

**2012 State of the Church Address**  
**Legacy United Methodist Church**  
**January 8, 2012**

It has been a couple years now since I last 'preached' the State of the Church Address. I wish today to take a few minutes, and share...in my opinion...the State or condition of our Church. To guide our thinking, I want to reference two things this morning, first would be this text. As I read and prepared for this message, this passage kept coming to my mind so let me share it:

*For God who said, "Let there be light in the darkness," has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves. 2 Corinthians 4: 6-7*

I believe this to be an apt description of Legacy UMC at the beginning of 2012. We are experiencing the light of God, shining in the dark places of our hearts, lives, church, community and world. We see the light in the face of Christ and it reveals to us the heart of God. We are seeking to live in that light; and shine and share it in the dark places our lives take us.

But we are clay jars, we are very earthen, earthy, vessels – we make no claim to be anything but cracked pots...broken people who are discovering the joy of Jesus on the shared journey to heaven. Some of us are further along than others. Some of us are farther away from our brokenness – but we share a common, human experience that unites us. We are strong in some places, and weak in some others. We are doing some things very well, and in some places we have some work to do. It is my privilege to be the leader of this ragamuffin bunch – only because I am chief among the broken sinners who call this place home. I am all too familiar with my extreme humanness (and

unfortunately so are you) – but out of this shared humanity – comes our greatest strength – not ours - but by God’s great power; Legacy’s best days are still in front of us...not behind us.

The second point of reference comes from an article I read a couple weeks ago about the founding CEO of Wendy’s – one of the fast food giants. Obviously, I show no discernible favoritism for one fast food place over another – I, obviously, enjoy them all - but I just found the article interesting. In it was contained a formula that Wendy’s has employed for success; which I found strikingly familiar to what I believe God has called this, and all other churches to practice. So using the outline of Wendy’s formula for success, I want to assess the state of Legacy UMC.

**1. HAVE A VISION**

*Where there is no vision the people perish.* Proverbs 28:18

A more modern version of this passage says this: “Where there is no vision – the people find a new parish.” I suppose that is true. At no other time in my 15 ½ years here have I been as convinced that we have a vision – and that vision is beginning to “have us”! We are buying into the whole sense of Legacy. We know we’ve inherited an amazing legacy from some awesome forefathers and mothers, who divested themselves to invest in our present. We have received an amazing legacy. Because we have, we are working hard to build a legacy that God desires. We are not much interested in what any focus or special interest group thinks we should become or be doing – but we are becoming quite proficient in weighing what God wants us to be doing. We are building this legacy right now – because we believe the Psalm that

reminds us that it is each generation's responsibility to pass on the faith to the next – we want to leave a legacy better than the one we've inherited.

Having a vision is more than branding a new logo – it is buying into a shared direction. Having a vision is as important for helping us decide what NOT to do, as it is in directing us what TO do. It's all about our legacy – the one we've received, the one we are building – the one we hope to leave.

## **2. DEVELOP A STRATEGY**

*Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me – everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you. Philippians 4:9*

Wendy's new strategy is to introduce a new French Fry – have any of you tried them? Are they as good as they look on the commercials? I've not had the pleasure yet – but I've been tempted!

Our strategy to build and leave a legacy that reflects the one we've received, is to practice some principles of priorities. We make no apologies for referring to these priorities as practices. Doctors "practice" medicine, lawyers "practice" the law – so why shouldn't Christians be "practicing" the priorities of Jesus? It works for us.

We have identified 6 practices in the life of Jesus that reflect the priorities he received from His father, and taught to his disciples. We are doing better at some than others. I first thought it might be interesting to have your rate how you think we are doing in each of these areas, but now I think it might be easier to just have you rate them 1-6; one being the one practice you personally feel we are doing the best, and 6 being the one that we are not doing as well. You might include an example next to each score if you wish. Enclosed in your bulletin is a score sheet, you can mark them as you

listen, and leave them in the baskets at the back. I'll share your tabulations next week – it will be a collective State of the Church address – in your opinion!

We practice **Radical Hospitality**, by the ways we welcome, invite and receive each other...not just at worship but in life. Are we kind to each other? Are we gracious, hospitable and appreciative of those who come to visit with us? I think we do this pretty well – but we will ALWAYS have room to improve. Would you accept a challenge from me for this New Year? How about inviting someone you know to church with you once a month? How about meeting someone new once a month? How about inviting someone to join you in brunch or dinner twice this year? We can do this! Start today.

We practice **Extravagant Generosity**, by the ways that we give of all our resources.

I think we are learning to do this very well. We have increased our giving to our community all while we have been raising money for a new facility – and I think THAT is the direct reason we were rewarded an amazing grant/gift from the Lasko Foundation.

People are discovering the joy of giving to be enhanced by getting out of debt – and the freedom that produces. Thanks to Lance and Melissa Hendrickson for leading our third session of Financial Peace University, with a preview in a few minutes, and class beginning next week. We have many folks who strategically and faithfully are exploring the challenge of tithing, and many who go beyond the minimum. But we still

have some who find giving to be scary, or unnecessary, and we want to encourage you too!

