

Northern Illinois Conference 2019 One Matters Award

Mendota: Zion (DeKalb District)



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Mendota Zion UMC is located in a rural town of about 7,000, which the church has served as the hands and feet of Jesus Christ for the past 150 years. Just as many other Methodist churches in rural areas, Zion UMC has struggled with shifting demographics in the community and continuing decline in membership for many years. In 2015, Pastor Hogun Kim's child was the only Sunday School student, and an average 50 members regularly worshiped on Sundays. It was apparent that church membership did not reflect the community it served.



But Zion Church members did not give up. By God's grace they remembered what Jesus said about how to bring a precious soul to Jesus, "No one can come to me, unless the Father who sent me draws them." (John 6:44) They knew there is no other hope but in God. The Holy Spirit led the church members to intentional prayer, to begin to cry out to God that God would send God's beloved souls and children to Jesus Christ through Zion UMC. They prayed not only alone but also together in one accord, in unity, remembering and holding on to the promise of Christ, "...If two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will

be done for you by my Father in heaven" (Matthew 18:19).

Beginning in 2015, two or three began meeting for prayer, but soon seven or eight church members would gather to pray every Tuesday night. They prayed God would use Zion UMC to make disciples of Jesus Christ and especially to bring the next generation to Jesus as He said, "Let the little children come to me" (Luke 18:16). They prayed God would let every person who stepped in the church building feel, experience, and be assured of the great love of Christ Jesus for them as they worshiped God and fellowshiped with church members. And God was faithful. Visitors and new members of the congregation frequently comment that both adults and children all feel so loved when they first visit Zion UMC church. Another frequent observation by new members is that their children wanted to come back to the church after the first visit. Today, about 40 Sunday school children regularly worship on Sundays and recently six teenagers were baptized and two confirmed. In 2018, the church had an average Sunday Worship attendance of 80. They have seen many families become new members and are now serving in different ministries, becoming and making disciples of Jesus Christ.

New members of the church often bring their other family members, relatives, friends, and neighbors to church; in turn, they become members through membership classes. Moreover, this love of God extended to the people of different cultures and races. For the first time in Zion UMC history, three Hispanic families and one interracial Filipino family have officially become members. When God's love truly works in God's people through prayer, it always reaches out to all people, even from different cultures and colors.

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People come to Jesus only when God draws them, as Jesus said 2,000 years ago. That's why Jesus Himself prayed all night and early in the morning, alone and together. The Apostles and early Christians also prayed in unity for people to experience Jesus' love and come to Him. Throughout the entire Christian history, it has always been prayer that drew people to Jesus because only prayer can move God to work. Zion church does not have any special program for evangelism, only doing the typical church ministries that other churches also do. It is not a program or special strategy that draws people to Jesus. Instead, it is always God who draws people to Jesus. Yes, God can use programs. But a successful program which works well in one local church does not always work in another church. Fervent, corporate, and sincere prayers, however, always work in any difficult situation because they always move God to work for God's name's sake, drawing people to Jesus and making disciples of Jesus Christ.