Rejoicing Spirits NEWSLETTER

Psalm 98:4

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth!



Thank You for the Privilege of Serving Through Rejoicing Spirits!

Pastor David deFreese



Greetings my dear friends in Christ!

As my time of service through Mosaic and Rejoicing Spirits comes to a close, three phrases keep surfacing in my thoughts:

THANK YOU!

I am so deeply grateful for the opportunity to have served with and through such a profoundly impactful ministry as Rejoicing Spirits. Rejoicing Spirits has awakened the spiritual lives of individuals, families, congregations, and whole communities. Its bold celebration of God's unconditional grace has embraced those who have too often felt forgotten, neglected, and even rejected in society and by faith communities.

Rejoicing Spirit's worship services have a "Holy Spirit chaos" quality that has invigorated congregations that were stagnant and in danger of falling asleep with God's good news. It has been pure joy to hear from parents and siblings who have felt the support of parishes who recognize the God-given gifts of their loved ones, when others saw only limitations. I have been fascinated by the numbers of folks who have articulated how Rejoicing Spirits have enabled them to experience God's presence in very real ways.

Welcome and hospitality is taught and caught by Rejoicing Spirits better than any tool the Church has. Through 12 years serving as a Bishop, I pleaded with congregations to work harder at welcoming the stranger. If only I had known Rejoicing Spirits then, I would have offered Rejoicing Spirits as a gift that makes hospitality contagious and a delight. Rejoicing Spirits naturally engenders an atmosphere of vibrant welcome that becomes part of the DNA of a faith community. Having welcoming people out in the parking lots, helping those in vans and cars, announcing: "We are so excited to have you here, we couldn't wait in the building," has an impact. I am grateful for what Rejoicing Spirits has taught me and so many congregations.

Continued on next page.

BE ENCOURAGED!

Rejoicing Spirits is not an easy ministry. It is not a "Field of Dreams" ministry, that "if you build it, they will come." It takes work developing partnerships with providers of services for people living with disabilities and to enlist parent support groups. Transportation is always a key and a challenge. Discouragement is Rejoicing Spirits' greatest enemy. Gathering the community takes constant and consistent effort to get the word out, to keep inviting. Please be encouraged knowing that the effort makes a difference, that those who respond are vitally important to God and therefore to us. Rejoicing Spirits is a ministry that enhances the lives of all those involved and it is worth the work.

CONTINUE TO GROW

One of the things I love most about Rejoicing Spirits is that it keeps you on your "spiritual" toes. It demands creativity in expressing the Gospel message, in responding to the needs of God's people, in building the Body of Christ. We never arrive as the Church, and Rejoicing Spirits is ever new in its efforts to respond to God's calling. Keep learning; keep creating; keep stretching. A recent book I found very helpful is My Body is Not a Prayer Request by Amy Kenny. It sensitizes all of us to the realities and spiritual longings of others. Be encouraged to stay on the growing edge as you serve.

Finally, I love poet Amy Frazey's delightful recasting of Jesus' words in the Beatitudes from Matthew 5. I believe they have a Rejoicing Spirits flavoring:

Blessed be the dreamers,
for they know how to hope.

Blessed be the mothers and fathers,
for they know the value of life.

Blessed be the faithful,
for they know the power of prayer.

Blessed be the wanderers,
for they know the ways of the world.

Blessed be the silent,
for they know how to truly listen.

Blessed be the teachers,
for they know the joy of a child.

Blessed be the lost,
for they know how it feels to be found.

Blessed be the joyful,
for they know the importance of laughter.

Thank you for the privilege of serving through Rejoicing Spirits!

Rejoicing with you,
Pastor Dave

INTRODUCING: PASTOR TWILA SCHOCK

Pastor Twila Schock will become Mosaic's Vice President of Church Relations and International Programming as well as director of the Rejoicing Spirits ministry. Pastor Twila, an ELCA clergy, served as a missionary in Slovakia, Germany and Russia for 12 years, worked as Director of Global Mission Support for ELCA Churchwide and, most recently, served as lead pastor at Christ Lutheran Church in Belvidere, Illinois. As director of the ELCA Wittenberg Center, she provided pilgrimage opportunities for people from around the world to visit sites in Germany, Italy, Norway, Denmark and Sweden. As an ELCA Regional Director, she led delegations to Palestinian territories for church leaders in the Peace Not Walls effort. Other travels include global mission interpretation visits to the Middle East, Asia and Africa. ***Please welcome Pastor Twila as she guides Rejoicing Spirits.***



PSALM 27

Leader 1: **The Lord is my light.**
God saves and forgives me.
Leader 2: *We remember:*
THANK YOU, GOD!

Leader 1: **The Lord is my Help.**
I fear no one.
Leader 2: *We remember:*
THANK YOU, GOD!

Leader 1: **But enemies and bullies may come after me.**
What can I do?
Leader 2: *Know that the Lord is our help;*
We remember:
THANK YOU, GOD!

Leader 1: **War sometimes breaks out in my head!**
Leader 2: *But the Lord is our light and peace!*
We remember:
THANK YOU, GOD!

Leader 1: **Sometimes, Lord, I get scared.**
Please don't hide from me!
Leader 2: *The Lord brings light into our darkness.*
God surrounds you with love.
We remember:
THANK YOU, GOD!

Leader 1: **What if I've done many wrong things, and feel bad?**
Leader 2: *The Lord is the one who saves and forgives you!*
We remember:
THANK YOU, GOD!

Leader 1: **There are times I don't know the way to go, and I feel alone.**
Leader 2: *God is with you, and God will bring you home.*
We remember:
THANK YOU, GOD!

