



The Methodist Messenger

JUNE 2020

Whiteville United Methodist Church

Sunday School - 9:00 a.m.

Sunday Worship Service - 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday Communion Service - 6:00 p.m.



A FINAL COLUMN

From January 1994 to June 2020, this pastor has written a monthly column for a church newsletter. This is the last of 318 editorials. (By the way, my first newsletter column was based on the ordered prayer that leads a congregation to say: "Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone." Can you imagine a similar editorial, written by yours truly, today? Yes, some things/people never change....)

WHY RETIREMENT?

On February 18, during an evening meeting in the Parlor, the Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) had understandingly heard and thoughtfully discussed the pastor's plans to retire. Almost two weeks later, at the end of the Service of Worship on March 1, the SPRC stood at the front of the sanctuary with the pastor, as he announced his retirement to the congregation.

Why did I decide to retire from pastoral ministry at the end of June 2020?

First and foremost, this decision is based on the well being of Whiteville United Methodist Church. Over the last year, I have sensed on several occasions that a change in pastors would be good for the Whiteville Church. A new pastor would bring a new perspective. A re-energized commitment. A fresh vision. An engaging voice. A new pastor will indeed bring all of these gifts and more to the congregation. That will be good, very good, for you.

Second, the decision to retire comes from my discernment of God's calling. As The United Methodist Church moves closer each day to a possible "separation" (that's the nice word, while "schism" is the unpleasant one), in which those who hold to the enduring faith of the universal Church are invited to leave, I sense a calling to write in defense of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. Unfortunately, many United Methodists today -- including Evangelical and Orthodox, Centrist/Liberal and Progressive leaders -- seem quite content with separation. I am not. So theological arguments must be proposed. And a witness must be offered. Ideally, those arguments and that witness are from one who is not pastoring a local church.

Third, the decision to retire comes from the need to spend more time with family. Driving long days and staying few nights, we have run all over the country for 43 years. It is time to slow down a bit -- at least to a jog.

Fourth, the decision to retire comes from a glance at the calendar. On March 30, this pastor turned 70. Enough said.

Marsha and I are hoping to move to the Nashville-Rocky Mount, NC area during the month of July. The Amtrak Station in Rocky Mount -- a 4-hour train ride to Union Station in Washington, DC and an 8-hour ride to Penn Station in New York City -- is an attractive feature.

WHY THE LONG PASTORATE?

In late June of 2012, the Stallworths moved to Whiteville. The landing was made a bit rocky by the former residents, at our current address, who were not much interested in surrendering the house to us. After a few nights at the Econo Lodge and the Madison House, and with a lot of help from our friends, we finally and gladly moved into the new address.

This is our eighth year in Whiteville and at the Whiteville United Methodist Church. On arrival, we had hoped for a 2-year stay and then retirement. It was not to be. The ministry and your friendship took us in, gave us energy, inspired us to reach higher, pushed us a little harder, and surprised us with some fun. And we looked up, and 8 years had passed. Eight!

The pastoral ministry here has attempted to take Word and Sacrament as its foundation. According to United Methodist doctrine, the Church is basically gathered by Word and Sacrament -- that is, around Jesus Christ speaking and being present. The Mission Statement of Whiteville United Methodist Church tries to reflect this reality. Through these 8 years, we have worked -- and often failed, to be sure -- to keep first things first. And the years have flown by.

THANK YOU

Now, I would like to offer thanks to you.

First, through the recent months of dealing with the challenge called COVID, many of you have done much to remain faithful to Christ, to Christ's Church, and to Whiteville United Methodist Church. Even as governmental directives are discouraging gatherings of 10 and more, you have done what you could to support and empower the Whiteville Church. Thank you.