

The Reverend's Ruminations

What a difference a year (or two or more) makes!?! As I sat down to write this month's "Ruminations," Ellen had just shared a Facebook memory picture of much younger Emma and Cameron holding a "Welcome home, Dad" sign as I arrived for a mid-tour leave from Afghanistan near the end of June in 2010. That got me reminiscing (and looking back with the help of my Google calendar) over Julys-gone-by, where I noticed some fairly significant milestones in the years since:

In July of 2016, I had already done two long-distance Skype interviews with the First Congregational UCC pastoral search committee, and was wrapping up operations in Kuwait with the 682nd Engineer Battalion. The following month would bring a final interview in Fairmont and an offer to become your settled pastor later in the fall. July of 2017 and 2018 were rather "normal," with a little bit of family vacation as well as involvement in the Blue Earth Town & Country Players' musicals. In July of 2019 I had just returned from a short-notice Army Chaplain class at Fort Jackson, SC and was preparing to ride the Habitat 500 with Eric Johnson. Ironically, by July of 2020 I swore into the Air National Guard--and we were still planning how and when we might resume in-person worship after months of COVID restrictions. Now here in July of 2021, I have been back from Air Force Chaplain training for just over a month, and worship services are *finally* back to a mostly "normal" in-person format. As they say, nothing is constant but CHANGE!

Speaking of change, after a couple summers without enough children to make Vacation Bible School possible, we have just concluded a successful three-day run of evening VBS with over a dozen kids in attendance at its peak. This is thanks to a greatly-increased enthusiasm for Sunday School and VBS by our energetic Christian Education Board, who deserve our thanks—and probably a bit of a summer break themselves! If you have children, grandchildren, nieces/nephews, or even neighbors who are school age, I hope you'll encourage them to regularly attend Sunday School when it resumes in September. Our children are the future of First Congregational United Church of Christ, so please keep encouraging their attendance and involvement!

IF our country and state continue to see improved vaccination rates, I hope that other activities of the church can resume or shift back toward "normal" (whether that's the "old normal" or a "new normal"). By August or September, it's likely that we'll once again be able to host our Free Community Meal indoors, and perhaps the choir will be able to resume singing as well. This all remains to be seen, and really is a "team" effort of both congregation and community, so continue to pray—for health, common sense, and a spirit of cooperation throughout the world.

As the writer of Ecclesiastes reminds us, *"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven... I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil. I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has done this, so that all should stand in awe before him"* (3:1, 12-14, NRSV). I pray that you and yours will stay cool in the weeks ahead, and find moments of summer relaxation that recharge your physical and spiritual batteries for the seasons ahead.

*Yours in Christ's service,
Rev. Cory Germain*