

## **Pastor's Report - March 2021**

While I'm writing this on a rainy, gray day - the hope of spring is slowly but surely bubbling up around us. We are mere days away from the entire state opening up vaccine eligibility to all adult Iowans (I'm praying fervently that supply will mesh with demand). There are even hints of warmth and sunshine on occasion and green leaves poking up in my flower beds. Life is resurrecting after the longest, darkest stretch in the tomb many of us can remember.

### **Staff Updates**

After today 3 out of the 5 of us on the Church Staff will have at least one Covid - 19 Vaccine in our arms. Next week Erin and I will receive shot #2. Lee is scheduled at the VA for his first dose mid-April. Ken continues to struggle to find a vaccine appointment as it is incredibly difficult to get one in Polk County where he lives. He is opening up his search to Poweshiek County since he works here. Fingers crossed. We continue with a flexible "come into the church office/work from home" hybrid model and this seems to be an adjustment of this long strange year that we will continue to embrace even after things return to "normal". We've all learned how to be more efficient, how to do our jobs with less, and how to communicate in meaningful ways when we cannot be together. That said - for the first time in more than a year Erin, Elizabeth and I were all able to be in the office today at the same time today and it was...so, so good. How we've missed one another. It is both a blessing and a reminder of the deep, unexpected grief and loss this experience has wrought.

### **Pastoral Care/Worship/Ministry Updates**

Praise Be to God that I finally have a functioning PRC in place. The third attempt at this really does seem to be the charm! We met as a committee on March 8 and will meet again on March 26. They are taking seriously the behavioral covenants as spelled out by the wider denomination in the "A Sure Foundation" document recently released by MESA, they've introduced themselves to the church via our Tuesdays Together email and we are working on exploring ways that folks in the congregation can offer meaningful feedback that isn't anonymous or subversive to my role and authority as pastor. I'm grateful for their wisdom, leadership and guidance.

Live Zoom worship continues to go well. We average about 30 folks in attendance, including one or two from Newton UCC, whom we've supported with worship resources since their pastor left for a new call last June. As always, the struggle to make any virtual worship option feel special and sacred, especially during our high holy days, is difficult, but we, as a staff, feel good about what we've pulled together for Holy Week.

I am grateful to read the report from our Covid-19 task force and am as eager as everyone to return to some sort of in person worship. I am extremely reluctant to offer any sort of in-person worship that requires pre-registration or is by invitation only which necessarily limits who can and cannot attend. If it isn't safe for everyone to attend in the building then my gut says no one should. This is a sacrifice I would prefer we continue to make for us to be true to our "No matter who you are...." commitment to extravagant welcome. I do fully support all efforts to keep our worship safe and welcoming, however we move forward, and I'd love to see us begin to have more in-person, outdoor worship opportunities once we are able to reach some of those target benchmarks as laid out by the task force. As a staff we'd love to offer an outdoor worship/palm burning/ bring your own lunch/picnic event (these have been church traditions in the past) on Pentecost, so perhaps May 23rd would be an excellent "resume" in-person (outdoors as long as the weather allows) worship goal?

Even if in-person, in the building worship is still a ways off, we are slowly planning and scheduling more and more small group activities with an outdoor Mayflower Wine and Cheese gathering scheduled for 4/29. Erin is planning something similar for families with kids once school is out.

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

The Central Association spring meeting is coming up on April 10. I plan to attend virtually. I continue on the Central Association COM, now as vice-chairperson. Our next meeting is April 15. The next meeting for the Iowa Conference Board of directors is April 17. I am currently using some of my continuing education funds (in the absence of the ability to travel to any actual continuing education opportunities) to offset the out of pocket costs for some intensive grief therapy I am working through.

**With Grace and Peace,**

**Pastor Jessica**