



Ray Of Hope

Church Of Our Lord Jesus Christ

"My House shall be a house of prayer for All People."

(Isaiah 56:7)

Founded: 10/31/1983. Now in our Forty-first year of Ministry.

MISSION: Love God, Love your neighbor,
and make disciples of every person

everywhere. (Matthew 22:37-39; Matthew 28:19)

"It is time to put our faith into action."

"Faith without works is dead." (James 2:14-26)

Veronica Floyd, Moderator

Rev. Br. Shawn F. Benedict, O.S.B, Appointed Pastor

We extend a special welcome to our visitors. You
are as welcome here as Jesus Christ Himself.

Scripture exhorts us: "Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed
you, for the glory of God" Romans 15:7 (NABRE – 2011)

Participate in some or all parts of this worship event as you are comfortable. We are building
a wonderful Christ-centered Community here, and we invite you to share in
our joy! After the Worship Service, please join us for refreshments and sharing.

Today is January 7, 2024, Epiphany I Year B

Orthodox Christmas January 6 and 7

Ray Of Hope Church teaches the same Christian faith of ancient ecumenical consensus. St. Vincent of Lerins,
a fifth-century monk and theologian, described it as

"what has been believed always, everywhere, and by all."

Scientific Discovery, Academic Knowledge, the Holy Scriptures, and Spirituality are Universal
and Unified. (Br. Benedict 8-6-23)

Scripture Readings for this worship event:

First Reading: Isaiah 60:1-6 NRSV 1st Test. Pg. 690

Psalm: Psalm 72:1-13 responsorial in this bulletin.

Second Reading: Eph 3:1-6 NRSV 2nd Test. Pg. 193

Gospel: Matt. 2:1-12 NRSV 2ND Testament page 2

***We use the term 1st for the "Old" Testament and 2nd for the "New" Testament.
The NRSV Bible, 1st Testament numbers, are in the front, and the 2nd Testament
numbers are in the back of the book. If this confuses you, ask someone around
you to assist you. Thank you.**

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CALL TO WORSHIP

Visit and greet one another until the bell rings.

Bell's 1st ring. As the bell rings, please find your seat and pray silently for the next few minutes. Please refrain from conversations as these disturb those trying to pray.

The St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi bell at Ray Of Hope Church, 380 W. 1st St. in Elmira, NY, was a gift from Michael Quinnell of Syracuse, NY, in September 2005. The bell rings out 39 joyful rings, in contrast to tolling the bell in single rings. The 39 joyful rings honor the 39 lashes Jesus endured that we now celebrate in victory and gratitude for our Salvation. "The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes, we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5) We ring the bell before worship and Bible Enrichment sessions. Listen carefully and see if you can hear all 39 rings.



WE GATHER TO PRAISE THE LORD AND GIVE THANKS

+ Pastoral Welcome

Leader-2: Hello. My name is _____, and I am in the City of _____ in the State of _____. Good morning, Merry Christmas, Holy

Epiphany Day, and welcome ■ (** Reader, stop, look up at the people, and smile.**)

Everyone is welcome to receive Holy Communion with us during the second part of this worship event. We celebrate the Lord's open table where Membership in this or any church is not required to receive Communion. People participating on the Internet, please bring the following items to your table at this time so you are prepared: 1) a cup with some wine or grape juice, 2) a small piece of bread, cracker, or matzo on a plate, 3) a second cup with some water, and 4) a side

napkin.

Leader-1: Today's bulletin order of worship and music supplement are available on Facebook Live; right-click the "Featured Links" icon. On Skype, look in the Chat window for two document icons. On our website, look at the large gold box labeled SUNDAY WORSHIP INFORMATION at www.rayofhopechurch.com. Take a moment now and gather these items. We will start shortly; thank you. Take a moment now and gather these items. We will start shortly. This morning, Ed Askins will play a prelude improvisation on, "**Silent Night, Holy Night.**" Everyone is invited to relax and listen attentively to enjoy this prayer time. Thank you.



ALL PEOPLE HAVE RECEIVED SALVATION AS A FREE GIFT FROM GOD, ARE ETERNALLY SECURE IN GOD'S LOVE AND ARE BY MODERN TERMS, "SAVED." ALL LGBTQ2SIA2ss+ persons of every sexual orientation and every gender expression are SAVED and are called to live out the fullness of who they are so that God may be praised. Ray Of Hope Church, Inc. officially took this position on September 18, 2011 and changed the By-laws to secure this position. (www.rayofhopechurch.com/faith.htm) (www.rayofhopechurch.com/purpose.htm)

(The Congregation amended this By-law on September 18, 2011, and used to read: We believe that Salvation is available to all who call on the Name of Jesus Christ, and are re-born into the Life of Christ.)([Article 10 STATEMENT OF FAITH 10.01 Short Form Statement Lines 1140 – 1143](#))



Bell's 2nd ring will announce the start of the worship event.

Pastor:

Ray Of Hope Church officially began on 10/31/1983.

Today is January 7, 2024, the third Sunday during the celebration of Christ's Birth, the Feast of Epiphany in our 41st year of ministry.

FIRST SONG: **O Come, All Ye Faithful/Adeste Fideles** G&P 311 Text: John F. Wade, ca. 1711-1786. English tr. Frederick Oakley, 1802-1880, alt. Music: Adeste Fideles John F. Wade, ca. 1711-1786. Setting by James Chepponis. Setting published in ©2017 by GIA Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Used with Print Permission and Streaming License A-74127. Performed by Rev. Clyde McLennan. As from October, 2015, I, Rev. Clyde McLennan, performer in this collection, have assigned my performer rights in this collection to Hymnary.org. Non-commercial use of these recordings is permitted.



WE PREPARE OUR HEARTS

+ Confession and Forgiveness of our sins.

Leader -2: In silent prayer, consider our relationships with God and others. Then, confess faults, sins, and failures to Christ, who will forgive us immediately.

(**silent prayer**)

Leader -2: We pray together:

ALL: I confess to Almighty God, and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have sinned through my own fault in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done, and in what I have failed to do. I declare in the midst of this assembly of believers that I am truly sorry for having offended anyone, and God, in any way. **Therefore, I ask you, my brothers and sisters, all the angels and the saints, to forgive me and pray for me to the Lord our God.**

Lord, have mercy.

ALL: Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy. (see John 1:1-5)

ALL: Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

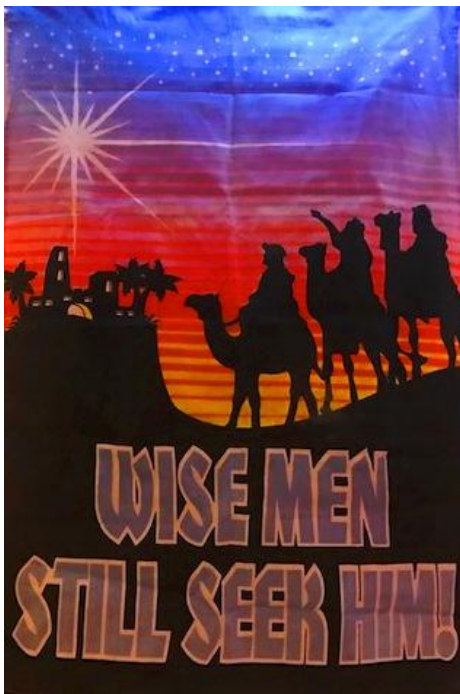
ALL: Lord, have mercy.

Lamb of God, ****you were born as a Child among us**** to take away the sins of the World; have mercy on us.

ALL: Lamb of God, **you were born as a Child among us to take away the sins of the World, grant us peace.**

Pastor: We pray that all of God's people may one day be reunited in God's Kingdom without the loss of anyone. Therefore, we ask Almighty God to have mercy on all of us, forgive all our sins, and keep us in everlasting life.

ALL: Amen.



Pastor: Having received forgiveness from the Prince of Peace, we pray together.

