New Directions

December

St Luke Union Church

Retirements

Congratulations to three members of our congregation who recently celebrated their retirement. We wish you happiness and success in your next chapter of life.

Charlene Beringer Munro, McLean County Court Services
Dan Staver, State Farm
Linda Sellberg, State Farm



Women's Fellowship Christmas Dinner
Tuesday, December 8 at 5:30 pm

We hope all the ladies of the church will join us for an evening of Christmas cheer. More details to come soon.

Thank You

Dear St Luke Union community,
This is a brief note with my heartfelt thanks for the gifts you gave me upon my departure. I'm very grateful for the time we spent together, seeing your strengths through the summer storm, the laughter and fun (and fatigue) of the Group Sale, and your willingness to try new things. Thank you for your kind gift cards and writing supplies. Wishing you a meaningful Advent season, and for continued growth and joy as "yoke fellows" in Christ.

Thanks again,
Susan Baller-Shepard

Advent Class

Pastor Andy will lead a class titled "Advent: The Light Will Shine" each Monday at Noon, in the conference room, starting Nov. 30 through Dec. 28. There is a sign-up sheet in Fellowship Hall. There is a resource book needed for this class. The cost is $22.



DECEMBER 2026

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		01	**02** Handbells 6p Choir 7p	**03** Spiritual Growth Team 5p	**04** Men's Breakfast 7a Troop 19 Court of Honor 5p	**05**
06 **Communion** Sun. School 9:30a Choir Prac.9:30a Worship 10:30a	**07** Adult Bible Study 12p Boy Scouts 7p	**08** Resource Team 2p Finance Team 5p WF Christmas Dinner 5:30p	**09** Worship Team 5p Handbells 6p Choir 7p	**10** Crossroads Board 9a	**11**	**12**
13 Choir Prac.9:30a Worship 10:30a	**14** Adult Bible Study 12p Boy Scouts 7p	**15** VMC Meeting 5:30p	**16** Handbells 6p Choir 7p	**17** Faith Brews 5p	**18**	**19** Music Shoppe Recital 12p
20 **RaiseRight Joy Offering** Sun. School 9:30a Choir Prac 9:30a Worship 10:30a	**21** Adult Bible Study 12p Boy Scouts 7p	**22** Lamplighters 7p	**23** Handbells 6p Choir 7p	**24** Christmas Eve Service 7p Reception to Follow	**25** Christmas Day	**26**
27 Choir Prac 9:30a Worship 10:30a	**28** Adult Bible Study 12p Boy Scouts 7p	**29**	**30** Handbells 6p Choir 7p	**31**		

Reminder:
Annual Reports are due Sunday, December 13!

Happy Birthday! Caroline Fleming 12/1; Abbie Baker 12/3; Rev Bud Roberts, Darlene Trower 12/5; Sarah Luna 12/11; Bob Hinthorn 12/12; Patricia Felan 12/16; Daniel Ferrier 12/17; Lynne Wright 12/19; Larry Maffet 12/20; Kim Feicke 12/21; Louise Moore 12/22; John Belletete 12/28; Colleen Zerebny 12/30

Happy Anniversary! Paul & Stephanie Dehner 12/31

Let's Make Christmas a Little Sweeter

On Sunday, December 20th we are hosting a Cookie Exchange following worship. You are each invited to bake your favorite Christmas Cookie or family's traditional holiday sweet treat to share and exchange with your church family. The idea is you come with one type of cookie and leave with all sorts of different cookies.



Christmas Joy Offering

On Sunday, December 20, we will collect the Christmas Joy Offering. This offering provides assistance to current and retired church workers and their families, who might be facing financial crisis, illness or unexpected hardship. It also supports children at risk & nurtures the faith of children & youth. The theme this year is from Micah 6:8: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and walk humbly with your God."

Special envelopes will be placed in the pew racks shortly before & after the offering day. You may also write in the memo section of your check, that it is for the Joy offering. When we all do a little, it adds up to a lot.

Thank you from the Mission Team.



Congratulations, Colleen!

Colleen Zerebny was recently awarded a Leader of Distinction Award – Twenty Under Forty by the McLean County Chamber of Commerce and The Pantagraph. Colleen was chosen because of her leadership at her full-time job as a real estate agent as well as her dedication to volunteering at local non-profit organizations.



Well Done, Charlene!

Charlene Beringer Munro recently retired from McLean County Court Services. Charlene retired on October 30, after nearly 40 years of service to the county.

