



Friendship News, December 2024

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

The Church Office Hours: Wednesdays – Fridays from 10:00am – 2:00pm

Office phone 218-829-2528

Office E-mail uccbrainerd@gmail.com

Pastor Leslie's E-mail: pastorleslieucc@gmail.com

Website: www.uccbrainerdmn.org

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

Pastor's Pen

Words for the Beginning

Our lives are made up of beginnings and endings. The changing of the seasons is particularly obvious right now as we have watched leaves change colors and fall from the trees and snow begins to coat the ground. We know that spring will bring new leaves and new life, but it is a new beginning for which we must wait. The season of Advent is also the season of endings and beginnings. As the calendar year comes to a close, a new church year begins. Christ's birth ushers us into new ways of living and loving; and yet, the world as we know it spins madly on. In many ways, pregnant Mary was surrounded by endings—large and small, personal and political. But Mary proclaimed hope in a God who was and is making all things new.

Christ's birth offered a beautiful new beginning for shepherds and Magi alike—all the while, King Herod tried to bring Christ's story to an end. When we ourselves navigate seasons filled with endings and beginnings, we need reminders. We need words that can feel like steady ground, like a path for our feet as we step into the unknown.

This year, we are exploring Advent with a worship series filled with the blessing of words we need to hear again and again as we begin a new season. The series was created by imagining the words Mary would speak to her newborn son. What scriptures and stories would she impart to him? What lessons would she teach him as he grew? And so, our weekly themes may feel like the lessons we teach to children, but in reality, these are lessons we continue to learn and relearn as adults. I invite you to enter this Advent season as if you are entering a sacred new chapter, holding fast to the reminders that will bolster you for the journey ahead.

As we journey through this season together, may you find words for belovedness and hope. May you find words for beginning again. For no matter what you are facing, no matter what this new day brings, love is your beginning.

With Peace,

Rev. Jessie Moughtin



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.”

Mission Statement of First Congregational UCC

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

First Congregational UCC News & Updates



Church Office Hours

Wednesday, Thursday, Friday 10:00 am - 2:00 pm
Please call Admin. Asst. Terri at the office 218-829-2528

The Office will be closed on Christmas Day, December 25th

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

**Drop-in hours are times set aside for “drop-in” conversations, much like a professor’s office hours. Pastor Leslie is typically working at the church the rest of the week, but it is possible that she may be in meetings, at a community event, or working off-site.*

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

**Need some fur-therapy?
Daisy is on duty!**



Daisy will be joining Pastor Leslie during office hours on most THURSDAYS from 2:00 – 4:00pm.

If you have allergies or other concerns, please contact Pastor Leslie to arrange for a dog-free meeting.

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>

****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>.

Financial Help Available Your Church Council voted last year 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. We received many generous donations! 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>

Announcements & Reminders

Advent and Christmas Worship

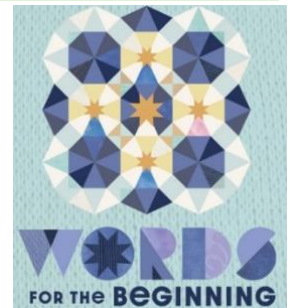
December 1: "You Are a Blessing" Worship with communion at **10:00 am**

December 8: "We Can't Go Alone" Worship at **10:00 am.**

December 15: "Do the Good That Is Yours to Do" Worship at **10:00 am.**

December 22: "Hope is Worth the Risk" Worship at **10:00 am.**

December 24: (Tuesday) – "Love Knows Your Name"
Christmas Eve Worship at 4:00 pm.



Advent Shadowbox in the Narthex



We invite you to be a part of our interactive Advent Shadowbox. Take a card and bring back something that represents the word in the context of this time of waiting for Christ.

What does this word mean to you? Does it evoke an emotion or memory? You might have a small object or possibly a brief writing either existing or original, maybe a photo expressing the word.

Please place your item(s) in the box by the date on the card. After Christmas you may take your item home. The object will need to fit into the 6-inch opening. You may want to label your item with your name on the back.

We are hoping this activity will spark us to look at the wait for Christmas in new ways, as well as encourage discussion among the congregation. Let your creativity shine!

Endings & Beginnings – Special Worship Service
Tuesday, December 10, 6:30 pm



Sometimes the holidays don't feel very jolly. Grief, stress, anxiety, depression and more may impact our ability to feel festive. This worship will make space for the difficult emotions many of us experience during the holiday season, particularly grief around endings and the anxiety that can come with new beginnings. In a world full of dead ends, the season of advent invites us to begin again. We invite you to start with love and begin again.