Spoken:

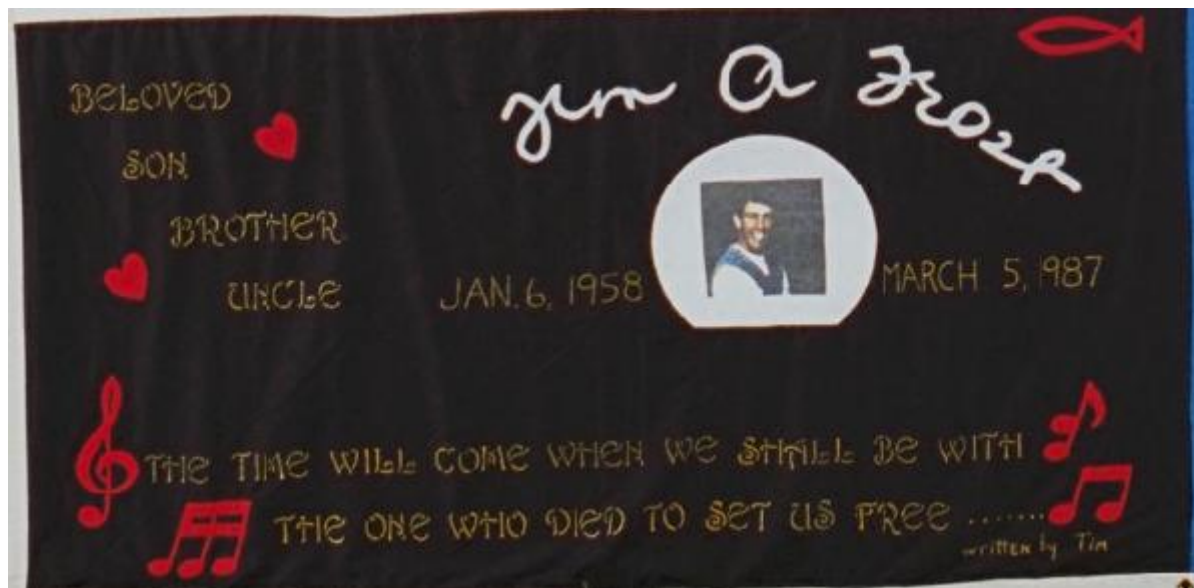
**Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to God's people on Earth.
You are the One God, Sovereign of the Universe,**

**Only Holy God, we worship you,
we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.**

Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away **the sin of the World**:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of God:
receive our prayer.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord of all,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,

with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of the
Holy Unity of God. Amen.



+ Opening Prayer

Leader: Eternal Word of God, fill us with your eternal love as we listen to your Word. We need to understand your Word to be witnesses by example of the love you give. We desire to give you honor and glory in all we do through Christ our Lord.

ALL: AMEN.

Leader 5: Please be seated now as we listen attentively to the Scriptures.
ALL: We read God's Word to recall, reflect on, and rejoice in the action of God in life.



THE SERVICE OF THE WORD OF GOD

+ First Reading

Reader: **** If an introduction is needed:**** Hello. My name is _____, and I am in the City of _____ in the State of _____.

The first reading on this, the Third and final Sunday of Christmas, the Feast of The Epiphany is in Book of Isaiah, chapter 60, verses 1-6. You will find this on page 690 in the front of the NRSV Bible. Here begins the reading:

Lift up your eyes and look around;
they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from far away,
and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.

⁵ Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,
because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

⁶ A multitude of camels shall cover you,
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;
all those from Sheba shall come.
They shall bring gold and frankincense,
and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.

Reader: This is the Word of the Lord!

ALL: Thanks be to God!

+ Psalm

Reader: **** If an introduction is needed:**** Hello. My name is _____, and I am in the City of _____ in the State of _____.

The Psalm today is number 27, verses one through thirteen, with a responsorial verse. The response today is the song " Lord, every nation on earth will adore you."

R. Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

O God, with your judgment endow the king,
and with your justice, the king's son;
He shall govern your people with justice
and your afflicted ones with judgment.

R. Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

Justice shall flower in his days,
and profound peace, till the moon be no more.
May he rule from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

R. Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

The kings of Tarshish and the Isles shall offer gifts;
the kings of Arabia and Seba shall bring tribute.
All kings shall pay him homage,
all nations shall serve him.

R. Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

For he shall rescue the poor when they pour out,
and the afflicted when there is no one to help them.
The King shall have pity for the lowly and the poor;
the lives of the poor he shall save.

R. Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

+ Second Reading

Reader: **** If an introduction is needed:**** Hello. My name is

_____, and I am in the City of _____ in the State
of _____.

The second reading is in the Book of Ephesians, chapter 3, verses 1-6. You will find this on page 193 in the back, the second testament of the NRSV Bible. Here begins the reading:

3 This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you **Gentiles**—² for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you,³ and how the **mystery was made known to me by revelation**, as I wrote above in a few words,⁴ a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of **the mystery of Christ**.⁵ In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit:⁶ that is, the **Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.**

Reader: This is the Word of the Lord!

ALL: Thanks be to God!

+ The Holy Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

Reader: We sing an acclamation before and one after the reading of the Gospel. Please rise as you are able for the Gospel Acclamation.

Gospel Acclamation

We Love Your Word!

To my friends in Christ
at Ray Of Hope Church

"Music for Worship"

Music by: Gaude! Liturgical Arts
October 31, 1993
Revised 8/2013

The musical score is written in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a 4/4 time signature. It consists of four staves of music with lyrics underneath. The lyrics are: "We love Your Word, O Lord for it set us free. We know the truth, O Lord; We are Yours e - ter - nal - ly. So we stand to hear Your Word. We praise You for Your Word. Al-le - lu - a! for Your Word. It heals our hearts, souls and minds. For Your Word, Al - le - lu - ia! Thank You Je - sus!"

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Reader: The Gospel reading is Matthew, chapter 2, verses 1-12 on page 2 in the second testament of the NRSV Bible. This takes place in the home in Nazareth, not in Bethlehem. (Luke 2:39)

Reader: Truly present among us, the Lord is with you.

ALL: And also with you.

Reader: A reading of the Holy Gospel according to Matthew.

ALL: Glory to you, O Lord. May the Word of God be in our (+) minds that we will understand it, on our (+) lips that we will speak it, and in our (+) hearts that we will love it.

The Visit of the Wise Men

2 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." ³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ They told

him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶ 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸ Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." ⁹ When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Reader: This is the Gospel of the Lord!

ALL: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

Gospel Acclamation

Forever, We Are Yours!

To my friends in Christ
at Ray Of Hope Church
for the 1996 New Year,
The Year of The Holy Spirit!

"Music For Worship"

Music by: Gaude! Liturgical Arts
December 31, 1995

Glo-ry to the One God! Glo-ry to our Sa - vior Je - sds the
 Christ! And, to the Ho - ly Spi - rit, for - ev - er You're Our God!
 You brought us out of dark - ness, in - to Your mar - ve - lous Light! Your Word is our
 joy! For this we give You glo - ry, both now and ev - er more!
 For - ev - er we are Yours! For - ev - er we are Yours!

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Ray Of Hope Church Of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Inc.
 The LGBTQISA2ss+ Pride Activities, and Social Events Center of Elmira, NY.
 The only Church in Central New York founded and fostered by the GLBTQSA2ss+ community for 39 years. October 31, 2022 - 39th Anniversary now in our 40th year in Ministry.

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and God's grace toward me has not been in vain. 1 Cor. 5:10

+ Sermon

Ray Of Hope Church teaches the same Christian faith of ancient ecumenical consensus. St. Vincent of Lerins, a fifth-century monk and theologian, described it as **"what has been believed always, everywhere, and by all."**

<http://www.rayofhopechurch.com/faith.htm>

Luke 2:39 **The Return to Nazareth**

³⁹ When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

January 6 original Christmas Nativity Mass, still is in some sections of the world Church.

WE ARE NOT USING ANY OF THE FOLLOWING SERMON MATERIALS TODAY. THESE ARE FOR YOUR READING THIS WEEK.

Prophecies in the Book of Daniel reveal when the Messiah would appear on the world stage, when he would die, and when he would set up his Universal kingdom. The date of his death was therefore the 14th of Nissan, the first Spring month on the Hebrew calendar.

Calendar at the time of Daniel was the lunar 30-day month calendar. Then there was the Julian Calendar until 1582 and then the modern Gregorian – a solar calendar with leap years. The Eastern Church was using a Greek calendar. There is a great note on this at Matthew 2:1 at the word "born" on page 1301 of your Scofield III Bibles. However, the church generally agreed until very recently that this meant Jesus died on April 6 after the calendar conversions were reconciled. A **Tradition** then followed that Jesus was conceived on the same date. Therefore, he was born on January 6. In 336 the Roman Empire began to formally celebrate Christmas on December 25, by the authority of the Emperor Constantine. Constantine declared Christianity to be the prominent religion of the Empire. By the fourth century, two dates had gained preeminence: Roman Calendar December 25 in the west, and January 6 in the east. Although the modern Armenian church continues to celebrate Christmas on January 6, December 25 ultimately prevailed, and January 6 was recast as the feast of Epiphany, commemorating the arrival of the Magi in Jerusalem. The period between these two dates constitute the famous "twelve days of Christmas." These are celebrations, not historical dates. In 1870 Christmas was declared a federal holiday. (see pages 29-33 Tim Dowley The History of Christianity © 1970, 1990 Lion Publishing)

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Some quotations from "Born To Be King" by Dom Bernard Orchard, O. S. B. beginning on page 51. "We now come to an incident in the early life of Jesus that is related only by Matthew; Luke, who knew our Gospel of Matthew, makes no mention of the flight into Egypt at all, thus ignoring entirely a period of some four to five years in the childhood of Jesus. But then there was no need for him to repeat what the evangelist Matthew had already adequately recorded. The child had already grown into a toddler; and everything was going on nicely when all of a sudden a party of distinguished visitors came to the village and knocked at their door. ... They proved to be a deputation from the East, and had been guided to the door by a special star which they claimed to have first seen in their own country, and which had led them to Jerusalem in their search for the king promised of old to the Jews."