Thank you, Charlene, for your years of service and your commitment to helping the youth in our community and being an advocate for those who need help.

Please take a minute to read the attached interview with WGLT. Click Here.

Poinsettias

You can help beautify our sanctuary for Christmas by purchasing poinsettias. These 4-6 blossom plants are $14 each.

Payment MUST accompany each order. Deadline to order is Sunday, December 13, 2026.

An alternative opportunity for giving may be a donation to **Ronald McDonald House Central Illinois.**

I wish to order _____ Poinsettia Plant(s) to be given to the glory of God and:

In memory of _____
OR
In honor of _____
OR
In celebration of _____

I wish to give a donation of _____ to be given to the glory of God and to **Ronald McDonald House Central Illinois** and:

In memory of _____
OR
In honor of _____
OR
In celebration of _____

Enclosed: $_____ (Checks payable to St. Luke Union Church, Memo: Poinsettia or Ronald McDonald House Central Illinois)

Donor(s)_____
(As it will appear in the acknowledgement listing)

Ronald McDonald House Central Illinois

Ronald McDonald House Central Illinois cares for families with children who are ill or injured. Through our programs and services in Peoria and Springfield, we help families stay close to their child's care while providing the comfort, resources, and support they need along the way.

Our Mission: We provide essential services that remove barriers, strengthen families, and promote healing when children need healthcare.

What We Do: When a child needs medical care the entire family needs support. Ronald McDonald House Central Illinois provides accommodations near hospitals, meals, laundry, respite and other essential resources that help families stay supported and involved in their child's care.

Our Impact: Each year, Ronald McDonald House Central Illinois serves more than 500 families and provides more than 8,000 overnight stays through our programs in Peoria and Springfield. These programs and services help families stay close to their child's care while providing essential resources and support along the way.

Paper Products Drive to Benefit Dreams Are Possible - Sunday, December 13

Dreams are Possible is an organization that empowers women by expanding their employment opportunities. It is based in West Bloomington and helps prepare women for employment in fields with family sustainable wages. A series of classes and workshops prepare them to enter the workplace or transition to the community college for additional training.

How can we help? In addition to volunteering and funding their work, one of the things that was suggested was a paper products event where we would collect non-food items such **as toilet paper, dish detergent, laundry detergent, tissues, shampoo, soap, deodorant, etc.** These non-food items are expensive for the students to purchase and they never get enough donated for them to take home after their classes. They have a small on-site food pantry but rarely have these non-food items to distribute.

St. Luke Union will be hosting such a drive on Sunday, December 13th. if you would be able to bring these items for this drive, it would be very helpful in supporting the work of this worthwhile organization.

Notes from UCC Illinois Conference Annual Celebration

On Friday and Saturday, November 6 & 7, we attended the Illinois Conference Annual Celebration at Covenant UCC (United Church of Christ) in south suburban South Holland, Illinois. It was an honor to represent St. Luke Union Church.

The Opening Service was simple with traditional hymns, and the youngest pastor in the Conference preaching a dynamic sermon. Following the service were two rounds of workshops on either side of a box lunch. Many of the nine workshops were offered twice. We each attended different workshops.

Martha - Faith in Place – This environmental non-profit partners with faith communities from diverse religious traditions as well as people who do not identify with a specific faith. SLUC has one of several Faith in Place Green Teams in the Bloomington-Normal area. During the 45-minute presentation, Rev. Brian Sauder and April Parker talked about the three program areas of Faith in Place.

1. Sustainable energy for churches and homes.
2. Healthy communities through community gardens, Green Teams, access to clean air and water, etc.
3. People Powered Futures where building a just and sustainable future requires investing in people and empowering communities.
   This workshop was very informative! To learn more, go to faithinplace.org.

Chuck - The more interesting of the two I attended was an introduction to the new Manual on the Church, presented by a member of the national staff of the UCC. This new resource, available as a free .pdf download from the national website (UCC.org), provides guides and encouragement to Faithful and Vital churches.

The business sessions were Friday afternoon and Saturday morning. Leadership reports were presented, committee reports were received and approved, including voting for officers and Ministry Teams.

There were many congregations recognized as 5 for 5, churches that support all five of the denomination wide stewardship campaigns. These include Neighbors in Need, Strengthen the Church, Our Churches Wider Mission (OCWM – basic support for Conference and national settings), Christmas Fund (for retired clergy and spouses), and One Great Hour of Sharing. We are not sure which of these five St. Luke supports.

