

Washington – Rainier Circuit (mid-Seattle and south)

Messiah Lutheran, Lacey, WA—Chris Royce

Pro - We have managed to successfully rebuild and stabilize after our October 2017 fire. We have awesome, clean, new facilities. As part of that, a significant amount of money was put into our online ministry/livestreaming as a service to homebound members/outreach tool and we have seen fruitful blessings from that.

Another pro - in my 1.5 years as pastor here I have noticed a wonderful culture of every member greeting/welcoming new guests. It isn't a "everyone keeps to themselves" type of ministry, or "only the greeters notice guests" - but everyone is very hospitable and welcoming. I thank God for that.

Con - We're currently kind of at a standstill of "where to go/what to do next" for our ministry. There were some early stages talk of getting a preschool going, but we're kind of unsure of where to go/what to do next. Some direction and invested members to take ownership of this idea would be ideal.

St. Paul's, Tacoma, WA—Dave Birsching

OUR CHALLENGES

1) Personal Health Issues - Much of this past year has been impacted by significant health issues for both myself and my wife. Last June I took a nasty fall down a stairway at St. Paul's, tearing the upper leg muscles of both my legs. This limited my mobility for some time, and I'm still not fully recovered. Meanwhile, the retina in Sheryl's left eye detached ... repeatedly. She has had multiple surgeries to repair it and is still impacted by it with at least one more surgery to come. She also had a leg surgery. All of these things have, of course, affected my ministry to some degree. St. Paul's has been extremely supportive, and the Lord has continued to sustain the congregation throughout.

2) COVID - Of course, what congregation wasn't impacted by the virus? However, with no school to keep some activities going like many sister congregations, it hit ours especially hard. It was an extremely difficult 18 months for us, and group engagement in general, but even in worship, was severely affected. Thankfully we finally seem to be pulling out of this and there seems to be a new eagerness for involvement again.

3) Capital Repairs - Our buildings (church and "Old Parsonage," which we use for office space and classrooms) are over 100 years old. Consequently, they typically need much attention. (For example, we need to replace our church roof in the very near future - a sizable project.) In addition, a driver in a stolen vehicle demolished our church sign. Since we decided to upgrade to a digital sign, we needed to cover the additional cost that insurance wouldn't cover. Thankfully we have no debt as a congregation, and have money in the bank, as well as generous members. Still, the needed repairs continue to come, and the money is limited. Thankfully, our God is not.

OUR BLESSINGS

1) "Evenings of Encouragement" - Last fall we began a weekly Wednesday evening worship service. It is not a "rehash" of a Sunday service, but a totally different focus and format ... a more relaxed and more contemporary approach. Instead of a sermon, we do a brief Bible study based on my weekly blog post (HeadingToHeaven.com). This has been a tremendous blessing. We have regular attendees who come on Wednesday evenings, some of whom can't

make it on Sunday morning, and some who attend both services. We also have had a number of inactive members attend, as well as non-members. It seems to be a more popular and comfortable option to younger generations. It has already provided us with at least one new member, with more on the immediate horizon. We continued this special approach (in a bit more blended format - traditional and contemporary) for our Lenten services and have seen our Lenten attendance higher than in past years.

2) "Season of Prayer" - Throughout the season of Lent, our entire congregation is engaged in a simple daily prayer campaign. I wrote 5 short prayers and have shared them (along with the rationale for the program) with our people. The focus of the 5 prayers is ... thanks for abundant blessings, and prayers for personal spiritual growth, for greater involvement in worship and Bible study, for personal opportunities to share Jesus, and for more effective congregational outreach. I have already seen multiple answers to these prayers, praise be to God!

3) Facility Improvements - In the past year God has blessed us with some significant upgrades on our campus. We have a new digital sign in front of our church which is an excellent tool for promoting our congregation's activities and is already garnering additional attention from our community. We also remodeled our church entryway, opening it up a bit more and making it much more welcoming as folks walk into our church. In addition, we added two rows of new, more comfortable and flexible chairs for those who were challenged (because of health issues) by sitting in the old wooden "theater seats" in our church. More upgrades will follow (new roof, replacement of one of our worship projectors, and an updated security system).

4) Quarterly Blood Drives - We work with Red Cross, who is a wonderful partner, to host quarterly 2-day blood drives in our fellowship area (our remodeled church basement). Our campus and facility are wonderfully equipped to host the drives and are centrally located to a huge population. Consequently, our drives tend to quickly fill up. This not only shows our congregation's care for our community, but also brings quite a number of visitors onto our campus for every drive. We have been able to share information on our congregation with many of them, as well as even some tours of our beautiful church. We are evaluating how we can better leverage these opportunities for sharing Jesus with those who walk through our doors.

Faith Lutheran, Tacoma—James Wilcox, CP

Blessings

1. Enrollment at our school is very strong, even aggressive. Usually, the lower grades are filled for the upcoming school year by now, but even our 7/8 grade classroom is full for next year with about 20 students. Like schools throughout the synod, we are looking to add teaching staff.
2. Our congregation weathered COVID pretty well – attendance of both in-person and online was fairly strong throughout. Our average worship attendance has been on a generally upward trend since 2020.
3. Our congregation is generally happy and excited about ministry. They enjoy worshipping Jesus and are excited for opportunities to share the message of Christ with our community and the world.

Things to pray for

1. We need space and teaching staff. In spite of a few “false starts” with building projects we are moving forward with a moderate expansion by installing a two-classroom portable on our empty lot. We are praying this will get installed and past inspection ahead of the upcoming school year. There are supply line issues that are threatening that as well as a shortage of engineers for needed site planning. With that comes the need for teachers to fill positions. We’re feeling some growing pains and we aren’t sure yet what we’ll do if we don’t have enough teachers for 22-23.
2. Our congregation is a little nervous about supporting a 500K building project. Please join in praying for hearts to be opened and resources available to support a new mortgage. We also give prayers of thanks that LACE was able to write us a loan with generous terms and no need for investments.
3. We have several families whose children have drifted from faith and want nothing to do with them, some even keeping them from meeting grandchildren. Please join me in praying for their strength and patience as they bear this bitter cross.

Des Moines, Holy Trinity—Bart Brauer, Park (Korean)

Covington, Light of Life—Daniel Lange

Half-way through delinquent list, 75% strength in people power and attendance. Teaching first BIC since pandemic