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Magi ([Latin](#) plural of *magus*; [Ancient Greek](#): μάγος *magos*; [Old Persian](#): *maguš*, [Persian](#): مَغ *mogh*; [English](#) singular *magian*, *mage*, *magus*, *magusian*, *magusaeen*; [Kurdish](#): *manji*) is a term, used since at least the 6th century BC, to denote followers of [Zurvanism](#) or [Zoroaster](#). a practitioner of magic, to include astrology, alchemy and other forms of esoteric knowledge.

The word *mágos* (Greek) and its variants appears in both the [Old](#) and [New Testaments](#).^[81] The Strong's Concordance says "magician, i.e. Oriental scientist; by implication a magician; - sorcerer, wise man. Ordinarily this word is translated "magician" in the sense of illusionist or fortune-teller,

and this is how it is translated in all of its occurrences except for the Gospel of Matthew, where it is rendered "wise man". However, early church bishops and theologians, such as [St. Justin](#), [Origen](#), [St. Augustine](#) and [St. Jerome](#), on up to the fifth century did not use the term "wise men," but transliterated the word in its ordinary sense, i.e. as "magician".^[9]

The Bible does not say how many or what gender they were. Travel! Wives and Children

The Magi are found in every ancient civilization

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From a previous bulletin: The prophet Daniel was taken into the court of eunuchs to serve King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon some **six hundred years earlier**. The eunuchs were often court magi and were called upon to interpret King Nebuchadnezzar's dreams and give him direction. In one particular dream God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar the empires of the world to the end when Messiah would set up His Kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar called upon his magi to 1) tell him the content of the dream, and 2) give him the interpretation. He set a serious standard this time; the magi who failed to give the dream and interpretation were put to death for failing to guide the King. The prophet Daniel was able through the powerful ministry of the Holy Spirit to tell the king his dream and to interpret it.

Therefore, since Daniel was successful, in Babylonian culture, Daniel became one of the magi and was elevated to being the chief magi for some forty years and he held a position of great respect and power. Scholars suggest Daniel influenced the writings of the prophecies of the Babylonian and then the Persian Zoroastrian magi to know that a divine child king, would come from Israel and he would be God's anointed Messiah deliverer for all humanity. **Those same magi would have been familiar with Daniel's writings where he predicted that 483 years after the Jewish people would be released from captivity, the Messiah, King, saving child would come. (Daniel 9:25-26).** THE SAME DATING PROCESS MENTIONED ABOVE THAT INFORMED BOTH THE ROMAN WESTERN AND GREEK EASTERN CHURCHES FOR THE DATING OF THE BIRTH. Perhaps some of the Magi remained faithful to the true God Daniel introduced them to. These might be some of the magi who went to Jerusalem to wait, watch, and pray for the birth of the coming King. Now that it had happened, we have the account of Matthew telling us they were convinced that these prophecies would have been recently fulfilled.

The magi studied the skies and star patterns as one of the sources of religious knowledge. The gospel tells us a new manifestation was showing in the skies and the Magi recognized it as the star that would guide them to the divine child.

It has been pointed out that Herod was likely terrified to see Parthian magi and troops coming into Jerusalem looking for a newborn king of the Jews! These magi were from enemy territory.

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Catholic and Protestant theologians are in agreement that the redaction of the event into three kings, who are later assigned the names Caspar, Balthasar, and Melchior, each bearing one gift, and each king representing the three main groupings of the human race (one is black, one is asian, and one is euro-centric and white) is mostly the result of Medieval legends, mystery plays, sacred plays that were presented in public--*. The gifts are variously interpreted as gold for the kingship of Christ, incense for his divinity, and myrrh for his redemptive suffering. Sometimes the gifts are said to represent virtue, prayer, and suffering. The gifts are definitely partial fulfillment of the prophecies of Isaiah 60:6,11,13 and Psalm 72:10-11.

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We are Magi:

Very interested in Spiritual things

You and I have taken great effort to stand up to our established religious institutions and try to move them forward on matters such as

Dignity of all persons of every ethnicity, every gender, every orientation

Dignity of women and the work necessary to root out culturally established misogyny

Addressing culturally rooted racism

Ageism

Structure of the Church – the place of anyone who is not a white male in that church

Definition of leadership in the church- Women Deaconesses, Married Women, Single Women, Women in Sacred Orders of Deacon, Priest, Bishop, Pope

MAGI meant RELIGIOUS LIFE. How should RELIGIOUS LIFE LOOK TODAY NEO-MONASTIC MOVEMENT

MAGI – Saints – established list – WE ARE ALL CALLED TO BE SAINTS FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT confirmation, laying on of hands, second blessing, speaking in tongues

End of Biblical mysticism

Full participation for divorced and remarried – there is a time for everything including ending unhealthy relationships

Stop casting aside LGBT bisexual, intersex,

FAMILIES OF CHOICE – JESUS -

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WE NEED AN EPIPHANY

1) Churches are disaffiliating from one another over LGBTQSIA2ss inclusion and leadership. Article: There Go The Churches by Mark Tooley January 2, 2023

There Go the Churches

The floodgates are opening, and congregations are leaving the United Methodist Church



Mark Tooley • January 2, 2023

(<https://ministrywatch.com/there-go-the-churches/7bd8d4wAR1LdP1YX0h3aE5p7-49m4DjL4SORzatyAaNYQ3z4pZd9PjpcOk>)

Recently, the number of congregations / churches approved for disaffiliation was at 1, 314. "Hundreds more have already voted to exit and are awaiting final approval." By the end of 2023 it may be between three to five-thousand congregations who will leave and take the church property with them. The cause? "... decades of rancorous debate over the ordination and marriage of LGBTQ United Methodists," (source: Emily Mc Farlan

Miller <https://ministrywatch.com/after-years-of-loud-debate-conservatives-quietly-split-from-united-methodist-church/>)

New denomination: Global Methodist Church (<https://globalmethodist.org/>)

New denomination: Methodist Collegiate College (https://www.whiteschapelumc.com/uploads/1/2/6/9/126965458/01_why_discernment.pdf)

New denomination: independent Methodist congregations.

Mark Tooley: " American nondenominational Christianity **continues** to grow while most denominations decline.

Unsurprisingly, the liberal denominations of the old Mainline Protestant world are the fastest to decline. The Episcopal Church just **announced** that in 2021 it lost 56,314 members while attendance dropped 36% from 2020. Sixty-two congregations were permanently closed. Average worship dropped from 55 to 21 persons. Ninety percent of Episcopal churches have fewer than 100 attendees on Sunday. Many Methodist congregations seek to escape this grim fate." (https://ministrywatch.com/news-at-the-hinterlands/?id=AR114PV1Xoh3t507_49a4Df1L00R2ahcAAKY0234g0Z9FPVc_Ok)

WE NEED AN EPIPHANY

2) Transgender Inmate Executed in Missouri (<https://gaycitynews.com/transgender-amber-mclaughlin-executed-missouri/>)

Amber McLaughlin, 49, was executed on January 3.

A transgender woman serving on death row in Missouri was executed by lethal injection on January 3 in a case that raised serious questions about judicial fairness and featured transphobic rhetoric by the state's governor during the final hours of her life.

Officials in Missouri said Amber McLaughlin, 49, died at 6:51 p.m. local time at Eastern Reception, Diagnostic, and Correctional Center. Multiple news reports described McLaughlin as the first out transgender person to be executed under the death penalty in the United States.

McLaughlin was serving time for raping and killing her ex-girlfriend, Beverly Guenther, in 2003. She was convicted in 2005, but the jury in St. Louis County deadlocked after failing to deliver a sentence.

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18? people on Death Row in Missouri. The previous person executed in the State was a black male.

WE NEED AN EPIPHANY

We need an epiphany. Last Sunday, we made this our theme: We need an epiphany. We actually prayed in the Prayers of the People: "Oh God, thank you for guiding **Ray Of Hope through 2022**. We ask for your blessing in this new year of 2023. Give us a new epiphany and vision for this new year. In thanksgiving, we pray to the Lord."

