

August 2021 Council Report The Rev. Amy Gopp, Senior Pastor

Worship and Preaching

Our summer worship experience has been experimental. As of July 4, we began worshipping outside in our back parking lot. Worship has been *very simple* this summer, given the circumstances. I recognize that many people are most excited just to be together—in person! There are still some who are more comfortable worshipping at home due to the pandemic. For this reason, we have provided many ways to worship. People have brought their own lawn chairs, others have enjoyed the broadcast through their car radios, and still others have worshiped at home thanks to our live-stream on the Kent UCC Video YouTube page.

I preached a sermon series on our mission statement in August. *“Enlivened by the grace of Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, Kent United Church of Christ does justice, embraces faithful love, and walks humbly with our God to serve and transform lives, our community and the world.”* This mission statement comes directly from the 6th chapter of Micah, verses 6 – 8: “...what does the LORD require of you, but to do justice, to embrace faithful love, and to walk humbly with your God?” Over the course of three Sundays, I preached on each pillar of what the Lord requires of us. I began with justice, then unpacked faithful love, and ended with what it means to walk humbly with God. The series was very well received! It is always fun for me to work with the same scripture passage over a few weeks—something I have done before during the summer months. It is also helpful to do a deeper dive bible study so we can all understand the text more fully. My hope is that our mission statement becomes more and more familiar until it really becomes our own. As we engage in our Reimagining Governance and Ministry process, this helps lay the groundwork for living into a new way of being church.

Worship and the Arts

HUGE thanks to our Worship and Arts Ministry! They have been busy this summer. 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 pandemic times? For me, this is a vital and timely question.

Our Worship Assistants have been key players in helping to ensure a smooth service. It has worked well to receive the offerings in the container on the small side table. The prayers of the people has also proved to be a meaningful ritual.

In consultation with the Deacons, we will not have a service of Holy Communion on September 5 but will do so on September 12 (with the hopes that we will be worshipping in the sanctuary that morning).

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

Our WISE Team has crafted a DRAFT covenant. It was shared with the Council. There have been several opportunities this summer to share it with small groups after worship. It is very important that we receive input and feedback from the congregation on the draft covenant. Please encourage people to attend these small group conversations or to offer us their feedback.

Social Justice

I spent several hours with Dr. Geraldine Nelson of the Portage County NAACP. I showed her the office space in the Sunday School wing that we originally intended for them. It is too small, however, and would have entailed moving all the historical documents and archives to another location. I was uncomfortable doing so. The room adjacent to 110, Room 112, was cleaned out and the NAACP will now have their office there. I am deeply grateful to the Rummage Sale committee volunteers who moved the rummage that was in that space as well as to the Property Ministry for getting the office space ready for the NAACP later this fall.

I am also pleased that a small group from the Social Justice Committee is meeting to write a grant application for a Prophetic Engagement Grant from the LWA. The grant will be to help fund our deepening partnership with the NAACP and our anti-racism work.

Outreach Ministry

The Birdie Bag distributions for the Curtis Foundation did not go well. I know the Outreach Ministry is looking at this and will discern how best to move forward. I also had concerns about what was in the bags themselves.

Big thanks for bringing out the shopping cart each Sunday to collect canned goods and school supplies for Kent Social Services.

Faith Formation

Vacation Bible School was planned for outside this year. In Kim's absence, I intended to attend the entire event. Unfortunately, due to inclement weather, we could only have two evenings of VBS. I believe it was a meaningful experience for the children those evenings. I was glad that we again partnered with First Christian Church this year.

Pastoral and Spiritual Care

I officiated a graveside service for Franklin Smith on July 31, as well as a memorial service in our Chapel. It was a small service with family coming from out of town.

I was able to spend an entire morning with Ray and Doris Aeschliman at the beginning of August. As always, it was a marvelous visit. I am especially grateful for that time now since learning of Ray's passing this past week. Doris will need our love and support.

I have made several other visits to those who are comfortable with me doing so. Others are still more comfortable with a phone call.

There are several funerals that have been put "on hold" due to COVID.

COVID-19 has taken a toll on our mental health. We are all still living in unsettled times. None of us have gone unaffected by this traumatic period. Let us hold spaces of grace for ourselves and each other.

Personnel

The staff evaluations were conducted this month, with the exception of Kim's and Heather's. Kim will have her review when she returns from parental leave and Heather will be evaluated after both Sally and I return from vacation. We have gotten into a nice rhythm with our annual review process. I am deeply grateful to my evaluation team for our rich and fruitful conversation.

Wider Church Engagement

The Rev. Nayiri Karjian, our Living Water Association General Minister, continues to meet with our Lead Team on Reimagining Governance and Ministry. Our work is now well underway as we explore how we as Kent UCC will live into this new era of organizing ourselves and being the church. Nayiri will be joining us for worship and a congregational presentation on World Communion Sunday in October.

I continue to serve on the 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)

Continuing Education

Thank you for your support of my participation in the spiritual guidance offerings of the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation. They feed my soul and give me space for my own spiritual growth so that I can better accompany all of you.

“The flame of life burns brighter when touched by the breath of the Spirit. The more we are open to the presence of the sacred in our lives, the more we find energy to do those things we only now imagine. Inspiration is not just an idea, but a movement, a tipping point towards creativity. It is what we believe opens our hearts and minds to discover new ways to share our lives with others. Spirituality is an exchange. Through it we receive the strength of the Spirit so that we may give our love more deeply. Burn bright in faith today, for with the Spirit all things are possible.” ~from *Ladder to the Light* by Steven Charleston

Future Dates

August 21 – 29 – Chautauqua Institution (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