

## FROM THE STAFF PARISH RELATIONS COMMITTEE TO THE FUMC ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL

Dear Friends,

The Staff Parish Relations Committee is specifically charged with monitoring and assisting with the health and well-being of our entire staff. Last week we had our first virtual meeting since the crisis, and we wanted to share some of our observations.

First off, our committee believes every one of our staff deserves our heartfelt gratitude and thanks for their continued great work during this pandemic, which has challenged our sense of normalcy and prodded us to act in an entirely new fashion. Since we have moved most of our interactions through safe distancing, whether it be online, through increased phone calls, emails, texts, and notes, the church is obviously not operating in a “business as usual” mode.

Here is a “behind the scenes” look at how our ministerial and lay staff are functioning now.

Pastor Dani and Pastor Henry continue to maintain their jobs with the Middletown School System and Henry is finishing his seminary course for the term. They continue to lead Corazones Ardientes (our Hispanic ministry) and are finding that their number of participants are actually increasing with viewers from Mexico, Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Dani continues to maintain a vibrant youth ministry using a variety of social media and virtual tools. And we see how Henry is able to bring new things to the Children’s Message each Sunday.

Mary Ellen continues her work as worship leader/organist/ choir director. We see evidence of her planning and organizing of volunteers every Sunday service on the web. What most of you do not see is how she is continuing her choir work through emails and sending of videos related to choir and vocal practicing daily through the week. She has also set up “special days” for each choir member, and moderated our first “online choir chat” this past week.

Greg is keeping our beautiful church building in good shape for when we can return by going in daily to check on things, collect the trash that accumulates around the outside of the building, and helps with office duties, among other things. He has been involved with recent a roof repair and a sump pump upgrade. Greg has a video feed of all the cameras we have installed around the church perimeters and has always kept an eye on the building for us, even when he is at home. He continues his unofficial “security role” at home in this way.

Our office continue to function well with the work of our financial secretary Linda Schmitt and our office manager JoAnn Wagner. Linda is working as much or more as previously, comes in every day to check the mail, makes sure checks are properly handled, the bills paid, and proper records kept. She opens up the church for those who need to get in and with Greg’s assistance has taken over the vital task of counting money, which until now has been a mostly volunteer activity. And again along with Greg, she keeps an eye on things since she and Johnny live next door. JoAnn’s focus has turned more to keeping the congregation informed through frequent mass emails, keeping up the church website and making sure messages or phone calls to the church go where they need to go. She is also assisting with the recording and

transmitting of the Sunday worship service as well as setting up and scheduling the many online “Zoom” meetings that are now taking place. For many in our congregation she is the main point of contact.

As with the rest of the staff, Rev. Wagner’s job responsibilities have been impacted by the shutdown. He is doing his best to keep up with his pastoral care, administration and preaching duties, all of which have required creative solutions involving conference calls, Zoom virtual meetings, video recordings and the like. He has also been working with our church leaders in dealing with both temporary changes and envisioning what our church need to do in the future.

Some common themes we hear when talking with our staff:

- 1) Great appreciation for the support they feel from church members and see demonstrated by continued volunteer efforts and maintaining monetary giving;
- 2) The fact that it has indeed been challenging to maintain the schedules and routines of the past;
- 3) Dealing with steep learning curves on all the new technology being utilized which takes increased time, energy, and focus from them. We have heard it expressed how hard it feels to ever “be off duty” with the increased volume of emails, calls, and virtual meetings.

It should be noted we asked the staff for these thoughts. They are all well aware that many local business and institutions are dealing with similar problems, and some are dealing with far worse situations brought on by the pandemic.

One suggestion for the congregation - for non-urgent church business, we ask that you call the church office at 513-423-4629 or use the main church email - [firstumcmiddletown@gmail.com](mailto:firstumcmiddletown@gmail.com). Both are being checked regularly.

Thanks – and thanks for your trust and support as we on SPRC try to do our part in keeping our church strong. Mike Hieber for SPRC