

The Reverend's Ruminations

As I sit down to write this, I am recalling the trip I made home from a MN Valleys Presbytery meeting in Willmar yesterday evening through a steady rain, a temp only barely approaching 50 degrees, and winds gusting over 45 m.p.h. It is nearing the end of May, isn't it?!? Let us pray that June will finally usher in spring—and even summer—temperatures! On a more serious note, my most fervent prayers right now are for our farmers near and far, that they might get crops planted safely and in time for a good growing season. Believe it or not, my very un-scientific observation during a couple weeks' travels around Okoboji, Fairmont, Blue Earth, and all the way up to Willmar is that Faribault, Martin, and southern Watonwan Counties are the only ones with any crops poking through the soil as of yet. I know that's not saying much considering the date, but it's something for which we in this area can be thankful.

May found us celebrating the addition of three new confirmands to our ranks, recognizing the milestone of high school and college graduation for four other young church members, and of course giving thanks to our dedicated Sunday school and confirmation teachers for their work in training our next generation of Christian adults. Proverbs 22:6 reminds us: *"Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray."* (NRSV) As I like to repeat at each confirmation service, "confirmation is not graduation"—by which I mean that it is not a step away from church involvement, but quite the opposite: it is the next step toward even more involvement in the life of the congregation. Likewise, although graduation does signify the completion of an educational milestone, it needn't mean a departure from church life. Yes, our budding college students will be away from Fairmont much of the upcoming years, but I challenge them to find a campus ministry or local church in which to find spiritual nourishment as they stretch their wings away from parents who may have "ensured" that they attended Sunday school and worship on a regular basis.

I find it hard to believe that I am not writing such words of encouragement to a generalized group of graduates, but this year to my own daughter as well. Where have the years gone since she cooed softly in a baby seat on the floor of the choir loft during chapel services in Mannheim, Germany? Or started Sunday school, kindergarten, confirmation, or high school? I know I'm not the first one to ponder these questions, and I certainly won't be the last! The years pass all too swiftly, and we are left to marvel at how God has blessed us with such an amazing gift. Praying for Emma and all our graduates, I echo the words of Joshua 1:9, *"...Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."* (NRSV) New adventures await all of our graduates, but the faith learned through their family and their church will surely guide them all the days of their lives.

Speaking of faith formation, as was recently highlighted during worship announcements, there are now scholarships available to help our congregation's youth take part in a summer church camp experience. Whether it's through Pilgrim Point (ministering this year at Carleton College and Luther Crest Camp after their dining hall fire), Lakeshore Center at Okoboji (where Emma will be a counselor), Prairie River Youth for Christ Camp near Bricelyn, or other locations, if your child or grandchild has never been to church camp, I hope you'll encourage them to attend. As an extension of what we teach in church, they are a great environment of Christian learning and growth for kids of all ages. Contact one of our Christian Education Board members or myself if you need camp information.

As you line up your family's getaways for the summer, I hope you include First Congregational UCC in your plans. If you are going to be out of town, please make a point to continue your regular financial gifts toward the life of the church. Tithing and offering numbers often suffer alongside church attendance during the summer months, which can make it hard to keep up with our regular operating expenses. We'll switch to our 9:30am summer schedule on June 2 so that you can come to worship God and still have most of Sunday available for additional summer activities. I plan to offer a few fun and informal Sunday morning worship opportunities, so stay tuned to our website or Facebook page and don't miss out!

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Cory Germain