

Newsletter

WINTER 2007

**United in Christ
Our Mission: To Serve**

The Pastoral Transition Process

Friends in Christ,

Last October I attended a one-week Interim Ministry Seminar at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and I will attend the second week of the seminar during the week of March 18. This will complete my training as an interim minister. Over the past 25 years or so interim ministry has become a specialized field, and numerous books and courses are offered for those interested in devoting themselves to it. The transition period for a church moving from one pastor to another is sometimes a difficult and anxious time, but it can also be a very creative and positive period in a church's history. To ease some of the anxiety and promote the positive, I'm going to use the opportunity of this newsletter to explain how the process works.

When a church needs to find a new pastor, its board begins by planning the transition process. The major steps in this process are (1) doing a mission study, (2) assessing the church's finances, (3) electing a Pastor Nominating Committee, and (4) deciding on a pastor and installing him or her.

We are currently doing the mission study. The United Parish's mission study committee began meeting on January 11 and plans to complete its work by the end of March. The major tasks of the committee will be to discern what God's will is for this church. It will do this by reflecting biblically and theologically on the purposes

of the church, looking carefully at our history, taking into consideration our strengths and weaknesses as a congregation, and surveying the demographics of the Bowie area to see what needs and opportunities there are. To help accomplish these tasks, the committee has recently reviewed the "Great Ends of the Church" as they are declared in the Book of Order of the PCUSA, and will we be reading together Alice Mann's *Raising the Roof: The Pastor-to-Program Size Transition*.

The mission committee is also planning to enlist the aid of the entire congregation in this project by having a series of three one-hour meetings in which interested people can participate and contribute their ideas about the mission of the church. We plan to hold these meetings during the weeks of February 25, March 4 and March 11. Each week will have a different theme, and different groups will meet at different times during each week. For example, one group may meet during Monday evenings for three weeks. Another will meet during the Wednesday night Lenten series. And a third may meet on Saturday mornings. Because each week will have a different theme, a person may decide to attend the Monday night meeting of week one, but the Saturday meetings of weeks two and three. In other words, we will be very flexible so that everyone who wants to can participate.

At the conclusion of the mission study, the committee will produce a "mission statement," a "vision statement," and a general report of its findings. The "mission

statement” will be a phrase or short sentence about what we believe the United Parish of Bowie is all about. The “vision statement” will be a list of our goals as a congregation during the next three to five years. The Parish Board must accept these statements, and then they will be presented to the entire church in a Congregational Meeting to accept, modify or reject. This should occur around Easter time.

While the mission committee is doing its work, the Parish Board will review the finances of the church and decide on the financial package that the church will be able to present to a potential candidate.

Toward the end or at the conclusion of mission study (probably by early April), the congregation will elect a Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC). The task of this group will be to select a pastor for the church who will be able to implement the ideas and goals of the mission and vision statements. To do this, the committee will complete a Church Information Form (CIF) that will be available on the Internet for all interested pastoral candidates. The candidates will also have posted their Pastor Information Forms (PIFs) that the committee will consider. Sorting through all these forms and then interviewing potential pastors and traveling to hear them speak can be a time consuming process. A reasonable amount of time to complete it would be five or six months, but, depending on circumstances, it could be much longer. When the PNC believes that it has found a pastor for the church, the entire congregation will vote to accept or reject its proposal at a Congregational Meeting.

I hope that this review of the transition process has been helpful. This is a tried and true method, and I am optimistic that by God’s grace and the full participation of the congregation we get through the process smoothly and easily. I want to conclude by reminding you that this should

be a positive and creative time in the history of the United Parish of Bowie. It will be a time to re-evaluate what we are about as a congregation under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Let’s go through it, then, as a true community, seeking as one body to discern God’s will.

Many blessings to you all in this season of Lent,

The Rev. Dr. Michael Parker



Adult Education

A class on the book of Revelation

The women’s Bible study group will sponsor a series of studies on the Revelation of John. The meetings will be once a month, beginning on Tuesday, February 20 from 7:30 to 9:15 PM. Mike Parker will teach the course using a lecture-discussion format. For those interested, the group will use an excellent short study of the Revelation written by the Princeton New Testament professor Bruce Metzger, *Unlocking the Code*. The Revelation of John is the most controversial book of the New Testament, one that has received a great deal of attention in both the popular and scholarly presses. This course will focus on the most popular themes in the book, making it fine introduction to current ideas concerning biblical prophesy.

