

We Are The Church Together  
Acts 11:19-21, 27-30  
November 8, 2009

I have been doing Church Conferences for 22 years. Over all those years I have never had one occur on a Sunday morning. Given the business that has to happen, it might seem odd to combine a Worship Service and the Church Conference.

Now that I have planned this morning's service, I realize there is a benefit for bringing the two together. As I shared in the Children's Message the purpose of the Church Conference is "to review and evaluate the total mission and ministry of the church." Since all we do is for the glory of God, what better time than worship to lift up the ministry of the church.

The other natural consequence of having your Church Conference during worship is a greater number of your members will be in attendance. Coming out on a weeknight or a Sunday afternoon for a church meeting is not high on most people's priority list.

I would admit that church conferences tend to be on the serious side (can we say dull). A good part of the blame for a boring conference is on the pastor. Personally I try to make the conference exciting, maybe even entertaining. Ask any superintendent that I have had about my church conferences, and they would tell you they are unique.

Last year I used the metaphor of dancing to describe our relationship with God. That dance can take us as individuals, and as a church to unique, maybe challenging, but often-wonderful experiences. To help set the mood I had a Disco Ball in motion during the report.

How about this year? How can we creatively celebrate what we did last year? What can we do to look at future goals that will motivate us? How can we do all this as an act of worship?

When I received the Church Conference material from the District Office there was a note from the Superintendent. In that note, Duane mentioned that for a non-worship church conference he would lead the devotion time. The theme of the devotion would be "We Are The Church Together".

I had no idea what direction Duane was planning to go with that title. I thought to myself; if that's the theme Duane wanted to set, why not use it as a sermon title.

### **“We Are The Church Together”**

One of the things we did last year was adopt a new vision statement. You recited that statement in the Call to Worship. “We strive to be a church home that reflects the diversity of our community, that gathers to praise God and scatters to serve others”.

When I think about the phrase “we are the church together”, it brings to mind the word inclusive. The “we” stands for everyone. All are invited to come together and be the church.

Our Scripture Lesson this morning might have sounded familiar to you. The passage from Acts was the same text I used on September 13<sup>th</sup>. I'll tell you why I like these verses.

The early church was homogeneous. All the members were Jews that decided to follow the way of Jesus Christ. Slowly however the message got out to the Gentiles, the non-Jews. The first place a truly integrated church was formed was Antioch. That's what is going on in our lesson. Other believers went to Antioch and proclaimed the message to the Gentiles. The Lord's power was with them and a great number of people, such as the Gentiles, believed and turned to the Lord.

We live in a diverse area. Whether it is ethnicity or education or income, there are many groups living near our church. Go to most churches however you will find a homogeneous body. Our vision is to be a diverse church home.

I am happy to say we do have diversity in our church. If you look at who is involved in leading worship, who holds leadership positions, you will find racial diversity. I believe we are a model of being the “church together”.

One of my goals for this coming year is to market our church. We need to let the community know who we are and what we are all about.

We have these post cards that have been printed. I am going to ask Mike to distribute one to every person here. If there is someone you can give it to, go ahead and share the card with them. If you say you can't think of any one, put in on your frig with a magnet. If you see someone move into your neighborhood, take the card and give it to your new neighbor.

Community! This is the word on the front of the post card. One way a community is formed is by folks being together in relaxed settings. Whether it's our monthly meals after the service, or the Young at Heart Group, there are times when we come together for food and fellowship.

Just this past week the ladies of the Friendly Circle met. Ann Farrington led a discussion on aprons. Many of the members brought in an apron to share with the group. After the meeting I was talking with Connie Kenty. I told Connie I could never recall a dinner I've attended where the hostess wore an apron.

Do folks still wear aprons? Are they becoming a thing of the past?

What is scary for us is that the same question about the apron has been asked about the church.

When I think about aprons I think about TV shows from the 50's and 60's. There is June Cleaver wearing an apron over her dress to do her daily housework.

If you look at the membership numbers for the main line churches (which includes United Methodist), you will see the peak was the late 50's and early 60's. Ever since then there has been a slow, steady decline.

This decline has led some to ask the question: is going to church, belonging to a church outdated?

I do not believe it is! There is something in us that wants to belong. I believe humans have a desire to connect with others. Though we can find this contact in a club or on a computer social network, the church offers community plus a whole lot more.

Some have wondered what would draw a young person, or a young family to a church filled with mature adults. I believe it is the warmth and wisdom

our members have that makes this an appealing option for anybody looking for a church home.

Speaking of our church home, there are two activities that are listed in our vision statement. I would like to look at what we did in these two areas this past year.

“Worship & Mission/Praising and Serving”

We have been blessed to have Rodger Phillips our Music Director/Organist. Last year we celebrated Rodger’s 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with us.

To help bring variety to our worship service Rodger made it possible for us to enjoy a Praise Band from the Livonia Newberg United Methodist Church, Fifth Season ~ a Female Choral Group, and Soul’s Harbor out of Saline. We also had the occasional visit by Bennye Waldon and the ongoing ministry of our dedicated choir.

Music is important in a worship service. Besides music there is also the preaching. Sometimes the two even come together! Do you remember my sermon series based on the Tim McGraw song “*Live Like You Were Dying*”?

What were we going to try to do?

Speak sweeter

Love deeper

Ask forgiveness

Embrace eternity

Truly we have praised God this past year. To help enhance our worship we are raising funds to purchase a flat screen TV for our sanctuary. With visual capability we will be able to do so much more to present the word. My goal is to have it up and running by Christmas.

When it comes to outreach, I would say this past year has been a banner year. If I have several volunteers I will show you what I mean. I have two banners that have been used this past year.

The first banner was used to advertise the documentary ~ “Pray The Devil Back To Hell”.

For one weekend in September over 70 people came to our church to watch this movie about peace coming to Liberia. The courageous women that pressured the president and warlords to negotiate for peace inspired those who watched the movie.

The United Methodist Union underwrote the cost for the weekend. The money raised from tickets sales and other donations came to about \$1,000. \$500 has already been sent to Monrovia First United Methodist Church and their micro loan program. The remaining money will go to the Bishop Judith Craig's Children's Home & School in Liberia.

The second banner has the word "Hungry" on it. Hungry is the name of a ministry that began in September. On the first Tuesday of the month lunch is served for free to students of Groves and Seaholm High Schools. This ministry is a joint effort between Birmingham First United Methodist Church and us.

Besides these programs we also had a successful Alternative Christmas Fair last December. We continue to donate food to Baldwin, an outreach ministry to the poor in Pontiac.

Out of our abundance we have been able to help those in need. This is similar to what the Antioch Church did. When they learned of the drought, they pooled what they had and sent it to those hurting in Judea.

I believe we did some great thing this past year. I believe there is a positive, optimistic spirit within our church. Financially our backs are up against the wall. With your continued support and this wisdom of our leader, we will be able to weather this storm. As we move forward we will be looking for ways to better our worship, to maximize our mission and to effectively and efficiently be the church.

If we are going to have a bright future it will take all of us working together. It's not just me! I am the church, but you are the church, we are the church together. Together let's become the church God wants us to be!