

Reports from Br. Benedict for the Annual Meeting 2023, the fortieth Annual Meeting in the forty-first year of ministry, January 21, 2024.

I. Pastoral Report

The first item is always to give God thanks and praise through Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, and in the powerful ministry of the Holy Spirit. Giving God thanks and praise is the primary reason for our association as Ray Of Hope Church Of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Inc. The second and following reasons for our association are stated in our [Statement Of Purpose](#). Additionally, every week, the following statement is printed on the front page of our bulletin:

MISSION: Love God, Love your neighbor,
and make disciples of every person everywhere.
(Matthew 22:37-39; Matthew 28:19)

We are the Church founded in Syracuse, New York, as Ray Of Hope MCC in 1983, and since then, fostered and continually supported for forty-one years by the LGBTQSIA2ss+ Community of Central New York State, from the border of Canada to the border of Pennsylvania, and now throughout the whole World on the Internet. This is the Church made by us, for us, made for you because we ARE you. You belong here just by being yourself.

The year 2023 started in the third month of our 40th year of ministry and saw the inauguration of our 41st year of ministry on October 31, 2023.

Today, January 21, 2024, is our 40th Annual Meeting, a considerable milestone, having met every year since our founding. We are grateful to God for bringing our Congregation this far.

During the first forty years, the founders, foundresses, and lay and clergy leadership successfully passed this church on to us, and now we must focus on passing it on to others.

The second item in this Pastoral report is to thank our very faithful Council Members: Veronica Floyd, our Moderator; April Struhm, our Vice Moderator; Lisa Frost, our Treasurer; and our new members, Ed Askins and Christina McLaughlin. This Council is committed to maintaining our democratic governing process. We are very grateful to be a Congregational church in our polity where there is a process that keeps everyone equally responsible and empowered to work together and bear the responsibility. This is a very generous and compassionate congregation where every person prays for our success and does all they can to assist in our work of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus for all.

Today, we also thank Lisa for her many years of service in the ministry of finances. More will be said officially during the meeting today, so for this report, it is fitting to thank you so much and ask God to return your years of service to you and your family as Divine Grace wherever it is most needed.

Church Growth. In 2023, we added two Council Members, Ed and Christina. The Inquiries Class was presented in August and September of 2023. Ed Askins became a Member at the September 24, 2023 Semi-annual Meeting of the Congregation. On Sunday, January 8, 2023, during Epiphany's worship event, we experienced an Eucharistic Miracle. The "Tau Cross" was imprinted and seen form on a Host bread while dipping it into the

consecrated grape juice. This miracle happened in Christina McLaughlin's hand as she prepared to serve her husband, Ian McLaughlin, at Holy Communion. This happened to be a time of great discernment in Ian's life and was the time he was looking to find new employment, which he found shortly after this event. Once again, the Pastor was nowhere near the location of this Eucharistic Miracle, and the people to whom the gift was given were not raised in churches centered on Eucharistic Theology. Once again, we are humbled that God would notice and care so well for our congregation.



Liturgy - The Sanctuary Lamp in the front window was modified to electric by Kaiden and Brother in February. Also, we fabricated a new electric Christ Candle for the Advent Wreath in December. Kaiden Benedict and Brother made both candles.

Throughout the year, we continued our practice of lighting the Candle Of Hope and reading names from the Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt as part of our vigil to keep HIV/AIDS in the conscious prayers of the people until we eradicate this disease.

We celebrated Civil Rights and Dr. Martin Luther King Sunday on January 15, 2023.

On January 23, 2023, a particular theme was chosen. I wrote: "As

the Appointed Pastor, I have chosen to emphasize the doctrine of Universal Salvation for this Annual Meeting in our 40th year. At our Semi-Annual Meeting, Ray Of Hope Church voted to agree on Universal Salvation on September 18, 2011." We also celebrated the life and ministry of St. Marianne Cope, the Mother of Outcasts.

On January 27, 2023, we broadcast the second annual Holocaust Memorial Prayers together at noon from our Chapel.

On Sunday, January 29, 2023, we celebrated a Memorial Service for Robert W. Ryan (b. 11-12-1941 - d. 1-23-23). Mr. Ryan is Kaiden Benedict's father.

We celebrated Black History Month in February. During Black History Month, we drew particular attention to the healthy definition of the word, woke.