Christmas Flowers 2024



You have the opportunity to give a gift in honor and in memory of your loved one(s). We will use the money to purchase flower arrangements for the altar. All memorials will be listed in the Christmas bulletin.

Please include all of the information below with your gift.

Amount of Memorial Gift: \$ _____

In Memory Of: _____

Your Name(s): _____

Write your checks to: **1st Congregational Church** with **Memo: "Christmas Flowers"**
Include this information with your check and drop it off at the church office, give at worship offertory, or mail it to: **First Congregational Church, 415 Juniper Street Brainerd, MN 56401**

You can also donate 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> Please memo: **"Christmas Flowers"**

December Adult Forums - 11:30 after worship



December 1st – "Soul Shop": In part one of this Biblically based series, the topic of what leads to suicidal desperation, how to identify its signs, and what we can do to intervene with family and friends to prevent the completion of a suicide attempt will be explored.

December 8th – "Heart of my Soul" – second book by Janet Kurtz: *"The Heart of my Soul: Tales of Five Generations at the Family Cabin"* will be the core of this week's Adult Forum. Jan's second book is a compilation of family letters, essays, snippets of handed down sayings and the

oral tradition practiced around bonfires, scripted for the future. She will read a few examples from her family stories and lead an activity in story-telling. With Christmas gatherings in the near future, maybe this is the year to tell or retell family lore, leaving a legacy, not just of physical inheritance, but of beliefs, humor, and a foundation of people that shed light on who we are and make us think about what we want to pass along. Join Jan and her quest to keep the family alive through their words and actions, thinking out beyond the five generations shared here. Both of her books will be available for sale. Check out her writing website at: www.janetkurtz.com

Church Cleaning - Friday, December 6th from 10 am - 2 pm



The trustees are hosting a cleaning day to freshen up various areas in the church.

Tasks we are wanting to work on are: dusting stair railings; removing cobwebs; polishing front and back glass doors along with the sanctuary door; vacuum and dust, spot clean carpet stains with carpet cleaner and kitchen cleaning and organizing of cupboards, refrigerator, etc. The trustees will serve a light lunch of soup and a dessert for all who volunteer. A signup sheet is in the Narthex through December 6th or email to Deb G. at ranger2949@gmail.com.

ANNUAL BUDGET Meeting - Congregational Budget Approval

Sunday, December 15, at 11:15 am after worship in-person and via Zoom



All voting Members are encouraged to attend the congregational budget meeting to review and vote on the 2025 church budget. Meeting packets will be distributed in person on the previous Sunday, December 8, and emailed to voting members on December 11.

Please notify Terri in the office if you need a packet sent to you by snail mail.

December Special Offering - UCC Missions - Christmas Fund **Sunday Worship – December 22nd**



This month we have an opportunity as we give our Special Offering to the Christmas Fund UCC Missions. Administered by the Pension Boards on behalf of the church, helps provide pension and health premium supplementation to low-income retirees, emergency assistance to clergy families in need and Christmas gift checks to hundreds of annuitants. To donate, send a check with "Christmas Fund" in the memo line to: First Congregational UCC, 415 Juniper St. Brainerd, MN 56401 or donate online using PayPal <https://www.paypal.me/uccbrainerd> and indicate "Christmas Fund" in the Note.



UCC Volunteers for the Warming Shelter **Bridge on 7th**



The week of December 29, 2024 - January 4, 2025, is our church's next week volunteering at the Warming Shelter.

Here is the sign up link for the week of December 29th

<https://whocanbetherere.com/SignUp/week-of-december-29/2na8cvq2>

If you have any questions at all, please talk with Deb Griffith when in church or by phone (218-851-2949). Thank you always for considering volunteering for this worthy cause.

Movie Night!



FREE!

Friday, December 6th
Film rolls @ 6:30 pm.
Fellowship Hall
First Congregational Church
5th & Juniper

Bring snacks to share and
beverage of your choice.

There will be a discussion
following the movie.
Free and open to all.

Invite your friends!

When 93-year-old Thelma Post gets duped by a phone scammer pretending to be her grandson, she sets out on a treacherous quest across the city to reclaim what was taken from her.



You're invited!

THE SECOND ANNUAL NEW YEAR'S EVE BASH!

Tuesday, December 31 @ 6:00 pm to 9:00ish pm

Fellowship Hall

\$5 Cover Charge

Join in Games, camaraderie, food, prizes, FUN, FUN, FUN!

*Bring an appetizer to share and your own beverages (no alcohol please)
Wear your ugliest Christmas sweater for the Ugly Christmas Sweater Contest -
Win fabulous prizes!

