



FIRST

VISIONS

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THE PASTOR PONDERS



"CHURCH MEMBERSHIP - WHY?"

A recent article in the national edition of the United Methodist Review caught my eye. Its headline read, "Church Membership Down, Constituency Up." The article went on to detail that the number of persons on the membership rolls of United Methodist Churches continues a slow but steady decline, but the number of "constituents" continues to rise. This is not only a United Methodist phenomenon; a similar trend is evident in virtually all traditional churches.

What is a church "constituent?" Three decades ago, when I first became a minister, that term didn't even register on my pastoral radar screen. But it's one that, with time, has gradually increased in numeric significance. A constituent is a semi-permanent visitor to a congregation - someone who attends, participates, perhaps even contributes time, talent, and/or treasure. And constituents expect to be treated just as if they were members: They require pastoral care, ministry programs to suit their needs, child care, Christian education, etc. In many outward ways, constituents are indistinguishable from members. Except - they don't "bother" to formally join that congregation.

The rise of "constituents" in churches parallels the rise in "living together without benefit of marriage" among couples in our society. The core issue is commitment. When you live together without formally being married, you can walk away at any time without significant consequences. And when you are a church constituent rather than a member, you have no formal ties to that church. If you show up one morning and an usher frowns at you, you're gone. As a pastor I've learned the hard way a dozen times over: In the long run I'd best not count on constituents.

To some of you I may be representing a "dinosaur" point of view,

but I still strongly endorse the concept of church membership. And I would support that viewpoint with the Holy Word of God, specifically I Corinthians 12:12 through 27. In this passage the apostle Paul carefully explains both the meaning and purpose of church membership. I commend it to your reading and meditation.

For those who have "deep roots" in a church elsewhere and would feel disloyal ever transferring from that church to another, or for those who are unsure whether or not you will be permanently in Los Alamos, the United Methodist church offers options. I can receive you here as an "affiliate" member while you retain your primary church membership in a United Methodist congregation elsewhere. For those whose denominational background is not United Methodist, but who prefer this particular congregation while in Los Alamos, "associate" membership at LA-FUMC allows you to be committed to this congregation, but retain your primary membership in that other portion of the Body of Christ.

LA-FUMC includes the largest cadre of "constituents" in relation to its membership size of any church I've ever served. If you're in that category I believe you need to prayerfully consider changing your status. Yes, Jesus loves you and so do I, but it's high time to make a sincere commitment to the congregation that currently sustains you.

Dave Ring

WANTED!

**SOMEONE AT FUMC
WHO WANTS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE
IN THE LIFE OF A CHILD!**

**SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS AND
ASSISTANTS NEEDED NOW!**

Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.

(Proverbs 22:6)

Sunday School is a vital part of our children's Christian journey. Its purpose is to lay strong Christian foundations and give our children the insight and the strength they will need as adults when deciding which direction in life they will take. We owe it to our children to prepare them spiritually.

Teachers and assistants are needed for the summer months to relieve our faithful workers who have taught all school year. You don't have to volunteer for every Sunday in the summer, but any times you could be available will help. Please look at your calendars and give us a call!

Teachers and assistants are also needed for next Fall to help our programs grow. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could look around this Church during the Sunday School hour and see our classrooms overflowing with children? They need you!

Sunday School teachers and assistants do make a difference in the lives of children. Please prayerfully consider this opportunity for service and call Geniece Courtright at 662-9216 or 662-5430 to volunteer.



BELIZE--A PERSONAL VIEW

When I learned that I was selected to go to Belize I did a little investigation. I read *Banana* by Dan Koeppe to learn that the US Govt involvement in Central America has been disgraceful pretty much from the beginning of the industrialization of agriculture, resulting in certainly hundreds of thousands of deaths of innocent people and perhaps millions, in order to assure cheap labor. So perhaps I began my trip as a penitent, hoping in some small way to make amends.

Some facts about Belize. It is about the size of El Salvador 23,000 sq. km. but 22 times less people, and 34% more wealthy on a per capita basis. Costa Rica is twice as large in area and 40% more wealthy, Mexico is about on par with Costa Rica. The population density is about like Norway and about 1/3rd the US.

