

March 2021 Council Report

The Rev. Amy Gopp, Senior Pastor

Worship and Preaching

We are well into our Lenten journey, “Holy Vessels: A Lenten Season of Recovery” focusing on healing and wholeness. In this Lenten spiritual season of recovery for our physical, communal, mental, intellectual, and environmental health, we have explored the healing stories of Jesus in the Gospel according to Matthew. In every single story, those needing healing approach Jesus, in trust and faith, seeking his healing touch. After a year like no other in our lives, we, too, can seek Jesus’ healing touch. The stories of this Lenten season teach us of divine solidarity with human suffering and remind us that we can begin a journey toward making something beautiful from that which is seemingly broken. I hope and pray that this Lenten season has been a meaningful liturgical and spiritual journey.

There is a plethora of devotional materials for the entire congregation to engage with, including our Lenten daily devotionals, prayer stations, blessing vessels, the Kintsugi (Japanese art) project, and the Holy Saturday prayer vigil. Lent-at-home bags were delivered to all Kent UCC households with our ritual objects—beach glass, craft wire, and peppermint oil—which have been used each Sunday in Lent and at your prayer stations. Thanks to our Worship and the Arts Ministry, the Mental Health Ministry, and our Fellowship Ministry for delivering these Lenten bags. Special thanks to Glenn Hanniford for putting the Lent kits together and for coordinating the deliveries; thanks to Jackie Peck for supplying the essential oils that were in each bag; Julie and Jimmy Wallace for creating our Kintsugi project outside the church office doors and for the “shards” in the bags; to Karen Carmany and Nancy Bubenzer for helping to create the blessing vessel models for our Stewardship component this Lent; and to Christian Education for working with our children to create the Last Supper reenactment for Maundy Thursday. I am so pleased with how many ministries and committees are a part of our Lenten journey in a more intentional and participatory way.

Palms will be available for the congregation to pick up this week. Instead of spreading them on the lawn as we did last year, Worship & Arts Ministry members will display them in large buckets outside our office doors, next to the Kintsugi project, for people to come and take. We encourage all of you to participate in our Kintsugi project! Palm Sunday will feature a liturgical dance with Rhuna Wall, thanks to her and Jaime Baughman. Our Maundy Thursday worship service is called “The Upper Zoom” and will be led by our confirmands, children and youth. Pastor Kim will facilitate the crafting of this particular service which will be held in “real time” on Zoom at 7pm. I encourage everyone to attend. Our Good Friday service is a collaborative one planned and produced with other churches in our UCC Living Water Association. We will once again hold a Holy Saturday prayer vigil between Good Friday and Easter morning and have already sent out the sign-up genius online for people to choose when they will pray. Our hand bell choir, children’s worship team, and chancel choir will participate in worship on Easter Sunday! We will also have other instrumentalists (brass) participating, as we normally do on Easter morning.

Pastoral and Spiritual Care

One of my primary and constant concerns is the spiritual health and wellbeing of our congregation. As I reported to Council last month, it is one of my top priorities (it always is as senior pastor) but especially so during this time of pandemic. The needs are different now. I continue to pray for God’s guidance as I do my best to offer spiritual care, support, and sustenance to our church family.

I have had to do so in new and creative ways, as you know. While imperfect, I trust that the Holy Spirit is moving among us in powerful ways—I have witnessed this—and continue to trust in that comforting and unifying Spirit even though we are not yet able to be together in physically. My hope is that during this time of pandemic, people are open to new spiritual practices that will support and sustain them.

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

As we live into this next phase of the pandemic, when many have been vaccinated but by no means everyone quite yet, we will have new needs and adaptations before us. I continue to be deeply concerned about the mental health crisis that has arisen during this pandemic and the increasingly complex mental health needs we now must confront. Becoming a W.I.S.E. congregation could not be more important, timely, or relevant than it is now.

And I am absolutely thrilled with our progress! Our Mental Health Ministry is moving forward with the W.I.S.E. process to become a more wise, inclusive, supportive, and engaged church for those with mental illness and addiction and their families and friends. We commissioned our W.I.S.E. team on January 31 during worship and the team has been meeting the first Monday of every month. What a thrill to have two youth on our team and one young adult! Huge thanks to the team for their participation in our worship service focusing on mental health. Some of them shared very personal stories; they were very well received by all. Most importantly, the congregation has an even deeper sense of urgency now to become “WISE” for our wider community.

