

## FROM THE PASTOR'S HEART...

The old saying about the unreliability of statistics goes: "Lies, D- - , Lies and Statistics". But stats give us one important part of the picture and we ignore them at our peril. Just when you think the statisticians have told us the bad news about the United Methodist Church's numerical decline in every way, they come up with another demoralizing view of our reality. Our friend, Rev. John Southwick, from Greenbluff UMC and also our denomination's statistician/researcher has sent out his latest report. It's a good thing we don't shoot the messenger of bad news these days, but I bet John sometimes worries about that.

This report combines the latest US Census data with the UMC data to reveal an even bleaker reality. On the national level, the US grew by 9.0% over the last decade while the UMC membership declined by 7.4%. This makes the UMC Membership "Market Share" decline actually 16.3%. UMC Sunday worship attendance declined nationally by 10.4%, making this figure really 19.3% worse than the previous decade.

Things are even worse in the Western Jurisdiction with our Pacific Northwest Conference numbers: Members -18.3%; Attendance -23.9%. Couple this with a 12% population growth and you get a -30.3% and -36.0% respective "Market Share" decadal decline.

In light of this, what are the stats for APUMC during this time? They are: -40.1% Membership (650>389); -38.8% Attendance (211>129); -52.1% Market Share Membership; -50.8% Market Share Attendance.

Truly we are dying by degrees; nationally, conference-wide and locally. I don't know if we will be able to reverse this decline at any of these levels, but I know we must try. In fact, reaching more people, younger people, and different people must be the top agenda of every United Methodist entity, especially every local congregation, from now on. But the main question must not become: "How do we grow?" The main question must be: "Why would God want us to grow?" As Doug Anderson has said, "Church growth is a wonderful result, but a lousy goal."

And this is why the Pacific Northwest Conference made a bold decision Saturday at a specially called session in Ellensburg to approve 1) to "launch a Conference-wide renewal program for local churches by creating a Center for Discipleship and Mission Field Engagement; and continuing the development of between three and six New Faith Communities by April, 2013, proceeding toward the goal of starting 20 New Faith Communities." And 2) to "approve a Conference-wide ministry campaign with a goal of \$3.5 million to fund the proposed Center for Discipleship and Mission Engagement and between three and six additional New Faith Communities, proceeding toward the goal of starting 20 New Faith Communities."

"Local churches will not be apportioned a share of the campaign and shall have the option of developing their own plans for raising funds to contribute to the campaign. All program and campaign costs are included in the goal." After time for preparation, the campaign will kick off in 2013.

The expected outcome of this decision was stated, thusly: "Every United Methodist Faith Community a Mission Outpost and Every United Methodist a Missionary." I think fulfilling the

above expectation has just become the job-description of the pastor and every member/constituent of Audubon Park UMC. What do you think?

See you in Church, APUMC!

Pastor Carl