In Mayan days the population was about 3 million. Today it is 300,000. The devastation brought by contact is difficult to get your mind around. Estimates run to 90% killed by Western disease and outright slaughter after contact. Ruins are everywhere. We had the opportunity to visit the archeological site at Lamanai. The Mayan pyramids are strikingly similar to the temples in Cambodia, even to the steepness of the steps.

The people of Belize are very diverse, many descendants of slaves, mulattoes, quadroons, octaroons, mestizos, hispanics, expatriots, former Brits, pirates of all stripes etc. There are a lot of German Mennonites and some Amish there. They make a strong contribution to Belize agriculture and economy. We met a Taosainio who has been in Belize for the last 17 years. He runs the "Super Market" across the street from the Burrell Boom Methodist (K thru 8) School where we worked. The school system follows the British pattern, since it was British Honduras until 1981. The official language in Belize is English, but creole (broken english, a pidgin-like language) is common, as is Spanish, Garifuna (the black slave language),

and Mayan. The school is built and staffed by the Methodist Church, or those chosen by them. However, the staff are paid by the Belize Govt. The children pay tuition, the equivalent of \$10 per year, and must wear uniforms which they must purchase and maintain. It is interesting to hear Christian songs being sung in the classrooms. Most of the schools in Belize are Christian.

The animals and birds are extraordinary. It was great to awaken to the concert from the birds. There is an animal prized for its meat, a rodent, called a gibbon or paca or agouti, about 22 pounds. When Queen Elizabeth II visited in the 80's, after Independence in '81. She was fed gibbon at a state dinner. The tabloids in England proclaimed the Queen was fed rat. Such is the nature of the 5th estate.

What were we to do in Belize? We had a vague notion that we were to do some sheet rock work on the school. We brought trowels and assorted hand tools. As it turned out we were to work on the headmaster, Marvin Kellyman's house which is built on the school grounds. This is a good idea, since the headmaster can also provide security for the school. There is also a small Methodist Church on the grounds. We attended there, more about that later. The house has been under construction for 3 years. The electrical wiring had been done, but since copper is now so expensive, thieves stole the first wiring. So the imperative for this trip was to make the house secure; install all the windows and doors so that it could be locked up. Termites are a significant problem in all the tropics and sub tropics. Therefore the construction is cinder block. That required a lot of work with mortar to make the door and window open-



Jon Sollid and his daughter, Shije

ings ready. Some carpentry was required to make the door frames and fit the doors. With direction of Glen Ford Zuniga, the foreman, and everyone pitching in this was accomplished.

Other small jobs that were useful were also done. The corrugated roof of one of the school buildings was banging disruptively in the wind. A hasty farm fix with bailing wire was effected. There were many rickety chairs and desks in the school rooms, and some protruding nails and screws and loose sheet metal that were safety hazards. We fixed those.

The interactions with the children were fun. Some of the women worked with the children, teaching vowel sounds by singing, leading singing, and making origami. We also handed out 20 Gideon New Testaments. The school is constantly in need of school supplies, pencils, pens, paper, notebooks, crayons etc. Peggy Blackburn from Albuquerque, brought 35 pounds of books and school supplies.

Sully was one of the girls that

watched us during their recesses. On Friday, our first day, little Sully watched us shyly, dressed in her clean uniform. She was probably 5th grade. Monday she did not show up. Tuesday I saw her in the school yard and asked her why she had not come to watch Monday. She was amazed that I remembered her name. I told her it was easy to remember since it sounds a lot like my name. The rest of the week she came at recess and brought us treats, salty cheese-it like things labeled "flaming hot." They were interested that we had a father daughter team with us. My singer daughter made a big hit. She was like the pied piper. Wherever she went there was a crowd of girls around her.

