

Report of the Pastor
Addendum 1
Charge Conference
October 18, 2009

Dear Theophilus,

Praise the Lord! In this 2009 year of our Lord, the people of First United Methodist Church of Valdese celebrate their 80th anniversary as a towering and influential presence in this community for the Kingdom of God. We stand today blessed and thankful to God for the dear Methodist saints who have gone before us to plow the fertile soil in the town of Valdese, to teach the ways of Jesus through the understanding of the Wesley brothers, to lay the foundations for not one but two church buildings, and to walk humbly with our God. We hope these saints would find us faithful to the heritage they began as we serve the spiritual and physical needs of today's people. Therefore, with thanksgiving to God and all the saints I humbly present this "State of the Church Report."



The state of the church is generally healthy. We continue to experience growth in spirituality, Biblical and theological understanding, attendance, mission outreach, and financial offering. The future continues to be bright, even brighter than it was at my last report.

Our Context

We make no bones about it: times are tough about us. As Burke County suffers with over 16% unemployment, we are not isolated. Our own church family is experiencing unemployment and underemployment of 9%. That is an improvement from the summer, but there are several other households whose employment is on shaky ground. Nonetheless, we have seen church offerings increase slightly at about 1.6%, which is below the rate of inflation.

Transforming the World



Yet at the same time our local benevolent ministry has doubled over last year with half of the financial assistance coming from the commission on the sale of Angel Food Boxes. To improve our stewardship of God's resources, we have teamed up with three other local churches (Cornerstone Baptist, First Baptist, and Waldensian Presbyterian) to adopt unified guidelines and track our combined financial assistance ministry through an internet vender called Charity Tracker. It is the goal for each church to maintain their unique ministry on their own campuses and that we as the unified body of Christ support one another in those ministries like the community hot meal ministry called Angel Food YUMM and the Hygiene Closet. We welcome our brothers and sisters from other congregations coming to prepare and serve these hot meals, just as we are carrying our non-perishable food collection to the community food pantry at Waldensian Presbyterian and our clothing collections to the community clothing closet called "Twice Blessed" at First Baptist. This is a community effort, joining together the leadership from all of the churches to form the Valdese Unified Mission. I have been serving as the Task Force leader for almost a year. Within the year we hope to have a partnership in place with government agencies in order to expand our assistance ministry.

The Angel Food YUMM continues to grow. Now we are averaging about 330 meals a week and can spike over 400 on the first Monday of each month during the Hygiene Closet distribution. Growth has slowed down to about 10% (still phenomenal) since last report, primarily by the constraints of the kitchen. All the volunteers work miracles in that space. Yet the kitchen is a pressing facility need in order to continue to provide for the physical nourishment of our neighbors.



A new ministry this year with the poor and suffering of our community developed from a prayer meeting on the National Day of Prayer. A testimony was shared about one of the public school teacher's heart breaking at the thought of some of her students having nothing to eat over the weekend between school provided meals. Her school developed a backpack ministry in which students take home on Fridays food for them packed discreetly in backpacks. The students return the bag on Monday for it to be ready again on Friday.

We believed this backpack ministry was needed in our own schools, but since it was near the end of school we discussed our fear that students might not be eating properly through the summer. In consultation with school guidance counselors we identified ten children in four local families. We provided those children with food weekly through the summer. Now with summer over, we have continued with these families with a backpack ministry of our own. The people of First Church have been extravagantly generous with this ministry. We are looking for sustainable funding to continue and expand this ministry. Furthermore, we have been able to provide some wholistic care for these families by assisting them financially with rent and power bills and also welcoming them into the worship life of our congregation.

Following Jesus and Making Disciples

As we continue to be "the church that feeds people", we have been working on expanding our discipleship opportunities for the intentional faith development of the people called Methodist. DISCIPLE Bible Study is the best tool we have to instruct people in the Bible and theology. Therefore, it is our intentional discipleship system to have our members participate in



DISCIPLE – the basic course, advanced courses, and the short-term courses. We have had 97 graduates of DISCIPLE courses. Additionally, we began three new courses this fall – 13 participants in DISCIPLE I, 15 students in Youth DISCIPLE, and 10 people in the Invitation to John class.

With the beginning of the school year we have been emphasizing adult Sunday School by hosting a series of open houses after featuring a class each month with video testimonies. This is a back to our roots campaign as the United Methodist Church in Valdese began as a Methodist Sunday School in 1928, organized by Connelly Springs Methodist and Bollinger's Chapel Methodist, with nine members. This followed the strong leadership of Ella Jones (the grandmother of Frank Pons), who was instrumental in beginning the first Sunday School of Valdese in 1915. This was an ecumenical ministry of Methodist, Presbyterians, and Baptist. From that humble beginning of 9 people the year before our founding as Valdese Methodist Church we have grown to 168 participants in Sunday School today.

There are also several other adult learning opportunities throughout the week with a total participation of 80. A new group called "Divine Wine" was started this year for young adults. They meet monthly at the Waldensian Heritage Winery for informal discussion on faith matters.