On Sunday, February 19, 2023, I said the following about Science:

Before we start, I want to say there is no conflict between the Scriptures and Science. Scientists are involved in discovering what God has done, is doing, and will do in the future. God is revealing through the Scriptures, through the Creation itself. Scientists do their best to understand and uncover the Cosmos God is continuing to create and to evolve into the fullness of what God has in store for the Universe. Science studies what is there, what may have been there, and what might be there. God is doing what Scientists are determined to understand. Therefore, there is nothing to be afraid of and everything to celebrate and be thankful for when it comes to Science and Exploration. I will say more about this in today's Sermon.

We celebrated Ash Wednesday in our Chapel on February 22, 2023, as there was no ecumenical event in 2023.

Beginning with Ash Wednesday, we celebrated an entire season of Lent with a special celebration on Laetare Sunday, Rose Sunday, the fourth Sunday in Lent, March 19. The readings for the day opened the opportunity to discuss the love between David and Jonathan in every Bible in the World and how God used this love to bring David to the Throne of Jerusalem.

We celebrated Women's History Month in March.

We celebrated a beautiful Holy Week in 2023. Palm Sunday was April 2, Holy Thursday was April 6, Good Friday was April 7, and Holy Saturday was April 8. All the Holy Week services were well attended. This year, the Holy Week sermon series was a set of questions about the week. Many thanks to Christina McLaughlin for singing excellent solos during Holy Week. Many thanks to Ed Askins for excellent Preludes during Holy Week.

Anyone is welcome to bring forward talents musically, artfully, etc. Thanks to Kaiden for all the assistance with her efforts to ensure the Chapel was ready for all services.

Pentecost Sunday and Memorial Day were celebrated on May 28, 2023. We prayed for a renewal of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and the life of this Congregation.

In June, we relicensed our Servants of the Eucharist, Lisa Frost, Tami Whatley, and Veronica Floyd, on the Feast of Corpus Christi.

We celebrated Pride Month, Juneteenth, the 27th Ordination anniversary, and Stonewall in June.

On Trinity Sunday, June 4, we celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the first public worship service held in our Elmira, New York chapel on June 1, 2003.

In July, we celebrated Independence weekend and spent a few weeks discussing the critical issues around religious freedom in our Country and the World.

June 2023 marks 31 years since Br. Benedict has donated to the Music Ministry as a volunteer. The Congregation should begin making plans for the next Music Minister, who should be compensated for their professional skill.

On September 5, 2023, I celebrated 30 years of Ray Of Hope Church membership.

On Sunday, October 1, 2023, we celebrated World Communion Sunday and the Feast of St. Francis in our Chapel. No ecumenical service was held in Elmira.

On October 9, 2023, we celebrated Indigenous Peoples Sunday for the first time, and we discussed the Doctrine of Discovery. War broke out between Hamas and Israel on October 7.

October 15, 2023, the Doctrine of Discovery continued and a review of some of the errors of the Euro/Roman Empire-centered Christianity;

a)The following is my list of the outstanding errors the Christian Church and Tradition made over the centuries, and I point out that we regularly name and study those errors. We are self-aware of the mistakes of the Church, and by studying those errors, we aim to prevent repeating them.

Removal of women from leadership in ministry. Failing to accept the Holy Spirit has been given to everyone.

Entangling with the Roman Empire as a way to gain political power in the World. This would be the first of many times the churches would combine with political powers.

Replacement Theology also known as Supersessionism: the Christian Church supersedes and replaces Israel.

Persecution of the Jewish People, even conducting enslavement of any people anywhere, often caused by false teachings on the sons of Noah, the Table of the Nations.

Favoring ethnic groups over others.

Control over the teaching ministry, over the formation and translation of the Scriptures.

Many errors in Teachings including sexuality, gender, divorce, and more.

Assigning to male leadership the same weight of authority as the inspiration of the Scriptures.

Twelve million Africans were forcibly brought to North and South America for enslavement. The people taken from Africa represented about fifty ethnic and linguistic groups. Approximately 1500 – 18 60's (source: <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/on-african-american-migrations/>)

A long history of killing people who held different ideas in Theology, even Pope John Paul, I was murdered for his ideas.

On the three Sundays of October 8, 15, and 23, we spent time on some background to the Israel and Palestinian conflict with a sermon series.

On October 29th, we celebrated our 40th Anniversary and All Saints. We renewed our commitment to the Ray Of Hope Church Statement Of Purpose during the worship.

