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Oral History Project

Sequoia S. Church Bergstrom

Religious Studies 301; Religion in America

April 30, 2021

Lutheran Church of Arcata, CA and COVID-19 Adaptations

On April 6, 2021 Taylor Hagbo was interviewed on behalf of the Religious Studies course “Religion in America” at Humboldt State University in order to obtain information on the experiences of past, present, current, and future protocols of church attendance as effected by COVID-19. Taylor is currently a Hospice Chaplin for Hospice of Humboldt as well as an Outreach Minister at the Arcata Lutheran Church in Humboldt County California¹. The focus of the interview was to obtain information on his role and the facility in which his position takes place at the Arcata Lutheran Church. Taylor’s position as an Outreach Minister is to focus on reaching out to the community through involvement outside of church settings in order to educate people on and expand the Arcata Lutheran Church. The following will be the content of the interview that was conducted in order to better understand how COVID-19 has effected the Arcata Lutheran Church as well as understand how they are acting upon the new regulations that have occurred during these events in order to maintain participation and faith amongst their members.

Prior to COVID-19 Taylor describes a typical church service to begin at 10:00am with roughly 75-100 people there on an average Sunday morning.² He goes to describe the church’s services by saying; “... we kind of have, um, this rhythm of doing some traditional services. So, a little older music, out of the hymnal, things like that. And also, more contemporary services. We just kind of cycle through on a monthly basis.”³ He continues to describe services outside of the typical Sunday worship by listing a once a week bible study with

¹ Taylor Hagbo, “Arcata Lutheran Church and COVID-19”, interview by Sequoia S. Church Bergstrom, April 6, 2021.

² Hagbo, interview.

³ Hagbo, interview.

the head pastor, a women's book club, and occasionally involvement with Humboldt State students through a program called 'Ignite'.⁴

Following the 'prior to COVID-19' discussion the interview stepped into the question; "How has your practice [the church's practice] changed due to COVID-19?".⁵ Taylor continued to describe what about the church or practices around the church have changed due to COVID-19 by saying; "We went through a few different phases. We started doing online services, and instead of doing a live service we decided to make more high quality produced, high quality videos that are about 20-30 minutes in length. So, we started that at, probably at the end of March, early April last year [2020]. And, all of those are online... on... our catalogue on our website".⁶⁷ Taylor continues to describe the process in which they made the videos describing that each of the videos was a simplified service consisting of about 3-4 songs done by a family worship team (for COVID-19 social distancing), a sermon, a reading, and some prayers. Taylor said this varied dependent on the Sunday and the topic of their sermon.⁸ Previously in the interview it was discussed that many of the members of the Lutheran Church of Arcata tend to be older in the sense that they are not as familiar with the ins and outs of technology. Because of this, each morning of a service an email was sent out with the link of each video so that there were more direct communications with those who are not as "...tech savvy...".⁹

Aside from sorting out technological difficulties with in the member of the church one of the largest challenges the church has faced during COVID-19 has been navigating the state

⁴ Hagbo, interview.

⁵ Sara Hart, "Syllabus 301 Spring 2021", Canvas, April 25, 2021.

⁶ <https://www.lutheranchurcharcata.org/live>

⁷ Hagbo, interview.

⁸ Habgo, interview.

⁹ Hagbo, interview.

guideline for COVID-19 protocols. Taylor describes how the fluctuation of states guidelines, that has allowed for the congregation to be in and out of the building itself, in California made it difficult to maintain a standard service by stating "... the human element is people, even in a single congregation, all across the board on their fear of COVID or their willingness to risk the disease in order to be together. And then there's the political element on top of that and umm it just gets really confusing."¹⁰ Taylor says that this "polarizing" that comes from these events are some of the largest challenges. Aside from the polarization aspect Taylor also says that not being able to have the choir in their in-person services has been quite a challenge as well as communion. Prior to the COVID-19 the choir was a large part of their services and a communal cup was always offered during communion which has slightly changed the tradition for their members.

COVID-19 has been a cause for many adaptations in all arenas. Taylor says that while they have stopped doing videos now that state guidelines allow them to be in person he think it is a good idea to incorporate videos on a regular basis as part of their expanding outreach he is working on. "Like so many churches we have learned a lot." Taylor says, while focusing on continuing the adaptations of video work in their congregation.¹¹ Outside of these adaptations he assumes post COVID-19, or at least until regulation lightens as the county reduces tiers, things will resume to pre-COVID-19 tendencies.

¹⁰ Hagbo, interview.

¹¹ Hagbo, interview.

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