

Message for January 2, 2022

So the tradition in the Moravian Church is that usually, and in the past, the community would gather on New Year's eve and welcome in the new year in prayer and in worship. As a part of that worship the pastor would read a memoir of the previous year, a recounting of the life of the community. As we no longer have an official watchnight service, we have blended that tradition into our Sunday morning on the first Sunday in January. So, I would like to share with you a reflective memorabilia of the Wisconsin Rapids Moravian Congregation for 2021.

2021 was the year of adaptability. We transitioned into this year with gathering only online for the second time since Covid-19 arrived in our state. We missed being able to gather, but found ways to stay connected while physically apart. We continued with weekly mailing that included any updates from church leadership, the bulletin for the upcoming worship as well as the transcription of the previous week's sermon. We had our meetings and studies online through Zoom and worshiped online via Zoom and YouTube live. We adapted for our Annual Church Council meeting having a Town Hall meeting online to answer questions and present information and then voted via snail mail. We elected our new members to the boards and CEC and approved our budget.

February saw the installation of newly elected joint board. Ash Wednesday we participated with the Province on a special Zoom worship experience which began the season of Lent. We began our Mid-week Lenten services on-line only, but were able to move into a hybrid offering as we began to offer the option of attending in-person with mitigations or by Zoom. On February 28 we began to offer two worship services, a 9 am in-person worship with mitigation protocols (masked, physically distanced, single representative responding on behalf of the congregation, ushered in and out of worship) and a 10:15 am service which was transmitted on an FM transmitter, Zoom and YouTube Live. Our Lenten journey concluded the celebration of Palm Sunday followed by our annual Readings for Holy Week services which for Monday through Wednesday we held as hybrid services then offered two services (one in-person and one broadcasted) on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Easter morning sunrise service offered us the opportunity to worship entirely at the cemetery with singing and responding and the addition of two trombonists playing "Sing Hallelujah, Praise the Lord" as we finished followed by an in-person service and the broadcasted service.

In March we celebrated paying off our Storm Drain loan and began fund raising to replace our lawn care equipment. We were able to raise enough funds to replace our lawn mower with snow blowing attachment in just a few months.

Pastor Beth secured a grant of \$5,000 from the Larger Life Foundation to be used to upgrade our equipment for broadcasting the worship service. This allowed us to purchase a second copyright license as well as a camera, tripod, and dedicated computer. With this upgrade a new ministry was formed in the church with the creation of Tech Team. This group was trained over the summer and began to facilitate the tech part of the broadcast service freeing up Pastor Beth to focus solely on worship leadership during the service.

In the spring we updated the Prayer Chain and had a transition in leadership of the text coordinator for this ministry. We also had our congregational delegates attend the all online Western District Synod.

In May our Wednesday Contemporary service had a Stewardship series which was led via Zoom by Laura Watson, director of stewardship services for the Moravian Ministries Foundation. We also began to have our in-person service outdoors if the temp was about 60 degrees. We also had an end of the school year Sunday School event for the children of the congregation, and held a youth event in both June and July.

June saw the transition from our contemporary worship services to the summer vespers series which were held around the campfire on Wednesday evenings.

Over the spring and summer and into the fall work was done in the church building to complete the renovations begun in 2019. We painted the ceilings in the sanctuary, fellowship hall and north stairway as well as the walls in the north stairway. We also carpeted the landing outside of the One Note at a Time rooms on the north end of the second floor.

July we transitioned back into the sanctuary during the majority of the month, designating the first Sunday of the month through September as outdoor Sunday and worshiping around the campfire space those weeks. We also saw a scaled down version of our July 4th stand serving popcorn, baked goods, and beverages. We also collected items for the annual "Stuff the Bus" for our community.

On September 12th we celebrated the Confirmation of Faith of Evelyn Fletcher, Lillia Fletcher, Keegan Guinn, Riley Ott and Elijah Schultz, and welcomed them into voting membership. This Sunday was also when we were able to blend back into one worship service as we were able to broadcast our in-person worship service thanks to the technology upgrade we were able to begin. We also held an Open House for the community on September 18th to let them see the renovations done in the building and to promote the One Note at a Time ministry. We then dedicated the space to God's glory on Sunday, September 19th.

September also saw us transition back to the Wednesday night contemporary worship from our summer vespers series and the resuming of the Breakfast Bible Study, though it gathered on a different day and at a new time. During the month we also saw the resignations of board members, one from the Trustees and one from the Elders.

October saw the appointment of others to fill out those terms, as well as the celebration of the baptism of Ava Ott. During the month we also saw the establishment of a new ministry, the Blessings Committee. Currently comprised of three members, this group is seeking to find ways to connect the congregation with each other and foster stronger relationships. In early November they sent out and collected Spiritual gifts inventories which will allow the congregation to connect its members with ministry opportunities within their interest.

November saw the return of our adult Sunday School with a Moravian refresher theme for the first three weeks then transitioning into Advent. It also saw our congregation offer an Inquirer's class for those interested in joining the congregation as well as hosting a Thanksgiving Service. We were able to resume some of our usual holiday traditions such as filling boxes for Operation Christmas Child, putting up the tree and putz, wrapping candles, and having the mitten tree put up.

We transitioned into the month of December with the Joint Board offering listening sessions to anyone in the congregation who wanted to ask questions and/or offer concerns and suggestions. These sessions were held the first two Sundays of the month following worship. We held our annual congregational Christmas Caroling event for our home bound members with those participating gathering around a table to sing into phones which allowed for all to stay warm and still share in the joy of the event. The Blessings Committee coordinated and hosted a Christmas Concert and Sing-along event on December 11. The choir sang a "mini" cantata for our worship on December 12 and the children of the congregation (with some help) presented their Christmas Program "A Moravian Christmas" as part of worship on December 19 which was followed by a time of fellowship in the social hall. The congregation participated in the Unity Prayer watch on December 21, offered a *Blue Christmas* service for those struggling during the holiday on December 22 and was able to offer in-person Christmas Eve Candlelight services at 4:30 and 7.

Over the year our congregation also offered outreach to our community and beyond. Our Cleansing Water teams continued to meet clients to help with their laundry, and we collected monthly for our Joyful Noise mission. Receiving the monies collected this year were: the Neighborhood Table, the Family Center, Moravian Disaster Relief (specifically to help in the relief efforts following the hurricanes in Nicaragua and Honduras), the Rapids Family Backpack Program, Jeremiah's Crossing, Camperships, the Ahuas Medical Clinic, Love INC, YouBelong, Tricklebee Café, Park Place Adult Care, and the service dog for Kolby Kelnhofer.

Through it all our watchword for the year, "'Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you.'" (Psalm 55:22) upheld us through the ups and downs of our life together. We turned to God in worship, in prayer, and in fellowship and have felt God's presence throughout the year. We pray 2022 will bring us peace, love and joy as we seek to be faithful in our call to be the family of Christ with each other and the world as we await what the new year holds in store.