Beginning November 1, 2023, at the Feast of All Saints, we started presenting the traditional Mass, the 1970s version, at noon on Wednesdays. All of the Wednesdays for November and December were very well attended. The Mass is about 35 to 40 minutes long. We have enjoyed fellowship and discussion time with delicious desserts after each Wednesday's Mass. We have made a concerted effort to inform those in attendance that we are not offering a re-presented "sacrifice of the Cross for the remission of sins," as is the understanding of the Roman Church. Instead, the Mass is a format and set of prayers deeply enjoyed by many, and we present it here to increase the faith of those who attend and participate. The Wednesday Mass is not presented online and is only offered here in the in-person format.

On November 5, we stressed the theme Souls and Soles to the Polls – VOTE.

On November 12, we discussed Veterans Weekend, war, world governments, and how power is used to govern by natural means since it is not in the hands of Christ.

On November 19, we started a six-week study of Eschatology with a realistic look at "kingdom," "empire," and "republic," what we have, what we should have, what we will have, and how we know.

On November 19, some of us attended the Southern Tier Interfaith Coalition Thanksgiving worship event. The best part of it was the social time, in my opinion.

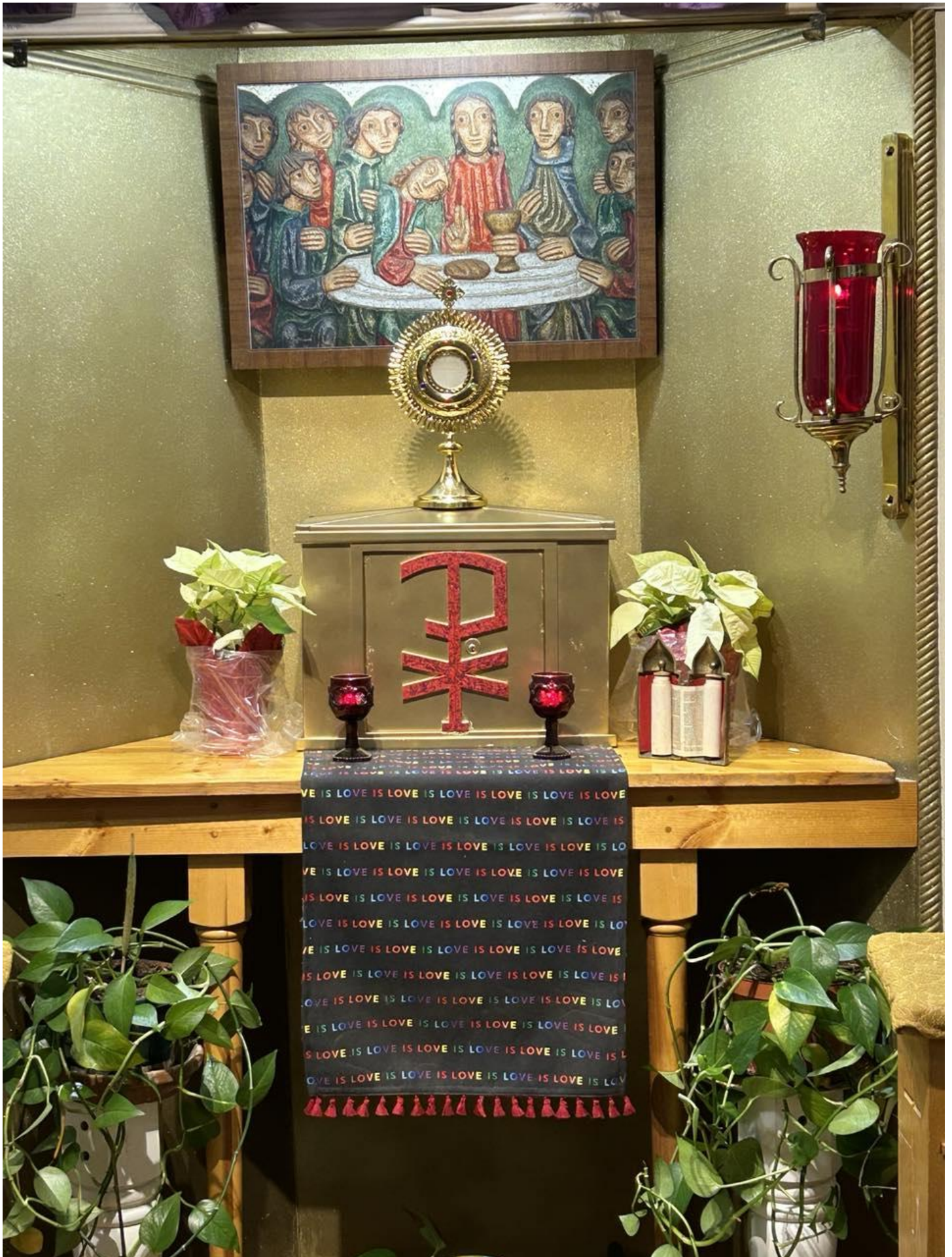
This year's four Sundays of Advent were Peace, Hope, Joy, and Love.

