

## FROM THE PASTOR'S HEART.....

Bishop John R. Schol from the Baltimore-Washington Conference is the Chair of the UMC's Vital Congregations initiative. He lists five characteristics of vital congregations. They are

- Inviting and inspiring worship
- Engaged disciples in mission and outreach
- Gifted, equipped and empowered lay leadership
- Effective, equipped and inspired clergy leadership
- Small groups and strong children's and youth ministry.

I am somewhat of a student of congregational revitalization. I have seen many such lists from many diverse sources and they all include pretty much the same things. What is unmentioned here, but presumed in the Bishop's list, one hopes, is the fact that the people of vital congregations are in love with God, each other, and the people in their mission field. Only the love given through a close, personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ can motivate us to create the conditions in which these characteristics are achieved. And only then by the wondrous workings of God's grace.

Over the four years that I have been your pastor, I believe we have improved in all of these categories. Especially in regaining our love of God and supporting one another in our spiritual journeys. Prayer and appreciation has mostly replaced criticism and complaint. Now we are seeking a unifying vision for our mission as a church. Over many years the tendency is for a congregation to create many ministries and activities that are only tangentially connected to the congregation's reason for being. These need to be evaluated and, if not discontinued, reinterpreted and realigned in light of a central vision mutually discerned to be of God. New ministries consistent with the new vision may replace or run alongside the revision-ed ones. A revitalized congregation shifts its emphasis from trying to do too much to trying to do what it is called to do, and doing that in and with the love of Jesus.

Our Church Council, under the leadership of Steve Cree, is now engaged in this process of spiritual discernment of re-visioning APUMC. This is important work, much in need of our prayers and participation. It is also important enough not to be rushed. You cannot both rush and relish God's renewing work. It is organic, not mechanical. It is lived into, not merely decided upon in a meeting. Last Sunday, I asked for your best sense of God's leading for our church. Note: We no longer really care "what you think the church should do." This mentality helped cause our morass. We want to transition from a preference driven mentality to a spirit informed one. We are asking for your help in discerning what we believe God is asking us to become. Please write a BRIEF statement of your discernment of our mission and return it to the church (somehow, any way that works for you) by this coming Sunday. It will become part of the grist from which our Church Council will eventually bake the Bread of Life that will be APUMC.

See you in Church, APUMC!

Pastor Carl