

**Staff Updates**

Everyone is back into the swing of things after the Christmas gauntlet and New Year Holiday. Elizabeth has closed out the books for 2025 and has turned her attention to the final drafts of the 2026 budget for the Annual Meeting. The entire staff and leadership is working tirelessly on the Annual Report. In addition, Lindsey and I are working in implementing all of the changes we need to put into place to be sure we are in compliance with our Safe Church Policy before Sunday School and OWL resume on January 25th. We are still down one Sunday School teacher for this spring semester, but Lindsey has several leads out with some church and choir members and I am confident we will have the position filled in time

**Pastoral Care**

December was a difficult month for pastoral care as I was ill most of the month and did not want to spread germs. I will be making as many visits as I can in January and am grateful to our Care Connections team as always for keeping in touch with many of our shut-in members. November/December brought the hard news of Blake Vosburg's death, and I am preparing for his funeral on 1/24/2026. In addition, January is already off to a difficult start with global and national news and so I am thinking of ways to extend pastoral care through sermons and additional churchwide communication for the heaviness we are all carrying related to domestic and global terror.

**Worship/Ministry Programming Updates**

I am continuing to use Widla Gafney's A Women's Lectionary for the Whole Church for Worship Planning as the year continues. In addition, I am part of an Iowa focus group that is anticipating introducing a Lenten Study called A Palm Sunday Path that is a Progressive Christian Based Response, rooted in Matthew 25, to the current Immigration crackdown that is being rolled out across the nation. This will include Adult Study throughout Lent and culminate with a protest/rally/vigil at the state capital on Palm Sunday afternoon.

**Continuing Education Updates/Wider Denominational Meetings**

This semester I will be teaching an online Intro to World Religions course as an adjunct professor at Iowa Valley Community College. In addition, I will be writing six essays for publication in Liberating the Lectionary, an upcoming project with Tehom Center Publishing.

I have also been approached by Newton UCC about our congregations having further discussions about the possibility of mutual support and collaboration in the future as they are hoping to explore the future of their congregation as the current covenant they are in with their Lutheran neighbor church comes up for renewal.

***Gratefully, Pastor Jessica***