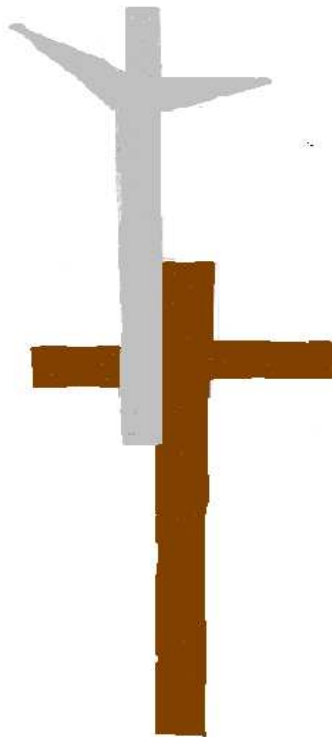


United in Faith

The Journey Continues: Years 11 - 15
2008 - 2013

Renewal!



United in Faith Lutheran Church

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Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.
Romans 12:2

The period of Years 11 through 15 began and ended with departures. In the Fall of 2008, Pastor Greg Moser left for a one year deployment to Afghanistan as a chaplain in the Illinois National Guard. In February 2013, Pastor Greg left United in Faith for a call to another congregation. The intervening years emphasized renewal with heightened spirituality, anxiety and drama due to the many changes, living our statement of affirmation and welcome, continued faithfulness and expanded ongoing ministry. In the midst of it all, Jesus Christ was proclaimed here in word and deed.

STAFFING

With Pastor Greg's deployment, Pastor Susan Schneider was called as our interim pastor. As our second intern, Carrie Smith, departed, our third intern, Julie Boleyn, arrived in Fall 2008. We were challenged to "walk our talk" of being a welcoming congregation with the change in spiritual leadership. At the same time, there was also a changeover in the music staff. The music director who left was replaced by one person to work as the choir director and organist and another to work as the praise band leader and pianist. The choir director/organist left after a year. Since that time, we have operated with a pianist/organist for the traditional service who also does choir direction and the praise band for the contemporary service.

Pastor Greg returned in the Fall of 2009. Our fourth intern, Richard Sheridan, began in Fall 2010. Pastor Greg continued to serve our congregation until resigning in February 2013. Shortly before his resignation, our administrative assistant position became vacant and a temporary

replacement was hired until the position was filled in May 2013.

Pastor Lester White was hired as our Intentional Interim Pastor after Pastor Greg's departure.

THE CONGREGATION

Official membership statistics indicate that the number of confirmed and baptized members remained stable, ending the period at 207 and 242 respectively. New members plus baptisms balanced the losses due to death or transfer. As a congregation that stresses discipleship over membership, several in the congregation are not included in the official counts.

RENEWAL

The intern's project as suggested by Pastor Greg at the time of his deployment was the initiation of a renewal effort based on Natural Church Development methodology. A team was formed to begin the process. An initial survey of members showed that Passionate Spirituality was our lowest dimension of the characteristics that make for a healthy ministry. In addition to ongoing activities of our ministries, such as Bible studies, book clubs, and small group gatherings, new activities to strengthen our spirituality were initiated and included:

- > Living the Lord's Prayer - a study that asked "what does it mean to be the church" and taught that God has a dream and we are in it
- > Raising awareness of God sightings, seeing God at work at UiF and asking how we can help
- > Incorporating prayer into meetings along with devotions; assigning prayer partners to youth on a mission trip; sharing of spontaneous community prayers during worship
- > Increasing use of the Taize worship format
- > Providing additional opportunities to support the Food Pantry with quarterly Brown Bag Sundays

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- > Moving from a Vision and Values church to one with a Purpose and Guiding Principles

Our Purpose
We are to be God's hands, feet and voice in the world.

Our Guiding Principles
Jesus is Lord and Savior
Reflect God's love
Pray and Listen for God's guidance
Continue to strengthen faith
Include all in God's work
Meet people where they are

Our Purpose and Guiding Principles were posted throughout the building to keep them in the forefront of our activities. Worksheets were developed for ministry and committee use to ensure that in planning activities our purpose and guiding principles were being fulfilled.

Subsequent surveys of the congregation showed that although Passionate Spirituality remained the lowest dimension, our focus on it was leverage to drive growth in all of the characteristics.

