

Churches: Our Everyday Superheroes

Stories of Hope and Inspiration from Our Churches Across the Country

St. John's United Church of Christ in Lawrence, KS

As we are approaching the end of 2020, it is important to reflect back and think critically about what we have achieved in making a positive impact on ourselves and others. Not only have the leaders and organizers of St. John's United Church of Christ made an impact on members of the church, they have positively influenced other families in the community as well. This small congregation, located near Lawrence, KS, has continued on a wonderful journey of faith and perseverance.

Robin Colerick, the Pastor of the church, explained the difficulties of predicting Covid-19's impact on the congregation. To follow health and safety approaches, St. John's instantly switched their worship services to virtual Zoom meetings in March. Robin had just started her pastorate there in February, giving her no choice but to meet her congregation virtually. Transitioning from in-person meetings to Zoom meetings is not always easy, especially for those who are less technology-driven; however, the leaders of this congregation have worked diligently to accommodate its members. Sunday school classes are held on Zoom along with congregational conversations. Anyone who wishes to join can even call and participate on the phone! These meetings are open to everyone, giving individuals the opportunity to catch up with one another, develop relationships, build trust, share feelings, and express emotions.

Connecting with others has been vital during this time. Robin states, "It's really enabled us to learn more about each other. I've met several guinea pigs that live with one family. We have met dogs who join us for worship and cats who walk across phones and keyboards. Several congregants have joined together for birthday celebrations and it's been really fun to see where people live." Although Covid-19 has prevented physical gatherings, there are still many advantages to video conferencing. It is very accessible and brings a sense of comfort by allowing the community to gloriously support one another. Zoom meetings have also encouraged visitors, who generally do not attend in-person service, to join virtually as it feels more comfortable for

them. Robin also mentioned that her mother serves a church in Missouri, which wasn't meeting for a period of time due to the pandemic; therefore, Robin invited her to meet with them via Zoom. She stated, "We work together on the sermon and lead worship for a UCC and a DOC congregation. The people have embraced each other and my Board even suggested having a meet/greet with them once Covid-19 is contained!"

St. John's UCC continues to support their regional ministries and find ways to reach out to the community including back to school celebrations, providing school supplies, and hosting a safe scavenger hunt over the summer. This fall, families and other members of the congregation participated in a fun work day!

"We are continuing to be the church." Robin says, "We may not be able to do big ministries to the homeless or those at risk....but we are continuing to be the church. We are finding ways to worship, learn, and fellowship."

Submitted by Carolyn Colerick-Shinkle

