

Mark 1: 9-11

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

River of Hope-ers, you have seen much change over the last couple years. I was told by one of the students that I confirmed last month that I was the fourth pastor he had for confirmation. Not only has there been much pastoral transition, but because of COVID, Pastor Kaela was not able to be embedded in this community. More change is afoot related to worship space. As I informed you in a letter earlier this week, the Event Center is not taking rental agreements beyond December of 2022. Therefore, in the months to come we will be finding a different worship space. But the church is not the pastor nor the building where worship happens. Rather, the church is us together – a community of people who gather around a baptismal font, a River of Hope, to splash in and celebrate who we are: beloved children of God. We hear these words again today as we come together around these waters of grace and emerge from them to go out in joyful service.

I am excited to be here in this moment as we discover where God is leading us. It is always healthy for a congregation to ask where we have been and where we are going. Slowly I am getting to know you and where you have been. I look forward to discovering how we might together throw Love into the world. I am reminded of a song that Bryan Sirchio, a friend and colleague, wrote:

*Dream God's dream Holy Spirit help us dream
of a world where there is justice and where everyone is free
to build and grow and love and to simply have enough.
The world will change when we dream God's dream.*

I am discovering that this is a community that believes God calls us to create a “world where there is justice and where everyone is free.” There are plenty of opportunities to plug in outside of worship. I invite you to join one of the tables. Or perhaps you can share your ideas with someone on a table. I want to hear what dreams you have for Hutchinson. Stop by the office on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday when I am usually there. I usually work from home on Fridays and take Monday as a Sabbath. Or, let’s set up some other time to meet. I continue to be inspired as I hear where God story is meeting your story.

Pastor Hans

Worship and Music (WAM) Table – Jim Nelson

Members: Jim Nelson, Sara Nelson, Portia Brandsoy, Louis Bedard, Ruth Hamlow and Rachel Stearns

The WAM table at first met every month to plan all aspects of worship, including lining up volunteers. When River Teams were developed, we began to meet as needed, and this tended to be in Sept / Oct to plan Advent and Christmas, and again in February to plan Lent / Easter. We also will meet to plan special services. I have a group of people that I email and however many can come will meet once or twice to plan out all of the details arounds these worship services. Not limited to musicians, we have folks who help with the visual arts, and the food, and the lining up of people to help coordinate all of the aspects of worship. In 2021 WAM only met twice. Once in May we began to plan for our “watch parties” as we slowly began to move away from worshipping at home to worshipping in person. We also planned our 3 outdoor worship services and how to begin worshipping in person again. We met again in October to discuss our special services: Confirmation, Riverpalooza and the installation service for Pastor Hans. We also have an ongoing discussion about our sound system and recording equipment and the need to replace both.

There are a few key people who help make worship happen at ROH. First, the “early crew” who come before the rest of the worship assistants to set up the screen, lamps, banners, outdoor and indoor signs, baptismal font and music stands, microphones and speakers. They are Arnie Koenig, Dale Redetzke, and Daryl and Kathy Bergs.

Second, I want to thank our River Guides that lead our River Tables that line up worship assistants each month. They are Ruth Hamlow, Kris Hartman, Brian Tillmann and Katie Weisenberger.

Third we have our Altar Crew who help with all things visual, and they include Portia Brandsoy, Carol Krage and Kathy Bergs.

Fourth, I want to thank our recording team of Chuck Hartman and Sara Nelson who take turns recording worship. We could use more people in this group so we could set up a recording schedule.

Fifth, I want to thank all of the Song Leaders who help us lead worship each week and they include Sara Nelson, Sara Pollmann, Ben Pollmann, Brian Pollmann, Sara Shorter, Mike and Katie Weisenberger, Kurt Schulz, Ruth Hamlow, Rachel Stearns, and Louis Bedard.

Finally, thanks to ALL the River of Hoppers who volunteer each week to be ushers, greeters, acolytes, etc., you are very much appreciated and too many to mention.

Faith Formation Table – Katie Weisenberger

Members: Kris Dobratz, Kris Hartman, Ron Johnson, Krista Picha, Sara Shorter, and Katie Weisenberger.

Faith Formation meets as needed usually once every other month. Our immediate goal this past year was to create intergenerational social events that would bring us back together as a community since we were lacking that in-person relationship building during COVID.

Our next goal is to provide more faith opportunities for the youth. We have established a confirmation routine and will soon be adding time for our 6th graders down to toddlers called

"Headwaters". We'll be meeting the first Wednesday of most months before confirmation, with time for music, crafts, games, and story time. We're excited to see where God leads us.

Vision Table – Ron Johnson

Members: Kris Hartman Dale Brandsoy, Ron Johnson, Jim Nelson.

Since early in the life of River of Hope, there has been a Vision Table. Through the years, it has been a place where its members have worked together to look to the future and come up with ideas to keep the church alive and vibrant. Those ideas and possible improvements are then brought forward to the River Table for further discussion and refinement.

