



THE BETHEL BREEZE

Bethel United
Methodist Church

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What Is the Future of Our Church As We Know It?

One of the topics that comes up often when the members of the Bethel congregation meet concerns the lack of viable growth in our membership. This is a topic of great interest and apprehension not only at Bethel, but at most United Methodist and Protestant churches throughout the United States. All main denominations have experienced a downturn in church population over the past several decades. What is the reason, or reasons, for this?

Below is recent article that appeared in *The Christian Post*, a world-wide Christian newspaper. It perhaps gives us some insight in answering that question..

United Methodist Church Continues to Decline in America, But Gains in Africa

By Michael Gryboski, *Christian Post* Reporter

The United Methodist Church has continued to decline in the United States of America, according to reports released by all but four of the denomination's 59 conferences. According to the reports, in 2011 the UMC suffered a decline of nearly 72,000 members, with 18 conferences reporting membership losses of 2 percent or more. Mark Tooley, president of the Institute on Religion & Democracy and a practicing Methodist, told *The Christian Post* that he did not feel confident in the survival of the UMC in America.

"Methodism in the U.S. has lost membership every year since 1964. It has lost over 4.5 million members. There is nothing in its U.S. policies that can or will reverse the decline in the near future," said Tooley. "My own local church is a very typical U.S. United Methodist congregation. It is selling its Sunday school building for lack of people and finances."

While the reports paint a bleak picture for American Methodism, the reported numbers did show the United Methodist Church growing, especially in Africa and the Philippines. According to the United Methodist News Service, during the past year the Burundi and East African conferences of the UMC gained over 68,000 members. Tooley believed that the growth of United Methodism abroad, especially in Africa, would come to influence the theology of the American UMC.

"The African churches now have over 4.2 million members and have been growing at over 200,000 members a year. They have the same evangelistic spark that made Methodism America's biggest and fastest growing church in 19th century America," said Tooley. "I think there will be a turn around when the African influence begins to reshape the now U.S. based seminaries and church agencies."

Paul Brunstetter, director of New Church Development for the Kentucky Conference, told CP that part of the reason for their success is the focus on church planting.

"We are placing value on starting new churches and faith communities, as we believe this is the most effective way to reach the un-churched for Jesus Christ," said Brunstetter. "These past four years we have started 15 new churches that reach into all kinds of demographics and ethnic cultures."

Regarding why the United Methodist Church in America is declining, Brunstetter said that he believes the UMC "has lost some of its evangelistic zeal. The heart of Methodism is having a vital heart relationship with God through Jesus Christ which effects a love for people and concern for unjust conditions," said Brunstetter. "While the Methodist church embraces all kinds of churches at different points along the spectrum, I believe the future of our church is our embrace of that sound theology that got us started, one that I am unapologetic for."



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**Sunday School
at 10:00 a.m.**

**Sunday Worship
at 11:00 a.m.**

**Fellowship Dinner
4th Sunday of the
month following the
worship service**

ALL ARE WELCOME!

*The Word(s) on the Street—
“Mathematical Malaise”***White Oak Church
Plans Special Events for
This Year**

After enjoying their year of special events to celebrate their 120th anniversary, the White Oak congregation has decided to hold a Ladies Aid meeting in May, a Community Picnic in July and a Cookout for the men in September.

More information will be coming soon about the exact dates for these events.

I	Preferably
Do	Community
Not	Building
Want	Belongs
Other	Within
People	Jesus’
Fearing	Work
Isolated	For
Insulated	Us
Alienation	!

Recently I find myself counting the increasing minutes of daylight as we distance ourselves from the winter solstice. Ascending and descending, increasing and decreasing numbers have been on my mind.

Inches of snowfall, minus degrees of temperature are included in my mathematical malaise.

Pastor Jerry

Fall Happenings at Bethel Church

As always, the Bethel Church quilters came through with their usual abundance of quilts to be sent to the Refuge and lap robes to be distributed to local nursing homes.

In all, there were 11 quilts and 6 lap robes, all beautifully put together into attractive, colorful coverlets. There is no doubt that those receiving these warm, comforting gifts will enjoy them.



Allison Mae with Pastor Jerry

Earlier this past year we advertised for an administrative assistant with some special skills. In addition to being computer savvy, we needed someone who could help with our new sanctuary technology so we would be able to project video clips from the internet.

Low and behold, we found the perfect person in Melissa Singh! She takes care of our web site, our Facebook page and assists Pastor Jerry with videos along with producing the

Sunday bulletin, forms for conference and whatever else may be needed. And she does all this with a big smile and an always friendly disposition.

We are so pleased to welcome Melissa and thank her for all she does to keep Bethel Church running smoothly!

