

Northern Illinois Conference 2023 One Matters Award

Paw Paw United Methodist Church

Paw Paw, IL - Prairie South

2021 was a difficult year for many reasons. The Covid-19 pandemic was still prominent, but also a recent Gallup poll revealed that church membership in the U.S. had dropped below 50% for the first time ever. A two-point charge in the Prairie South District of the Northern Illinois Conference of The United Methodist Church was experiencing the painful reality of this decline. Upon making the difficult decision to close Compton UMC and merge the congregation with that of Paw Paw United Methodist Church, the newly combined congregation remained faithful, reminded that "we are an Easter people." We know that where there is death/loss, there is also resurrection. For only after we face an ending can we enter into a new beginning. A new beginning is precisely what the church has been up to. Paw Paw UMC is turning things around, making disciples of Jesus for the transformation of the world.

Last summer 35 children joined our VBS, and the goal this year is to have 50 children present in June. "We are just trying to be faithful to what the Spirit is leading us to. The past few years have been somewhat of a roller coaster, but we have been able to feel and see hope through it all and know and feel God's presence. Now it is up to us to stay faithful in prayer, worship, and response to whatever it is God is doing in our community that allows us the opportunity to be a part of God's work in making disciples," shared Pastor Dana Cox.



Early Christians used the time of Lent to prepare new followers of Christ for baptism and church membership. As the Church Council reflected on this, they decided to do just that for Easter 2023. Using #BeUMC curriculum from UM Discipleship Ministries, Pastor Dana held classes for new members after worship during Lent. On April 9th, the church celebrated Christ's miraculous resurrection on Easter Sunday, along with six baptisms and welcoming nine new members! The church is alive and well!

After hearing a few comments from church members about a desire to know each other better, the Council agreed to hold their April 30th (fifth Sunday) worship during brunch in the church's fellowship hall. Each table had conversation cards if needed. The church worshipped in prayer and song and spent time learning more about others at their table through conversation over a bountiful Methodist potluck. They also listened to Scripture and devotions related to being the church community and the importance of planting roots.



The people of Paw Paw United Methodist Church trust that this is just the beginning and that through continual prayer, with God's help, they will see the revitalization of the church's ministry and mission flourish even more and grow increasingly fruitful.

Written by Pastor Dana Cox