Friendship News, July 2025

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First Congregational United Church of Christ, Brainerd

An Open and Affirming Congregation

The Church Office Hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday from 10:00am – 2:00pm

Office phone 218-829-2528 Office E-mail [*uccbrainerd@gmail.com*](mailto:uccbrainerd@gmail.com)

Pastor Leslie’s E-mail: [*pastorleslieucc@gmail.com*](mailto:pastorleslieucc@gmail.com)Website: [*www.uccbrainerdmn.org*](http://www.uccbrainerdmn.org)

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

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**Pastor’s Pen**

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***The Summer Day***

Growing up in Arizona, summers felt like they lasted forever! We would often see the high temperatures hit 100 degrees in May while we were still in school and they would easily last until the end of September if not October. Like most kids, I looked forward to summer because it meant a break from school. But otherwise, summer was not a season that I savored.

Then I moved to Minnesota. It took no time at all for me to appreciate how beautiful the Minnesota summers are. But I confess it took me a few years to really understand how quickly the summers passed by, and the importance of savoring this season.

When life gets difficult, when the world feels like it is crumbling, when we feel overwhelmed, I think one of the best things we can do is to slow down and simply notice the world around us. Getting outside and paying attention to the tiniest of flowers or to the way a soft breeze feels on our skin. I heard the poem, *The Summer Day* by Mary Oliver at a UCC Minnesota Youth Camp a few summers ago, and it spoke deeply to me about this very notion…

Who made the world?

Who made the swan, and the black bear?

Who made the grasshopper?

This grasshopper, I mean—

the one who has flung herself out of the grass,

the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,

who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down—

who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.

Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.

Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.

I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down

into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,

how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,

which is what I have been doing all day.

Tell me, what else should I have done?

Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?

—Mary Oliver

“I don’t know exactly what a prayer is. I do know how to pay attention…” This might be my favorite line in the poem. I believe that paying attention to the beauty in front of us can itself be a prayer. A prayer of gratitude, a prayer of awe and wonder, a prayer to be connected to the creation of the Divine. As we pay attention to what is right in front of us – a blade of grass, the sound of the birds singing, colorful flowers in someone’s garden – other thoughts are unable to take up as much space in our minds. We become more able to notice the movement of the Holy within us and between us, and the overwhelming-ness of the world and our lives start to feel more manageable.

A person wearing glasses smiling

Description automatically generatedOur lives are precious and wild, as Mary Oliver writes. So may we pay attention, may we drink in the beauty, may we find renewal in the warmth of the summer sun and juicy sweetness of summer fruit.

With Peace,

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Mission Statement of First Congregational UCC

***“To know and share God’s love within us.”***

Purpose Statement of First Congregational United Church of Christ

***“First Congregational UCC is a welcoming, inclusive, and progressive community committed to promoting social justice, spiritual growth, and love for all people. We reject discrimination and advocate for equality and dignity for marginalized communities. Through worship, education, and service, we work to make a positive impact on the world and invite all individuals to join us in this journey of faith and service.”***

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**Church Office Hours**

**Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday 10:00 am - 2:00 pm**

***Closed Mondays and Fridays***

**Admin. Asst. Terri vacation days - Tuesday, July 22nd &**

**Tuesday, July 29th**

Please call Admin. Asst. Terri at the office 218-829-2528

**Pastor Leslie’s Workday Schedule**

**Sunday through Thursday (Days off are Friday and Saturday)**

**Drop-in Hours: Wednesdays 11:00 am – 1:00 pm Thursdays 2:00 – 4:00 pm**

**Pastor Leslie will be out of the office July 10th through July 16th**

**& July 31st Through August 3rd**

*\*Drop-in hours are times set aside for “drop-in” conversations, much like a professor’s office hours.*

Everyone is encouraged to make an appointment, especially if the above times are not convenient. You can go to [*www.calendly.com/pastorleslieucc*](http://www.calendly.com/pastorleslieucc/) and select a day and time that works for you, or you can email Pastor Leslie at [*pastorleslieucc@gmail.com*](mailto:pastorleslieucc@gmail.com) or call/text at 218-656-0096.