We were not prepared for what God had in store for us during the worship event. During our worship service, we had a Eucharistic Miracle as a cross appeared on the host, the wafer, that was about to be received by Ian from Christina. The Eucharistic Miracle was a sign of strength for Ian and Christina and a sign that God is with them and hearing their prayers during this time of transition and change for Ian. This event also has meaning for all of us individually and as Ray Of Hope Church.

I have looked at the pictures I took after worship a few times and thought I was seeing the Tau Cross, which looks like the Latin letter T. This cross is also known as the Saint Anthony of Egypt Cross. Tertullian (c. 155- c. 240) wrote this was often the kind of cross used for executions, the T. St. Francis of Assisi (1181 – 1226) used the Tau cross as his signature and personal seal. The Tau cross was also popular in the Church at the time of the life of Francis. There also is an interesting connection for us as our Congregation is close to the ministry of Francis, who taught the Church to welcome and embrace all people. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tau_cross) Story of the Tau Cross at Mother Angelica's Church in Alabama (http://www.thecross-photo.com/Story_of_a_damaged_Roman_Cross.htm) Here is a great video of close looks at the Tau Cross in Alabama

(https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=https%3A%2F%2Fi.ytimg.com%2Fvi%2FNQcMR22vgMM%2Fmaxresdefault.jpg&imgrefurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DnQcMR22vgMM&tbnid=JPPEzMdVLcWpM&vet=12ahUKEwjBwvix8j8AhXms3IEHZJMD_YQMvqEqQIARAv..i&docid=sbMvMK5Fvyb64M&w=1280&h=720&itq=1&q=Shrine%20of%20the%20Blessed%20Sacrament%20Our%20Lady%20of%20the%20Angels%20Monastery%20Tau%20cross%20on%20top%20of%20church&hl=en&ved=2ahUKEwjBwvix8j8AhXms3IEHZJMD_YQMvqEqQIARAv)



Keeping our eyes on the Bethlehem Star of Jesus. The Star of God, the Superstar, Christ Our Lord. We continually hasten to His Throne.

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*****OPEN MICROPHONE *****

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WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

+ The Prayers of the People

There are many convenient ways to participate with your donation. Anyone



may use the QRCode or press control + click or tap on this link: [Donate to Ray Of Hope Church Of Our Lord Jesus Christ](#) in the bulletin or mail a check to Ray Of Hope Church, 380 W. First St. Elmira, NY 14901. People in the Chapel may use the envelopes and the donation box next to the door before, during, or after this worship event.

(We sing **The Doxology here.**)

ALL: Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise God, all creatures here below. Praise God above ye heavenly hosts. Praise God the Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.



WE CELEBRATE THE SACRED MEAL OF CHRIST

Pastor: Blessed are you, Lord, God of all Creation. Through your goodness, we have this bread, and fruit of the vine, which the Earth has given us and human hands have lovingly made.

Now, through the powerful ministry of the Holy Spirit, this bread will become for us the Bread From Heaven (Exodus 16:2, Psalm 78:24, John 6:32, 41,50,58), and this fruit of the vine will become for us the Cup of Our Salvation (Psalm 116:13), the Cup of Everlasting Life (John 6:54-57), and together they will be the Sacrament of the Eucharist, the very Body and Blood Of Christ (John 6:54-56; 1Corinthians 10:16).

ALL: Blessed be God forever.

(Other titles include the Bread of the Angels (Psalm 78:25), the Bread of God (John 6:33), Cup of Our Salvation (Psalm 116:13), the Cup of Everlasting Life (John 6:54- 57), the Cup of the New Covenant (Matthew 26:28, Luke 22:20, 1 Corinthians 11:25)

Pastor: Please set down your communion kit.

Pastor: Truly present and risen among us; **SAINTS** the Lord is with you!

ALL: And also with you!

Pastor: As His Body, we lift up our hearts!

ALL: We lift them up to the Lord!

Pastor: As His Church, we give thanks to the Lord, our God!

ALL: It is right to give God thanks and praise.

Pastor: It is truly right and just....

May our voices be one with all the fabulous Faithful from every time and place as we sing our song and join their unending praise hymns.

Holy, Holy, Lord!

To my friends in Christ
at Ray Of Hope Church

"Music for Worship"

Music by: Gaude! Liturgical Arts
October 31, 1993
Revised 8/2013

Ho - ly Ho - ly Ho - ly Lord, God of pow'r and
5 might. Hea-ven and earth are full of your glo-ry. Ho - san - na in the
10 high-est. Ho - san - na in the high-est. Ho - san - na in the high-est.
16 Bless - ed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord.
22 Ho - san - na in the high-est. Ho - san - na in the high-est. Ho -
27 san - na in the high-est.

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+ We Invoke the Blessing Of The Holy Spirit

Leader: At Ray Of Hope Church, we pray together and ask the Holy Spirit to give us the same gifts that Jesus gave when He instituted Holy Communion for His Church. We invite you to extend your hands forward over the bread and fruit of the vine or extend your arms out with palms turned up in prayer and say the following Invocation of the Holy Spirit with me.

ALL: O God, in the Name of Jesus, we, your faithful people, ask your Only One and Holy Spirit to bless and separate this bread and fruit of the vine for Christ's purpose. Through the powerful ministry of the Holy Spirit, give to us the Body and Blood of Jesus

Christ in precisely the exact same manner that He gave them, and commissioned us to do often in His Holy Name. You alone, O Loving, True God, authenticate for us that this is the Messiah, Christ, New Covenant Meal that Jesus instituted for **our physical and spiritual wellbeing. We ask this in the Name of Jesus. Amen**

Leader: You may relax your arms and hands.

+ The Words Of The Institution Of The Holy Eucharist



The Reception of Holy Communion

BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD BEHOLD HIM WHO TAKES BEHOLD THE BREAD OF LIFE AND THE CUP

Lord, you make me worthy to receive you and by your Word, I am healed.

Pastor: Open your kit and receive Holy Communion at this time. The Gift of God for the People of God....

Pastor: I assure you, by the promises of Christ, that anyone who receives this Holy Communion today will indeed receive sanctification and healing in mind, body, soul, and spirit, be raised by Christ to new life, and live forever.

ALL: Thanks be to God.

PRIVATE PRAYER FOR A SPIRITUAL COMMUNION.

Pastor: Some people are watching from a location where they do not have actual Holy Communion Bread and Wine with them. We offer the following prayer for them based upon a prayer from the Episcopal National Cathedral Prayer book for a Spiritual reception of Holy Communion.

This prayer assures all the benefits and blessings of a physical reception. Together...

Oh, My Jesus, I believe that you are truly present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. I love you above all things, and I welcome you in my soul. Since I cannot now receive you in the Sacrament of your Body and Blood, come spiritually into my heart. Cleanse and strengthen me with your grace, Lord Jesus, and let me never be separated from you. May I live in you, and you in me, in this life and the life to come. Amen.

Spiritual Communion Prayer from the Episcopal National Cathedral Prayer Book.

A spiritual communion is a personal devotional that anyone can pray at any time to express their desire to receive Holy Communion at that moment, but in which circumstances impede them from actually receiving Holy Communion.

+ The Lord's Prayer

Leader -4: Having heard the Word of God and remembering the sacrifice of the Cross, we invite everyone to pray together the prayer of Jesus.

**ALL: Our Father, who art in Heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on Earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us; and
lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen**

+ Final Doxology

Pastor: Together, we pray:

ALL: It is through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ, in the unity of

the Holy Spirit, that all honor and glory is yours, Almighty God, forever and ever.

Doxology/Amen!

To my friends in Christ
at Ray Of Hope Church

"Music For Worship"

Music by: Gaude! Liturgical Arts
October 31, 1993

All hon - or and glo - ry be un - to You. Al - migh - ty
 5 God world with - out end. A men! Al - le - lu - ia
 11 A men! Al - le - lu - ia! All hon - or and glo - ry to you! A - men!

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+ Sign Of Peace

Veronica Floyd, Moderator: The Peace of the Lord Jesus Christ is with you.

ALL: And also with you.

Veronica Floyd: Please take a moment to share a sign of Peace with those around you. **During COVID, we wave across the room and into the camera for the Internet.

Veronica Floyd: Now, we clean our tables and altars. Please be sure all of the crumbs are in your cup. Add some water and swirl it around inside the cup. Drink the water. Dry the cup with the side napkin. Clear your worship table and altar.

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Reports from Br. Benedict for the Annual Meeting 2023, the fortieth Annual Meeting in the forty-first year of ministry, January 21, 2024.

