

# That old time religion

Hermiston residents lead Echo hymn sings

By ERICK PETERSON  
Hermiston Herald

Not every church-goer appreciates the tide of change, according to one Hermiston resident.

Doug Fehrenbacher said there are many believers, like himself, who prefer hymns. They have been sidelined, in his expressed estimation. He is trying to bring them back to popularity with musical services at Echo Community Church on the first Sunday of every month at 5:30 p.m.

"I think a lot of older people, people who have been Christians for a long time, feel left out," he said. "The last thing an 80-year-old woman wants is to learn a new song. They like the ones they know."

He said people are allowed to sing the hymns they choose at his services from provided hymnals. Attendees are accompanied by Louise Sundvall, a fellow Hermiston resident.

"She is just absolutely outstanding," Fehrenbacher said. "Not only does she know all the songs, but she can run that keyboard so beautifully."

Sundvall said she has been playing piano for around 80 years, though she has not played hymns exclu-



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald  
Doug Fehrenbacher flips through a hymnal Feb. 9, 2022, in the living room of his Hermiston home.

sively. She started with classical music, then played for churches.

"I add my style to it," she said of church music. She described her style as "Southern gospel" with "life and pep."

Sundvall plays piano, but it is Fehrenbacher who is the worship leader. He sings and directs the service.

He said he used to hold his services at a church in Hermiston; however, his services became a problem.

"As our numbers grew and grew, it seems like we were interfering with the

other ministries," he said.

He expressed his feeling the services were unappreciated, so he took them elsewhere. The Echo church invited him, he said, and has "bent over backwards" helping put this together.

"They've been just wonderful," he said. "I can't say enough about them."

In one of his Echo Community services, attendees sing six songs. Then, they have what Fehrenbacher calls "a special." One or two people will stand up in front of the congregation and sing by themselves.

He said the special gives a person an opportunity to shine, and sometimes the singer will amaze others with their talent.

"It's a very unorganized and nondenominational," he said. "We have some Adventists. We have all the denominations, represented at one time or another."

## The importance of hymns

He called his services important because music is vital to the Christian faith.

"I feel in so many church services they use the music as a means of bringing people from their problems and off the streets to where they can focus on the spoken word," he said.

In his services, however, Fehrenbacher puts total attention on the music, he said. His services do not even have a sermon. After the hymns and the special, there is only a fellowship get-together, which is at the end of the service.

He said people have a good time with this and travel from Richland, Washington, and Walla Walla to attend.

These hymns have served him, as well as his congregation, Fehrenbacher said. He added that hymns such as "It is Well with My Soul" have helped him during dark times. He said he will continue singing hymns and giving others opportunities to sing them for as long as he can.

# Hermiston Rotary donates \$9K to help Christmas Express

By ERICK PETERSON  
Hermiston Herald

It already is beginning to look a lot like Christmas for at least one group of donors in Hermiston.

The Hermiston Rotary Club recently donated \$9,000 to help support next December's Christmas Express. Founded by the Hermiston Police Department, this annual charity drive provides food and toys to individuals in need.

Volunteers include police officers, firefighters and city employees. Donors include local organizations, individuals and companies.

According to Jason Edmiston, Hermiston police chief, Rotary "is and has been the largest monetary donor" for Christmas Express.

"If it wasn't for Rotary and a couple of other 'large' donors, we would not be able to keep putting the program on," Edmiston said. "I firmly believe our program assists the Agape House not only in December but January and likely February as well."

The chief also credited local students for donating an "incredible amount of canned food items."

Glenn Silaski, Rotary president, said his group's donation is in line with its mission and history. The club, he said, has long supported local charities.

"It's one of the biggest traditions that I got to know when I joined Rotary, when I came to town seven years ago," he said. "It's just something there's a lot of enthusiasm for."

He added that Rotarians look forward to Christmas Express and discuss it throughout the year.

"It's a Christmas tradition for us to sit down and grab that checkbook," Silaski said, and members pitch in individually to "do the things that money can do."

But money alone does not make Christmas Express happen every year. He said volunteers deserve credit for doing the "real work" of packing items and distributing them to where they are needed.

"Those are the guys who do the work," he said. "Rotary is happy to help pay some of the bills, but the real heroes are the people who join in. With all the things to do around the holiday, they put in the effort."

# Upcoming Christian gathering seeks to empower women

IF:Hermiston returns to in-person format March 4 and 5

By ERICK PETERSON  
Hermiston Herald

An annual event in Hermiston that has drawn female believers returns this year.

IF:Gathering comes back for an in-person format March 4 and 5 at New Hope Community Church, 1350 S. Highway 395, Hermis-

ton. On the first day, doors open at 5 p.m. for a 6 p.m. start. For the second day of the event, doors open at 8:30 a.m. for a 9 a.m. start.

IF:Hermiston is part of a larger national women's nondenominational event, IF:Gathering. Kimberly Rill, a volunteer for the event, explained the first IF:Gathering in 2014 had the theme, "If we follow God, then what can happen?" The following events kept this title, inviting attendees to imag-

ine the possibilities of their devotion.

According to a recent press release, the main IF:Gathering is in Dallas, Texas. Hermiston and other communities are hosting their own events that will stream the Dallas event and watch its speakers. The IF:Hermiston event also will have local speakers.

Rill said at the start, IF:Hermiston was a small gathering and has grown each year. Around 300 peo-

ple have been showing up in recent years, and they come from Hermiston, Boardman, Irrigon, Umatilla and other nearby cities.

"We draw in a big crowd," she said.

And all attendees are women.

Rill, who also is a workforce training specialist with the Port of Morrow, said she started her involvement with this event as a participant. She later became a volunteer.

"I felt like it was a really strong group of women in Hermiston," she said. "They were doing a great mission. It's a great event and something I want to see continue."

She said every year is different, but this year's overall message is that God can do good things. She added she hopes women can learn new ways of communication through their involvement in IF:Hermiston. Also, they should feel empow-

ered, Rill said.

Topics will include "living with compassion and conviction," social media use, embracing emotions and family life, she said.

The press release directs people to IF:Hermiston on Facebook for more information. In addition, women are asked to register at [www.tinyurl.com/ifhermiston2022](http://www.tinyurl.com/ifhermiston2022). After registering, further details will be provided. Email questions to [if.hermiston@gmail.com](mailto:if.hermiston@gmail.com).



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