

**Reports from Br. Benedict for the Annual Meeting for the year 2019, the thirty-sixth Annual Meeting in the thirty-seventh year of ministry, January 19, 2020.**

**I. Pastoral Report**

The year of 2019 was one of stability and growth for Ray Of Hope Church Of Our Lord Jesus Christ. The passing of Robb Bacon on December 23, 2018 brought awareness that those of us who regularly attend Ray Of Hope have the full responsibility for the future of our Congregation, since the entire first generation has passed away or left the area. As we went through the Annual Meeting last January it was very clear that the responsibility of the future of Ray Of Hope Church has been passed to us, the current Membership. No one has stepped up to host the outreach of Ray Of Hope in Syracuse, NY since Robb Bacon's passing, which pretty much has put the Syracuse Extension in limbo. Lack of transportation also became an issue for others from Syracuse who had been regular attendees at congregational events and meetings in previous years. The Internet is still a viable outreach tool to anyone in Syracuse who wants to participate, however the loss of a physical location where people can gather for worship and events has brought our Syracuse presence into a period of uncertainty. For the very first time since the beginning of the Pride Festival in Syracuse we were not able to participate this year due to a shortage of persons to staff the booth. There were special circumstances for sure, namely, Jane was very unstable in her health by June and I did not feel confident leaving her for the full day. Charlotte was doing well at the time, but we were cautious about leaving her for that long of a period and being so far away from her as well. This reality has also served as a wake-up call that we must carefully plan for a new generation of leaders to take up the mantle of Ray Of Hope if it is going to survive until Christ returns.

As the year 2019 progressed we all were very much aware of Nora Jane Mc Dermott's health and her final days with us. We were also very much aware of Charlotte J. Allen's determination to be with us in worship every possible Sunday her body would allow her to be here. By the close of the year, both Saints were with Christ, Jane going home on October 1 and Charlotte going home to Christ on December 23. We all extend our condolences to Cheryl especially, and to Charlotte's family. All of the Council members have gone through this and we certainly understand the loss of a parent and how this feels. We will all certainly keep Cheryl and Charlotte's family in our prayers. Everyone is missing Charlotte, yet we all

agree she ran out her body and pushed it for all it had and we are all comforted that Charlotte is no longer fighting her body. We are so grateful that Charlotte shared five years of her spiritual journey with us in this church.

We should also remember the people who worked here with Jane, especially Crystal, Tara, Matt, Dave, Phillip, and so many others who loved Jane as their client. They participated in the life of the church while working here mostly because Jane had been involved in the daily life in the monastery when she was healthy. Jane wanted to stay as involved as she could right up to the day she passed. I know from talking to the aides that this has been a hard four months for them, and that they have missed Jane very much. Please keep them in your prayers.

It is memorable to me in pastoral ministry that my own mother passed close to World Communion Sunday and the Feast of St. Francis. It is also memorable to me in pastoral ministry to have had not one but two giants of sainthood in our Congregation pass on December 23 one year apart. All three of these holy deaths were enfolded in very holy times of the church year. All three of these Saints gave us a strong witness of faith that colored our understanding of where we were in the liturgical year too.

This year was one of great personal development for me as well. Christina came back to the area and I was very involved in helping her settle into her own apartment. This involved going through the system as there was much to reset for her New York residency. Christina became active in the church again and everyone welcomed her. Christina and I invested a significant amount of time getting her re-established and finally furnishing her apartment. By the year's end, I met Ken Ryan on the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross and Christina met Ian McLaughlin at World Communion Sunday. All four of us are celebrating holy friendship and helping each other move into God's plans for us as couples.

I went to World Pride and Stonewall 50 in June. Some of you will remember I went to Stonewall 25 back in 1994-one year after becoming a member at Ray Of Hope Church. Stonewall 50 was a life-changing experience for me. I could see massive improvements in the life of our community. Just the extraordinary number of people out of the closet is remarkably different from my first NYC Pride Parade in 1978. People of all ages were much more relaxed being fully themselves now in 2019.

Because this was World Pride there was a very large contingent from other nations as well. In short, things are getting better, much better, thanks be to God and a lot of hard work by organizations such as ours. I did not purchase a ticket to any of the special events. One reason is they were all three figure tickets. However, I did experience the closing ceremony in Time Square with celebrity performances and a party in the streets of Time Square that lasted well into the night. I spent most of Monday at the Pride Center in NYC. There was much to see and listen to that day. During the four days in the City I spent time in churches and walking in Central Park for prayer time. It was a refreshing time.

