jesus. The holidays of Christmas and Easter seem to bring up an interesting tension for many progressive Christians, myself included. The stories of these holy-days are close to our hearts in ways that are beyond logical explanation. At Christmas we experience the story of God becoming human in the form of a baby, born to a poor couple from Nazareth. A star shines overhead, angels proclaim the birth to shepherds and the wise ones journey from afar to witness the prophesied birth.

At Easter we experience the resurrection of Jesus as the Christ. We proclaim "He is risen!" We hear the story of the empty tomb, the appearance of angels and even an appearance of Jesus. Logic, reason, and experience have lead many of us to conclude that these events didn't literally happen as historical events. Our post-enlightenment brains have learned from scholars that these are most likely metaphorical stories which allude to the uniqueness of Jesus, or the depth of connection the disciples felt to Jesus. After his death, Jesus didn't make actual appearances but instead his presence was felt at different times, like when a meal was shared on the beach or on the road to Emmaus.

I often wonder if those of us who take the Bible seriously but not literally run the risk of becoming too certain in our own belief that these stories are just stories. Are we too adamant that the tomb wasn't *really* empty or that Jesus didn't actually make appearances after his death? Are we too resolute that these stories are absolutely the mythical imagination of first century authors attempting to describe the indescribable experience of such a transformative leader as Jesus?

I strongly believe that doubt and uncertainty are central to a mature faith. Wonder and awe remind us that we don't have all the answers - that God is beyond our imagining. But here's the thing - *There is no requirement that our faith has to be an either/or faith.* The logical part of my brain tells me that the Christmas story was invented by human beings as a way of testifying to the importance of Jesus' life and ministry. My post-modern thought process tells me that the Easter story of the empty tomb may have been a necessary creation to inspire hope and confidence that God hadn't abandoned the Jesus movement; that the followers of Jesus were part of something so important that even the greatest power in the world [Roman Empire] couldn't snuff it out. But I think we can also allow ourselves to experience the mystery and wonder of these stories as well. Our faith journey doesn't have to be a straight line or follow a prescribed progression from a to z. It is completely acceptable, and maybe even preferable to give ourselves permission to hold as true competing theologies and discordant understandings.

Depending on the day, I may believe that the empty tomb is a metaphor for the power of God to find possibilities where none seem to exist AND that Jesus was literally resurrected from the dead, and I can hold both of these competing beliefs as true in the same instant. Other days, I may approach the empty tomb from a purely academic perspective and see it as a story of mythological imagination. Our faith is not dependent on our certainty one way or the other. I would argue that our certainty does more to hinder our faith than to grow it. So let yourself feel the wonder of the mystery, be astounded by the story. Logic and reason can make some room at the table for a little awe and curiosity.

With peace,
Pastor Leslie

Moderator's Notes – “Thank You Volunteers!”

April is Volunteer Recognition Month.

Did you know that over 35% of Minnesotans volunteer? We are 4th in the nation. Yupper, some 1.5 million of us provide over 153 million hours of service. And over 60% of us donate \$25 or more to a charity.

Yay, us!

Volunteering your time and skills has many benefits. Obviously, the person or group receiving the service benefits. But beyond that, the giver gains a satisfaction and experience that money can't buy. And I don't mean, 'wow, I'm such a great person.' No. It's about getting out of yourself. Being a little or a lot uncomfortable in the service of others is good. It resets what's important. Volunteering bolsters a positive attitude and working with a group of positive people on an important project is great fun. There is evidence that folks who volunteer live longer and be healthier.

I've had the privilege of accompanying our youth on two mission trips. Their exposure to extreme poverty and those 'living in the shadows of life' was life changing for them. It was for me too.

Some people hesitate to volunteer because they fear they will be over worked. It's a valid point. The need will always be greater than the resources. I tell people that you should say yes; but you also must set limits. It's OK to say no.

I think everybody has an obligation to do at least one thing as a volunteer. Say yes and then decide how much you want to do. Set your limit and stick to it. Find your balance point. You're no good to anyone if you're burned out and angry. You should be a positive example to others – but then those others need to step up. There needs to be a space for them to fill. If you're trying to do everything you're not going to be a positive example, and there will be nothing for a new volunteer to do.

