

Is Lutheran Revival An Oxymoron?

"A 'revival' at St. Timothy's?" one neighbor was overheard to say. "That doesn't seem like something St. Timothy's would do!" "I hope it's not weird," said one long time St Tim's member. We don't want to be associated with anything weird." Testimonials! "AMENS!" Hand waving! Foot stomping! Laying on of hands! Alleluias! At a Lutheran church? What is going on???

August 10-12, 2007 saw a circus-sized white tent on the grounds of St. Timothy's Lutheran Church in the suburbs of Troy, New York, garnering looks of interest from all who passed by. Now, tents at St. Timothy's are not unusual, as the annual Fair, Vacation Bible School and any other outdoor activity is always accompanied by one of the big yellow and white tents. But this was surely the biggest tent there'd ever been on the grounds and that tent and all the yellow "2007 Tent Revival" signs that were plastered for miles in every direction were generating a lot of buzz in the community.

The congregation had been hearing about the revival for over a year as plans were shared, however, there seemed to be a general skepticism in this congregation known throughout the synod for its innovative approach to ministry, its commitment to community service and its usual penchant for not being afraid to do things a little differently. This might have been just a little too far out even for St. Timothy's.

The committee chair, Greg Whitney, performed a Herculean task in organizing the event. The committee performed a variety of tasks: arranging for bands, getting food donations, taking care of publicity, public service announcements, newspaper ads, articles. The committee hoped that this second revival to take place in the Hudson-Mohawk Conference would be well attended by all the area Lutheran churches as well as members of other local churches.

It rained all day Friday. But just as the revival was beginning in the evening, the skies cleared and the sun came out. It felt like God was smiling down. Friday night was Youth Night. A wonderfully talented group of young people from Prince of Peace Lutheran in Clifton Park called the King's Clowns Troupe delighted the audience with their communion service which was both delightful and moving. Their talent was obvious and their commitment to sharing the Good News through this medium, touching. Diagnosis Free, a Christian Band, rocked the tent with music particularly suited to a young audience. In addition, the music for all the weekend worship services was provided by Prince of Peace's own Praise Band, Shine. Pastor Timothy Graham was the keynote speaker. He told an inspirational story of his own difficult youth and his eventual discovery that he wanted to serve. Following his sermon, we gathered around a bonfire that shot over 15 ft into the air and attracted neighbors like moths to a flame.

A beautiful Saturday began with Pastor Mary Ann Nelson-Loefke leading about 25 people in an Evangelism Workshop. Later in the evening Judah Maximum Praise bluegrass Christian band got everyone toe tapping and foot stomping as they led up to the inspired address by Pastor Mary Ann. Although exhausted from three unexpected deaths of persons dear to her in her congregation during the week, Pastor Loefke's sadness was uplifted by her steady, warm, unwavering faith.

A gorgeous summer Sunday found as many of St. Timothy's flock as were in town in attendance at morning worship. Shine kept the congregation singing. The Rev. Dr. Kathryn Love was powerful in her message. Prayer partners were available for individual comfort in prayer.

Pastor Kim Cottingham shared, "We were happy to have over 100 people each day of the Revival and hope that as the Hudson-Mohawk Conference continues to do Revivals the attendance will grow."

Those who attended learned that the word revival is not to be feared and can, in fact, be an unexpected spiritual reawakening. Stepping out of the box in worship allows for new expressions of faith and a new understanding that different doesn't mean bad (or weird). Faith comes in all shapes and sizes and we know that Christ called the "unusual" to be His disciples.

"There were so many opportunities to have hearts touched, and spirits revived. I enjoy what a revival offers. There is so much at a revival that normally isn't found in a regular church service. A church service is about an hour long, and much in the liturgy is repeating every week. After hearing it repeated for so many years it's a challenge for me to feel the words in my heart, and not just say the words from memory.

"In fact, I think the variety offered was one of the strong points. There seemed to be something for everyone. There was enough of the familiar liturgy so people who find comfort in it, would enjoy themselves, and there were eclectic forms of worship, such as clown ministry, praise bands, and testimonies, all of which I enjoy. With the revival spreading across so many potential barriers—varying denominations, a wide age range, varied musical styles, etc, it's easy to see why it is indeed so renewing. Hosting a revival is a lot of work, but despite that, I know that even those who had many duties had their hearts refreshed." Duane, Deacon and committee member of 2006 Revival at his church

"My favorite part of the whole weekend was the King's Clown Troupe!!!" – Donna, St Tim's member

"I didn't know what to expect. It was very uplifting, very moving spiritually. I was happy to be a part of it. Wish we had more people. Was great to

have so much community support, the area businesses which donated food and supplies. It was a terrific weekend.:" Lisa, St. Tim's member

Don't be afraid to host a revival. In addition to a wonderful opportunity for your congregation to work together, get to know each other and allow members to use their special gifts, your activity puts you on the map as wanting to make Christ known in your community. If you hear about a revival in your conference, check it out! Support those who are holding them! Lutherans are new at this whole revival thing. The more we practice, the better we'll get! And the less weird it will feel!