

Pastor's Report

As a wise pastor once wrote: "Since I've been here only six months, I thought that maybe I should write only half-a-report..." *Rev. Rich Smith*. If that is the case then I should write only a sixth of a report since I've been here a mere two and a-half months. But that wouldn't do justice to the phenomenal 2 ½ months it's been. Just think – we survived our first Christmas together!

Not being terribly familiar with the west or Reno – we immediately fell in love with the mountains, the weather, and the 'biggest little city in the world'. That was just the beginning of our new love affair – we met the wonderful people of First Congregational Church and the deal was sealed! Y'all (a little left over southern Indiana lingo) have been gracious, loving, and oh so easy to fall in love with! As I wrote in my first Christmas letter ever...

"As you know we moved to Reno, and we love it!!!! We love waking up to sunny skies 95% of the time – driving to work and being surrounded by snow-capped mountains – living in "the biggest little city" that has all the amenities of a big city with a small town feel – and not rushing here and there because life in the west is just slower paced!

The church I now serve is wonderful. They are Open and Affirming, and are working diligently to figure out how to proclaim their extravagant welcome to the Reno community most effectively. The church is integrated and multi-generational and economically diverse, and is actively involved in hunger relief, homelessness ministry, immigrant issues, ethnic and religious tolerance education and being a safe place for those who have felt excluded following the recent election. I am encouraged to preach without fear of repercussions, thus was able to address the election and resulting fear and grief openly. The congregation listens to my sermons with open minds and hearts – even when they might differ in opinions. The committees (excluding council) all meet on respective Sundays each month after worship, thus people don't spend their evenings fighting fatigue and supper hang-over and the time spent together is productive and uplifting. The Deacons Committee, which has been specially trained in care-giving ministry, is separated into 12 shepherds that tend to their flock (12+ families/individuals), actively contacting them on a monthly basis – so pastoral care is done by the community as well as the pastor. A church member offers free yoga classes each week, and two other members lead separate weekly adult education opportunities. The church offers space to thirteen -12 step programs and 7 community groups from La Leche league to a Blue Grass Band on a weekly basis, as well as host a pre-school co-op. So needless to say they are small but mighty!

Like every church they deal with financial issues, and an aging physical plant – so \$ is limited and repairs and upkeep are an on-going problem, but they tend to make up for the financial shortfall in spirit and commitment! If something needs to be done – they just step up and do it!

Can you tell – I'm in LOVE and am energized in my ministry?!"

I have enjoyed: working with the leadership of the church; getting to know the congregation and fabulous fellow staff members (thanks to June, Ted, Saralinda, and Lupe for making my job easy and being the true force that keeps this church running smoothly); figuring out what makes this church tick;

and slowly but surely getting to know each of you as individuals. My hopes and dreams for our time together will be discovering with you where God is calling us as a faithfilled community of believers and how 'God is still speaking' to and through First Congregational Church as we continue our journey together.

Kate