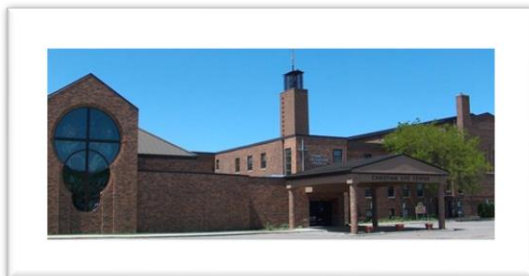


An Interview with Trinity Lutheran Church, Moorhead, MN

#BeALight

By Stephanie Pasch

Pastor Matt Peterson, Education Pastor, shared what Trinity is up to in their congregation and community with Stephanie.



How many members do you have?

On paper, approximately 3000 members. Pre-COVID worshiped around 750/week. Although we had an online presence prior to COVID-19, we now average 1500-1600 “views” online as we both livestream our services and post them online for viewing on demand.



Community Information: Moorhead, MN has a population of 43,652 (2019 estimate). Moorhead also has 2 four year colleges: Concordia College and Minnesota State University, Moorhead. Moorhead is also part of the Fargo/Moorhead “metro” area, population 229,000. Fargo has a four-year college, North Dakota State University.

Describe the “Be A Light” focus or initiative.

Be A Light came about through a capital campaign that began 4-5 years ago. Prior to the campaign the congregation put together a Missional Narrative... What is Trinity all about? Who are we? Why do we do what we do? From that, they came up with the focus “Be A Light”. As we studied the first chapter of John, we came up with our mission statement, “*Be a light into downtown Moorhead and beyond.*”



The goal of the capital campaign is to raise funds for renovating our building. The building is rooted in downtown Moorhead and has had multiple additions over the years. While the worship spaces are great (we have both a contemporary space and a traditional sanctuary), the space in between will hopefully become more cohesive and offer new opportunities.

Fall of 2019 is when they really kicked off *Be A Light* throughout the church. They wrote curriculum for the children, youth and families that had stories of light woven into the curriculum. The other part of our theme at that time was “Refocus, Renew, Refresh... Be A Light”. We had big stickers made up that we handed out in church that fall and also in the community – in the parades, etc. It really caught on!

People now are posting ways on Facebook that they can “Be A Light” in their workspaces, in the community and in their everyday lives.

Starting in the spring of 2020 (during COVID-19), we started doing once a month drive throughs. Offerings have been collected for different community groups such as a preschool (people donated diapers, crayons, etc), the Churches United Homeless Shelter, and the Pathways Outdoor Ministries (church camps). These drive throughs gave the opportunities for the church to send something home as well. Like a “smores bag” – supplies for making smores at home- or an Advent calendar.

We made our own Advent calendar with different things members of all ages could do every day during Advent. We gave star stickers to put on the challenges that were completed. These “challenges” or suggestions were also posted daily on our Facebook page. (Pastor Matt generously shared the calendar and the sheet with the stars with the Christian Education Network of the ELCA. Check them out!)

Due to COVID-19, the local homeless shelter had to rethink how they were distributing meals during the days. The shelter had a group of people staying at the shelter and they needed to keep them separate from the folks that just came for lunch. In the summertime, they handed out bagged lunches. As winter rolled in, bag lunches were no longer a good option. So, Trinity Lutheran has opened our doors to provide a noon meal each day for anybody who needs it! It is one way that we can *Be A Light* in the community!

What has been the most positive outcome of this initiative?

Trinity has a sense of unity... a sense of unified mission.

As Trinity has two worship spaces – one for contemporary worship and one for traditional worship, it’s easy to become separated by our own areas and our own connections. However, as everyone is involved in *Being a Light* in the community we are brought together.

What was the most unexpected outcome?

Trinity has always had good relationships with the other congregations in the Fargo/ Moorhead area. This community connection has only improved that! In fact, another congregation in Moorhead, Good Shepherd, had a focus that began at the same time as Trinity’s. Trinity’s is *Be A Light*. Good Shepherd was *For Fargo/Moorhead*. So in the fall of 2019, we combined efforts on occasion *Be A Light For Fargo/Moorhead*. We did pastor exchanges for Sundays, traded t-shirts with each other’s taglines on them and other partnered events.

What are the next steps?

First and foremost is the Capital Campaign. In addition, there will be a drive-through event to hand out Lenten Reflections, collect kids offering for Lutheran World Relief, and hand out Bible Blast Bags (Sunday School supplies for the upcoming month). Lenten Reflections will have a different feel than the Advent Calendars.

After that, who knows what is next!

Do you have advice for a church wanting to start something like this?

Involve as many people as possible... in the congregation and in the community. When Trinity began our study for our Missional Narrative, we had listening sessions. Some of these were specific to the congregation. Some were more community focused, inviting leaders from the homeless shelter, the police department, the school district, the United Way, etc. We asked the community leaders about what places did they have needs that perhaps Trinity could help with? We also asked about what the community leaders knew about Trinity? What was their perception of Trinity? From those listening sessions... where we asked a lot of questions and then listened... and then asked more questions... our Missional narrative came together and from that came the focus *Be A Light*.

As we concluded our interview, Pastor Matt brought a quote from the poet, Amanda Gorman, at inauguration, "There is always light, if only we're brave enough to see it. If only we're brave enough to be it."