STRUCTURED FOR OUR PURPOSE

Governance and Committees
Church Council
Executive Committee

Audit
Call (*inactive*)
Education Endowment and Scholarship
Finance
Intern (*inactive*)
Mission Endowment Fund
Mutual Ministry
Nominating
Property Management

Communication (*inactive*)
Computer Administrators
Future Building Use (*inactive*)
Landscape
Renewal Team (*new*)
Thrivent Coordinators
Website

A **Call Committee** will be formed as part of the Transition period following the departure of Pastor Greg. The **Intern Committee**, which served as support for the intern, became inactive following the end of our intern program participation in 2011.

The Ministries of United in Faith
Children's
Confirmation
Faith Development (*inactive*)
Fellowship
Gay and Straight Together (*new*)
Communion Visitation
Hospitality
Justice (*inactive*)
Men in Mission
Outreach
Prayer
Service and Mission
Stewardship
Women's
Worship and Music

Gay and Straight Together ministry was formed in 2011 to commit time and energy to focus on outreach to the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) community. **Decorative Arts** ministry was merged back into Worship and Music. **Justice**, **Faith Development** and the Youth component of **Confirmation**, are currently inactive.

Funding

The Education Endowment and Scholarship Fund continued to provide annual scholarships and tuition to students. Almost \$5,000 was awarded to 5 students in 2012 and membership in the Luther High School North Association was maintained.

The Family Crisis Fund, administered by the Service and Mission ministry, is supported by the congregation and provides funds to meet critical financial needs.

Special appeals were made for furnace and roof repairs.

Although cash income has never covered cash expenditures, money received from the sale of the church buildings from the consolidation in 1998 has been prudently invested, and investment

income and occasional bequests have in many years offset the cash deficits. In recent years, cash income has somewhat stabilized and expenditures especially in the area of staff have been reduced significantly to close the gap left by the loss of investment income due to the recession. The cash deficit in 2012 was the lowest in a decade.

Communication

Pictures for a pictorial directory were taken at the end of 2012 with the publication of the directory expected in mid 2013.

In 2010, United in Faith established a Facebook profile to have a more public presence on social media and to post more timely information, announcements, and requests for prayer support.

The website, unitedinfaith.org, was redesigned in 2011 to be more user friendly.

A congregational forum was held on the fifth Sundays of a month to open the lines of communication and update the congregation on current and upcoming activities

Our intern, Richard Sheridan, held an educational seminar on interpersonal communication as an integral part of Christian discipleship.

Property

Major projects included: furnace repair (2012) and roof repairs and replacement (2013). The front facades of our buildings were repainted in 2012, funded by an anonymous donor. The parking lot was repaved in 2011.

The Boy Scouts have assisted in several projects, including painting the interior of the west building and weeding the garden areas.

The church bus was sold in 2009 due to lack of use.

In 2012 a Spanish-speaking ministry began renting our west ministry center building for Sunday worship.

Worship and Music

Early in 2008, the congregation acquired the new Lutheran hymnals, Evangelical Lutheran Worship. In January 2009, an envisioning opportunity was held for congregational input on worship. During the year, our worship schedule included a Traditional service and a Praise and Worship (formally contemporary) service each Sunday morning except when there was a fifth Sunday in a month. Then one service was held, alternating the worship format. During the summer months, one service was held alternating each week between Traditional and Praise and Worship formats. Sunday school was held during a portion of each service except during the summer months.

The music and liturgy continued to be highly regarded - varied, spirit-filled, and celebratory. The choir sings at the traditional service. Our Praise band, The Voice of the Turtle (originally called Midnight Mass), continues to lead music at the Praise and Worship service. Two large screens were installed on either side of the altar for the projection of the words to the songs used in the Praise and Worship service. They are also used to project videos and pictures for multimedia presentations. A new sound system was installed in 2009, funded by an anonymous donor.

Multi-week themed preaching series were used periodically on Sundays and during Lent and Advent to explore topics in depth. Themes included: Summer Road Trip: Family Vacation with Abraham and Sarah; Healing; Preparing for the Messiah; Basic Christian Living; A Season of Hope, A Life of Hope; What is Faith?; Can God Save Us?; and Teach Me to Pray.

Average Sunday worship attendance declined 17%, and the 2013 average attendance through Easter is 101.

LIVING OUR PURPOSE

Continuing Traditions

Some of our traditions, created over our 15 years continued, while some fell away as needs and passions changed and new events were held to supplement traditions.

