



**February 18th, 2026
Ash Wednesday
Holy Communion**

GUESTS, Welcome to our faith community. To learn more about us please visit our website at www.unionucc.org or like us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/unionneffs. Let us know you're here by completing the Welcome Card in the racks in front of you.

Vision Statement

UNION UCC: RELEVANT, ENGAGED, and GROWING

Mission Statement

Our church is a diverse family of believers, spiritually united in Christ, rooted in a rich heritage and growing with vitality into the future. We proclaim God's word, nurturing and inspiring dedicated Christian discipleship through worship, education, pastoral care, fellowship, and outreach within our community and the world.

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

Union UCC is an Open and Affirming (ONA) Community.

Lay Reader

Ron Pope

Sound

Dawn Dengler

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"You don't choose a life, you live a life." — *The Way* (2010)
I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert- Isaiah 43:19

Lent is a time of reflection, and there's nothing like a pilgrimage to conjure that up. Making intentional journeys has been a ritual of humankind across time and traditions. Inspired by passages in the Judeo-Christian scriptures that talk about the journeys, roads, and pathways of life, we will make our way together through this season. The popular and poignant movie, *The Way*, about a father's pilgrimage in honor of his late son on the famed Camino de Santiago in France and Spain, accompanies us as our modern-day inspiration to live the life we've been given to the fullest.

Directions for Receiving Ashes and Holy Communion

Everyone is welcome to the table of God's love and grace. Here at church: You will be invited to come forward to receive ashes and to take Holy Communion at the altar.

On the tray of bread there is bread and a gluten free prepackaged cup with a wafer and a cup of juice. On the tray of cups there is red wine or white grape juice.

At Home: Please get supplies that represent Communion for you so that we can share this meal together.

Prelude Music

Jesus Paid It All Elvina M. Hall, John T. Grape
Blake Hoppes

WE GATHER

Meeting One Another on The Way

**Welcome to Union UCC!
Welcome & Announcements**

**We often share parts of worship responsively.
Phrases in Bold = All Read
Phrases NOT in bold = Leader**

Preparing Together

A Wilderness Wandering People Jim and Jeanie Strathdee

Leader: Sometimes things happen in our lives that cause us to awaken to a new perspective and we begin to reassess the life road we are following, the directions we are going. Ash Wednesday is a time in the church where we talk of "repentance" which literally means to turn around and head in a new direction. This night, we will receive ashes in the sign of the cross on our foreheads—a traditional sign of our own mortality and the necessity of making this life purposeful.

Prayer for the Path

**God of All Souls
who have ever traveled The Way of Life,
you know the depth of ache
we sometimes feel on the journey.
We come seeking your guidance,
as we consider the paths and directions of our lives.
Help us to find our Way Back to you,
to choose to turn towards you,
as the Ultimate Companion on The Way.
Amen.**

Greeting Each Other

Leader: The best part of having companions on The Way is the sharing that we get to do that makes us feel just a little less alone. During this series, we will share answers to a common question with each other. I invite you to turn to someone you did not come to church with and answer this question: "What is the scariest road you've ever been on?"

***Please rise in body or spirit to greet each other and to share your answers with each other and for the first song.**

***Hymn** Bless Now, O God, the Journey

Words: Sylvia G. Dunstan, © 1991 GIA Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted under ONE LICENSE #A - 730053

**Bless now, O God, the journey that all your people make,
The path through noise and silence, the way of give and take.
The trail is found in desert and winds the mountains round,
Then leads beside still waters, the road where faith is found.**

**Bless sojourners and pilgrims who share this winding way;
Your hope burns through the terrors, your love sustains the day.
We yearn for holy freedom while often we are bound;
Together we are seeking the road where faith is found.**

**Divine eternal lover, you meet us on the road.
We wait for lands of promise where milk and honey flow,
But waiting not for places' you meet us all around.
Our covenant is written on roads, as faith is found.**

Please be seated.

