

Some Reflections on the Writing of “This Gifted Land”

As you can easily imagine, the assignment to put together the story of the gift by the Dauck family of the land on which our church rests was fascinating and very challenging. I spent several hours visiting with members of the Dauck family and with members of Madison Christian Community who played a role in the beginnings of what I have come to call, “the Dream Church.” The results are interesting and inspiring but probably still fall short of presenting an accurate account of what actually took place.

It is common in oral histories for remembered events to be placed either before or after the time in which they occurred. I’ve been told that some of the struggles I described during Advent’s sojourn down on Eau Claire and Sheboygan actually took place after the decision was made to form the ecumenical partnership with Community of Hope. If this is true, it raises an interesting point for us to think about. It suggests that the three miracles I spoke about did not result in the life and mission of Madison Christian Community becoming less difficult and challenging, but just the opposite. That runs contrary to our normal way of thinking. We like to believe that when we respond in faith to God’s leading, everything we do is blessed. I still believe that to be true, but I also have come to believe that sometimes God’s blessing takes the form of leading us into difficult and painful times of testing. This is that divine work of pruning that tests our faith and hopefully engenders in us a spirit of humility, trust and compassion.

I do feel a need to correct any impression I might have given that Community of Hope came to “the marriage” with empty hands. In point of fact, the members of Community of Hope and the United Church of Christ contributed generously to the beginnings of this venture of faith through individual gifts by members and through grants and loan money from the denomination. We needed each other then and we need each other today for many reasons.

One interesting historical bit of information shared with me was the fact that the invitation to the first meeting to discuss the possibility of an ecumenical parish came, not from Advent, but from the Catholic priests at St. Thomas Aquinas parish. It reminds us of how widespread the spirit of ecumenism was in those days. And we might well pray that this spirit would return again to bless the whole family of God and to bless this conflicted world in which we carry out our life and mission.

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