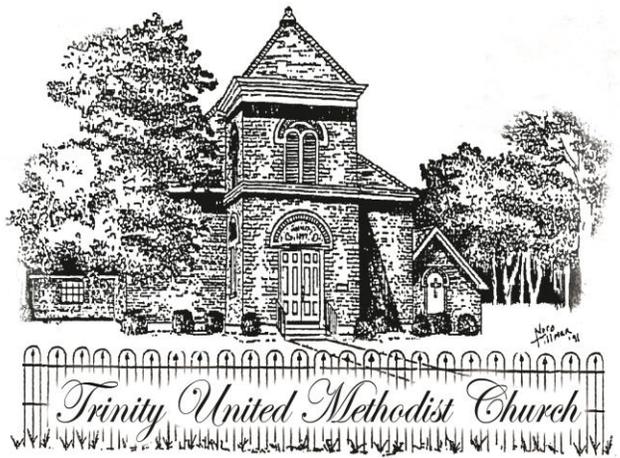




# Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter

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## Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations

*[In the coming weeks I will be discussing the Tennessee Conference's initiative called 72+U that emphasizes the importance of the local Church reaching into the community to spread the Gospel. As an introduction to that material I am reprinting some articles that I first published over two years ago.]*

The call to Discipleship is not to grow in numbers but to be fruitful. Some years ago Bishop Robert Schnase wrote a book titled *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*. Regardless of the shape that ministry takes at Trinity UMC, there are practices that are followed by healthy, fruitful congregations that Trinity should seek to emulate. These Churches practice:

1. Radical Hospitality
2. Passionate Worship
3. Intentional Faith Development
4. Risk-taking Mission and Service and
5. Extravagant Generosity

Copies of this book will be available for those members who wish to read it. Over the coming weeks I will discuss each of these practices. If there is interest, I would be happy to lead a study group looking at this book.

## Risk-Taking Mission and Service

What is meant by Risk-taking mission and service? It is mission and service that takes us outside of our comfort zones; mission and service that we've never attempted before and to people outside of our everyday community. It might include a mission trip to another country, or mission and ministry in an area of our own country that is new and strange to us. It might also mean mission and service in connection with unpopular causes, maybe even causes that we are struggling with.

Two scriptures come to mind when I think of risk-taking ministry and service. The first is the book of Jonah. Jonah did not want to minister to the people of Nineveh. He hated the people of Nineveh and would have been happy if God chose to wipe the city from the face of the earth. When told to go and preach to the

people of Nineveh, he ran in the other direction. It was only after his time in the belly of the great fish that he changed his mind and went to Nineveh. Jonah had forgotten that the ministry was God's ministry, not Jonah's.

Imagine Jonah going to his friends and neighbors seeking help with this ministry. Most likely, everyone in his community felt the same way about Nineveh as he did. "You want me to give you money so you can go help Nineveh? No way!" That is an example of risk-taking ministry. Today it might mean a mission trip to Cuba or working with immigrants in Williamson County. Risk-taking ministry can take many shapes.

Consider also Matthew 25:31-46. In this passage, Christ reminds us that the smallest act of compassion we do for someone, is done for Christ. In effect, each person we encounter offers a chance to encounter the living Christ. In helping others, we open a way for God to work in our own lives. We give God room to change us.

## **Worshipping Ignorance Rather Than God**

*In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, <sup>2</sup> the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. <sup>3</sup> Then God said, "Let there be light..." Genesis 1:1-3 NRSV*

In the early 1600s, Galileo Galilei was ordered to stop teaching the "Copernican theory." The Copernican theory had been declared heretical because it was deemed to contradict scripture. The Copernican theory stated that the Earth was not the center of the universe but rather that the sun was one of many stars in the Universe and that the Earth, along with other planets, circled the sun. No one today questions that proposition. We have sent devices and people into space and we know that the Copernican theory is correct in so far as it describes the solar system. Even Copernicus had not grasped the vastness of the universe; had not envisioned a universe filled with galaxies and other astronomical wonders. He had not envisioned a solar system that orbited a gigantic black hole at the center of the galaxy or that we were part of one galaxy in a cluster of galaxies circling one another and also an unseen center. We can look back now and marvel at the ignorance of those Church leaders who condemned people to torture and death in a misguided attempt to "protect" the bible and God from the discoveries of science. Yet, 400 years later, the same sort of attacks continue to take place.

