

Ely United Methodist Church
Church Conference 2022
December 14, 2022

State of the Church
Pastor Craig Haberman

Christian Churches across the United Church are in flux as 2022 draws to a close. The Covid-19 pandemic has profoundly affected most congregations, accelerating an already existing trend of diminishing membership and vitality. This trend has three basic facets.

First, people increasingly pull together an amalgam of beliefs from a variety of sources of spirituality to form their faith, rather than seek out the Christian faith passed down by the church for centuries.

Second, individuals who still basically identify as Christian are choosing not to participate in the institution of the church itself; in an organized congregation.

Third, an increasing number of people just plain describe themselves as non-religious, or what sociologists of religion call the "Nones."

Switching to the pandemic: It was about two years ago that we started hearing about a virus over in China. I would have never believed it if someone would have told me that churches and schools would shut down almost completely by the beginning of April 2020 and major disruptions would continue for almost a year. It still seems a little unreal to me.

I believe the resiliency of our church since March of 2020 and the vitality we're experiencing here in December of 2022 is the result of three gifts: God's grace, the commitment of our lay and clergy in our church across a hundred-plus years, and the underlying cohesion and support of the Ely community.

Our Administrative Council, each of our committees, and especially our Visioning Committee have spent time in 2021 and 2022 pondering and praying about what exactly comes next. And we will continue to do so. But my sense is to keep on in the direction we're heading, even while being alert to any shifts in our church or the community.

Our adaptations during Covid, particularly streaming services, have been a huge plus for us and we'll continue to tweak those or add to them as necessary. Just this week we received an enthusiastic comment of support from someone wintering in Tucson, expressing their gratitude in being able to be part of our worship service while down south. It's also reassuring to know we have Zoom in our back pocket as a Plan B should the need arise.

But our primary focus will be our in-person gatherings for worship, education, fellowship, meetings, and just plain coming together face to face as followers of Jesus Christ.

It's my privilege to be your pastor. I'm grateful for our partnership in the Gospel.

Pastor Craig Haberman