If you would like to be a part of a group that continues the tradition of helping our church to be more welcoming, more Spirit-centered and a place for spiritual growth, please consider joining the Vision Table. It is a great place to make a difference!

Parish Personnel Table – Nan Crary

Members: Nan Crary, Brian Pollmann and Heather Goodrich

Parish Personnel Table is charged with equipping the called and employed staff of River of Hope to serve the congregation and the community. Table activities include checking in with the pastor and staff for goals, performance review, and general support. The table assists with recruiting and interviewing job candidates, updating job descriptions and maintaining an employee handbook for staff.

During the past year Nan Crary, Heather Goodrich and Brian Pollmann served on the parish personnel table. The table worked closely with Pastor Kayla Monson during the challenges presented by COVID. When Pastor Kayla decided to take a leave from call in May of 2021, the table deferred to the call committee for the search for a new settled pastor as required by our constitution.

We are grateful to the members of the call committee who worked over the spring and summer to call Pastor Hans Peterson to serve River of Hope. Call committee members were Louis Bedard, Dale Brandsoy, Nan Crary, Kris Dobratz, Kris Hartman, Jerry Lindberg, Katie Weisenberger and Matthew Weisenberger. Southwest Minnesota ELCA Synod Pastor Stephen Cook was a very helpful resource to the call committee regarding the call process.

Parish Personnel Table plans to meet quarterly in 2022. We welcome additional members to the table. If you have an interest in serving or would like more information about the work of the table, please contact Nan Crary, table chair.

The Gathering Table – Rachel Stearns

Members: Portia Brandsoy, Nan Crary, Heather Fisher and Rachel Stearns

Please connect with one of the above if you'd like to join this table.

The Gathering Table is called upon whenever food is needed. Examples would be confirmation, preparing food for members of our church family, or making cookies for Pastor Hans to share on his visits.

This table is currently under construction.

We Go Out Table – Sara Pollmann

Members: Sara Pollman, Sara Nelson, Sandy Tracy, Nan Crary, Andy Koenig, Heather Fischer

We Go Out to Serve, We Go Out to Educate, We Go Out to Advocate. Our Table is charged with organizing WGO events for RoH members. We provide opportunities for members of RoH to live out the mission of our church. We provide support for members of RoH who want to lead a WGO event. Table members are not expected to be the only brainstormers of ideas, only leaders of events, or always participants of events. We will often work alongside the Faith Formation Table.

Our work this year has consisted of creating the table, finding table members, and beginning our mission. Initially, we are primarily focusing our “Going Out” to our River of Hope community as we have found that we need to reconnect as a community, focus on building ourselves up so we can serve others.

Going out to serve, we have made greeting cards to send to those needing some love, connected with college age River of Hoppers, handing out large bags of treats to fast food workers in Hutchinson with No Strings Attached. And, of course, this month, we have made tie-blankets and collected needed supplies for homeless people in Minneapolis.

Going out to Educate, we have participated in Hutchinson’s Welcoming Event down by the River and have sponsored the Time for the Truth book study.

There will be an event to “Go Out” to advocate in January. Nan and Sandy have already begun telling people about the event, but more info will be coming as the date gets closer.

We currently are a 4 member table (Sara Pollmann, Sara Nelson, Sandy Tracy & Nan Crary) and welcome you to come to the table.

Meals on Wheels, Laundry Love, & Beer & Hymns are considered ways River of Hope Goes Out.

We have 3 new ministries Heather Fischer’s “Pen’s and Prayers” where on the last Tuesday of the month, anyone can make and send cards to those we know who need prayers or messages of hope, and Andy Koenig’s “Letters of Love” where she alone sends cards to people needing love, and my “College Correspondence”, where I have connected RoH members to college-age kids (regardless of being in college) to remind them that they are still valuable RoH members. While those are long term ministries, Mike Weisenberger connected with our table to help him with a WGO project supporting Operation Hope that serves the Minneapolis homeless population. Mike saw a way, RoH could Go Out and serve, but when the project is over, so is his time commitment. Thrivent offers money to its members to make a difference in the lives of others. Mike is using his grant money, plus River of Hoppers time and treasure, to transform lives. If YOU are a Thrivent member, I encourage you to think of a way WE can “Go Out” to transform lives, by Serving, Educating or Advocating. With the \$250 grant, we have a start. Maybe you aren’t a Thrivent member, but have a project idea. The table can connect you with a Thrivent member, or we as a church, can financially support it, and get you moving on your idea. Some ideas are absolutely free, but need someone to organize it.

Again, we welcome more at our table to help River of Hoppers Go Out to transform lives. Some may sit at the table for a year or two and help with lots of projects, some may sit at the table once, get the support they need to serve, educate, or advocate and return when the Holy Spirit inspires them again.