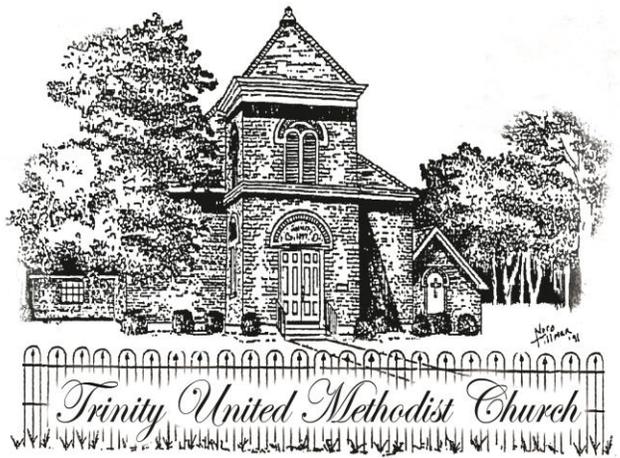




Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter

2084 Wilson Pike · Franklin, TN 37067 · 615.794.2665
Pastor Dennis Meaker: 615.794.2665 · djmeaker@gmail.com



February 4, 2015

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.

Passionate Worship

⁶ *Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Psalm 150:6.*

One of the five practices of effective congregations is passionate worship. But what is passionate worship? Does it require a praise band, an organ, a piano or no instruments at all? Should the music be loud or soft? Should we sing Gospel or Mozart? Should the pastor wear a robe, a suit or jeans? Must the congregation be quiet or vocal?

The answer to all the above questions is, "Yes." Passionate worship can take many forms. Some worship services are very structured with liturgies that have been largely unchanged for decades or centuries. A Roman Catholic Mass is an example. Some worship services are very active and spontaneous with testimonies,

shouts of “amen” or even speaking in tongues. Others, like the Quaker’s, are very contemplative. The Quakers gather quietly and wait expectantly for whatever happens. From time to time someone may be moved to stand and say a few words, to “preach.” Or they may offer a scripture or even a song. Or, the community may gather for a time and simply sit in silence. And some worship services are like our own blended services with new liturgies mixing with old, with a variety of music and other expressions of faith. However, any of the above forms may result in a worship service that never stirs the soul. Clearly it is not the form of worship that governs passionate worship.

From time to time I have the opportunity to help new pastors who are preparing for their ordination interviews with the Board of Ordained Ministry. When I ask them why we worship some will say that we do it to honor God or because it pleases God. Some even say that God desires our worship. They are startled to hear me say that God receives nothing from us and does not desire our praise. To help them understand the concept I ask them if they would receive satisfaction from the adoration of a class of nursery age children? There are a number of places in scripture where God declares that God is unimpressed with liturgy and worship. See e.g. Isaiah 58:1-11; Amos 5:21-27; Matt 25:31-46. God desires a faithful people.

Why then do we worship? As our Lay Leader Brooks Crowell reminds us every Sunday morning, we worship for our own benefit. Worship reminds us **who we are and whose we are**. We are a people called to be the Body of Christ and we belong to God. We worship the God who is good to us every day of our lives. Passionate worship affirms who we are and whose we are.

The first “act of worship” each week may be overlooked by many people. It is the simple act of gathering together for worship. We, as a people who believe in God and Jesus Christ, gather together in one place to affirm those beliefs in the sight of God and each other and the community. We are the Body of Christ and by coming together each Sunday we affirm that we understand that we are the Body of Christ and that we belong to God. Where two or more are gathered, worship can take place. While one is certainly able to contemplate the nature of God while hiking in the mountains or playing golf, worship is a corporate activity.

Our opening prayer is a form of centering prayer. We acknowledge that God is always with us and we ask God’s help in opening our minds to God’s presence and by asking God’s help in being present for God. The music that follows, and indeed all the music in the service, is chosen with care each week to compliment the scripture passages and the sermon topic. In a real sense all the music taken together is a second sermon that may speak more clearly than the spoken sermon.

The call to worship is an act of corporate worship affirming who and whose we are. Likewise, the opening hymn is chosen to affirm us as the Body of Christ that belongs to God.

The next section of the worship service is receiving the written and spoken word. Two scripture passages, usually complementary, are read. The Children’s sermon is an effort, more successful at some times than others, to relate the Gospel to the lives of our young people. If the Gospel we preach cannot be related to the everyday experience of our children then we are failing to communicate the Gospel. For that reason I make every effort to connect the Gospel with something that the young people have experienced. That becomes harder as the age range of the children increases. Still, it is hoped that week after week a connection can be built that will assist our young people in their own faith journey.

