



The Methodist Messenger

DECEMBER 2017



Whiteville United Methodist Church
902 Pinckney Street
Whiteville, NC 28472
910.642.3376
wumc@whitevilleumc.org

Sunday School - 9:00 a.m.
Sunday Worship Service - 10:00 a.m.
Wednesday Communion Service - 6:30 p.m.

LEARNING FROM THE LUTHERANS

The 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation was officially observed throughout World Christianity on October 31, 2017. On October 28, during the Sunday Service of Worship, Whiteville United Methodist Church celebrated this 500th Anniversary with prayers and hymns ("A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" especially!), Scripture lessons and sermon, that connect with Martin Luther and the Reformation he led. A thoughtful note from an anonymous church member/friend suggested that the Reformation Day's service and sermon were particularly heartfelt and strong. The note brought to mind what this pastor learned a long time ago: through their best witness to the Word of God, Lutherans deeply inspire and greatly strengthen Christians of all the churches.

Below, I will give some evidence.

Dr. Robert W. Jenson was a great Lutheran and ecumenical theologian. After a good, long life, a fruitful ministry, and an influential academic career, he died three months ago (on September 5th) in Princeton, NJ. During the 1980s, Dr. Jenson attended many of the New York City conferences hosted by then Lutheran Pastor Richard John Neuhaus. In those days, Dr. Jenson's nearly shoulder-length hair and full beard distinguished him from other participants. But his Christian thought most distinguished him. Here he speaks about "God is love: "'God is love' is...a slogan, and indispensable in that role. It is shorthand for the whole narrative of God's history with Israel, culminating in Christ's life, death, and resurrection, all grasped in God's saving intent. [At the Whiteville Church, we often speak of the Gospel as "the story of the world," a description coined by Dr. Jenson.]

"In theological history the sentence then became an ecumenical theological proposition.... The triune life that is God is an action of love, between Father and Son in the Spirit -- as it is of his righteousness, power, and whatever else may be true of him.

"But despite all this varied truth once evoked by 'God is love,' when I now hear the preacher proclaim the formula as if that by itself took care of my problems, or when I sometimes join the popular chant...'Where love is, there God is,' I need to make a mental reservation, 'Well, that depends...' For in wide stretches of American Christianity -- to say nothing of pop 'spirituality' -- 'love' in 'God is love' is untethered [that is, untied] from the specific story of the Lord's love affair with his people. The suggestion now is that wherever we encounter something we can call love, within whatever discourses we chance to inhabit, there God -- or 'the divine' or some similar evasion -- must be. This theology is bluntly unchristian, indeed antichristian. For it dissolves the specific God of Israel, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, into a soup of our own miscellaneous 'loves.'" (Lutheran Slogans: Use and Abuse, ALPB Books, 2011, pp. 7-8, quoted by Lutheran Forum, November 2017, p. 1)

After teaching and writing theology for decades, Dr. Jenson had a powerful impact on the faith and life of countless people. One of them was the Lutheran Ray Kibler, who wrote this about Dr. Jenson: "Though I never was in his classroom, Robert Jenson was among my most influential teachers. Particularly, he imparted to me three learnings. [1] When [the Bible] seemed...subject to variegated [various] interpretations, Jenson taught me to understand Scripture comprehensively as the Church's story and, indeed, the world's story. [2] When the Holy One seemed subject to metaphorical descriptions born of human experience [or when our understanding of God is totally determined by our human lives] Jenson taught me to believe in, and to confess, God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. [3] When North American Lutheranism seemed subject to independent self-direction, as many congregations and denominational structures took it to be their right to determine what they ought believe and do, Jenson taught me to confess the authority of the holy catholic Church in its fullness, in every time and place. For these learnings and more, I thank God for Jenson's witness and for his ability to write prodigiously, so his texts will continue to teach us over decades to come." (Forum Letter, November 2017, p. 7)

Perhaps what this United Methodist pastor is stammering to say is that some outstanding Lutherans, as demonstrated by Dr. Robert Jenson and Ray Kibler, are theologically decisive and courageous. They rely on the Holy Spirit, do their homework, get out there, and propose Christian truth -- even in disagreeable, perhaps tough, circumstances. This probably reflects their father in the Church's faith, Dr. Martin Luther, who had little or no fear of the corrupt ecclesiastical authorities of his time. Luther, it is reported (and disputed), once said: "If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the Word of God except

precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing [declaring!] Christ, however boldly I may be professing [affirming] Him." (quoted by John Stonestreet with Shane Morris, "Costly Views on 'The View:' Don't Crack under Cocktail Party Pressure," BreakPoint Daily [November 16, 2017], The Chuck Colson Center for Christian Worldview)

With very Luther taught and teaches the Lutherans; and with very the Lutherans taught and teach the rest of us in the Christian world. This has been going on for 500 years. We can hope that it goes on until Christ returns in glory. In Christ,
Pastor Paul

FOR ALL THE SAINTS

"For all the saints who went before us, who have spoken to our hearts and touched us with their fire, we praise you, O God." All Saints Day is a yearly celebration in which we remember those who have crossed the Jordan and gone to be with the Lord. It is also a time to remember that we are literally "all saints!"

