

Easter sunrise service celebrates resurrection, tradition

By Annie McCallum | The Roanoke Times | Posted: Sunday, April 20, 2014 8:49 pm

For decades a group has gathered at Mountain View Memorial Cemetery early on Easter morning. The sunrise service, which has become an area tradition for some in Franklin County, marked its 71st year Sunday.

About 60 people filled the pavement outside the park's office with the sun rising behind them and the grassy cemetery stretched out in front. Cars lined the nearby road as families got out and walked into the lawn for the service.

"Good morning," the Rev. Bruce Huffman said as he welcomed the group. "We're so glad you came together to witness the sunrise, but also to witness the son rise."

Huffman offered the call to worship before the group was led in the hymn "Low in the Grave He Lay." Several other area pastors also participated, offering an invocation and a litany of celebration.

The Mountain View service is the work of four area churches, including Boones Mill Christian Church, which welcomed participants for breakfast following the service.

Huffman, pastor of Germantown Brick Church of the Brethren, has been participating in the early morning holiday service for 20 years.

"I just think it's a neat tradition," he said afterward, adding he thinks the tradition is what keeps people returning year after year.

He said it's an important event that should continue.

"Because it is a public service, it's a way for the church to reach out to the community," he said.

Even for those not present Sunday, the service holds special memories.

Gelene Amos, 87, said she attended many previous services, but for the past several years her health has kept her away. But she remembers the feeling the event left with her.

"I don't know how to explain. I can't put it in words," the Boones Mill Christian Church member said in a recent phone interview. "I just remember the wonderful feeling you get and the camaraderie and all the different churches that gather."

Diane Bernard, also a Boones Mill Christian Church parishioner, was at the service Sunday. In fact, she was there early handing out programs.

Bernard said she's been attending the service for 15 years. Explaining why she comes each year, Bernard gestured toward the sun climbing higher in the sky, casting a glow on those in attendance.

"Because of that," she said. "I believe every day is a gift. It's a new beginning, a new day."