

J U L Y 2 0 2 0

the

Newsletter

God Bless You!

We Are Union!

Church Family,

Due to the rapid growth with the Coronavirus our Staff and Board feel that it is best to postpone the church opening until further notice. We are saddened as we have been looking forward to worshipping together; however, the health and safety of our Union family is our top priority. As you read this Newsletter, you will see the different ministry and worship opportunities during this pandemic. And remember, we the church have never closed...just the building. Let's continue to be the church – let's continue to be Union!

Loving God & Loving People,
Pastor Aaron Jahjah
(Executive Pastor)

We Are The Church!



A Letter From Your Lead Pastor...

Dear Friends,

This has been a year like no other year. I'm still stuck somewhere in March, planning for Easter and summer vacations and youth group trips. But this is our reality! The COVID-19 pandemic is raging four times worse than when we shut down in March, and it's now July.

I am longing to see you, to worship physically with you, do small groups again, and make plans for trips and special events. I'm staying busy writing, studying and taping sermons twice a week. Members and friends drop by the church or call with prayer requests and updates on their lives. I'm here on campus Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm...but it's not the same.

You are my priority! Not what I want! I will NEVER risk your health for my benefit. All the doctors say meeting indoors are very risky; however, thank you for faithfully watching our services and supporting our mission financially and in prayer. We are not going to pick a date to reopen the church for live worship...the virus will do that.

We reap what we sow and we are in this position because Florida re-opened too soon, including most churches. Don't put God to a foolish test. Wear a mask if out and about; stay home whenever possible and we'll be back together soon.

- **Pastor Bill Breylinger (Lead Pastor)**

Church Secretary's Report

Church Membership

Total Full Time Membership:

533

Households Represented:

332

Total Associate Membership:

39

Households Represented:

28

Total Membership:

572

Total Households Represented:

360

(This report reflects a four-month audit of Membership from 1987)

We Welcome Our Newest Members

- ☺ Tom Chiappone
- ☺ Brooklyn Sneed

In Deepest Sympathy

Our condolences go out to the following family, friends and members:

- † Harry Berry
- † Bill Bently
- † Larry Chaney
- † Gerald Geouque
- † Myron Hodgon
- † Christopher Knight
- † Lynn Larson
- † Ray Shaw
- † Gerald Witte

Decisions For Christ

2020 Baptisms: 1

2020 Infant Dedications: 2

2020 Re-dedications: 0

(These numbers reflect reported Decisions)

If you're interested in sending out birthday cards please call the church office. We would like to become more intentional in reaching out to our members and friends!

Please direct any and all address changes, phone numbers changes, or any other changes to your contact info to the attention of Miss Chris Hess. Church Phone: 863-453-3345

*In His Service,
Chris Hess (Church Secretary)*

Provision In A Pandemic

We want to take this opportunity to express how truly thankful & blessed we are by your continued faithfulness to give to the Ministry & Mission here at Union. This "new normal" of distanced worship has been challenging, but God's promise of working ALL things together for our good stands true.

Under normal circumstances, summers are usually a time when we struggle financially. Two thirds of our congregation head back North and our monthly utility bills increase drastically. God has always made a way when we didn't see a way. We now have a plot twist, where we are forced to close our doors to the one third that remains, in our effort to protect the flock from the spread of a virus. I am here to testify that by the GRACE of God, Union Church is standing strong in spite of empty pews and collection plates that cannot be passed. We've seen the faithfulness of families that joined together to give their offerings. We've seen members lovingly keeping track of weekly giving. Your donations are so often accompanied by beautiful heartfelt words of encouragement. Your faithfulness is absolutely inspiring!

Your support, in the midst of this storm, allows us to continue to be good stewards of our financial responsibilities and to carry out our mission of being the hands & feet of Jesus. Thank you for being vessels of provision. You are loved & appreciated beyond measure.

WAYS TO GIVE

Online: WEAREUNION.ORG

Scroll down the homepage and click on the option to give online

By Mail: 106 N. Butler Avenue Avon Park, FL 33825

"And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:19)

With A Thankful Heart,
Tracey Caraballo (Church Treasurer)



Every year for as long as I have known, the Voices of Truth Choir takes the summer months off to vacation, spend time with family, relax and re-group. So even though at this time we wouldn't be meeting anyway, I still feel along with other members, a strange emptiness that overwhelms us and saddens us that we are not together. Maybe it's the fact that we are not seeing each other on Sundays. Or maybe it is that our weekly rehearsals and performances were suddenly interrupted at the last minute making us feel almost as if the Rapture had come!

The other day as I was cleaning out choir folders, I had the strangest feeling come over me as these folders were filled with Easter music and plans that within days were suddenly taken away from us. Tissues, pencils, bulletins... all left as if each choir member were quickly taken from us.

The good news is that these members were NOT taken away, and we are still a family and long for the day to return to what we do best, WORSHIP THROUGH MUSIC! We are just for the time being taking that same summer time off.