**A dog with a white collar

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**Stay Connected**

**How to watch Sunday worship:** The worship service is **broadcasted on the church Facebook page and the church's YouTube channel every Sunday at 10:00 am.**  
To watch worship on Facebook, go to [*https://www.facebook.com/uccbrainerd/live*](https://www.facebook.com/uccbrainerd/live)  
***\*\*Live stream videos are saved and can be viewed at any time. All memorials, weddings and 12th Night Concert are on our church Facebook page.***

**How to stay connected with First Congregational friends and members:** Join the private group for our Facebook Connections Page at [*https://www.facebook.com/groups/uccbrainerd*](https://www.facebook.com/groups/uccbrainerd)*.*

**Financial Help Available** The Pastor's Discretionary Fund is available to assist church members and others in the Brainerd area who are experiencing financial distress with modest financial help. If you need assistance, please email, call, or text Pastor Leslie. Let her know what your situation is and how the church might be of help.

**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 use PayPal, go to: [*https://www.paypal.me/uccbrainerd*](https://www.paypal.me/uccbrainerd)

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**First Congregational UCC News & Updates**

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We are looking for a volunteer to submit information about church events to the Brainerd Dispatch.  It won't take much time, but someone will have to think about it on a weekly basis. Usually, items which appear in the Sunday Bulletin can be submitted.

So, not a lot of time or work, but it is important.

Thank you to Judy Whiteman who has done this task so faithfully for many years.

Please contact Dan Hegstad at:  [*dan@danhegstad.com*](mailto:dan@danhegstad.com)

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****Church BBQ & Potluck**

**Date: Saturday, July 19th**

**Time: 11:00 am**

**Where:**

**First Congregational UCC front lawn**

***Provided: Hotdogs & Pulled Pork***

***Vegetarian Bean Burgers available***

**What to bring: side dishes, dessert, your own beverage & lawn chairs**

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**A group of square wooden blocks with white text

AI-generated content may be incorrect.Church Name Change**

You may have heard that we are considering changing the name of our church from First Congregational.

If you have questions, please take a few minutes to watch this short video.

**Video Produced by Dan Hegstad & Jonathan Weise.**

**Here is the link:** [***https://youtu.be/w-gQGsMLoGA***](https://youtu.be/w-gQGsMLoGA)

***Our task group will meet Sunday, July 20th @ 11:30***

***after worship to discuss the next steps.***

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**A logo for a health network

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**W.I.S.E**

*Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive and Engaged*

*in the Mental Health of the community and the wider world*

First Congregational UCC Brainerd has devoted time learning about mental health issues to become a WISE (Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive and Engaged around mental health) Congregation registered with the United Church of Christ Mental Health Network.

Raising awareness around mental health, our church members voted at the June 2024 Annual Meeting to reconfirm our WISE Covenant which has allowed us to be designated as a WISE Congregation in the United Church of Christ. Stay tuned for upcoming events.

**Dear WISE Committee and WISE friends of Brainerd UCC:**

On behalf of the entire Board of the Mental Health Network of the UCC, I want to congratulate First Congregational UCC of Brainerd on becoming our 83rd WISE Congregation! Woo-hoo. We are thrilled to welcome you into our national family and are blessed to receive your gifts of advocacy and justice for the mental health needs of your congregation and surrounding community.

You are a powerful voice for those dealing with stigma, rejection, misunderstanding, and loneliness as a result of their mental health. Thank you for doing the work to receive certification, and for knowing that this recognition is a touchstone for launching an even greater ministry on behalf of those who are hurting and alone. Through the years you will save many lives. You have undertaken a calling that is so needed. You are truly God's boots on the ground for mental health justice.

You will be listed on our website. You will shortly receive a certificate that I hope you will proudly frame, and you may use the WISE logo for all of your materials.