But I'm almost literally 'preachin' to the choir' here.

The only thing left to say is thank you. Thank you for all you do. You are making a difference!

Dan Hegstad – Church Council Moderator

Christian Education

CHECK OUT CE's Service Board....Need some help with spring clean-up or any household chore? The youth would like to help you and raise money for the National Youth Event this summer. You tell us what you need done and we'll arrange to be there. This is a free-will donation.

Recycle a treasure you are tired of!! April 10th, Youth will be serving sandwich luncheon and hosting a silent auction. We need items donated for the auction. We would be looking for the following...small furniture, spring themed items, art work, pottery, plants or maybe a talent you would be willing to share. Items may be brought to the first Sunday School room in the Rainbow Center.

Church Directory Update

We will be updating the church directory. If you have a new address, phone number or email, please let Bobbie know. Phone: 218-829-2528, Email: firstcong@brainerd.net.

Adult Forum

Sunday, April 3: Living the Question – David Crum

Sunday, April 10: Hospice and Home Care Presentation – Laura Large

Sunday, April 17: Living the Question – David Crum

Sunday, April 24: Environmental Justice – Coleen Carder, Greg Johnson and Mike North

Parsonage Roof Repair Needs Some Support

In January & February of 2013 when the parsonage got a 'makeover' before the arrival of interim pastor Linda Crowe (& Randy), many of you contributed hours of helping out by scrubbing, painting, cleaning, building, providing meals & treats and financial resources. That 3-week experience improved the health & wellbeing of the building as well as many of us. A renewed community of folks was reignited during that process. The end result was a beautiful building for our pastors to call home. Other improvements made since then include: maple floors redone in the living room, dining room, front entry and office, totally redone main floor ½ bath into a ¾ bath, and new carpet upstairs in the master bedroom & hallway.

When the Trustees budgeted for 2016 in November 2015, the parsonage roof was on the radar but not budgeted because there were more requests for funds than dollars. Little did we know by Christmas, there would be a leak in the master bedroom that is causing damage to the ceiling and north wall. There is a need for \$10,000-\$13,000 for a new roof, depending on the condition of the roof boards/deck. In an attempt to minimize the ceiling and wall damage as much as possible, a roofing contractor has been secured to begin the project in March when the weather cooperates. The Treasurer and Trustees are reviewing all financial resources to pay for this project but feel we will need additional funds. Questions, please ask Jeff Behr, Coleen Carder or Steve Crum.

Thank you for the generous donations we have received so far!

HUGS

April 3

Hosts: Mark & Becky Stadem

Ushers: Roger Best, Greg Johnson, Ken Nelson & Gary Whiteman

Greeters: Bobbie Borg & Karlee Micek

Counters: Jeff Behr & Jerry Kuehn

April 10

Hosts: CE Group

Ushers/Greeters: Nicole Grabowski, Jack Kraywinkle, Itty & Preston Newgord

Counters: Deb Griffith & Judy Whiteman

April 17

Hosts: Shirley Barten & Deb Lundberg

Ushers: Austin & Preston Newgord

Greeter: Marcia Mans

Counters: Coleen Carder & Vi Heiser

April 24

Hosts: Ellie Burkett & Ann Turnbull

Ushers/Greeters: Tracy Lyons, Karen Ogdahl, Mike & Beth Schrader

Counters: Nancy Gould & Lowell Johnson



April Birthdays

4/4	Krystal Graf	4/14	Dan Hegstad	4/24	Jeff Spear
4/7	David Crust	4/15	Joey Halvorson	4/24	Austin Newgord
4/8	Karlee Micek	4/23	Emma Ferrie	4/26	Mitch Crum
4/9	Alice Widmark	4/24	JoAnne Nelson	4/27	Lori Howe
4/13	Hans Stadem	4/24	Coleen Carder	4/30	Millie Gjertson
4/14	Bonnie Crum				

Food Shelf Offering – March 20

Each month we bring groceries, necessities and financial donations to help feed hungry neighbors in our community. The Salvation Army Food Shelf serves 400 families each month. On March 20 we received \$360 and 56 pounds of food. Our next offering will be Sunday, April 24. **Thank you!**

COMMAntary

The COMMAntary will no longer be forwarded by the church office. If you would like to continue to receive the COMMAntary every Thursday, you can sign up at the link below:

<http://visitor.r20.constantcontact.com/email.jsp?m=1102308277559>.