As the definite time for re-opening is unsure, I want you to know that plans are underway to come up with fresh and inventive ideas to keep the Creative Arts going. Not just for the choir, but for bells, orchestra, drama, skits and much more. In the beginning we thought this was going to be a short happening. However, since we see that this is stretching out, we must be prepared to create a new normal that might be with us for a long time to come. Singing together in a large group is under a lot of question these days even with churches that are open. But...we will return one-way or the other.

I want to close by leaving you with these great lyrics from a Sandi Patty song entitled, "The Stage is Bare." God bless you all and hang on and be safe...and please know, our day of Sunday unity will resume here at Union!



*The stage is bare The crowds are gone
The love we shared still lingers on
We sang and played and we laughed and cried
And in our tumbling way we tried to say that
Only hearts can know
And all too soon we had to go
But now here in this darkened room, just
Empty seats there's just me and you
It was so easy to call you Lord
When a thousand voices sang your praise
But there's no one to hear me now.
So hear me now, be near me now
The stage is bare The crowds are gone
Lord now the time I need your song
To give me joy and certainty
When no one else is watching me
I need you more than words can say.
Tomorrow's such a daily day
And so I need to feel you then
Holding my hand
Please hold me then
I need you, Lord
- Sandi Patty*

**God Bless You All,
Pastor Jim Lanier
(Creative Arts Pastor)**

Hello Union Family!

Our Tech Team Ministry here at Union just wanted to let you all know that through this time you can continue to connect with us through our church website: weareunion.org. I have been working on keeping our website up-to-date with current information. Remember you can stay connected with us and watch our sermons or videos on our church Facebook page: **UnionChurchAP** (make sure you Like, Share & Follow) or on our YouTube Channel (make sure to subscribe and hit the bell icon to get notified when we go live or upload a new video): <https://m.youtube.com/c/UnionChurchAP/>

We are also making CD's for those who have no access to the internet. If you would like CD's of the sermons please call the church office and let us know!

If anyone needs technical help to get connected to our sites or setting things up call the church office or email me at mbernhard@weareunion.org

♥ Always – Byeeeeeeee
Miranda Bernhard (Production Manager)



Youth Ministry

Ministry practices here at The Rock, Union's Student Ministry, are facing great challenges during this time of uncertainty. However, students certainly still need to hear the hope of the Gospel, be disciplined, and continue to experience Christian community.

Like many of you, we have had to change the way we do life. When we would normally be meeting face-to-face with students Wednesday nights or Sunday mornings, our church has transitioned to online services on a variety of platforms. Discovering new methods to engage in Student Ministry has been a little more than tricky. The in-person experience is such a strong component of Student Ministry because youth tend to thrive and flourish on community, friendships, and social interactions. Taking away school, church, hangouts, and parties have created a tangible feeling of disconnection for our students. Over the last few months, I have realized how much more our students are depending on our Student ministry team to bring hope during this time of uncertainty, or in my own personal kids, combat boredom.

Between FaceTime calls, Zoom Bible studies, and spontaneous conversations in yards across the county, The Rock is still alive and as busy as ever! I have kept my camping chair for Gatlinburg in my trunk for occasions where we can come together while still practicing social distancing. We meet outdoors, 7 feet apart (an extra foot for extra precaution,) and leap right back into genuine conversation as if we have not been separated by screens or miles for the past few months. It may be a one-on-one conversation, or it may be a small group (8 or less) of Middle or High School students. We are also offering our Wednesday Night Youth Ministry Worship Services LIVE on Wednesday nights at 7PM. Following the worship service, we offer a Bible Study via ZOOM...so feel free to tune in with us (if you need help joining the live service or Bible Study please let us know).

Even those students that we cannot physically reach are still given opportunity to stay connected. Daily, we call church members, students included, to stay in touch and see how we can continue to help ease one another's burdens. Some of these are familiar forms of ministry, like my lovely wife Leslie and I providing marriage counseling, for example. Some are utterly foreign and new experiences for me. I have even branched out to playing Xbox and Mobile games with our Teens! In any case, our goal is the same: Establish and nurture genuine relationship with the Students of our county while introducing them to the Love of Christ.

**To God's Glory,
Pastor Eddie Morrison (Youth Pastor)**



Children's Ministry

I pray this finds you healthy and safe. The Base Children's Ministry has been active in continuing to worship and learn about God's word. The kids have been doing weekly devotionals on a different topic each Wednesday and Sunday. We also do ZOOM meetings, calls, games and scavenger hunts.

This week I will be starting a bi-weekly Bible study with Q & As. Due to this ongoing virus, I haven't been able to meet with my families, so Ms. Tracey and I will host a monthly outing at a nearby park or outdoor location where we will social distance, wear masks and be able to enjoy seeing and blessing our children and their families.

I can't wait until we can all be together again. Until that time, I pray blessings upon blessings.

"He is before all things and in Him all things hold together." Colossians 1:17

Fawn Waterman (Children's Minister)

Church Family Words From Your Small Groups Pastor...

