

Looking Back and Looking Ahead

by Stephanie Belanger

The United Church of Ferndale (WA) has been closed to in-person worship since March 2020 and has been holding services over Zoom and Facebook Live, just as many other churches are doing. Our Reimagining Ministry team was excited about having a service in the church on September 12th. However, the delta variant had other ideas, and the new wave of infections made it unwise to meet in person, even though most of the congregation are vaccinated.

In some ways closure of the building has been a blessing, because since last year we've been able to make several improvements to our building and grounds and also replaced our aging roof. Many of these improvements were accomplished by a core group of volunteers. A Mission Minds team has held drives in our parking lot for food, children's books, backpacks, and winter clothing. The Blessing Box is kept full of food, too.

Pastor Bobbi Virta retired in July after 14 years at United Church, and we have welcomed Joel Aosved as our new pastor. Some small groups are allowed to meet in the building, but the Loving Tree Preschool will not be opening this fall. A new video recording system is being put in place so that services will continue to be available on Zoom and Facebook Live, as many people from around the world have tuned in to see their relatives and friends.

Throughout the pandemic, the Pacific Northwest Conference has offered support and guidance to local churches, pastors, moderators, administrators, and church leaders. Updates from Mike Denton keep us apprised of the latest conditions, and we heed his advice rigorously. As Moderator in 2020 I appreciated connecting with others around the conference at a weekly meeting led by Courtney to exchange ideas for dealing with the pandemic. PNC provided a worship library, digital worship services and a wonderful Lenten devotional series, as well as workshops for church leaders.

United Church's finances have remained positive, and the roof loan is ahead of schedule in monthly payments. Though pledges have decreased this year, we are still on track with our OCWM monthly payments. As a member of the PNC Stewardship Committee, I've been able to see how OCWM giving has remained strong throughout the pandemic across our conference. This support from local churches to the PNC is vitally important to maintain programs that train, educate, make micro-loans, respond to disasters, support missionaries, and work for peace and justice around the world.

We are eagerly awaiting a return to in-person worship, even without any singing or choir, and we pray that no one in our church family has been hospitalized or died from this terrible virus. In the words of a well-loved hymn, "Great Is Thy Faithfulness," we look forward "with strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow."