

Loren Webb Interviewing Joseph Doherty
of
New Promise Lutheran Church

Faith Represented: Lutheran

Date of Interview: October 20, 2022

Participants: Loren Webb
Joseph Doherty

Webb: Welcome to the Washington County Historical Society Oral History Program. My name is Loren Webb. I am President of the Historical Society, and today I am interviewing Pastor Joe Doherty of the New Promise Lutheran Church. So to begin with, just, if you would, Pastor Joe, would you list, tell us your name, and tell us the day, month, and the year, and then also just tell us where this interview is being held.

Doherty: Okay. So the, today's date, right, so I'm Joseph Doherty, Pastor Joe Doherty. This is October 21st, Thursday, is that right?

Webb: October 20th.

Doherty: Twentieth.

Webb: October 20th.

Doherty: I am failing this interview already. And we are on the campus of Utah Tech University.

Webb: Very good. And this is, we are doing the interview in a Community Educational Channel studio. So where and when were you born?

Doherty: I was born in 1965 in Salt Lake City, St. Marks Hospital, I think—

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: The actual hospital. But, and I basically grew up in the Salt Lake area—

Webb: Okay.

Doherty. Mostly Sandy, after I was about eight years old.

Webb: Yeah, I'm familiar with the hospital. Tell us the names of your parents and any, the names of any brothers or sisters.

Doherty: Yeah. My mother is Winifred Doherty. She wouldn't like me calling her that. She preferred Freda. And my father was John Doherty. And I have two sisters and a brother. My oldest sister is Helen. I have a brother Jim who is in Oregon, and a younger sister who is now in Phoenix, Arizona. Her name is Ann.

Webb: Okay. So tell us about any highlights in your growing-up years, anything that stands out.

Doherty: You know, I kind of think I had a pretty underwhelming, I was not into sports as a kid, I really didn't bloom physically until I was probably late in high school and in college, you know, I, I had a wonderful experience growing up, once I got my license and was able to explore Utah, I really enjoyed doing that. Utah is just a great place to grow up.

Webb: It is.

Doherty: We were in Salt Lake, and so I was into skiing and hiking and cycling and so lots of, especially, summer kinds of activities is really where I, things I enjoyed doing, and basketball. I was sort of a basketball nut, grew up a Jazz fan my whole life.

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: And still remember, you probably don't want me going too far into this, but still remember when [Karl] Malone was drafted I was there, so that was a big thing. So I was kind of a basketball nut.

Webb: Okay. Um, what is the name of the elementary, the middle school, or junior high or high school that you attended, and what was the location of those schools?

Doherty: So I said we moved to Sandy when I was about eight, and so I, the school I remember most is Oakdale Elementary. I'm not even sure if that's still there. And then I went to junior high at Union Junior High, and Hillcrest High School.

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: And then when I graduated from there I did my, my college degree at the University of Utah.

Webb: University of Utah. Okay. And what was your major or minor there?

Doherty: I was a double major—psychology and philosophy.

Webb: Okay. Did you, did you attend any vocational or divinity school?

Doherty: I did, yeah. So my undergraduate was at the University of Utah, and then I went on to do my master's, which is a four-year Masters of Divinity, at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Webb: Okay. What are, what's, what are one or two things that most impressed you from this experience?

Doherty: You mean the whole kind of experience of education?

Webb: Yeah, any of the, any of the educational experience?

Doherty: I think maybe especially college and seminary experience were just sort of, how do I, so I guess realized how much I didn't know. I think part of a good college experience is you think you know the world, and you think you know a lot when you get there, and you kind of realize there is so much more, and it's so much more complicated—

Webb: Right.

Doherty: Than you ever imagined. And that was true, especially of my theology degree. I think most of us have a fairly naïve theology as kids, and we have to kind of, as we mature, grow past that. And so that, I would say, was my biggest experience.

Webb: Okay. In your social life, who did you marry, and when and where did you get married, and how did you meet, and any children?

Doherty: Yeah, I do. I have two kids. Just to back up a little bit, my wife and I met at Seminary. She's also a pastor, actually, and we are co-pastors at New Promise Lutheran.

Webb: Her name?

Doherty: Her name is Jill.

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: And we married the year that we graduated, and we started our ministry together in separate churches in New England. So we were in Connecticut for three years, and then we moved to Maine, and we served two churches up there for seven years. And this is all before we moved back to Utah. She's originally from Wisconsin, so it was a bit of a challenge to move to a desert state. That was a big—

Webb: Yeah.

Doherty: Challenge for her. But she really loves the area. She loves the church and the people.

Webb: How did you meet?

Doherty: So in Seminary, yeah.

Webb: Oh, in Seminary.

Doherty: We were friends—

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: In Seminary for the whole four years.

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: And so we just kind of grew close over the years.

Webb: How many children?

Doherty: We have two children.

Webb: Two children.

Doherty: So my oldest is Hannah. She's at the University of Utah. And my youngest is Rachel, and she is choosing to go to school out in New York.

Webb: Wow! Okay. Occupation-wise, what were some of the full-time jobs or vocations that you did before becoming pastor of the New Promise Lutheran Church.

Doherty: Yeah. So, I mean, my first job was at Albertsons. So I did that all through high school and college.

Webb: Doing what?

Doherty: You know, I kind of covered almost everything in that store. I was a bagger, I was a checker, I did freight, you know, all night, stocking shelves. And then I did produce for a while, so it was a very full experience.

Webb: Did you ever get to meet Joe Albertson?

Doherty: No, I did not. My one disappointment, although I felt we had a kinship because of our name. But—

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: No. We sang that song a lot back then, though.

Webb: I know.

Doherty: It's funny you remember that.

Webb:It was a catchy s—

Doherty: It was.

Webb:A catchy commercial.

Doherty: Yep, yep.

Webb:It's Joe Albertson's supermarket, but the produce department belongs to me.

Doherty: Exactly, exactly.

Webb:Or something like that.

Doherty. I love that you still remember that line.

Webb:I do. When you, when did you become Pastor of the New Promise Lutheran Church, and where is it located, and did it ever start at another location?

Doherty: It did. So my arrival came right about the time they were moving into their current building, which is on Valley View Drive. And we've been there since 2008.

Webb:Okay.

Doherty: That's when I arrived and when it was built. But they had met in a number of places. I think the place they moved right before moving into the building was in the Phoenix Plaza area.

Webb:Okay. And does this go back to 1995?

Doherty: Not that far back, but probably they were there for, I would say, six or seven years, maybe, and they were—

Webb:So around 2001?

Doherty: Somewhere in there, yeah. Now the previous pastor was a guy named Luther Anderson, and—

Webb:Does he predate 2001?

Doherty: He does.

Webb:Or, okay.

Doherty : He was there for probably 10 years before. So—

Webb:Oh.

Doherty: But I don't know, I'm a little fuzzy on some of that history prior to that.

Webb:Okay. So what prompted the move to your new and, newest location?

Doherty: They had been worshipping in a store front, and kind of their dream was to have a more traditional church structure, so they spent a long time planning and saving and preparing for that, and then they found a little piece of property just down the road from where they were.

Webb:Okay.

Doherty: And at that time it was fairly undeveloped there, and—

Webb:What's the address, there on Valley View?

Doherty: 244 South Valley View Drive.

Webb:Okay.

Doherty: And the people we bought the home, the property from, were the Carters. I know the son's name is, I'm going to blank on his name now that I said that, Lloyd, Lloyd Carter.

Webb:Okay.

Doherty: And he's the one we primarily dealt with. But his parents were wonderful people, very generous and gracious, great neighbors. They lived right on the corner of our property for years. And then when they both passed away, Lloyd came to us and said, "Hey, do you want to buy the house that was on the corner of the property you bought? And we said, "Yeah, let's do it." So we ended up buying the house as well, and that now is our meeting space, classroom space, storage space.

Webb:Okay.

Doherty: So it's, so.

Webb:That's awesome. So how many members of the church were there when you arrived?

Doherty: I would say, I'm just going to go by attendance and not actual membership. So, and it fluctuates. So probably in the, in the, so we're, we have quite a few snowbirds. So in the summer it dwindles down to, you know, 80 to 100.

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: And in the winter it will go up to 150, 180 at times, you know. And it, it still fluctuates. We have not fully, we're not back to those levels since the pandemic.

Webb: Since the pandemic, okay.

Doherty: So a lot of people have, are continuing to worship online. We have started to do online worship as a result of that, and that we'll probably continue to do.

Webb: So, but those are your current numbers, too, right?

Doherty: Yeah, I would say it's probably in that same area.

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: The other thing I would say is true about our church is it's fairly transitional. You know, we, most of our members are fairly new to the community. They are people who have retired and moved to St. George from different parts of the country, and over the years, you know, they, they'll spend their sort of golden years here, and then as things get, as things change in their life, maybe a family member back home that they feel that they need to get back to, or their own health that draws them back to their roots.

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: And so they'll be here for a while, and then they'll go. We see that quite a bit at this church, which is probably the most challenging part of ministry at this church for me, seeing people come and go in that, that regular fashion.

Webb: Yeah. Okay. What's the, what's the square footage of your church building, and how many people does the main assembly hall seat?

Doherty: Yeah, so it's probably about 9,000 square feet. It's two major areas. There's the worship space and the fellowship space. And there is some office space there, too, but each of those are probably about 3,000 square feet. And so the sanctuary holds, probably, at capacity, 200 people.

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: That would be jammed full. One classroom—

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: And one office, well, actually, the secretary's office and then the pastor's office. That's it.

Webb: No kitchen or special-use room?

Doherty: Oh, we do have a kitchen, yeah, we do have a kitchen, and I would say our fellowship area is the multi-purpose room.

Webb: Okay, okay.

Doherty: So we have, but one of the reasons why the house was so appealing that we bought later was because we didn't really have a lot of storage space and classroom space, so that was very handy to have it right across the parking lot.

Webb: Okay. So when and where was the Lutheran faith organized?

Doherty: So this goes back to 1520s, Martin Luther, the first Martin Luther, not Martin Luther King, but he was the, a reformer that challenged some of the practices of the Catholic Church at that time.

Webb: In Germany, correct?

Doherty: In Germany, correct, yeah.

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: So.

Webb: Ninety-five theses, that he nailed on the—

Doherty: Ninety-five theses, yeah.

Webb: On the door?

Doherty: Yeah, exactly.

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: And most of that had to do with the selling of indulgences. This was a practice at the time that Luther took exception with. And really, he didn't intend to break away and start a new church at all. His intention was to reform the church that he was in. He, Luther never really considered himself anything but Catholic. But, of course, when the Pope got hold of the 95 theses, which was, you know, there was this new invention that Luther hadn't really adjusted to, which was the printing press. And so he didn't realize that this was going to be a world-wide issue. He thought it was a local debate he was starting. And so the Pope quickly excommunicated him, or tried to squash this whole rebellion, and then finally excommunicated him. And so, you know, many

priests of Luther's day found his theology and his message appealing and began starting what they called the Lutheran Church in his name, and—

Webb: So they officially organized a Lutheran Church, right, at that time?

Doherty: Yeah, I, I, yeah, I, I—

Webb: Pretty much?

Doherty: I couldn't say how that officially began, they just began calling themselves Lutherans.

Webb: Lutherans.

Doherty: Yeah.

Webb: Okay. After his name? Luther's name.

Doherty: After Luther's name, right.

Webb: Okay. And what sacred writings does your church subscribe to?

Doherty: The sacred writings, the only sacred writings they subscribe to is the Bible.

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: The Old and New Testament. However, they do have other what they would call formative literature, which they refer to as the Book of Concord, and these are a lot of the writings that, for example, the 95 theses would be a part of that. Luther wrote the Large and Small Catechism. They are a part of that. These are just sort of essentials of faith. There are some documents in there that hold debates that when Luther was defending his theology against the Pope, he was invited to the Diet of Worms, and he was called to defend himself, and, of course, it wasn't really a defense. They wanted him to just recant, and, but Luther had prepared a whole defense for all of his positions, and his issues with the Catholic Church, and so that's a part of it, and so--

Webb: So a couple of things that—

Doherty: Uh-huh.

Webb: That bring me to a little bit further on that, what are the basic beliefs or tenets of your church?

Doherty: So the Catholic Church's core, or excuse me, the Lutheran Church's core, I would say, doctrine of faith is Grace, that we're saved by grace, not by our own works. Um, Luther is one who kind of coined that phrase, faith alone, grace alone, word alone. Um, and this was, again, in direct opposition to this notion of indulgences.

Indulgences were a way of assuring a certain amount of grace toward forgiveness and toward your own salvation, and Luther thought that was undermining the whole message of Jesus. And so that is really what started the whole thing. And everything in terms of Luther's theology and how he understood the creed, the commandments, you know, the Lord's Prayer, all of that is sort of shaped through that lens of grace.

Webb: So would you say that Martin Luther was the founder of the Protestant movement? Or one of the founders?

Doherty: One of the founders. So Calvin, and you may have talked about this a little bit with Pastor Clingan, but there were many, you know, Luther was really the first to, to openly rebel against the Pope—not intentionally, but, and that just opened the floodgates. I mean, really, the time and the circumstances of the Catholic Church, it was ripe for reformation. So there are even precursors to Martin Luther. John Hus is one that comes to mind, and he was pretty quickly executed. But the Church didn't allow those things to last long. Fortunately for Luther, I don't know how far you want to get into this, but for Luther, there was a political dynamic that Luther was in a part of Germany where the lord of that Saxon was a little bit happy to be at odds with the Pope and so protected Luther, and after the Diet of Worms he swept him away and hid him away in a castle so that he wouldn't be executed, because he liked having this famous reformer as part of his, his, lands.

Webb: Okay. So is there a preferred edition of the Bible, like the King James Version, that you use, that the Lutheran church uses, or are there various editions?

Doherty: There, I mean, so, all translations, I think, are okay, so we don't have a preferred, I mean I think, what we do, what we use in our worship service, is the NRSV.

Webb: The, which?

Doherty: New Revised Standard Version.

Webb: New Revised Standard Version.

Doherty: Yeah.

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: But there are people who use the NIV, and we're fully supportive of that, or, you know, various paraphrases of the Bible.

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: We don't tend to use the King James a lot just because the language is a little bit cumbersome; it's a little bit inaccessible for folks.

Webb: Okay. So what are your duties as pastor of the Church, and is this a part-time or a full-time position?

Doherty: This is full time for me. I'm the full-time pastor. My wife is part time. We also have another part-time pastor who's recently joined our community. Her name is Katie Langston.

Webb: Oh, okay.

Doherty: And so she's also part time. And we have different roles. My wife focuses mostly on youth and family. Katie's role is more intentional evangelism and reaching out to neighbors and friends. And I do a lot of the pastoral care and preaching. Actually, we share the preaching role. A lot of the administrative stuff falls on me—leadership, that kind of stuff.

Webb: Okay. What are the physical boundaries of your church, if any?

Doherty: Now, so in terms of parish boundaries?

Webb: Yes, like a parish or a ward or a stake in LDS terminology.

Doherty: Yeah. We have, we don't really have a specified area. We are the only ELCA Church for probably a hundred miles. The closest other one is in Vegas.

Webb: E-L-

Doherty: E-L-C-A.

Webb: What does that stand for?

Doherty: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Thank you for this. You can't, not letting me get away with my, so—

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: Yeah, so that's the denomination, the larger denomination we're part of. There are multiple Lutheran denominations, the Missouri Synod, WELS, and so—

Webb: How did that come about? So how many, how, so how many would, are those schisms or break offs, or are they part of—

Doherty: Well, sometimes, I mean that's certainly part of it, most Lutherans in America come from, you know, during the immigration era of immigration there were periods of immigration from Scandinavia, you know, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, lots of Lutherans in those areas. Then there are the Germans. And so when they came over here, they generally set up churches in their own language. And over time, as they

began to use English, they began to merge, and they sort of coalesced around different theological traditions. There's a more artistic tradition that comes out of Germany, and so they tended to gravitate to a particular denomination here. It's more a Missouri Synod, and then the ELCA was more Swedish, Scandinavian, tended to be, and so, yeah, it's, there's quite a long history there, but—

Webb: Okay. Well, what does evangelical mean, to you?

Doherty: So evangelical literally means—

Webb: Tied, yeah, tied to Lutheran.

Doherty: Yeah, right, so it means good news.

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: And so we don't necessarily, you know, evangelical, I think today in our culture has a very, connotation of conservative type of, of, Christian perspective. And we pref—we—I would like to hold on to that original meaning of it, which is that we are about sharing good news.

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: With anyone and everyone.

Webb: Do you have, are there regular amount of visitors that come to your services?

Doherty: We do have—

Webb: At each—

Doherty: A lot of visitors, yeah.

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: And I think that parallels the visitors that St. George gets in general. I think this is a—

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: Community that does a good job of drawing people in with, you know, Ironman and Huntsman games.

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: And all those things.

Webb: Are people of other faiths welcome to your congregation?

Doherty: Absolutely.

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: We have, in fact, that's one of the things I love about New Promise is it's, it's somewhat eclectic. It doesn't have just Lutherans. There are people who are part of our community who have come from Methodist or Episcopalian or, you know, a Presbyterian background.

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: And other traditions, and so—

Webb: During this time were you asked by representatives of other organizations such as clubs, other faiths, or government bodies to serve in any community capacities, and if so, can you describe those experiences.

Doherty: Yeah, so I have served on the Interfaith Council here in St. George since almost since my first or second year here—

Webb: Uh-huh.

Doherty: Is when the Interfaith Council formed, and I have been a past leader of that. I've served for a while in committees of, you know, community domestic violence kinds of coalitions and, yeah, those are the two that come to mind right away.

Webb: Okay. How and when did you become affiliated with the St. George Interfaith Council?

Doherty: Well, I think the, I think it was the Mormon Church that actually invited all the churches in the community to get together and sort of just dream about what it would, what that would look like and how it would be effective and how we would work together and what kinds of things we could collaborate on, and—

Webb: How's that worked out?

