

Pastor's Report - September 2022

Rev. Jessica Margrave Schirm

Staff Updates

Just as August put our staff through its paces with regard to multiple funerals and pastoral care needs, there was no letdown entering into September with the joy of 2022 Rally Day fast upon us. I cannot say enough about Elizabeth Haas, Lindsey Altenhofen and Ken Davis for the ways in which their combined skills made September 11, 2022 feel as close to "normal" a Rally Day as we've had in several years. From full and fun Sunday School classes, to meaningful worship, to a festive picnic on the lawn, I left the church that day with a full and grateful heart.

Ken's impending retirement looms large and I am eager for the work of the Music Ministry Task Force to begin and am eager to see the direction the Spirit leads us as we imagine our future.

The church staff is in the beginning stages of budget building and planning for 2023 in anticipation of our stewardship campaign which will take place in November. I am grateful for the wisdom and faithful leadership of the governing board moderators as part of this process.

Pastoral Care

This month we've had one death among our church family and an increase in church members hospitalized or entering hospice and nursing care along with an increase in Covid affecting members of our church family. I'm grateful that so many in our community rise to the challenge of providing caring and support - whether through prayers, cards, visits - for our members and friends.

Worship/Ministry Programming Updates

We are averaging about 20 kids (ages 1-14) in the nursery and Sunday School on Sunday mornings, with a full complement of eager, wonderful college students who are doing an amazing job teaching and connecting with the students. The "Come to the Table" option for parents and young professionals is thriving - we've received amazing feedback about the benefits of having this time to simply sit and be present with other adults - no agendas, no screens. Seekers remains a meaningful opportunity for other adults to have engaging, in depth theological conversations led by Rabbi Rob.

In addition, there are several meaningful, community building activities coming up including packing Refugee Welcome Backpacks for Church World Service on October 2; a family night out gathering, and a retirement fellowship celebration for Ken.

Finally, preparations for our next round of Our Whole Lives classes are underway which will include OWL for elementary grades 4-5 and high school grades 10-12 both beginning in January.

Wider Ministerial/Denomination Updates

There continues to be a wider conversation happening in the Iowa Conference as to whether the Geographical Association model is still working/worth maintaining and it is likely there will be movement away from this model to a more centralized allocation of COM tasks (along with other committees and their work) at a state-wide level. I am part of this ongoing conversation as part of my role on the Committee on Ministry and as a member of the Central Association Advisory Council. More of this will be discussed at the Joint Annual Meeting which will take place in Northwest Iowa October 9-11. I am planning to attend. Henry Rietz will be preaching in my absence on 10/9.

Grinnell UCC will be the host site of the Central Association fall meeting which will take place on Sunday, October 23rd at 3pm. This gathering will include worship, an educational/discussion session on some of the proposed restructuring ideas noted above, some other community/relationship building work and a meal. Interim Conference Minister Phil Hart will be in attendance (either in person or via zoom) for this meeting.

Continuing Education Updates

I am relieved to be on the other side of my first ACTS DMin in Preaching - Year 1 sermon assignment. I preached the assigned sermon on September 11 and am grateful for the congregation's support and feedback. I am especially thankful to Henry Rietz, Gayle Strickler, Jean Pendleton, Skadi Snook, Tommy Haas and Elizabeth Haas for being a part of my parish project group who helped shape the direction of the sermon, gave direct feedback and collected additional feedback from the congregation about the sermon, and submitted a report to my advisor and professors as to how I worked toward/met my learning goals with this first sermon. My next sermon is assigned for 11/6.

With Gratitude, Pastor Jessica