When we attended church, the Pastor, Lincoln Gillett, remarked how nice it was to hear strong male voices singing. They have a tremendous need for hymnals. Pastor Gillett was interested in having our piano tuner Jim Beinke tell him if his piano could be saved (it could not). A nifty electric keyboard piano synthesizer would be an excellent

gift to them. They have a Belize Chorus that practices Tues and Thurs nights, in Belize City. It takes 2 hours to go and return and an hour of practice. That's dedication. Lincoln asked Shije (my daughter the singer) to come listen to them and give them a critique. Shije did go, and video taped them and will try to post it to UTube so they can see it. Shije said they were excellent. Many of the singers are teachers.

USAID (US Gov't foreign aid) built a fine antenna for them so that the school could have internet access. That project is not finished. The antenna is there, cables, and a 16 port fan-out, but no WIFI router and inadequate antique computers. The room at the school where the cable terminates is secure with strong lockable doors and has bars on the windows. Here is another way we can make a difference in the future.

If we want to send anything to the school it is best to send it directly to Marvin Kellyman by means other than the Post Office. Use DHL or UPS or some such. Big stuff may have to be sent by ship, but again, directly and expressly labeled "School Supplies" otherwise they slap on exorbitant tariffs.

We stayed at a luxurious resort, The Black Orchid, run by Doug Thompson. He is Belizian, left home at 21, worked 37 years in the US in the communications union, rose to Shop Steward. Now in his retirement he has come back to Belize, built this resort and is trying to add to the economy of Belize. I salute him and his efforts. Doug arranged the archeological visit to Lamanai on Saturday, and the cave tubing on Sunday. Some of us had an informative hike thru the forest, and rode inner tubes for an hour thru 3 big caves. We had a lot of fun as well as doing a little work. There are bugs in Belize and it is hot and humid.

Dave did a great job as "Ring Leader" and trip coordinator etc.

Jon Sollid



"Dinner for 8" group--Enemarks, Hodgsons, Trumblee & Nava, and Hundleys. We had a lot of good food and many laughs.

Photos
from
Church
activities



Washing dishes in the Ark

SPECIAL MAY DAYS

| | | | |
|-------------------|------------|--------------------------|-------|
| Birthdays: | Anna Parks | 05/19 | |
| Jana Beery | 05/02 | Sarah Ricketts | 05/26 |
| Fred DeVries | 05/03 | Kyle Beery | 05/27 |
| Hunter Eaton | 05/03 | Walker Eaton | 05/29 |
| Jason Trimmer | 05/04 | Angela Hodgson | 05/30 |
| Tom Ricketts | 05/06 | | |
| Bob Malone | 05/09 | Anniversaries: | |
| Rachel Taylor | 05/11 | May 21 | |
| Debbie Trimmer | 05/11 | Tom & Vicki Ricketts | |
| Brent Collom | 05/12 | May 23 | |
| Brad Wescott | 05/12 | Dale & Linda Leschnitzer | |
| Ron Jones | 05/13 | May 24 | |
| Judy Keen | 05/15 | Bill & Carol Mead | |

PHOTO DIRECTORY

REMINDER

The Scheduled Dates for Photography and Portrait Viewing Are:

Thursday, May 15th from 3:00-9:30 pm
Friday, May 16th from 3:00-9:30 pm
Saturday, May 17th from 10:00 am-5:00 pm

If you have questions, please contact Jan Stong at the church office, 662-6277. We look forward to seeing everyone in the directory. Our new pictorial directory just won't be complete without you!

FAMILY MISSION TRIP TO FOUR CORNERS

MAY 30 - JUNE 1, 2008

IT'S TIME TO SIGN UP FOR THE FOUR CORNERS TRIP! WE WILL BE LEAVING LOS ALAMOS ON FRIDAY, MAY 30 AND RETURNING SUNDAY JUNE 1.

THERE ARE ACCOMMODATIONS FOR SLEEPING AND COOKING. GAMES ARE NEEDED FOR FAMILY FUN TIME.

IF YOU WANT TO GO AND VISIT THE NAVAJOS WHO CAME TO FUMC IN JANUARY, BRING YOUR \$50 PER FAMILY/\$25 PER INDIVIDUAL FEE TO THE CHURCH OFFICE BY MAY 12. MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO FUMC.

