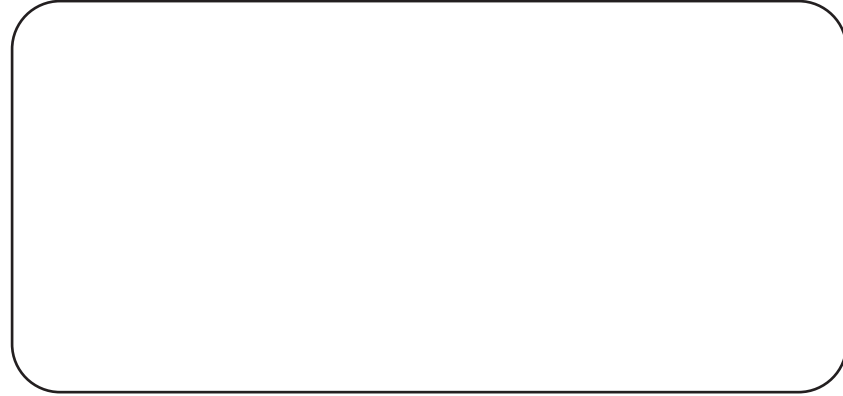




RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



John Anderson's Journey

As a child, around the age of 5-6, John Anderson remembers visiting his great grandmother's apartment, a couple of blocks away. He would ride his bike there and play games. One day his great grandmother took him on her lap, reached over, grabbed a black leather-bound book, and opened it up and started reading, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." She read and explained to him the story of creation and who God was. That was the first time he felt a sense of call.

"I have always somewhat felt a sense of call. I think like many people, I either would brush it aside or sometimes run the other way," says Anderson. "I ultimately started pursuing it differently. I never really left the field of

religion. I just pursued it in a different way by going the academic route. I have taught religion at the collegiate level for the past ten years now."

Besides teaching at the collegiate level, he has been doing pulpit supply for several years, throughout southeastern South Dakota. That has fostered and nurtured the sense of call that Anderson first felt sitting on his great grandmother's lap.

Anderson says, "Pulpit supply helped me do what I try to teach in the classroom, that there is an intersection between faith and what happens in the classroom. I was fortunate that my sermons were always well received. I never really made that connection that maybe this was something that I should do until I came to Spirit of Faith."

While doing pulpit supply at Spirit of Faith, in Woonsocket, South Dakota, Anderson gave a sermon that shared his faith journey. Some of the congregation members gathered to discuss how he might become the pastor for Spirit of Faith church.

One of the members of the group that had gathered was out mowing her lawn. She felt this strong urge to stop mowing and let Pastor John know that the conversation had taken place. At the exact time, he was having the same feelings, thinking—I wonder if this is something I could pursue?

"The Spirit was at work, bringing us together to this moment," says Anderson. "It was a moment that affirmed my call, and God finally caught up with me."

His faith journey is full of ecumenical experiences. Anderson grew up in the Lutheran tradition.

He was educated and has taught at Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, and Catholic higher educational institutions. He is now serving as a pastor at a congregation that has members of the Methodist and Lutheran tradition.

"We are all grappling after the same truth. We are just coming at it in different ways. I have been nurtured in a way that is open to many faith traditions. At Spirit of Faith, I can understand and speak from both perspectives, members of the United Methodist tradition, and members of the ELCA—Lutheran tradition. The ecumenical spirit and learning from one another are present at Spirit of Faith. That is tremendously important to me," says Anderson.

On July 1, 2020, Pastor Anderson entered his first official year as a local licensed pastor, assigned to serve Spirit of Faith in Woonsocket, South Dakota. He completed the licensing school in June, and the congregation celebrated the milestone by giving him a quilted stole.

Anderson looks forward to serving Spirit of Faith this year and beyond. He sees the congregation as a great example of unleashing the Holy Spirit to guide them.

"Spirit of Faith is so attuned to the Holy Spirit and how the Holy Spirit works in the world and the community. I feel like I am playing catch up sometimes," he says. "We are always waiting and watching for what God is up to."

"This has taught us how we can be innovative in the ways that we do ministry. The kind of energy and passion at Spirit of Faith does not come without the Holy Spirit's presence," says Pastor John.

2015-2020 Thrive by the numbers:

Since 2015...



Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.
Ephesians 1:3

Thank you! Thank you for your commitment to our Thrive campaign Strength for Today, Hope for Tomorrow. Thank you for your commitment to the Dakotas Annual Conference and believing in our dream to start new places for new people, strengthen existing churches, and developing passionate, effective leaders among our clergy and laity. Through hours of prayer and discernment, Thrive has led us on a spiritual journey to strengthen the Church across the Dakotas. Your heart for the Church and support of this campaign allows us to reach new people with the Good News of God's saving love through Jesus Christ.



Through your generosity we were able to start new congregations, renew existing churches, and develop a multiplication culture to meet new people.