The sermon seeks to do the same thing. If the Gospel does not touch our lives as adults it is dead; meaningless; useless. When I approach a scripture text I am always asking myself, “Where is the Gospel message?” Where is the Good News? In discussing the Gospel it might be necessary to discuss cultural and

historical backgrounds, but if I allow the sermon to become a lecture I've failed. However, there is an aspect of preaching that all pastors rely upon: the presence of the Holy Spirit. Many times people will tell me that they liked a sermon. I appreciate that. Any sermon represents hours of preparation and the affirmation is appreciated. Sometimes people will describe a particular section that was meaningful. That is also appreciated. Finally there are those who tell me that what I said about subject X was just what they needed to hear. I always thank them too, even though I never said a thing about subject X. Somehow, something I said was an aid in that person hearing the Word of God that they needed that day. My assumption is that they heard the Word of God directly from the Holy Spirit.

Following the Word read and proclaimed, the congregation is given an opportunity to respond. Some of this response is structured. The Hymn of Response is already selected, as is the Apostles Creed. Likewise, the prayer of Confession is a liturgy used each week. However, the sharing of joys and concerns does provide an opportunity for the community to respond to the scriptures and sermon as well as raise other joys and concerns. And the time of private confession also encourages the members of the community to reflect upon their own discipleship journey.

The pastoral prayer offers an opportunity to lift up the concerns that are the subject of the sermon, the concerns raised by the community and on-going concerns such as the welfare of our service people. I have tried to lift up our service people every week since we first went into Afghanistan following 9/11. I fear that many people in the United States give little thought to our service people and that many forget that they are serving in dangerous places and engaging in dangerous missions because we, through our government, have sent them there. Regardless of how we might feel about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, our service people must go where they are sent. They deserve our support during and after their service and too often they do not receive that support. It is appropriate that we remember them each week and that, outside of worship, we do all in our power to support them.

The Lord's Prayer is a declaration by the community of who and whose we are, in words shaped by Christ for the Church. When I lead the prayer I tend to emphasize the pronouns of the prayer. We really are praying for **God's** will to be done on earth even though having that happen might be contrary to what we might wish socially and politically. **We** are giving thanks for God's blessings and **we** are agreeing that **we** will forgive those who sins harm us. Emphasizing the pronouns in the prayer is a way of keeping the prayer from becoming something we say with little thought.

The offering provides an opportunity to place our money where our hearts are. Matthew 6:21. Giving freely from our blessings is a concept that is established early in scripture and reinforced repeatedly. See e.g. Exodus 25:2.

As most of you have no doubt noted, I usually close the service with the same benediction:

You are the Body of Christ made so not through anything you have done but through the power of God's Spirit. Go forth, filled with the Spirit of God, and dare to be the presence of Christ in a world that so desperately needs the presence of Jesus Christ.

I close with this benediction because I believe that it is vital that each Christian understand that they are a part of one another's lives and that they have a responsibility to God's world. That is a message that I fear often gets lost in what has become American Christianity with an overriding emphasis on accepting Christ as personal savior. Acceptance of Christ is, indeed, central to our faith as can be seen from our liturgy of Baptism. But we

are also the Body of Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:27. This same sentiment can be found in the prayer used to close the liturgy of the Lord's Supper:

We give you thanks for this Holy mystery in which you have given yourself to us. Grant that we may go into the world, in the strength of your Spirit, to give ourselves for others in the name of Jesus Christ.

Worship is something we do. Passionate worship, however celebrated, means worship that expresses our belief that we are the Body of Christ and that we belong to God. Passionate worship is not dependent upon style. Passionate worship can take place during a very high, liturgical service, a camp meeting service or a service punctuated by beating drums and electric guitars. It is the gathered community that makes worship "passionate worship."

Passionate worship begins with each of us making the commitment to gather each and every week as an expression of who we are and what we believe. Passionate worship is expressed in our reading of the scripture, the singing of hymns, and our prayers. Passionate worship is expressed in our celebration of the sacraments and, ultimately, in our lives. Passionate worship does not only take place in the gathered community on Sunday morning, but can take place wherever two or more are gathered in God's name. As the Psalmist says, "6 Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!" Psalm 150:6.

Human Trafficking

The Shocking Truth Hits Close To Home

It's the fastest growing crime in the state. The average age of its victims is 13. And most of us aren't even aware it exists. It's human trafficking. And besides Atlanta and New Orleans, Nashville and Middle Tennessee hold the distinction of being one of the South's three top hubs for trafficking and sexual slavery.

On February 17th you can learn more about this hidden crime. The Franklin chapter of Soroptimist International, along with End Slavery Tennessee, is once again sponsoring a free public forum to raise awareness of human trafficking and sexual slavery in Middle Tennessee and Williamson County. Held Tuesday, February 17th at 7PM at the Franklin Campus of Fellowship Bible Church, the program "Human Trafficking: Closer Than Ever To Home" will feature Derri Smith, Executive Director and Karen Karpinski, Director of Education from End Slavery Tennessee speaking on the widespread sexual slavery trade and its deep impact on the victims and our local communities.