I. Pastoral Report

The first item is always to give God thanks and praise through Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, and in the powerful ministry of the Holy Spirit. Giving God thanks and praise is the primary reason for our association as Ray Of Hope Church Of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Inc. The second and following reasons for our association are stated in our [Statement Of Purpose](#). Additionally, every week, the following statement is printed on the front page of our bulletin:

MISSION: Love God, Love your neighbor,
and make disciples of every person everywhere.
(Matthew 22:37-39; Matthew 28:19)

We are the Church founded in Syracuse, New York, as Ray Of Hope MCC in 1983, and since then, fostered and continually supported for forty-one years by the LGBTQSIA2ss+ Community of Central New York State, from the border of Canada to the border of Pennsylvania, and now throughout the whole World on the Internet. This is the Church made by us, for us, made for you because we ARE you. You belong here just by being yourself.

The year 2023 started in the third month of our 40th year of ministry and saw the inauguration of our 41st year of ministry on October 31, 2023.

Today, January 21, 2024, is our 40th Annual Meeting, a considerable milestone, having met every year since our founding. We are grateful to God for bringing our Congregation this far. During the first forty years, the founders, foundresses, and lay and clergy leadership successfully passed this church on to us, and now we must focus on passing it on to others.

The second item in this Pastoral report is to thank our very faithful Council Members: Veronica Floyd, our Moderator; April Struhm, our Vice Moderator; Lisa Frost, our Treasurer; and our new members, Ed Askins and Christina McLaughlin. This Council is committed to

maintaining our democratic governing process. We are very grateful to be a Congregational church in our polity where there is a process that keeps everyone equally responsible and empowered to work together and bear the responsibility. This is a very generous and compassionate congregation where every person prays for our success and does all they can to assist in our work of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus for all.

Today, we also thank Lisa for her many years of service in the ministry of finances. More will be said officially during the meeting today, so for this report, it is fitting to thank you so much and ask God to return your years of service to you and your family as Divine Grace wherever it is most needed.

Church Growth. In 2023, we added two Council Members, Ed and Christina. The Inquiries Class was presented in August and September of 2023. Ed Askins became a Member at the September 24, 2023 Semi-annual Meeting of the Congregation. On Sunday, January 8, 2023, during Epiphany's worship event, we experienced an Eucharistic Miracle. The "Tau Cross" was imprinted and seen form on a Host bread while dipping it into the consecrated grape juice. This miracle happened in Christina McLaughlin's hand as she prepared to serve her husband, Ian McLaughlin, at Holy Communion. This happened to be a time of great discernment in Ian's life and was the time he was looking to find new employment, which he found shortly after this event. Once again, the Pastor was nowhere near the location of this Eucharistic Miracle, and the people to whom the gift was given were not raised in churches centered on Eucharistic Theology. Once again, we are humbled that God would notice and care so well for our congregation.



Liturgy - The Sanctuary Lamp in the front window was modified to electric by Kaiden and Brother in February. Also, we fabricated a new electric Christ Candle for the Advent Wreath in December. Kaiden Benedict and Brother made both candles.

Throughout the year, we continued our practice of lighting the Candle Of Hope and reading names from the Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt as part of our vigil to keep HIV/AIDS in the conscious prayers of the people until we eradicate this disease.

We celebrated Civil Rights and Dr. Martin Luther King Sunday on January 15, 2023.

On January 23, 2023, a particular theme was chosen. I wrote: "As the Appointed Pastor, I have chosen to emphasize the doctrine of Universal Salvation for this Annual Meeting in our 40th year. At our Semi-Annual Meeting, Ray Of Hope Church voted to agree on Universal Salvation on September 18, 2011." We also celebrated the life and ministry of St. Marianne Cope, the Mother of Outcasts.

On January 27, 2023, we broadcast the second annual Holocaust Memorial Prayers together at noon from our Chapel.

On Sunday, January 29, 2023, we celebrated a Memorial Service for Robert W. Ryan (b. 11-12-1941 - d. 1-23-23). Mr. Ryan is Kaiden Benedict's father.

We celebrated Black History Month in February. During Black History Month, we drew particular attention to the healthy definition of the word, woke.

On Sunday, February 19, 2023, I said the following about Science:
Before we start, I want to say there is no conflict between the Scriptures and Science. Scientists are involved in discovering what God has done, is doing, and will do in the future. God is revealing through the Scriptures, through the Creation itself. Scientists do their best to understand and uncover the Cosmos God is continuing to create and to evolve into the fullness of what God has in store for the Universe. Science studies what is

there, what may have been there, and what might be there. God is doing what Scientists are determined to understand. Therefore, there is nothing to be afraid of and everything to celebrate and be thankful for when it comes to Science and Exploration. I will say more about this in today's Sermon.

We celebrated Ash Wednesday in our Chapel on February 22, 2023, as there was no ecumenical event in 2023.

Beginning with Ash Wednesday, we celebrated an entire season of Lent with a special celebration on Laetare Sunday, Rose Sunday, the fourth Sunday in Lent, March 19. The readings for the day opened the opportunity to discuss the love between David and Jonathan in every Bible in the World and how God used this love to bring David to the Throne of Jerusalem.

We celebrated Women's History Month in March.

We celebrated a beautiful Holy Week in 2023. Palm Sunday was April 2, Holy Thursday was April 6, Good Friday was April 7, and Holy Saturday was April 8. All the Holy Week services were well attended. This year, the Holy Week sermon series was a set of questions about the week. Many thanks to Christina McLaughlin for singing excellent solos during Holy Week. Many thanks to Ed Askins for excellent Preludes during Holy Week.

Anyone is welcome to bring forward talents musically, artfully, etc. Thanks to Kaiden for all the assistance with her efforts to ensure the Chapel was ready for all services.

Pentecost Sunday and Memorial Day were celebrated on May 28, 2023. We prayed for a renewal of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and the life of this Congregation.

In June, we relicensed our Servants of the Eucharist, Lisa Frost, Tami Whatley, and Veronica Floyd, on the Feast of Corpus Christi.

We celebrated Pride Month, Juneteenth, the 27th Ordination anniversary, and Stonewall in June.

On Trinity Sunday, June 4, we celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the first public worship service held in our Elmira, New York chapel on

June 1, 2003.

In July, we celebrated Independence weekend and spent a few weeks discussing the critical issues around religious freedom in our Country and the World.

June 2023 marks 31 years since Br. Benedict has donated to the Music Ministry as a volunteer. The Congregation should begin making plans for the next Music Minister, who should be compensated for their professional skill.

On September 5, 2023, I celebrated 30 years of Ray Of Hope Church membership.

On Sunday, October 1, 2023, we celebrated World Communion Sunday and the Feast of St. Francis in our Chapel. No ecumenical service was held in Elmira.

On October 9, 2023, we celebrated Indigenous Peoples Sunday for the first time, and we discussed the Doctrine of Discovery. War broke out between Hamas and Israel on October 7.

October 15, 2023, the Doctrine of Discovery continued and a review of some of the errors of the Euro/Roman Empire-centered Christianity;

a)The following is my list of the outstanding errors the Christian Church and Tradition made over the centuries, and I point out that we regularly name and study those errors. We are self-aware of the mistakes of the Church, and by studying those errors, we aim to prevent repeating them.

Removal of women from leadership in ministry. Failing to accept the Holy Spirit has been given to everyone.

Entangling with the Roman Empire as a way to gain political power in the World. This would be the first of many times the churches would combine with political powers.

Replacement Theology also known as Supersessionism: the Christian Church supersedes and replaces Israel.

Persecution of the Jewish People, even conducting enslavement of any people anywhere, often caused by false teachings on the sons of Noah, the Table of the Nations.

Favoring ethnic groups over others.

Control over the teaching ministry, over the formation and translation of the Scriptures.

Many errors in Teachings including sexuality, gender, divorce, and more.

Assigning to male leadership the same weight of authority as the inspiration of the Scriptures.

Twelve million Africans were forcibly brought to North and South America for enslavement. The people taken from Africa represented about fifty ethnic and linguistic groups.

Approximately 1500 – 18 60's (source: <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/on-african-american-migrations/>)

A long history of killing people who held different ideas in Theology, even Pope John Paul, I was murdered for his ideas.

On the three Sundays of October 8, 15, and 23, we spent time on some background to the Israel and Palestinian conflict with a sermon series.

On October 29th, we celebrated our 40th Anniversary and All Saints. We renewed our commitment to the Ray Of Hope Church Statement Of Purpose during the worship.

Beginning November 1, 2023, at the Feast of All Saints, we started presenting the traditional Mass, the 1970s version, at noon on Wednesdays. All of the Wednesdays for November and December were very well attended. The Mass is about 35 to 40 minutes long. We have enjoyed fellowship and discussion time with delicious desserts after each Wednesday's Mass. We have made a concerted effort to inform those in attendance that we are not offering a re-presented "sacrifice of the Cross for the remission of sins," as is the understanding of the Roman Church. Instead, the Mass is a format and set of prayers deeply enjoyed by many, and we present it here to increase the faith of those who attend and participate. The Wednesday Mass is not presented online and is only offered here in the in-person format.

