

FROM THE PASTOR'S HEART

District Superintendent Challenges Area Churches to Save "Dying Congregations"

The most important member in any congregation is the newest member who continues coming to meetings, Dave Hansen told church members and their guests at the church's recent Charter Night celebration.

Without new and dedicated members there are no congregations and no denominations said Hansen, a member of the Sharbot Lake Church who was the guest speaker at the event, held last week to celebrate the congregation's history and achievement.

In a speech with the theme "a challenge to change", Hansen urged church members, and United Methodists everywhere, to each sponsor a new member to ensure the viability and survival of the congregation. In particular, congregations need younger members, especially those who are willing to attend meetings regularly and become involved in fundraising activities, he said.

"We are a dying congregation," Hansen said, noting that some churches are attracting only older members, while others have been reduced in size to as few as seven members. Part of the problem is that many congregations are "still doing things the same old way", he said.

But change is inevitable, and some congregations are changing; one even holds its meetings over the internet, Hansen said.

"The world has changed; it's not what it was when I joined the church 27 years ago."

A colleague sent me this article. It really describes the plight of a lot of congregations in a lot of denominations across the land, doesn't it? Well, let me let you in on the secret. It is not about congregations. It's about Lion's Clubs. I changed all references to Lion's Clubs to either congregations or churches. The actual title was: **District Governor Challenges Area Lions to Save Dying Organizations.**

What can we learn from this?

The American culture is undergoing great changes.

All organizations are being forced to change or die; or at least decline. Not just churches.

All management types, Pastors, D.S.'s, Regional Managers, District Governors, etc., are experts at stating the obvious in speeches that "challenge to change".

We all need younger members. But almost all decisions are made by and supported by older members who have been in the organization for a long time. This works against reaching younger people. Why not turn over the task of reaching younger people to whatever younger people we have before we don't have any younger people? Older people will have to "buy themselves out" of the task by giving their money. And not getting in the way. Before you get mad, remember, I'm old, too.

The article fails to realize that the ultimate problem is not that the organization lacks new, younger members, but that it lacks new members, period. Organizations don't die because they get old; they die because they run out of steam and fail to fulfill their stated purposes. Eventually they see the decline and mistake the result for the cause.

The solution lies not in "getting new, younger members". It lies in being the right kind of members doing the things that connect with and attract those outside the organization that they are capable of reaching, regardless of their age or condition. A new, older member is just as good as a new, younger member. Any growth helps to create more growth all across the age spectrum.

Your pastor is a devious man who will use anything and stop at nothing to help our church grow!

See you in Church, APUMC!

Pastor Carl