

Calvary Lutheran pastor now serves two churches

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ROCK ISLAND — Churches have found that sharing pastors can help with the changing times.

Such is the case for the Rev. Donald Knowles, pastor at Calvary Lutheran Church in Moline since 2010 who recently became pastor at St. James Lutheran Church in Rock Island. He said he offered to help when the St. James congregation found themselves without a pastor and considered ending its ministry in Rock Island.

“I, and the people of Calvary, offered to be a part of the solution and explore sharing pastoral ministry,” Rev. Knowles said. “It is what we felt God was calling us to do. As one Calvary council member said in one of our discussions about this ministry proposal, ‘It is the right thing to do.’”

Rev. Knowles began serving both congregations Aug. 1, with both congregations adjusting their worship times. Sunday morning worship at St. James Church, at 3145 31st Ave., Rock Island, is at 8:30 a.m. Worship begins at 10:30 a.m. at Calvary Church, 4700 53rd St., Moline.

“The new worship times allow an opportunity for me to visit with members of both congregations following worship, when a lot of pastoral care takes place” Rev. Knowles said.

“The reality of the mainline Christian church in our current culture has changed over the last generation, he said. “That is certainly true for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America congregations in our area. We are experiencing population declines in general and smaller numbers of people participating in organized religion.”

Rev. Knowles said average worship attendance is “significantly smaller than it was in the heyday of many of our congregations in the '50s and '60s.

“At the same time, there are fewer people entering seminary and seeking calls to full-time ministry,” he said. “So, we have smaller congregations seeking leadership from fewer pastors.

“I think the model of congregations trying to serve the needs of a cross-section of the population – children, youth, young adults, middle aged and the elderly – will not be viable,” he said. Likewise, he said, the model of one pastor serving one congregation will work in very limited settings, such as in very large congregations.



The Rev. Donald Knowles, who has been pastor at Calvary Lutheran Church in Moline, now is serving both Calvary church and St. James Lutheran Church in Rock Island.

"I think it is crucial that congregations see their neighbors as partners in ministry instead of competitors," he said.

St. James had been without a full-time pastor for more than two years and was served by an interim pastor and an intern.

"Like many of our congregations, the number of people supporting the congregation financially has dwindled and calling a full-time pastor, even if one was available, was unlikely," Rev. Knowles said. "Finding someone willing to be a part-time pastor also is difficult."

Serving two congregations is not new for Rev. Knowles. He began his ministry at a two-point parish in Pennsylvania, and did his internship with a three-point parish.

"And what that experience taught me was that both congregations receive full-time leadership," he said. "I am available to both congregations on a full-time basis."

Both Calvary and St. James will maintain separate identities while exploring ways to be supportive of each other and share ministries.

"I understand there will soon be a joint event for the women's groups of the two congregations," Rev. Knowles said. "We are only just beginning to explore the possibilities that exist for expanding our ministries together."

He also said he is excited to be sharing in St. James' ministries with African refugees, supporting missionaries in Tanzania and their partnership with local ministries such as Habitat for Humanity, Relay for Life and Christian Care Rescue Mission.

"The apostle Paul calls on the people of God to recognize that we are a part of the body of Christ," Rev. Knowles said. "No one individual or congregation is the whole body, rather, we are called on to work together, as parts of the body work together, to accomplish the work that is before us. That is what led the people of God at Calvary and St. James to begin working together and sharing pastoral ministry."

THE REV. DONALD KNOWLES

Birth date: Jan. 14, 1960.

Family: Wife, Mary; one son and one daughter.

Hometown: Des Plaines.

Education: Bachelor's degree from Augustana; Master of Divinity from Lutheran Theological Seminary, Gettysburg, Pa.

Experience: Lavansville-Bakersville Lutheran Parish, Somerset, Pa., 1987-1992; Lutheran Outdoor Ministry Center, Oregon, Ill., 1992-1996; Immanuel Lutheran Church, Earlville, 1996-1999; Calvary Lutheran Church, Moline, 2000.

Favorite Scripture: "Any passage that tells the story of an ordinary, fallible person being called to do God's work."

Biblical character I'd like to meet: Jonah.

Hobbies and activities: Reading, camping, going to the theater.

One thing I feel strongly about: "That everything God created is good, all things and people have value in the eyes of God."

I wish I knew how to: Carry a tune.