

Madison Area Ecumenical Thanksgiving Service History

Thanksgiving has long presented an opportunity across America for Christian churches to look beyond sincerely held theology differences, celebrate the basic tenets of our faith, and praise God for His many blessings.

The first Madison Area Ecumenical Thanksgiving Service, per my perspective, came as a result of:

- The example of ecumenical services held annually in several small Southwest WI towns and by several churches in Madison.
- The example of the Charismatic Renewal which led Christians from various denominations, filled with the Holy Spirit, to worship side-by-side.
- A brief encounter at the Capitol, for the 2019 National Day of Prayer, with Marcio Sierra Jr. of Lighthouse Church. He shared his desire to bring local Christian leaders together to pray.
- Conversations with and the encouragement of Catholic Bishop Donald Hying in 2021 and later with his Chief of Staff, Dr. Chris McAtee to value and try to enhance ecumenical relationships.
- The example and bonds built via the Collaboration Project's 2022 "For Dane" initiative.
- A chance meeting and related discussion with like-minded Deacon Mark Zwolski at Our Lady Queen of Peace church in June, 2022. A quick decision by the Queen of Peace staff to embrace and agree to host the initial 2022 service. Mark's subsequent efforts to structure the worship service.
- Additional essential early support from the Wisconsin Council of Churches, the MP3 group, Upper House, the Catholic Herald, Lighthouse, SS Morris Community AME, City Church, Geneva Campus, Bethel Lutheran, St. Cyril and Methodius Orthodox, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Dennis, Westwood Christian, Madison Christian Community and several other churches.

The dozen or so members of the planning team approached the initial service in 2022 uncertain if our spotty outreach efforts, amidst a resurgence of COVID, would result in many attending. We were shocked and pleasantly surprised when approximately 850 flowed into Our Lady Queen of Peace church filled with a spirit of joy, excited to be together, eager to praise God and pray side-by-side. The feedback was extremely positive. A ton of food and several thousand dollars was donated to local food pantries.

The 2023 Service was sparked by the previous year's celebration and a God moment meeting between Andrew Henderson (City Church) and myself as we limped through the SSM Clinic parking lot. Like Queen of Peace the year before, City Church threw itself into planning and hosting the event, supported by a couple dozen co-sponsors. Approximately 950 people attend.

As co-organizers Becca Feldhacker (Collaboration Project), Micah Behr (Geneva Campus Church) and I looked toward 2024, we sought out a large mainline Protestant church. That search led us to Bethel Lutheran and Pastors Lauren & David Wrightsman. They enthusiastically and whole-heartedly embraced the vision behind this event and committed the resources to make it a success. The 2024

service featured a combined worship team, a call by Rev. Marcio Sierra Jr. to remember our shared allegiance first of all to God, and a joint message of praise and thanksgiving by ELCA Bishop Joy Bishop and Catholic Bishop Don Hying.

As we prepare for our 2025 gathering, we are thankfully that Our Lady Queen of Peace has once again opened their hearts and doors to host the event. Come join us on Monday evening, November 24th. We look forward to coming together to celebrate what we have in common in Christ, thank God for our many blessings, support those in need and be a witness in our community.