Lay Shepherding

I attribute the majority of the increased participation within all the ministries of the church to the new loving, caring Lay Shepherd Ministry. We Shepherds to FEED & TEND the Lord's flock Shepherd was assigned a group of members their flock noting when they are participating they are absent. It is our goal that none of our cracks or has an unknown and financial. Communication within the Shepherds, members are encouraged in opportunities. It is not cliché in Valdese community. It is reality!

trained and commissioned twenty Lay called Valdese First United Methodist. Each Lay to shepherd. They make weekly contact with in the life of the church and checking on them when those whom the Lord has entrusted to us slips through therefore unmet need – spiritual, physical, and/or church has greatly improved. Through our Lay their participation in spiritual growth and fellowship that God's people feel loved and cared for by the

The Lay Shepherd Ministry will be expanding within the year when two more phases will be implemented. Phase Two: our homebound members are assigned to the flocks of our Lay Shepherds. Phase Three: local inactive households will be added to the flock. Each of these requires a different type of ministry for which our Lay Shepherds will receive additional training.

The Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations

Since last fall, the church has been intentionally reflecting on *The Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*. We used "Focus on the Five Practices: A Congregation-Wide Initiative" developed by Bishop Robert Schnase. Church leaders read and discussed the book. Families shared daily devotions. I preached a five week sermon series. Planning teams met to discuss each practice within the life of our congregation. The results have been phenomenal. Radical Hospitality, Passionate Worship, Intentional Faith-Development, Risk-Taking Mission and Service, Extravagant Generosity have become a part of our vocabulary and a lens with which we evaluate our ministry. New leaders have risen up from the planning teams. We have begun to implement new practices in our current ministries, like some changes in worship to provide opportunities for Passionate Worship and the renewal of the Great Commission Day to stretch us in to more Risk-Taking Mission and Service.

Other ideas are being implemented after intensive study and planning phases due to the complexity of the initiatives. Specifically, two new ministries are beginning this intentional period with full implementation by this time next year. First, a reconstituted Children's Church will be an age-appropriate, interactive worship and learning experience addressing the needs of our pre-school through 2nd grade young people. Secondly, the creation of an additional worship experience that will provide truer indigenous worship experiences for the wide range of people desiring to worship with the people called Methodist on the corner of St. Germain Avenue and Carolina Street.

Radical Hospitality
Passionate Worship
Intentional Faith-Development
Risk-Taking Mission and Service
Extravagant Generosity

Ministering in My Spiritual Gifts

My teaching and preaching foci have been in series to address the needs I discern in the community of faith. I began the year with a series on forgiveness (*4G!VE*). During Lent I preached a series on the book of James concentrating at the things "*At the Core*" of our life and faith. The current series, *Spiritual Urban Legends*, is intended to teach correct theology in place of the cultural beliefs about God, which are based on misinterpretations of Scripture. I continually work to improve of my preaching and teaching to be relevant to the issues of faith and life in the world in which we live. In August, I spent a week on study retreat to reflect and pray for guidance over the next year's themes. With input from the congregation we are planned up to Advent 2010. I declare the time away was extremely fruitful. I look forward to making it an annual practice.

I continue to lead a small group on Sunday evening at the Parsonage. We have spent a year looking at our United Methodist Christian beliefs by comparing them with other denominations and religions through Adam Hamilton studies. We spent the summer engaging the charismatic movement and understand the Holy Spirit better. I also did several short-term studies after our weekly Wednesday fellowship meals – the Sermon on the Mount and *The Shack*. I am excited about having a new Confirmation Class. We will spend the year in *The Apostles' Creed* and our unique Methodist expression of faith and church life. I continue to write the curriculum with hopes of publishing it one day.

Church Leadership

The Church Leadership is encouraged by Bishop Goodpaster's Power of 3. It has focused us on areas of well-rounded growth. We are challenging ourselves to not only meet, but also exceed the expectations placed on our congregation. It continues to be our goal to be among one of the conference's Five Star

Church of Excellence. One place that is holding us back is that we are struggling to get back on track with our apportionment commitment after participating in the recently voided Choice Empowerment program.

Our Church Council is working together setting goals and will be developing more intentional ways of reporting the needs and results to the leaders and people of our congregation. We had an excellent Council Retreat in January which challenged us to think about what it means to be "First". It has a variety of meanings and implications for us as we strive to be God's people. Mostly, I believe it pushes us to pursue excellence. We will get back to the mountaintop.

**We will be Jesus' people in the world.
We will make disciples of Jesus Christ.
We will transform the world.**

Thank you for allowing me to serve the people called Methodist on the corner of St. Germain Avenue and Carolina Street in Valdese, North Carolina.

Blessed,

Pastor Dan Lyons

CAMP TEKOA 60th Anniversary/Reunion

Saturday, October 31, 2009 – 10:00am-4:00pm

SAVE THE DATE!

Staff, campers, and parents from past to present, join us to celebrate Camp Tekoa's 60th Anniversary! Come spend the day at Tekoa and see what is new while reflecting on our great memories of the past with all of your many camp friends!

This is a drop-in event. You and your family can stay all day or just for the food. We will have activities lined up for this wonderful occasion. Activities include: music, boats, zipline, giant swing, camp tours, hayride, fishing, store, campfire and more.

A picnic lunch will be served at 12:30pm.

Please send RSVP to reunion@camptekoa.org and indicate how many people in your party will be joining us for lunch.

We hope to see you for this great celebration!

If you would like to go to this celebration, please speak with Pastor Dan and we'll take the church van.