Church Financials

Financial Results – General Fund Year to Date Results as of 2/29/16	2016 Annual Budget	Actuals Through 2/29/16	% of Budget
Income:			
From Giving Units	\$ 150,481	\$ 24,970	16.59%
Other Giving	\$ 5,500	\$ 3,607	65.59%
Total Income	\$ 155,981	\$ 28,577	18.32%
Expenses:			
Council	\$ 97,324	\$ 11,118	11.42%
Christian Ministry	\$ 13,150	\$ 2,267	17.24%
Christian Education	\$ 2,950	\$ 35	1.19%
Stewardship	\$ 570	\$ 59	10.35%
Trustees	\$ 60,170	\$ 8,720	14.49%
Total Expenses	\$ 174,164	\$ 22,199	12.75%
Net Income (Loss) Year to Date:	\$ (18,183)	\$ 6,378	

March 16, 2016 Church Council Minutes

Moderator – Dan Hegstad	Assistant Moderator –
Clerk – Karen Ogdahl	Treasurer – Mike Schrader
Christian Ministry – Joey Halvorson	Trustees – Coleen Carder
Christian Education – Marina Grabowski	Stewardship – Marcia Mans
Council at Large – Ann Turnbull, Nicole Grabowski, Bonnie Crum	

Present: Marina Grabowski, Nicole Grabowski, Dan Hegstad, Karen Ogdahl, Marcia Mans, Joey Halvorson, Bonnie Crum, Mike Schrader, Nancy Gould, Rev. Leslie Moughty

Marcia began the meeting with a devotional titled *Raised Expectations*.

CLERK'S REPORT – nothing to report

TREASURER'S REPORT – Giving is good, and we are close to being on budget. There are, as always, concerns about having enough money to fund future building issues.

PASTOR'S REPORT – Leading weekly Lenten series "Gifts of the Dark Wood"; continuing new member classes, 8 pastoral care consultations; submitted "intent to apply" for a Next Generation Leadership Program for UCC pastors; worked with Randi Beryl and Lowell Johnson about offering Our Whole Lives sexuality program; finding a date in July for Songs of Hope concert (youth performance camp); on vacation April 11 – April 17.

STEWARDSHIP REPORT – Stewardship has been organizing the volunteer brunch, which will be held after church on May 15.

TRUSTEES' REPORT -- The fellowship hall is nearing completion. It needs six door handles at \$300 each (required by fire code). Art hangers have been installed. The first art display will be Lakes Area Music Festival photos by David Boran. The parsonage roof will be replaced this spring, thanks to generous donations. Cost will depend on the condition of the sheathing.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION – CE will hold a fundraiser lunch on April 10 to support the youth trip. They need donations of items and events for the silent auction. They have also applied to make money by bagging groceries at a grocery store. CE is looking for new Sunday School curriculum for next year.

CHRISTIAN MINISTRY – CM is working on arrangements for the Food Shelf concert on March 20. On April 17 Kevin Pelkey will speak about Habitat for Humanity.

AT-LARGE MEMBERS – They hope to have an assistant moderator soon. Council discussed the difficulty of recruiting church leaders.

NEW BUSINESS –

Concerns were expressed about the gap between the budget and actual spending. This has always been an issue, but Council agreed that, with careful monitoring, it could be managed. We need to keep the congregation informed about the finances. Mike mentioned the need to find someone to handle the church's on-line banking.

A question was asked about the necessity of raising the pew pads after worship. After discussion, Council approved leaving the pew pads on the seats.

