

## What Are Other Churches Doing? Part Five – First Methodist



Last Easter was not my favorite Easter.

You remember Easter a year ago, don't you? The virus came. Things began to be cancelled. New rules began to be applied. Masks. Spacing.

I suspect a lot of you would have joined me back then as I said, "Just don't cancel Easter services. We'll give up a lot. But not Easter."

I love Easter. Sunrise Service. And breakfast. Worship. Jesus Christ is alive. Jesus Christ is alive, indeed. Up From the Grave He Arose. Excitement. Joy. Please, not Easter. Just let us have Easter.

Nope. No Easter services allowed.

You probably joined me in trying to celebrate through the disappointment. We knew it was Easter. We knew Jesus was alive. But, oh, how we missed each other. Trying to worship at home. Or trying that new thing called Zoom. Or watching a live stream. None of it was the same. As Easter night came, we were pretty sure it could not get worse. About time to give up and go to bed.

Then it got worse. The rain had been coming down much of the day. Then it started raining harder. I think it was about 10:30 or 11. Gloria and I looked out the window. The rain was pouring down. We could hear it pounding the ground, the roof, the house. The wind blowing the branches like wildly moving people. I don't ever remember it raining so hard. (Turns out it was the third most rain recorded in this area in the last hundred years.)

I began to be a little concerned. I looked out the back door. We have lived in this house for thirty years. Had lots of storms. I had never seen anything like this. There is a ditch behind our house that fills with water during storms. The water in the ditch is supposed to flow into a pipe that carries it safely underground to the storm sewer. Not last Easter. The rainwater overflowed the ditch and pipe. It filled the street by our house. You could have easily ridden a kayak down the street to Highway 11. The water was flowing across our yard. It surrounded the back of our house, flowing around our cars and rushing down the north side of our house.

It was then that I thought about the sump pump at the bottom of the ramp by our basement door. The electricity was still working. I flipped on the light. The pump was pumping away. Then I looked up the concrete ramp. Our back yard was a lake. And much of the water was now flowing down our ramp toward the door. The pump was being overloaded. It could not handle this much water. Soon the water would be flowing into our basement. And there was not one thing that I could do to stop it. I was a feeling of complete helplessness. Gloria and I looked at each other. We hugged and prayed. If the rain continued, we would have a swimming pool in the basement.

Just as the water was about to overflow into the house the rain slowed down. Just enough. The stream coming down the south side of the house was disappearing. The pump kept pumping. And finally the rain stopped. It was just a while before midnight. Easter 2020 was ending.

Lots of water still seeped into the basement. Gloria and I would spend several hours wet vacuuming. Moving furniture. Trying to save everything that had been on the floor near the flooding.

I love Easter. But last year we were glad to say goodbye to it. It was about 4 the next morning. We had hoped for a sunrise service on Easter. Instead we saw the sunrise the next day as we fell asleep.

We thought that we had it bad. And then we learned how wrong we were. So many of you had it so much worse than us. Our wet basement seemed a very small problem compared to tornadoes. Houses destroyed. Churches destroyed. People hurt. People dead. Turned out we had it pretty good compared to an awful lot of people, including some of you.

It was several days before I learned what happened to that Easter white water stream flowing down our street. Much of the water had gone down the hill on Highway 11. But an awful lot of it had gone across the street into the yard at the Methodist Church. And much of that water flowed right on into the fellowship hall downstairs at the church. And destroyed the floors. And the walls. And lots of other things. Oh, how Gloria and I hurt for the good people of the Methodist Church.

When we first moved to Collinsville, our church had let us know that we got along well with most to the other Baptist churches and local churches. (Aren't you glad Collinsville churches and Christians get along?) It was also emphasized to us that we would especially work with, worship with and fellowship with the First Methodist Church. And so we have.

I cannot remember how many time I have had the honor of standing behind their pulpit to speak. Joint services. Community services. Pulpit exchanges. Baccalaureates. Weddings. Funerals. It is the church, after Collinsville Baptist, where I have most often spoken. I have also sat in their balcony and watched lots of cantatas and other special services. It is a special, sacred place to Gloria and I.

But I have to admit that I may have loved their fellowship hall even more. Cantata over? I would herd my boys down those narrow, steep stairs to get near the front of the line for cookies, cakes and lots of other wonders. Punch. Coffee. Talk with people I love. Laugh. Joke. Hug a little. Try to put a few cookies in my pocket to carry home. But usually told by one of those hosting to fix me a plate to carry with

me. Loving. Generous. A place where that Methodist flame in their logo burned warmly between Collinsville Christians. A place that practiced Christian love.

And there were receptions. Breakfasts. Dinners (how many of you know there was once that a Business Men's Luncheon there that Munsey Box made sure I attended?). Receptions. Football dinners. If I sit here, I will keep thinking of other special dinners and times.

I think that we Christians often treat the fellowship hall and what goes on there as an add on. When it was always designed to be an integral part of being a Christian. We may have Communion upstairs. We practice communion downstairs. As Jesus prayed for his disciples at the Last Supper he closed the prayer by praying that His followers might be one. United. In love. In service. It was crucial for the spread of the Gospel that we be one. So the world could see the difference Jesus can make in lives. Our eating cookies and loving each other is a witness.

I love First Methodist. And I hurt with them as they tried to figure out what to do after the Easter floods. Their conclusion? Build back. Better. People anxious to make it better.



Tear out the old that was ruined by the water. There was lots of volunteer labor working over there. (Please note that the actual work crew was not Carol and Gloria as in the picture. Though you could do a whole lot worse.) Lots of tearing out. Cleaning. Getting everything ready for the new. Lots of offerings. Lots of planning to get it just right. Making it better.

They had some happy surprises. A line of windows that had been covered by the back wall are now letting lots of light into the basement. They have shared small appliances and limited areas for years. No longer. They now have two complete kitchen areas for the different groups that will use them. New cabinets. New appliances.



And they are getting anxious to have full services upstairs. And full fellowships downstairs in their brand new kitchen and fellowship area. That is good news for us all. Somewhere in this article is a picture of a certain hungry preacher. Holding a spoon and an empty bowl. Maybe needs some cookies. Or bacon. Or casserole. Or cobbler. The list is endless. And that hungry preacher is not alone in looking forward to the next time together.



We have missed a lot this year. Weddings and celebrations. Funerals and consolations. Worship services. Singing. Even a sermon or two. But I think that what most of us have missed the most is people. Each other. Not being able to hug family. Or friends. Or our brothers and sisters in Christ. We have missed each other. We need each other. We need Christian fellowship.

A year ago Easter had lots of disappointments. This year Easter has lots of promises. We are so near to throwing away masks. So close to the things we have missed being restored. Thank you First Methodist for showing us how to move forward after the storm. After the virus. After the dark.

Nothing darker than a closed tomb. Until Easter comes and brings victory.