

Pastor's Annual Report for 2019

First Congregational UCC of Sioux City, IA

January 19, 2020

I was blessed to be invited to preach at FCUCC during Lent of 2019. I celebrated Easter with you, and then came on board as the part-time Interim Pastor in the summer.

To this position, I bring 33 years of experience as a clergyperson. I also bring doctoral-level training in leadership (DMin) and in psychology (PhD).

I began by meeting with as many congregation members as possible to learn the history of the church. As a result, I've heard stories about the tenures of pastors over the past 30 years, including Pastor Richard Smith, Pastor Alva Hohl, and Pastor Ryan Dowell Baum. Knowing this history has been very instructive in gauging where we are now.

WHERE WE'VE BEEN

4/1990 to 10/1996	Richard Smith
11/1996 to 10/1998	Interim Pastors (3)
11/1998 to 2/2011	Alva Hohl
3/2011 to 6/2012	Interim (Ken Lieschman)
7/2012 to 11/2018	Ryan Dowell Baum

One thing I have learned in 20 years of helping churches develop teams of leaders is that each of us has only one of the 8 skill sets needed to lead an organization. That is true of pastors, too. So, having a solid team, and appropriate support structures in place, is essential for the success of any church.

The church flourished under Pastor Al, but had challenging times under both Pastor Richard and Pastor Ryan.

Those who were members at the time recalled that Pastor Richard was a good preacher, but struggled with administration, follow-through, and accountability.

Pastor Al was a strong preacher. He also had a 40 hour/week administrator and a 30 hour/week secretary. That meant the congregation had 70 hours/week of staff support. During the 12 years he pastored, committees also met regularly. That level of support and communication let Pastor Al function in his best leadership area, because the other 7 leadership functions were being covered by support staff and committees. He was wise enough to know that administration and congregational communication/nurture were not his leadership skill sets. At one point, I was told, when there was a move to disband committees, Pastor Al discouraged it. He reminded church members that a congregational church is run by the congregation, not the pastor.

Pastor Ryan's leadership passion was clearly in the area of community networking. Administration and congregational communication/nurture were not their leadership skill sets. Yet, under Pastor Ryan, the 70 hours/week of staff support in place under Pastor Al was pared down to 30 hours/week, and then to 20

hours/week. Often the remaining administrative position was staffed by a person who was not well-suited for the role. It was soon apparent there was not enough coordination at the center.

In addition, under Pastor Ryan, committees were disbanded.

Committees serve a number of very important roles in a congregation. First, and foremost, a committee's work is just a rationale to get together because, fundamentally, every committee is an intentional small group whose real purpose is to get to know, and care for, each other. Second, committees serve as a very important way of transmitting communication from individual members to committees and Council, and from Council and committees to the members. When there are no committees, that communication channel is lost. Finally, committees are designed to cover all 8 leadership areas for the congregation. This ensures that, no matter which one leadership skill the pastor has, the organization will continue to move forward.

Unfortunately, not realizing the long-term implications of these staffing and committee changes, Council supported the changes. However, trying to pastor a church without committees or administrative support is like trying to drive a car without wheels (committees) or a chassis (administrative support). Despite the best intentions of both Pastor Ryan and the Council, it's no wonder things fell apart.

Also, psychologically, we know that when leaders find themselves in untenable situations, they will often unconsciously participate in a crisis that ends their leadership term. That certainly was the case with Pastor Richard -- he had an affair with a church member that ended his pastorate. It appears that Pastor Ryan also engaged in behavior that led to the end of their pastorate.

The Personnel Committee and the Council had been working on administrative problems with Pastor Ryan for several years. By 2018, the situation had deteriorated severely. Then Pastor Ryan announced they are gender-diverse. Being transgender or gender diverse is a recognized, and often distressing, medical condition. This could have been well-managed by working collaboratively with Personnel and the Council. (As a certified gender specialist, I have helped many employees and companies make these transitions – and with careful, collaborative planning it goes very well.) At that point, however, with things already falling apart administratively, Pastor Ryan chose another way to publicly transition; it did not go well.

By then, Pastor Ryan was overwhelmed and in crisis, so they were granted a month of sick leave in October 2018. At the end of that period, Pastor Ryan decided to resign, and the resignation was accepted by the Council.

During the month of leave in 2018, and then through May 2019, in order to support Pastor Ryan and their family through the remainder of the school year, the congregation provided Pastor Ryan with full salary, housing allowance, medical benefits, pension, and Social Security offset payments. The total amount paid to support Pastor Ryan during those months was \$52,487.86.

In 33 years of ministry, I've only known of one other congregation that provided that level of generous support as their pastor transitioned to the next phase of their life.

GOING FORWARD

Going forward, in 2020, taking a cue from the successful tenure of Pastor Al, committees have been reconstituted. The Nominations Committee has designed the current committees in such a way that most

congregation members are serving on only one committee. This serves 2 purposes: 1) to engage more members in order to increase caring, communication, and ownership, and 2) to prevent member burnout.

Attention is also being paid to the need to re-establish a strong program of congregational care and nurture. We cannot do for others what we are not doing for ourselves. As Jesus reminds us, we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves – our own work together comes first. That’s how we practice and “fund” our caring in the wider community!