We celebrated Kwanzaa for the second year in a row. We enjoyed many friends on the Internet each night. The different time of the services (8:45 pm) seems to bring us a group of participants who are not available at our regular Sunday morning time. It was refreshing to hear some different perspectives from our visiting friends. We did record each night, so all of the Kwanzaa services are found on our web site's Kwanzaa page. We also featured the celebration of Hanukkah on our web site. All our worship experiences were well attended and we celebrated the Holy Days with beauty and reverence.

I attended all of the Elmira Clergy meetings in 2019. We participated in the all-city Elmira Clergy Group Ash Wednesday and World Communion Sunday services. We supplied readers, choristers, and Holy Communion servants. I gave the sermon for Ash Wednesday, 2019.

Poor People's Campaign: I attended the Poor People's Campaign "Doing Time In Elmira Poor People's Hearing" on April 5 at the Frederick Douglass Memorial AME Zion Church. At this event I learned of the national organization and its goals for June of 2020. I brought back materials and passed them out and added information in our Black History section of our web site. The national events for 2019 were held in Washington, DC on June 17 – 19. These events were broadcast on television and I was able to watch and participate.

I attended a special day with author and theologian Dr. Amy-Jill Levine on Thursday November 21 at the Congregation Kol Ami. Her lectures were under the title: "Agreeing to Disagree: How and Why Jews and Christians Read Scripture Differently." There was a daytime program for clergy only

and an evening program. We were able to have a few people from our congregation attend the evening program.

Hosting NA meetings: In 2019 we hosted a weekly Sunday evening meeting of NA. There is a policy, known as Tradition #6 of NA: "An NA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the NA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, or prestige divert us from our primary purpose." While Ray Of Hope hosted these meetings in our building, we would not list them as our program due to this Tradition #6. However, we all know how pleased we are to have this kind of work being done here. Those NA meetings were successful. Many people visited our building who might otherwise never come inside. We also know many of the participants in those meetings expressed they felt safe and loved in our chapel. The meetings have been suspended until better weather in the Spring of 2020.

## **II. Bible Enrichment Sessions**

Bible Enrichment continued on a steady schedule in 2019. The beginning of the year was spent finishing our study on the Book of Revelation. We followed this with a study of the Book of Ruth, specifically looking at the relationship of Ruth and Naomi and the child they raised. Their child is the grandfather of King David, putting this couple into the family tree of Jesus. This was followed by a study of the books of First and Second Samuel with a very close look at the relationship of David and Jonathan. Here we watched and learned how God brought David to the throne through his relationship with Jonathan. The Scriptures put this couple into the family tree of Jesus. We used many of the sources that are available in our library for these very important studies. Following a rest for Holy Week we began the Book of Ephesians. This was stopped for a two week Hanukkah study and then we returned to the Doctrines found in Ephesians. The Bible Enrichment group grew in attendance this year with a new basic core group of six weekly attendants. At Ray Of Hope Church we are comfortable with a liturgical and a literal / prophetic study of Holy Scripture, using the best of study materials published and computer programs that assist with word-by-word translations. Our resources reflect our respect for all denominational positions as we search for the truth together. Most Pastors and Bible teachers are governed by denominational strict guidelines on Bible interpretation and application. At Ray Of Hope Church we are free to explore and learn without those restrictions.

### **III. Candles for Intercessory Prayer**

There were very few candle donations for the chapel throughout the year. What is the value of candles burning in the worship space? We understand that the souls and spirits of those who have passed on to Paradise actively are involved in the worship of God. We know this from the many windows into heavenly worship found in Scriptures. The experience of the Church has been that it is beneficial to call on those who are in Paradise to pray for us and our intentions just as much if not more than it had ever been when they were alive here on Earth. You may recall this was part of Fr. McNeill's sermon at Ordination when he said we will be able to do far more for the Congregation from Heaven than we can do here on Earth because we will be able to pray without restraint of sin and such in Paradise. In addition to our Founders, Foundresses, Family and Friends in Faith (do notice all those words start with "f") praying for us we also have the Holy Angels. Remember, we each have our very own Guardian Angel. Also, remember we have Jesus and the Holy Spirit praying inside our very bodies. "I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart; in the presence of the angels I sing your praise." (Psalm 137:1) This is what it means to be alive and moving in the church "visible and invisible." The candles are visible reminders that prayer is happening all the time. The candles mark out the space as holy space. The candles send a very clear message about the purpose of the chapel space. Just as a rack of clothes in a store make it clear one is in the clothing department, or a freezer full of meat marks out the space for meat in the grocery store, so the candles mark the space as holy ground. Remember, holy means separated for God's purposes. The candles clearly proclaim that we have separated this space for prayer, devotion, community, and activities all directed to the honor and glory of God. When we purchase candles for the chapel and dedicate them to a specific intention, we invite everyone who reads the bulletin to join us in the special intention for which we bought the candles in the first place. Secondarily but truly we are also helping the liturgical supply budget when we donate the funds for the candles. This takes that much more strain off the general budget to supply what we need for our ministry. Do consider dedicating some candles to be lit as a reminder of your prayerful intentions.

