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Sandy Miller



## First Lutheran Church Hope, Minnesota

By: Rev. Sandy Miller

**T**wo years ago, First Lutheran in Hope, MN, took a huge step of faith. With only 20 faithful worshipers, a long term relationship with a sister parish was ended as we put our hope in the Lord that He would be faithful to breathe new life and a fresh Spirit into the 93-year-old congregation. To no surprise, the Lord was faithful. As we worked toward affiliating with LCMC in November, 2012, our average worship attendance quickly grew to 65. Small potatoes to some, but we knew in our hearts that you don't have to be a big congregation to make a huge impact in the Kingdom of God.

Sunday morning worship became vibrant and Spirit-filled; weekday and Sunday morning Bible studies began to flourish; Sunday school and confirmation was established; benevolence became a precedence; and global ministry partnerships were initiated in Uganda, Tanzania and the Republic of Congo.

Oh, that's not to say there weren't a few bumps along the way. When a congregation has been around for 90+ years, there are certain ways you do things! And now 70% of our membership was new. It took a real work of the Spirit to bring us all together, building trust and growing us in love toward one another. Again, the Lord was so faithful to bring just the right people who had genuine care and concern for the history of the church and the people who worshiped there. At the same time, the Lord extended grace through the long-term members toward all the new faces that had converged upon this quiet, traditional church. It's not always love at first sight, if you know what I mean! But again, how faithful the Lord has been to shape us and mold us into one body working together to bring glory to God!

Early on, we received what we felt was a prophetic word, that "*the LORD would teach us how to pray, how to study His word, and how to love God and love each other.*" Again, it sounds pretty simple, but He has been so faithful to bring forth that Word. We immediately put a prayer team in place and did some study on prayer. Our faith was built up and we've experienced many miraculous answers to prayer. Our Bible studies continue to thrive, and we are ever-growing in our love for God and for each other. We're especially excited to do an outreach this Christmas season where members will use their spiritual gifts to bless under-privileged families with a beautifully framed family portrait. This will also give us an opportunity to give a reason for the hope that we have in Christ Jesus.

According to church statistics, our little church in Hope, MN, population 100, should be dying. But true to the Gospel, it has been resurrected! There is "hope in Hope"!

*"May the God of all hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope!" — Romans 15:13*