

State of the Parish Address 2024
Voters Assembly
March 17, 2024

I think many of us didn't think Hope would be in its current state as of March of 2024. I think many of us thought we would no longer be in a state of transition. Hope would have a new senior pastor by now, and we would be pushing together into a new era. But that is not the case. Here we still are in transition – waiting on the Lord. But that is not necessarily a bad thing. The prophet Jeremiah, in his book of Lamentations – where he bemoans and struggles with Israel's current state in exile in Babylon – wrote these comforting words:

“The steadfast love the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion says my soul, therefore I will hope in him. The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.”

And so, we continue to wait - waiting for the Lord and what He will do.

But that does not mean life and ministry and growth are NOT happening at Hope. They are. I want to walk through with you just some of the highlights of what has been going on the past year.

Attendance: Despite being in a time of transition, our worship attendance is up, year over year, for the past two years. In 2022, average total attendance was 276, a 10.4% increase over 2021 (toward the end of covid.) In 2023, average total attendance was 287, a 4% increase over 2022. At the 7:00 Christmas Eve service, we had 393 people in attendance. We haven't seen the Sanctuary that full in a long time – even before covid. Our current baptized membership stands at 613. Confirmed membership, 533. Last year we had one of the largest new

member classes in a long time -18 new members at once. Some other statistics: we had 5 baptisms and 11 deaths. Demographically, 20% of the congregation is under 18, 30% is between 19 and 49, 50% are over 50.

Here are some highlights about ministry here at Hope:

For Mosaic – our Wednesday gathering for food and faith activities, we now regularly have over 50 in attendance – growing every year since it was started.

We've grown to now offer two parenting Bible studies on Sunday morning.

Ladies Guild Bunco had a record attendance and it's becoming an outreach event.

An Outreach Task Force has begun work to brainstorm and plan outreach opportunities for Hope.

The staff did their own service project this past summer – hosting the Friendswood Community Prayer Breakfast in July.

We tried new things last summer for Bible class – learning some apologetics (defending the faith) together in an intergenerational way, and even greater things are being planned for this summer.

We kicked off a prayer partner program in the fall of 2023. We have more than 20 volunteers praying for and connecting with our children and youth.

Men's Ministry's retreat, which has always been solid, expanded their outreach to our 20 something crowd and had good results.

The women's retreat was amazing as usual.

And all the following new things are all led by lay people, not the staff:

Lutherfest – led entirely by laypeople and expanded to multiple ministries participating with spectacular results.

The Altar Flower Committee was started because of an issue with florists not wanting to supply and deliver flowers at a price we could afford. It is entirely lay-led, and have, and will produce amazing bouquets of flowers to beautify the chancel. In addition, the group draws together mixed ages of people to put together those lovely creations.

4th of July fireworks. Hotdogs and popcorn distributed to our neighbors who come to watch fireworks from our backyard. Hosted by Men's ministry last year and the Outreach Task Force is looking to dramatically increase our presence for this year.

The community garden I began back in 2012. Because of my workload, I can no longer lead it. A group of members have come together with new dreams of expanding and improving it – an opportunity for outreach and intergenerational ministry.

Instead of the staff putting up and taking down the Christmas decorations in the Sanctuary, the congregation got to do it. We had a "Hanging of the Greens" where, with the help of the Fellowship Task Force, everyone in the congregation was invited to join in to decorate the sanctuary. And we did "Un-decking the Halls" to do the same to bring them back down.

These are just some highlights. I'm sure there are many other examples. And there are many ministries of Hope that continue to faithfully plug along at what they do – keeping this congregation afloat and moving forward together.

A big “thank you” to all those who are giving their time and effort toward ministry at Hope. It doesn’t happen with out all of you contributing in some way.

The staff has a white board in the copier room which we now use to record things we are celebrating at Hope. We’ve taken photos of these lists and would like to share them with you. (Show slides)

I think the point I’m trying to drive home is this: despite being in transition, Hope is doing okay. And I pray that pattern continues, no matter what happens today, or tomorrow, or next month, or next year.

We have a shared life together as the Body of Christ known as Hope Lutheran Church. We’re all sinners. But in Christ, we’re all forgiven sinners. Life together as a congregation of God’s people is like a family – it’s always a messy thing. But at the very same time, it’s a beautiful thing to see. We have had challenges and joys. And there will continue to be challenges and joys. That’s the life of a disciple of Jesus and the life of a community of faith following their Savior. So, during this time of extended transition, we wait – we wait with eager anticipation for the new thing the Lord will do among us. And at the same time, we press forward with the great commission and the ministry our Lord had entrusted to His people.