Please enjoy a Congratulatory video that was made for you. Copy this link, open a new browser window, paste into that window, and play:

[**https://drive.google.com/file/d/1\_kRlEPXtqjST-sj-NpJst1fQO4h83eTv/view?usp=sharing**](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_kRlEPXtqjST-sj-NpJst1fQO4h83eTv/view?usp=sharing)

**Again, many congratulations! I am so happy for you!**

Blessings,

Vicki K. Harvey, Psy.D.

MHN WISE

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**Next Council Meeting**

***Wednesday, July 17, 2025, 3:30 pm***

**in-person and via Zoom** [*tinyurl.com/uccbrainerdzoom*](http://tinyurl.com/uccbrainerdzoom)

**Reports are due via email on Monday, July 14th to Kim Slipy, Moderator &**

**Terri Chidester, Admin. Asst.**

**First Congregational Approved Council Meeting Minutes are available upon request. Please contact Terri Admin Asst. at the Church Office.**

**Volunteer at Church!**

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***There are many other opportunities for you to share your talents***

**Committees needing your gifts of volunteer time \* Trustees \* Stewardship**

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A colorful balloons with text

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**July Birthdays**

Gary Whiteman July 4 Chris Yager July 23

Steve Newcom July 17 Stephen Crum July 26

**Diagram

Description automatically generatedAdult Forum**

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***Adult Forum will resume in the Fall.***

***Contact Lowell Johnson if you have an idea for a presentation.***

[***johnsonlowells@gmail.com***](mailto:johnsonlowells@gmail.com)

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**A red and black logo

Description automatically generated with low confidenceFirst Congregational Food Shelf Collection**

**Our church continues to collect non-perishable food items for the Salvation Army Food Shelf. Please consider bringing items and donating.**

**There are two collection boxes: one in the parking lot entry hallway, the other in the Narthex. Brian Twamley picks up and delivers the food. Thank you!**

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**A blue circle with white text

Description automatically generatedSpecial Offering Sunday Worship July 27th - Food Shelf**

This month we have an opportunity to help as we give our Fourth Sunday Special Offering to the **Salvation Army Food Shelf**. The food shelf offers a wide range of groceries, allowing individuals and families in need to stretch their budgets. Food boxes may include shelf-stable pantry items, breads, cereals, meat and other household necessities. On occasion, fresh produce is also made available.

Please send your donation to First Congregational UCC, 415 Juniper St. Brainerd, MN 56401.

Or for your convenience use our Paypal account at: [*paypal.me/uccbrainerd*](https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/uccbrainerd). Make note on your offering **“*Food Shelf Special Offering.”***

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**A handshake with text

Description automatically generatedH.U.G.S.**

**Hosts, Ushers, Greeters, Scripture-readers**

Sunday morning greeters/ushers and coffee hosts play an important part in making our church a warm and welcoming place for all. Signup below for your first Sunday as the face of the church! [***https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0E48A9A823A5FFC07-hugs/16034811***](https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0E48A9A823A5FFC07-hugs/16034811)

**\*\*Notice – Hosts may be reimbursed for snacks/food that are purchased for Fellowship Coffee Hour. Reimbursement Forms are in pocket folders outside the office. Please fill out and submit with receipts in the folder provided next to the form.**

**A book cover of a flower

AI-generated content may be incorrect.Friday Book Group**

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**We meet each Friday morning at 10:30 am via zoom**.

Church Zoom link: [*https://tinyurl.com/uccbrainerdzoom*](https://tinyurl.com/uccbrainerdzoom)

We are reading, "Aging as a Spiritual Practice: A Contemplative Guide to Growing Older" by Lewis Richmond.  
  
A wise, compassionate book that guides readers through the four key stages of aging—such as “Lightning Strikes” (the moment we wake up to our aging)—as well as the processes of adapting to change, embracing who we are, and appreciating our unique life chapters.  
Breath by breath, moment by moment, Richmond’s teachings inspire limitless opportunities for a joy that transcends age.

*Contact Pat Scott for more information.*

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**A picture containing sketch, clipart, drawing, illustration

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For anyone who wishes to join in making calls or visits, **the Care Team meets every month on the first Thursday @ 10:00 am**.

