

Pastor's Report - October 2022
Rev. Jessica Margrave Schirm

Staff Updates

October has been a month of meetings, planning and loss for our congregation. Thankfully our Sunday School programs are running well and had a bit of a reprieve while the college and public schools had fall break/long weekends. I attended the Joint Annual Meeting of the Tri-Conference (Iowa, Nebraska and South Dakota) of the United Church of Christ in Sioux City and Grinnell UCC hosted the Fall Gathering of the Central Association of the Iowas Conference of the UCC on 10/23. Special thanks to Elizabeth for doing so much of the logistical planning, Lindsey for arranging childcare support and Henry for help with set up. Both JAM and the Fall gathering are our first in person meetings since 2019.

Ken's impending retirement looms large and thankfully the work of the Music Ministry Task Force has begun.

The church staff completed compiling the draft budget for 2023 in anticipation of our stewardship campaign which will take place in November. I am grateful for the wisdom and faithful leadership of the governing board moderators as part of this process.

Pastoral Care

This month was one of profound loss for our congregation and the wider community as George Drake died. I was honored to support George and his family in his final days. Planning is underway for a memorial service at the college in mid November and I will be collaborating with Deanna Shorb for that. I also officiated two weddings this month, one in Henry's stead while he was sick with Covid and one for a church member, Casie McGee, which took place in West Des Moines.

Worship/Ministry Programming Updates

The music ministry task force met on October 16 to begin the dreaming and visioning process for the future of our church's music program. Next steps include an initial conversation with Music Ministry Consultant Sarah Dan Jones and two brainstorming sessions with some folks in our community who are well versed in church music ministry.

Upcoming we have a family night out gathering happening in early November, and a retirement fellowship celebration for Ken on 11/13.

Lindsey is finalizing plans for our next round of Our Whole Lives classes which will include OWL for elementary grades 4-5 and high school grades 10-12 both beginning in January. And Lindsey is in the process of selecting a pageant Script for our annual Christmas pageant, which will take place on 12/18 this year.

Wider Ministerial/Denomination Updates

The Joint Annual Meeting took place in Sioux City, Iowa October 9-11. I am grateful to John Ashby and John and Dorothy Noer who attended as delegates from our church and represented us well. This was a restorative gathering with engaging speakers and workshops, but it also included tough conversations about the tri-conference budget and difficult decisions that are upcoming. I left feeling a sense of heaviness on behalf of our conference staff.

Grinnell UCC was the host site of the Central Association fall meeting which will take place on Sunday, October 23rd at 3pm. This gathering included worship, a discussion session on how churches navigated the pandemic with plenty of time for community/relationship building work and a meal. Interim Conference Minister Phil Hart presented on behalf of the conference.

My work as the chairperson of the Committee on Ministry continues and I am grateful to serve the wider denomination in this way. Our next meeting is December 15, 2023.

Continuing Education Updates

I received “exceeds expectations” across the board for my first ACTS DMin in Preaching - Year 1 sermon assignment. I am especially thankful to Henry Rietz, Gayle Strickler, Jean Pendleton, Skadi Snook, Tommy Haas and Elizabeth Haas for being a part of my parish project group who helped shape the direction of the sermon, gave direct feedback and collected additional feedback from the congregation about the sermon, and submitted a report to my advisor and professors as to how I worked toward/met my learning goals with this first sermon. My next sermon is assigned for 11/6 and preparations are well underway.

With Gratitude, Pastor Jessica