Another area the Personnel Committee will be addressing is staffing. It is clear that 20 hours/week is not enough staff time to coordinate communication, manage the needs of this congregation, and support a pastor.

A key finding of the January 2017 Progressive Renewal report also needs to be taken into consideration. The only item that was not underlined in the copy of the report I was given was the major area of growth expected in Sioux City. The report states “the population’s fastest growth segment will be those over 65 years of age.” The report also noted that people in FCUCC’s zip code are attracted to “yoga, meditation, discussion groups, Christian Education for children [although the report states the number of children is declining in Sioux City], and traditional worship.” It seems that FCUCC may be uniquely positioned to address the needs and interests of the fastest growing group in Sioux City: seniors.

I am blessed every day to be serving with you, and I look forward to where God is leading us in 2020.

Blessings,



Rev. Dr. Anne Dilenschneider

WHAT PASTOR ANNE WAS DOING IN 2019

So far, during my time with FCUCC, I’ve paid attention to the 4 quadrants of leadership in these ways (two of the 8 leadership skills are associated with each one of these quadrants):

- 1) Attention is being paid to our spirituality (North – Soul, our connection with God)
 - I’ve spent time listening to congregation members and tightening up the worship service.
 - The weekly “Straight to the Point” newsletter contains a gratitude prayer or reflection for the coming week.
 - The summer sermon series was focused on the Book of Acts – it’s a good road map from the early church to remind us we are not lost. In the fall, we began a series of sermons on spiritual disciplines – these help sustain Christian living for the long-haul. That series will finish before Lent begins in late February. In the meantime, the focus has been on Christmas and Epiphany and the presence of God in our midst.

- 2) Attention is being paid to membership (East – Heart, our connection with each other):
- I've prioritized time visiting with and listening to congregation members when I've been in Sioux City (when I'm not doing administrative tasks or in meetings). The Communication Committee has been invaluable in providing direction.
 - I've also been sending out birthday cards and thank you notes. It's so important to appreciate each other. In the coming year, we will be updating our contact list, and making sure we have an emergency contact number for each person related to our community.
 - Two new members have joined the congregation, and their two children were baptized.
 - A new "Foodie Group" has begun getting together to explore regional restaurants, and they are teaching me a great deal about Sioux City in the process. I'm also appreciative of the ways the bridge groups and the book group bring people together.
- 3) Attention is being paid to the "nuts and bolts" (South – Mind, the structure that supports us):
- There is a large 12-month calendar on the office wall, It is color-coded for events, meetings, outside groups, etc. That way everyone will have a quick visual to work with, we won't double book, and the administrative assistant will be able to see what needs to be publicized
 - I've met with the Worship Committee. We've reviewed the current service flow and adjusted it. I'm thankful for the ways the committee invites members to share their gifts in worship.
 - I've spent time with members of Personnel. The job description for the current 20-hour administrative assistant position is being updated.
 - Eventually, having the administrative assistant, intergenerational program coordinator, and communications coordinator in place would put FCUCC at 60 hours/week of staff support – this is closer to the 70 hours/week of staff support that helped the church flourish when Pastor Al was here.
 - At this point in time Jerrod Kiernan and Todd Siefker have been creating a new website and Facebook page, and helping manage our electronic communications.
 - I've spent time with members of the Education team. Todd Siefker was hired as intergenerational program coordinator. Education has been working with Todd on realistic goals based on strengths we have now, and possible next steps.
 - The Sunday Admiration Series continues under Todd's leadership, with participants often taking turns leading. I am also leading a Friday afternoon study at Pierce Street Coffee Works on the scripture for the coming Sunday. Michele Schwerin is providing leadership for the JOY group. Michele Schwerin and Suzanne Johnson are guiding the Adulging Group for transition-age youth. The Beer and Theology group continues under Chris Schwerin and Jeff Stellish.
 - I've spent time with members of the Nominations team. Nominations' goal was to have members serve on only one committee for the coming year. This should help increase involvement, communication, and care.

- I've spent time with members of the PRC team. PRC developed a clear flow chart to help us utilize a process to resolve differences.
 - The Financial Team is providing monthly income and expenditure reports for Council members. This is helping us understand our current challenges, needs, and obligations.
 - Among other things, Building and Grounds has addressed lighting, safety, and leaks.
 - I am planning to meet with the Stewardship team with the goal of developing ways to help all of us understand how we are supporting our church with our prayers, presence, financial gifts, and service. It often helps for a congregation to have this information on a monthly basis.
- 4) Attention is being paid to mission (West – Strength, our purpose together in the wider community):
- I've been listening to what makes congregation members “come alive.” There are dreams percolating among us. In a few weeks, we'll engage in a process that will help us learn more about who we are. This will help our Pastoral Search Committee develop our church profile.
 - In the meantime, congregation members continue teaching me about our community ministries – Children's Closet, Rummage Sales, Moving on Boxes, Soup Kitchen, Sanford Center, hosting the Martin Luther King Jr. event, etc.
 - I continue to meet monthly with area UCC clergy.
 - I met with Conference Minister Samantha Houser to provide some background as to how FCUCC came to this point of challenge and opportunity. It's far more complicated than the “presenting issue” of the last year.