Mark Hatfield, a former United States Senator, tells of touring Calcutta with Mother Teresa and visiting the so-called "House of Dying," where sick children are cared for in their last days, and the dispensary, where the poor line up by the hundreds to receive medical attention. Watching Mother Teresa minister to these people, feeding and nursing those left by others to die, Hatfield was overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of the suffering she and her co-workers face daily. "How can you bear the load without being crushed by it?" he asked. Mother Teresa replied, "My dear Senator, I am not called to be successful, I am called to be faithful."

We tend to think of people like Mother Teresa as saints. They are special because their lives reflect the very best of human behavior. As we think of them and the way that they lived, we are encouraged to be more like them. We think of them as being holy, in the sense of living special godly lives, separated from the grubbiness of usual daily living.

A lady once asked John Wesley that, supposing he were to know that he would die at 12:00 midnight tomorrow, how would he spend the intervening time. His reply: "Why madam, just as I intend to spend it now. I would preach this evening at Gloucester, and again at five tomorrow morning; after that I would ride to Tewkesbury, preach in the afternoon, and meet the societies in the evening. I would then go to Rev. Martin's house, who expects to entertain me, talk and pray with the family as usual, retire to my room at 10 o'clock, commend myself to my heavenly Father, lie down to rest, and wake up in glory."

We say, "Oh, but John Wesley had a dramatic calling from God to begin the movement that led to the establishment of the Methodist Church! We are just ordinary folks trying to follow Christ." That is all well and good, but we need to remember that you and I are saints as well. We may not live such remarkable lives like Mother Teresa and John Wesley, but we are still saints, already holy because we

are God's children. We admire the "remarkable" saints, and we use them as role models to encourage ourselves to be more faithful to our calling.

But Fred Craddock says the practical implications of consecration for you and me are more like this: "To give my life for Christ appears glorious. To pour myself out for others. . . to pay the ultimate price of martyrdom – 'I'll do it. I'm ready, Lord, to go out in a blaze of glory.' We think giving our all to the Lord is like taking a \$1,000 bill and laying it on the table-- 'Here's my life, Lord. I'm giving it all.' But the reality for most of us is that he sends us to the bank and has us cash in the \$1,000 for quarters. We go through life putting out 25 cents here and 50 cents there. Listen to the neighbor kid's troubles instead of saying, 'Get lost.' Go to a committee meeting. Give a cup of water to a shaky old man in a nursing home. Usually giving our life to Christ isn't glorious. It's done in all those little acts of love, 25 cents at a time. It would be easy to go out in a flash of glory; it's harder to live the Christian life little by little over the long haul."

– Wanda Diefes, Co-Lay Leader

NURTURE COMMITTEE

The Nurture Committee is helping to put up the Chrismon tree on Friday, December 1st, at 10:00 a.m. in preparation for the Hanging of the Greens during the Sunday morning worship service on December 3rd. Anyone that wants to come and help on December 1st is welcome!

- Debbie Conway, Chair

WORSHIP COMMITTEE

"Well done, good, and faithful servant." (Matthew 25: 23)

As my first year of serving as "Chair" of the Worship Committee comes to an end, I would like to express my thanks and appreciation for the many labors of love so many of you have given to Whiteville United Methodist Church. Your willingness to use your gifts and abilities has strengthened the ministry of this church, and you have been true examples of servant-leadership and giving—a real blessing to this congregation!

The Worship Committee met November 9, and discussed plans for the Christmas Season/December. Personally, I adore the spirit of this season—twinkly lights, the smell of fresh-cut pine, the singing of familiar Christmas carols, the nativity scene, and the reading of the Christmas story with all of its mystery and awe... Come, this is the season to worship! Sunday, December 3rd, the first of the four Sundays of Advent and also a time when we will celebrate our church's annual Hanging of the Greens service during our regular worship service at 10:00 a.m. Other special services in December include the Christmas Eve Service on December 24th and the New Year's Eve Service on December 31st. Both of these services will be at 5:00 pm in the sanctuary.

