

Merry Christmas

from the Union Church of Hinsdale

The past two years, we've began these Christmas letters with "What a wonderful year we've had in our shared life of faith! So many delightful things to celebrate from 202_!"

...And, I mean, don't get us wrong, there are still plenty of great things to celebrate, but to pretend everything was roses and sunshine feels a little disingenuous. So, in the spirit of integrity, here's an honest look back at 2024:

January – Grant began his 8 weeks of paternity leave, unknowingly (and unfortunately) reminding staff members that there are other ways to leave the church besides in a box. More on that later. Bright spots included Elton John EGOT-ing, Caitlin Clark being Caitlin Clark, and our 'Day of Service' on MLK day was really well attended meaningful for all who participated!

February – Outside of some confusion over the 'Apres Ski' dress code for the UCECP fundraiser, this month wasn't all that bad all things considered. Beyoncé became the first Black female artist to top Billboard's Hot Country Songs Chart, Caitlin Clark continued being Caitlin Clark, and our Gather+Grow youth group celebrated their annual Mardi Gras Pancake Party!

March – Shifting the Easter Egg hunt to the day before Easter dramatically increased our participation, which was amazing!!! But did we, as Union Church, potentially witness our final Palm/Passion Sunday dramatic reading and not even know it!? (From what we hear through the grapevine, this is either devastating or glorious news depending on who you are)

April – Roses included installing and celebrating the new stained glass window prior to the Second Coming, our Tower Bells were ringing once again, and Taylor Swift releasing 'The Tortured Poets Department,' setting a Spotify record for over 300 million streams in one day.

Thorns included learning, by way of the Arizona Supreme Court, that 1864 is too far back for Throwback Thursday and, according to a new study analyzing songs from 1970-2020, lyrics have become 'simpler and more repetitive.' In other news, the sun is hot, water is wet, and the Pope is Catholic.

May – In May we were firing on all cylinders! We celebrated Moma completing his D.Min., the Spring Allegrezza concert was a smash success, and we welcomed another big new member class. Figuratively speaking, 'Stocks have reached what looks like a permanently high plateau.' - Irving Fisher, Professor of Economics, Yale University, 1929.

June – On the bright side, we celebrated Pride month with our new 'Open & Affirming' designation and fun was had by all at the All-Church Picnic. Moreover, thanks to our 'Roar' Summer Sermon Series, the 'Our Father' temporarily became 'Our Mother' and our 'Camp Firelight' theme for VBS was a big hit with the kids!

...But there were some curveballs. After due diligence revealed problems, the congregation voted down the Summit proposal to purchase a new building, Mike announced that he would be stepping down after 11 years as our Senior Pastor, and the world collectively mourned as, after 43 years, Pat Sajak hosted his last Wheel of Fortune. Is there nothing sacred?

July – Some of the highlights included lovingly welcoming back Rev. Victoria Wick and Rev. Dr. Anna Verlee Copeland as featured preachers for our 'Roar,' series, meeting Dr. Jan Nolting Carter and beginning our interim work, and some heartwarming farewell events for Mike. Meanwhile, the staff was cycling through all 5 stages of grief. Highlights include Carissa refusing to believe Mike and insisting it was his 'least funny joke ever' for a full 48 hours, Grant blurting out, mid-staff meeting, 'You can't break up with me if I break up with you first!', and Adriana's presentation of her going-away present – a candle that 'smells like abandonment, with hints of betrayal, tears, and still happy for you.' (One of those is actually real).

August – This month was a toughie. We had Mike's last Sunday followed two weeks later by Stephen Uhl's last Sunday. And for the highlights... I'm really grasping at straws here, guys. Maybe Snoop Dogg's coverage of the Olympics?

September – Come September things really started to look up again. Unfortunately, there was a little confusion over a dress code again, this time for the Union Church ‘Black and White’ fundraiser. 45 minutes prior to the start of the event Andy Mushynski described it as ‘having the potential to destroy a marriage.’ Nonetheless, if we had to pick a ‘winner’ it would have been Carlton Berg, dressed as a prisoner from the late 1800s. In worship we had the fan-favorite Pet and Stuffed Animal Blessing and Kick Off Sunday. We officially commissioned our ‘Discovery Team,’ and we learned that our current staff is at least capable of not burning the building to the ground without Mike so, count your blessings.

October – We kicked off October with a new take on World Communion Sunday, featuring breads from many different cultures and a mid-service livestream with our friends from Guatemala to share in an international Lord’s Supper. We welcomed another new member class, and had record attendance at Worship in the Woods! Who needs Mike anyway!?! We felt just as confident as the Bears, going 4-0 in the preseason and 4-2 going into the bye week. (For how that’s gone since, see Irving Fisher’s quote above).

November – You know what, I’m not even going to touch this one.

December – And here we are in December, already having stuffed over 500 stockings to share with our mission partners across the city! We are looking forward to an absolutely precious children’s Christmas pageant, a magical Christmas Eve, and God willing some (light) snow to beautify the neighborhood. We wish you nothing but health and happiness in 2025.

Merry Christmas,

From your (just ever-so-slightly overworked) staff