

Pastor's Report
August/September, 2020 (cont.)
Rev. Jessica Margrave Schirm

It has been two months since my last formal update and so much has happened, I can't even begin to reflect on it all. Most notably I want to say thank you to our staff and our board, and to our congregation and wider community for the ways everyone rallied around one another and our church building/property in the wake of the derecho that left our community in tatters. I am also grateful for the Governing Board who insisted I take a couple weeks off for rest and recuperation. Sadly, my father in law passed away in the midst of this time off, so the second half of that leave became more of a bereavement leave than a vacation, but it was good to be able to be with our family during this difficult time.

Staff Updates

These last few months have been filled with continued maintenance and repair projects on the building, while having his car smashed by a tree branch in our alley parking during the derecho (Bill); Fall Sunday School planning and community wide derecho clean up efforts (as well as all the stress that goes into a "back to school" plan in the midst of an ongoing pandemic with high risk family members) (Erin); Keeping the church office afloat, making adjustments to our draft budget for 2021 in the midst of unprecedented unknowns, curating weekly worship playlists and monthly newsletters (not only for our church but also the Newton UCC while their pastor is on sabbatical) and managing church building repair estimates/projects related to the derecho, etc. (Elizabeth); and recording worship music, recruiting soloists, and creating monthly worship music plans while still commuting to Grinnell one day per week during a pandemic (Ken). AND these folks did all of this while enduring anywhere from 5-10 days without power, internet, air conditioning, etc. over the last few weeks. 2020 is exhausting, and our staff is amazing in spite of it. Thank them when you are able. In a separate communication I will be sending a draft for our 2021 budget which includes some changes to our personnel budget - reflective of altered responsibilities (both up and down depending on staff roles) during this pandemic season.

Pastoral Care/Worship/Ministry Updates

I am grateful for the ongoing faithfulness of our Care Connections team members who are bearing the brunt of the routine pastoral care needs in our congregation (calls, cards, check ins) so that I can focus on the urgent needs of our community. I continue to receive good feedback about the youtube video playlist format of our worship services and am grateful for everyone who has volunteered to be a liturgist. I continue to welcome feedback related to ways we can make this virtual worship more engaging. As you've hopefully seen in our most recent Newsletter, our fall education programs will resume in a virtual format on September 13 - and we will gather in person (briefly, outside, masked, socially distanced) for a "return to learn" blessing and supplies pick up. Our recent "the moms are not ok" masked, socially distanced support gathering was well received and I am planning to do the same for those that identify as dads in the near future. I'm finding that our 30/40 something aged parents of school aged kids, most of whom are also working full time and planning to homeschool or navigate some form of a return to learn plan that is less than encouraging - are the most worn out from this year so far and need all the extra support we can give.

Wider Ministerial/Denomination/Continuing Education Updates

Our local ministerial association resumed meeting after a summer “off” this past week. I am still currently the group president, but have asked to transition into a secretary/scribe role as I anticipate the nomination for the Iowa Conference Moderator position for the upcoming year and want to be conscious of the limits of my time and energy. Our town has had an influx of new pastors as others have retired or moved away so I am in the process of getting to know them. We are imagining ways that the GMA might be able to meet the ongoing derecho clean up needs in Grinnell and are brainstorming ideas for that - particularly around a tree removal fund. The Virtual Annual meeting for the Iowa conference of the UCC is October 17. I am tentatively planning to take a week of continuing education/study leave around that time to both attend the meeting online and do a week of reading, studying and advance planning to imagine what a virtual advent and Christmas season might look like. This is all very tentative as when I put intentions out into the universe to be away someone dies...so I'm being extra cautious and may not actually know for sure that I will be away until the last minute. {{Join me in laughing until we cry}}

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

ADDENDUM 9/27/2020 :

Since it has only been three weeks since our last attempt at a meeting, I am not going to update this entire report section by section. But I want to highlight a few things:

- 1) My deep gratitude for the love and support, concern, prayers, cards and gift cards I've received from the church after breaking my leg.**
- 2) Our {virtual} Sunday School programs are off to a good start with very few glitches.**
- 3) I'm grateful for the community wide interest and church support for the silent vigil for Michael Williams, and I am especially grateful for Erin Bustin and many of you on the board who collaborated to pull that event together. It was meaningful for our community to mourn together and this is EXACTLY what ministry looks like during this pandemic season.**
- 4) I am attending an Enneagram for Ministry conference via Zoom on 9/29; and the Annual Meeting for the Iowa Conference of the UCC will be 10/17.**
- 5) We have been approached by Newton UCC to provide interim pastoral care support for them as their Pastor has taken a new call and they transition into the search and call process. I will include the document with this info in a separate email.**
- 6) Henry Rietz has been a Member in Discernment for Ordination for many years now and is nearing approval by the Committee on Ministry to have an Ecclesiastical Council. We can talk more about this during the meeting and should likely schedule a time to have Henry chat with us during a Board Meeting about this process and the support we can provide.**
- 7) November will be Stewardship Month and I have some ideas for how we might make this a moving and dynamic experience even while worshipping online - we can include ideas about this with our budget discussion.**