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Anna Branson

Religion in America

Professor Sara Hart

04/17/2021

Oral History Project

Humboldt county has a variety of religious groups including multiple Christian churches. I interviewed a pastor from a non-denominational Christian Church in Southern Humboldt. He has chosen to keep himself and the church anonymous. He states that before the COVID-19 pandemic the church was small with 15-30 people who attended consistently.¹ The pastor has been serving this church for over 10 years. The population of attendee's has waxed and waned over this time. The typical demographic is elderly people, and a couple families. Luckily, the building was donated to the church before this pastor began serving, which allows them to continue even when census is low. He states they were gaining members right before the pandemic began.¹

I asked what a typical day of worship and/or gathering entails, he states "Well our setup for Sunday is we have announcements, welcome, and sharing. Then we have singing. Then we have the teaching of God's word, and then we take the lords supper. And then we close in a time of prayer."¹ When asked, "how did your religious practice change when the pandemic began?" He states that they did initially close per CDC guidelines in the beginning and throughout the pandemic. During the closure he sent out video text messages of him reading scripture.¹ The

1. Anonymous (Christian Pastor), in discussion with author, August 4, 2021.

does not have much technology, so live streaming or recording a service was not something they could do. Also, with his population being mostly elderly video message through text messaging was an easier way for them to stay connected.

He states that they did open earlier than recommended by the county when all the senior's got vaccinated. When they did open, they followed the guidelines from the CDC.

He stated:

Well, we had to social distance, so we had to keep people 6 feet apart. We wore masks, but the practice of worship did not change however, even when the governor stated when we were allowed to open that we should forgo singing, but since our singing isn't loud or boisterous, we decided we would follow the CDC guidelines which did not state to not sing. I don't know where he got that information, but singing is a major part of our worship, so we were going to continue.¹

He reports there were multiple challenges due to this pandemic. He states "Well right before we had to close because of the mandated guidelines from the state. Our church was experiencing some growth, we had new families coming. And since that time when we reopened, I think February, we had lost a number of families, so it was very detrimental to the church."¹ Luckily, he reports they did not take a hit to their finances too much as they had savings, the church members still supported the church, they do not have to pay a mortgage for the building, and they don't have paid salaries. He goes on to explain, "The pastor is pro bono and just receives resources for the property he lives on."¹

1. Anonymous (Christian Pastor), in discussion with author, August 4, 2021.

He wanted to mention the largest challenge the church faced was division among belief's about COVID. He states, "It really did cause division in the church, because Christian's are independent thinkers, and we don't all think alike. So, you have some people who are so far that this is a conspiracy and won't wear a mask. And then you have people on the other end who are scared to death and fearful. So somewhere in that you have people who are just really edgy. So that caused a problem."¹

He goes on to say, "It's those people I had an issue with, who wouldn't social distance and wouldn't wear a mask. That's why I said I wouldn't meet because I was worried for our people who are in their eighties, pushing one hundred. They are very healthy, but their vulnerable. It frustrated me that people couldn't see the danger."¹ He states now things have settled down and there is piece since most of them are vaccinated.

When asked what his practice looks like now, he states that all his church members who can get vaccinated have done so. Because of this they feel safe not wearing masks during the service. He states, "I don't even worry about masks unless we have visitors come in."¹ The safety of the elderly members has always been his priority and the vaccines have made them all more comfortable. When asked if he will incorporate any new processes acquired from the pandemic into their practice he states, "I'll be glad when we get to normal. But it won't quite be the same."¹ They are on their way to get back to normalcy. They now meet weekly, take the lords supper, and sing together.

1. Anonymous (Christian Pastor), in discussion with author, August 4, 2021.

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