- We developed a robust culture of call for clergy and lay leadership by strengthening our recruitment and formation strategy—including our Elisha Internship program—to better support our clergy and equip the next generation of bold spirit-leaders.
- We have encouraged a culture of starting new ministries creating an entrepreneurial spirit to reach new people outside of the church.
- We initiated a breakthrough prayer movement so that our renewal efforts would be bathed in prayer and Holy Spirit led.
- We launched generous givers and stewardship workshops which expanded our financial revenue streams to call forth God's abundant resources for mission and remain a vital, sustainable conference in the future.

Ministry does not happen alone, and the success of the Thrive campaign is because of you and your love for our Church. Thank you for today's strength and giving us hope for the Church of tomorrow.

Bishop Bruce R. Ough

On April 5th, during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, Pastor Anderson preached to drive-in worshipers from the bed of a pickup truck. Photos courtesy of Spirit of Faith facebook page.

Sunnycrest lives out mission to love God, love your neighbor

“The church is more alive than it has ever been. People are exhausted with the joy of serving and showing the love of Christ to others,” says Pastor Charlie Moore, who serves Sunnycrest UMC in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

The leadership team at Sunnycrest has identified core values, a vision summed up in this tagline “Love God, Love your neighbor.” Many of members of the congregation are demonstrating the core values and visions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

What is making the difference, and why is this happening? The laity in the congregation are taking the lead. The leadership team is creating spaces where people can live out their passion for serving and showing the heart of Jesus to others.

Moore says the beauty is in the leadership team empowering others to see a need and respond. “The lay leadership has taken over,” says Moore.

The foundation for the overwhelming response is active members who understand the vision to love God and love neighbor. In the past three years, the number of small groups has increased from seven groups to more than 30.

Sermons and worship are focused on vision and values. “I have spent the last year and a half preaching about the heart of Jesus,” says Moore. “I tell people to let their hearts be broken and step in and meet the need.”

Here are some of the mission and outreach in the past months.

\$10,000 donation to Dakotas Camping Ministry: The summer programming at the three Dakotas Camp and Retreat Centers—Lake Poinsett, Storm Mountain, Wesley Acres, have been suspended for the summer of 2020. A layperson at Sunnycrest UMC, who has a passion for the camping

ministry, called Pastor Charlie to do something for camps. The congregation had money put away for scholarships and decided to give those funds to the conference camping program, even though kids would not attend camp for the summer. That amount was approximately \$5,000. The donation grew to \$10,000 because of calls made by the layperson living out their passion for the camping ministry.

Sunnycrest Village food drive: Members of Sunnycrest gathered more than 2,000 pounds of food for Sunnycrest Village, a senior living community.

Residents at Sunnycrest Village could not leave, so congregants became personal shoppers for people at Sunnycrest Village.

Hayward meals: As part of the Nightwatch Canteen, members and friends of Sunnycrest UMC served free meals every Monday at Hayward Elementary School.

Blood drives: During the COVID pandemic, many of the regularly scheduled blood drives were canceled. Members of Sunnycrest stepped up to the call for donations by holding two separate blood drives. In the two days, 84 people donated blood, with the help of medical professionals, in a COVID safe manner. The donations for the second blood drive came from congregation members at Sunnycrest UMC.

Coronahelps.org: Many Sunnycrest members are active in delivering food and supplies to Sioux Falls residents through Coronahelps.org.

Adopting a village in Guatemala: In January of 2020, Sunnycrest UMC decided to adopt a village in Guatemala, a ten-year, \$250,000 commitment through World Help. The goal for the first year was to rebuild a school in the village, then COVID hit. The congregation has raised almost \$30k for the village in Guatemala so far this year. That is enough funds to rebuild the school and support the training of a pastor. Additionally, the congregation collected \$6,000 to buy supplies needed in the farming village during COVID—food, sanitary supplies, masks.

Making masks: Families in the congregation have made and donated over 4,000 masks since the start of the COVID pandemic. Masks have been distributed to hospitals, businesses,



Members of Sunnycrest UMC serve a hot meal at Hayward elementary school.

and nursing homes. The families just started making the masks, and the requests came in, and they kept pouring them out, donating time and money.

Response to four kids in crisis: The news reported that abuse of four children in the Sioux Falls Area. The four kids suffered abuse at the hands of their meth-addicted parents. Within a few days, a team from the congregation raised \$7,000 cash and over \$1,000 in gift cards to support the four children.

East River Foster Care Network: The congregation has conducted multiple clothing drives for the East River Foster Care Network. There have been six different deliveries of clothes.

Pastoral care and connection are vibrant during the pandemic. Lay leadership developed, started up, and hosts prayer/Bible studies via zoom five nights a week and a **Challenge Checkup.** Every Wednesday night, at 7 p.m. via Zoom, leaders can check-in and respond to a challenge issued each week.

