



The Methodist Messenger

JUNE 2017

Whiteville United Methodist Church

Sunday School - 9:00 a.m.

Sunday Worship Service - 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday Communion Service - 6:30 p.m.



A SERMON SERIES ON THE CONFESSION OF FAITH

In 1968, when the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church merged to become The United Methodist Church, "[t]he Confession of Faith...was brought over intact into the Discipline" of the new denomination. Now, "[t]he Constitution of The United Methodist Church, in its Restrictive Rules..., protects both the Articles of Religion [doctrines from the Methodist Church] and the Confession of Faith [doctrines from The Evangelical United Brethren Church] as doctrinal standards that shall not be revoked, altered, or changed." (Paragraph 103, Section 2, The Book of Discipline [2016])

A sermon series, covering the Confession of Faith in its entirety, will begin June 4 and conclude in September -- God willing. During the summer, one article will be addressed each Sunday. It is hoped and prayed that this series will be Biblically-based, Christ-honoring, Spirit-driven, and church-building.

In this issue of our church newsletter, please find a copy of the Confession of Faith. You might want to keep it for future reference -- during the sermon series and beyond. (PTS)

"WE BELIEVE IN THE CHURCH!"

That was the title of a conference that took place on April 28 and 29. The conference was sponsored by the Wesleyan Covenant Association and held at Christ United Methodist Church in Memphis, TN. Attended by over 500 worldwide United Methodists, the conference challenged us to understand the Church theologically -- that is, to understand the Church through the eyes of the Christian faith.

This conference was long overdue. After all, as The United Methodist Church is experiencing many challenges, this was exactly the time to think faithfully and deeply about The United Methodist Church as a part of Christ's Church. The conference was brilliantly planned. The conference followed The Nicene Creed's declarations: "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life... We believe in the one holy catholic and apostolic Church...." That is, the conference was organized around the Holy Spirit and the four marks of the Church. The conference was well executed. The conference presentations and teaching were uniformly excellent. The conference contained worship that was faithful to the Gospel. And the conference sermons, by Bishop James Swanson (of the Mississippi Episcopal Area), offered Gospel truth and challenge to all the assembly.

THE SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH'S FOUR MARKS

Dr. Jason E. Vickers, a theology professor at Asbury Theological Seminary, taught that the Holy Spirit is behind all the Church is and does. The Nicene Creed proclaims belief in God the Holy Spirit at the beginning of its third section -- after the sections on God the Father and God the Son. Then the Church, which is named a bit later in the third section, is suggested by the creed as a visible result of the Spirit's presence and power. So, the Church does not rely on human genius. The Church is not self-originating. The Church is not self-sustaining. The Church is not self-guiding. The Church is not self-renewing. For its origin and its everyday life and its mission and its guidance and its renewal, the Church depends on the Holy Spirit -- who is "the giver of life" (The Nicene Creed) to the Church. So, the Church is not simply a social club, a political caucus, or a moral school. Essentially, the Holy Spirit leads the Church to witness to Jesus Christ, who through His death and resurrection reconciles the world to God the Father. This Gospel (Good News) has social, political, and educational implications for the Church. But those implications flow, with the Spirit's help, from the Gospel; that is, those implications do not stand alone.

Dr. Chris Ritter, the directing pastor of several United Methodist churches in Illinois, spoke about the Church's unity and its unity in Christian truth. He emphasized the Church's "covenantal unity," which requires its leaders (with the Spirit's

assistance) to speak the truth in love. Yes, of course, the Church welcomes all. However, at the same time, the Church's leaders are held to a higher doctrinal and moral standard. Leadership in the Church is about service, not entitlement.

Dr. Andrew Thompson, the senior pastor of First United Methodist Church in Springdale, AR, addressed the Church's holiness. Because God is holy, the People of God is holy. As John Wesley made clear, holiness is all about love -- sacrificial love for the genuine good of the one who is loved. According to Dr. Thompson, there are now two contrasting definitions of holiness circulating in The United Methodist Church. One encourages each person, on his or her own, to decide what is holy love. Sadly, this elevation of individual preference makes the Church's Biblical interpretation practically impossible. The other understanding of holiness relies on receiving the will of God from the Bible, assisted by Church tradition, reason, and experience. This understanding depends upon an openness, and obedience, to the Biblical witness.