First United Methodist Church
called to:

*Seek God,
Share Christ's Word,
Serve His World*

The next edition of Visions will be dated May 16.
The deadline for articles is Wednesday, May 7.

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United Skates
First Session:
3rd graders & younger
5:30 pm - 6:45 pm
Admission \$2.00
Second Session:
4th graders & older
7:00 pm - 9:00 pm
Admission \$2.50
Sunday Services & Activities
8:30 a.m. Contemporary Worship
9:45 a.m. Sunday School
11 a.m. Traditional Worship
Wednesday Activities
Chancel Choir 7 p.m.

Healing Service

May 4th
6 pm
Sanctuary



Thanks to Our
Sunday School
Teachers!



Appreciation Brunch
May 4th
8 to 9:30 am,
Fellowship Hall

SUMMER CAMP SCHOLARSHIPS

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CONTRIBUTE TO SUMMER CAMP SCHOLARSHIPS FOR OUR NAVAJO FRIENDS FROM WINDOW ROCK, AZ, PLEASE SEND YOUR CHECK, PAYABLE TO FUMC, NOTED "CAMP SCHOLARSHIPS-BENSON NDOLO" TO THE CHURCH OFFICE.

OUR GOAL IS TO COLLECT ENOUGH TO SEND TWO CHILDREN TO CAMP. THAT WOULD BE \$255 X 2 = \$510.

UPCOMING EVENTS Highlights

Sermon Titles

May 4 Communion Sunday
Pastor Ring's meditation "The Great Reversal" Gospel
Scripture Text: Mark 10:35-45
May 11 Mother's Day/
Pentecost Pastor Ring's
Sermon: "Hannah: A Mother with the Right Priority" Old Testament Scripture Text: I Samuel 1, 2:1-11 & 18-21
May 18 The Rev. David Sims will preach.

Global Days of Prayer

May 1-11

Staff Meeting

May 2, 9 am, in the Library

Sager-Brown Mission

May 3-8, Baldwin, LA

Spirit Day

May 3, 10 am Ecumenical meeting in the Sanctuary.
Contact Eileen Douglass at 470-4048 if interested.

Sunday School Teachers

Appreciation Brunch

May 4, 8 to 9:30 am (come and go) in the Fellowship Hall

MF

May 4, 4 pm in the Senior High Room

Healing Service

May 4, 6 pm in the Sanctuary

Church Council

May 4, 7 pm in the Fellowship Hall

Emmaus Community

May 5 6 pm in the Fellowship Hall and Friendship Center

Trustees

May 6, 6 pm in the Library

Disciple I

May 6, 6:30 pm in the Friendship Center

Newspaper Articles Due

May 7

Grace, Grace, God's Amazing Grace and Fire

May 8, 11:30 am to 1 pm--a special City-Wide Worship and Prayer Leading into Pentecost

Staff Meeting

May 9, 9 am in the Library

Mother's Day/Pentecost

May 11 Special Recognitions of all women present at both am Worship Services

LAF Crafts

May 11, 4 pm in the Friendship Center

Mission/Outreach

May 12 in the Library--Special discussion of Christmas Boxes project

Disciple I

May 12, 6 pm in the Friendship Center

Autism Training

May 13, 5:30 pm in the Friendship Center

Christian Education

May 13, 6:30 pm in the Library

SPRC

May 13, 7 pm in the Asbury Room

Photo Directory Pictures

May 15-16, 3 through 9:30 pm

Ark Graduation

May 15, 5 pm

Parents' Night Out

May 16, 6 pm

Photo Directory Pictures

May 17, 10 am through 5 pm

League of Women Voters

May 17, 10 am in the Friendship Center

Senior Brunch

May 18, 9:30 am in the Friendship Center

MF Party

May 18, 4:30 pm--Welcome for summer intern Travis Knapp and farewell to the Ortiz family

Disciple I

May 19 6:30 pm in the Friendship Center