

2022 Annual Pastor's Report

Once again this annual pastor's report is in large part exactly what I shared with SaLT in December as my own self-evaluation for 2022. And once again, I am delighted to say that I think we are thriving in just about every conceivable way!

I also just want to say that I continue to LOVE being the pastor of this wonderful congregation and that I feel great about who we are and who we are evolving into as a church. I am now beginning my 5th year as your pastor and I think we're in a very good position to continue to grow and do some very exciting ministry together. Thank you all for making it so easy and so enjoyable to serve in this capacity.

Things I Feel Good About and Grateful For (In no particular order)

- 1. Worship:** Well in general I'm feeling great about our worship services, and I'm probably most proud and grateful of the way we have integrated zoom worship and in-person worship. With that in mind I do think it's time to get a large screen in the back of the sanctuary so that I can more easily communicate with people who are on zoom. The way things are I often have no idea who is joining us via zoom, and there have been some times when I would have interacted more with someone if I'd known they were with us on zoom. I particularly want to make sure that kids on zoom are seen and included and feel part of things. So while it's not urgent I do think it's time to get that screen in the back of the sanctuary. In general though I think things are going great and I'm so glad more people are beginning to come back to church and that more new people are finding their way to us as well. The UCC national leadership sent out communication to clergy letting us know that if we have 30% of our people back in the building now since the pandemic that we are doing well. We are way beyond that so I'm really glad we're thriving as much as we are. I'm not going to assume credit for our "success" because it takes all of us to be the warm and welcoming community we are. But I've gotten lots of good feedback on my messages and how I try to balance out personal spirituality and social justice and offer something that people can relate to in their lives. So I'm grateful for that. Also, I'm just thrilled that the choir is finally able to sing again and I think that will add a real boost to our worship experiences along with having more people share art and music with us as often as possible. As I have said many times during worship, I would love to see more people in our worshipping community share their own artistic gifts and creativity in worship, and I will be extending this invitation to bring more art into our worship services.
- 2. Community:** Once again I think I and all of us have done a wonderful job of keeping our church alive and connected as a community through worship, the weekly Pulse messages, and through our committee work and Outreach Ministries. Our 8:00 a.m. morning devotion group Mondays through Fridays consistently has between 12 and 20 attendees and that has evolved into a wonderful small group of prayer and support. At least 6 of the regulars have found their way to us even though they are not members or Sunday morning attendees, and so this is an

additional presence and outreach of our fellowship. The “Midweek Inhale” programs also are deeply meaningful for those who have participated.

- 3. Pastoral Care, Counseling, and Spiritual Growth:** I feel very good about my pastoral presence and work. I’ve done my very best to be available and responsive to anyone who has been in particular need. There are quite a few newer people around, many who have officially joined our congregation, and most of whom have found their way to us because they have felt a need and desire to grow spiritually. This has been absolutely wonderful, but I will also say that it has greatly increased the amount of time I am spending in counseling and conversation by appointment with people. This is not a complaint at all, and there is nothing to be “done” about it. It just means that I’m working more than ever and spending way more time than anyone knows in pastoral work. Again, this is great problem to have! This is why I’m here. My challenge as we move forward however is just to do my best to keep my life in balance and to make sure I have enough down time to stay rested and healthy.

In addition to the zoom programs I mentioned in above, I think I’ve done a good job in terms of my weekly messages trying to help us all stay grounded in God’s Love and grow spiritually. I’m going to reiterate here what I wrote last year. I’ve done my best to speak to various issues and current events, but to always do so from a biblically grounded perspective so that I am preaching and standing for what I sense the Spirit is saying to us rather than simply offering my own personal opinions. This is important to me. I think we’ve all done a good job of truly seeking the will and guidance of God together, and I am grateful beyond words for our mutual resonance in this regard.

