

The Home of the Hapless, Helpless and Hopeless

The story of an Episcopal Church

There was a church located in the County Seat, and it was founded by a group of Episcopalians who wished to worship in an inclusive congregation. There was a bigger, wealthier church on the main street; however, it carried all the trappings and allure of a restricted community.

The new church welcomed everyone to worship, and never offered the brown paper bag test. The congregation grew over the years, and with the growth, the spirit of a close-knit family prevailed. There was a point in time when a member of the congregation was diagnosed with a life-ending disease that affected gay men and drug users. The congregation supported the member and his family, offering a safe house for the people living with HIV AIDS.

This congregation opened their doors to people living with addiction, offering space for group meetings. It was said this church is the home of the Hapless, Helpless and Hopeless. When, in fact, this community was living the Gospel of Jesus.

Just opening doors and welcoming was not sufficient, and the congregation was the first to offer inclusive and nonpatriarchal language. The prayer Jesus taught was said: Our Mother, our Father in heaven... Same sex couples were offered blessings of their relationships in a sacred space. Ordained women were welcomed to preach, and you were fortunate to witness an ordination that invited the congregation to assist in laying hands on the ordinand.

The Rector of the church invited the laity to join in designing and planning the weekly worship. This work modeled mutual respect, building a stronger congregation.

Recognizing the gifts of our fragile planet and creation was celebrated as a new season. The long season of green was augmented with a new addition that celebrated Sacred Stories. This congregation has been recognized throughout the greater Episcopal Church for innovation of worship while embracing an open inclusion of the sacred mystery of faith.

The church faced some hard times marked by a declining membership. A worldwide pandemic led to a suspension of in-person corporate worship. Clergy transition and personality disputes all converged as a perfect storm. Despite all of this, the faithful community is committed to embracing their faith and unique customs and worship. Yet the church is alive and full of promise.

The dedication of the faithful inspired a new period of growth built upon the foundations of a house of worship that welcomes all. Yes, that church may as well be the Church of the Redeemer. In fact, it is that church, and each of you has the ability and the God-given gifts to make this story a truth.

Redeemer is the church that welcomes all, including the successful and the hopeless. This is the church that has no secret handshake or unwritten code. People who share the peace on Sunday in church will share the peace whenever they meet you or see you. This is a community of believers that strives for justice not just in words but in actions. I urge you all to embrace your heritage and celebrate your unique gifts and open doors wide. Go out into the world and share the love of our Redeemer with all whom you meet. May God continue to shine her love and grace on this parish family. AMEN.

Presented on Sunday, August 23, 2026, Church of the Redeemer

By The Reverend Deacon Erik Soldwedel