

AMC Pastor's Report for 2023
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We've been together nearly a year, and the time has just flown by! From that quiet first day I spent alone unpacking in a new office last February, to now having my weeks filled with meetings, visits, planning, reading, sermon writing, speaking, connecting and working with local groups, and sometimes doing youth activities – I am grateful for all of it, and for all of you!

We have gone through pretty much a full liturgical cycle, as well, beginning last year with Shrove Tuesday when you welcomed me with a wonderful pancake supper! We then entered the Lenten season of wilderness and reflection, taking in the story of Jesus in a deliberate way for Holy Week with a Palm Sunday procession, a Maundy Thursday service of music, communion, and readings that took us through Jesus's final day up to his time of prayer and lament in the garden of Gethsemane. On Good Friday we were joined by friends from Altona United Church to pick up in that story and witness the arrest, trial and crucifixion of our Lord through art, readings and song (which included a volunteer choir made up of singers from both congregations).

We celebrated the resurrection with a joyful Easter morning that began with a Paska breakfast, and the youth & kids even learned to bake paska together the week before! During these first months as your pastor, I also made visits and started getting to know some of you a little better! This has also happened by way of committee work, grocery store visits, email and text messages, phone calls, church pop ins, etc. and I enjoy each connection and chat!

In May the Spirit of Pentecost descended on the church in the form of a phoenix's nest, which was the centerpiece of our worship visually – each of us contributing pinecones to that nest of God's Spirit which represented both our shared life together and our potential for growth and giftedness. Our focus then shifted in June with the theme of "Imagine..." that took us through the summer months. We imagined play when our Church Picnic included renting the pool and swimming together (age 5-85 or so), followed by food and fellowship under the shady trees!

I spent a week at Camp Assiniboia in July, supporting camp staff and leading daily devotions. We had over half a dozen campers from AMC attend Camps with Meaning, and there was also a group of women from our church who volunteered in the kitchen! Folks went to the beach, the cottage, on road trips, gardened, read in the backyard, and we even met for worship on the church yard a couple of times more informally, which was lovely! At the end of August the campers and support staff shared music and memories on a Sunday morning.

In fall we kicked off a new year by celebrating communion together, and the energy in our sanctuary was (and remains) wonderfully vibrant. Bibles were presented to the kids and youth of AMC, and they were encouraged to receive them as a sign of their growing faith and sense of belonging within our church family. We've all gone back to Sunday school together, too! Stories

That Shape Us has been a worship series that seeks to revisit the biblical stories of old with fresh eyes and ears, exploring ancient texts and narratives from the dual perspective of locating them within their original context, and viewing/interrogating them from our modern one to see how they interact and intersect theologically, socially, historically, etc.

Advent was a beautiful season of longing, preparing, and finally the arrival of the light of the world in the birth of Jesus. We had a rather simple visual display with the manger taking center stage under a mobile of cascading stars and twinkling lights, encircled by pillars of candle clusters, which were used in place of an advent wreath. We sang and heard the music of the season, used all of our senses to explore the Advent of Christ, and collected donations for the local food bank. On Christmas Eve we had two services: morning worship and an evening candlelight service. This was a very meaningful and sacred season, and I am simply in awe of the cooperative spirit in our church, as well as your openness to new experiences and different expressions of God's Spirit among us and around us and guiding us into the future alongside one another.

I have thoroughly enjoyed being involved in the various committees of AMC, as well as others beyond the walls of our church that I am able to participate in (Steps Toward Reconciliation & Mennonite Coalition for Indigenous Solidarity) as a representative of our congregation. I spend 1-2 mornings a month as a host at The Community Exchange drop-in program, where I've had the privilege of making new acquaintances and connections in town! Along with Margruite Krahn, I've visited Roseau River Anishinaabe First Nation a handful of times to socialize and collaborate, and am excited for where this might one day lead.

I've done 2.5 funerals (only 1 at AMC) since starting in this position, spoken at 2 MCI chapel services, led worship 3 times at Eastview and the Gardens Apartments (along with Marilyn HH), and occasionally helped to lead youth events at Altona Bergthaler Church. I was also honoured to deliver the pastoral reflection at the Altona & Area Palliative Care Longest Night Service last month. Connecting regularly with MCM is an important part of my work, in order to receive collegial support and conference resourcing & education, to remain accountable and anchored (in a sense) to the larger church body which we belong to. I will continue to be dedicated in this area.

I have tremendously appreciated all the prayers, care and support you have extended to me and my family over the past 11 months. It's been an absolute joy to serve as your minister, and I thank God for each one of you and all that you bring to the shared life and work of our congregation!

With much love and gratitude,

Erika