

June 2021 Council Report

The Rev. Amy Gopp, Senior Pastor

Worship and Preaching

This may be the last month of pre-recording our worship services. It doesn't seem possible that we've done so since mid-March of last year. When I think about the first time we live-streamed the service from our sanctuary—none of us knowing what we were doing—only that we had to do it and that God would guide us, I am amazed at what the Lord has been able to do through us. I am so grateful for the many lessons learned during this pandemic period as well as the opportunity to be creative, imaginative, and to experiment with visual liturgy in new ways. While a challenge and quite stressful at times, it was also incredibly rewarding! I believe it has also offered our members the opportunity to experience the Spirit in a new way—even if uncomfortable or strange.

We are 202 years old! We celebrated Founders' Day on Sunday, June 13. While the actual date of our founding is June 16, since that falls mid-week this year, the choice was made to avoid Founders' Day falling on Father's Day. Thank you to the Fellowship Ministry who distributed gifts to our founders via home deliveries. It was such a joy for me to make home visits again, now that I am fully vaccinated and most of our people are, too. I loved visiting with some of our most senior 30+year members and including them in our worship service!

After the season of Pentecost, we enter Ordinary Time on the liturgical calendar. The lectionary cycle we are now following is based on the Gospel of Mark. I have enjoyed preaching on several of Jesus' parables this month. I have been extremely grateful for all those who have volunteered to participate in worship throughout this pandemic period—recording, interpreting the readings, and uploading the videos—this is new territory for all of us and I have been so moved by everyone's willingness to jump in and make it work! Despite all the obstacles, we have managed to offer meaningful and memorable worship experiences.

Worship and the Arts

The Worship and Arts Ministry has their hands full! The entire ministry is actively engaging in new ideas for worship in these times—live-streaming, pre-recorded online, in person, and hybrid. We have entered a new era of Church! And a new era of how we worship the living God. How might we, as a congregation, open ourselves even more widely to the movement of the Holy Spirit in our midst, in these post-pandemic times? For me, this is a vital and timely question.

As of July 4, we will begin worshipping outside in our back parking lot. Corey (and other musicians substituting for Corey while he is on vacation this summer) and I will be under the awning just outside the library doors. Worship will be *very simple* this summer, given the circumstances. We recognize that people are most excited to be together—in person! I will be unable to craft a service the way I normally do, so will focus on the most important and foundational elements for our summer worship together. Please bring your own lawn chairs to worship so that you can sit outside with others if you would like. Otherwise, the service will also be broadcast through the radio and you will be able to hear the service in your cars on the radio. We are making a banner now with the radio station information for all to see from their parked cars. For those who plan to sit outside in their chairs, we ask that you park in the back of the lot to give others who would prefer to stay in their cars a front spot. We also need to be mindful of our handicapped spots and ensure that they are available for those who need them.

Julie and Felicia will set up our sound system; we have rented speakers from Woodsey's for the summer. All our AV equipment will be stored in the closet beside the library through Labor Day. Our W&A Ministry has covered all the bases for outdoor worship: parking lot attendants (2 per Sunday), sound system operators, liturgists, and worship assistants. Bulletins will be provided in pdf format in the Friday Updates. We are encouraging people to download and print them at home and bring them to worship, although there will be some printed at the church for those who don't arrive with bulletins in hand. In conversation with the Diaconate, who is responsible for the administering of sacraments, it was decided that people would also be invited to bring their own Communion elements with them on the three Sundays we will celebrate the Lord's Supper (July 4, August 1, and Sept. 5). There will be some elements available at a small table in the grassy area for those who did not bring their elements with them; the Deacons will staff this table along with the Worship Assistant. There will be no offering plates passed either but receptacles in which to place your offerings on the table with Communion.

Worship and Arts also submitted the first grant for external funding from the Living Water Association for a Technology Grant. We received the wonderful news that we have been awarded with a \$10,000 grant! This is one of the largest grants awarded! We received the check this past week. Praise be to God from whom all blessings flow!

Mental Health Ministry/W.I.S.E. Process

Our WISE process has been a beautiful journey! The WISE Team has now crafted a DRAFT covenant which will be shared with the Council for your blessing. Our next step is to meet with small groups from the congregation to receive their input on the draft covenant.

