

**Charge Conference  
State of the Church  
Joshua 1:1-9; Matthew 28:16-20**

St. Paul – writing to the church he helped to birth at Philippi – writes: “Every time you cross my mind, I break out in exclamation of thanks to God. Each exclamation is a trigger to prayer. I find myself praying for you with a glad heart.” (The Message)

As the duly appointed pastors of EUMC we shared similar thoughts of affirmation and affection for the church family we have been called to serve. We have prayed and worked and thought a great deal about you in the year of our Lord 2009.

On November 5<sup>th</sup> we met together to write and share our thoughts about the state of the church as requested by our District Superintendent for this Charge Conference. This report reflects our joys, concerns, and future hope for our work together in the days ahead.

As we look back over the year of 2009, we see the fruitfulness of our Christian walk and witness here at EUMC.

One of the questions asked of the pastors is -“If your church would cease to exist, would the community even notice?” We believe the answer is a resounding “Yes!” We would be missed. The evidence is as follows:

- Donated over 40 book bags to the needy school children in the ELANCO School District
- Gave over \$1,000 to local food bank
- Youth collected over 50 boxes of food during the Farm Show Parade for the Food Pantry
- Our joint Vacation Bible School program with LUMINA under the visionary leadership of Beth Keretzman
- We raised over \$2,600 for the St. Andrew’s Potato Project Ministry
- We received over \$1200.00 for the One Great Hour of Sharing offering.
- The Pastors made over 150 visits to hospitals, nursing homes and local residences, often sharing Holy Communion
- 28 of our members went on short-term mission trips
- Kitchen Ministry provides casseroles for the sick and shut-ins and luncheons
- Our Mission Commission budget is over \$100,000 to support missionaries around the world. They also planned and conducted a weekend missionary conference.
- Provide a 3-day/week preschool program for the community. We operated the program at a loss financially so our fees are reasonable for working families.
- Yearly outreach worship service to the Garden Spot Retirement Community
- Provide an active Wednesday night program for children and youth
- Provide weekly meals for youth, plus retreats and special activities
- Provide special worship services during Lent and Christmas

- Special music programs at the 10:30 AM services with the Bravura Brass
- Special music services and cantatas offered by the Praise Team at the 8:30 service
- 6 adult SS classes, averaging over 120 in weekly attendance
- Regularly provide 2 worship services, weekly
- Support local Cross-Connection Youth Ministry
- Yearly mission trips for Youth
- Good multi-media ministry team for both services
- Hard-working, dedicated Trustees who keep building and grounds in good conditions
- Good visitation committee headed by Faye Hurst
- Supported LUMINA Outreach at Thanksgiving and Christmas (baskets and gifts)
- Went to Mission Central (sponsored by UMCOR) in Mechanicsburg; gave flood buckets and volunteered for a day
- Sewing Committee that supports work at Lancaster General Hospital
- Provide playground for children in local community. The Burkhart family and others work hard to keep the grounds in good shape.
- We fulfilled our connectional ministry fund commitment in 2008 and hope to do the same in 2009.

Yes, our community would be impoverished without our ministry and mission. We have been “salt and light and leaven.”

It was once said that the state of Texas built highways and the Methodists wore them out going to church and potluck dinners. As you can see, we are a busy church. Our people are busy going to church - meetings, activities, meals, Bible studies, and worship services.

A question that was raised during our summer adult class was why we are not growing with all this we are doing for the Lord and His ministry and mission. There is lots of energy and giving that has been demonstrated in word and deed this past year. We are grateful that EUMC is a very good giving church. Many fulfill the Biblical standard of tithing. However, Jeff Shirk once told us that we have members who will write us a check before they will give us their time. We must develop members who are willing not only to write a check but invite and bring others to the doorway of the church. Both are important. Both are needed.

However, as the spiritual writer, Richard Foster, shares - “Busyness does not equal disciple making.” Sometimes these activities actually prevent us from our task of disciple-making.

As pastors of this church, we have come to believe that the one thing we need to develop is ongoing, consistent ministry contact with people outside the church, living out the words of our mission statement which proclaims that our purpose is to “join together to continue the ministry of Jesus Christ by inviting people into the life-changing presence of Jesus Christ.”

Both of the scripture lessons read tonight demonstrated a major transition in geography and were necessary for the people of God to go forward.

Joshua had to lead his people across the Jordan River to the Promised Land. They could no longer talk about or admire it from a safe distance.

The disciples had to leave Jerusalem and go into all the world. The comfort zone would no longer exist.