Sunday Morning Adult Education Offerings for Spring 2007

Our current class is “Growth and Outreach,” led by Herb Sheppard and Bill Collins. This course will examine how churches grow and reach out to the surrounding community and beyond.

Types of growth include numerical, maturational, organic, and incarnational. The assigned book is *More Than Numbers: The Way Churches Grow*,” by Loren Mead.

The next class will be “The Protestant Reformation,” which will be offered from March 4 through April 1. This will be taught by Mike Parker, who taught church history for ten years abroad. The course will study the great thinkers and trends of the sixteenth century, including Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin and the Anabaptist movement. The text, for those interested, will be Justo L. Gonzalez’s *The Story of Christianity*, Volume II. This period of the Reformation is the most crucial for an understanding of the essential ideas of the Protestant movement. Don’t miss out.

Merrill Hathaway will then lead a class on “Diet, Food, and Wellness,” from April 15 through May 20. Using recent studies of diet, food and health, this class will explore the impact that changes in the food supply have had on our well being. Recommendations for improving our dietary habits will be considered. The PBS documentary, “Diet Wars,” will serve as a basis for discussion. The pros and cons of some popular diets will be assessed.

The final class, led by Mike Mehl, will be “The Story of David,” as depicted in First Samuel. It begins on May 27 and finishes on June 24. The take-off point for this course will be the end of Judges: “In those days, there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes.” The Books of Samuel I and II tell the story of how this anarchy was changed into a unified kingdom under Saul and David, trying to answer the question, “Why did God choose a shepherder to lead His people?”

Sunday April 15

Barbara Ruffin will be our guest soloist for the 11:00 AM worship service. She is the wife of The Rev. Joe Ruffin, pastor of First Community Church that church meets in our building for worship and education on Sunday afternoons.

Barbara will be accompanied by their Gospel Choir. The Gospel Choir and instrumentalists will also provide music at the beginning of our worship. Pastor Ruffin will also participate in the service.

The Wednesday Evening Lenten Series

The Lenten series this year will begin, naturally, on Ash Wednesday, February 21, and continue until March 28. Jan Barbato will be organizing the food, so please pay attention to her coming announcements and the sign-up sheets in the Narthex. Three of these six evenings will be devoted to the mission study of the church. These will provide opportunities for everyone to contribute their ideas about the direction of the church in the coming years. The other meetings will include brief talks yet to be arranged. Meals will be \$3 for adults and \$1 for children.

Men’s Fellowship Group

You’re invited to join the Men’s Fellowship group and enjoy breakfast at the Bob Evans Restaurant (located on 301 in Bowie) any first and third Tuesday of the month. We meet for fellowship at 7:45 a.m. to discuss the world events. See you there anytime.

Herb Sheppard

Important Dates

The Wednesday Evening Lenten Series begins on February 21 and continues each Wednesday through March 28, from 6:00 to 7:30 PM.

The **Maundy Thursday** service will be on April 5 at 7:30 PM.

Easter Sunday will be April 8.

Community Service Committee

The Community Service Committee continues (after fifteen years!) to provide the residents of the Safe Passage home of the Family Crisis Center with a Sunday meal every third Sunday of the month. This meal is lovingly provided by a large number of parishioners month in and month out.

We also take the donated nonperishable staples and canned goods to the Bowie Pantry. This is especially important in the summer and early fall when their stocks decline precipitously. The food basket is located next to the sign-up-sheet table in the Narthex. Bringing something every week is a tangible gift that many of our families provide.

This fall we provided seven backpacks filled with items on grade-appropriate lists for students identified for us by the Central Union Mission in Washington. We outdid ourselves on this project and made up extra packs with CUM's advice.