We have also been invited to join the Advocacy Committee of the Mental Health and Recovery Board of Portage County. At our next WISE team meeting, we will discuss who may be willing to serve on that committee. Our youth are also planning another event with our local NAMI Chapter this fall.

Stewardship and New Funding Streams

I encourage all of us to brainstorm and reflect on financial stewardship and generosity in new ways—moving us beyond the offering plate. As many of you are already aware, relying solely on the offerings placed in the offering plate, or online, or as a check in an envelope mailed to the church, will be enhanced by our intentional efforts to find other revenue streams. It is a new day, Church! And it is exciting! This is an opportunity for us to get creative, to do some research, apply for grants and other sources of funding, as well as look more strategically at our assets. How might we make better use of our building, for example?

I cannot encourage you, as lay leaders serving on Council, strongly enough—please commit to this new way of thinking and “being the church” in these times. We can be proactive as we make a slow return to in person worship and activities. Our congregation will look different! Membership will no longer be the only way people relate to our congregation. There will be many who worship online or participate in an outreach project or social justice initiative. But they may not be “members” in the traditional sense, meaning those who officially “join” the church and who tithe or pledge. We have a wonderful chance to begin thinking about how we might ensure the future of our THRIVING church in so many ways by also thinking outside the box on how we will fund our critical mission.

We can do this! I am excited to help move us forward as a true community center--reaching out from our congregation to our wider community. In a post-pandemic context, we can no longer

count on traditional forms of church giving. But we can count on the God who never stops giving!

Pastoral and Spiritual Care

I praise God that I am once again able to make in person pastoral calls! Hallelujah! John Bertsch has also indicated to me that he is still willing to do some calls for the church. If there is anyone in particular need at this time, please let me know so that I am aware. I am not always aware of all the needs at any given time and certainly want to reach out personally or ask John or a Deacon to do so if I'm not able. Thank you so much!

Allow me also to reiterate the importance of taking care of ourselves in this liminal period. We are all so eager to return to a more normal way of moving through the world, and yet the pandemic is not over. And we all know the toll COVID-19 has taken on our mental health. None of us have gone unaffected by this traumatic period. Our youth are struggling; our elderly are lonely and confused; our parents of young families are doing their best to keep it all together; our staff are tired, a bit weary, and deserving of a break after what has been a tremendously difficult time. I ask all of you to continue to practice good self-care and to hold one another tenderly. Let us hold spaces of grace for ourselves and each other.

Wider Church Engagement

The Rev. Nayiri Karjian, our Living Water Association General Minister, held her first meeting with our Lead Team on Reimagining Governance and Ministry. Our work is now underway as we explore how we as Kent UCC will live into this new era of organizing ourselves and being the church. THANK YOU, Council, for taking this leap of faith! Our second meeting is next week. After that, please expect to hear more about this process and your involvement.

I continue to serve on the Living Water Association Commission on the Ministry and the Discernment Working Group (DWG). These meetings are every other week on Thursdays. While a big commitment, it is a wonderful use of my gifts and skills and I am truly honored to serve the wider church in this capacity.

2021 Objectives

As a reminder, I have set my intentions on five key objectives, aligned with our Strategic Plan:

1. **Spiritual development and growth** (Caring for Our Congregation and Faith Formation and Spiritual Growth mission priorities; Spiritual Care of Our Members and Expand Bible Study Opportunities ministries)
2. **Keeping us all connected** (Caring for Our Congregation mission priority; Small Groups ministry)
3. **Becoming a WISE congregation** (Community Outreach and Care mission priority; Mental Health and Addiction Recovery ministry)
4. **Becoming an Anti-Racist congregation** (Social Justice and Global Engagement mission priority; Racial Justice and Reconciliation ministry)
5. **Participatory, elicitive and visionary leadership and governance** (living fully into our mission and claiming our vision to “Be the Church” in beloved community)

Future Dates

July 5 – 4th of July observed for staff, church office closed

August 10 – 19 – Spiritual Guidance Program – Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation (on Zoom)

August 21 – 29 – Chautauqua (in person!)

We are guided and inspired by our congregational vision of a beloved community where everyone is celebrated just as God made us, and where all of creation flourishes in the compassion, healing, justice and love of Christ. Our mission is to love and transform lives by the grace and guidance of Jesus Christ as we do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with God. Let us commit fully to our mission and vision.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Amy Gopp