

MISSION MOMENT

Drive-In Worship Ushers in Awe and Delight!

By Deacon Vicki Hanrahan, Assistant to the Bishop for Synodical Life



I have attended the fair-weather drive-in worship at First Lutheran Church in Janesville. It's been a while since I attended it, but you may remember that story in Walking Together, "Bread, Wine & Jumper Cables." What a delight that was to see a hundred vehicles pull up for worship with their partners and spouses in the passenger seat and pets and children in the back seat...all getting the gospel before going about their summer day.

So while not the first to approach worship in this way, the drive-in service at St. John's in Johnson Creek felt special and different. Held last Sunday at 9:00 and attended by more people than their average in-person worship, all I could think of was how much we longed to be together during this pandemic and this drive-in worship made that possible. By tuning into 87.9 on our FM dials, we could hear the assurance from Pastor Dale Vlastnik that the Lord is with us. Over and over in my mind, I heard the words from the Psalmist:

*As a deer longs for flowing streams,
So my soul longs for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.
Psalm 42:1-2*



Perhaps it was because this service like scripture in the bible (as Martin Luther would say) was humbly cradled in the swaddling cloths of this pandemic that it felt so loving and holy. It was indeed quenching a thirst for community, a thirst for assurance that we're going to be okay because God is always with us, and a thirst that the familiar place where we go to be fed and familiar faces that we long to see are reachable.



Preaching from a hay wagon, bundled up in his Carhardts under his alb, Rev. Dale Vlastnik preached the gospel, presided over communion, and sent the worshippers out into the community to go in peace and serve the Lord. Of course, it looked quite different as he served communion through our rolled down windows, encouraged our offerings to be placed into the drive by offering plates on pedestals, and gave us a blessing before directing us to the exit where a sign reminded us to go in peace and serve the Lord.

When I asked congregants for their reactions, Steve & Julie Wollin felt the worship was "Awesome. We felt we were fed. We weren't surprised that Pastor Dale could do this because we know him and he's great." Awesome was the reply I received from several in attendance. Awe and delight were ushered in and I am thinking that God said it was good.

All could not be accomplished without the enthusiasm and technical support from member, James Toppel and his team. As we entered the parking lot, we were greeted by an "usher" and invited to tune into the low frequency FM station 87.7. Last minute adjustments to the hay wagon and technical considerations with the transmitter were met with God's help according to Jim. As there is always a learning curve, this team learned that not all car radios could dial into the 87.7 FM frequency...their radios didn't dial down that low! So they quickly adjusted to 87.9 and all was well. This coming weekend, Jim explained, they are getting a transmitter that will allow them to transmit music in addition to Pastor Dale's voice.



I noticed the service started exactly on time with a welcome, a blessing, scripture, message on John 9, intercessory prayers, the words of institution, communion and sending.

As Pastor Dale promised, "I will preach from a farm wagon and we'll have an abbreviated service, but we'll offer communion and gather the offering as folks drive out of the parking lot. God will be working through us and through all of this during this challenging time."

The synod office had sent out a press release mentioning the creative adjustments our pastors and deacons were making to the ways in which we serve our communities while the order for social distancing is enforced. Of those mentioned to the local media, the drive-in service at St. John's captured the attention of News 3 Now who covered the story. Here is the link to the video and the press release:

<https://www.channel3000.com/church-hosts-drive-in-services-members-tune-in-to-sermons/?fbclid=IwAR0nowG4-QQjMqol0QlyU2wzdFJzrMnQlaRpF8VvTSEzPeXJzRA38tFodgU>

Something you might pay attention to are the local media who are very interested in how a community that relies on in person gatherings is managing through the pandemic. I encourage you to craft your own press releases to your local newspapers to tell your own stories of how you continue to share the gospel and stay in connected community! You may capture their attention to tell your story that might just be read by someone who desperately needs to be in community with you. If you would like a copy of the press release in which you might model, send me an email: vickih@scsw-elca.org.