On November 5, we stressed the theme Souls and Soles to the Polls – VOTE.

On November 12, we discussed Veterans Weekend, war, world governments, and how power is used to govern by natural means since it is not in the hands of Christ.

On November 19, we started a six-week study of Eschatology with a realistic look at "kingdom," "empire," and "republic," what we have, what we should have, what we will have, and how we know.

On November 19, some of us attended the Southern Tier Interfaith Coalition Thanksgiving worship event. The best part of it was the social time, in my opinion.

This year's four Sundays of Advent were Peace, Hope, Joy, and Love. On December 9, Christina, Kaiden, and April redecorated the chapel

for the Gaudete Party.

We held our first in-house shared dinner since the COVID shutdown on Gaudete Sunday, December 10, 2023. The Gaudete Party was a great success, and we included online participants by keeping the Skype webcast open. During the night of December 10, 2023, our monastery cat, Princess, who was 21 years old, passed away peacefully, with Isabella pressing her head to Isabella's head through the night.

During the week of December 11 to the 15th, we completely remodeled the Tabernacle area, painting the Tabernacle gold, spraying gold glitter paint on the walls, simplifying the plants, and placing one of our monstrances on top. We also brought out the painting Christina had purchased in honor of her mother. Thank you to Ed Askins and Kaiden for helping with all of the work involved in this project.



We celebrated the eight nights of Hanukkah with short live ceremonies at around 5:00 p.m. on Facebook Live.

We celebrated Kwanzaa with a one-evening celebration of all the principles, prayers, and discussion.

All year, we have enjoyed prelude musical pieces on the keyboard prepared and played by Ed Askins. We also enjoyed special music vocal solos and songs with the Congregation singing choir parts prepared by Christina McLaughlin.

The year 2023 sermon series were presented on the subjects of Satan, Lucifer, the Devil, Angels, Demons, the seven judgments in Scripture, postmillennial politics that pose a present danger to our Democracy, and Eschatology.

During the year, interest was expressed in forming a St. Benedict Chapter (study and fellowship group on Benedictine Spirituality).

Bible Enrichment: Topics covered this year included the Pre-Adamite World/ Gap Theory/ Old Earth Theory, Sexuality and the Bible (continuing what was required for Inquiries Class) however, there was plenty of new and updated materials added to the classes; and, The Rites/Rituals/Sacraments/Ordinances of the Church (continuing what was required for Inquiries Class).

Copyright and Webcast licensing. During January of 2023, we studied and reviewed our obligations for licensure. At the January monthly council meeting, we passed a motion to add the CCLI Streaming Plus License at \$108.00 a year, and Song selected Premium at \$215.00 and \$190.00 Onelicense.net Category A with Podcast/Streaming—a total of \$513.00. Understanding our obligations took many phone calls and editing hours during January, February, and March. As many as 150 of our videos have been taken down from the Internet while all the details are sorted out. Taking down videos takes more time than uploading the videos. We settled on licenses from two companies because of our mix of music from so many different traditions. Still, we have found limitations with some of the soloist music we wanted to use this year. Acquiring all the rights is undoubtedly an educational

opportunity for all of us. We certainly need to have one person who would be interested in being our technology ministry person in charge.

Technology Report: In March, we set up a computer and monitor the Frasier Room so online participants may be involved in after-worship conversations and visiting. April Strum donated up to six computers and monitors during 2023 to help us expand our in-person electronic bulletin and music supplement use in the Chapel and expand our use of technology for fellowship and meeting times.

We must convert to an all-digital system with one mixing board and one output for our webcasts.

As of the end of 2023, about ten videos are posted that still need to be edited and copyright information added. It would be great if someone interested in video editing and the skills to type and do precision picture editing would take on this ministry.

QR Codes have been added to many of our web pages and web features during the year. We also updated our donation online process to a one-step process and placed links for this throughout our website and worship materials.

We began converting the entire Membership Book to electronic form and uploading it to our website. Digitizing the Membership Book is a very time-consuming project and will require some copyright statements to be added to some content.

Social Ministry outreach. In March 2023, two new flags, the updated Progress Flag and the Together We Rise flags, were purchased. Kaiden donated the Progress flag, and April donated the Together We Rise Flags. In May, we designed a new vinyl 2'x8' 18 oz banner to be part of our new campaign, "Church by YOU, for YOU, we are YOU!" as part of our new mobile-friendly website addition.

(<http://www.rayofhopechurch.com/P2023-Bookmark.htm>)

During the year, we addressed various social issues, including book banning, laws regarding transgender healthcare, laws such as the "Don't say gay" bill, Tennessee enacting the Nation's first law restricting drag shows, and banning gender-affirming care for youth,

etc.

Pride Month Committee (June 2023). We attended and set up tables at the Elmira Pride and Corning Pride events in June 2023. A mobile-friendly version of our website was designed and inaugurated in time for these two events. The mobile-friendly site was coded and set up by Brother Benedict. We tried to incorporate the many ideas suggested by our friends and members. Lisa Frost designed and printed a two-sided bookmark index for the new mobile-friendly website. We passed out nearly 400 bookmarks between the two Pride celebrations. Thank you to everyone who helped with this project and assisted at these two Pride events.

On June 1, 2023, we adopted a Media Policy
Ray of Hope Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Inc.
Media Response Policy
June 1, 2023

This policy is being drafted to communicate how we consistently provide positive feedback and response to the media for any inquiries received regarding Ray of Hope Church, our Statement of purpose, our Pastoral Team, or any members.

Policy: All media relations activity should be completed to ensure a positive and accurate account of Ray of Hope Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Inc. mission objectives as outlined in our Statement of Purpose.

The Moderator is the official spokesperson and will coordinate contact to the media and the responses.

If approached by a member of the media, an individual member or friend should only speak on their personal experiences as to how long and why they attend Ray of Hope and what they have learned. Keep it brief and refer the media to send all other questions to the Moderator of Ray of Hope via email. The current contact email is : veeflo@aol.com.

Veronica Floyd, Ray of Hope Moderator, June 1, 2023

Ecumenical and Interreligious outreach. This year, the Elmira Area Clergy cancelled Ash Wednesday and World Communion Sunday services. I wish I could report this was due to COVID, but it is a lack of leadership on the part of the current pastors. As for the Southern Tier Interfaith Coalition, the group met once a month for much of the year. The Abrahamic Walk, a guest lecture on interracial outreach, and an Interfaith Thanksgiving Service were all successful. We attended each event.

Pastoral Care. In March, I officiated in the Black Church tradition at a funeral in Rochester, NY. The funeral was for the husband of my second cousin, Sister Rich. Kaiden assisted with the trip and ministry. There were many hospital visits and home visits in 2023.

Lecturing and guest speaking. Two professors invited me to present my "Sexuality and the Bible" workshop. A total of five workshops were given during 2023. 2023 was the twenty-first year of presenting these workshops for two professors. I developed this workshop and presented it in 1987, and it has developed each year as new research and published scholarship becomes available to be added.

St. Benedict of Nursia Memorial Library Committee: Continuing to thin out the Library and giving away many books. Books are becoming available in digital form. Much of the library is now available digitally, which was not the case 20 years ago. We can now make more space for people.

Building Report- During the late summer there was a break-in to the Carley Room through the back door and paint on the building. Ed Askins repaired and painted the building. February included painting the entranceway, internal doors, floors painted in the Frasier Room, and shag carpet removed. Removing the shag rug made it possible to bring down Motion #8 from Old Business which was written by Michael Quinnell many years ago, and pass it at the February 2023 meeting.

The head of the Sacred Heart statue was repaired, the Kitchen walls and ceiling were painted. Burleigh Heating was called for assistance with the second-floor Heating. We were unable to schedule an appointment with Burleigh.

On May 16, 2023, Jon's Heating assessed the heating issues. Jon's Heating gave us an estimate for \$1,160.00 for repairs. Brother Benedict solved most of the heating issues by spending time bleeding the air out of the system. The kitchen wall behind the sink was properly fitted with backboard that we had on hand. All the light bulbs in the Chapel were changed to daylight bulbs with higher lumens and less wattage to produce a much brighter light. In April 2023, the fire extinguishers were taken to the inspection site and certified. We are facing having to service the extinguishers in 2024, which will cost nearly \$400.00. The Fire Alarm was inspected on May 24, 2023. The boiler was inspected on September 25, 2023. The Fire Department informed us there were no inspections performed in 2023. The Council will request a letter with the new requirements spelled out officially. Ed also painted and repaired the walls in the kitchen and the restroom.