On December 9, Christina, Kaiden, and April redecorated the chapel for the Gaudete Party.

We held our first in-house shared dinner since the COVID shutdown on Gaudete Sunday, December 10, 2023. The Gaudete Party was a great success, and we included online participants by keeping the Skype webcast open. During the night of December 10, 2023, our monastery cat, Princess, who was 21 years old, passed away peacefully, with Isabella pressing her head to Isabella's head through the night.

During the week of December 11 to the 15th, we completely remodeled the Tabernacle area, painting the Tabernacle gold, spraying gold glitter paint on the walls, simplifying the plants, and placing one of our monstrances on top. We also brought out the

painting Christina had purchased in honor of her mother. Thank you to Ed Askins and Kaiden for helping with all of the work involved in this project.



We celebrated the eight nights of Hanukkah with short live ceremonies at around 5:00 p.m. on Facebook Live.

We celebrated Kwanzaa with a one-evening celebration of all the principles, prayers, and discussion.

All year, we have enjoyed prelude musical pieces on the keyboard prepared and played by Ed Askins. We also enjoyed special music vocal solos and songs with the Congregation singing choir parts prepared by Christina McLaughlin.

The year 2023 sermon series were presented on the subjects of Satan, Lucifer, the Devil, Angels, Demons, the seven judgments in Scripture, postmillennial politics that pose a present danger to our Democracy, and Eschatology.

During the year, interest was expressed in forming a St. Benedict Chapter (study and fellowship group on Benedictine Spirituality).

Bible Enrichment: Topics covered this year included the Pre-Adamite World/ Gap Theory/ Old Earth Theory, Sexuality and the Bible (continuing what was required for Inquiries Class) however, there was plenty of new and updated materials added to the classes; and, The Rites/Rituals/Sacraments/Ordinances of the Church (continuing what was required for Inquiries Class).

Copyright and Webcast licensing. During January of 2023, we studied and reviewed our obligations for licensure. At the January monthly council meeting, we passed a motion to add the CCLI Streaming Plus License at \$108.00 a year, and Song selected Premium at \$215.00 and \$190.00 Onelicense.net Category A with Podcast/Streaming—a total of \$513.00. Understanding our

obligations took many phone calls and editing hours during January, February, and March. As many as 150 of our videos have been taken down from the Internet while all the details are sorted out. Taking down videos takes more time than uploading the videos. We settled on licenses from two companies because of our mix of music from so many different traditions. Still, we have found limitations with some of the soloist music we wanted to use this year. Acquiring all the rights is undoubtedly an educational opportunity for all of us. We certainly need to have one person who would be interested in being our technology ministry person in charge.

Technology Report: In March, we set up a computer and monitor the Frasier Room so online participants may be involved in after-worship conversations and visiting. April Strum donated up to six computers and monitors during 2023 to help us expand our in-person electronic bulletin and music supplement use in the Chapel and expand our use of technology for fellowship and meeting times.

We must convert to an all-digital system with one mixing board and one output for our webcasts.

As of the end of 2023, about ten videos are posted that still need to be edited and copyright information added. It would be great if someone interested in video editing and the skills to type and do precision picture editing would take on this ministry.

QR Codes have been added to many of our web pages and web features during the year. We also updated our donation online process to a one-step process and placed links for this throughout our website and worship materials.

We began converting the entire Membership Book to electronic form and uploading it to our website. Digitizing the Membership Book is a very time-consuming project and will require some copyright statements to be added to some content.

