

Pastor's Report – August 2026

UMC family,

I want to start by first saying I recognize the privilege of being in a job that is so fulfilling and connected to my own vocational call. Not everyone gets to experience that in their daily work. You have given me a gift, and my hope is that I am able to live in to your expectations as the pastor of University Mennonite Church.

Over the first 2.5 months, with summer guest speakers still on the calendar, I've tried to use some of that non-sermon-prep time to connect one-on-one (or sometimes with a family or couple) with as many of you as possible. At this moment I count 118 folks who connect with our congregational worship in some regular way. Thus far I've met with 37 of you (not including the Wideman family members), plus another nine who no longer attend or have moved away. As we've navigated those three questions - *What brought you to UMC, and why have you stayed (or not)?, When are we at our best?, and What are your hopes for the future?* – I have been touched by the variety of responses. It is also a good demonstration of the way we try to be meaningful and connected community with each other. I hope I can continue to find ways to connect with more of you moving forward.

In these first few months I've also become more acutely aware that our church has a significant number of folks who fit one of the following categories;

- Unspoken prayer requests or concerns, too weighty to share during a service
- Ongoing health challenges that are not apparent when we meet on Sunday morning
- Navigating complicated relationship challenges with family and friends

We are also a group that includes many who desire more ways to explore their faith and study scripture. We also long for more ways to connect beyond Sunday mornings, and the informal and formal connecting points during this summer have been a lovely way to build community.

While many people I've met with have shared aspects of church that they wish were slightly different, there is a general appreciation of where we are today as a congregation.

Please keep our Leadership Team in your prayers as we continue to imagine who we are as a congregation moving forward, as we care for folks with challenges that seem insurmountable, and as I continue to discern the balance of caring for our congregation and being present beyond our building out in our community.

In peace,

- Ben Wideman