

Many came to our annual memorial service – Pastor Charles Stevenson

At St. John we were surprised by the **high level of participation** in a special memorial service that we held on a Saturday night for our members and the community. The service had almost **twice as many people in attendance** as during a regular Sunday service. The memorial service was inspired by the candle lighting services offered by many hospices in memory those who died in the preceding year, but ours was **an explicitly Christian worship service**. We offered the service as part of our larger efforts to minister to a surrounding community that has the lowest church attendance in the nation.

The memorial service began with a welcome to worship, followed by The Service of Light from the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, during which the altar and a service candle were lit. After this piece of liturgy concluded, the pastor offered prayers and then invited members of each family to come forward to light a candle in honor of their lost loved one. Since the service took place in a Lutheran congregation, we then followed a traditional order of service, with three hymns, three readings, prayers before the altar, and a homily from a hospice chaplain. The service concluded with an invitation from the pastor for those present to join together in a community meal.

The memorial service is part of a growing partnership between St. John and a local hospice that helps each group to improve the pastoral care provided to grieving members of the community. In this work we work together, St. John will continue to provide the hospice chaplain with resources and space for holding grief support workshops. We will build a list of local people whose loved ones were cared for by the hospice. These grieving people will then be invited to next year's memorial service. The hospice chaplain will again participate in the service, which both provides a comforting presence to people that he met during the past year and introduces him to our members who may wish to consider joining a grief workshop.

The memorial service seems to provide some hints as to what people find valuable in worship, and a further exploration of these themes might help congregations to draw some to more frequent participation in the life of the community.

Service Overview:

Preservice Music/Prelude

Service Candle is lit or procession with a large, lighted candle

Welcome by Pastor

Service of Light, page 142 LBW, or similar

Altar Candle is lit

Service of Light continues, pages 143-145 or similar.

Brief pastoral prayer

Invitation to family members to come forward and light a candle

Opening Hymn

First Lesson

Second Lesson

Gospel Reading

Homily

Hymn

Prayers, concluding with the Lord's Prayer
Hymn
Benediction
Invitation to Community Meal

Some hymn suggestions:

LBW 346, 448, 532

WOV 690, 738, 746, 779