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"New Ways to Be Faithful"

Christian community

When a congregation's location can best be described as "on the road out of town, near the mall," that might be a reason people aren't filling the pews. In fact, in early 2020, Living Christ Lutheran Church, Flagstaff, Ariz., was facing a 65% decline in membership since 2013. *Grants from the Grand Canyon Synod, funded by Mission Support, helped sustain Living Christ's ministry.*

So when the pandemic struck, the congregation faced an uncertain future.

After in-person worship was halted, Living Christ reignited its ministry by expanding its online footprint to include digital worship, with new sermon videos posted weekly and associated worship materials provided via PDF.

"We were initially just getting anywhere from 30 to 40 viewings for the sermons," said Dean Garner, council member and IT/website manager for Living Christ. "When I put a little more work towards it when the pandemic started, we got up to 70 to 100. Then we put just a few dollars into it [on Facebook], and now we're averaging 500 for the viewing of the sermons."

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"The internet has basically been as much of a change for the church as, say, Gutenberg and the printing press was for Luther," said Living Christ's pastor, Kurt Fangmeier. "We're always trying to find new ways to be faithful, both to the calling in our baptism but also in the midst of the world as it is."

Though Living Christ may be new to internet outreach, the congregation has long been known for involvement in its community, particularly Flagstaff's LGBTQIA+ population. In 2011, the congregation began sponsoring Pride in the Pines, an annual celebration in Flagstaff that is hosted by the Northern Arizona Pride Association (NAPA) and typically draws over 4,000 attendees.

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"There are not too many churches ... that walk the walk and talk the talk," said Debra Taylor, president of NAPA, of the congregation's LGBTQIA+ outreach. "Living Christ does."

Now, in year two of the pandemic, Living Christ has transitioned to a hybrid in-person/online model and plans to relocate to downtown Flagstaff, which offers ample outreach opportunities.

"The building has served us well for over 35 years and will serve us well again by providing us the means to take our mission elsewhere in our community," Garner said. "Jesus did not share the good news from one place, nor shall we. ... We are excited about this new journey."



To learn more about Living Christ's ministry, view the video at ELCA.org/SOFIA.



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God's work. Our hands.