

Pastor's Report - February 2021

Even though I am completing this report on February 17, 2021, Ash Wednesday, technically the beginning of Lent, it feels like we are on day 357 of a Lenten Season which began on Ash Wednesday, February 26, 2020. Our frailty, mortality, vulnerability, brokenness and interdependence has been on full display every minute of every day for 357 days now. I'm longing for resurrection, aren't you? For new life, for the joy that comes in the morning. Perhaps when these next 40 days are over we will be a little closer to that reality in 2021.

Staff Updates

For a variety of reasons - vulnerable health status, weather, accessibility - we continue to work in a flexible home/church office hybrid state. Erin is working from home 100%, Elizabeth is working from the office 90%, I am working from home and office roughly 50% (coming to Grinnell 2-3 days a week and working from home the rest) and Ken is coming to Grinnell approx 1-2 times a month to record music for worship. Flexibility, gentleness, "enough-ness", honoring our limits, needs and mental and physical health remain staff priorities as we continue to serve the pastoral care, spiritual education and worship needs of our congregation.

The highlight of staff news right now is the hiring of Lee Walker to be our Maintenance Custodian. Lee was an applicant for the position the first time around and if we could have offered the job to two people at that time, we would have hired him as well. As soon as the position opened up again, we contacted Lee and the rest is history. We all believe the timing is perfect for him to join our church staff. Whereas Bill's main focus was on maintenance projects, Lee has experience with and a passion for the custodial side of our building care. We are grateful for his attention to detail and the knowledge he brings to the position.

Pastoral Care/Worship/Ministry Updates

Hopefully the third time's the charm as I attempt to convene a Pastor Relations Committee. Initially when I was hired the plan was for the search committee to serve in this capacity, but then half of the search committee became members of the governing board and it didn't make sense boundary-wise for the whole committee to do both. Last year, I tried to pull together a new group - but then Covid derailed...well, everything... and now some of the folks' situations have changed and they can no longer commit to the task. So, I've reached out with new asks and have commitments from Henry Rietz, Laura Nelson Lof, Rick Ramsey and Judy Scheer to be the PRC going forward. I've ordered the most updated information from the UCC MESA team about pastor and parish relations for each of them, there is an upcoming webinar regarding PRCs that I will be attending (and have invited them to attend as well) and we will hopefully have our first meeting via Zoom in March sometime.

In addition, I am pleased with our recent transition to live Zoom worship. While it requires a different level of energy from me and flexibility from my family to make this happen (it is much easier to record worship videos when the kids are at school than to juggle a live worship setting from home - hence my working from the office more lately!), I understand that this meets a spiritual-connection need that members of our community are grateful for and I am happy with how things are going so far. The biggest need at the moment is for a larger team of tech savvy folks to step up to the plate so that Elizabeth can create a future oriented schedule of Zoom hosts/tech leaders and know that she can have a Sunday off every now and then with confidence that everything will go smoothly in her absence. I know this is a need the moderators are addressing and I am grateful for that leadership and staff support.

Wider Ministerial/Denomination/Continuing Education Updates

I continue as a member of the Committee on Ministry for the Central Association, the 2021 Moderator for our Iowa Conference UCC's Annual Meeting, and a member of the Grinnell Ministerial Association. The GMA is currently focused on building relationships with several new ministers in town, the new Police Chief and addressing some changes to funding emergency hotel stays. I will be on vacation March 12-20th.

With Grace and Peace, Pastor Jessica