This coming weekend is "Evolution Weekend". Evolution weekend is an offshoot of something called *The Clergy Letter Project* started ten years ago by a university science professor named Michael Zimmerman. Professor Zimmerman believes that "religion and science are compatible and [there is a need] to elevate the quality of the debate of this issue." <http://www.theclergyletterproject.org/> Over twelve thousand Pastors, Priests, Rabbis and Imams from around the world have signed a statement supporting the proposition that studying of science and faith are not antithetical. The Christian variant of the letter states, in part:

*We the undersigned, Christian clergy from many different traditions, believe that the timeless truths of the Bible and the discoveries of modern science may comfortably coexist. We believe that the theory of evolution is a foundational scientific truth, one that has stood up to rigorous scrutiny and upon which much of human knowledge and achievement rests. To reject this truth or to treat it as "one theory among others" is to deliberately embrace scientific ignorance and transmit such ignorance to our children.*

I signed the letter when it was first proposed in 2004. It has since been endorsed by the General Conference of the United Methodist Church.

This resurgence of religious opposition to science is of real concern to everyone, especially to parents of children still in elementary or high school. Tennessee, like many Southern states, has passed legislation that allows such pseudo-science as “Intelligent Design” or “Creationism” to be taught in public schools as “alternate theories.” The supposed rationale for this legislation is to allow all theories to be taught. However, the legislation’s use of the term “theory” is unrelated to a scientific understanding of a “theory.”

A scientific theory is derived by forming a hypothesis regarding physical laws based upon observation. The hypothesis is then tested by experimentation to see if it accurately predicts how those physical laws work. The results of the experimentation are observed and the hypothesis refined. The method and results of the experimentation are carefully recorded to allow others to reproduce the experiment and observe the results for themselves. Once the hypothesis has been thoroughly tested experimentally it rises to a level of a theory. A theory may still be wrong in some respects but it provides a basis for forming new hypotheses and new experiments. A theory then is not some wild conjecture totally lacking in scientific evidence, but a thoroughly observed phenomenon that has been experimentally tested and proven by hundreds, thousands or millions of scientists. Our science is based upon the work of scientists throughout the centuries patiently building upon what others learned through careful experimentation. As Sir Isaac Newton said in a letter to a colleague, “If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants.”

In contrast is the pseudo “theory” of “Creationism” or “Intelligent Design.” Rather than starting from observation of the physical world and moving forward by careful experimentation, intelligent design declares that there was a creator who created all that exists. This is a religious proposition with which I and many Christians agree. However, it **IS NOT** a proposition that can be proven by applying the scientific method. There is no experiment that can be created by human beings that will prove that God created the Universe or prove that God did not create the universe. **Belief in God as the creator of the universe is a matter of faith, not science.** There is no science of Creationism or Intelligent Design. Teaching these propositions as science not only undermines our children’s education but, in public schools, is unconstitutional as an establishment of religion.

As Christians we profess belief in the existence of a God who cannot be seen but whose existence we nevertheless experience. Science cannot prove the existence of God nor can it disprove the existence of God. Science can help us understand the complexity of the universe God created. For many scientists, the more they see of the wonders of the universe the greater their faith.

John Wesley believed that our faith beliefs must be reasonable. He proclaimed that he would as soon give up his soul as his God given power to reason. Our faith proclaims that God created the universe and that God desires us to live in the universe, sharing it with all the rest of God’s creations. We should move forward with the call to live in the Kingdom of God and live in wonder at the complexity of the universe being disclosed by modern science. For the sake of our children, speak out against the effort to teach religion as science in our schools.

