

Reverend Ann Marie Utke

The Interim Minister Search Committee is excited to introduce the Reverend Ann Utke, who will step into the role of Interim Minister at SCUCC beginning on November 28, 2022. Pastor Ann, or simply Ann, grew up and spent her life in Wisconsin, until moving to Arizona in 2021 with her husband Bill, who was called to be the settled minister at Desert Garden UCC in Sun City West. As a graduate of the University of Wisconsin – Madison, Ann should feel right at home with our many other Badgers! Her Master of Divinity comes from Eden Theological Seminary in Webster Groves, Missouri.

Ann grew up in a family with both a Roman Catholic and United Church of Christ background, and spent time with a friend at a self-proclaimed Fundamentalist church. From Ann's profile:

*"In those circles, there were many messages that became clear: the Bible was interpreted in a literal way, and I was told that I must be born again in order to be saved from hell, and that only saved Christians were the true believers, as compared to the churches that had been home for me growing up. After an exchange year abroad, I became even more convinced that God was much larger than one particular group of Christians."*

As Ann talks about offering gifts and talent in the ministry to God, art, biking, swimming, hiking, baking, cooking, music, and spending time with family and friends are all mentioned as sources of personal inspiration. In fact, Ann plays the ukulele, and has even accompanied a Children's Christmas Pageant on her ukulele! She also mentions the importance of events and programs in our Christian way of life:

*"To be sure, our ministry to God is expressed through offering the very best of our gifts and talents. At times, the very ability to belong to a blessed community that is greater than ourselves is the gift that God's presence in the church brings to us."*

Ann's ministerial experience includes several interim positions, as well as full and part-time pastorates and time as a hospice chaplain. She sets high standards for herself in all her presentations, from sermons and worship, to communication and writings. Other personal qualities come through her references, this one from a co-worker where Ann served as Hospice Chaplain:

*"Ann has an ability to be culturally competent and accepting of cultural diversity. Ann did a fantastic job supporting my family with a funeral service for all denominations. Ann has strengths in speaking, using humor, connecting with everyone, and a passion for her work."*

From a member of a church where Ann served as an interim pastor:

*"Rev. Ann is good with people of all ages. She delights in meeting with the children during services and Sunday School. She has done creative things with our teens going through Confirmation."*

With regards to working with churches in transition, Ann shares a bit about her style and process:

*“In the last few years as I have worked with churches in transition, I have come to appreciate how each congregation has a unique identity that is shaped by the history, strengths, and energies of its members. It is my hope as a spiritual leader to help the congregation understand its special role in the community, and to make itself known in relevant ways. I would like to help create the kind of church environment in which people from both within and beyond the church can have a sense of belonging, acceptance, and contributing to God’s greater good.*

*“My tendency in working with congregations is to be open to asking each other which of our traditions should continue, and to evaluate how our practices may need to change for the current need. There is a fine balance between providing continuity and having the discernment to bring an event or program to an end, in order to make room for God’s spirit to move among us.”*

Another member of a previous pastorate summed up Ann’s ministry in this way:

*“For anyone interacting with Rev. Ann she will definitely leave a positive imprint on you! Our church was at a low when she came to us and she was just what we needed! She will be remembered for getting us on the right track again.”*

Ann will begin her ministry with SCUCC on Monday, November 28, 2022, and will lead us in worship starting December 4, 2022.

Sincerely,

Your Interim Minister Search Team

Rachel Davis, Linda Prideaux, Connor White, and Vance Wilson