

MISSION MOMENT

United in Christ Meets Congregants Where They Are At For the Sake of the Gospel

By Deacon Vicki Hanrahan

Isn't that what we always say Jesus did with his disciples? Jesus meets us where we are at in order that we may follow and actively participate in God's work using the gifts and abilities that God has given us. This is the story of one church that sees challenges as opportunities to sharing the gospel in a way that allows everyone to follow along.

The Rev. Peter Heide, Interim pastor of United in Christ Lutheran Church in Morrisonville holds Telephone Worship each week. Recognizing that this congregation is predominantly internet and



technology challenged, when the pandemic numbers started skyrocketing around the state, they decided they needed a workable alternative to in person worship. Rev. Heide shared, "Their main concern was that 1/3 of the congregation has either no computer, no internet except via dial up in their rural community, and no cell service, so how are we going to do this?!"

As a member of the blind community, Pastor Heide was part of a group that had been doing phone conference calls for years, so he offered the simple approach of an audio conference call through freeconferencecall.com as their possible solution. Everyone has touchtone phones, so this was recognized as the common denominator. Pastor Heide said, "The beauty of it is that some of the people have hearing aids that run through their phones or they have volume controls on their phones. Some people have reported they can hear me better on their phones than in a traditional worship service. It's very low tech but the important thing is that it's very accessible to all." They also say they listen better with the absence of visuals, so Rev. Heide light-heartedly agreed that it puts a bit more pressure on enhancing the quality of his sermons. Always a good thing for any pastor or deacon!

They are working on singing as it's tricky, so sometimes after playing the music, Pastor Heide reads the words as a poem, while they still have the melody in their head. Like so many other congregations are experiencing, one of the other benefits of virtual worship includes expanded outreach. "We're a small community but I have a couple blind friends that are attending because they can participate now where they would not have been able to come to in person worship because of the drive," Heide shared.

Following worship, they hang on for a relaxed coffee hour in the virtual space already created for worship. What a wonderful inspiring story of meeting people where they are at for the sake of the gospel. Staying in connected community is paramount to keeping people connected to their faith practices. Not everyone needs whistles and bells. Well done United in Christ Lutheran Church!