The temptation to remain safely in a comfort zone also comes to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. At the church house, whether for the 8:30 or 10:30 service, we tend to arrive about the same time, park in the same parking space, sit in the same place, and hang out and eat lunch with the same people. Church activities fill our little black books. We obey the command to go (and we go to church). No wonder we have no time to run shoulders with unchurched people. It is easy to stay secured in these church walls.<sup>1</sup>

However, our lessons tonight compel us to cross the Jordans and the doorways of the church to rub shoulders with the unsaved. The days of people falling across the doorway into the church are over. As we are learning, the church is more of a verb than a noun, something we do as well as a place we go.

All surveys and polls indicate a great spiritual hunger in America. Unfortunately, few are looking to the church to meet this need.

Every member of our church must see themselves as disciples of Jesus Christ. This will require us to receive training and encouragement to fulfill our calling. Some of our educational pursuits will need to be re-directed.

1 Peter 2:4-10 reminds us that we are a royal priesthood, living stones and a called out people, a holy nation. Eugene Peterson tells us that many people in the church know the Jesus truth, but not the Jesus Way. It is when the Jesus truth and the Jesus Way are united that they produce the Jesus life. This is not easy. It requires commitment and sacrifice. It is a life-long journey.

One effort that our Long-term Strategic Planning Team has made to reach unchurched or disconnected believers is to offer the ALPHA course. This has required a great deal of time and preparation from the Pastors and others. It is not a one time offering but a whole new approach to disciple making. We learned that ALPHA programs often start primarily with people from within the church. As excitement about the program grows, people take the message and invite those outside the church family. The ALPHA program offered in the fall was attended primarily by church folks and friends. We hope that when the program is offered in the spring, it will provide a springboard to reach many in our community with the Jesus Way and truth. Like any program, ALPHA will not succeed unless we invite and go to others with this life-changing opportunity. We must develop programs that provide ministry contact with people outside the walls of this church.

The church must always keep its doorway open to those outside the faith. The very reason we exist on Main Street in New Holland is that someone made the commitment to do exactly that. We must train our members to be on the job for our Lord in the office, in the factory, in the retirement community, in the classroom, in the supermarket, in the mall, at the gas pump. Imagine if we used our cell phones and Blackberries to invite someone to church.

This past year has seen a slight decline in our worship and Sunday School attendance. Some committees did not function due to a lack of willingness to assume leadership. People tell us not to worry about numbers. However, numbers count because people count. There is a whole book of the Bible called “Numbers”! Accurate arithmetic can be a sign of vitality or the lack of it.<sup>2</sup>

Yes, we are called to be faithful but we also can be successful as well. If a body is not generating, it is degenerating.

We believe EUMC has a lot to offer and that we do not lack any spiritual gift. God has blessed us with His gifts and with His grace and we need to faithfully use His gifts to reach as many as possible.

God had the vision of reaching the whole world. That is vision extraordinary! Gratefully, we are part of the great story of a people empowered by the Holy Spirit that did cross the Jordan and did move out of Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria and the end of the earth.

The youth ministry team has been showing the Nooma video series developed by Rob Bell to teach the faith in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He tells the story found in John 20:17 where Mary Magdalene wants to cling to the risen Christ. He shares with her, “Do not cling to me for I have not yet ascended to my Father.” However, he gives her the assignment to go and share the good news with his disciples. Rob Bell shared that Mary was overjoyed to meet Jesus, thinking that the good old days had returned but Jesus did not rise from the dead to bring back the good old times of yesterday. He brings the promise of the future. He propels us forward in ministry.

If Mary Magdalene had clung to Jesus, she would have not moved forward with the good news that opened the door for all the world.

Recently, the well known Christian writer, Phillip Yancey, wrote his final column for Christianity Today. In it, he shares his reflections on the evangelical movement in America and around the world. He has seen the evangelical Christian movement at her best and at her worst. He shares that many of his colleagues in the faith believe we should abandon or drop the word “evangelical”. He does not share that opinion. Yancey rightly shares that we need not abandon our name or identity - just live up to it.<sup>3</sup> Yes, we need to live up to the meaning of our name!

The word “evangelical” means “one who is excited about the gospel. So much so that we are compelled to share it and live it out.”

This is our understanding as pastors of the Word as well and we commit ourselves to do exactly that: to equip and direct our church family to do the same.

We need all your hands and hearts to help us!

Pastor Eric

Pastor Ray

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., **“The NIV Application Commentary: JOSHUA.”** Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2009, pages 98-100.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, **CONVERSATIONS: The Message Bible with its Translator,** NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO, 2007, page 191.

<sup>3</sup> **“Christianity Today,”** November, 2009, page 65, **“Just Wondering”** column.