The Virginia Lutheran

We Are Church Together

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A Methodist Among Lutherans

Shared by Don Hawks, Interim Pastor, St. Jacob's-Trinity Lutheran Churches



I thought I had retired from pastoral ministry.

I retired from the United Methodist Church in 2016, and I certainly did not expect that nine years later I would once again be serving as pastor of two congregations—especially two Lutheran congregations.

But sometimes ministry has a way of finding you again.

Early in 2025, I was asked to provide occasional pulpit supply for St. Jacob's-Spaders Lutheran Church and Trinity Lutheran Church in Rockingham County. The congregations had been without a pastor for more than two years and had relied largely on lay speakers for Sunday worship. One need was having an ordained pastor available so they could regularly celebrate Holy Communion.

After only my second Sunday with them, I was approached about becoming their interim pastor. My first reaction was probably, "I wasn't looking for this."

But I had already begun to feel a connection with the people. They were gracious, welcoming, and eager for consistency in worship and pastoral leadership. I also realized that many months without a pastor had meant more than an empty pulpit. They had missed someone to visit the sick, sit with families in grief, bury the dead, and share in the ordinary joys and struggles of congregational life.

So, in November 2025, I became their interim pastor.

It has allowed me to return to the parts of ministry I have always loved most: preaching the Word, presiding at the sacraments, providing pastoral care, and listening to people's stories.





Several members have told me how much that presence has meant. One parishioner described my ministry as “a blessing,” especially during a year of serious illness and several deaths. She also noted that my sermons often leave people with a thought or question to ponder—and perhaps act upon—in the week ahead. Another member called my arrival “a Godsend.”

Their words have reminded me that ministry is often less about programs and more about presence.

I have also developed a new appreciation for Lutheran worship. I confess there were a few moments early on when someone needed to gently steer this Methodist pastor back to the right place in the liturgy! But I have come to love the movement and rhythm of liturgy. For me, it is more than an order of service. It is a journey of grace: God gathers us, speaks to us, feeds us at the table, and sends us back into the world.

My own journey of faith has crossed several Christian traditions. I was baptized Baptist, educated in a Presbyterian seminary, spent 30 years as a United Methodist pastor, and was influenced by the Mennonite peace witness through my work in a Mennonite counseling center and service with a Mennonite CPE program. Now I find myself enriched by the Lutheran tradition of Word and Sacrament.



John Wesley famously spoke of his heart being “strangely warmed.” Sometimes that warming comes through a familiar tradition. Sometimes it comes through a new one. And sometimes it comes through two small Lutheran congregations that open a door you never expected to walk through.



The full communion relationship between the ELCA and The United Methodist Church made this ministry possible. As one member observed, “The fact that he is not a Lutheran has not in any way diminished what he brings. We are still searching for a full-time pastor and will be lucky to find one who fits so well in our community.”

On paper, full communion is an agreement between denominations. In Rockingham County, it has become something much more tangible: congregations receiving Word and Sacrament, members receiving pastoral care, and one retired Methodist pastor receiving an unexpected gift of grace.

I thought I had retired from pastoral ministry; apparently, grace still had new possibilities to place before me—and an invitation to say yes.