

Pastor's Report - November/December 2023

Rev. Jessica Margrave Schirm

Staff Updates

The priorities for church staff over the last couple months have been all things stewardship, Jingle Bell Holiday, wrapping up HS OWL, prepping for Advent/Christmas services and the children's program, Christmas Shares and Suds of Love. Lindsey continues to work from the church office Wednesdays and Sundays and from home Monday, Tuesday and Thursday (Friday/Saturday is her weekend). Elizabeth works from home on Monday, from the church office on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday and Sunday (Friday/Saturday is also her weekend). Mondays are now my Sabbath day and I am working from the office, home, Pella apartment, car and everywhere else Tuesday through Friday, and of course from church on Sunday. Saturday is my other day off each week.

Pastoral Care

Our Care Connections team has spent the fall reading You Can Talk to God Like That: The Surprising Power of Lament to Save Your Faith by Abby Norman. We've had good conversation around the power of bring all of our emotions to God and how the idea of Lament is a faithful tool to help us through difficult times - personally and collectively.

Worship/Ministry Programming Updates

High School OWL finished up and was a huge success. 65% of the students taking the course were youth from outside of our congregation. Planning is underway for a K-1 OWL class which will happen Jan- March 2024. Suds of Love is quickly becoming a highlight of the month - not only for me - but for our volunteers and the friends from our community that are making good use of the program. Each month things run more smoothly, our relationships with the Maytag staff and our neighbors deepen and we are dreaming big dreams about how to make this program sustainable and even more impactful in the long term. **Here are some statistics highlighting the impact of the Suds of Love events in our community:**

- Number of Attendees: 136 adults & 45 children, representing a total of 62 households.**
- Loads of Laundry Completed: 285 total loads**

Having the choir back in action has been wonderful and it is so cool to see college students who sing with the choir on choir days attending worship on other Sundays as well. Jingle Bell Holiday which took place on November 17th was a fun, annual collaboration between the Grinnell UCC Preschool, the Grinnell Children's Choir and our church. A parents and young

professionals night out at Solera on Dec 3rd - with childcare happening here at the church. And the Christmas program which, this year, will be a service of lessons and carols.

Continuing Education Updates

My second year preaching project, focusing on, "Preaching to Recognize our Commitment to Justice: On the way to Re-imagining the Activist Roots of Grinnell United Church of Christ - Congregational for the Twenty-first Century" is underway. I preached two sermons for this year's project and December 3, 10, 17 will be a group read of An Abolitionist's Handbook: 12 Steps to Changing Yourself and the World Hardcover by Patrisse Cullors. These conversations have been rewarding and meaningful.

Plans continue for my Sabbatical and Study Leave April/May/June/July and I have recently signed on to go on UCC Pastor Led Spiritual Pilgrimage in England and Scotland next May while I am on Sabbatical. A walking pilgrimage for spiritual renewal and growth like this has been on my radar for a while now and when I found one established for and led by UCC ministers I couldn't pass it up. I am asking to board for permission/blessing to use the remainder of my "Ministry Expenses/Conference, Association and Wider Church Meetings" budget for this year and a portion of that fund for next year to help offset some of the costs I will incur for I've already had to put down a \$1000 deposit and will have an additional \$1600 plus airfare due next year. Would you allow me to use the \$415 that remains in my "Ministry Expenses/Conference, Association and Wider Church Meetings" Budget and all or a portion of the \$450 allocated for next year to help offset these costs? For clarity my call agreement says this about these funds:

Our church will reimburse you for ministry expenses up to \$450 annually. Ministry expenses include such items as journal subscriptions, hosting expenses for church guests, professional dues, vestments, and other legitimate costs incurred as a result of your service to this church.

Our church values and expects your participation in the wider church, thus we will reimburse reasonable expenses for participation in our United Church of Christ national, conference, association, and other meetings.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. This isn't the group I'm traveling with for my St. Cuthbert's Pilgrimage, but this is similar in length and style and is what the UCC led pilgrimage is based on: <https://spectrummagazine.org/news/2022/join-us-st-cuthberts-pilgrimage>

With Gratitude, Pastor Jessica