

Pastor's Report
April 15, 2020
Rev. Jessica Margrave Schirm

It's a struggle to even know where to begin a Pastor's Report in this strange season of life. In some ways I feel like I am working harder than ever before - mainly because doing "routine" things take an incredible amount of energy and creativity as they can no longer be done without much thought or with relative ease. I can imagine you are feeling the same related to your own work or routines. In other ways I am feeling the gaping holes of connection and community that come with my pastoral identity and am struggling to figure out how to maintain that aspect of my role when it is necessary to remain apart - perhaps for a very long time. I am quite sure you are feeling this too in ways unique to your family, community and work.

For the most part I am doing my best to keep a weekly work schedule of Monday through Friday office hours from 9am-Noon, and then am available essentially 24/7 for pastoral care, phone calls, prayer, etc. It is not uncommon for me to get text messages from members before 7 am and phone calls as late as 8 pm. I want to be available and am doing my best to do just that. It's tricky because I feel compelled to be "working and available" at all times to offset what we are missing in actual face to face pastoral interaction, while at the same time balancing time for rest, grief, family, sabbath, worship, exercise and mitigating the underlying anxiety that is everywhere and in everything and everyone right now. We are all figuring it out as we go along and I am grateful for the love and grace I have felt from our church.

For privacy reasons I cannot give details, but there have been several urgent pastoral care needs during this quarantine that have taken extensive effort, energy and physical time ensuring the health and safety of some of the folks in our church community. I am so grateful that in moments of need, our people know that their church is there for them - even if the ways we can be physically present look very different.

Staff Updates

I continue to be in weekly contact with Elizabeth who is working as she is able Monday through Friday from the church office - even though the building is closed to the public at all times. We have maintained our Tuesday morning office chats and the "business" of the church office remains constant and stable. Financially we continue to be in a healthy place which is a great gift in this uncertain time. Erin and Ken continue to work from home as they are able and I remain in contact with them for support and encouragement and teambuilding. Bill continues to work at the church as often as he can, ensuring routine janitorial tasks are completed and staying on top of maintenance. Lawn care will be a subject in need of addressing very soon.

Pastoral Care/Worship/Ministry Updates

As I mentioned previously there have been several time intensive pastoral care needs, but I am also prioritizing routine check ins with folks by phone or email as often as I can. I am slowly making my way through the newly updated directory to do that.

I haven't received much feedback on the small groups at this point. But I know the leaders are trying to connect and reach out.

Perhaps the biggest hurdle we've faced so far is delivering Meals on Wheels while maintaining social distancing. I am grateful for all of the new volunteers who stepped up so that our retirees could stay safe. I know this was a stressful first experience as Outreach Chair for Kelsey Sandeno. She deserves our support and thanks.

The leadership of the Iowa Conference of the UCC is providing an online worship experience for Sunday, April 19, so that pastors throughout the state can have some time off from worship planning. I am grateful for this. I would like some feedback on how our worship format (interactive bulletin, audio recorded sermon, etc) is working for you and your families? What is working? What isn't? What would you like to see that might be different? I want what we offer to be user friendly and spiritually meaningful for the oldest and youngest members of our community as well as the most and least tech savvy. I also want to acknowledge my own limits with regard to technology, space, musical ability, etc as we imagine what that content needs to look like - staying the same or changing in needed ways.

Thank you for your continued leadership. I am so grateful that we are not only a team but also a family of faith.

With Grace and Peace,

Pastor Jessica