



Congregational Update

Sunday, July 19, 2020



worship | grow | connect | give

All God's works shall give thanks ... God is faithful in all things

Psalms 145:10, 12

Dear Beloved Union —

It's midway through 2020, and geez, what a year we've had thus far! While we do not know what the future holds, as Pastor Nikki and Pastor Jay preached during the first Sunday **worship** service of 2020, we are certain that we'll get through "this" together — during this [Year of Elevation](#). Yes, despite the challenges that characterized the past few months, Union has **risen** to the occasion. We continue to **connect** with one another and to **grow** spiritually, numerically, financially, and missionally.

With the start of summer, it's a great time to offer an update on the blessings that we have experienced together — as we look towards what God has in store for us in the coming months:

Celebrations

Although it's been a rough year, there is still so much for which we rejoice and celebrate:

- **Rev. Ashley** and **Rev. Adama** were elected into provisional membership as United Methodist clergy in The United Methodist Church — en route for ordination as deacons. Their election occurred in the New England Conference clergy session and a public service of **commissioning** will be held as soon as possible. [Deacons](#) are called to connect the church with the community in the ministry of Word, Service, Compassion, and Justice.
- **New Members** — Despite our inability to worship together in-person in our beloved church building, we are still growing numerically as a church family! In May, we welcomed four persons formally to the Union family: **Sarah, Rev. Ted, Kathryn, and Robert**. And, the Ministerial Team is in conversation with several more persons who are interested in taking the formal vows of membership.
- **New Babies** — We rejoice for the births of **Zoë Gabriella** (May 8, parents Tatiana & Stan) and **James Delta** (June 19, parents Blake & Erin)! We bless these newborns and pray God's flourishing and protection.
- **ABC Plus** — Last month, in June, we celebrated student achievement as the academic year concluded. Our young people are excelling and we have so very much for which to be thankful.
- **Celebrating the Union Family** — Headed up by Ruth Jemison, Union continues to rejoice in the life of its members through our monthly birthday celebrations.



Digital Union

As we have adapted to physical and social distancing requirements, which have [eliminated our ability to gather in-building](#), we have created a “**digital sanctuary**” through which we worship and connect virtually.

- **Online Sunday Services** — Every Sunday, we gather for an interactive, dynamic, and uplifting online worship service. Virtual church is both creative and collaborative.



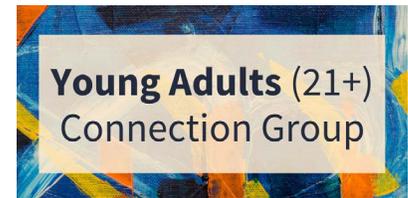
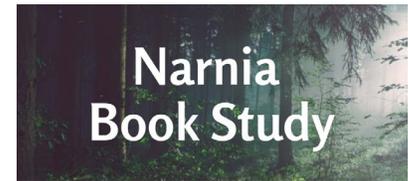
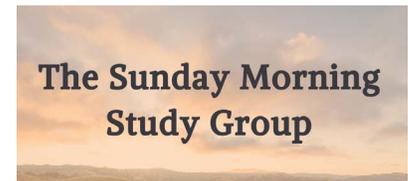
- **World-class Music & Worship Arts** — With thanksgiving to our staff musicians, Plamen, Willie, & Angela, who collaborate with the Praise Team, Ensemble, Dance Ministry, and various cantors, Union’s online worship services are shaped by extraordinary musical offerings on a weekly basis.
- **Video Editing & Audio Mixing** — Cyrus and Robert lead our Tech Team in *creative digital storytelling* through video and sound.
- **Empowering Sermons** — The Pastoral Team (Rev. Ashley, Minister Kyle, Pastor Nikki, and Pastor Jay) preaches inspiring and thoughtful messages weekly with Pentecost fire.
- **Website Redesign** — Minister Kyle, our Minister for Digital Union and Community Engagement, has beautifully redesigned unionboston.org in order to connect and expand our growing virtual church family. Check it out...it’s great!
- **Union App** — Union’s tech team has developed an **app**, which will soon be downloadable from the Apple and Android stores! The **Union App**, will augment our website as a “one stop shop” for all things Digital Union. You will be able to log onto Sunday Zoom worship; download Union sermons and music; explore connection groups, Bible resources, blogs; give and financially support our ministries; check out the church calendar and what’s happening in our community; and even message with other Union members! Many thanks to Robert Kelsey III for envisioning the Union App, and for working with Minister Kyle and the tech team in order to develop it. ***It should be available for download in early August!***



- **A Transformed Church** — The pandemic has forced us to innovate and our community has been transformed by it. Digital Union has opened up new ways of connection, worship, and discipleship that will continue to be part of our church experience well beyond the end of this pandemic era.