### **IV. Elmira's "gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, str8, social group"**

I have chaired and facilitated our social group ministry for all of 2019. In fact, we have held 47 meetings, each one showing films from the Queer Cinema tradition. I donate the cost of the Meetup page. I hope it serves as

yet another outreach of our message to another population who may never have heard of us. Currently there are 347 “members” or subscribers to our Meetup page. To visit our Meetup page go here: <https://www.meetup.com/Elmira-gay-lesbian-bisexual-trans-str8-social-group/>

## **V. Pastoral Guest Lecturing**

In 2019 the Pastor was invited to universities on 4 occasions to present the workshop on sexuality and the Bible and social issues. The workshops were presented to students and professionals.

## **VI. Web Site and Internet Presence and Technology**

In 2019 there was a steady change of content on our web site. Several pages were added. We also added links to Facebook Live Video content taken throughout the year. The format of the web site was updated with increased links on the submenu found on the left side of each page. This has proven to cause other problems when finding one’s way around so there will be improvements in 2020 to address this problem. There were visitors to the Sunday morning worship events as a result of people reading content on our web site. There will be many more changes to format and many pictures added in 2020. The web site costs reflected in the 2020 budget are \$1,150.00. All of those monies come from donations and do not come from the Sunday morning offering plate as of now. Line 2 of the budget is a reflection of our usual offering plate income, \$22,600.00. Line 3 calls for donations to support our General Fund and calls for \$15,817.00. Our web site depends on that category of donations so please consider special donations to the web site during this year. This is the modern answer to printing fliers and handing them out as we did in the past. Today we have an Internet presence and it is not without significant costs to maintain. Please be generous and help with this important ministry.

In 2019 I was able to unlock our access to our Facebook page. Here is a direct link to our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/Ray-Of-Hope-Church-Of-Our-Lord-Jesus-Christ-Inc-1988653457927081/> ... It is now possible to search Ray Of Hope Church Elmira NY on Facebook and find us. However, it is not my intention to monitor this page closely at all. It is there for free advertising of our events in my opinion.

In 2019 there were no new videos added to our YouTube page. To visit our YouTube page go to: [www.youtube.com/rayofhopenyglbtqs](http://www.youtube.com/rayofhopenyglbtqs) . Hopefully more content will be added in the future.

In 2019 we continued to struggle to increase the quality of our live Internet worship experiences. This included the purchase of another laptop computer and adding RAM to it and even sending it off to be looked at by others. It will help reduce the use of personal computers during church functions. In 2020 it is likely we will seek the assistance of some professional sound engineers to help us produce higher quality sound for our music in worship as it is broadcast on the Internet.

### **VII. St. Benedict of Nursia Memorial Library**

The library was thinned out two times in 2019. As for the future of the library it is hard to determine at this point. Indeed in 2019 many of the books that are important to the work we do here continue to be uploaded to the Internet in digital format. At some point the physical space for people gathering will become more important than the preservation of books on our subjects as these resources become available in digital format. The transition is beginning to happen.

### **VIII. Elmira Building Report**

As for the Elmira building all required inspections and tests were brought up to date by the end of 2019. The most wonderful accomplishment for the building this year was the completion of all the paperwork, the meetings and finally the full fabrication and installation of the new doors in front. Many thanks to Lisa Frost for taking charge of completing all the paperwork, setting up the hearing before the Historical Commission, and making all the final contacts with Elmira City officials before the fabrication and installation was started. The installation started on October 1, the exact three-year anniversary of the break-in that started the need for new doors. The work was all done by Pastor Arthur Reed in his shop at Arthur Reed Wood Artisans in Lowman, NY. We are grateful to Pastor Reed and Ed Adamus for their amazing skills shared with us in these fully customized doors. On November 3, the Feast Of All Saints, we dedicated our new front doors and we also renamed the small door to the chapel "The Kenneth Frasier Miracle Door."