We also welcomed Cheyenne and Christopher Harger as new members on Sunday, November 3rd.

Allison Mae Hummer was baptized on Sunday, November 10 amid the admiring glances of her family and the congregation of Bethel Church.

Her older brother, Noah, seemed very happy with his little sister and we all loved his enthusiasm!

We welcome Allison Mae into our church family and hope to see her often along with her big brother!



Allison Mae with her happy family

**Approximate Distribution of U.S. Protestant and
Other Christian Churches by Size Based on NCS Study**
(excluding Catholic/Orthodox)

ATTENDANCE	# OF CHURCHES	WEEKLY WORSHIPERS	PERCENT
7-99	177,000	9 million	59%
100-499	105,000	25 million	35%
500-999	12,000	9 million	4%
1,000-1,999	6,000	8 million	2%
2,000-9,999	1,170	4 million	.4%
10,000-plus	40	.7 million	.01%
TOTALS	approx. 300,000	approx. 56 million	100%

On the chart above prepared by New Church Specialties, it is quite easy to see where our church fits. It is also easy to see that our church is included in the largest category, that of churches with attendance of 7-99 members at weekly worship services.

Small country churches such as we see sprinkled throughout western Pennsylvania are for the most part churches that, like ours, were once the heart of small communities in the days when it was difficult for people to travel very far to attend church and/or social functions.

Older folks remember the days of the one or two room schools which, like the churches, could not be located very far from the people they served. These schools have been absorbed in mergers which have led to large school districts. In the case of the churches, this has rarely happened so we have many small, struggling congregations.

We at Bethel have tried and tried to think of ways to attract new members to our small member church with not a great amount of success. What we perhaps need to realize is that it may not be completely a lack of trying on our part but the fact that there are many things which are working against us.

Modern families with both parents working must spend weekends catching up on chores. Sporting events for kids are often scheduled for Sunday mornings. The population of our area has decreased greatly over the years. We have many older, retired people living in our area who do not have children to attend Sunday school and youth group.

Those are all facts which must be considered, but we may also want to think about what Paul Brunstetter said in the article on the front page of the newsletter. Have we lost our evangelistic zeal? It's something to think about.

Faith Sharing Seminar

A seminar, *Faith Sharing Made Simple*, will be presented at Cranberry UMC, Rt.322, Cranberry, PA on March 8 from 9:30 a.m.—2:00 p.m.

Rev. Seth McPherson will speak on “Sharing Faith with the Lost Generations.”

Rev. Roy Gearhart’s topic will be “Sharing Faith with

the De-Churched.”

Paul Morelli will present “Sharing Faith with Those Who Have Never Believed.”

To register, or for more information, call Rev. Calvin Cook at 814-354-2305 or send an email to FertigsUM@venustel.com

Be ready to share the good news of Jesus!



Bethel United
Methodist Church

BETHEL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Pastor*

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Sunday Worship

11:00 a.m.

ALL ARE WELCOME!



The Soup Bowl

Mondays: February 24, March 3, 10, 17
Soup Dinner at 5:15 p.m. Bible Study at 6:00 p.m.



Pastor Jerry will conduct a four-session Bible study, **“Discovering a Spirituality That Fits You,”** inspired by Richard Rohr’s book, “Falling Upward,” on the four Mondays listed above. The event will be held in Bethel Church’s fellowship hall and is open to members of Bethel and White Oak, relatives, neighbors and friends, in short, anyone who would like to come.

The evening will start off with a hot bowl of soup created by Kitty Fiely to warm us up on a chilly winter evening. At about 6:00 p.m. when we’re all filled with a delicious meal, the Bible study will begin.

In Pastor Jerry’s words, this “food for thought” series will offer four random studies that will enable us to develop a spirituality that can take us into the rest of our lives.

Session One- “Fireplaces and Firestorms” (Feb. 24)

Authentic God experiences always burn us yet they will not destroy us. These “meetings” reshape us and propel us into new insights and behavior. (Exodus 3:2-3)

Session Two- “House Cleaning” (Mar. 2)

Divine love is transformative. Salvation is not sin perfectly avoided, as some would have us think. (Luke 11:24-26)

Session Three- “Transferring Our Love of the Raft to the Shore Where It Has Taken Us” (Mar. 10)

Living the Eight Beatitudes (Matthew 5:43-48) is actually better than following the Ten Commandments.

Session Four- “Only Two or Three Are Needed” (Mar. 17)

Spiritual journeys often begin when we are at our lowest and in our most need. (Matthew 18:20; 20:1-16)

All you need to bring each evening is a good appetite and a Bible. Everything else will be provided. Feel free, however, to invite and bring along friends and neighbors. There will be enough “food” for all. See you on Monday!