On November 18, a very generous donation was made to purchase and install a new door to the Carley Room. We are very grateful for this excellent quality door and rebuilt door frame that has undoubtedly increased our security.

Ed Askins donated and installed a new refrigerator for the downstairs chapel kitchen, and disposed of the old refrigerator on December 4th. The front of the building suffered two incidents of vandalism a few hours apart on December 22nd. Both flags were taken, and the flag holder of one was actually broken into two pieces.

During the year, there have been a few discussions about adding exterior lighting and security cameras on all four sides of the building. The Elmira Police Department has asked us a few times to consider cameras that record so they can make identifications and speak to the people who are trespassing and harming our building.

We received estimates for the repair and painting of the exterior of the building—4-24-23 Trimline Painting for \$12,000 plus contingencies. Norb Miller, \$50,000 for complete replacement of clapboards, paint, and seal.

The wheelchair lift malfunctioned with people using it in November. It is nonfunctional at the end of 2023.

As 2023 ends, it is my pleasure to turn over the Building Manager ministry to Ed Askins. I will work with Ed during 2024 to help make sure everything is remembered and on time.

2023 saw plenty of denominational mayhem in mainline churches.

The United Methodist Church lost 7,659 churches as the time to request disaffiliation ended at the end of the year 2023. The publisher Christianity Today reports that it is one in four congregations, calling it "the largest US denominational schism since the Civil War." The article also writes: "the thousands of disaffiliations represent the conclusion of decades of UMC debates, proposals, and gatherings focused on sexuality." (<https://christianitytoday.com/news/2023/december/united-methodist-church-split-total-umc-disaffiliation-lgbt.html>)

Tragically, in my opinion, it is apparent that the clergy of the United Methodist Church are not equipped to handle the answers to these concerns directly from the Holy Scriptures first, then Tradition, and then the worldwide records of the Human Race. These concerns could have been answered if the clergy of the UMC were allowed to give Scripture the academic attention deserved in the original languages as we teach here at Ray of Hope. This unnecessary house fire in the UMC has saddened me. What I find very disturbing is the fact that all of the new churches are forming to firm up their opposition to any relationship that is not either celibate or heterosexually married as one cis-gendered male to one cis-gendered female. I wonder what it must be like to know these are the reasons you are starting a worship community: to exclude others. Even here in the Upper New York district of the UMC, Christianity Today reports that 118

congregations have left to form the conservative Global Methodist Church, the Wesleyan Covenant Association, and other group affiliations. How many people are out there now affirming one another in the Name of Christ as they form new "churches" with the intent of excluding others? What is the message this is sending out to our general society, and of course, to the electorate across the Nation as issues of sexuality, gender, marriage, and family are making their way through the courts in 2023?

Theological chaos also grew exponentially in 2023, in my opinion.

What started in the mid-1800s with the questions of interpretation of biblical texts continues to cause eruptions, cracks, and quakes throughout the church and society. Young and middle-aged adults are signing up for seminary education with the idea that it must all be reasonably the same from one place to another. It often takes time to realize the standard operations of biblical interpretation that each seminary decides and enforces. Some theologians have even begun to speak of a "post-Christian" era, meaning it is time to give up on the Divinity of Christ and join a worldwide spiritual community. Still, other groups are swinging entirely in the other direction, trying to recreate the practices of another time and believing certain practices of worship techniques create "the real" or even "the only true" forms of worship. The Roman Catholic Church has a significant fissure between "The Latin Movement" or TLM, a moderate Vatican II movement, and a far-left-"Liberation Theology" movement. Pope Francis is having enormous challenges trying to hold the opposing wings of the building attached to the one building. These are just a couple of examples of the chaos in Theology that I followed in 2023.

Then there is **the Political / Theological intersection** we find ourselves in, along with most Countries in the World. Theology is often the unseen guide that dictates what is happening in politics. During the Season of Advent, I try to review the prominent schools of Eschatology that are all at play and attempt to control world governments' socio/political constructs. In our current political setting,

issues of life, death, marriage, sex, sexuality, gender, war, war crimes, settlements and occupations, and a whole host of other political issues are deeply rooted in religious systems, even if those systems are rarely named during political debate.

Thinking about how to pass Ray Of Hope Church on to others in this chaotic time of Theology and Politics has led me many times in 2023 to **research and evaluate the health of denominations and associations that might be possible places for us** to land this plane named Ray Of Hope (metaphorically speaking of course). You already know I have not found any suitable candidate for us to discuss associating with because I have not brought any idea forward in our Council Meetings.

Even our own Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Churches, the denomination the fourteen people who started Ray Of Hope in Syracuse chose to join, has lost all of the Upstate New York churches that were here when I joined in 1993. The Northeast District in 1993 had a church in Buffalo, one in Rochester, and we were based in Syracuse, one in Albany, and one in New York City. We were growing into Ithaca and here into Elmira, intending that all three of our extensions would be known as MCC churches. A short attempt was made in Binghamton at one time. Today all that remains is New York City. Even the Rochester church announced it held its last worship event as Open Arms MCC on Sunday, November 20, 2022. The following is from their former Facebook page.

Please join us for our last-ever worship service as Open Arms MCC this Sunday, November 20, 2022 @ approx. 12:15 p.m. (we are starting a little later because several of us will be attending the Transgender Day of Remembrance event that starts at 11 a.m.). We'd love to see you! On Sunday, November 27, many of us will begin attending worship at Mary Magdalene's open and inclusive "small-c" catholic service at 1008 Main St., East Rochester, NY, where ALL are welcome AND celebrated! Please consider joining us there! Look for a Facebook event on this page!

Our congregation voted to leave for fear that MCC would not survive the changes in denominational leadership and new theologies in the mid-1990s. It was a prophetic vision looking back on it now. The UFMCC that made it impossible for us to stay went on to shut down all

of the upstate churches in New York, and our sister church in Worcester, MA, that formed in 1974 has closed its doors, as have other congregations we once fellowshiped with in the Northeast District. The reason for bringing this up is that even the denomination we once affiliated with struggles with questions of theology, ecclesiology, and Christology.

Members of Ray Of Hope, listen to me. If for one moment you have the impression our work is done or no longer needed, stop and look at just the United Methodist Church, which started in the USA, or the Roman Catholic Church saying blessings are okay as long as it doesn't look like a marriage, or the Mormons declaring the children of same-gender parents cannot be baptized which consigns those children to be eternally lost and see for yourself the issue is sexuality, gender, family, and faith are just as present today as they were in 1983. If you look across all the denominations experiencing internal chaos in 2023, without exception, every subject in discussion was regarding issues of theology, Christology, sexuality, and gender.

The issues have not changed much over these 40 years, and in some ways, they are red-hot again, almost like they were in the late 1970s in theology and politics all over again. Hopefully, we will take our mission to prayer and be grateful we have survived these storms, are growing, and are seeking every new opportunity that comes our way.

During the year of 2023 I have come to a great realization that we are so fortunate to be in an independent church. Denominational affiliation might well have done us in over these last 40 years. As an independent congregational democratic worship community, like an independent monastic community, we have been able to survive the stormy waters of politics, theology, sexuality, tradition, customs, and all the rest. It is a gift to be where we are. We may be able to join others in our next few years, but I have come to be very grateful for the vote of this congregation to step aside and trust God and God alone over 28 years ago. It was the right decision. NOW, we

discern together what is next for our growth and our passing on this beautiful Ray Of Hope to others. Let's join hands, hearts, and (walking sticks and some wheelchairs perhaps) as we follow the Star of Bethlehem, the Superstar, The Light for All People. As we pray every Sunday: **We go forth in peace and Love to serve all people and the Lord ...**

ALL: ... on our journey into renewal, fresh beginnings, new possibilities, and a renewed embrace of our potential! Thanks be to God.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Br. Shawn Benedict, Pastor.
1-7-24

----- On the next page, see the poster for the first night our Elmira Bible Study visited Ray Of Hope Church in Syracuse, NY. Whose handwriting do you think this is?

Come One!
Come All!!!
Join the Gay Pride Festivities

"If you are gay -
be proud of how God made you!
If you are straight -
be proud of the fact that your brothers
and sisters can worship along side of you.
If you are not proud of who you are -
Come and find out what a difference
God makes!"
(Morningstar Witness)

Ray of Hope

Metropolitan Community Church
Proudly invites you

to a service -

- Celebrating the Gay Spirit -
Sunday - June 21, 1992 - 6:00 P.M.

Grace Church, 819 Madison St.

Guest Speaker: Rev. Keith Herrick

Join us
after the service
for a Potluck Supper
in the Parish Hall

Bring a dish to pass
Share the fellowship!