Hosted by Kay Cox and Pam Wible

UCC Women's Coffee
 December 14th @ 9:30 am
 Fellowship Hall
 Mary Reardon Hosting



UCC Women's Lunch



Thursday, December 19th @ 11:30 am
 Baia Della in Baxter
 Kay Cox Hosting
 *Show & Tell

Everyone is welcome - no reservations are required for either gathering.

Men's Lunch

Not Organized - No Agenda - Join us!

Each Wednesday 11:45 am
 Wings Airport Café



***Christmas Day, Dec. 25th &
 New Year's Day Jan. 1st Cancelled***

December Birthdays



Mary Harder	December 1	John Krueger	December 12
Karen Ford	December 5	Paige Gustafson	December 22
Joy Persall	December 7	Carol Phelps	December 29
Lisa Wigand	December 9	Dave TenEyck	December 29
Jack Kraywinkle	December 11	Dorothy Highum	December 29
Greta Norlander	December 11	Maggie Panning	December 30
		Greg Johnson	December 31

Church Leadership

Get Involved, Give Back, Grow Connections – Volunteer at Church!
There are many other opportunities for you to share your talents!

Council & Committees needing fresh faces and leadership:

***Council Member-At-Large:** Attend council meetings, act as a liaison for church members and council, help with nominations, spokesperson for historically underrepresented groups (HUGS).

***Christian Education *Music *Arts *Trustees**
 Contact Mary Reardon - Moderator with your nominations

First Congregational Council Minutes, October 24, 2024

~If you would like a copy of any of the Council Minutes, please contact the church office ~

Council members Present: Mary Readon, Cynthia Janes, Georgia Harris, Lowell Johnson, Marcia Ferris, Deb Griffith, Sue Hadland, Kay Cox, and Terri Chidester via Zoom.

The Council meeting was called to order with prayer.

Food for thought: how to help more when there are things that need to be done.

A written report needs to be done outlining how the money was spent by the Church during Leslie's Renewal Time.

There was an agreement by Council members that there still to be a discussion about the church's safety during worship hour and other church events.

It was moved to accept the September's minutes and the August's minutes submitted for approval at the next council meeting.

The Foundation submitted funds to reimburse partial amount for the "City Street Construction" with \$8,874 and in 2025 the Foundation plans to reimburse the final balance to the church.

There was discussion about financial planning for the end of life---- how church members can leave donations to the church. Suggestion: a memorial insurance policy can be taken out to leave money to the church.

Adjourned: 5:25pm

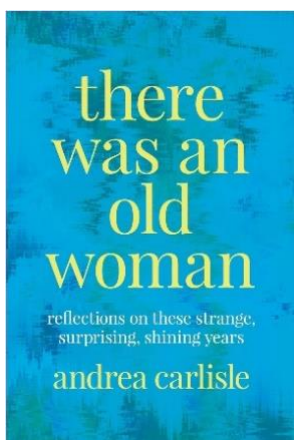
Respectfully submitted,
Georgia Harris

Next Regular Council Meeting:
Thursday, December 19th 2024, 4:30 pm
in-person and via Zoom tinyurl.com/uccbrainerdzoom

Friday Book Group

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

Church Zoom link: <https://tinyurl.com/uccbrainerdzoom>



We are reading "There Was an Old Woman: Reflections on These Strange, Surprising, Shining Years" by Andrea Carlisle. In these personal essays, Carlisle looks for new ways to bring herself more fully to this time of life, such as daily walks with other women and connecting to the natural world that surrounds her houseboat on an Oregon river at the foot of a forest.

Those curious about, approaching, or living in old age will find wisdom and insight in her unique perspective. In a voice that rings with clarity, humor, and humility, Carlisle shows us that old age is not another country where we can expect to find the Old Woman grimly waiting but is instead an expansion of the borders in the country, we're most familiar with: ourselves. Contact Pat Scott for more information

UCC Care Team

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 Hoelt, Jack and Kay Kraywinkle, Pat Scott, Chris Yager, Deb Griffith, Joey Halvorson (text or email) and Pastor Leslie.



H.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>

First 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.

Thank you, Brian Twamley and Stephanie Lee, for picking up and delivering the food to the Salvation Army.



You may also send a money donation to the church; First Congregational UCC 415 Juniper St. Brainerd, MN 56401. Or for your convenience use our Paypal account at: [paypal.me/ucbrainerd](https://www.paypal.com/ucbrainerd) Make sure to write in memo "Food Shelf".