Social Ministry outreach. In March 2023, two new flags, the updated Progress Flag and the Together We Rise flags, were purchased. Kaiden donated the Progress flag, and April donated the Together We Rise Flags. In May, we designed a new vinyl 2'x8' 18 oz banner to be part of our new campaign, "Church by YOU, for YOU, we are YOU!" as part of our new mobile-friendly website addition. (<http://www.rayofhopechurch.com/P2023-Bookmark.htm>)

During the year, we addressed various social issues, including book banning, laws regarding transgender healthcare, laws such as the "Don't say gay" bill, Tennessee enacting the Nation's first law restricting drag shows, and banning gender-affirming care for youth, etc.

Pride Month Committee (June 2023). We attended and set up tables at the Elmira Pride and Corning Pride events in June 2023. A mobile-friendly version of our website was designed and inaugurated in time for these two events. The mobile-friendly site was coded and set up by Brother Benedict. We tried to incorporate the many ideas suggested by our friends and members. Lisa Frost designed and printed a two-sided bookmark index for the new mobile-friendly website. We passed out nearly 400 bookmarks between the two Pride celebrations. Thank you to everyone who helped with this project and assisted at these two Pride events.

On June 1, 2023, we adopted a Media Policy

Ray of Hope Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Inc.
Media Response Policy
June 1, 2023

This policy is being drafted to communicate how we consistently provide positive feedback and response to the media for any inquiries received regarding Ray of Hope Church, our Statement of purpose, our Pastoral Team, or any members.

Policy: All media relations activity should be completed to ensure a positive and accurate account of Ray of Hope Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Inc. mission objectives as outlined in our Statement of Purpose.

The Moderator is the official spokesperson and will coordinate contact to the media and the responses.

If approached by a member of the media, an individual member or friend should only speak on their personal experiences as to how long and why they attend Ray of Hope and what they have learned. Keep it brief and refer the media to send all other questions to the Moderator of Ray of Hope via email. The current contact email is : veeflo@aol.com.

Veronica Floyd, Ray of Hope Moderator, June 1, 2023

Ecumenical and Interreligious outreach. This year, the Elmira Area Clergy cancelled Ash Wednesday and World Communion Sunday services. I wish I could report this was due to COVID, but it is a lack of leadership on the part of the current pastors. As for the Southern Tier Interfaith Coalition, the group met once a month for much of the year. The Abrahamic Walk, a guest lecture on interracial outreach, and an Interfaith Thanksgiving Service were all successful. We attended each event.

Pastoral Care. In March, I officiated in the Black Church tradition at a funeral in Rochester, NY. The funeral was for the husband of my second cousin, Sister Rich. Kaiden assisted with the trip and ministry. There were many hospital visits and home visits in 2023.

Lecturing and guest speaking. Two professors invited me to present my "Sexuality and the Bible" workshop. A total of five workshops were given during 2023. 2023 was the twenty-first year of presenting these workshops for two professors. I developed this workshop and presented it in 1987, and it has developed each year as new research and published scholarship becomes available to be added.

St. Benedict of Nursia Memorial Library Committee: Continuing to thin out the Library and giving away many books. Books are becoming available in digital form. Much of the library is now available digitally, which was not the case 20 years ago. We can now make more space for people.

Building Report- During the late summer there was a break-in to the Carley Room through the back door and paint on the building. Ed Askins repaired and painted the building. February included painting the entranceway, internal doors, floors painted in the Frasier Room, and shag carpet removed. Removing the shag rug made it possible to bring down Motion #8 from Old Business which was written by Michael Quinnell many years ago, and pass it at the

February 2023 meeting. The head of the Sacred Heart statue was repaired, the Kitchen walls and ceiling were painted. Burleigh Heating was called for assistance with the second-floor Heating. We were unable to schedule an appointment with Burleigh.

On May 16, 2023, Jon's Heating assessed the heating issues. Jon's Heating gave us an estimate for \$1,160.00 for repairs. Brother Benedict solved most of the heating issues by spending time bleeding the air out of the system. The kitchen wall behind the sink was properly fitted with backboard that we had on hand. All the light bulbs in the Chapel were changed to daylight bulbs with higher lumens and less wattage to produce a much brighter light. In April 2023, the fire extinguishers were taken to the inspection site and certified. We are facing having to service the extinguishers in 2024, which will cost nearly \$400.00. The Fire Alarm was inspected on May 24, 2023. The boiler was inspected on September 25, 2023. The Fire Department informed us there were no inspections performed in 2023. The Council will request a letter with the new requirements spelled out officially. Ed also painted and repaired the walls in the kitchen and the restroom.