- 4. Outreach:** Once again, I feel very good about the extent to which I have administered the pastoral discretionary fund and all the meetings, calls, and pastoral care that goes along with that. This is also taking more time and energy than in the past, but it is an honor to express compassion and caring on behalf of our congregation in this way. I also feel that our primary Outreach Ministries are continuing to grow and that they have been very fruitful and effective. As I said last year, to me the best thing about our Outreach groups is that they are all lay led by incredibly gifted and committed leaders and not at all dependent on my input or leadership. This is as it should be. I look forward to getting the racial justice ministries moving in a more ongoing sense in 2023. I am particularly thrilled with the scholarship program NION has brought into being with Madison College, and the Green Team is just thriving in all kinds of ways.

I also continue to think it’s been great to have our third Sunday of the month Outreach Celebration moments in worship. And the Outreach Funds Group we all worked hard to put together last year has been working beautifully. In fact I actually think what we’ve done in this regard is a model and an inspiration to/for other congregations. What I wrote last year needs

to simply be said again. We are VERY healthy as a church regarding the way all of our leaders work together to get things done. One of my overall goals has been to make sure that things get done without being “pastor-centric.” I could not do that without significant participation from many others. Again, I need to recognize Joan Jacobsen’s exceptional administrative gifts and commitment regarding many of these processes—especially the Outreach Funds Committee, which had never before existed. But the recent establishment of our “Worship & Arts Team” is another example of us all seeing an area of our congregation that needed some structure, process, and leadership. The ease and joy with which this team came into being is another expression of our ability to be in community, share power and authority, commission and release leadership to serve our congregation in this capacity, and get things done. This may not seem like a big deal, but these are the kinds of things that many congregations get all tied up in knots about. We enjoy each other, listen well to differing perspectives, welcome new voices and personalities, and roll right along. That is so refreshing and it’s the kind of church/organization people enjoy being a part of.

5. **Youth Programming:** I’m feeling great about our progress in youth ministry! I think we turned a corner both with our younger kids and our teen youth group in 2022, and that was one of my primary goals. The numbers are growing and more families with kids are finding their way to us. I am so grateful for this! It’s also been wonderful to have Sheryl Rowe emerge and want to offer some leadership and energy to working with the younger kids. So many of the parents are extremely busy and unable to take on an additional commitment like this, so Sheryl’s emergence is a blessing. In addition to having more kids around and to offering vital Christian education for them, I also don’t want the youth programs to be overly centered around my presence. Sheryl’s leadership will be a big gift in that regard. As for teens, our joint youth group experience with Lake Edge has been great, and as a few younger kids have “graduated” into the older group we now have a critical nucleus that makes it feel like there is a solid base. That’s always the hardest thing to bring into being when you’re pretty much starting from scratch as we did, especially after the pandemic. I’ll say a bit more about my hopes for youth ministry in my 2023 goals.

6. **Administrative Assistance:** Well thank God we found Ginger Hummer! As you all know Ginger is quite a find and very skilled and will make a big difference in our life together as we move forward. As for my own self-evaluation, I think I did a solid job of keeping things together administratively without any ongoing office admin support. Thanks again to Joan for all her help, and also to Melissa from a distance. But as far as any areas where I feel like I dropped the ball now and then, it would be with things like keeping up with email on an administrative level (not pastoral—the pastoral stuff always got my primary attention). But things like updating the church calendar, or making sure everything that should be in the Pulse each week got in there—these were places where despite my best efforts things got by me a few times. Ginger will be GREAT at keeping on top of everything, including the calendar. Already she has made it

more the “Source of Truth” regarding all meetings in the building AND on zoom that we have hoped it would be. She will also eventually do a much better job of updating the website, which she and I will do together once she starts doing the Pulse. In any case, things are already way more efficient administratively and I am very grateful for that!

- 7. Self-Care:** Again, I wrote this last year but I can’t say it any better than I did then. So here’s what I wrote that still stands. “I am grateful to God that I am healthy and not stressed out and that I feel grounded and centered spiritually. This is all a gift from God, but I also feel good that I have taken care of myself during a very stressful time for clergy and for churches in general. Navigating the return to in-person worship was not easy for any of us, and I think we did a great job of working together, making difficult decisions, and working through the details. As I said to you last year, you all have made these things so much easier for me than many of my colleagues have experienced with their congregations. The maturity of our membership and leadership and the fact that we have no ongoing undercurrent of negativity is such a gift to me. I also make it a point to eat well, exercise, take time off, get enough sleep, feed myself spiritually, spend time with friends one way or another, take walks in the woods, etc. Again, I won’t take too much credit for this, but I think I’ve done my part to keep myself in a healthy place both physically and spiritually.”