Welcome to our Facility



It is the policy and privilege of the First Congregational United Church of Christ (UCC) Brainerd, to share its 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 the church office, administrative assistant Terri at 218-829-2528 or email ucbrainerd@gmail.com. Submit the request form to the administrative assistant. For wedding or funeral use, contact the Pastor Leslie: pastorleslieucc@gmail.com

Answer this Bible Trivia and Win a Prize

Be the first person to call or email the office with the correct answer to this trivia question and win some UCC Swag:

Who did Mary visit after she learned she was pregnant?

Save these Dates in January 2025!

19th Annual Twelfth Night Concert - Sunday, January 5th 2025 @ 7:00 pm

First Congregational UCC of Brainerd extends a warm welcome to please join us for our 19th Annual Concert in Celebration of the Twelfth Night of Christmas!

***Volunteers are needed as we prepare and organize the event.
Call or text Cynthia - 218-513-3956.***



January Adult Forum - 11:30 am after worship

Sunday, January 5th - You may have read or heard that we are considering changing our name, not our denomination, just the name. It's a long process; the next step is to discuss it at this Adult Forum. Come with questions and thoughts. Thanks!

Should We Change the Name of Our Church?

Dan Hegstad, Marketing Committee

I submitted a number of ideas to our church Council for reorganizing our church. I said we might even consider changing our name. I didn't expect that would get any interest, but some people began to discuss it. There were even a few suggestions. I approached the church Council January 18th asking for permission to officially explore this idea. At that meeting the Council voted yes and charged me with gathering information and exploring the idea of possibly changing our name.

No, we don't have to Some churches change their name as they merge with another congregation. In the case of Mayflower UCC in Minneapolis, that name is now associated with slavery and genocide. Plymouth Congregational in Minneapolis is Congregational (but it is not UCC.)

Why should we consider a change? A conversation with Rev. Kelly Gallagher (our Minnesota UCC Conference Associate Minister) noted that the denomination has not been purely "Congregational" since **1957** when we became the United Church of Christ. Other churches have renamed (New Journey – Hutchinson UCC and New Spirit – Savage UCC) and she said we should talk to them about the process. I did that. They were most helpful.

People are leaving churches that do not fulfill their needs or where they don't feel welcome. I believe some of those people are looking for us! When they search for an open, progressive church our name will be one of the first things they see. A name that reflects who we are will entice them to open the door to see what's inside!

Are we leaving the United Church of Christ? No. Let's be clear that we will always be United Church of Christ (UCC.) We are not changing our affiliation. We are proposing changing the *First Congregational* part of our name. Our neighbor church Park United Methodist (PUMC) is now going by "Park Church." They had the option to shorten and simplify.

But I like our name! Keeping our current name is an option. "No Change" will be an option after our exploration. There's nothing wrong with our name. We don't have to change our name. But I think this is an opportunity to reflect who we are now.

The Process This is the first step; simply marking this as a starting point and proceeding to take in all viewpoints. We will take time to reach a conclusion. Now is a time for taking suggestions and ideas, discussing the pro's and con's and hearing everyone's voice. Adult Forums and small groups could serve as discussions for this topic.

What's in a Name? I learned years ago that naming is remarkably important. It is part of a first impression. It can work for you or against you.

We want your ideas! There are no bad ideas. Frequently, one person's idea will spark a great idea! We want to make sure we choose a name that is easy to say and reflects who we are. We will be careful to choose a name that isn't trendy. It needs to be memorable. There's nothing wrong with having the same name as another church that isn't too close by. (There are 3 Peace UCC's in Minnesota.)

What's next? Put the question in your brain and let it percolate. You may be surprised at how many ideas come to you. Then send them to me. I think sharing ideas and insights as they come in may spark other ideas. I assume submissions will ebb and flow but after a while we'll have a number of great choices. But remember, you are welcome to vote "none of the above. Keep it First Congregational." I don't think I/we will share who submitted which suggestion. I will, however, note duplicate suggestions.

Do you have questions? Send questions and name ideas to dan@danhegstad.com. Please do not call me or give me your idea in person. I may not remember, and I want a "written" record.

Thank You, Dan

Brainerd Lakes Area Information

~ Opportunities to Know and Share God's Love ~

The Bridge on 7th – Overnight Shelter

Since opening our doors nearly three years ago, The Bridge on 7th has provided over 9,000 nights of safe, warm sleep to over 423 individuals in our community who had nowhere else to turn. At The Bridge on 7th, we offer not only a bed but a place of comfort and hope for neighbors in need. For many of our guests, it's a crucial first step toward stability and a fresh start. Every night, we see the impact a safe place to rest can have on a person's life.

