

Grace/Zion/SOTC/New Era Temple Talk on Collaborative Ministry

August 4, 2024

Within our summer announcements, you've likely noticed that several of our events have been shared endeavors between our Muscatine ELCA congregations.

But where has this come from? And where is this going?

Before COVID, Grace approached Shepherd of the Cross about the possibility for joint youth ministry. Eventually, this blossomed into Family Faith Nights and included the participation of Zion by 2021. Beyond Family Faith Nights, members of our congregations have also participated collaboratively in service and social events, along with faith formation groups like Book Club. As our ministry deliberately expanded, we intentionally adopted the name "Faith Together Muscatine" to encompass our shared ministry together.

Most recently, New Era has been without a pastor for a year and half and despite many creative efforts, the current pastoral shortage has left them dangling. As a result, prayerful conversations with the Synod Office, and with the leadership of New Era, Zion, Shepherd, and Grace, have been taking place over the last few months to discern how we could more effectively come together as *all* the ELCA congregations in Muscatine to support not only New Era, but each of our communities .

Our goal is to build relationships between our congregations as we all desire the same thing: to love and serve the Lord with everything we have to offer, both as individual congregations and as congregations working together. This is not a prelude to closing or merging congregations, although we all know that the church is changing alongside the rest of society and we cannot know what the future will bring. Rather, this is an opportunity to share one another's strengths, to bolster our weaknesses, and to become stronger together as we follow the Spirit's leading.

This past May, we heard the theme of our Synod Assembly: **Listen, God is Calling!** It was based on Isaiah 43:19: "**I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?**" Expanding our collaborative ministry is a new thing springing forth—we are asking you to perceive it and celebrate this new opportunity. It is our intention to be transparent with communication as we move forward.

In that air of transparency, we wanted to share where we're at with you so that you all can be on the journey with us. In the near future, a discernment team will be formed – equally representing each congregation – to continue to discern where the Spirit is calling us. More details about how this team will be formed, and an invitation to be a part of this team, will be shared in upcoming weeks. As that team meets, that team will continue to report back to individual councils and congregations.

Right now, there are likely more questions than answers. Even so, we want to hear your thoughts, concerns, and questions. You can direct your feedback to your council members, (individuals who've been a part of the conversation) or your pastor. Our prayer is that you all will be our eyes and ears for what God is doing in our midst, and that you all will join us in prayer as we heed the wind of the Spirit. May God continue to bless us on this journey.