Doherty: It's worked out great. It's been fabulous.

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: It's—

Webb: Any particular experiences that you could relate while being a member of the council?

Doherty: Um, so I just, some things that I'm really proud of that that council has done, it has continued to hold an annual Crop Walk which raises money for hunger issues around the world, and especially here in our community. It has, you know, responded or rallied in times of crises. I think there was an incident some years ago, I remember, a police officer being shot, and it was just such a shock. I don't know that it was in St. George, but I think it might have been in Utah. And so, you know, we wanted to just affirm our appreciation for police officers and support the work that they do in our community, and so we put together a rally of that, for that.

Webb: Okay. But Prayer Over the City and Stations of the Cross, is that—

Doherty: Stations of the Cross is another one, Prayer Over the City, both of those are good examples and things that we've done. Another one is the prayer, what is it, the May, I think it is a prayer breakfast that we do in May.

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: And we have different speakers come, and that's another one. So, yeah, there's just a lot of ways that I think they help affirm not just the value of religion, but the value of religion or religions working together.

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: And that's what I appreciate most about that group.

Webb: Okay. Can you tell us how the New Promise Lutheran Church first came to Washington County? How did that happen? And, you know, who were the principal leaders and pastors over those years?

Doherty: Yeah, so New Promise began with a pastor who was a fairly short time, Rodger Prois. And—

Webb: How it got started.

Doherty: I'll just give you my—

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: Well, I think what happened is there were some retirees who had moved to St. George, and they were at the time worshiping at, it may have been the Baptist Church, right here, Alex Wilkie's church.

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: I don't know that it was that far back, but I, as I am told, this is all through second-hand, one of my members tells me that they were sitting at coffee one day, and

he was talking to somebody else, and he said, "I'm actually Lutheran." And the other guy said, "Well, I'm Lutheran, too." And they said, "Well, gee, I wonder if there would be more that we could maybe start our own congregation." And so they, they did some, some networking and found out that there were, indeed, quite a few Lutherans in the area that would want to be part of a Lutheran congregation. They then reached out to the, the, our larger area, it's called a Synod, and they reached out to the Bishop of the Synod and said, "What would it take to start a Lutheran Church down here?" And so that's what got the ball rolling, and I think it started sometime in 1995.

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: Around there sometime.

Webb: What, what do you see, what goals do you see for your faith in Washington County?

Doherty: Yeah, I think, you know, my goals tend to be more relational goals, process goals. I, you know, I, my goal isn't to have a, you know, a thriving, 3,000-member congregation. I'm not going to turn that away if it were to happen, but I'm more interested in just a healthy community where people can grow in their faith, can, can learn how their faith calls them to be active in the Church community, active in their broader community of St. George, how we might collaborate together with other Christians. To me, that's the more important goal of who we are as Christians.

Webb: Okay. When you look back over your life, what lessons have you learned, and what advice would you like to share with others?

Doherty: Hmm, well, that's a long list. Um, say, ask the question one more time. Sorry, you can cut that whole—

Webb: Okay.

Doherty: I want to make sure I—

Webb: So when you look back over your life--

Doherty: Yeah.

Webb: So what are some, what are some things that you would like to share with others that you've learned? Any kind of lessons or advice, or anything that stands out in your life that, or things that may be, from representing your church, you know, what are some things that you would like to share?

Doherty: Yeah. Um, so as I get older, what becomes important to me in my faith and what I think is more important in terms of what I'm trying to pass on to others is the importance of faith for today, for right here and now. I think we get, I think we make

two general mistakes when it comes to faith, and one is we think of faith as an individual matter, right? It's how do I get saved, how do I make it to Heaven? And I think the more important question is how we relate to one another. It's not so much an individual faith as it is a communal faith. It's, it, we are called to community, not to just individual faith. The other thing is that faith, I think we, we tend to think of faith as a very, in very abstract ways, right? Heaven is this abstraction of this place that we want to go when we die, and I would much rather think about heaven as something that we create and how live right here and now. How do we make our community, our family, and our, our relationships a glimpse of Heaven right here and right now.

Webb:Okay.

Doherty: I think that's what we're called to.

Webb:Okay. Is there anything else that you would like to add that I haven't asked you?

Doherty: I think you've been very thorough. I've enjoyed the conversation.

Webb:Okay. All right. Well, thank you so much for joining us today. This has been Pastor Joe Doherty from the New Promise Lutheran Church, and, again, we want to thank those of you who are listening to this broadcast, and we appreciate, again, Utah Tech University and the Community Education Channel studios for allowing us to have this interview here. Thank you so much.