On November 18, a very generous donation was made to purchase and install a new door to the Carley Room. We are very grateful for this excellent quality door and rebuilt door frame that has undoubtedly increased our security.

Ed Askins donated and installed a new refrigerator for the downstairs chapel kitchen, and disposed of the old refrigerator on December 4th.

The front of the building suffered two incidents of vandalism a few hours apart on December 22nd. Both flags were taken, and the flag holder of one was actually broken into two pieces.

During the year, there have been a few discussions about adding exterior lighting and security cameras on all four sides of the building. The Elmira Police Department has asked us a few times to consider cameras that record so they can make identifications and speak to the people who are trespassing and harming our building.

We received estimates for the repair and painting of the exterior of the building—4-24-23 Trimline Painting for \$12,000 plus contingencies. Norb Miller, \$50,000 for complete replacement of clapboards, paint, and seal.

The wheelchair lift malfunctioned with people using it in November. It is nonfunctional at the end of 2023.

As 2023 ends, it is my pleasure to turn over the Building Manager ministry to Ed Askins. I will work with Ed during 2024 to help make sure everything is remembered and on time.

2023 saw plenty of denominational mayhem in mainline churches. The United Methodist Church lost 7,659 churches as the time to request disaffiliation ended at the end of the year 2023. The publisher Christianity Today reports that it is one in four congregations, calling it "the largest US denominational schism since the Civil War." The article also writes: "the thousands of disaffiliations represent the conclusion of decades of UMC debates,

proposals, and gatherings focused on sexuality."

<https://christianitytoday.com/news/2023/december/united-methodist-church-split-total-umc-disaffiliation-lgbt.html>)

Tragically, in my opinion, it is apparent that the clergy of the United Methodist Church are not equipped to handle the answers to these concerns directly from the Holy Scriptures first, then Tradition, and then the worldwide records of the Human Race. These concerns could have been answered if the clergy of the UMC were allowed to give Scripture the academic attention deserved in the original languages as we teach here at Ray of Hope. This unnecessary house fire in the UMC has saddened me. What I find very disturbing is the fact that all of the new churches are forming to firm up their opposition to any relationship that is not either celibate or heterosexually married as one cis-gendered male to one cis-gendered female. I wonder what it must be like to know these are the reasons you are starting a worship community: to exclude others. Even here in the Upper New York district of the UMC, Christianity Today reports that 118 congregations have left to form the conservative Global Methodist Church, the Wesleyan Covenant Association, and other group affiliations. How many people are out there now affirming one another in the Name of Christ as they form new "churches" with the intent of excluding others? What is the message this is sending out to our general society, and of course, to the electorate across the Nation as issues of sexuality, gender, marriage, and family are making their way through the courts in 2023?

Theological chaos also grew exponentially in 2023, in my opinion. What started in the mid-1800s with the questions of

interpretation of biblical texts continues to cause eruptions, cracks, and quakes throughout the church and society. Young and middle-aged adults are signing up for seminary education with the idea that it must all be reasonably the same from one place to another. It often takes time to realize the standard operations of biblical interpretation that each seminary decides and enforces. Some theologians have even begun to speak of a "post-Christian" era, meaning it is time to give up on the Divinity of Christ and join a worldwide spiritual community. Still, other groups are swinging entirely in the other direction, trying to recreate the practices of another time and believing certain practices of worship techniques create "the real" or even "the only true" forms of worship. The Roman Catholic Church has a significant fissure between "The Latin Movement" or TLM, a moderate Vatican II movement, and a far-left-"Liberation Theology" movement. Pope Francis is having enormous challenges trying to hold the opposing wings of the building attached to the one building. These are just a couple of examples of the chaos in Theology that I followed in 2023.

Then there is **the Political / Theological intersection** we find ourselves in, along with most Countries in the World. Theology is often the unseen guide that dictates what is happening in politics. During the Season of Advent, I try to review the prominent schools of Eschatology that are all at play and attempt to control world governments' socio/political constructs. In our current political setting, issues of life, death, marriage, sex, sexuality, gender, war, war crimes, settlements and occupations, and a whole host of other political issues are deeply rooted in religious systems, even if those systems are rarely named during political debate.

Thinking about how to pass Ray Of Hope Church on to others in this chaotic time of Theology and Politics has led me many times in 2023 to **research and evaluate the health of denominations and associations that might be possible places for us** to land this plane named Ray Of Hope (metaphorically speaking of course). You already know I have not found any suitable candidate for us to discuss associating with because I have not brought any idea forward in our Council Meetings.