- * Care packages and a pen pal campaign during Pastor Greg's absence
- * Summer concert series (2008)
- * Bible giveaways
- * Blessing of the animals in October
- * Seasonal, holiday and special event Fellowship and Outreach dinners and pot lucks
- * Annual Spring Cleaning
- * Annual Women's Spring Brunch
- * Men's Monthly breakfast meetings
- * Girl Scout Pancake Breakfasts
- * Easter and Mother's Day breakfasts
- * Baby showers for new little ones
- * Family game nights
- * Stewardship Temple Talks
- * Pampered Chef fundraiser
- * Attending Lutheran Day in Springfield to discuss issues with representatives and meet other Lutheran advocates
- * Wrapping cookies/packing health kits/serving dinner/making donations for The Night Ministry organization
- * Youth summer mission/gathering trips (2008 Global Mission Event in Lacrosse, WI; 2011 mission trip to Hancock Co. Mississippi)
- * Confirmation retreats
- * Women's retreats (Prayer June 2009, Spirituality April 2011)
- * Fall Rally Day/Block Party for the congregation, neighbors, and friends with food, music, entertainment, registration, and information on the ministries of United in Faith
- * Explore Belonging classes for people interested in learning more about United in Faith
- * Thanksgiving Eve worship services and pie sharing
- * Christmas Bazaar in October (discontinued 2009)
- * Cookie Walk in December
- * Forum on end of life planning

- * Collection of Back to School Supplies for Lutheran Social Services of Illinois, St. Cyprian's Food Pantry, and the children of Afghanistan
- * Special St. Cyprian's Food Pantry collections of food and funds for Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas as well as quarterly Brown Bag Sundays
- * Donations to the children of St. Cyprian's Food Pantry of Christmas gifts (125 gifts in 2012) and Easter baskets (330 in 2013)
- * Making scarves for St. Cyprian's families and a special project by a member donating 1,000 hats

Serving

Outreach events by the Gay and Straight Together ministry included a film festival, marching in the annual Pride Parade, a workshop on marriage equality, and celebrating Reconciling in Christ Sundays.

New Life for Old Bags is a ministry started by one of our members in 2010 that recycles plastic shopping bags to make sleeping mats for the homeless. All ages can participate in the process, which to date has recycled 549,500 bags into 785 mats representing 62,800 hours of volunteer labor. Although not an official ministry of the congregation, NLOB is supported by the congregation by providing office space and meeting space for monthly work days, in addition to workers.

Other ministries continued their dedicated work:

- * Sunday Church School
- * Weekly Bible/book studies
- * Vacation Bible School
- * Monthly communion visitation to those unable to attend church
- * Intercessory prayers as requested, a monthly community prayer session and maintenance of a prayer list for distribution
- * Addition of a stand of candles and kneeler in the sanctuary
- * The Family Crisis Fund collection and disbursement
- * Building and landscape maintenance and upkeep including computer infrastructure
- * *The Lutheran* magazine subscriptions to all families

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- * Daily devotional booklets available to all
- * Preparation of the altar for each service and maintenance of the paraments, vestments, and linens
- * Greeters for Sunday worship services and "coffee and" supplied for Sunday morning fellowship, plus special desserts for celebrations
- * Preparation of youth for confirmation
- * Raising up stewardship topics
- * Monthly opportunities to grow in faith by the Women of the ELCA

United in Faith continued to host these organizations:

Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts
Girl Scouts and Brownies
Golden Diners
St. Cyprian's Food Pantry
New Life for Old Bags
Senior Club
Alcoholics Anonymous
Al Anon
Survivors of Incest Anonymous

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

As this 5 year period comes to a close, United in Faith is entering into an Intentional Transition period as it prepares to call a new pastor. A Transition Team has been appointed to take the congregation through the following steps:

- > Coming to terms with our history
- > Discovering a new identity
- > Enabling needed leadership change
- > Renewing denominational linkages
- > Committing to a new direction in ministry

The Renewal Team will be renamed the Church Health Team to signify the ongoing process to assess and strengthen the health of the church using the Natural Church Development process. A recommitment to supporting the health of the church will be asked of each person in the congregation.

Putting Passionate Spirituality aside, the Church Health Team will engage the entire congregation in a spiritual gifts assessment. This will allow for personal growth plans for each person and

deployment of the discovered gifts in appropriate ministries to fulfill individual passions. Instead of a focus on meeting the needs of our church, we can become an asset-based climate where members' assets drive the matching to opportunities and needs.

**Renewed in Christ,
we remain United in Faith,
striving to be God's Hands,
Feet and Voice
in the World**