WE PROCLAIM

Discovering Ourselves on The Way

First Reading

Psalm 51:10-15 (NRSVUE)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

Second Reading

Joel 2:12-29

Yet even now, says the Lord,
return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
rend your hearts and not your clothing.
Return to the Lord your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love,
and relenting from punishment.

Who knows whether he will not turn and relent
and leave a blessing behind him,
a grain offering and a drink offering
for the Lord your God?

Blow the trumpet in Zion;
consecrate a fast;
call a solemn assembly;
gather the people.
Consecrate the congregation;
assemble the aged;
gather the children,
even infants at the breast.
Let the bridegroom leave his room
and the bride her canopy.
Between the vestibule and the altar,
let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep.
Let them say, "Spare your people, O Lord,
and do not make your heritage a mockery,
a byword among the nations.
Why should it be said among the peoples,
'Where is their God?'"

Then afterward
I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old ones shall dream dreams,
and your ones shall see visions.
On all, bound and free,
in those days I will pour out my spirit.

**Message
Pastor Kris**

Resources for you for this season leading you to on The Way to Easter:

Movie: The Way (2010) When his son dies while hiking the famed Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route in the Pyrenees, Tom flies to France to claim the remains. Looking for insights into his estranged child's life, he decides to complete the 500-mile mountain trek to Spain. Tom soon joins up with other travelers and realizes they're all searching for something. The Friday and Sunday classes will be watching the movie. You can also stream it on several sites.

Book: Wisdom Walking: Pilgrimage as a Way of Life Gil Stafford
The Friday and Sunday adult classes are reading this. Join us! Extra copies are available on the table in the lobby.

Journals: Packets that include scripture, prayer, and reflections questions are available on the table in the lobby.

Small Groups Book: The Pauses of Len: 40 Words for 40 Days by Trevor Hudson. Contact Sue Matta to participate in or lead a group.

WE RESPOND

Opening to the Holy on The Way

A Ritual for Getting Out of Our Own Way

Leader: As we prepare to receive ashes in the centuries-old Christian tradition for the beginning of Lent, let us offer to God our most honest selves, inviting a point from which to make a new start this night. After the prayer and some music, we will take time to be in some stillness, resting beside the Road of Life in order to discern whether our paths are leading us *toward the fullness* of life, or away from it.

Dear God,
This night help me feel as though
I am kneeling with the saints of all ages,
who discovered that it is only through
honest confession of sin to you
that one can become more than a sinner.

My eyes see beyond my innocence,
so I know that yours do.
Your mercy encourages.
Your forgiveness cleanses.
Your love saves.

May these forty days until Easter
be a season in which
I keep my promises to you,
through Christ our Savior.
Amen.

Stillness
Lindy Thompson, Mark Miller

**All Sung:
Meet me in the stillness, Lord
Be the air I breathe
Meet me in the stillness, Lord
Free me to receive**

Ash Wednesday is a commemoration that started many centuries after the life of Jesus. By the 4th century, the season of Lent had been established as a period of fasting and preparation for baptism for new Christians. In that time period, there were many converts as Christianity had become a state religion under the Emperor Constantine.

But by the 6th and 7th centuries, the numbers of people being baptized were fewer so the meaning of Lent shifted to a time of preparation for those who had lapsed in their faith to name their intent to rejoin the journey of faith. They would wear sackcloth and were sprinkled with ashes at the beginning of the fasting period, a sign that they were undergoing this journey to a reaffirmation of their faith. In the year 601, Ash Wednesday was officially sanctioned as the beginning of Lent and thereafter Lent was considered a time for all Christians to “return” to a deeper expression of their connection to God, the one who gave us life, formed us from the dust of the earth, and to whom our spirits will return when we are again part of the dust of the earth.