Council discussed the propriety of applause during worship. The consensus was that applause is appropriate in some situations, and we should leave it to individuals to decide.

The Annual Meeting will be May 15. Committee reports should be submitted to Bobbie by May 1.

The meeting was adjourned with the Lord's Prayer. The next meeting will be April 20 at 7:00.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Ogdahl, Clerk of Council

Church Calendar – April 2016

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1 10:30 Book Group	2
3 8:30 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Fellowship 11:00 Sunday School 11:30 Living the Question	4	5	6 9:30 Prayer Circle 11:30 Men's Group @ Sawmill Inn 6:00 Gifts of the Dark Wood	7 11:30 Clergy Cluster	8 10:30 Book Group	9
10 8:30 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Fellowship 11:00 Sandwich Luncheon & Silent Auction 11:30 Adult Forum	11	12	13 9:30 Prayer Circle 11:30 Men's Group @ Sawmill Inn	14 5:30 Committee Meetings	15 10:30 Book Group 6:00 Process & Film	16
17 8:30 Choir 10:00 Worship 11:00 Fellowship 11:00 Sunday School 11:30 Living the Question	18 6:30 Art Committee	19	20 9:30 Prayer Circle 11:30 Men's Group @ Sawmill Inn 7:00 Council Meeting	21 6:00 Around the World Sampler	22 10:30 Book Group 4:00 Soup Kitchen	23
24 10:00 Worship & Food Shelf Offering 11:00 Fellowship 11:00 Sunday School 11:30 Adult Forum Newsletter Deadline New Pathways	25 New Pathways	26 New Pathways	27 9:30 Prayer Circle 11:30 Men's Group @ Sawmill Inn New Pathways	28 5:30 PPRC New Pathways	29 10:30 Book Group New Pathways	30 New Pathways

Community Events

Being Open & Affirming Changes Lives!

A celebration of the Open and Affirming presence in the MN Conference UCC. Saturday, April 9. Exciting workshop options at 1:00pm: "How Being Open and Affirming Changes the Life of Congregations," "Changed Lives of Youth Ministry in and Open and Affirming Church" and "Open and Affirming: Changing Lives at the Intersections." Creative Worship that is Empowering at 2:30pm. Hosted by Linden Hills Congregational UCC, 4200 Upton Ave S, Minneapolis.

Sagatun Lodge, Sons of Norway 22nd Annual Frokost

You are invited to the 22nd annual Frokost, a Scandinavian Breakfast/Brunch, on Saturday, April 9, at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in east Brainerd. There are two seatings, 9:30 and 11:30, cost is \$12. To reserve tickets, call 218-7640-3336. P.S. There is no lutefisk involved!

Women Making Waves

The Brainerd Lakes Area Women's Fund inspires the next generation of women leaders in the community by recognizing those that are setting strong examples of leadership, generosity and service in our community with our **Women Making Waves** award. The award recognizes a woman who has significantly contributed to the field of philanthropy in the region through her personal or professional contributions. It is important that the honoree has shared her time, talent and financial resources in the community. Who do you know that deserves recognition?

The Women's Fund of the Brainerd Lakes Area Community Foundation will recognize the honoree at the Women Making Waves event which will be on April 27 at the Arrowwood Lodge (ticket and sponsorship information coming soon!)

Here is a link to the nomination form and more information:

<http://www.communitygiving.org/foundations/brainerd-lakes-area-community-foundation/blacf-funds/blacf-womens-fund>

Confidence Learning Center

Diamond in the Rough Spring Clean-up. For more information or to sign up, contact Mary Harder (21-828-2344 or mary@campconfidence.com). There is also more information available on their website: <http://www.campconfidence.com/volunteer>.

Crow Wing Energized Aging Conference

April 16, 8:30am-2:00pm, First Lutheran Church 424 S 8th St. Key note: Dr. Dale Anderson. Topics include: Difficult Conversations, Age in Place, Matter of Balance, Financial/Estate Planning, Care Choice, Health Care Directive. Register at www.CrowWingEnergized.org/events/got-plans/.