We practice **Passionate Worship**, by the ways we try and engage folks into seeing that worship is a way of life, not just a song list or a prayer concern. The future of our worship experience is not dependent on who stands behind the keyboard or a guitar, or who leads from this platform. Passionate Worship is a heart issue, and we all need to constantly be engaging our hearts in offering praise, worship, gratitude, and our passions to God.

We practice **Authentic Faith Sharing**, by the ways that we live, and interact with the people that God chooses to cross our paths. We have no “evangelism program” – we are the “evangelism program”. We don’t put on airs or profess to be any great witnesses – we just try to live distinctive Christian lives, in non-offensive, life engaging, humble and authentic ways. I think many of us are getting the hang of this – and discovering it is not hard, scary or work – it is just a choice to live authentically and share occasionally the love of God we have shining in our lives.

We practice **Intentional Faith Development**, by offering Legacy Life groups in and outside the church, and by trying to help people practice the disciplines that produce effective disciples.

We always need more and different types of “life groups”, and leaders/facilitators to enhance those experiences...but mostly we need more people to avail themselves of these life and truth imparting experiences.

We practice **Risk-taking Mission and Service**, by empowering people to discover their gifts, and enabling people to exercise what they are passionate about.

We can't do everything for everybody, all the time, but we as a church have established bulkhead ministries on 3 foreign continents, and in our local community, and all around the world. I'll be excited for you to hear from the folks who are working right now to move a young girl from Ghana to Bismarck so she might receive some life-changing surgery – there are risks.

These practices are the strategy we have adopted to fulfill our vision to build and leave a Godly legacy.

### 3. **DEFINE REALITY**

Our reality is that we are a strong, healthy group of forward thinking believers and seekers who are doing many things well. We are seeing lives positively impacted by the various ministries we undertake. We are making a difference in our world, our community and in individual lives – but we are not growing. Our church attendance has remained stagnant, at about 250, and hasn't changed for the past 4 years. Our membership remains at about 550, we have to take in 3 new members to gain one, because of death, transfers and attrition.

Many causes might be identified to define this reality, and you may want to offer your own, but I will have you consider mine. Our building continues to inhibit our ability to grow. Children's Ministry is the "front door" of our church, and we are full, period. I'm grateful that all signs point to the reality that we will likely break ground this spring on our new facility on North Washington, which will give us much needed space, visibility, and accessibility.

Secondly, I believe that our stagnant reality is a national trend. I just last Tuesday read an article that highlighted that in spite of the big deal we make of “religion” in our political debates, religion and its practices are falling out of favor across our country.

We might think we are immune living in this the Midwest, but I don’t think so. People who say they believe in God continue to decrease. The number of people who profess to be Christians continues to decline. Attendance at public worship continues to wane. Obviously there are pockets where this is not true, but I believe the cultural shift has reached ND.

Lastly, I believe that our lack of growth might be based on numerous factors that point to the general sense that church, religion, and even God are irrelevant in many people’s lives. I know I’m preaching to the choir today with those of you who are here, but over the years I’ve been deeply saddened by the richness and variety of excuses people use to justify their lack of involvement, participation and leadership. I am fully aware that the days when you just opened the door and welcomed people to come into your church are over; but I believe we offer a life-giving, holistic, healthy ministry – and I’m troubled by how many seem so indifferent to the relevance of Jesus for our world and their lives.

#### 4. **GIVE HOPE**

I have no clue how Wendy’s attempts to give anyone any hope besides the hope of increasing their waist-line...but I do know a thing or two about our hope as followers of Jesus! Identifying yourself as a follower of Jesus, or a Christian may be falling out of favor in our culture, but that fact does not change God, Jesus or the Word that strategically declares - *“Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell will*

*not prevail against it!"* What is that rock? It is Jesus Christ Himself! I'm not making that up – that is a direct quote from the lips of the one who died to save human souls, and you can take it to the bank that our hope is not built on fashionable fads or fancy trendiness- but upon the Word of God. As long as we continue to attempt to do our best at that – then the results are up to God! I can live with that!

## 5. **EXECUTE**

At some point you just have to get to work and get it done! I know we have a great staff and many tireless volunteers – but I'd like to encourage and challenge some of you who have yet to be engaged in this life-altering, kingdom-building adventure.

Let us help you discover your giftedness, develop your passion, and engage your life in some significant way. Many of you are giving your time in many places across the community – but if you are yet to discover the joy of giving your life away – for a cause greater than yourself – let us help you execute the plan God has for all of us!

A bit later in his second letter to the church at Corinth, Paul the apostle cites how he felt they were able to prove the sincerity of their ministry. I think this fits us as well, and I'll leave us with that today:

*We prove ourselves by our purity, our understanding, our patience, our kindness, by the Holy Spirit within us, and by our sincere love. We faithfully preach the truth. God's power is working in us. We use the weapons of righteousness in the right hand for attack and the left hand for defense. We serve God whether people honor us or despise us, whether they slander us or praise us. We are honest, but some call us impostors. We are ignored, even though we are well known. We live close to death, but we are still alive. We have been beaten, but we have not been killed. Our hearts ache, but we always have joy. We are poor, but we give spiritual riches to others. We own nothing, and yet we have everything. 2 Corinthians 6:6-10*

The state of Legacy UMC – strong, healthy, authentic...but not perfect...or done...

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