

## **THE LEGACY PROJECT 3**

### **“WE WILL LIVE INSIDE – OUT”**

2 weeks ago I began to share with you my perceptions about how First UMC must live in the coming decades if we wish to really leave a legacy, thus the name: The Legacy Project. On that first Sunday I spoke with you about living Backside – Forward, and we discussed some ways we as a church, and we as individuals must convert our Birthright, into our Legacy by recapturing, the best of our heritage, and reinventing that heritage for creative and effective ministry as we push further into this new century.

Last Sunday I spoke about living Upside – Down, and I discussed ways that First Church must convert our Worship of God, into a God-honoring Way of Life. Being a follower of Jesus is more than a one hour a week proposition, it is a 24 hour a day, 7 days a week adventure that affects every aspect of our lives...or should!

Today I am excited to visit with you about living Inside – Out as we explore how I believe First Church’s legacy in the next decades must include a conversion from our **Internal** focus to an **External** one. You have heard me talk occasionally and sporadically about remembering that the church doesn’t just exist for those inside it, but also for those outside it, and today I want to complete those random thoughts in a more concrete way. In a sense, we might say this is a conversion from our focus on Our Church to a Focus on The Kingdom. Let’s begin with the scripture:

*“Starting with Samuel, every prophet spoke about what is happening today. You are the children of those prophets, and you are included in the covenant God promised to your ancestors. For God said to Abraham, ‘through your descendants all the families on earth will be blessed.’” Acts 3:24-25 and this:*

*“The real children of Abraham, then, are all those who put their faith in God. What’s more, the Scriptures looked forward to this time when God would accept the Gentiles, too, on the basis of their faith. God promised this good news to Abraham long ago when he said, ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’” Gal. 3: 7-8*

As members and friends of FUMC we must remember that this covenant that has captured us is two-fold. There is first; the fact that by giving our lives to God, we are saved from our sin, and death, and hell. But secondly; we are also saved TO; good works that include, sharing that Good News, so that all the families on earth will be blessed. I'm afraid we are committing similar sins to those that plagued the Israelites for over 4000 years. We are happy to focus on the first part of that covenant, but the more comfortable we get receiving the blessing of belonging to God, the easier it is to forget that we also bear a responsibility to spread that Good News around the world, including our community! The longer we are part of the church, the easier it is to forget that there are many others who are not yet, and its OUR JOB to make sure they receive what we have received. Even a brief look at Israel's history ought to remind us that we don't want to go there!

I'm afraid there are many churches (and in some ways, ours is included) that have wrongly come to believe that the church exists to meet the needs of its members, that the church exists to make or keep us happy, that the church exists to marry, baptize and bury me and my loved ones, that the church exists to provide tables for my rummage sale, or space for my reception, that the church exists as just one more non-profit organization that must compete for my ever-shrinking charitable dollar. That is what we're going to explore today; how we must convert our focus on The Church to a focus on The Kingdom!

## **INSIDE – OUT (KINGDOM) LIVING;**

### **1. Turns a Church Focus into a Community Focus**

Looking to meet the needs of our community, not just our church is easier said than done, especially for those who believe that the church exists to serve itself!

It's easy to say we want to 'reach' or community, until we begin to reapportion our resources to support community projects instead of church programs. It's easy to say we will 'invite' people to come to our church, but quite another to go get them!

And it's not just about developing programs that reach into our community, but a refocusing of our lives. It's not just a program or even an emphasis to 'invite the unchurched to church'. It's about converting our community, one person at a time! We must come to see that being a Christian is not just attending church, or even serving on a Church committee, but utilizing our gifts and living our lives as distinctive Christians in our everyday world.

It's about closing the gap between the secular and sacred. Many people in today's churches live with a refuge mentality toward the world and those outside our doors. The people on the outside are not our enemy, they are our mission field!

Practically speaking, and related directly to our upcoming Legacy vote; whatever decision we make, whether to stay or relocate, must recapture our heart for our community! In much the same way that starting Med Center One 98 years ago defined the First Evangelical Church of Bismarck...I want us to wrestle with what decision we could make today that might have a similar impact on the communities of Bismarck and Mandan 100 years from now! It will not be this building, or another on N. Washington.

But it might be a unique partnership we form with the YMCA to ensure that every person in Bismarck has the opportunity to be a whole person, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. I spoke last week with a friend who challenged me to think that churches ought to solve the issue of Native American relations in this community, or to ensure that every child needing care in this community has access to affordable child care, or to eliminate homelessness from our community, or to provide adequate food or housing, or transitional care for prisoners getting out of the penitentiary.