Hispanic ministry is thriving. The ministry is growing into three sites - Sioux Falls, Plankinton and soon Mitchell. In Sioux Falls: The Kingdom Kids, Sunday school participants, held a food drive for members of Sunnycrest’s Hispanic community. The Sioux Falls congregation also conducted a drive for Hy-Vee gift cards for folks, making more than **\$4,000 in gifts available to the Hispanic community.** At Blessings Repeated in **Plankinton, South Dakota, four food drives** have been held for the Hispanic community, and **hot meals are prepared and served every day for Hispanic folks.**

God’s next steps for Celebrate Grace and Legacy South

Prayer and God connected the two congregations in Bismarck, North Dakota. In a 30-day time frame, the two ministries have acquired a building, done some repairs, cleaning, painting and renovations, and moved-in.

Pastor Chris Chase, who serves as the leader of the recovery ministry and worshipping community known as Celebrate Grace UMC, received notice that the space Celebrate Grace was utilizing would no longer be available. The ministry was expanding and growing fast, seeing 55-65 people attending worship each week.

“We had standing-room only in worship. We also tried to accommodate 17 small groups,” says Pastor Chris Chase. “We have not come close to reaching our potential with what we want to do to help people with recovery and tell them about Jesus. I knew I had to look around and find a space.”

He looked and found a building just down the street from the location where the ministry was located. Chase took a leap of faith and bought the building.

Real Church, an agency working with people on probation, which Chase operates, is the owner of the newly acquired property. The effort in the building is known now as The Recovery Factory. It is a center that provides resources, faith-based, and non-faith-based, for people in recovery. “Our goal is to provide support for people who are unable to get support,” he says,

Legacy South, a new church start launched by Legacy UMC in Bismarck, has been

worshipping in a dance studio each week, for more than a year. Each Sunday, volunteers revamp the dance studio into a worship setting. The setup begins at 6 a.m., and the teardown has to be completed by 1 p.m.

Pastor Chris Chase of Celebrate Grace UMC in Bismarck, ND, is excited about the possibilities of the new space they will share with Legacy South UMC.

“We have been meeting in the Dance Studio each week, setting up and tearing down,” says Pastor Andy Early, who serves as the leader of Legacy South UMC. “For the past year and several months, we have been leasing this space, praying, and waiting for God’s next step. We are not in a position to go out and buy a building or be self-sustaining.”

Rev. Kermit Culver, who served as the district superintendent for the Northwest District of the Dakotas Conference, suggested that Chase and Early meet to discuss the next steps for both of the ministries. Early says, “Kermit suggested that Chris and I should connect. I set up a chance to have coffee with him, and it was amazing how the Holy Spirit orchestrated things.”

The two pastors learned quickly that both ministries needed each other. Celebrate Grace had acquired a building with lots of room. Legacy South had a lot of equipment, chairs, staging, and more.

“Chris had this new building,” says Early. “He didn’t have the things for worship, stage pieces, chairs. I was like, ‘Well we have stage pieces and chairs. We can bring that to share.’ For us, we needed a space for worship and other activities on Sunday.”

The two ministries are now collaborating to share worship and other space. “It just happened to work out. It was a God thing, how we got together. They will come in and do a Sunday morning worship,” says Chase.



Rev. Andy Early preaching a message at the dance studio where Legacy South UMC has been holding worship services. Photo by David Stucke, Dakotas Conference.

“Legacy has its mission and vision. Celebrate Grace has its mission and vision. Hopefully, we will volunteer with each other’s outreach and mission work. It is really exciting.”

A team of volunteers started making needed renovations to the space, cleaning and painting. There are ten rooms for small groups and offices and ample worship space. When restrictions are lifted for in-person gatherings, the worship space will be ready. Another great asset is that the building is accessible to persons with disabilities.

Chase describes that plans are to add bathrooms this summer and a kitchen. “The type of ministry we do needs that capacity,” he says. “We are looking at adding a food pantry. That way, we can be a one-stop-shop. We would be able to provide a lot of resources for people; do what is needed.”

Legacy will actually lease the space from the Recovery Factory and Real Church. “God’s hand was in it. It is going to be a win-win situation,” Early says. “We are not going to be having to set up and tear down each week; that saves us a lot of time. It is cool how the Holy Spirit has been orchestrating all of this.”

“I want to reach people who have never met Jesus or who have been scared away from the church. I hope to reach those people in Bismarck,” says Chase. “We are going to be able to show people what Christ’s love and Grace is and not just tell them.”

“I feel our call is to be a beacon of light and revamp the south side of Bismarck. I think this is the next step in bigger plans that God has for both ministries,” says Early.



Pastor Chris Chase of Celebrate Grace UMC in Bismarck, ND, is excited about the possibilities of the new space they will share with Legacy South UMC.



Food distribution at Blessings Repeated in Plankinton.