The KnoxBox was finally installed on the outside of our building with keys inside. The KnoxBox was inspected, closed and sealed by the Fire Marshall. This was something that we have needed to do since 2003! However, we were fortunate to have health aides here with us around the clock so there was not as much of a need as there is now. If no one is in the Monastery and the Fire Department needs to get inside they now have

the KnoxBox outside to assist them and prevent them from breaking doors to enter.

### **IX. Vocational Ministry Training Program**

There were no applicants for the VMTP in 2019.

### **X. Pastoral Search Committee**

There has been no interest in the growing of our Pastoral Ministry in 2019.

Volunteers at Ray Of Hope: I just want to recognize the hours and hours of work that go into the ministry of Treasurer, Lisa Frost, and of Moderator, Veronica Floyd in our church. Our Council members are very dedicated to the past, present, and future of Ray Of Hope. Our Council members set the example of service in Membership to the Body Of Christ. The keeping of accurate financial records takes a lot of time and prayers. Often the Treasurer has a very difficult time with cash flow and the paying of responsibilities in a timely manner. Many thanks to Lisa Frost for giving countless hours to keep our records up to date, accurate, and ready upon request for inspection by anyone. The ministry of Moderator also takes a lot of time and prayers. In order for the fiscal and theological "sides" of the Congregation to work well together there must be a very skilled and prayerful Moderator steering the ship with the pastors. The Moderator often spends time studying the bylaws, reviewing all matters brought through proper channels regarding concerns and questions. The Moderator must be prepared at a moment's notice to oversee and manage any and all concerns that may involve church discipline, and / or church finances. I am sure this is an incomplete assessment of both of these ministries, but time and space govern this. Most people in the public have the impression that churches function with just a pastor. This is not how Ray Of Hope Church functions. We require an involved Membership both in Membership Meetings and in the monthly Council Meetings. We appreciate all who have served on the Council and we thank those who are serving now. At this time we renew our call for more people to become Members of the church and then to serve the church in leadership.

Help with the building: I want to thank Ken and Michael for the hours spent getting the chapel ready for Jane's Service of the Resurrection. Jane passed on October 1. We had from Tuesday morning October 8 until Friday evening October 11 to remove all of the medical equipment, clean the library, remove all of the living room furniture out of the chapel and into

the library, bring up chairs from storage in the basement, clean the chairs, and set the chapel to receive twenty-two guests. The Communion Table / Altar was put into place at 6:15 pm on Friday night for the 7:00 pm service. The next morning, Michael and I noted we had put it in the exact place where Jane's wheelchair had been set for every Sunday worship for the previous two years. The Communion Table was her "viewing" as finally, The Blessed Sacrament had been the victory in her life. Michael was the last person to have given Jane Holy Communion.

I want to thank Michael for spending a lot of time cleaning the books when we closed the healthcare space and returned the space to the purpose of the library. Michael vacuumed dust and powder out of hundreds of books. Thank you, Michael.

I also want to thank both Christina and Ken for the hours spent helping to clean the second floor. There is still much to be done, but the great cleanout of the building has begun.

I also want to thank Tara, Crystal, Christina, Cheryl, and Ken for assisting with the decorating of the worship space during this year.

Thank you also to Lisa for the extra help with the preparation of materials for the three resurrection worship services we have had this year. Each of the services were unique as we took into account the understanding of the families of the deceased and yet we brought to them the powerful Doctrines of the Resurrection, the central message of Ray Of Hope Church.

Kindnesses: Finally, thank you to all of you who have reached out to me personally this year. Your kindnesses have been much appreciated.

There is one more special concern I have. In 2020 we must add bodies to the Congregation and add bodies to the Council so we may improve on the exercise of our Spiritual Gifts. There has been mild growth this year, but we can always welcome more people who want to help sustain and grow this very special ministry of Ray Of Hope Church Of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, I recommend the following Scripture to our Congregation;  
Colossians 3:16-17 <sup>16</sup>Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and

spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. <sup>17</sup> And whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

We pray together; Lord, hear our prayer.

Please, "do not miss this for the world!"

I am sure I have forgotten important events and may have forgotten to thank persons who should be thanked. Please forgive me and understand it is not intentional. We move on in the love of Christ.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Rev. Br. Shawn F. Benedict, O. S. B.,  
Appointed Pastor  
1-19-2020