If you know of anyone who would enjoy a call from the care team, please contact one of our Care Team; *Barb Hoeft, Jack and Kay Kraywinkle, Pat Scott, Chris Yager, Deb Griffith, Joey Halvorson (text or email) and Pastor Leslie.*

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**Logo

Description automatically generated with medium confidence Cooking For Everyone**

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**This group is OPEN FOR EVERYONE!**

Email Lowell [*johnsonlowells@gmail.com*](mailto:johnsonlowells@gmail.com) and he will add you to the member list so that you will know when and where we will next meet.

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***A time to connect, socialize and enjoy some local food.***

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A menu of a lunch

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**A wooden crate full of vegetables

Description automatically generated with low confidenceGarden Gleaning**

***A Biblical (and environmentally) inspired activity***

This is how it works: Gardeners and plant people bring in their “gleanings” to share. This ranges from rhubarb and vegetable plants in the spring to daffodil bulbs in the fall. A table, poster and donation basket are in Narthex entrance. Enjoy the fruits of our labors!

***All are welcome to help themselves! All donations are given to the Food Shelf.***

*Historical note: Begun here circa 1988 when our church began Hunger Action outreach, Central America updates and global food connections.*

A group of doors with text on them

Description automatically generated**Welcome to our Facility**

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We are blessed to be able to share our beautiful church facilities for purposes that match the values of the church and its mission which is “To know and share God’s love within us.” We are an open church valuing the diversity of age, culture, gender identity, opinions, physical and mental abilities, and sexual orientation.

To request a space for general use, ask for a “Request for Church Building Use” form and

policy packet from Terri in the church office, at 218-829-2528 or email *uccbrainerd@gmail.com.* Submit the request form back to Terri in the office, and it will be submitted for approval at the next Council Meeting.

For wedding or funeral use, contact Pastor Leslie: [*pastorleslieucc@gmail.com*](mailto:pastorleslieucc@gmail.com)

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**The Columbarium & Memorial Garden**

**First Congregational UCC, Brainerd**

The Columbarium is in the historic space that once was our church’s front entry way.

How appropriate it is that our Columbarium now marks another entry way into a new life — where the Spirits of Love and Truth are always present!

The Memorial Garden is located on the south lawn of the church. The Garden provides a place for cremains of your loved one to be buried in the ground among natural plantings. The Garden fee includes the inscription of your loved one’s name on a granite plaque that is mounted on the outside wall of the church.

Should you wish to learn more about the purchase of a niche for your own cremains or for the ashes of a loved one, please call the church office at (218) 829-2528 and a packet of materials will be sent to you via email or regular mail. The Memorial Committee has prepared the information packet, and it contains all the details you will need as you consider inurnment here at First Congregational UCC.

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A purple bird house on a post

AI-generated content may be incorrect.**Community Prayer Box**

Thank you to our Memorial Committee and the craftsmanship of Jack Kraywinkle, for making Pastor Leslie’s idea for a Community Prayer Box in the Memorial Garden a reality! You can find the prayer box on the South side of the church (the side that faces Juniper Street.)

Community members frequently walk through the garden and this box will offer our wider community an opportunity to share their prayers. Prayer cards and pens are provided, and the box is secured with a padlock, so the submitted prayers don’t fly away with the wind!

Pastor Leslie checks the box weekly and pray for any prayers submitted as well as bring them to the Care Team for prayer as well.

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A logo for outdoor ministry

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**"Weaving Our Soul Stories in Wild Spaces"**

**Outdoor Ministry 2025**

You are all invited to experience the *MN Conference Outdoor Ministry* as we take this season to *“Weave our Soul Stories in Wild Spaces.”* Many of our in-person events will be located at Camp Onomia to offer consistency, while book studies and resources will be available online. “Wild” Worship liturgies are also in the works for congregations looking to add earth-based Christian elements to their worship services.

**For more ﻿Information and registration:**[***www.uccmn.org/programs-support/outdoor/***](https://www.uccmn.org/programs-support/outdoor/)

**Family Camp** | July 11 – 13 Cost: $150 – $450

Family Camp is back! This camp is open to all individuals, couples, and families of all sizes. There will be swimming, canoeing, fishing, worship, art, relaxing, and so much more available.

