

The Reverend's Ruminations - September 2020

Believe it or not, “summer” as we know it in Minnesota is nearly gone! Sure, there will still be plenty of warm—even hot—days in September, but even with a fairly late Labor Day, it somehow seems like summer never quite reached its full potential. Sure, we’ve had a couple good ol’ fashioned heat waves to remind us of the season; but with the ongoing pandemic, so many of the fun annual summertime events we know and love have had to be cancelled—some for the first time in decades.

As many of you know, I’m again participating in the Habitat 500 bicycle ride to raise money for Habitat for Humanity. Like many other activities, the ride organizers had to re-imagine their event—in this case a multi-day tour where participants ordinarily eat meals shoulder-to-shoulder and sleep in close proximity to one another on school gymnasium floors. The solution became a “virtual” Habitat 500, where riders each cover 500 miles at their own pace closer to home. In some ways this makes the miles easier, but the challenge is still daunting—and the hard part is that there aren’t hundreds of other bicyclists sharing the joys and struggles of the open road. As I write this in the last week of August, I am over halfway to my 500-mile goal, but hopefully September will bring some milder weather in which to cross the virtual finish line. Thank you very much to all who donated toward my ride—and more specifically toward Habitat for Humanity of Martin and Faribault Counties. Through your support there is great work being done here in Fairmont and throughout Southern MN!!

Of course, the topic of conversation among church members throughout the country continues to be whether or not they have resumed in-person worship services. The answer to that at First Congregational United Church of Christ is finally, “YES.” This is now an option for those who feel comfortable being in a congregational setting, but it is not the only option. We have had very good “attendance” by alternate means throughout the COVID-19 restrictions, so we plan for those online and cable options to continue and even improve. In fact, new online streaming hardware/software has recently been added to our existing HD camera system that will soon allow even our Facebook Live viewers to experience a much better quality picture and sound than the cellphone video format that Ellen has done such a good and faithful job sharing. I couldn’t have kept services going without her!

Nothing is constant but change, and despite (or because of) our coronavirus separation this spring and summer, other changes are also happening at First Congregational UCC. MRCI (Managed Resource Connections, Inc.) has provided custodial services to our church for a number of years, as well as valuable training and employment for many community members with disabilities. But the restrictions brought on by the pandemic, and the resulting economic impacts, have caused a restructuring of MRCI’s operations and a closure of their Fairmont facility. We muddled through for several months without much vacuuming, mopping, or dusting since no one was in the church building, but now we have hired the cleaning services of Jill Houge to again keep the building in tip-top shape. If you happen to stop by during the week, greet Jill—if you can catch up with her!

Our Assistant Treasurer of several years, Jodi Kuhlert, has also resigned to have more time to spend with her grandchildren and soon-to-be-retired husband. While Jodi’s work behind the scenes is something many probably take for granted, without her efficiency and attention to detail, the church’s bills would be a mess. We owe her a big THANK YOU! One of the joys of a small town is that family connections are everywhere, and we are blessed to announce that Jodi’s daughter, Dara Bliesmer, has agreed to step into the Assistant Treasurer position. Dara has subbed for her mom in the past, and brings an accounting and business background that is sure to make the transition seamless. Welcome Dara!

Updates and changes are also underway in our Christian Education program—including some great refreshing of the upstairs classrooms by our hardworking CE Board members—so stay tuned here in the newsletter and in upcoming email, and be sure to “like” our new Sunday School Facebook page:

@FirstCongoUCCSundaySchool

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Cory Germain