In The Creative Spirit: Psalm 27

Pastor John Gosswein

We have been using Psalm 27 as a joyful, hope-filled and expressive litany in our (still online!) worships throughout this 2023 Epiphany season. While searching for a way to help our congregation appreciate Psalm 27, we realized several things: The language in our translations can be intimidating, let alone understood; The psalm writer is encouraging the listener to participate in the journey of trust, not to merely hear the account of the psalmist.

We (Pr. Eric Spruth-Janssen, Micah Sherwin, Judy Gosswein and I) took the liberty of adapting the thought and language of the Psalm. We are delighted at the exuberance of response from the congregation with "Thank you, God."

As presented here, two leaders can be used; Leader 1 makes a statement, asks a question, or even registers a doubt; Leader 2 responds with God's gracious response and help offered. The cue of "we remember" should be enough to bring the congregational response "Thank you, God!"

While we have been leading the psalm, we have found delightful and meaningful moments to dwell on some of the Leader parts. For instance, we can pause at "enemies we face" and name some things that have bothered or frustrated us. The mention of "war in my head" allows us to elaborate our own conflicting thoughts of fear and hope, or anger and care. Finally, we lean toward language about "God's house" or "land of the living" to the more applicable "God brings us home."

For our adaptation of Psalm 27 (see left panel), we used portions of NRSV, NIV, Message and CEV.

Before the psalm, you may introduce the physical (American Sign Language) sign used for the response Thank you, God! While normal "thank you" is expressed with the hands coming from the mouth towards the recipient, our sign explodes upwards with outstretched arms.

Services at St. Paul's UCC

Rejoicing Spirits of Eastern Berks County has facilitated four worship services at St. Paul's UCC, Kutztown, Pennsylvania. They shared the following regarding their services:

- The number of people in attendance has been remarkable, with Rejoicers and their families even coming on New Year's Day.
- We had one parent tell us that her Rejoicer loves Rejoicing Spirits and talks about it to everyone he sees. He tells his friends how great it is and invites them to come.
- We have parents thanking us for facilitating the worship services. One father said he and his wife have not been able to attend church for years, and that now they are so excited because they can go once a month. He is vowing to spread the word to others about our Rejoicing Spirits services.
- We have a volunteer with an immune deficiency disorder that will not allow her to enter the church building with so many others. She spends a lot of time in and out of the hospital. She volunteers with Rejoicing Spirits by standing on the sidewalk in front of the church and directing any new Rejoicers to the parking lot at the back of the church. The parking lot entrance is handicap accessible and is the entrance that everyone uses for all church services and activities.
- During a service, we had one Rejoicer ask another Rejoicer, who was reluctant to say yes, to participate by collecting our index card gifts offering with him. The reluctant Rejoicer got up and went with him, passing an offering basket.
- When I spoke to the retired pastor who had volunteered to lead our December Christmas service and thanked her for volunteering her time, I found out she was the grandmother of one of our Rejoicers. She said, "Of course I want to facilitate this service. If I don't do this, where is my grandson going to be able to go to church for a Christmas service?"
- Our volunteers who come from many different churches interact with one another. They plan together, share together, laugh together and help each other as well as the Rejoicers. They even ask when the next planning meeting is. They are fantastic!
- There is a wondrous moving of the Holy Spirit that touches those in attendance. The Rejoicers feel comfortable and volunteer in roles that were, a few short months ago, out of their comfort zone.
- Our Rejoicers are sharing prayer requests for their family members.
- We are so thankful that God is working through us to offer a worship service format that is friendly and inviting, that encourages participation and loud, joyful singing and instrument playing including the clappers you sent us. Our Rejoicers, their families, friends, and caregivers as well as our volunteers have all been blessed by this ministry.

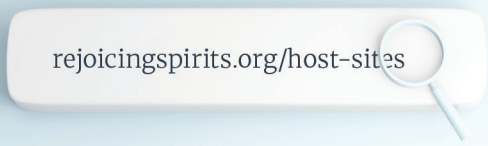
Thank you for sharing such positive observations regarding your services.
What a great ministry you are offering!

Survey Results

Thank you to all who took the time to fill out the survey that was sent to you. Here is a brief summary of information received:

- **Many of you mentioned that you would like to see a monthly email communication. We are researching this possibility in hopes to begin in May or June 2023.**
- **Resources—creative worship ideas and talking with other host sites—was a common theme. We will be focusing on providing new worship ideas and how to engage host site leaders.**
- **Below are some wonderful words of advice given for new Rejoicing Spirits host sites:**
  - Pick a theme and use a good skit book like The Humongous Book of Bible Skits by Group Publishing.
  - Remember that Rejoicing Spirits is not about perfect, liturgical worship. It needs to be OK to be messy and loud. Rejoicing Spirits is about making a joyful noise and allowing voices to speak that aren't often listened to.
  - Let the Holy Spirit guide you. Rejoice in the fellowship with the Rejoicers.
  - Encourage participants to help with various tasks, as they are able.
  - Expect the unexpected—you cannot anticipate every scenario. Go with the flow and enjoy the worship experience and fellowship time with the Rejoicers.
  - Be patient, show love and compassion and be committed to the Rejoicing Spirits mission.

As always, please feel free to reach out to Kelli Joseph, kelli.joseph@mosaicinfo.org with any questions, ideas, and updates.



HOST SITE RESOURCES

Have you checked out all the resources on our website?

Visit: rejoicingspirits.org/host-sites to view what is available.

If you are a host site and do not have access to this website, please contact Kelli Joseph (kelli.joseph@mosaicinfo.org).

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Mission:	Rejoicing Spirits was founded on the belief that all people should have the opportunity to explore faith and spirituality. Rejoicing Spirits is a ministry of Mosaic.
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