Connection Groups

- **Bible Study** — Since the beginning of May, we are gathering on Wednesdays at 6pm for churchwide exploration of the holy, biblical scriptures. Averaging 25 curious faithful, this online connection group has been an opportunity to learn more about the Bible *and* members of the Union family.
- **Spiritual Refreshes** — Pastor Nikki guides two midweek occasions (Wednesday 7am Prayer and Friday noontime meditation) for our community to gather for “recharging our spiritual batteries.”
- **Book Clubs**
 - **UnionReads** — Rev. Ashley leads our longest-running book club, which recently finished *The Water Dancer* by the acclaimed Ta-Nehisi Coates.
 - **Sunday Morning Study** — Rev. Dr. Adama is currently guiding a study of Dr. Ibram X. Kendi’s groundbreaking *How To Be An Antiracist*.
 - **Narnia** — Minister Kyle and his partner Angie co-lead the fourth installment of C.S. Lewis’s *The Chronicles of Narnia* every other Sunday afternoon, following 11:15am worship.
- **Young Adults Small Group** — Ryan and Collin coordinate the young adults digital gathering for fellowship, study, and exploration.



Pastoral and Congregational Care

The Pastoral Team and Care Team have been providing crucial care during this pandemic period.

- **Weddings** — Pastor Jay officiated the weddings of Stephanie Anderson & Bill Stearns (May 30) and Chaylin Diaz & LaTiesha Johnson (July 11).



- **Funerals and Homegoing Celebrations** — With heavy hearts, we said farewell to two of our church mothers: Mona Scantlebury (April 23) & Catherine Kornegay (May 22). Mothers Mona and Catherine were co-founders and trailblazers of Union's Food Pantry ministry. We will miss them both, and intend to have a public memorial service in-sanctuary once it is safe to gather. The Pastoral Team also officiated a virtual memorial service for Harriette Gurley (late mother of Gabrielle Gurley) on July 11th.
- **Pastoral Care and Counseling** — We continue to provide virtual pastoral conversation and counseling to all those in need. Union offers monetary assistance through its Urban Responsibility Fund to those requiring a little bit of extra help during these tough times.
- **Care Team** — A team of more than 30 Union members make biweekly "check-in" calls to the full Union membership. We want everyone to always know that "at Union, you're family."

Community Engagement

- **Food Pantry** — The coronavirus pandemic and economic downturn has caused increased need for food. And Union's network is providing healthy food for members of our community. We are grateful for the leadership of Ruth Ann Brown, John Jemison, and Dr. Melissa Pearson who are coordinating volunteers and making grocery deliveries for members of our church family.
- **MLK Memorial Breakfast** — Riding the success of the 50th anniversary MLK Breakfast, the planning team is diligently working to present a hybrid in-person / virtual 2021 celebration. More to be announced soon!
 - The 2020 Breakfast raised \$15,000 in student scholarships and \$100,000 for community programming.

Returning to In-Building Worship

*"The building may be closed, but we are still open, growing, and thriving." These words are on the banners outside Union's church building — inviting neighbors to **join Union Church Online**.*



- In the [May congregational update](#), we said: "Until we can all gather safely, we will continue to be church virtually. We are planning for the painful reality that it may not be possible to gather regularly for Sunday worship until a vaccine, or other significant safety mechanisms, emerge." Today, while the number of COVID-19 cases in Massachusetts have declined, the national numbers have seen sharp increases. And the full health ramifications of the coronavirus are still far from known. For this reason, we do not believe that large gatherings, such as a worship service in our sanctuary, are necessary or safe for our congregation.
- As the coronavirus cases continue throughout the United States, disproportionately harming urban and communities of color, we remain committed to worshipping digitally and connecting virtually.

