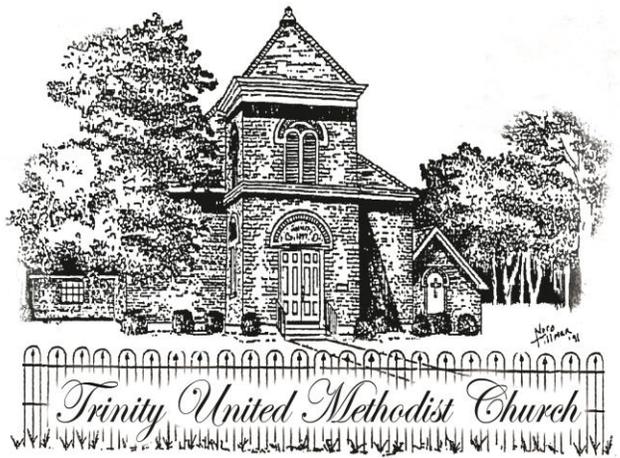




Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter

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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.

Extravagant Generosity

Let's begin with what Extravagant Generosity does not mean. It does not mean that you give everything you own to the church. It does mean that you accept that all that you have, all that we all have, is a blessing from the hand of God. Take a moment to consider Deuteronomy 8:11-18, presented here from "The Message" translation of the bible:

Make sure you don't forget God, your God, by not keeping his commandments, his rules and regulations that I command you today. Make sure that when you eat and are satisfied, build pleasant houses and settle in, see your herds and flocks flourish and more and more money come in, watch your standard of living going up and up—make sure you don't become so full of yourself and your things that you forget God, your God,

*the God who delivered you from Egyptian slavery;
the God who led you through that huge and fearsome wilderness,
those desolate, arid badlands crawling with fiery snakes and scorpions;
the God who gave you water gushing from hard rock;
the God who gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never heard of, in
order to give you a taste of the hard life, to test you so that you would be prepared to live well in the days ahead
of you.*

*If you start thinking to yourselves, “I did all this. And all by myself. I’m rich. It’s all mine!”—well, think
again. Remember that God, your God, gave you the strength to produce all this wealth so as to confirm the
covenant that he promised to your ancestors—as it is today.*

One of the principle themes of scripture, and one that may well consume more pages of scripture than any other, is the problem wealth and possessions pose for us in our relationship with God and one another. It is very easy to allow our desire for wealth and the security it represents to dominate our lives. Recognizing that all we have is a blessing from God, meant to be shared and used not just for our well-being but for the well-being of others, is an important aspect of discipleship.

In speaking with the church at Corinth (2 Cor. 8:13-15), Paul dealt with the fear some had that they were being asked to give up too much:

¹³ I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between ¹⁴ your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. ¹⁵ As it is written, “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.”

The call to extravagant generosity is a call to proportional giving: giving from our abundance in proportion to that abundance. In many ways, it is the hardest spiritual practice for us to embrace.

Freedom of Religion

Two experiences lately have me thinking about freedom of religion in this nation. The first was a conversation with a retired United Methodist Pastor at a District Ministers’ meeting. The meeting was the District Board of Ministry meeting, the committee charged with supervising licensed local pastors in our district. These persons are not ordained but serve United Methodist churches on a full or part-time basis and who receive training and on-going education for their work as pastors. During a supervisory interview I had sought clarification from a part-time licensed local pastor that, in his role as a school teacher, he was not leading his students in prayer on the school grounds. The retired United Methodist pastor, an ordained elder, was surprised that I would not approve of this teacher leading his students in organized prayer. For my part I was surprised that my colleague would consider it appropriate for this public school teacher to abuse his position as a teacher by imposing his religious views on his students.

The second experience was reading about a recent survey that indicated that a large number of American Christians would like to see Christianity established as the national religion.

The establishment clause states, *Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion...* The Fourteenth Amendment makes this clause applicable to the States. The Supreme Court has correctly

determined that any organized act by state agencies that tends to establish a religion is also prohibited. In other words, there is little difference between a law that establishes a state religion and a policy or practice of a school district requiring a morning prayer from students. In either case the authority of the State is used to impose a particular religious belief. Article 3 of the Tennessee Constitution states:

§ 3. *Freedom of worship*

That all men have a natural and indefeasible right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own conscience; that no man can of right be compelled to attend, erect, or support any place of worship, or to maintain any minister against his consent; that no human authority can, in any case whatever, control or interfere with the rights of conscience; and that no preference shall ever be given, by law, to any religious establishment or mode of worship.

The Framers of the Bill of Rights and the Tennessee Constitution were aware of the history of religious persecution in the colonies and of the experience of State sponsored religion in Europe that often led to persecution and bloodshed. They wished to insure that such problems would no longer plague our new nation.

So what would be the problem from a Christian perspective of making Christianity a national religion? The first answer to that is a question. Which Christian Tradition will be so honored? Will the beliefs of Roman Catholic or Greek or Russian Orthodox be followed? How would a member of the Church of Christ or Southern Baptist tradition feel about being compelled to offer a prayer seeking the intercession of the Blessed Virgin or one of the Saints? How would the members of our Armed Forces feel about a move to adopt the pacifism of the Quakers as our national religion? Perhaps we could adopt the Christian Dispensational (often referred to as Evangelical) view and make “the Nation Raptured” as a national goal. We could seek to leave the rest of the world “Behind.”

Of course, we would be opening people of all other religions up to persecution. It might not be as extreme as we are seeing in some foreign lands, but it would be inevitable. Once you have created a category recognized by law there are those who are ‘inside’ and those who are ‘outside.’ What happens to the Jew, the Muslim, the Hindu, the Mormon, the agnostic and the atheist? Do they become second class citizens? Can they vote? Can they hold office? Are they even allowed to work?

Putting those issues aside, history tells us that whenever the Church has joined forces with government the Church has suffered. The Christian Church in Europe is a shadow of what it once was, in no small part because of its involvement with and dependence upon government. Taxes support the Church. Moreover, as President Obama recently pointed out to much Christian outcry, the abuses of the Crusades and the inquisition relied upon the power of the State. A great irony of history is that the Crusaders, seeking to take back the holy land in the name of Christianity, slaughtered whole Christian communities in the Holy Land because those communities did not look like the Crusaders.

Christians are part of a nation of sorts. We are part of the Body of Christ. A body created by the Holy Spirit that is made up of all Christians wherever they are. It is true that the Body of Christ is far from perfect. It is, after all, made up of sinners. But, we cannot bind ourselves to another nation without raising the possibility of divided loyalties. Will we serve God or will we serve our nation?

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.

*⁵ Our God, from your sacred home
you take care of orphans
and protect widows. Ps 68:5*

In many quarters it is unpopular to assert that we should seek to help those in need. Some have even argued that we should allow the hungry and homeless, as well as their children, to starve because then they will be motivated to do something. Yet, the people of Israel understood that God held the weakest members of society in high regard. Did God provide manna for the poor? No. God blessed the nation of Israel whose members, in turn, were to share those blessings.

¹⁹ “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. Luke 16:19-21

Jesus uses the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus to bring this point home. After death, the “Rich Man” is sent to eternal torment and Lazarus to paradise. Based upon the parable, what was the Rich Man’s sin? He ignored Lazarus when it was within his power to help him.

Prayer Ministry

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

| | | | |
|-----------------|---------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Elva Beard | Sarah Jordan | Kenneth Stevens | Judy Richardson |
| Larry Eastwood | Mac McAfee | Patricia Stevens | Charles Wilson |
| Leslie Eastwood | Rachel Newman | Sam Richardson | |

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

March 1st: 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.

March 8th: 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!