Dr. William J. Abraham, the Outler professor at Perkins School of Theology (Southern Methodist University), tackled what it means for the Church to be catholic. Often, United Methodists let catholic simply mean universal, as does the footnote on "catholic" in The Apostles' Creed in The United Methodist Hymnal (p. 881). Better yet, said Dr. Abraham, is to understand catholic to mean "according to the whole." So the Church's catholic beliefs and practices are held by Christians around the world and through the ages -- in other words, "according to the whole." A crisis in a church forces that church to decide, and resolve its disagreement, "according to the whole." United Methodists in our many conferences -- General Conference, Annual Conference, and Charge Conference -- should be well acquainted with deciding "according to the whole." The Church catholic is a gift from God, a responsibility to meet, and a promise to hope for.

Rev. Carolyn Moore, the founding pastor of Mosaic Church in Evans, GA, presented on the Church being apostolic. To be an apostle is to be sent out by Jesus Christ. Because the Church is apostolic, "I do not get to decide what it means to follow our Lord," said Rev. Moore. As The Letter of Jude makes clear -- "contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3, NRSV) -- the Church is apostolic because the Church's faith is apostolic. Therefore, maintaining the Church in apostolicity (sorry about that word!) requires leaders who firmly hold to the Church's received faith. Those leaders must offer more than pastoral care and politics to their people. At times, according to Saint Paul's instruction to young Timothy, leaders must "get in there and fight for the faith." Those fights will usually "take longer and cost more" than the leaders and people of the Church would prefer.

CHURCH TEACHING OVER DISSENTING OPINION

So, insofar as the Church is Spirit-driven, the Church will be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic in real time

-- that is, through history and on the ground. Her unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity will not be perfect. She will fail. She will mess up. But the Church, because of God's gift and help, will be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, more or less.

Because the Church knows of her own imperfection and incompleteness, the Church welcomes dissent that aims to correct and purify the Church's faith and life. That is, the Church allows those who disagree with the Church's message and governance to make their best case and attempt to change the Church's message and governance. The Church treats dissenters with respect, and also expects the dissenters to abide by the Church's discipline. The Church will hear the witness of those in dissent in the appropriate conferences, set it next to established teaching and practice, debate it, discern God's word, will, and way, and decide what to do with the dissenters' proposal (approve it as a faithful development of the Church's faith and order, amend it and then approve or reject it, or reject it as contrary to the Church's faith and order).

For nearly fifty years, those who want to alter the Church's teaching on human sexuality have challenged The United Methodist Church through a persistent, dissenting witness. Since 1972, General Conferences, every four years, have welcomed this organized, vocal, well funded dissent. After considering this dissenting witness, General Conferences have consistently, without exception, voted to maintain traditional teaching on human sexuality in The United Methodist Church. Exactly that teaching remains The United Methodist Church's teaching. And not incidentally, exactly that teaching is the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church's teaching.

As noted above, a fifty-year dissent has challenged The United Methodist Church's established teaching. But this dissent has not displaced, demoted, or relativized The United Methodist Church's established teaching. That is, dissent has not reduced established Church teaching into a matter of opinions (all of which are assumed to be equally valid) for all the members of the Church. Rather, that established teaching, as stated in The Book of Discipline, remains The United Methodist Church's teaching, which is consistent with the teaching of the Church that is made possible by the Spirit's work and that is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

There is recent news about the Judicial Council's recent Decision 1431. The news is that the Judicial Council (The United Methodist Church's Supreme Court) is ruling according to church law stated in The Book of Discipline. That is, the Judicial Council is not deciding cases according to the preferred opinions of the women and men who sit on the Council. In Decision 1431, the Judicial Council ruled that the consecration of a person, who is practicing a homosexual lifestyle, to the office of bishop violates church law. In the case of Karen Oliveto, that happened last summer. So, according to the Judicial Council's ruling, she must now undergo judicial review as outlined by the Discipline and as reinforced by the Council. This rightly

protects Karen Oliveto's church-constitutional right to due process that is fair and not arbitrary. (It should also be noted that at the time Decision 1431 was released, the Judicial Council handed down other decisions, that had to do with human sexuality, that prove the Council's rulings are now being properly guided by the rule of law established by The Book of Discipline.)

A LAST WORD

So, with the presence and in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. The United Methodist Church has received Christian teaching on human sexuality (from "the faith once for all entrusted to the saints," Jude 3, NRSV). The United Methodist Church has invited dissent from this teaching for nearly fifty years. That dissent has not changed The United Methodist Church's teaching. The teaching remains. In place. And now that teaching is being upheld by the church's Judicial Council.

