

LAKE FORESTER SPOTLIGHT

Union Church's Hindman is dedicated to guiding all-denomination congregation in 'life of service'

By LINDA BLASER
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Union Church of Lake Bluff, located at 525 E. Prospect in Lake Bluff. Established in 1866, it is one of the oldest churches in Lake County. Mark Hindman serves as pastor.

What is the history of the Union Church in the U.S.?

Union Churches were established after the Civil War when there was a great resurgence in spiritual life and religious life. There weren't enough people from every denomination to start their own church in every little town across the country. Union Churches were meant to be ecumenical. They started popping up all over the country. Our church was started in 1866.

How is a Union Church different?

A Union Church is an all-denomination church. That's not just wordplay. One-third of our members are from Protestant backgrounds, one-third of the members are Catholic and the final one-third are folks who grew up without a church background. We have interfaith families where one parent is Jewish and the other Christian or one is Muslim and the other Christian.

How does your church work if everyone is different?

We draw from all backgrounds. Our service reflect that variety. A good example of this is when I asked members to list their favorite hymns to be sung during the upcoming year. Several peo-

ple commented, "I probably said what everyone else said." In reality, there were no repeats. We sang them all.

We're very much a thinking church. The church is a place people can ask questions. It's also a place where faithful people can disagree with one another and still respect each other as faithful people. What brings us together is not a doctrine or theology but the desire to worship our loving God.

What is your Sunday service like?

One of the things that is different about our service is the children's time, which is early in the service where the children come forward. Lots of churches have this time. For us, though, this time is a real focus and usually a learning time for everyone.

We also have joys and concerns sharing before the pastoral prayer. This is a time for people to share what's going on in their lives and in the lives of those they love. In a smaller church people seem more willing to be open, so joys and concerns sharing can sometimes be as long as a sermon. This can create deep connections between people. Like other denominations, we sing hymns, we celebrate communion, and we baptize children. We do a lot of things other Christians do. The congregation is pretty informal. Most Sundays the only person with a tie on is me.

How many members are there?

We really don't count, but I'd say we're on the cusp between small and medium. I joke with peo-

ple that we're "smedium." We're a different size than most of the churches that surround us. But at the Union Church, people know your name and they'll know about you. We're the kind of church where if someone here knows you're having a bad week, it won't take long for the casseroles to start showing up.

What has been the biggest change at Union Church?

I've been pastor here 16 years now and the biggest change is we've become a very service-oriented congregation. For a relatively small church, our congrega-

tion does an amazing variety of service at all levels, from PADS, volunteering at the local food pantry, working with Habitat for Humanity and helping others as far away as Rio de Janeiro, where a former church member provided medical attention to the poorest of the poor. From monetary donations to hands-on work, our congregation is very involved. Our hope is that when we do this work, God's presence can shine through us. We believe that God is calling us not to a life of worry about where we're going in the next life but to a life of service, bringing faith to life, one person at a time.

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