We all have personally experienced the repercussions of this pandemic financially, socially, and spiritually. Our time together in fellowship now have a thin layer of glass, some microchips, and so many miles between us. Out of these new obstacles, we have been doing what Humans do best: innovate. Between Facebook Messenger, Zoom, Google Meets, and FaceTime, we have a plethora of options to stay as connected as possible. Sure, it is not the same nor is it easy. We were never told it would be! We were encouraged; however, to be strong and courageous and to not lean on our own understanding.

Here's to learning as we go!

Creation's safety takes precedence over convenience. Because of that, small groups have become smaller, in size and in number. As we have seen this seemingly relentless first wave of Covid-19 prove that physical gatherings may need to continue to wait, we are continuing to find new ways to connect. One such way is having after service Zoom sessions to discuss the various experiences around our community here at Union. Growing out of these sessions, we hope to see the conversations flourish and move outside of our short, digital time together. This will, only at first, be available after the 11AM Sunday Contemporary services and the 7PM Wednesday Rock Youth Ministry services.

On another note: The horrors of the Black American experience has been plunged to the forefront of public discourse. Union has always taken a strong "We are not free until we are ALL free" stance. It is too much to get into in a Newsletter, but my 3 recent sermons at the 11AM Sunday Contemporary service touch on Union's history in Race relations¹. To meet this moment, Union hosted the event "Breaking Chains ~ Building Bridges." This was a beautiful start to a new season here at Union, but we are looking to have a genuine, vulnerable, and transparent discussion to get these difficult conversations on human dignity flowing. Thursday, July 30th, we will be having a Zoom meeting as an initial gathering to see who we have and discuss what actionable, realistic goals we can aim for. No, I do not believe we identify the scope, source, and severity of the situation in a single conversation; but we must repent from our complacency and take this first, dangerous step in the direction of Love.

My Zoom ID is 740 160 7626 and the password is 0 (the number zero). For the time being, this will be the primary digital gathering space for the after service and any other special Zoom event. I look forward to being able to breathe the same air as you'll soon!

Peace, Chaos, Joy, Entropy, and Love,
Pastor Jeremiah Lambright (Small Groups Pastor)

¹ The sermon titles are: *Two Bad Apples and a Good Samaritan*, *A Break From Your Regular Scheduled Programming*, and *How to Approach the Promised Land*. They can be found on our website, weareunion.org

We Miss You!

As we are away from each other in presence may we continue to lift each other up in prayer! We serve a God who never leaves our side.

Our God is a:
 Way Maker
 Miracle Worker
 Promise Keeper
 Light In The Darkness
 My God
 That Is Who You Are!



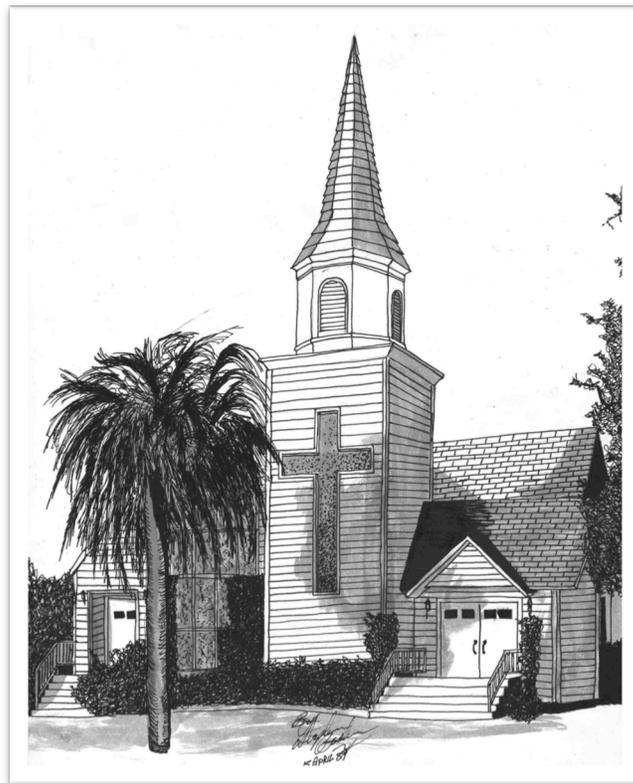
Congratulations to all our 2020 Graduates this year! We were thankful to be able to host a drive-by celebration as we honored our graduates from Union Church! God bless you all!

A Note Of Thanks:

Thank you, one and all that participated in the surprise Birthday Parade on May 5, 2020 for my birthday. It was absolutely wonderful and I do appreciate it. It was good to see all of you, even from the limited view of cars and trucks.

This is something I'll never forget. I have a huge family and no way to get together now for birthdays, etc. Another surprise was to see so many of my family walking from the back to see me. We had my birthday cake on the porch with family members in the yard. Strange settings but ok in our national crisis.

- Roberta Flowers



Purpose Statement

Loving God ~ Loving People

Vision Statement

Together we will create an atmosphere where people experience God's love.

Mission Statement

Motivated by God's love and fueled by His grace, whenever and wherever a hand reaches out for help, we want the hand of Jesus to be there. For this we are responsible