I wish all of you and your loved ones a happy, healthy, and peaceful holiday season. - Betty Gray, Chair

UNITED METHODIST WOMEN

As we think upon the Advent Season, may we each be very thankful for the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May each one of us realize the true meaning of Christmas and take the time to enjoy this true meaning.

Whiteville United Methodist Women will have their December meeting on Monday, December 4, at 6:30 p.m. in the Parlor. This will be a time when the officers for 2018 will be installed. We are blessed to have the Secretary of Harbor District, Mary Greene, install the local UMW officers for the coming year. We will also be making the final arrangements for delivery of the Christmas remembrances to our shut-ins.

Debbie Conway will have the devotion for this meeting, and Patricia Ray and Ann Pait will be the hostesses. I encourage all local officers to put forth an extra effort to attend this special meeting. We also encourage all women to join us in a night of good fellowship.

- Dixie Batten, President

OUTREACH COMMITTEE

The Outreach Committee is happy to report that we will be hosting the Wonderful Wednesday (WOW) Meal on Wednesday, December 13. Please mark your calendar to come out and enjoy some good old fellowship with each other in a way that we cannot get with meetings and other activities in the church.

We will sponsor the Angel Tree again this year during the Christmas Season. Please take a moment to choose an Angel from the tree. The star contains information about him/her and his/her likes. Please turn in unwrapped gifts to Families First, Inc. by Friday, December 16.

We will be working with Wallyce Todd and her CCPR group to assist up to 21 children, who were victims of the Hurricane, in receiving beds and bedding. Funding was received by the Columbus County Community Foundation to assist in these efforts.

Please, during this beautiful season, remember those who may be experiencing extreme loneliness, depression, and hopelessness for many reasons. Pray that they may find comfort in the love of God. Reach out to them and show that you care.

We all wish you a wonderful Christmas. May you be blessed and be a blessing to others.

- Vickie Pait, Outreach Chairperson

PARISH NURSE NOTES

The Columbus County Reimagining Health Collaborative (RHC) 2017 has now completed the first six of nine study sessions on the Church and Mental Health developed by Duke University Divinity School. The original five RHC members from WUMC and St. Mark AME Zion changed recently due to the Southeastern AME Zion Annual Conference reassignment of RHC member Rev. "Chuck" Mapson to a church in Wilson. Her replacement at the Whiteville church is Rev. James Williams from Columbia, SC. Rev. Williams expressed a strong desire to fill Rev.

Mapson's slot and was invited to join. He has already actively participated in one study group and attended the recent Opioid Public Forum at SCC with our local RHC.

The group is on target with the time-line to finish the Conversation and Program Planning Guide by the end of 2017. At the conclusion of the scripturally based study guide, a strategic plan will be developed, reviewed, and implemented in 2018. The plan will initially focus on increasing awareness and knowledge of Mental Health/Mental Illness and decreasing the stigma of Mental Illness, especially in Faith Communities.

RHC will also lead in a community Service of Lights on Tuesday, December 5, at 6:00 p.m. at the Arts Council Building. The purpose of the service is to offer hope and comfort through prayer and reflection to those who have suffered a loss of any kind in the past and may find themselves seeking a way to get through challenging emotions, especially in the bleakness of winter and during Christmastide. The public is invited to attend.

The annual WUMC Flu Clinic was held on October 9. We are grateful to Columbus County Health Department staff who helped make the morning successful. Forty-four people were immunized during the clinic.

The Lunch and Learn program, held on November 20th, was provided by McCoy Creech, who spoke about her professional journey as a social worker. She will receive her Master's Degree in Social work from East Carolina University in May and is currently completing an internship at Donayre Cancer Center. She has just started a Support Group at WUMC for persons impacted by cancer either personally or through a loved one, spouse or friend and welcomes interested individuals to participate. The Support Group meets the third Thursday in the Worthington Bible Class from 4:00 to 5:00 p.m. and is open to the entire community.

Food for thought: Since the last Church Council meeting on September 18, transportation assistance was provided to at least 7 members of WUMC for medical, dental and other treatment reasons, Rx pick-ups, health education, exercise, grocery shopping, worship, etc. Twelve different individuals provided transportation at least one time for more than 45 trips to parts of Whiteville, Wilmington, Lumberton, and Durham/Duke Medical Center. We thank God for the privilege of serving our church family in such a special way. If you are interested in participating in transportation assistance, please call Pat Ray at 642-4813.

- Patricia Ray, Parish Nurse

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. - I Corinthians 12:12 – 13



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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. - 12:00 noon and 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

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Rev. Paul T. Stallsworth, Pastor