I'm not sure what the cause or issue or effort will be, but I don't think I want to stand before God come judgment day and offer to him that the best I did was try to faithfully serve the churches to which I was appointed. I want us all to stand before God, now and in eternity and say, we did our best to convert the community where we lived with the Gospel we have received. Inside – out living; kingdom focused, community focused. Inside out living;

## **2. Turns Members into Missionaries**

We've all seen the signs on 'trying to be hip' churches that say: FUMC: Pastor: Rev. Kermit Culver,...Ministers: All the People. That's fine, but I'd propose that Inside out living would take us one step further: Pastor: Rev. Kermit Culver ...Missionaries: All the people. How would that change our church culture, or how about our community? Ministers are church employees or volunteers who primarily serve the people who pay the bills, and I hope they at least serve an important role, but missionaries are people who cross the barriers of country, language, and culture to share that Good News that will ensure that all the people of the world will be blessed! Missionaries are people who go. Like former SD Governor George Mickelson said: Leaders are people who show up! Missionaries are people who go, to people who don't know, that Jesus is the only show! (wow: I'm beginning to sound like Ernie)

Reggie McNeal reminds us of an unsettling truth in his book *The Present Future*: "Unfortunately, the North American church has lost its influence at this critical juncture. It has lost its influence because it has lost its identity. It has lost its identity because it has lost its mission. (As former DS and First Church associate pastor said: We are not the harvest!) The appropriate response to the emerging world is a rebooting of the mission, a radical obedience to an ancient covenantal command, a loss of self rather than self-preoccupation, and a concern about service and sacrifice rather than concern about style!"

How might it change your life to consider yourself a Missionary, a missionary for Christ? You don't have to go to Bolivia, how about to Barnes and Noble? You don't have to go to Spirit Lake, how about to Sam's Club, or Shooters Pool Hall? You don't have to go overseas, but could you at least go over there... wherever 'there' is, and represent your Lord and Savior by the way you treat the mom struggling with an unruly child in the endless line at the checkout, or the waitress who serves your food, or the mechanic who changes your tires? We are ambassadors, we are co-laborers, we are called, we are missionaries of Jesus Christ, and we must go. This new century deserves it, our savior demands it, our world needs it, and our community is waiting! Thirdly; living inside out:

### **3. Turns Saints (and sinners) into Serving Stewards**

Do you want to know what both scares and excites me most about the Legacy Vote scheduled for Oct. 1<sup>st</sup>? It's not that we vote to stay here, or move there; it's that which ever we decide will likely cost us so stinking much money that we will not be able to depend upon our own human ingenuity or human resources to pay the bill! Do you think the people who voted 50 years ago to build this building had all the money they needed to build this facility? Or did they pray down a miracle or two along the way? Do think the doctors and Pastor who met 98 years ago to discuss starting a hospital had any idea what that vision might become or cost?

You see, I'm convinced that which ever decision we make in Oct. must be connected to a mission and vision so much larger than ourselves, that we have no choice but to fully and completely, individually and corporately, depend entirely on GOD to see it come to pass. Yes, we'll have to write the checks, and yes we'll have to work to fill the check books, but we'll have to depend on God to take care of our basic needs, and depend on God to repay any sacrifices we might make! (Ask Ernie about the \$100 he put in the plate last week.)

In my opinion, there is no greater need in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church than for people who are honestly and authentically committed to Christ, to become serving Stewards. Salvation is what we have received, Servants are who we are, and Stewardship is what we do. We are not owners, of this church, of our bank accounts, or our lives. We are stewards of all that God has given us, or allowed us to earn.

Many of you know the name Harry George, many of you don't. I've heard since my coming here many stories about Martha's husband, and his great leadership in this church. One sticks in my mind, and fits my point. This is how the story was relayed to me. It was during the discussion of adding the elevator and offices addition on to this original building. Harry was opposed to that idea, and gentlemanly stated his opinion of such. He preferred that the church relocate to another site, and offered some money to do so. When the vote was taken, the church decided to build the addition, Harry and his opinion which was certainly held by some others, was voted down. But when the fundraising began, and the addition commenced, who do you guess served on the building committee and who paid more than their fair share? Harry and Martha George understood that inside out living means converting their sainthood into a self-sacrificing, serving, life of stewardship, and I pray their number might increase!

In four weeks we'll celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ministry in this facility, 3 weeks later we'll be voting on what we believe God would have us do regarding a place for our future ministry; here, or on N. Washington Ave. That vote (and the meetings and work leading up to it) has the potential to unify and solidify us toward the vision we believe God has put before us, or it has the potential to divide us if we allow the results of that decision to separate us from our membership vows, our Christian calling to be serving stewards, and our mandate to be the messengers God will use to ensure that our church, our community, and our world, will know Jesus Christ and enter the Kingdom of God.

It's no small task to be given the responsibility for insuring that all the world come to know the blessings of God. It is not for the faint of heart, to be charged with a covenant command to share the Good News with those who don't yet know Jesus. But frankly, I'm sick of giving my life away to unworthy causes, when making the world different is within my/our reach. How about you? Are you ready to live Backside – Forward, converting our birthright into our legacy? Are you ready to live Upside – Down, converting our worship into a God – honoring way of Life. Are you ready to live Inside – Out, converting our focus from just our church, to the community and kingdom beyond? So am I.

So vote on our legacy how you see fit, but make sure that your vote squares with what God has revealed to you these past three weeks. And make sure that that vote does justice to the vision of our forefathers and mothers who took a similar vote some 50 years ago. And make certain that your vote rings true to the spirit of your former pastor and those two doctors who took a vote some 98 years ago. Heck, make sure your vote is consistent with what you believe God had in mind 6000 years ago when he called a simple farmer named Abraham to go be a missionary to his community, which now includes us. Let's all make sure our vote is a vote that will honor Christ, insure our legacy, and be the blessing of God, for the world at large. That's kingdom living, inside out, upside down, and backside forward. Let us pray!

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