

Pastor's Report - Summer 2022

Rev. Jessica Margrave Schirm

Staff Updates

I am delighted to begin this Summer 2022 Pastor's Report by celebrating the hiring of Lindsey Altenhofen as our Full-Time (effective Sept 1) Director of Outreach and Education. Lindsey comes to us with a wealth of experience in education, a passion for social justice and a desire to combine those to create systemic change in the community. Despite being new to Grinnell, Lindsey is already very well connected and is eager to explore new community partnerships that will further our outreach with OWL. In addition Lindsey's family sought out our congregation for worship, long before this position was available, because they are seeking community and connection. As such Lindsey is eager to help our congregation reach the levels of participation and relationship building that were on pace before the Covid -19 Pandemic began. Between now and September 1, Lindsey will be in the church office part time while she finishes up her contract with the GEP and Grinnell College.

Maintaining the theme of transition, Ken has informed me that he will officially retire as Music Director of Grinnell UCC Effective December 31, 2022, after 8 years of faithful service. As that date draws closer we will plan a reception to thank Ken for his hard work and the rich legacy he leaves behind. It will be important for the Governing Board to begin the work of exploring the future of our music ministry (consultants, surveys?) and convene a task force to do the work of hiring Ken's successor.

Pastoral Care

I am thankful to Judy Scheer and John Ashby who were able to stand in the gap for pastoral care while I was away on Study Leave, despite dealing with their own ailments and issues during this time. I'm grateful that most of the pastoral care needs that arose while I was away were able to be addressed with phone calls (from them and me) with prayer support from the prayer chain/care connections team. Looking ahead, Jean Libbey's memorial service will be at the church on August 27th and I am in the planning stages of that in collaboration with her family.

Worship/Ministry Programming Updates

I am grateful for the voices who have filled this pulpit while I was away on Study Leave - John Chaplin, Crystal Schrader and on a less than a moment's notice - John and Dorothy Noer and Dot Anderson and Shane Estes - who pulled together a service on 7/3 when the technology failed, making the planned service unavailable.

Lindsey and I have spent the bulk of her initial hours in the office talking through the plans for the 2022-2023 Program year which will include two new/additional Sunday School offerings - a 6-8th grade class which will also double as a confirmation class for students interested in pursuing that faith development path and a class specifically for parents with kids in the various Sunday School classes and young professionals who might want a different Sunday School experience that is more focused on relationship building vs the study experience offered in Seekers. In addition we will have two OWL

courses for the upcoming year Grades 4-5 and a High School session. Our August newsletter will detail all of these offerings and will include a full year program calendar which will allow folks an “at a glance” way to incorporate church events that might be meaningful to them into their family calendars.

Wider Ministerial/Denomination Updates

As you know I serve as the Chairperson for the Central Association Committee on Ministry. In the last few months there have been quite a few changes with regard to our duties - namely picking up responsibility for the churches/pastors in the Southwest Association as their COM was no longer able to function productively due to committee turnover/staff moving away. In addition, there is 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. 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. I believe John Noer, Dorothy Noer and John Ashby have tentatively agreed to be our church delegates for the annual meeting.

Also, Grinnell UCC will be the site of the Central Association fall meeting (I don't think any of the changes above will affect this) with a date still TBD. This will take place on a Saturday and include worship, an educational session and some other community/relationship building work.

Continuing Education Updates

Wow! What a wild few weeks! I have officially completed my first three-week intensive for the ACTS Doctor of Ministry in Preaching program I am enrolled in through Chicago Theological Seminary. You can find out more about the program here: <https://www.actsdminpreaching.com/>

The next, and longest phase of this first year of the program, is the work I will be doing between now and March 2023, in partnership with a committee of folks from the church, called the Parish Project Group. The PPG will help me shape the direction of my three required sermons, give me feedback and collect additional feedback from the congregation about those sermons, and submit reports to my advisor and professors as to how I am working toward/meeting my learning goals. I have begun the process of recruiting this team and am eager for this next phase of work to begin.

Miscellaneous

I will be on vacation July 21-29, Rev. Liz Colton will be preaching while I am away. I am grateful for some renewing time with my extended family after the intensity of these last few weeks and months.

With Gratitude, Pastor Jessica