Church teaching remains Church teaching. Dissent remains dissent. Opinions remain opinions.

During the Memphis Conference on the Church, there was an incident that illustrates The United Methodist Church at its most faithful during this difficult time. Toward the end of one of the presentations, during the time for questions and answers, a person stood to question and challenge the presenter. This person, who dissented from the Church's teaching on human sexuality, was respected and encouraged to speak. But the points she raised were thoughtfully answered. Dinner for all soon followed. As Marsha and I were walking to our dinner table, we passed by the person who had voiced dissent. She was sitting, at table, with a couple of the Conference presenters. The three of them were involved in earnest, civil conversation about the matters at hand. That is the best way dissent is expressed in the Church, and the best way dissent is answered in the Church .

A PLEA FOR PRAYER

The United Methodist Church now awaits the report that will be formulated by the Commission on a Way Forward for the Council of Bishops, and how the special, called 2019 General Conference will respond to the proposal from the Council of Bishops. General Conference will adopt, amend and adopt, amend and reject, or reject what the Bishops propose.

Pray for the Commission on a Way Forward, for the Council of Bishops, and for the next General Conference.
In Christ,
Pastor Paul

CONGRATULATIONS 2017 GRADUATES!

Nicholas Bell (Whiteville High School)

Ashlyn Cox (East Carolina University)

Matthew Farmer (Whiteville High School)

Carly High (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill)

Kyle Hood (Appalachian State University)

UNITED METHODIST MEN

The United Methodist Men will meet in the Fellowship Hall on June 1, Thursday, at 6:30 p.m. for dinner, devotion, and a program on church security given by Sergeant Gary Turlington of the Bladen County Sheriff's Office. If possible, please call the Church Office if you plan to attend as the dinner will be catered and a head count will be needed.
- Brad Crowell, President

UNITED METHODIST WOMEN

Whiteville United Methodist Women will have their June meeting on June 5, Monday, at 6:30 p.m. in the Parlor. Florence Marlowe has the devotion, and Dixie Batten will be the hostess. Debbie Conway has the program. Please come to enjoy and participate in "A Crafty Surprise." All ladies are encouraged to attend for an evening of fellowship as well as fun and food.

North Carolina Conference UMW "Mission U" will be held at Methodist University in Fayetteville July 27-29. There are many options available for attendees. It is possible to attend a study all in one day or an afternoon plus the following morning. You can attend for the entire time if you so desire. Registration forms are due by June 15.

We will not be meeting for the months of July and August. In September we will begin the fall with a covered-dish meal on September 11, Monday, at 6:30 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall. Please consider becoming a part of this mission-minded group of ladies. - Dixie Batten, President

YOUTH FELLOWSHIP

Thank you to everyone who donated items or attended our yard sale that was held May 20, Saturday, in the Fellowship Hall. We made \$735.31 and will use the proceeds for our end-of-the-year party and summer adventure. We appreciate the support of the church through prayers and deeds! We are busily preparing for Youth Sunday, which will be during the Worship Service on Sunday, June 11, and we hope you will attend. We will not have regularly scheduled meetings during the summer season and look forward to starting up again in the fall.

- Heather LaMora

REACHING OUT

Reaching Out provides an opportunity for widowers and widows to meet, as a group, to enjoy food, fellowship, and a little education and spirituality from various speakers. June's meeting will be held on June 27, at 6:00 p.m. at Dale's Seafood in Whiteville. Rev. Jeremy Simmons, Columbus Regional Healthcare System chaplain, will be the guest speaker.



Whiteville United
Methodist Church
902 Pinckney Street
Whiteville, NC 28472

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Mission Statement of Whiteville United Methodist Church

As people of the body of Christ, we will gather for and be strengthened by Word and Sacraments, participate in loving fellowship, grow in discipleship, and serve our community and the world in Christ's name.

The Service of Worship is broadcast on WTXY 1540 AM from 10:00 a.m. until 11:00 a.m. on Sundays. Also it is available online at www.wtxy1540.com: click on "Click to Listen Live" under "United Methodist Church of Whiteville" at 10:00 a.m. to hear the complete audio of the service.

Mrs. Kathy Graham, Administrative Assistant

Mr. Layton Dowless, Custodian

Office Hours:

Monday-Thursday

9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

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Rev. Paul T. Stallsworth, Pastor