We renewed many of our relationships with friends, pastors, and lay leaders, and met new people active in Illinois.

The Closing Worship was far more contemporary, with a jazz combo leading the music and providing energy through the transitions. The preacher was the Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson, President and General Minister (and poet) to the United Church of Christ. She set the challenges of this day against the biblical history of people of faith. The recurring image was a prominent clock tower she saw when visiting Hungary, with four faces, none of which had hands to indicate the time of day. She reminds us that there is no time for panic, and no better time to be present with God and each other.

The institution of the Illinois Conference is under great strain. The Conference is functioning with minimal staff, and they are overworked. The future will be very different than today, just as today is dramatically different than the past. If you have other questions about the UCC part of our identity, please ask us.

Chuck and Martha Maney

One of the things I greatly missed while on sabbatical was hearing the life stories of the people of St. Luke Union Church. Throughout my time as your pastor, I have been privileged to hear about your exploits and adventures, as well as your trials, challenges, and misgivings. It was also difficult not to send pictures back of my own discoveries and epiphanies along the way! Since returning, I have been working to catch up on what has been happening in each of your lives, and I look forward to continually hearing your tales. I have also been trying my best to share some of the adventures I experienced during my time away. With that in mind, this month's letter is a funny story from my time on the Isle of Iona.



It became my practice to wake with the sun on this tiny island off the west coast of Scotland. Since the sun rose before 5:00 a.m. and breakfast wasn't served until 8:00, I had nearly three hours each morning to hike. And hike I did! Each morning brought a new discovery, a new place to stop, pray, and reflect.

Wednesdays on the Isle of Iona are designated as pilgrimage days, and everyone staying at the Abbey is invited to participate in a communal pilgrimage. I packed a lunch and set out with my fellow pilgrims. Not everyone in the group walked at the same pace, and the larger group moved considerably slower than I would have preferred. Eventually, we arrived on the west side of the island for lunch, but not before participating in a little release exercise. We were invited to find a favorite rock and then throw it into the ocean as a symbol of letting go of whatever anxieties or burdens we might be carrying. There was something rather satisfying about hurling a rock into the North Atlantic!

After lunch, and all that rock throwing, the group began making its way back to the Abbey. I knew this was my opportunity. I made my break and headed in the opposite direction. We were close to a part of the island I had yet to explore, and I wasn't about to miss the opportunity to climb the two highest points on the island, where I hoped to enjoy some of the best views of the North Atlantic.

I followed a well-maintained trail for quite some time until it eventually came to an end. Unfortunately, I was still several miles from my intended destination. After pausing for a moment and convincing myself that this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, I decided to head across the moor and make my own way toward the summit. With about a half-mile still to go, I noticed a large gray seagull sitting on one of the rocky peaks. I didn't think much of it until I was within a few hundred yards of what I had envisioned as my picturesque destination. Suddenly, not one but TWO very large seagulls began dive-bombing me from somewhere above! I pressed on. They got closer. I ducked and covered. They continued their aerial assault, hurling what I can only assume were insults and warnings. It soon became apparent that I wasn't going to reach the crest of those hills. Apparently, this was a part of the island that didn't see many visitors, which made it an ideal place for a pair of seagulls to build a nest and raise a family. Maybe I should have kept my rock? It was at this point that I turned around and headed back toward the Abbey, ending my pilgrimage discouraged, defeated, and thoroughly humbled by a pair of seagulls.



I think the lesson is that pilgrimage isn't always about reaching the summit or getting the view we anticipated. Sometimes it's about letting go of our own expectations, recognizing that we aren't always in control, and discovering that God has something to teach us even when the journey doesn't go according to plan.

Be a Blessing, Pastor Andy

Mission Notes

The Mission Team held their quarterly meeting on Tuesday, November 3, 2026. One of our jobs is to disburse Mission funds that we receive from the church. The Mission Team does not have a budget, but receives 10% of the church budget for outreach.

In the 3rd quarter, we donated $4153.41 to **Dreams Are Possible**. This is the Mission Team's portion of the Fall Group Sale.