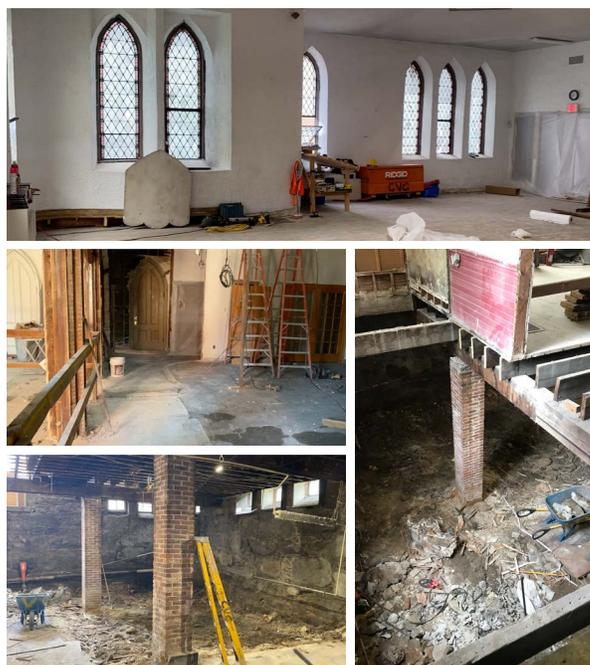


- Because we likely will not return to in-person gatherings until next year, Union's leadership team is working on a plan to increase access — especially for our seniors — to Digital Union.
- When we do return to in-person gatherings, we will continue Digital Union, finding ways to connect and engage our members near and far.
- The leadership team will continue to monitor this pandemic, take the advice of health experts, and be proactive to keep our church community and congregation safe.

Accessibility Renovations

Union is now engaged in its **first proactive renovation project** in the 148-year history of our 485 Columbus Avenue building — the first since completion of the original construction in 1872. (Between 1995 and 2012, there were 13 major repair, restoration, or replacement projects — all on an emergency basis!)

- You can check out a project overview and video updates at unionboston.org/renovation.



Administration

■ Finance

- **Generosity in Giving** — Union members and friends remain faithful in financially supporting Union's ministry and mission. Our *regular* giving remains stable and on par to giving during the same March 15 - July 15 period last year. *This is great news considering we're not "passing the plate" in building!*
 - ◆ Through our website and text-to-give, 117 new donors have supported our transformational ministry.
 - ◆ In addition, we've received several *one-time* gifts since March, totalling \$25,000. These contributions to general fund (unrestricted) offerings actually place us *ahead* of where we were this time last year. **Glory be to God!**
- **Please Don't Stop Giving....We're Getting Healthier**
 - ◆ Strong regular giving, special one-time contributions, and decreased building operating expenses allow Union to start paying down significant debt.
 - ◆ Because of so much economic and public health uncertainty, we pray that you will continue to support the Union community.
 - ◆ The Finance Committee is finalizing a **Budget** and **Pledge Campaign** for August



- December 2020, so that we can plan accordingly as we continue to live in this pandemic period.

- ◆ Our new budget will include line items that will allow us to continue to adapt to the changing needs, technology upgrades, cleaning supplies, and social distancing measures that will ensure Union’s digital and in-person future once we return to the building (most likely next year).

- **PPP Loan** — Pastor Jay worked with Union’s banking relationship managers to secure a \$75,300 **forgivable** loan through the Payroll Protection Program (PPP), which has provided much-needed financial support to ensure that Union’s staff remain employed during the economic downturn.

- **Staff Parish Relations** — Our Union staff (paid and volunteer) is doing extra-ordinary work during difficult days. Our musicians and ministers have adapted and “haven’t skipped a beat.” In addition to our long-standing paid staff members (Plamen, Willie, Angela, Fabio, Vidal, Pastor Nikki, and Pastor Jay), in May we welcomed Kyle as our Minister for Digital Union and Community Engagement.

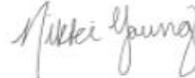
- **Trustees** — Although our congregation is not worshipping in the building, we still are maintaining our 485 Columbus Avenue (church) and Cleveland Park (parsonage) properties. In fact, we are in the process of the accessibility renovation at the church, and we will soon complete a bathroom renovation in the parsonage in order to increase the occupant capacity.

- Check out visuals of the church renovation at unionboston.org/renovation.

Union, God is indeed faithful in all things!

We give thanks for what God has done...and we remain confident that the best is still yet to come!

With hope and peace,

				
Pastor Jay Williams	Ruby Blake	Dr. Gary Bailey	Pastor Nikki Young	Cyrus Weaver
Lead Pastor	Lay Leader	Chair, Church Council	Assistant Pastor	Church Operations Officer

			
Dr. Melissa Pearson	John Jemison	Kevin Whetstone	David Jackson, Jr.
Chair, Staff-Parish Relations	Chair, Board of Trustees	Chair, Finance Committee	Treasurer