Even our own Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Churches, the denomination the fourteen people who started Ray Of Hope in Syracuse chose to join, has lost all of the Upstate New York churches that were here when I joined in 1993. The Northeast District in 1993 had a church in Buffalo, one in Rochester, and we were based in Syracuse, one in Albany, and one in New York City. We were growing into Ithaca and here into Elmira, intending that all three of our extensions would be known as MCC churches. A short attempt was made in Binghamton at one time. Today all that remains is New York City. Even the Rochester church announced it held its last worship event as Open Arms MCC on Sunday, November 20, 2022. The following is from their former Facebook page.

Please join us for our last-ever worship service as Open Arms MCC this Sunday, November 20, 2022 @ approx. 12:15 p.m. (we are starting a little later because several of us will be attending the Transgender Day of Remembrance event that starts at 11 a.m.). We'd love to see you!

On Sunday, November 27, many of us will begin attending worship at Mary Magdalene's open and inclusive "small-c" catholic service at 1008 Main St., East Rochester, NY, where ALL are welcome AND celebrated! Please consider joining us there! Look for a Facebook event on this page!

Our congregation voted to leave for fear that MCC would not survive the changes in denominational leadership and new

theologies in the mid-1990s. It was a prophetic vision looking back on it now. The UFMCC that made it impossible for us to stay went on to shut down all of the upstate churches in New York, and our sister church in Worcester, MA, that formed in 1974 has closed its doors, as have other congregations we once fellowshiped with in the Northeast District. The reason for bringing this up is that even the denomination we once affiliated with struggles with questions of theology, ecclesiology, and Christology.

Members of Ray Of Hope, listen to me. If for one moment you have the impression our work is done or no longer needed, stop and look at just the United Methodist Church, which started in the USA, or the Roman Catholic Church saying blessings are okay as long as it doesn't look like a marriage, or the Mormons declaring the children of same-gender parents cannot be baptized which consigns those children to be eternally lost and see for yourself the issue is sexuality, gender, family, and faith are just as present today as they were in 1983. If you look across all the denominations experiencing internal chaos in 2023, without exception, every subject in discussion was regarding issues of theology, Christology, sexuality, and gender.

The issues have not changed much over these 40 years, and in some ways, they are red-hot again, almost like they were in the late 1970s in theology and politics all over again. Hopefully, we will take our mission to prayer and be grateful we have survived these storms, are growing, and are seeking every new opportunity that comes our way.

During the year of 2023 I have come to a great realization that we are so fortunate to be in an independent church. Denominational affiliation might well have done us in over these last 40 years. As an independent congregational democratic worship community, like an independent monastic community, we have been able to survive the stormy waters of politics, theology, sexuality, tradition, customs, and all the rest. It is a gift to be where we are. We may be able to join others in our next few years, but I have come to be very grateful for the vote of this congregation to step aside and trust God and God alone over 28 years ago. It was the right decision. NOW, we discern together what is next for our growth and our passing on this beautiful Ray Of Hope to others. Let's join hands, hearts, and (walking sticks and some wheelchairs perhaps) as we follow the Star of Bethlehem, the Superstar, The Light for All People. As we pray every Sunday: **We go forth in peace and Love to serve all people and the Lord ...**

ALL: ... on our journey into renewal, fresh beginnings, new possibilities, and a renewed embrace of our potential! Thanks be to God.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Br. Shawn Benedict, Pastor.

1-7-24

----- On the next page, see the poster for the first night our Elmira Bible Study visited Ray Of Hope Church in Syracuse, NY. Whose handwriting do you think this is?

Come One!
Come All!!!
Join the Gay Pride Festivities

"If you are gay -
be proud of how God made you!
If you are straight -
be proud of the fact that your brothers
and sisters can worship along side of you.
If you are not proud of who you are -
Come and find out what a difference
God makes!"
(Morningstar Witness)

Ray of Hope

Metropolitan Community Church
proudly invites you

to a service -

- Celebrating the Gay Spirit -
Sunday - June 21, 1992 - 6:00 P.M.
Grace Church, 819 Madison St.
Guest Speaker: Rev. Keith Herrick

Join us
after the service
for a Potluck Supper
in the Parish Hall

Bring a dish to pass
Share the fellowship!