For the 4th quarter, we chose to support the following groups:

- **Salvation Army Food Pantry**: $2000
- **Tazwood Community Services**: $2000
- **Western Avenue Community Center - Willie Brown Leadership Program**: $2000

We will be sending alternative poinsettia donations to Ronald **McDonald House of Central Illinois.**

Thank you for the ability to reach out to our community!
Jim Munro

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Mitten Tree

You may bring children's mittens, hats, gloves, scarves, underwear, and socks to place on the tree in Fellowship Hall through the last Sunday in December. We will also collect "necessities" for adults (men's and women's undergarments, long underwear, hats, gloves, scarves, etc).



CONTACT US!

Rev. Dr. Andrew Gifford, Pastor

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Website:

www.stlukeunion.org

Facebook

Like our Facebook page for updates on church news, events & Reginald's whereabouts! Sunday Worship will go Facebook LIVE at 10:30am!

www.facebook.com/stlukeunionchurch

YouTube

Search: St Luke Union Church

Church Office Hours:

Monday: 9a – 3p

Tuesday: 9a – 3p

Wednesday: 9a – 3p

Thursday: 9a – 3p

Friday & Saturday: Closed

Phone:

309-663-7437

Worship

Online + In-Person

Sunday 10:30am!

St Luke Union Church
2101 E Washington St Bloomington, IL 61701
(Corner of Regency Drive and Washington St – open 24 hrs/7 days a week)
TerraCycle Programs & Other Collections
Collection is in the garage behind the church where collection containers are labeled;
if you do not see a container, please DO NOT leave it.

- **ARM & HAMMER™ and OxiClean™:** Recycle ARM & HAMMER and OxiClean brand only plastic pouches
- **Burt's Bee:** Accepts Burt's Bee product packaging (must be this brand only).
- **Cigarette Waste: NO DROP OFF– PLEASE EMAIL AMIE, joelamiekeeton@gmail.com FOR MORE INSTRUCTIONS.** Accepts cold extinguished cigarettes, cigarette filters, loose tobacco pouches, outer plastic packaging, inner foil packaging, rolling paper and ash.
- **Colgate® Oral Care: All brands** toothpaste tubes and caps, toothbrushes, floss containers, mouthwash bottles and caps.
- **Drink Pouch:** Recycle **all brands** of drink pouches.
- **Entenmann's Little Bites Pouches:** Accepts only Entenmann's brand Little Bites plastic pouches and clear Entenmann's Minis packaging.
- **eos:** Packaging from eos brand only.
- **Febreze Air Care:** Accepts all brands of air freshener cartridges and plus, packaging and flexible film packaging, and trigger heads (plastic bottles/cans go in regular curbside recycling).
- **Gillette Razor:** **All brands** of blades, razors, and plastic packaging.
- **GoGo squeeZ® Food Pouch: Accepts all brands** of food plastic pouches and caps (such as Go-Go Squeeze, Ella's, Earth's Best, etc.). Please leave the cap on to reduce smell and leaking.
- **GOLDTOE Socks:** Accepts GOLDTOE brand socks. Please launder.
- **Hasbro:** Recycle Hasbro brand toys and games.
- **Kroger® Brands:** Recycle flexible plastic packaging from Kroger® brands through this program.
- **Stanley Black & Decker Tools:** Recycle DEWALT®, CRAFTSMAN®, BLACK+DECKER®, STANLEY®, IRWIN®, LENOX®, MAC Tools®, PORTER-CABLE® and Bostitch® branded tools.
- **Swiffer®:** Recycle Swiffer refills (must be Swiffer).
- **Takis® Snacks Recycling Program:** Recycle Takis Snack packaging (must be Takis)
- **Tom's of Maine:** Recycle all Tom's of Maine packaging (must be Tom's of Maine)
- **VTech® & LeapFrog®:** Recycle VTech and LeapFrog electronic learning devices and electronic toys.

Additional Recycling Collections at the St Luke:

Aluminum Can Recycling: Please put cans in the Large labeled wooden box in the front and center of the garage. Please consider recycling your ALUMINUM cans with us instead of just putting them in city recycling. We recycle locally to get money for charity.

Holiday-Type Light Strands & Cords/Wire/Cable Recycling: Twinkle light bulbs ok to leave on; larger light bulbs should be removed and can be recycled at the lighting section of our local Menards, Lowes or Home Depot. Please remove any other plastic or metal decor before donating light strands.

Lion's Club box: Cell phones; small printer cartridges (**from home use only)**; eyeglasses; hearing aids; keys. Lion's Club volunteers manage this for charity.

Updated 11-24-2026