## The Poverty and Justice Bible

*The Poverty & Justice Bible* is a bible that highlights each passage of scripture that deals with the issues of poverty and justice. There are more than 2000 references in scripture to poverty and justice, as opposed to four or five on such controversial subjects as homosexual acts or marriage. Yet many Christians seem to think that helping the poor is a pointless and even harmful act. As an on-going part of this newsletter, I will be providing citations to passages from the Old and New Testaments each week that deal with what scripture tells us about poverty and justice. If you are interested in learning more about *The Poverty & Justice Bible* you can check on Amazon.com or go to [www.Justicebible.org](http://www.Justicebible.org).

*... Win victories for truth  
and mercy and justice.*

...  
<sup>6</sup> *You are God, and you will rule  
forever as king.  
Your royal power  
brings about justice.*

<sup>7</sup> *You love justice and hate evil... Ps 45:4-7 CEV*

Psalm 45 is believed to be a psalm written for a royal wedding, possibly even one of King David's many weddings. Yet it highlights what was believed to be important to God. A King was to win victories not for personal gain, but for truth, mercy and justice. The King, like God, was to love justice and hate evil (injustice.)

<sup>10</sup> *God blesses those people  
who are treated badly  
for doing right.  
They belong to the kingdom  
of heaven.*

<sup>11</sup> *God will bless you when people insult you, mistreat you, and tell all kinds of evil lies about you because of me. <sup>12</sup> Be happy and excited! You will have a great reward in heaven. People did these same things to the prophets who lived long ago. Matt 5:10-12 CEV*

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus emphasizes that it will be unpopular to stand up for the Gospel and its call to give to the poor and love your neighbor. Yet the call remains the same. If we love God, we must also speak up for those things that scripture tells us are special concerns of God, even if that causes us to experience persecution.

### Prayer Ministry

The following persons have agreed to be part of the prayer ministry at Trinity UMC:

Elva Beard  
Larry Eastwood  
Leslie Eastwood

Sarah Jordan  
Mac McAfee  
Rachel Newman

Kenneth Stevens  
Patricia Stevens  
Sam Richardson

Judy Richardson  
Charles Wilson

The members of the prayer ministry of Trinity United Methodist church covenant with one another to pray daily for:

- Those concerns on the prayer list of the Church and for healing of body and spirit for all persons listed;
- For each ministry of the church that each ministry would work to bring the Gospel to those within our community and most especially to bring the Gospel to those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;
- For all the members of the Trinity UMC community that they be led and enabled to live as the Body of Christ;
- For our local community and all its needs, especially for those who are struggling with the burden of poverty;
- For our nation and our world that God help lead the people of the world to live in peace with God's Kingdom.

If you would like to be a part of this ministry (or if you have already spoken to me about it and were inadvertently left off the list) please let me know and I will see that you are added.

### **Up-Coming Sermons**

February 21<sup>st</sup>: Sermon: **God and Evolution. Science and Faith.** Note the use of the Conjunction "And." One idea does not exclude the other. My texts are John 1:1-5 and Genesis 1.

February 28<sup>th</sup>: Sermon: Things Human and Things Divine. What does it mean to focus on the divine instead of the human? My texts are Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 and Mark 8:31-38.

### **Worship Leader's Schedule**

#### **February 22**

Linda Robinson, **Liturgist**

Cherry Klein & Pat Moran, **Greeters**

Herb Haynes & Sam Richardson, **Ushers**

#### **March 1**

Marty Bauguess, **Liturgist**

Mike & Elaine Rohrig, **Greeters**

Mike & Renee Fetting, **Ushers**

### **February Birthdays**

**Donnie Hartsock, Joyce Edwards, Bert Winton, Maurice Edwards, Jeanne Rybolt, Patricia Stevens, Rodger Klein, Eric Crowell**

**Happy Birthday to each of you!**