

Thoughts on a Pandemic Ministry December 2022

Nearly every day here in Flagstaff, I have walked my dog Billie across sunny Switzer Mesa, with the majestic San Francisco Peaks on the horizon. It struck me recently that in every season here, the landscape blooms golden. In the summer, a riot of sunflowers erupts everywhere. In autumn, the aspen trees transform into a towering canvass of yellow, and as winter approaches, the mesa is carpeted with petite golden wildflowers that mellow into brown.

This perennial golden progression feels like a fitting metaphor for the optimistic constancy of the Beacon UU Congregation. I came here in August 2019 for what was meant to be a straightforward two-year interim ministry. No one could have predicted the unprecedented events precipitated by the COVID pandemic and its effect on all of us. I'm now concluding my fourth year of an extended interim with these good people and I can honestly say that they, too, are golden.

During the pandemic, we adopted the theme, "Beacon-Always Connected" and we lived that value. The congregation was remarkably calm and steady and deeply committed to sustaining the community and supporting me as their minister in uncharted territory. Together, we embraced technology, produced excellent You Tube worship services, offered appealing online Religious Exploration, funded the budget, adopted the 8th principle, offered OWL, experimented with more of a "team" structure, rebooted the Circle Supper program, operated with a full staff, established an endowment, and welcomed 20 new members. The building project was completed, the Sanctuary brightened, and the backyard beautifully landscaped.

In many ways, the pandemic accelerated progress and growth in key congregational areas such as Social Justice and Congregational Vitality. The leaders here are sharp, grounded and collaborative. The congregation has reestablished good self-esteem after an unsuccessful settled ministry. They are warm and relaxed and do not tolerate bad behavior. This has been the least conflictual ministry of my 20-plus year career.

I have loved the work of congregational ministry in each setting I have served (even during a pandemic!), and I'm looking forward with enthusiasm to embarking on this next adventure of heart, mind, and spirit, wherever it may take me.