

Douglas Congregational United Church of Christ

Pastor's Report: April 21, 2020

Dear Church Council:

This is my first Pastor's Report since returning back to work from my sabbatical, and I want to begin by expressing my gratitude to all of you for your leadership while I was away, especially these last few weeks. Thanks to your wise guidance, we were one of the very first churches who made the decision to close our church building due to coronavirus. Thank you for guiding us so well during this unprecedented crisis. This is not exactly the way I envisioned returning from my sabbatical, but I am grateful to be home and back at work.

From all accounts, it seems as if the sabbatical was a great success. Our attendance remained strong. The average Sunday attendance during the time I was away was 97 people. I am grateful to our amazing congregation for their continued support; to all the worship leaders and speakers; and to our Pastoral Relations Committee for preparing us so well.

I am also thankful to Julie Ridl for her excellent work in taking over the administrative duties while I was away, and I am grateful that she will be staying on at least until the end of our fiscal year. Her technical and social media skills are extremely needed during this time when we are unable to safely gather together.

Our church building may be closed at this time, but our church remains open for service. I am so proud of our church members for checking in with one another, helping one another, and staying home and safe for one another. Our Congregational Care Team continues to meet people's needs, and our Stephen Ministers continue to meet with their care receivers over the phone each week. I have been maintaining "office hours" over the phone and have been doing my best to make sure everyone is feeling cared for and connected.

We also staying connected as a congregation via weekly "Coffee Hour" sessions on Zoom each Sunday following our online worship service. More than 100 people from our congregation have taken part in these weekly online "Friendship Hall" gatherings, staying connected during this time apart.

Our online Sunday worship videos have been so extremely well received. More than 1,000 viewers have been tuning in each week! We've even had people watching and commenting from Germany, New Zealand, and the UK! This is absolutely extraordinary for small church like ours.

I am grateful to our Director of Music, Peter Black, for making worship music videos from his home each week, and I am thankful to our special musicians and readers who are also contributing to our worship services each week via videos from their homes. I am also grateful to my husband, Gregg Smith, who is helping me film, edit, and upload the videos each week. It's a lot of work, but I am grateful we have the technology and equipment.

Every Tuesday, I have been taking part in a UCC Grand West Association Pastors Meeting via Zoom. Hearing the struggles so many other churches are having right now, I am so very grateful that we made the wise decision a few years ago to upgrade our website, lighting, sound, and video equipment, as well as establish a successful YouTube channel, social media presence, and online giving program. Many churches are scrambling to get these things up-and-running right now, so we are "ahead of the curve" and very blessed in so many ways.

The most important thing right now is that our church members are all home, safe, and healthy. We will get through this together. Please know how grateful I am for your leadership and guidance.

Pastor Sal

Rev. Salvatore Sapienza