

# Northern Illinois Conference 2023 One Matters Award

## Wellspring United Methodist Church

### Oswego, IL - Prairie Central

Wellspring United Methodist Church launched on January 1st, 2021 with 57 members. Since its conception, Wellspring has become an oasis for many in the Oswego-land area of Illinois. People from all backgrounds, many of whom have felt excluded from regular church life, are discovering that Wellspring is embodying the vision that has been claimed over the last year: *"We are a God-loving, inclusive community of compassion, healing, growth and service."* For us, "Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors." is both a welcome and a call. We believe that all are invited to experience the wellspring of abundant life. We strive not only to welcome, but foster belonging.



Since its inception, Wellspring has been developing ministries within the five life systems of church life (Worship, Community, Equipping, Service and Evangelism) and this has led to remarkable growth. Over the past two years Wellspring has grown 131% in its membership with our average attendance from February 2022 to February 2023 growing 61%, hitting two benchmark records for number of persons

attending in a single service in the past three months (116).

Although we celebrate the numerical growth in our community, what we're most excited about is the wonderful testimonies from some of our newest members of discipleship, outreach, and mission work taking place. This excitement is especially felt with several promising young families who have sought baptism for themselves and their children since the beginning of the year as well as the professions of faith that have emerged from persons who have found a home with Wellspring. One such testimony captures the sentiment of many: *"I left church ministry absolutely fried, cynical, apathetic, and full of doubts. I did not think I would ever attend church on a regular basis again. Then in 2022 we encountered a small church just down the road from our house called 'Wellspring.' Our family felt welcome the moment we walked through the door. It was a place to worship for us, but for me personally it was a breath of fresh air. I encountered Christ in a healing way and was reminded of all the goodness and life that is found through the gospel."*

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Here are a few things Wellspring has done that have made an impact in our community:

In *worship*, we launched in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic full mitigation restrictions and for the first three



months of our church life worshiped fully online. Since that time, not only have we transitioned to hybrid worship, but we have made concerted efforts to improve both our in-person and online experience in order to foster vital worship. We have enough musicians to staff three bands, a choir, and instrumental ensemble. Worship leaders are increasing in numbers. A teaching staff of five persons rotates in the preaching and develops sermon themes at least six months in advance. A Wellness team (safety and care) has been developed for Sunday mornings and other events and upgrades are being done for all technical aspects of worship.

*Connections* are growing through fellowship events, after-worship gatherings, and newly developed “Better Together” home groups. Game nights, back-to-school festivals, Chili Cook-Offs, and movie nights among other activities encourage friendships and connections. An exploratory team has been organized to develop children and family ministries. Wellspring also hosts on Good Friday an Ecumenical service with three other church communities joining in a unique and meaningful service.

There is special effort going into *equipping* the congregation and leaders. Regular leadership training takes place from our Leadership Development and Nominations Team. And Wellspring hosted its first Leadership Training Workshop for onboarding its present and new leaders. For many of the sermon series throughout the year, daily devotionals are written to encourage people to dive deeper into the Sunday morning themes on their own. Over the last year, time was spent in defining what a Disciple looks like at Wellspring (Discipleship Matrix) and that profile is now becoming a reference point for what is done in our church life.

*Service* has been a part of Wellspring’s DNA from the beginning. The current Mission/Outreach team has established monthly donation foci, recruiting the congregation to provide everything from canned goods, school supplies, to cleaning supplies. Personal service is also recruited for serving at a mission center. Wellspring has also made its facility available for many support groups throughout the week. We are looking forward to expanding our impact upon the Oswego-area in the near future. Wellspring routinely offers Empowerment workshops helping our community discern their STRIDE (spiritual gifts, talents and abilities, resources, individual style, dreams and experiences) equipping and connecting them to key areas of ministry based on their discoveries. The current level of regular volunteerism within the church is a little over 75%.



*Evangelism* is going to take on a whole new image in the near future. New housing complexes are under development all around the Wellspring community with over 13,768 units currently forecasted. Wellspring is getting the word out in a number of ways such as coordinating with the Oswego Chamber of Commerce, Marketing plans for social media, newspapers sources, website, and SEO for search platforms. Most importantly, though, Wellspring is striving to be not just an inclusive community, but an inviting one.

Overall, this is an exciting time to be a part of the Wellspring community as we continue to grow and help people become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

*Written by Pastor Corey Ashley*