

Reference for Peace United, Rochester, MN

**Describe some areas of strength in this church's ministry.**

My relationship with Peace United began in 2003 when I was called to be their Associate Pastor. I served there until 2009 when I felt called to return to a ministry opportunity that would allow me closer proximity to my family in the St. Louis area. I have remained, from a distance, a friend of the congregation and colleague of Pastor Paul.

Cameron Trimble has encouraged congregations to see themselves as “schools of love” where people learn to be “more compassionate, spiritually mature and socially responsible”. The creativity of leadership, response and engagement of the congregation, and intentional commitment to the needs of the community have fostered Peace United’s core presence in the Rochester Community. It was, when I served there, and continues to be a “school of love”.

After a discernment process, the congregation of Peace United voted to become an Open and Affirming congregation (2003?), and it remains a “safe space” as a spiritual home and/or community for ALL people. Their intentional ministry to the LGBTQ+ community and allies adds a vibrancy and energy to their congregational life. Inclusivity of all God’s people is a core value of Peace United.

Spirit inspired worship is one of the heart beats of the congregation. It is collaborative, with music that allows people to connect, relevant prayers and concerns for the community, deep encounters with the messages of Scripture and active participation of all worshippers. It is marked with honesty, integrity, and pastoral concern for all. It is a rare worship experience where personal introductions include pronouns: inclusivity at its best. Worship and Music are core values of Peace United.

Peace United is a center of peacemaking, activism and service to the Rochester community and beyond. The congregation believes in the urgent call to heal the broken and unjust systems of our world. The opportunities to volunteer both within the church community and Rochester community are extensive, allowing each person to discern their gifts and respond accordingly. Engagement and outreach are core values of Peace United.

My ministry experience at Peace United was an opportunity to encourage new models and ways to approach Faith Formation. In 2003, with the support of the Senior Pastor and Council, children remained in worship and Sunday School/Faith Formation followed. Their current educational program, Pathways, created by Dylon Starr (Director of Program and Music), is intergenerational. It meets before worship and prepares participants for the worship experience using the theme and Scripture for the day, with stations or workshops to meet the needs of a variety of learning styles. In addition, there are opportunities weekly for age-appropriate faith formation experiences. Faith Formation for all ages is a core value of Peace United.

In the past five years, Peace United has navigated COVID and a heartbreaking, destructive church fire. Strong pastoral leadership, talented staff and the congregation responded with deep commitment and care to stay successfully engaged as a faith community and a staple of the Rochester community. Their love and vitality as a community of faith is evident in their ministries and as you share in worship and/or the

life of the congregation. Somewhere on the Peace United website it says something like: let us SHOW you what we believe.

**Describe some areas for improvement in this church's ministry.**

My hope for Peace United is that they continue to build on their strengths. Pastor Paul has served and modeled strong pastoral servant leadership for more than two decades and retires from the congregation having always encouraged visioning, implementation and engagement. His presence, love for the people and an ongoing vision for the future are gifts that have enabled a long term, healthy ministry. The staff is gifted and ready for a future that holds the congregation's articulated vision as their guiding principles: caring without limit, embracing without exception, loving without condition.

**Describe a significant experience you have had of this church's ministry.**

A personal reflection and a key memory/experience: when my husband and I moved from the St. Louis area to Rochester in the fall of 2003, we settled into a rental home until we found one to purchase. In the spring of 2004, we were assured that moving (again) wouldn't be a big deal and on the morning of our scheduled move, the street was lined with cars, trucks and congregation members who moved all our "stuff" to our new home. Congregational care, for one another and the Rochester community, is a core value of Peace United.

Memory/experience of what became the annual Thanksgiving Dinner on the Sunday before Thanksgiving: This was (and is) a meal for anyone who wants to come. Those early years in 2004-2009, the meal was prepared by the congregation (amazing fellowship, collaboration, fun) and the community response was extraordinary with tables for our many guests set up all over the building. It remains a lifelong memory for me of authentic hospitality and servant leadership. For Peace United...it is who they are.

**Anything else you wish to share.**

Peace United, from my experience and perspective, has embraced the power to act creatively rather than be reactive to the challenges of congregational life and its future. They have a vision and advocate for values and resources that serve the common good and protect the vulnerable. They are a People following the way of LOVE.

My prayers are with Peace United as they engage in their search for their next Lead Pastor,

Rev. Linda Reynolds

Relationship to the Congregation: Associate Pastor at Peace United 2003-2009, now retired UCC Pastor

Current home church: Kirkwood United Church of Christ, Kirkwood, MO (Missouri MidSouth Conference)

Cell: 507-254-7630  
[lindareyno@aol.com](mailto:lindareyno@aol.com)