

**Pastor's Report  
October 2020  
Rev. Jessica Margrave Schirm**

It is hard to believe that we have passed the seven month mark for not meeting in our building for worship. As the grief over the deaths of my dad and father-in-law become more integrated into my being, the grief over not seeing our family of faith for that long is settling in too. I miss the kids running through our building. I miss shaking hands and giving hugs in the narthex after worship - hearing about upcoming doctors appointments, and new grandbabies, and getting parts in the school play. I miss congregational singing - and that's usually the least impactful part of worship for me! Now as winter quickly approaches (or is it already here - does snow on the ground equal winter?) and we anticipate what Advent and Christmas might look like in the midst of a socially distanced pandemic the fatigue that comes with doing anything for the long haul threatens to overwhelm creativity and inspiration, not only for me but all of us.

**Staff Updates**

I'm exceedingly grateful for Elizabeth's work to gather the input needed from a variety of sources to pull together our working budget for 2021 and to generate the mailings related to our stewardship campaign. Elizabeth continues to do much of our worship video recording and worship playlist generating. Ken and Erin continue at 1/4 time and I am grateful for their willingness to do so for the foreseeable future and what that means for our budget. Bill continues at 1/3 time and has recently completed the much needed repairs on the parlor ceiling.

**Pastoral Care/Worship/Ministry Updates**

Another area where I'm feeling the domino effect of the loss of our in person gatherings relates to being able to provide meaningful and timely pastoral care. As I mentioned above, Sunday mornings were the time when I learned about the wider congregational joys and concerns, upcoming health related needs, additional prayer requests or pastoral needs. In this season of separateness I've struggled to find a meaningful and equally efficient way to glean the pastoral needs of the congregation. I've attempted several things - namely our early experiment with small groups which seemed to be a bust due to their intergenerational make up; The care connections team has divided the congregation up into small groups and makes routine phone calls; I've made or sent numerous random phone calls or emails or hand written notes; Tuesday's Together emails/facebook posts; monthly Zoom fellowships. But I'm still concerned that I'm not meeting our congregation's pastoral care needs simply because I don't know what's going on. Making 80+ phone calls a week is unrealistic, and while I could send that many emails a week, I fear that would quickly become impersonal. I'm open to feedback as to ways to make pandemic pastoral care more meaningful and/or permission to cut myself some slack :-)

Also, as I mentioned above, Advent is fast upon us and our first session of virtual Sunday School is nearing an end. The month of November will be a planning time for Erin and I - and we have some wonderful, enriching ideas about how we can create a sense of togetherness during Advent even while worshipping apart. Our virtual Sunday School attempts have been a resounding success and the plan is to resume these during Advent for all ages. In addition, we are brainstorming a way to have our traditional Christmas pageant in our current virtual setting and I'm excited to see how we can pull this together!

**Wider Ministerial/Denomination/Continuing Education Updates**

This month was my last month as president of the Grinnell Ministerial Association. I have held that position since early 2019. It was time to transition out of that leadership role because I have been elected to be the Moderator for the 2021 Iowa Conference Annual Meeting of the UCC. This will require me to participate in the Board of Directors meetings for the next year. I participated in the Annual meeting for the TriConference of the United Church of Christ on October 17 and am grateful for this time of learning and growth and challenge and worship.

**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**