**Night Hawk Summer Youth Camp** | July 13 – 18 Cost: $350

Love the late nights and later mornings? In this awesome program, campers stay up late into the night and sleep late into the morning. God’s creation is a whole different adventure during the dark hours. We are partnering with the ELCA to offer this camp to youth who have finished grades 6-12.

**Clergy Family Retreat** | August 10 – 12 Cost: $75 – $180

Hey clergy! We know the weight of the world and your service to your settings can be heavy. The MN Conference would like to offer you and your family an affordable getaway. There will be plenty of time to relax, fish, swim, and canoe. All ordained, licensed, chaplain, and retired clergy (single, couple, or family) are welcome to attend.

**Great Lakes Collaborative Summit** | August 24 – 26 Cost: $185 – $235

This is a partner collaboration retreat with all UCC conferences around the great lakes and UCCanada. Join us for this three-day event, to discern what it means to be good stewards to our lakes and watersheds. Keynote speaker is Ched Meyer, editor of *Watershed Discipleship* and author of the recently released book *Affluenza and Resisting Plutocracy: Luke’s Jesus and Sabbath Economics*.

**Women’s Retreat** | September 12 – 14 Cost: $250

Paula J. Pederson — psychologist, interculturalist, and facilitator with the Center for Courage and Renewal — joins singer-songwriter Sara Thomsen to weave deeper connections of self with creation and the Divine. This is open to all women no matter age, pronouns, and spiritual identity.

*Let us gather at the altar of nature as we learn to listen, learn, and heal.  
Let us go forth to be good stewards of the Earth in all the ways that bring wholeness to all living creatures.*

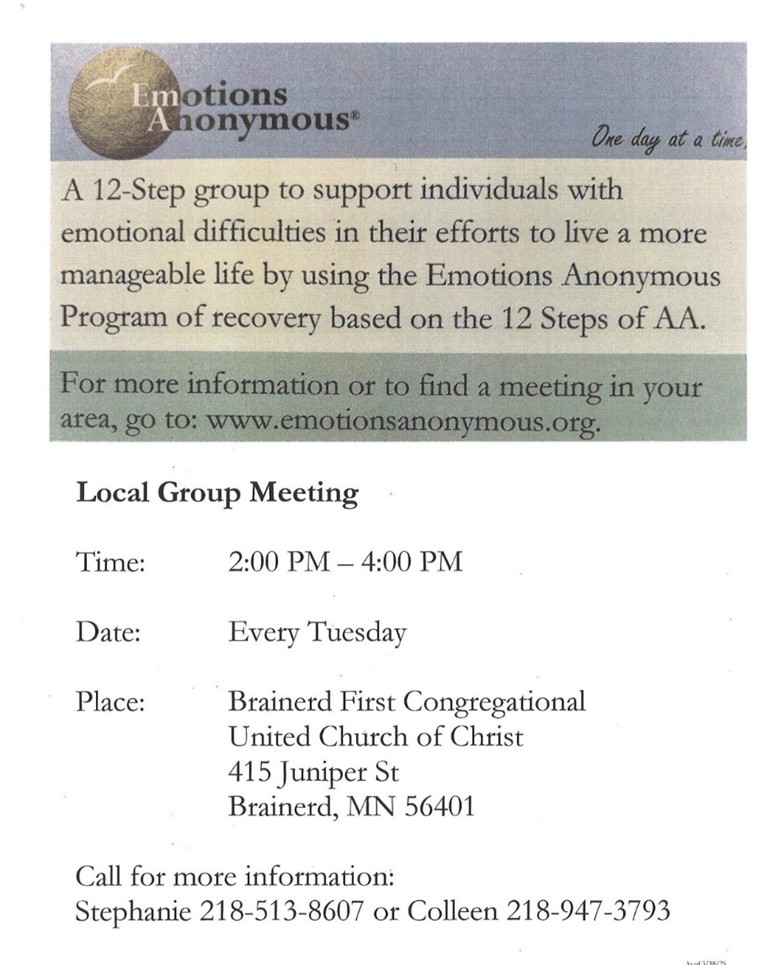
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**Brainerd Lakes & Surrounding Area Information**

