

MUMC Worship Design 2022 Annual Report

Prayerfully submitted by Elizabeth Thangaraj

Worship services at Middletown United Methodist Church have grown strong and increasingly robust over the last year. MUMC's worship design team consists of a group of committed Christians who work with the pastor and music leaders in planning and preparing for worship services at the church. Three options are available for worshipers to participate in Sunday morning worship services: attendance in our sanctuary, viewing the live stream via Facebook, and listening to the service via conference calling. The challenges due to the COVID virus have receded and we anticipate an increasing number of families joining us for worship each Sunday.

Worship at MUMC: Sunday Morning Services are held each week at the sanctuary at 10:00AM. Several additional worship services are held during the week and evenings at various times of the year. Worship services are built around themes and some memorable themes have been 'Les Mis', 'Home for the Holidays', 'The Lord's Prayer', 'Down the Shore'. A Thanksgiving evening service was held on Thursday, 11/21 at 7:00PM. The choir and praise band united in providing the music for the service. Communion was served at the service; Caroling around the fire worship services were held on Sunday evenings during the advent season, at 5PM. A Blue Christmas Service was held on 12/21 at 7:00PM. The choir participated at the service. Contemporary and traditional Christmas Eve Services were held at 5:00PM and 10:00PM respectively. An Ash Wednesday Evening Service was held at 10:00PM, and a Good Friday Service of lessons and hymns was held 7:00PM. Special Sunday Services included Scout Sunday, Homecoming Sunday, Summer Camp Sunday, Remembrance Sunday on 9/11.

Worship services at MUMC are a combination of contemporary and traditional worship. There is considerable support for the current style of worship and a single Sunday service that enables the entire congregation to gather for worship and meet one another. However, the WD Team has been told to plan for separate contemporary and traditional services on Sunday once the average in-person attendance on Sunday morning exceeds 80 people, sustained for a couple of months, even though the sanctuary can seat 250 persons. The planning for the second service will be similar to launching a new project. Logistics such as A/V coverage, length of time between services, and turn around and prep time for the different musical groups will have to be carefully planned and implemented. January would be the best time to launch a second service.

Communion is offered during Sunday Service on the first Sunday of each month. In April, for the first time since the pandemic shutdown, Communion was served at the altar. COVID safety precautions were taken into account during the distribution. The loaf of bread was pre-cut and put into individual cups for the pastor to serve at the altar rails. The number of individuals receiving communion has increased steadily each month.

Budget: A budget of \$3,380 has been allocated to Worship Design by the MUMC Finance Committee for use by WD. The budgeted amount is used to pay for equipment maintenance, copyright and licensing agreements, streaming license, AV equipment purchase, new worship launch, flowers and other miscellaneous expenditures.

To plan and prepare for worship, the Design team incorporates various ministries at the church, such as music, welcome, audio visual, and Sunday evening worship.

A Welcome Team is available every Sunday morning for those attending in-person to provide seating placement assistance and information on the current COVID protocol guidelines established by our MUMC Leadership Team. The team tracks attendance at all worship services. More families with young children and individuals are attending service in the sanctuary this year, compared to last year. An increasing number of new people are connecting with the church. Members of the welcome team also connect with online worshippers at the conclusion of the service. Online worshippers have declined over the last year. Identified people on Facebook viewing the service remains constant. The livestream will continue as it provides a try-out for those looking for a church to attend, and those who are unable to attend onsite. Refreshments are served in the Fellowship Hall after morning and evening services.

The Music Ministry has grown tremendously in scope and depth over the last year. Nearly all music is live at the sanctuary, but recordings of hymns performed by our Choir and Bell Choir are occasionally presented as a regular part of our Order of Worship. There is more congregational singing with the Praise Band as contemporary songs are sung at the worship services. In the introduction of a new song, the congregation joins in the singing of a repeated chorus as they learn the song. The Traditional music ministry has broadened to include a flute ensemble along with the adult choir and bell ringers. More worshippers are showing interest in joining the flute group. The hymn-sing serves as a prelude to morning worship and contains three components: a traditional hymn, a contemporary song by the praise band, and a piano piece.

The Audio-visual Ministry continues to enrich the worship services in the sanctuary and online, with the available technology. This year, the WD team welcomed an AV specialist to assist in assessing and correcting AV issues such as video presentation, audio management and Facebook Livestream during worship service. Two ambient mics for pick-up of choir sound and other acoustics were set up during the year to replace a faulty microphone. The ambient mics also pick up congregational singing along with the praise band or choir. A sound mixer board with different adjustments for the ambient mics, praise band mics, hand-held mics and lapel mics has resulted in an excellent balance of sound for the choir, the band, the worship leader and the readers.

The Sunday Evening Worship Ministry - "Conversations": While our morning worship is music driven, evening worship is conversational. The experimental introduction of an evening service focused on conversation was expected to create a worship experience for those who may not know or have distanced themselves from God. A group of committed Christians would engage with those with questions to seek a new understanding and insight in the Christian faith. Music was to be tailored to serve the worship, and the seating was around tables in the Fellowship Hall. The service was assigned a title "Conversations" to highlight its conversational base and to contrast it from a regular service that is liturgically based. A first soft launch of the evening service was held in March. The aim was to try out the structure of the service within the church family, and to make any adjustments needed before advertising it to the public. The teams involved in the preparation and planning included a prayer team, welcome team, musical team, and a seeding team. The latter were those who would be able to get the conversations going. The structure included three musicians playing in the background and a scripture passage (with focused questions) being discussed across tables. We anticipated 20-30 people in its first service, but only five people attended outside of the launch team. Over the six launches that were held, the numbers dwindled to zero, and it was agreed to allow more time for reflection, and rethinking Conversations. A hiatus is currently being held for the ministry.

Covid protocols have been relaxed for in person attendance at worship service. So far no COVID cases have been reported because of on-site church attendance. The left side of the sanctuary is reserved, with signs on the seats, for those who prefer to stay masked and distanced.



Music Ministry Report

Prayerfully submitted by Cindy Balme, Director of Music

MUMC currently has 4 volunteer music ensembles: the Praise Band, Chancel Choir, Handbell Choir and Flute Choir.

During Covid lockdown, our handbells and choir remained active by creating videos to be played during service on the Facebook livestream. We were very creative with the singing choir, visiting Monmouth County parks and using our beautiful church grounds to record anthems outdoors, keeping everyone safe.

Coming out of this time, all our musical groups are contributing to worship in-person. In our current single service on Sunday mornings, all our volunteer musicians add their style of musical praise. In this regard, I believe MUMC has created a truly blended contemporary/traditional service, offering all parishioners a style of music that enhances their worship.

All our musical teams also work with the worship themes created by Pastor Derrick, making sure the music creates a coherent message each Sunday.