

FROM THE PASTOR'S HEART

I don't want to alarm you, but the New Year is coming! Ye gads! 2010 already! I can only vaguely remember the year 2000. It seems to me we made a big deal out of it. Y2K is now a decade old. I hate it when I think about how fleeting life is. All my life I have listened to "old people" say things about how fast time passes. I just can't understand why such things would now be coming out of my mouth.

Oh well . . .

Life is a journey through time into eternity. I like church's with classy names. I learned of one in Round Rock, Texas called "Journey of Faith UMC." I saw it in a mailing I get from the national Reconciling Ministries Network. The RMN is an organization of UM laity and clergy devoted to inclusiveness in our church. Although I am not much of a joiner, I guess you could say I am a "member" of the RMN, at least a sympathizer. I believe in the inclusiveness of all manner of people in God's Church. The slogan that will soon be displayed on our new sign in February, will declare "Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors." Now that is something to live up to.

Even though I like good church names, I seldom like church mission statements. Most are too wordy, too detailed, too long and too boring to be of much use. Church mission statements and novels are America's most common forms of fiction. Only churches that have forgotten God's mission need mission statements. That's extreme, I know, but I think we should all just settle for UM Discipline paragraph 120. "The purpose of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."

That said, I was impressed with Journey of Faith UMC's "Welcome Statement." I can see the value of a "Welcome Statement." Here it is:

"Journey of Faith United Methodist Church is a grace filled community which offers a safe place to ask the tough questions of life in an atmosphere of unconditional acceptance.

As a United Methodist Church we are proud to be a church with open hearts, open minds, and open doors and we invite you to become a part of God's amazing grace through our church family. Wherever you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome in this place. We proclaim this statement of welcome to all who have known the pain of exclusion and discrimination within the church. We celebrate our diversity and recognize the sacred worth and dignity of all persons regardless of sexual orientation, gender, race, age, ethnicity, physical or mental capacity, education or economic or marital status.

At the same time, we recognize there are differences of opinion among us. We do not seek to erase our differences. We welcome all in our journey together in faith toward greater understanding and mutual respect."

I believe this statement reflects the Spirit of Jesus and the intent of the Gospel. I am not so much interested in Audubon Park UMC formalizing a statement as I am in living in the spirit of welcome and inclusion that such a statement articulates so well. Moving intentionally in the direction of inclusivity would be worthy of our journey into the new year.

See you in Church, APUMC!

Pastor Carl