The W.I.S.E. team will soon be working on a covenant that will eventually be presented to the congregation for support. Mental Health Sunday is in May.

Faith Formation—Adult Education

I have been teaching an adult education series on Sunday mornings entitled “Mindful Silence” based on the book of the same title. This series focuses on Christian contemplative practices and prayer and is a wonderful complement to our Lenten season of recovery and healing. We have consistently had over 20 participants in the class. It is my great JOY and privilege to introduce contemplative practices to our congregation and facilitate this experience of spiritual exploration and growth.

Throughout Lent, we will also have our usual Wednesday evening programs, although of course not in person this year. Kim has been facilitating this weekly bible study looking more closely at the healing stories from the Gospel according to Matthew.

Communications

The Marketing and Communications Committee has been helping me track our website since we unrolled the new site last year. Feedback and analysis of the user experience led us to make some necessary edits to kentucc.org. I met with our designer from Each + Every, Gabe Schut, who helps us maintain the site when needed. He made significant changes last week, especially on our Donate page (linking directly to the Engage giving portal), adding a button to our Member Directory, and a password-protected Council page. Our worship services are also easier to find—without having to go to our YouTube page or Facebook. I also asked him to include more specific and visible language and graphics regarding our ONA, A2A, and eventually our WISE status as a UCC congregation.

Please offer any feedback on our website and other communication tools! I continue to write our Friday Updates each week and have received very positive feedback; I hope they are helpful in

keeping everyone informed and prepared for worship, weekly events and ministry activities. I am also aware of some frustration in getting used to our Engage system. Please let me or Kelley Gifford, Chair of Marketing and Communications Committee, Leah, or Heather know if you have any concerns, questions, or ideas for improvement.

I am also grateful to Terri Silver for joining our Marketing and Communications team as she takes on the new role of editor of the Messenger. We are exploring new formats and approaches to the monthly newsletter. Stay tuned!

Wider Church Engagement

I attended a Health Practices ministry workshop organized by LWA on March 6. The topic was engaging in “difficult conversations in anxious times” and led by a spiritual director and leadership coach. It was a wonderful workshop and well worth my Saturday!

I continue to serve on the Living Water Association Commission on the Ministry and the Discernment Working Group. 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.

The National UCC Offices, under the direction of Traci Blackmon of Justice and Local Church Ministries, have asked me to help facilitate the UCC Women’s Table. We meet quarterly. This is an important group as there is no longer a women’s desk or women’s ministry position on the national staff.

2021 Objectives

As we live into this year of ongoing pandemic, political strife, cultural shifts, and racial inequities, 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” and beloved community)

I look forward to Rev. Nayiri Karjian’s visit with the Council on Monday, March 22, and to debriefing the meeting with all of you on March 23.

Future Dates

April 4 - Easter Sunday (Diaconate will be delivering Communion to Kent UCC households, with the help of the Men Baking Bread group who will provide the hot cross buns!)

April 5 - Easter Monday - church office is officially closed and staff have the day off; WISE Team meets that evening

April 10 - "Name that Tune" online event organized by the Hospitality and Membership Committee

April 11 - Heartland Conference of the UCC (Ohio Conference) providing worship

April 12 - Social Justice and Advocacy Committee meets with Rev. Dr. Velda Love, Racial Justice Minister of the United Church of Christ national offices

April 25 - Care for Creation Sunday in honor of Earth Day

May 2 - Pastor Kim preaching; Pastor Amy off

June 13 - Founders' Day

We are guided and inspired by a vision of a beloved community where everyone is celebrated just as God made them, 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, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. What we have to offer is what people most need, especially now as so many experience loneliness and social isolation, fear and anxiety, grief and longing for what they have either lost or fear losing, and a sense of great uncertainty and even terror about the future. Let us commit fully to our mission and vision.

Thank you for your ministry and your witness!

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Amy Gopp