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

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| July 2025 Calendar |

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| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
| **Y- Yes Meeting in person**  **FB -Facebook Stream Online**  **C- Cancelled N-No Meeting**  **Z-our church Zoom** | **Office Closed** | Office Open  10am – 2pm | Office Hours  10am – 2pm  Pastor Drop-in Hours  11:00 am – 1:00 pm | Office Hours  10am – 2pm  Pastor Drop-in Hours  2:00 – 4:00 pm  **w/Daisy** | **Office Closed** |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| ***Pastor Leslie out of the Office July 10th through July 16th – & Vacation July 31 st through August 3 rd*** |  | **1**  2pm EA-**Y**  5:30pm OA -**Y** | 11:45pm Men’s **2**  Grp@Wings Café-**Y**  7pm AA Common-**Y** | **3**  10am Care Team-**Y**  4-8:30pm Indivisible Grp. Mtg-**Y** | **4**  10:30am Bk Grp-**Z**  ~~Movie Night-~~**~~C~~** | **5**  . |
| 8:30am Bnrd Frnds-**Y 6**  10am W0rship & Communion-Y&**FB**  11am Fellowshp-**Y**  11:15am Chatty Hour Conversations**-Y** | **7** | **8**  Foundation Mtg.-TBD  2pm EA-**Y**  4:30pm Christian Ministry-**Y**  5:30pm OA -**Y** | 11:45pm Men’s **9**  Grp@Wings Café-**Y**  12pm Memorial Mtg.-**Y**  3:30pm Exec. Mtg.-**Y**  7pm AA Common-**Y** | **10**  ***Pastor Leslie out of Office-UCC Nat’l Synod through July 16th*** | **11**  10:30am Bk Grp- **Z** | **12**  ~~Women’s~~~~Fellowship~~-**C** |
| 8:30am Bnrd Frnds-**Y 13**  10am Worship-**Y**&**FB**  **Emily Goldthwaite preaching**  11am Fellowshp-**Y**  11:15am Chatty Hour Conversations**-Y** | **14** | 2pm EA-**Y 15**  5:30pm OA -**Y** | 11:45pm Men’s **16**  Grp@Wings Café-**Y**  Trustees Mtg. TBD  7pm AA Common-**Y** | ***Pastor Leslie 17***  ***back in Office***  3:30pm Council Mtg.-**Y&Z**  6:30pm Dist.7AA-**Y** | **18**  10:30am Bk Grp- **Z** | **19**  11am Church BBQ Potluck bring side dish and/or dessert, lawn chairs |
| 8:30am Bnrd Frnds-**Y 20**  10am Worship**-Y**&**FB**  11:15am Fellowshp-**Y**  11:15am Chatty Hour Conversations**-Y**  **11:30am Name Chage Mtg-Y** | **21** | **22**  ***Terri Admin. Asst. Vacation Day***  2pm EA-**Y**  5:30pm OA -**Y** | 11:45pm Men’s **23**  Grp@Wings Café-**Y**  4pm Neighbors for Shelter Mtg. - **Y**  7pm AA Common-**Y** | **24** | **25**  10:30am Bk Grp- **Z** | **26** |
| 8:30am Bnrd Frnds-**Y**  **27**  10am Worship-**Y**&**FB**  11am Fellowshp-**Y**  11:15am Chatty Hour Conversations**-Y**  **\*\*Special Offering Food Shelf**  **\*Newsletter Deadline** | **28** | **29**  ***Terri Admin. Asst. Vacation Day***  2pm EA-**Y**  5:30pm OA -**Y** | 11:45pm Men’s **30**  Grp@Wings Café-**Y**  7pm AA Common-**Y** | **31**  11:30am Women’s Lunch @ TBD  ***Pastor Leslie begins Vacation thru Aug.3*** |  |  |