

Pastor's Report - December 2021

General Updates

December has been a busy month for our staff in more ways than one. In addition to Advent and Christmas worship, pageant planning, multiple community outreach projects including collecting Spanish language children's books for missionaries who will be with us in January and support Grinnell Christmas Shares, I had end of the year touch bases with both Erin and Ken. In my meeting with Erin she submitted her resignation effective at the end of February 2022. This wasn't a shocking surprise, though perhaps coming sooner than I anticipated, in light of the opening of her music studio which has been her life-long dream and the work she is truly called and educated to do. I am grateful she gave such significant notice so that we can ensure OWL and other programming for 2022 are in place before she is gone.

One of the key things that I took from our conversation was how her position - initially intended to be a very small 15 hours or less part time job of basic community organizing around social justice - grew to include nearly all of our Christian Ed programming, church-wide community building, OWL which is the greatest gift to come from her work, AND community organizing around social justice. This could easily be a 3/4 to full time job. What is more is that Erin expressed how much this work felt like ministry, which she was never fully comfortable with because she does not see herself as a minister. I left that meeting wondering if it might be in our church's future to envision bringing on a 3/4-full time associate pastor as we imagine the next phase of this role. I've asked Erin to submit her resignation in writing and will ask her to write something announcing this to the church for the January newsletter. We can plan an official goodbye for her in February.

During my touch base with Ken we discussed in detail his retirement plans. For as long as I have been pastor at Grinnell UCC, Ken's plan was to retire at Christmas this year. He turns 70 this month and hopes to move back to his childhood hometown as soon as possible. However, he has had difficulty finding a home that he would like to purchase in Bloomington because the market is turning over so fast and he isn't ready to be "done done" with us until he has a move in sight.

We talked through how the past 20 months have shown potential growth opportunities in our music ministry with regard to technology, innovation and adaptation. We had a good discussion about how he is both meeting the basic needs of our congregation with regard to worship music and how the future of worship for our community is likely ready to evolve and he does not imagine himself leading that change. I would like for the Music Task Force to resume ASAP - it is likely we will need to reimagine/reassign folks to this task force and create an even more specific vision for what they are working on in light of what we've learned in 2020-2021. Ken has noted that he is happy to be the organist/accompanist until he is ready to move/retire.

Pastoral Care/Worship/Ministry Updates

The memorial service for Lois Strickler was held at Grinnell UCC on December 4th. The service was meaningful, sacred and honored Lois' full life, well lived. In addition to our own five worship services in December, Grinnell UCC also hosted the winter concerts/programs for the students of Erin's music studio - Studio E; the Grinnell Children's Choir; and the UCC Community Preschool. In December I also led a chapel worship for the Independent Residents at the Mayflower, and a second service for the Health Center and Beebe residents.

Wider Ministerial/Denomination/Continuing Education Updates/Miscellaneous

I attended a virtual retreat on December 9 called Arise, Shine: Restoring Your Light - a digital advent quiet day for clergy women. It was a meaningful and restorative day in the midst of a very busy season. I will be on Vacation 12/25-1/1 (out of state spending the post-Christmas week with my Kentucky family) and again January 20-27th. On January 2nd, Missionaries Bruce and Linda Hanson will be joining us in worship, sharing a bit about their mission work in Honduras. Their educational work in Honduras is why we have been collecting Spanish Language books. During worship we will bless the books and their ongoing work as a UCC mission partner.

**With Hope and Peace, Joy and Love,
Pastor Jessica**