The symbolism of the ashes with a cross on our forehead helps us remember that Jesus, too, was human and formed from the dust of the earth. We are part of this story and his disciples on this earth while we have life and breath. Traditionally, the ashes are created from the palms we wave on Palm Sunday the year before, reminding us of the cycle of our faith story, from triumphant parades that proclaim life and justice, to the sorrow of death. And yet, we also have Easter as part of our story. This means that even in the ritual of ashes we do tonight, we know that in the end, we have life. For this we are eternally grateful.

Tonight, I invite you to come to the railing and receive the ashes on your forehead and then receive Communion.

And then as you return to your seats, return your cup and take a rock. The movie, *The Way*, that accompanies our Lenten journey this year has the symbol of a rock that pilgrims on the *Camino de Santiago* carry with them on the pilgrimage until they reach a very special place where they let go of it with a prayer. The rock comes to symbolize the things they carry that weigh them down. You will have the opportunity this year to

carry your rock with you or display it somewhere in your home where you can see it every day as we contemplate together about the things we need, and do not need, for the journey. Then later in Lent we will let them go, just as the pilgrims have done for centuries.

“Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return.” And you are loved deeply in the midst of this reality, and carried along The Way when you need it most. Let us begin our journey to The Way Back to Love.

Ashes, Holy Communion, and Rocks

**Everyone is welcome to this meal of love and grace.
We invite you to come forward to the railing to receive ashes and communion.**

**The ushers will direct you when to come forward.
The pastors will let you know when to leave the railing.
Please place your empty cup in the trays as you return to your seat.
Pick up a rock at this time.**

**If you want to be served in your seats,
let the ushers know and the pastors will come to you.**

**If you are at home, we invite you to find something to eat
and drink that represents the elements for you.**

**A non-gluten option with juice is available in a
prepackaged container on the bread tray.
Both red wine and white grape juice are on the tray of cups.
Please choose either.**

Music Offering Just As I Am
Charlotte Elliot, William B. Bradbury; Arr. Emily Lund
Adult Choir

Let us pray the prayer Jesus taught us...

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**ALL: Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.**

**Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.**

**And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory, forever. Amen.**

NEWS ABOUT THE MINISTRY AND MISSION OF GOD'S CHURCH AT UNION

Easter Mission Offering

You can support this by using the Easter Mission Offering envelope in your envelope packet, or a blank envelope marked - Easter Mission, or donate electronically by using any of the options below and noting "Easter Mission."

Habitat for Humanity Founded in 1989, Habitat Lehigh Valley brings together people from all walks of life to help others. Habitat Lehigh Valley works by partnering with local businesses, individuals and faith-based groups to build and renovate housing for families in need in our community. Their objective is to provide families with a decent home in a safe neighborhood. Additionally, families help to revitalize neighborhoods and increase the local tax base.

Meals on Wheels For over 50 years, Meals on Wheels has been passionately committed to serving seniors and adults. Their mission is simple yet profound: to provide nutritious meals and foster social connection across the Greater Lehigh Valley. They have become an integral part of the lives of over 2,000 seniors and adults with disabilities.



Thank you for all the ways that you help us make God's dream a reality at Union UCC.

ELECTRONIC GIVING <https://secure.myvanco.com/L-Z51X/home> or QR code. Single or ongoing donation with credit/debit card. Help with fees if you can.

FREE Vanco Mobile Faith Engagement app. Look for our church Union United Church of Christ, Neffs, PA and register your information to contribute.

Venmo @unionuccneffs Make a donation or pay for a fundraiser or event. Complete "What's this for?" See QR code.

Cash or checks to "Union UCC" Place in Sunday's offering plate with a member offering envelope or guest envelope (in the seat racks).

Please reach out to Don Penrod or Pastor Kris if you have questions or if you'd like to learn more about other giving options or legacy gifts to Union.

Electronic Giving



Vanco Mobile



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Ambassadors (everyone!): Share our news, events, and spirit on social media and with your friends, family, and neighbors.

That's what keeps us relevant, engaged, and growing!

Watch for Union UCC merchandise soon!



UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Relevant • Engaged • Growing

Music Offering: Make Me a Channel of Your Peace
Sebastian Temple; Arr. Mark Hayes
Blake Hoppes, Piano

Please stand in body or spirit.

Offering Response

ALL SUNG:

**Amazing grace, How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now I am found,
Was blind, but now I see.**

**Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come,
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far
And grace will lead me home.**

WE GO FORTH

Continuing with Jesus on The Way

Benediction

Our blessing, or “benediction,” for this season
is a call and response form.

Your response is:

“We will follow on The Way.”
“We will follow on The Way.”

The Creator God filled you with breath,
inviting you to this journey called Life.

We will follow on The Way.

Jesus, our Guide, showed us what it means
to make a new way with Love.

We will follow on The Way.

The Spirit gives us strength to move forward
with Courage and Compassion for all we meet.

We will follow on The Way.

May it be so. Amen.
“Buen Camino!”

HYMN #173 You Have Come Down to the Lakeshore
Black Hymnal/New Century Hymnal

**You have come down to the lakeshore
Seeking neither the wise nor the wealthy,
But only asking for me to follow.**

**Sweet Lord, you have looked into my eyes,
Kindly smiling, you've called out my name.
On the sand I've abandoned my small boat;
Now with you, I will seek other seas.**

**You know full well my possessions;
Neither treasure nor weapons for conquest,
Just these my fishnets and will for working.**

**Sweet Lord, you have looked into my eyes,
Kindly smiling, you've called out my name.
On the sand I've abandoned my small boat;
Now with you, I will seek other seas.**

**You need my hands, my exhaustion,
Working love for the rest of the weary,
A love that's willing to go on loving.**

**Sweet Lord, you have looked into my eyes,
Kindly smiling, you've called out my name.
On the sand I've abandoned my small boat;
Now with you, I will seek other seas.**

**You who have fished other waters;
You, the longing of souls that are yearning;
As loving Friend, you have come to call me.**

**Sweet Lord, you have looked into my eyes,
Kindly smiling, you've called out my name.
On the sand I've abandoned my small boat;
Now with you, I will seek other seas.**

**Postlude: I Surrender All Judson Van DeVenter & Winfield Weedon
Blake Hoppes, Piano**

**Worship Theme: c. Worship Design Studio
Worship Design Team: Kathy Bonsell, Claire Kern, Deb Topp, Pastor Kris
Easter Flower Set Up: Rick and Kathy Bonsell
Special thanks to Kerry Snyder, Ron Snyder, Pastor Kayli, and Nikki
Pentland for altar decoration supplies.**

EVIDENCE OF STEWARDSHIP LAST SUNDAY

Offering (e-giving, envelopes, and plate)		Attendance Last Week	
Last Week	\$4,523.00	8 AM	50
Calendar Year 2026 (Jan)	\$25,139.32	10:30 AM	98
Calendar Year 2025 (Jan)	\$31,482.00	Sunday School	-
Change from Last Year	-20.1%	God First	-
Budget FY 2025-2026 (July-Jan)	\$261,240.00	Faith on Tap	40
Actual Fiscal Year-to-Date (July-Jan)	\$253,989.00	Breathe	-
Difference in Giving vs. Budget	-2.8%	2026 Donations to the Northern Lehigh Food Bank:	
<i>Additional financial information available in Consistory Minutes</i>		Last Week	\$100, 150 Lbs
		YTD	\$200, 900 Lbs,
		Blanket Sunday	\$1,893.00
		Souper Bowl Sunday	\$826.00

Presentations to the Glory of God

**Grateful to be a part of the best team at Union UCC!
- Pastor Kris**

Good News Sponsor– for \$20 help us cover the costs of advertising on social media, mailings, and local papers.

Children’s Bulletin Sponsor– for \$8 cover the cost of bulletins for children. Send to Union UCC through your offering envelope or online marked Spread the Good News or Children’s Bulletin. Contact Sarah to sign up for a certain date or to sponsor in honor or memory of someone.