

JANUARY MINISTER'S REPORT

I feel like I should write a whole bunch about the decision to temporarily return to in-person worship, how strangely familiar it felt to be back at my kitchen table leading worship, how much I miss gathering in person, how glad I was to say hello to folks who are mostly on Zoom...but I am out of words.

I recently purchased a book by church management guru Susan Beaumont. It's title? *How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're Going: Leading in a Liminal Season*. And that just about sums it up. Once I've read it and have all the answers (which of course hasn't happened yet!), I'll let you know. 😊

STAFF SAFETY CONCERNS: Last Monday, January 10, our administrator Jamie Thompson received a disturbing telephone call from someone who said they were armed and threatening violence. In accordance with our emergency preparedness plan, Jamie pulled the panic alarm at her desk, which triggered ADT to notify police of an immediate threat at our facility. While in this instance the threat turned out not to be immediate (the caller was not in the area) it was deeply frightening for Jamie, and brought to light a few elements of building security:

- There was some uncertainty that the panic alarm had triggered a call to the police for immediate aid. I called ADT and confirmed that the device has worked properly, and ADT immediately notified local law enforcement.
 - In the course of doing some research, I discovered that Church Mutual also offers a similar device, at no charge with the installation of another Church Mutual product—the CM Sensor, a 24/7 Temperature and Water Alert System. Should we look into this as a possible lower-cost way to meet this need?
- Jamie, Gay Lynn and I have all discussed our plan of action if another incident occurs, something we had never thought out completely before. In general, the plan after pulling the panic alarm would be to go to the second floor if it was safe to do so. From the second floor, there are two routes of exit. Other options for exit include the front of the sanctuary and the Spirit Play classroom. I'm looking for a good safety audit with help from the UU Trauma Response Ministry.
 - Jamie realized during the event on Jan. 10 that there was no phone on the second floor of the building. She has purchased a new phone system with additional receivers, allowing two receivers to be placed upstairs for better access to a telephone for security.
- Sid came up the next day and got the outside cameras working again. She also helped staff to log in to the app needed to view the camera feeds from our phones.
- Although the outside cameras add security, they do not provide a way to check and see if anyone is in the building. Gay Lynn and Connie have a wireless security system with several cameras that they are not using, and we'd like permission to install it in the church, with cameras on the upstairs and downstairs hallways and possibly the front entrance. If it is a good permanent fit, we would need to purchase our own equipment, but this would give us a chance to try it out.

The police received reports of a similar nature from six churches in the Woodlands, and further investigation indicates that other churches in Texas cities may have been targeted. That investigation is ongoing. For the time being, Jamie is working offsite during hours she would be working alone at the church, and she, Gay Lynn and I are coordinating our schedules accordingly.

ZOOM ATTENDANCE POLL RESULTS

Note: These results are from congregants attending worship via Zoom on two recent Sundays. When we did the poll for the second time, I asked that people who had taken it before not take it again, to minimize duplicates that might skew the data.

Do you attend worship exclusively online at this time?

| Response Options | Dec. 19 poll (28 responses) | Jan. 2 Poll (14 responses) | Total (42 responses) |
|---|-----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|
| Yes, I only attend worship online right now. | 12 | 7 | 19 (45.3%) |
| I attend worship in person as well as online. | 16 | 7 | 23 (54.7%) |

What are the primary factors that influence your choice to attend worship online?

| Response Options | Dec. 19 poll (28 responses) | Jan. 2 Poll (14 responses) | Total (42 responses) |
|--|-----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|
| Concerns about COVID-19 transmission and pandemic safety factors. | 9 | 5 | 14 (33.3%) |
| It depends on my family's/ children's schedule or other commitments. | 6 | 5 | 11 (26%) |
| I've just gotten out of the habit. | 7 | 2 | 9 (21%) |
| I don't like the sign-up process/committing to attend in advance. | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| I live pretty far away, and it's a long drive to make every week. | 2 | 0 | 2 (4.7 %) |
| I have more specific reasons, which I will share with Rev. Sarah. | 4 | 2 | 6 (14.3%) |

Trends: 8 out of 10 people surveyed cited one of three primary factors, and each factor indicates something different. My speculation:

- **Concerns About COVID:** These folks will return to in-person worship, in some fashion, as they feel it is safe to do so. How often they will be in person versus online remains to be seen.
- **Scheduling/Commitments:** I expect that this group will come in person some(and probably already do) but continue to attend online when needed, which is a win—they would otherwise not attend on these Sundays where their schedules prevent it.
- **Out of the Habit:** These are folks that I hope we can encourage to come back in person more often—and one at least a few instances, just recognizing that this was a factor has moved people to come back in person.

UPDATES: REV. SARAH'S PRIORITY PROJECTS

- **Membership push/ new member integration plans:** Working on reaching out to folks who've joined recently individually, in tandem with the membership team. Hoping to loop stewardship into this project as well. *Ongoing.*
- **Lay ministry and pastoral care infrastructure:** I still need to reach out to Mira and Cyndie, and start to form a pastoral care group in the fashion outlined below. The switch

back online and the decision-making process took precedence over some of my longer-term projects, such as this one. *Ongoing*

- **Spiritual Practice spring series:** Started worship series and started weekly Spiritual Practice Challenge, which will continue through the spring. Looking for ways for folks to share their experiences beyond FB and fellowship hour. Recruiting NW members to share spiritual practices with congregation. *Ongoing*

MUSINGS: LESS PREP, MORE PRESENCE

Part of exploring what church looks like now is reimagining what adult faith development looks like. How can I best support the spiritual growth and health and maturity of Northwoods members? I am imagining what this looks like, beyond the more ministry-specific parts of my role. What does adult faith development look like and how can I best spread myself out with the time I have to dedicate to this? One way I'm exploring is to support the formation of communities within the larger community. One of the ways we can connect to Northwoods is through weekly worship, but it's a connection to individuals and a shared community that turn new members into community members and leaders. The groups could form organically, as needed, and last as long as they need to. I would provide support, training, and resources as needed, but the types of groups that form would be determined by where energy is among congregants. What are you wrestling with in your daily life? What do you need a place to talk about or learn about? PS- I have no idea how to formally make this happen other than to talk to people and look for opportunities to build connections.

COMING UP: HOUSTON AREA UU VOTING JUSTICE PROPOSAL

From Colin Bossen, developmental senior minister, First UU of Houston:

In the lead-up to the 2020 election First Houston hired a Voting Justice coordinator who worked with area congregations, including all of yours, to mobilize UUs around voter registration and turn-out. As you might recall, the effort was a huge success and empowered our collective communities to coordinate the work of almost 300 volunteers and contact approximately 43,000 voters.

The 2022 autumn elections are likely to be crucial ones for the future of electoral democracy in the United States. I would like to see Houston UUs mount a similar effort to the one we did in the 2020 election. My proposal is to have the Houston area congregations raise money through special collections to hire another voting justice coordinator for the upcoming election. My suggested structure would be for the person be technically hired by First Houston because we have the experience in supervising such a position but funded by and working for the congregations throughout the area. I suspect that we could hire a 20 hour a week contractor, which is what we did last time, for five months (June through November) for around \$10,000. The special collections and contributions that many of you have contributed for the Afghan refugees has come out to about this much and I suspect that this would be a fairly doable amount of money for us to raise for such an effort.