

Fellow members of the faith community of Hope Lutheran Nanaimo

It has been over a year since I have sent you all a report on our progress as a faith community navigating the pandemic that has so affected all of our lives.

The presence of the COVID virus in its various and evolving forms seems to be shifting to what the public health experts refer to as endemic, that is an ongoing background condition that we expect will be with us well into the future. Like so much we encounter in life, this is a circumstance we would not have chosen, AND we now must adjust.

Few of us would have expected in January of 2020 that we would be experiencing such a shift in our total way of being together in the world and as a faith community, yet, here we are, together along a journey we would not have imagined, sharing our faith in ways we would never have dreamed of, experiencing our church community in ways which seem to have deepened our shared faith.

None of us would have chosen these circumstances, yet, in so many ways each week our little community of Hope Lutheran is finding ways to truly Be the Body of Christ in our community and in the world at large. The Gospel, it seems, is not simply an age-old tradition to be recited, but rather a living breathing presence of love and joy and connection with one another in troubled and difficult times.

We are evolving and responding as a faith community and we are welcoming new participants who have joined us to share in our journey. And so much has changed in the past year.

Worshipping together at home and in our Sanctuary

In the late fall last year we formed a working group to design and implement a way to bind together our growing zoom worship gatherings with gatherings in-person in our church worship space. As with our first halting steps with our zoom services in the Spring of 2020 we stumbled, sometimes fell and got up, dusted ourselves off and kept going until we had most of the bugs worked out. With hybrid services we have gone through a similar process. Sometimes the complexity of the tasks can seem a bit overwhelming AND we seem to be finding ways to work together to overcome the hurdles.

Now, on each Sunday we worship as a united congregation participating together in the gift of the liturgy of our Faith, some at home on their computers, some in the sanctuary of our little church. Scripture is read and shared, sometimes in the sanctuary and sometimes by a participant in his/her home. The prayers of the people are offered, sometimes through a participant on screen from home and sometimes from the church sanctuary. Each Sunday the participants in the sanctuary can see the faces of those who are participating from home, and those at home can see the gathering in the sanctuary as we worship together.

What allows this community to experience our worship together is not only technology, but, more important, our grace as a community and our patience to work through the ever-present glitches. The Hybrid working group is so encouraged by the generous spirit of our faith community.

In accomplishing this we have purchase and installed equipment to facilitate our hybrid services including computers, a large monitor, microphones and sound mixers, cameras and cabinets to house our equipment, and what seems like miles of cables and connectors.

AND we are now singing hymns together at home and in the sanctuary with music that is performed live in the sanctuary and transmitted to participants at home.

Opening our church building to Community groups

In addition to worshipping together we have also opened our doors to the many community groups that make use of our space. Throughout the pandemic many 12 Step groups have had to curtail their needed meetings. We know as a congregation that our health as a faith community is dependent on our ability to Be together, to support and encourage one another. This is so true of the communities that gather as 12 step groups to deal with the pain of various forms of addiction.

In the fall of last year, I contacted the Health Authority to ask about their requirements to open our building for AA and NA groups. The response was not a list of rules to follow and hurdles to jump, but rather an overwhelming Thank You for our willingness to offer our space. In the midst of our concerns over COVID we have been navigating another, far more deadly pandemic, the opioid crisis that takes so many lives each week from each community and from all walks of life.

So we installed ventilation and cleaning and sanitation stations and opened our doors to resurrect this important part of our faith journey together.

Planned improvements to our Church

We have also renewed the flooring on our church and purchased a used lawn tractor to take care of our grounds and to help our hard-working garden crew to haul dirt and other objects when needed.

All of this is happening as we find we are welcoming new members and working with the changing environment from week to week.

In doing this we so appreciate the support you, the members of our faith community, provide to us. You encourage all of our teams of volunteers; you show up in so many ways each week and each day.

Increased Worship costs

We have been dealing with some increases in our expenses as we navigate our way through this journey together. Last month council approved the ongoing expense of external musicians to play at Sunday services when volunteers are not available and we have been upgrading our sound equipment to enhance the quality of sound to our zoom participants for both music and spoken liturgy.

We are so encouraged to see so many faces each Sunday, both in the sanctuary and on screen.

So far this year we have been keeping our heads above water AND it would be very helpful if those of you who feel able, could assist us to better meet the financial challenges our faith journey is presenting to us.

We have come far together in this difficult time. I want to repeat the words of the late Irish writer and theologian, John O'Donohue.

This is the Time to be Slow

This is the time to be slow
Lie low to the wall
Until the bitter weather passes

Try, as best you can, not to let
The wire brush of doubt
Scrape from your heart
All sense of yourself
And your hesitant light.
If you remain generous,
Time will come good;
And you will find your feet
Again on fresh pastures of promise,
Where the air will be kind
And blushed with new beginning.

These are words of faith and of courage. It is faith and courage that give birth to a generous spirit.

It is a privilege and a joy to serve this faithful and courageous community of Hope Lutheran Nanaimo.

Take care, you are all so precious to us.

Treasurer

Gerry Owen