All I will add to this now however is that I did NOT take any time away for continuing education in 2022. Nor did I take a group trip to Haiti as I am encouraged to do according to my contract with our congregation. Hopefully Haiti’s political violence will subside a bit in 2023 and we will be able to offer a trip like this before too long. I will definitely take some continuing education time in 2023. I think that’s important both for me and for our congregation.

Areas for Improvement & Primary Goals for 2023

- 1. Reaching Out To Some Who Have Drifted Off During The Pandemic:** I did reach out to every family or person whom I noticed had drifted from us since the pandemic started. Some have found their way back. A few have not yet but may, and I’m not going to “bug” them. They’ve been graciously contacted and know they are always welcome. I’ll reach out again before too long, but I also think people need to be able to leave if that’s their choice without having to offer a reason.
- 2. Increased Presence in the McFarland Community:** This was one of the expressed priorities coming out of our church retreat. I’m not sure exactly what this might mean, but I just want to name it as a priority. Some possible ideas I have would be to host more events at our

congregation (concerts, speakers on topics like eco-justice, immigration issues, voting rights, etc., gatherings like the Solstice Celebrations) to which we would invite the community at large and that would be of interest to people who might not be inclined to come to a worship service. In any case I look forward to asking ourselves how we can have an even more meaningful presence in McFarland in general.

3. **Teen Youth, Outdoor Ministry, and Mission Trip(s):** Now that we have a teen group again that is active, a goal of mine for 2023 is to bring in a service component to their youth experience both locally and more widely. Assuming there is no uptick in the pandemic that causes us to be unable to meet in person and go places together, I am hoping to organize a significant youth group trip for service of some kind and fun. I will be getting on this quickly in 2023 as I know summer schedules are already starting to fill up. I am also hoping to see some of our youth attend camp at the UCC camps, and will be encouraging that. Our confirmation class has a great time at Daycholah Center at the “Knock Knock” retreat and I think that helped to sow a few seeds there. I am a big believer in the power of weekend retreats for youth and mission trips for youth AND adults
4. **A Possible Adult Mission Trip:** I would love to see a group of adults from our congregation take a trip together on some kind of mission experience. Unfortunately Haiti is still too volatile for me to feel good about, but eventually I’d love to see more from our congregation have that experience. A very “doable” trip for this year though would be to take a group to Suaharita, AZ and spend time with Rev. Randy Mayer and “Church of the Good Shepherd” and their “Good Samaritan” project with immigrants and immigration justice. Judy and Mark Emmerich will be attending a conference on Immigration Justice at Good Shepherd Church in AZ in January, 2023, and hopefully this will be the beginning of a more active connection to the plight of migrants at our southern U.S. border.

Closing

My 2021 closing paragraph fits hauntingly well once again so I’ll close the same way...

To be honest, there are no other areas where I feel I have been particularly ineffective as your pastor, so I’m not going to manufacture one just to seem humble or self-aware! By all means feel free to let me know if there are things you’d like to see me do better. I know I am diligent and committed and hardworking, but of course I’m just another imperfect person with plenty of shortcomings and areas in which I hope to continue to evolve and grow. Most of those that I’m aware of however are more personal than professional. For example, I need to play more and have more fun in my life and probably have some kind of social life! But that’s not a work thing and I have LOTS of love and friendship in my life. I’m involved in a lot of things, but I’m not a workaholic. I’m really a very happy and content and fulfilled person, and for that I’m grateful to God first and foremost, but also to our SaLT leaders and to our congregation. You all make it easy and joyful to be your pastor, and as I tell my colleagues, I totally lucked out with

McFarland UCC. To state that more meaningfully, I truly feel that I was and am blessed to be called to serve this congregation. Thank you God, and thanks to all of you.

It's hard to believe it's been FOUR years!!

Here's to a Spirit-Centered and fruitful and FUN 2023!

Grace and Peace,

Pastor Bryan