General Offering for the week of December 3 \$1,564.00 (some people give monthly rather than weekly) Attendance 9

General Offering for the week of December 10 \$568.00 (some people give monthly rather than weekly) Attendance 12

General Offering for the week of December 17 \$208.00 (some people give monthly rather than weekly) Attendance 9

General Offering for the week of December 24 \$208.00 (some people give monthly rather than weekly) Attendance 15

General Offering for the week of December 31 \$193.00 (some people give monthly rather than weekly) Attendance 8

An announcement from Lisa Frost, Treasurer.

Currently we are \$100 shy of the \$1,000 pastor self employment tax payment we budgeted in 2023. Please contact Lisa Frost by January 10 if you wish to help meet this goal by making a special donation. Thank you.

****Special Gifts****

April Struhm made a \$200.00 toward the Pastor Self Employment Tax line in our budget. Thank you April.

Veronica Floyd made a special gift to be used at the Treasurer's discretion of \$375.00. Thank you Veronica.

Recent Special Gifts:

We give God thanks and praise for all these gifts given. We appreciate the special gifts being made at this time.

To be added to our email list, fill out the email information form at the hospitality table and place it in the offerings/donations box at the door. Internet participants can email rayofhopechurch@aol.com and write "email list" in the Subject box.

UPCOMING EVENTS ON OUR CALENDAR

** See the Q.R. Code on the last page.**

January 7, Sunday, Feast of The Epiphany, Orthodox Christmas 10:30 a.m.
– online format only

January 7, 2024 Annual Reports Due to Veronica

January 9, Tuesday, 6:30 p.m. Bible Enrichment– online format only

January 10, Wednesday, SUSPENDED Noon Traditional Mass in English -
in person.

January 14, Sunday, Civil Rights, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. 10:30 a.m.

January 14, 2024 Reports for Annual Meeting will be distributed.

January 21, 2024 Mother Marianne Cope, "Beloved Mother of
Outcasts" Annual Meeting with Dinner.

(Marianne Cope was born on January 23, 1838, in Darmstadt, Germany. In 1862, she entered the Sisters of Saint Francis in Syracuse, New York. In 1883, she led a group of sisters to the Hawaiian Islands to care for the poor, especially those suffering from leprosy. She died on August 9, 1918.)

The Third Annual Prayers At Noon Together on the International Holocaust Remembrance Day will take place Saturday, January 27, 2024 at NOON. It will be in-person and virtual. Mark your calendar and plan to attend.



We Are Sent Forth To Serve

Pastor: **SAINTS** The Lord is with you!

ALL: And also with you!

Pastor: (a prayer is said) In the Name of God, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

ALL: Amen

ALL: Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen (Romans 15:13)

Leader-4: We go forth in peace and Love to serve all people and the Lord ...

ALL: ... on our journey into renewal, fresh beginnings, new possibilities, and a renewed embrace of our potential! Thanks be to God.

CLOSING SONG: **Angels We Have Heard On High** G&P 313 Text: 77 77 with refrain; trad. French carol, ca. 18th cent.; tr. from Crown of Jesus Music, II, London, 1862; tr. by James Chadwick, 1813–1882, and others, alt. Music: Trad. French carol. Onelicense Song #84241 Glory and Praise Second Edition 313, Onelicense Song#83405 Used with Print Permission and Streaming License A-74127.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. Isaiah 9:7 This is all God's fault, God's design, God's doing from start to end.

Br. Benedict at the time of Renewal of Vows, June 20, 2021: "Looking forward, I like to say the first twenty-five years were spent on **stabilization, survival, and sustainability**. The second twenty-five years will be spent on growth to help Ray Of Hope **thrive, train, and transplant** this Congregation to new leadership. The founders and foundresses successfully transferred the leadership to a new generation, us, and now we must do the same. I plan to fade into the Congregation and continue providing support to the new leadership. My goal is to leave the Congregation with new leadership, in good standing, and thriving."



We never held a vote to decide if we would be an ***INCLUSIVE*** church for you.

We are not an ***OPEN AND AFFIRMING*** church for you.

We are not a ***RECONCILING CHURCH*** or
RECONCILING CONGREGATION for you.

We are not an ***OPEN MINDED*** or ***ACCEPTING*** or ***WELCOMING***
Church where you can attend as long as you blend in quietly and discretely.

WE ARE YOU!

THIS is the Church where YOU belong.

Ray Of Hope Church is the Church by us, for us, and made by You.

The Third Sunday of Pride, 2019

Made by you and for you, because we are

The Third Sunday of Pride, 2019

Ray Of Hope Church Weekly Schedule

Elmira Worship- Sunday 10:30 a.m. – 380 W. First St. Parsonage/Monastery .
Join us live on SKYPE: rayofhope26 is our contact name. Sign on by 10:15 a.m.
Syracuse Worship- looking for a host in Syracuse. For more information
[Click Here](#).

Bible Enrichment- Tuesday 6:30–8 p.m.-380 W. First St. Parsonage
/Monastery. Or Join us live on SKYPE: rayofhope26 is our contact name. Sign
on by 6:15 p.m. [Click Here](#).

**** to call the Pastor: Rev. Shawn Benedict: 607-280-0374***

Policy Concerning Minors at Events

Ray Of Hope Church Of Our Lord Jesus Christ welcomes all youth and children to worship with us and participate in our activities. We endeavor to provide a safe and non-threatening environment for all children. To this end, we have a Policy Concerning Minors at Events, which is available from the Clerk upon request and is on our website;

http://www.rayofhopechurch.com/Minors_At_Events.htm. Please enjoy your visit with us, and we hope you will return.

NOTE: On June 15, 1996, as a part of the Ordination Ceremony and his profession of Benedictine Vows, Rev. Leo W. McDermott, II retired the use of his secular birth name and was given a new name in religion, Brother Shawn Francis Benedict.

The Chapel is not open to the general public as we try to do our part to stop the spread of COVID-19. Call for an appointment if you want some time to come in and pray. Our regular services will be blended with live participation in the Chapel and live on Skype and Facebook Live. To read the information on how to use Skype to participate with us, [Click Here](#).. Visit our Facebook page [Click Here](#). We will reopen the Chapel as soon as it is reasonably safe and prudent.

Visitors: Please feel free to fill out the information slip below and place it in the collection plate. Please indicate any special needs you may have. All information will be used for church purposes *only*.

(Optional) Name: _____

(Optional) Phone: _____

Email Address: _____

I would like to be included on the church Email list.

I would like to schedule an appointment with the Pastor.



Ray Of Hope Church Statement Of Purpose

In the Spirit of God, and in the footsteps of Christ Jesus, we the Faith Community at Ray Of Hope Church commit to:

- **guide** and welcome all people to the Free Gift of Salvation in Christ Jesus, with a God-ordained celebration of all sexual orientations, and gender expressions, with an open ministry to persons affected by or infected with HIV/AIDS, their families and friends,
- **declare** and openly assert the truth that same-sex relationships, founded and fostered in God-centered Love, are holy and blessed, and in fact originate by the work of the Holy Spirit; and, that God equally uses blessed same-sex and heterosexual Holy Unions and Marriages to bring God's own Love and good news of "Salvation to all who believe" into the World,
- **uphold**, proclaim, and teach the historic Biblical Christian Doctrine, build community through worship and prayer, break the bread, and live the ministry of the Holy Spirit,
- **change** the World around us by living Gospel principles of social justice in everything we do, thereby exposing all forms of prejudice, oppression, racism, homophobia, sexism, and misogyny,
- **proclaim** the ray of hope, which is the soon coming return of Christ Jesus, and the fullness of His Eternal Community where the Will of God will establish liberty, justice, equity, and peace for all God's People and the universe.

Visit us online:

Our website: <http://www.rayofhopechurch.com/> Mobile-Friendly website version: <http://www.rayofhopechurch.com/P2023-Bookmark.htm> Facebook Page (like and follow) [Click Here](#). Our YouTube page: www.youtube.com/rayofhopenyglbtqs

—————Scripture verses to share with others:—————

Romans 15:13 Now may the God of **hope** fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in **hope** by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Titus 2:11, 3:4 The grace, the goodness, the loving-kindness of our God has appeared, bringing Salvation **to everyone**.

John 5:24 Those who hear my Word and **believe in God** who sent me, **have** eternal life, will **never** come under judgment and have passed from **death to life** already.

Romans 10:13 "For **whoever** calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." (repeated @ Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21) "everyone, anyone who" asks. "Lord" here refers to God principally as in the book of Joel that is being quoted, so all persons who call on God shall be saved.

"Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"
(Isaiah 43:19 ESV)

"Behold, I make all things new." (Revelation 21:5)



