

Pastor Report: December 2020

Church life has continued to be a source of learning, personal spiritual growth and an opportunity to serve the risen Christ. I am grateful for the UMC community and ways we've grown during these present COVID times. These past 8 months of virtual worship have been an opportunity to reach out and worship with people around the world. We've welcomed one another into each other's lives and homes through pictures, videos, songs and stories, learning to know each other in new ways. The Spirit of God continues to move in our midst - I see signs of it all the time. I pray you do as well.

While virtual worship has become the norm, it takes significant time each week to plan meaningful services involving a variety of individuals, both before and during the actual Sunday morning service. Working with Ben Wideman continues to be an incredible gift. Ben's 8 hours a week involved creating videos, interfacing with various worship participants, Joel Weidner on the bulletin and whomever is scheduled to be the video sharer for a given Sunday, allowing me to be creative in crafting sermons and other aspects of our weekly service suited for online worship. Ben and I meet at least once a week to shape and plan all aspects of the worship service. We average 45-50 screens on a Sunday morning, representing over 100 individuals. COVID has allowed UMC to minister to a wider audience - an unexpected bright spot and source of joy for many.

In addition to Sunday worship we've continued to hold a Wednesday sharing and prayer time, which has fewer participants now, but continues to be a valuable way of checking in and holding one another in prayer. I also continue to offer a weekly meditation session.

Adjusting to the changing landscape of COVID changed the ways I visit and check in with others. There also has been an increase in individual counseling requested, which has varied from a couple of sessions together, to an ongoing check in to provide support. Visits have taken place on porches, while walking, around the fire pit and on Zoom. I continue to look for ways to remain connected and available with the congregation. Twice I've met for ice cream with those in Penns Valley area, and also hosted PSU grad students twice here in my backyard as well. It's been a joy sitting with this younger crowd, helping them find others of faith with whom to connect. Hopefully in the spring gatherings with both of these groups will resume. We resumed Sunday school this fall as another way to engage and learn together.

This spring, in collaboration with the meetinghouse committee, we reached out to local immigrants, transforming some of UMC's lawn into garden raised beds. 6 Guatemalan families partnered with us, and the relationship continues to grow. Hopefully they will continue to use this space in 2021 as well as finding ways to support them and nurture friendships.

I have spent quite a bit of time educating myself on the peace and justice issues of our time, brought to the forefront with the killing of George Floyd earlier this year. I continue to participate

in CCU (Campus and Community in Unity) monthly meetings and joined a weekly subgroup of policy and advocacy that works on anti-bias issues in our community.

In May the 10 month program through BackStory Preaching finished. That was a fruitful opportunity to work in groups and individually honing my preaching skills. This fall I took a 4 week course with The Bible For Normal People on the archaeology of the bible, and will begin a 6 week series through Fuller Seminary in late January on Leadership Resilience.

I continue to look for ways to engage, nurture and support our congregation, both on Sunday mornings and throughout the week. Sir Winston Churchill once said: "Never let a good crisis go to waste." With that in mind, I find myself pondering how this time of COVID will shape us and encourage us to find new, vibrant ways of being church together, and sharing the Good News with others in our community.

I pray for each of you, am grateful for each of you and welcome each of you to let me know how to continue to walk this journey of life together.

In Christ,
Kate