

# Merry Christmas

from the Union Church of Hinsdale

What a wonderful year we've had in our shared life of faith! So many delightful things to celebrate from 2023!

**Adriana** moved from splitting her time between UCECP and UCH to full time here at the church. Perks for that include use of the staff parking spaces, a clearer window into how the sausage is made, and an upgraded room package upon entry into heaven.

**Sherry** is now cooking more than ever! Providing creative, delicious meals for both church and school, she continues to keep us all well fed! \*Friendly Reminder: The 'big' kitchen is a certified commercial kitchen. So don't, like, drink directly from milk cartons or double dip in the salsa. You might have been able to get away with that before in the old kitchen, but not now! Not on Sherry's watch!

**Gaby** continued her long-standing tenure as the church's financial manager. Highlights from the year include telling Mike 'no, you can't do that,' telling Grant 'no, you can't do that,' and continuing to keep the church compliant with the IRS (see 2 earlier highlights for specifics).

**Ann** oversaw the transition to a new pay system at the church. So, as the rest of us figured that out, she was provided the opportunity to grow both in patience and forgiveness. 😊

**Carissa** also moved to full time, splitting her responsibilities between UCECP and UCH. Some of her additional responsibilities include producing more Taylor Swift-related content for the church sign, knowing pretty much everyone in the neighborhood, and continuing to make sure our social media pages don't turn into a dumpster fire. 🔥

**Stephen C Edwards** not only continued (and grew!) our excellent music program here at UCH, but he also got behind the pulpit and preached, twice! Although the content and delivery were excellent, we were hoping with his southern roots there'd be more fire and brimstone, sweating through wild gesticulations, or at least some snake handling but alas...maybe in 2024...

**Liz** continues as a cornerstone on our church staff as the Director of Handbells. However, if you were at this year's Beer & Brat party, then you'd also know she has a profound appreciation for the art of karaoke. Liz, along with **Stephen Uhl**, our brilliant organist, took to the stage (or pool deck, rather) and gave electrifying performances, demonstrating raw talent, wide range, and powerful stage presence.

Not many people know this, but **Adam**, our Director of Audio/Visual Media, was offered the position of lead AV tech for Taylor Swift's tour but turned it down, citing 1 John 2:15-17:

*Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world, for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world. And the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God abide forever.*

**Jennifer**, director of the long-running, much-beloved, and well-respected Union Church Early Childhood Program, continued to grow our program through offering cutting-edge, experiential opportunities in the classroom. She also has been an invaluable asset as we continue in our efforts to establish another early childhood program in the community of Summit. Currently, she is debating rolling out a 'UCECP VIP Experience' package – complete with spa treatments, private polo lessons, Michelin star snack time, and Ivy League admissions coaching. The demand is obviously there, it's really just a question of logistics at this point.

Although we didn't have a female pastor for much of this past year, **Penny** has certainly checked many of those boxes for us. For starters, she's female, so, already more qualified than Mike, Grant, or Robb. We also heard her preach during the 'What's Your Why?' series, her wisdom and non-anxious presence served so many of us in difficult times, and her consistency in working and being in the building during normal working hours (Grant? Stephen?) have been integral in keeping us even keeled through the various staff transitions this year.

**Robb** continues to support our Union Church Early Childhood Initiative, provide pastoral care, and lead worship on Sundays. When Grant's responsibilities shifted away from youth, Robb jumped at the opportunity to take over the program. "I'm an excellent dodgeball player, can easily stay up all night for lock-ins, and am currently working on becoming TikTok famous." Jury is still out on that, pending number of TikTok followers he can amass.

This past year we added **Francisco** to our staff as Building Manager. He passed all of the typical initiation trials with flying colors: sleeping in the belltower during a lightning storm, reciting the Lord's Prayer over and over while doing 1,000 pushups, surviving on cubes of bread and grape juice for a full week, and running the Women's Association gauntlet. Congratulations Francisco! Welcome to the team! But in all seriousness, he has the abilities of a jack-of-all-trades, the faith of a pastor, the patience and kindness of a Sunday school teacher, and the compassion of a chaplain. This church wouldn't run without him, and we are so grateful for all his hard work.

For **Grant**, this has been a big year of major changes! He moved to the office next door to Mike's, transitioning from a 'hoarder/storage closet' aesthetic to 'old seminary library.' He's picked up some new responsibilities with our young families and the UCECP, so he'll have to actually act like an adult in social situations at least some of the time now, so...pray for him. To the delight of many (especially his wife), it appears as though he's finally done with that stupid mohawk. And he became a father! *\*Grant would like to make it clear to everyone that if his son grows into a juvenile delinquent it is, in fact, not because he's a 'pastor's kid' but simply because he wound up with more of his father in him than his mother. Thoughts and prayers he takes after Anna.*

**Mike** has been embroiled in scandal after scandal this year. First, he was accused of misallocating funds to pay for a private bathroom off of his office, complete with whirlpool jets, walk-in sauna, and waterfall shower. Then Executive council rejected his "Burning Man Adult Work Tour" proposal, stopped funding on the new parsonage in Tahoe, and insisted that he stop encouraging parishioners to go on vision quests with his 'buddy from college, Randy' –Mike, it's cultural appropriation, it's using definitely illegal substances, and Randy is...unique.

Some highlights from his year include hosting Rev. Moma from Angola for several months as he finished his doctorate, the birth of his first grandson, and managing to transport a giant microscope to Angola resulting in the restoration of sight for 600 people per year (for those of you keeping track at home, that's, like, way more than Jesus. Just sayin').

**Merry Christmas! Hope to see you on Christmas Eve!**