

Greetings Kent UCC Friends!

When we first discussed a time capsule, it was in conjunction with the Kent United Church of Christ's Bicentennial anniversary. It was our intent to wrap up our year-long celebration which began on Founders Day June 2019, by burying a time capsule in June, 2020. In it, we would include mementos from our 200th birthday.

Midway through our celebration – in the first few months of 2020 – there were reports of a newly identified virus in China. It was compared to the flu. Some reports said the flu was worse.

Our Bicentennial celebration continued with our Kent UCC Story Corps Lab in which members were invited to record their own story of their Faith Journey. We enjoyed a Mardi Gras party and concert, and had the opportunity to visit the Islamic Society of Akron as a part of our Interfaith focus for the spring.

Meanwhile, there was increasing coverage regarding this novel Corona virus.

On March 7, 2020, we hosted The Cleveland Chamber Choir along with Kent's Theodore Roosevelt High School ChoralWorks in "We March On! Music of Social Justice," commemorating the 50th anniversary of the tragic events of May 4, 1970 on the campus of Kent State.

It was a standing-room only event.

One week later, on Sunday, March 15, as Corona virus infections began to sweep the globe; we held our last in-person worship service for 15 months. Even at that, only a handful of members attended because we had urged the congregation to remain safely at home due to the spread of the virus. We would live-stream the service, too.

Nearly everything shut down in Ohio on Monday, March 16. That health order extended through the end of March, then was extended until May 1 and, then extended again through May 31. The goal: flatten the curve and slow the spread. If we did not self-isolate, our hospitals would be overwhelmed with cases of what was now called COVID-19.

As it turned out, we would not worship together again in person until Sunday, July 4, 2021.

Under the tremendous leadership and spiritual guidance of our Minister, Pastor Amy Gopp, and the support of church staff and a number of volunteers, we did a remarkable job pivoting to a virtual worship experience that was both creative and meaningful. Services could be viewed via our YouTube channel, on Facebook and through our website.

A Kent UCC COVID-19 Advisory Team was formed to monitor the pandemic, research and investigate options. The team consisted of members involved in the healthcare industry, as well as representation from the Property/Safety, Worship & Arts and Education ministries. They provided important guidance as Council made decisions regarding all aspects of church life.

Our staff worked primarily from home and the building was closed for normal operations. Only small groups of ten or less were permitted for weddings or funerals. Otherwise, Ministry and committee meetings, as well as social events were scheduled and held on Zoom. Weather permitting, groups were able to meet outdoors as long as they masked, brought their own chairs and maintained social distance.

Yet, the care for each other and those in our community continued.

Our third-Sunday community meal was prepared to-go for pick-up and delivery. An Apostle's build through Habitat for Humanity was completed. Bread was baked and delivered to each member's home for communion. Advent activities and Lenten materials were also personally delivered. A front-porch Easter egg hunt was held. A variety of spiritual and educational opportunities was offered for all ages.

And, nearly a year after the initial shut-down, a COVID 19 vaccine was finally approved and available for adults. Church members helped each other schedule and get to their appointments. Currently, vaccines are approved for those 12 and older. We eagerly await a vaccine for children.

It has been amazing to witness the ongoing work of our church in spite of the global pandemic. The Congregation's response has been thoughtful and heartwarming. So, you'll find more than just mementos from an almost year-long birthday party in this time capsule. You'll find evidence of perseverance, creativity, and most importantly, God's Grace.

And now, we remain cautiously optimistic. On this day, September 12, 2021, we are enjoying a new-take on our traditional "Kick-off" Sunday. We will wear masks, and endeavor to maintain social distance, as we return to worship together inside our church. Instead of a meal, we'll keep it simple and enjoy a long-overdue coffee social time, - outside if possible as it's safer for everyone that way.

And we'll rejoice in the shared knowledge that God is Good.

Grace and Mercy to You,

Jaime B. Baughman
Bicentennial Celebration Chair
2020 Moderator