As the weather turns colder, the need to keep our shelter open and available is more urgent than ever. Would you consider supporting The Bridge on 7th this month? Together, we can make a lasting impact on our community, providing refuge and hope to those who need it most.

Thank you for considering this opportunity to make a difference. Your generosity can help us to continue helping our neighbors in need, one night at a time.

With gratitude,

Bill Wear, *Shelter Manager, The Bridge on 7th* www.bridgesofhopemn.org/donate



Your gift directly impacts those we serve, providing safety and warmth to individuals in need. Here's how your generosity can make a difference:

- \$30 – Provides a supervised night of safe, warm sleep for a guest
- \$50 – Supplies personal necessities and warm clothing for guests
- \$100 – Stocks The Bridge with coffee and snacks for a week
- \$150 – Covers a week's worth of laundry supplies for clean blankets and pillows
- \$300 – Provides a ten-night stay for someone in transition



NAMI Connection Recovery Support Group is a free, peer-led support group for any adult who has experienced symptoms of a mental health condition. You will gain insight from hearing the challenges and successes of others, and the groups are led by trained leaders who've been there.

- Free of cost to participants
- Designed for adults (18+) with mental health conditions
- Led by people with mental health conditions
- No specific medical therapy or treatment is endorsed
- Confidential



First Congregational United Church of Christ
Fellowship Hall
415 Juniper St, Brainerd, MN 56401



2nd and 4th Thursday
6:30-8:00 p.m.

 218-833-9436

 heather@crisislineandreferralservice.org

[HTTPS://WWW.NAMI.ORG/](https://www.nami.org/)

December 2024 Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Y- Yes Meeting in person FB -Facebook Stream Online Z-our church Zoom	C- Cancelled N - No Meeting ? - No update TBD - To be determined		Office Hours 10am – 2pm Pastor Drop-in Hours 11:00 am – 1:00 pm	Office Hour 10am – 2pm Pastor Drop-in Hours 2:00 – 4:00 pm w/Daisy	Office Hours 10am – 2pm	
8.30am Bnrd Frnds-Y 1 10am Wrship & Communion- Y&FB 11am Fellowship-Y 11:15am Adult Forum-“Soul Shop”- Y	7pm BACP/ BLUE-Z 2	2pm EA-Y 3 5:30pm OA -Y	11:45pm Men’s 4 Grp @Wings Café-Y 1:30pm PRC-Y 4pm CM-Y 7pm AA Common-Y	10am Care Team 5 Mtg.-Y	10:30am Bk Grp-Z 6 6:30pm Movie Night	9:30am-1pm AAUW 7 Mtg.-Y Fellowship Hall
8:30am Bnrd Frnds-Y 8 10am Wrship-Y&FB 11am Fellowship-Y 11:15am Adult Forum-“Heart of my Soul” Jan K.-Y *Budget Packets handed out to members	9	2pm EA-Y 10 5:30pm OA -Y 6:30pm Special Worship Service “Endings & Beginnings”	Budget Packets 11 emailed to members 10am Trustees-Y&Z 11:45pm Men’s Grp @Wings Café-Y 7pm AA Common-Y	12 4:30pm Exec. Team Mtg.-Y&Z 6pm NAMI Mtg.-Y	13 10:30am Bk Grp- Z	Women’s Fellowship in Fellowship Hall-Y 14 Mary R. hosting
8:30am Bnrd Frnds-Y 15 10am Wrship -Y&FB 11:15am Annual Budget Mtg. approval by members-Y&Z 11:45am Fellowship-Y 1:30pm Girl Scouts-Y	16	2pm EA-Y 17 5:30pm OA -Y	11:45pm Men’s 18 Grp @Wings Café-Y 7pm AA Common-Y	19 11:30am Women’s Lunch@ Baia Della-Y 4:30pm Council Mtg-Y&Z 6:30pm Dist.7AA-Y	20 10:30am Bk Grp- Z	21 Winter Solstice /Longest Night
8:30am Bnrd Frnds-Y 22 10am Wrship -Y&FB 11am Fellowship-Y ** Newsletter Deadline **Special Offering Christmas Fund	23	Christmas Eve 24 4pm Worship Service 2pm EA-Y 5:30pm OA -Y	Christmas Day 25 <u>Office Closed</u> 11:45pm Men’s Grp-C TheShop cooking-C 7pm AA Common-Y	26 6pm NAMI Mtg.-Y	27 10:30am Bk Grp- Z	28
8:30am Bnrd Frnds-Y 29 10am Sunday Wrship-Y&FB 11am Fellowship-Y	30	New Year’s 31 Eve 6pm-9pm 2nd Annual New Years Church Party				