

Pastor's Report - February 2023

Rev. Jessica Margrave Schirm

Staff Updates

The middle of January through February has wreaked havoc on our church staff with consecutive bouts with Covid for Pastor Jessica and Elizabeth. While 2023 is nearly two full months old, in many ways it feels like we have barely started the year because of all of the setbacks. Thankfully, living through the more intense season of the pandemic in 2020-21 taught us how to maximize our work from home time so, for the most part, things have continued as close to normal as possible. We are now into Lent and upcoming stretches of spring break with both the public schools and college which means several shifts for our Sunday School programming which Lindsey is handling with care. I am especially grateful for the organists who have filled in and led our music ministry over the last two months as our music ministry task force continues their work.

Pastoral Care

The last few weeks have been particularly hard on our congregation as we lost one of our own beloved members, Betty Anne Francis, as several households have dealt with long bouts of Covid and other illnesses and injuries, and as several of our church members have lost beloved family members. I am grateful for the ways in which our community cares for one another in these hard seasons.

Worship/Ministry Programming Updates

OWL for 4-5 graders is underway, and as a parent with a kiddo in this session I can say that it is going really well. Lindsey has worked hard to get immersed in the OWL process and has been incredibly successful in recruiting teachers, assistants and engaging energy around the program. In addition Lindsey and Elizabeth and the Outreach worked hard to prep and pull off our most recent CWS packing session - period packs. Thanks to the generosity of our congregation we were able to send 50 packs to folks who live with period supply related poverty. Unfortunately our planned Music Ministry Workshop that was scheduled for 2/26 had to be canceled at the last minute due to our consultant no longer being available to work with us. This is discouraging, but we had such a good response to our congregation-wide Music Ministry Survey that there is hope that our task force can move forward with some tentative plans for next steps. For three Sundays during Lent, as part of my work towards my Doctorate of Ministry in Preaching, I will lead a study for Adults to explore the legacy of Henry Ward Beecher, Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, Harry Emerson Fosdick, William Howard Taft, and Washington Gladden, activists who have all proclaimed the word of God to our congregation and to wonder together how their presence in our pulpit contributes to our legacy and continued commitments to justice and activism in the 21st Century. The class will meet where the Seekers typically meet.

Wider Ministerial/Denomination Updates

Drastic changes continue for our Iowa Conference of the UCC. Another full time Associate Conference Minister, Sarah Rentzel Jones, is leaving at the beginning of March which leave us with our Interim ECM Phil Hart - full time, ACM Kendy Miller - full time, Consultant ACMs - Jonna Jensen and Campbell Lovett - 10 hrs a week. The conference has recently extended a call for 10 Conference Deacons who will work five hours a week to help churches in their assigned region connect and collaborate with the conference. Details and Applications can be found here:

<https://ucctcm.org/deacons/> My work as the chairperson of the Committee on Ministry continues and I am grateful to serve the wider denomination in this way. Our work has been particularly challenging as of late. Our next meeting is April 20, 2023.

Continuing Education Updates

I am in the final push of my first year of my ACTS Doctor of Ministry in Preaching program. My final, year 1 integrative paper is due March 10. I am so grateful for the support of the church during this first year of work and learning and growth.

I will be on vacation March 11-18, 2023 and Rev. Lindsey Braun will be preaching in my absence for which I am very grateful.

With Gratitude, Pastor Jessica