We have completed a similar, but even more ambitious, project every year by Thanksgiving—putting together a large bag of gifts (mostly clothing) for a greater number of children for Christmas. Judy Farrell has coordinated these projects. We've done the back-to-school project for the named students for only a couple of years, but the Christmas gifts has been a long-time commitment. Every year we get more information on each child, it seems, so that we can take their favorite colors and pastimes into account. And we have yet to hear a complaint! Ten children was possibly too ambitious, but we met all reasonable requests.

A project we have cut back on has been the Christmas food baskets. We have been taking a few names from the county's social services department plus two known to Jan Sheppard through school to provide the makings of a holiday meal. This year we just prepared two

baskets, limited to Christmas dinner items, with extra sandwich makings.

In 2005 we provided a dinner for a homeless shelter on Super Bowl Sunday. We had many slow cookers-full of chili and cornbread, salad, and dessert. We did a meal a year ago, but the committee chair did the cooking and there were other dishes available because ours was the last day. We have not been contacted this year; perhaps the shepherd's pie was not a hit?

The youth of the church have been providing Easter baskets for the children at the Family Crisis Center for quite a few years. These are usually assembled during Activity Time, in order to get children involved in our service to the community.

Christmas in April will probably be described separately, but it is probably our most popular community service-type project.

At the end of 2006 our remaining budget was divided among the national (Gulf emphasis) Habitat for Humanity, the Bowie Pantry, and the Rwanda theological school where Michael Parker taught.

We continue to seek other avenues for service, and we appreciate having such a giving congregation to work with. We welcome anyone wishing to join in the committee's tasks and we welcome suggestions from all.

Nancy Snyder, chair

The New Roof

The congregation voted on Sunday, January 28, to spend about \$20,000 from the Building Fund to replace the roof. The new roof will be installed during the week of February 4. If the weather is bad, the work may continue over into the following week.

What Does Discipline Have to Do with Lent?

Many of us have habits that consume our waking hours with activity. Much of the activity is necessary because of the lifestyles we've assumed. In addition we have a need for leisure involvements of some sort. For me to sit and play the piano is one of my indulgences. We may be so accustomed to our busy schedules that we make sure there are few silences. In some homes the television plays for hours whether or not anyone is watching the screen. If the television or radio aren't playing, we may feel disconnected with other people. Perhaps no friend sent us an e-mail today so we sit down and fire off a message or text message to someone while we're riding the Metro.

In our fast-paced society with gargantuan options for spending time and money as well as myriad enrichment activities for our children, we may suffer from overload. We can become so worn out from all of our activity that we have little or no time for talking to God in non-desperate fashion or for meditation or searching the Bible for deeper understanding.

Christians will soon begin Lent on Ash Wednesday, February 21. This period of forty days and six Sundays culminating in Easter on April 8 would be an ideal time for us to join with other Christians worldwide who will consider critical times in Jesus' life, beginning with his temptation in the wilderness and culminating in Palm Sunday and Easter. One of the ways we are called to observe

Lent is to use this time as a spiritual examination period. How can you and I become more disciplined in our obedience to Jesus Christ?

Seven disciplines are recommended in the "Historic Call to a Holy Lent." Are you and I willing to practice any or all of these seven disciplines? They are reading and meditating on the Bible, self-denial, prayer, fasting, penitence, and self-examination. Diedra Kriewald, professor at Wesley Theological Seminary, has written that the church expects these seven disciplines to be practiced in addition to our normal habits for living the Christian life. Now I am feeling very uncomfortable. Those words "self-denial" and "fasting" prick my conscience.

I do not need to purchase a new outfit for Easter, nor do I need to decorate my door with the Easter bunny. I become disheartened when I search and search to find an Easter card with a message other than "happy springtime" and pictures of something other than bunnies and flowers. I realize that Easter should be the most important and treasured celebration of the year for me if I am serious in giving the control of my life to Jesus Christ. Now I must ask myself, "What additional discipline do I need to assume in order that I might grow and become a more faithful follower of Christ?" Are you also questioning if there is some additional discipline you should attempt in order to be better prepared for the April 8 celebration of Jesus Christ's resurrection?

Shirley Klotz Bickel