

Pastor's Report
May 20, 2020
Rev. Jessica Margrave Schirm

I begin this update with words of gratitude. In the midst of global, national, and local despair, death, uncertainty, confusion, conflict, grief, exhaustion, boredom and chaos the sense I have gleaned from among our family of faith is one of connection, deep prayer, hopefulness and patience. I am so grateful for this and pray continually that this same connection, prayer, hope and patience will carry us through into whatever unforeseen future awaits. In this season of deep grief for me personally, grief which is getting stronger and harder now that the shock and numbness is beginning to wane, it is a time when I wish I could be doing my job as pastor on autopilot. This is when I wish the deep wells of knowledge and skill that I've honed over the years could rise to the top so that I could use all my extra energy to tend to myself, our family and these uncharted emotional waters. Instead, I am, like so many of you are, floundering around like fish out of water - learning how to do old jobs all over again in a new way, and trying to connect to folks in virtual ways that fall literally, painfully short. Thank you for your continued grace and patience with me and with our whole church body as what we had hoped would be a brief anomaly in our church's worship plans likely becomes the "way things must be" for a much longer time.

Staff Updates

For the most part Erin and I continue to work from home, Ken is coming into the office one day per week, and Elizabeth and Bill have maintained their usual work schedules in the building - while the church building has been closed to all outside traffic and visitors. As of June 1st I will resume working from the church office (assuming the state's COVID-19 numbers indicate it is moderately safe to do so) and all staff in the building will be expected to wear a mask, maintain proper social distancing and practice good hand hygiene. Bill will increase sanitation priorities as needed. During this time when much of Ken's in person work is impossible, Ken has voluntarily asked to have his salary reduced by half to better reflect his actual workload. This change went into effect with the May 15 paycheck and will continue until we are safely able to worship together again and/or until something else changes related to his workload. While the building has been closed, Bill has actually increased his work hours to complete several projects that we otherwise would have outsourced. He did not charge the church any hours above and beyond his regularly scheduled hours, despite more being asked of him. As such I have approved a one time bonus of \$750 to reflect the additional hours of work Bill did over a six week period from the end of March to the beginning of May.

One of the additional tasks that Bill completed for us was to locate and purchase a riding mower so that our lawn care can be done inhouse going forward. Thanks to the generosity of our church family we secured more than enough funds to purchase the mower and will keep this ask open for another couple of weeks. Any additional funds that come in will be used to purchase a small storage shed for these lawn care items.

Another delightful addition to our church staff is Lola, Elizabeth's new dog. Lola is a lovely, mixed breed rescue from the animal shelter in Oskaloosa, Iowa. We have given her the official title of Employee Satisfaction Manager. She has met Ebony, our Chief Morale Officer, and the two get along splendidly. I'm sure you'll meet her when and if you are able to be in the building during office hours again.

Pastoral Care/Worship/Ministry Updates

I continue to receive good feedback about our worship format from many folks in our faith community. Tonight we will discuss in depth the plan for convening a Reopening Task Force and I am inclined to err on the side of utmost caution. In addition to the resources I sent Terese, here is the most recent guidance from the national setting:

https://www.ucc.org/news_pastoral_letter_should_churches_return_to_worship_in_their_sanctuaries_05192020

In light of this guidance, as well as other data available to us, if it is many, many months before we worship in person again, I would like to expand my skill set with options for a virtual worship option that is both meaningful while also allowing for the broadest amount of participation across the spectrum of our church members and friends. Erin and I have begun what this might look like for Christian Education once the program year resumes this fall. Ken and I have begun discussing how we might incorporate more of our own musicians into this worship effort while maintaining safety. I am currently exploring online learning and coaching opportunities to grow in these areas.

I continue to reach out to our church membership by phone and email as much as I am able. Folks are responding well to our Tuesday's Together call for Joys and Concerns and the Thursday facebook live bible study. I will serve as back up emergency pastoral care for Rev. Dave Crow at the UMC while he is on vacation through June 1.

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