"It's easy to think that this problem goes on in other countries half way around the world, but what is shocking is the degree to which it is happening in our own back yards," said Cindy Sargent, President, Soroptimist of Franklin. "Doing something to stop and prevent this horrific crime here begins first with awareness and understanding of what we can do to make a difference."

It is far more profitable for a trafficker to prostitute a child than to commit other crimes, such as drug dealing because the child (unlike drugs) is reusable, and the internet allows them to reach more buyers quickly. Though they involve more legal risks for pimps, juvenile girls fetch higher prices and are far more valuable and easier to manipulate than adult women, according to the nonprofit group Freeing American Children from Exploitation and Sexual Slavery.

Close to one hundred children a month are sexually trafficked in Tennessee alone, occurring in both rural and urban counties across all socioeconomic levels.

Potential trafficking victims are often initially approached on social networking websites, such as Facebook, where pimps and traffickers gain the trust of the child by expressing sentiments of love, or the willingness to make the individual a model, singer or actor. And in a city where dreams of making it big in the entertainment industry run deep, promises of stardom are a real and effective lure.

Fellowship Franklin Campus is located at 1725 Columbia Avenue in Franklin. Doors open at 6:30PM. Donations of gas cards, fast food gift certificates, and Walmart, Target or Kmart gift cards are appreciated, and will be given to victims being helped through End Slavery Tennessee. For more information, visit SIFranklin.org.

Contact: Cindy Sargent
615-775-7364
or

Jen Cherry
615-663-6241

WHAT: “Human Trafficking: Closer Than Ever To Home”
Public Awareness Forum

WHEN: Tuesday, February 17, 2015 7PM

WHERE: Fellowship Bible Church, Franklin Campus
1725 Columbia Avenue, Franklin, TN

COST: Free

WHO: Presented by Soroptimist Franklin and End Slavery
Tennessee
SIFranklin.org
endslaverytn.org

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.

*²⁷You people of Israel, say,
“God pays no attention to us!”*

*He doesn't care if we
are treated unjustly."
But how can you say that?
²⁸Don't you know?
Haven't you heard?
The LORD is the eternal God,
Creator of the earth.
He never gets weary or tired;
his wisdom cannot be measured. Isaiah 40:27-28 CEV*

People often ask, "Where is God? Doesn't God care?" As shown in this scripture, such questions did not originate in our society. They were common 3000 years ago. Yet the message of scripture is consistent that God does care how we treat one another. We can be certain that if we ignore the needs of those around us, God takes note.

²⁷ But the rich man said, "Abraham, then please send Lazarus to my father's home. ²⁸ Let him warn my five brothers, so they won't come to this horrible place."

²⁹ Abraham answered, "Your brothers can read what Moses and the prophets wrote. They should pay attention to that."

³⁰ Then the rich man said, "No, that's not enough! If only someone from the dead would go to them, they would listen and turn to God."

³¹ So Abraham said, "If they won't pay attention to Moses and the prophets, they won't listen even to someone who comes back from the dead." Luke 16:27-31.

The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus echoes the sentiment of Isaiah. The parable reminds the listeners what they can find in the scriptures, the Law and the Prophets. **God cares.** Unlike Lazarus and his brothers, we have had the word from someone returned from the dead. Will it help us to hear the Gospel?

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

February 8th Sermon: Spreading the Gospel. Why should you share your faith and how should you go about it? My texts are Mark 1:29–39 and 1 Corinthians 9:16–23.

February 15th Sermon: Images. Scripture shares the Gospel in words, in feelings and in images. The story of the Transfiguration provides many images related to the Gospel and the Kingdom of God. My texts are 2 Kings 2:1-12 and Mark 9:2-9.

Worship Leader's Schedule

February 8

Renita Hartsock, **Liturgist**

Mike & Renee Fetting, **Greeters**

Maurice & Joyce Edwards, **Ushers**

February 15

Elaine Rohrig, **Liturgist**

Tommy & Jo Cotton, **Greeters**

Jason & Lindsey Aldred, **Ushers**

Announcements

The **Men's** group is planning a pancake breakfast on **Valentine's Day, February 14**. Breakfast will be served between the hours of **8:00 AM and 10:00 AM**. Please add this event to your "Must Attend" calendar.

Companions in Christ New Series on **John Wesley, "Revival,"** began Sunday, January 4. If you are looking to deepen your faith in 2015, join us for a video journey following the life of John Wesley and exploring the

defining characteristics of a Wesleyan Christian. Wesley's story is our story. It defines our faith and it challenges us to rediscover our spiritual passion.

The DVD features pastor Adam Hamilton guiding us through a Bible study tracing Wesley throughout England. It intends to deepen people's faith by calling them to a devout and holy life while defining what the Christian life looks like through his eyes.

February Birthdays

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

Happy Birthday to each of you!