

Report of the Pastor, Supplemental Information
By Rev. Steve Easterday-McPadden, Pastor
First United Methodist Church, Grand Junction
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THE GENERAL STATE OF THE CHURCH

As can be seen in the Membership Report, First United Methodist Church of Grand Junction, like many mainline churches and United Methodist Churches across the country (USA), is in a slow state of decline. We continue to conduct many more funerals and memorial services than we do celebrations of baptism, profession of faith, and new membership. The annual giving to the general needs of the Church is just enough to meet our annual expenses. And late this year (Oct. 29, 2017) our associate pastor, Rev. Laura Cartwright, went on spiritual renewal leave, to be followed by a Voluntary Leave of Absence (effective Jan. 1, 2018) of indeterminate length, not to return to her appointment here at FUMCGJ. The number of active FUMC families with children and youth continues to decline, forcing the average age of the congregation ever older.

This is not unlike the situation the Denver Broncos found themselves in in January of 1987 when offensive guard Keith Bishop said facetiously of the Cleveland Browns at the start of the 98-yard game-tying offensive play series known across the NFL simply as “The Drive”, “We got 'em right where we want 'em!” And with courage, confidence, skill, excellent leadership – and, dare I say, a touch of divine providence! – John Elway, then Denver Broncos quarterback, led his team to tie the game in regulation and win it in overtime for the AFC Championship Title.

We at FUMCGJ may be backed up against our own end zone, but we have a vision for ministry and incredible people, so like the Broncos in 1987, “We got 'em right where we want 'em!”

THE GOAL OF OUR MINISTRY at FUMCGJ:

The Making of Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World

This is more than a tidy mission statement here at FUMCGJ; it guides our ministry and our ministry planning as best we can utilize it. We describe Christian discipleship here as being characterized by the following 5 “markers”, taken from the early chapters of *Acts of the Apostles*:

1. Worship and study
2. The practice of spiritual disciplines, like prayer and Scripture reading, that cultivate a close, personal relationship with Christ
3. Meaningful, caring connection with others in the Body of Christ
4. Stewardship of our resources for the betterment of the Body – financial to be sure – but also our time, talents, skills, and passions
5. Service to the church, the community, and the world

We start with a Sunday morning schedule with this kind of discipleship in mind. We have two (high quality) Sunday morning worship services: “Contemporary” at 8:30 AM and Traditional at 11:00 AM. Between these services, from 9:45 – 10:45 AM we have a dedicated Christian education hour with classes for all ages. I know that part of the decline we are seeing in the participation of young families is our insistence on this Sunday morning schedule despite the preference – stated by several in the congregation and visible in the culture – of many to have concurrent worship and Sunday School (especially for children and youth), so that parents can be in worship while their kids are in Sunday School with the goal being to give only one hour or so per week to Church life. In our understanding of Christian discipleship, such a pattern is anemic and delivers exactly what we are seeing: a Church in decline. The folks who are staying see the

vision, and for that I am grateful. But, we are holding out for the day when our commitment to radical Christian discipleship results in a culture of joyful and active participation in healthy Christian community. Like all culture change, this is going to take time – and it’s probably going to get more challenging before it gets better.

That being said, we are moving forward! Major goals for the year ahead include the following:

1. A serious investment in and commitment to *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* as the culture-setting approach to radical Christian discipleship that results in deeply changed lives.

Three pilot courses have been held at FUMCGJ since July (2017): two courses in *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* and one in *Emotionally Healthy Relationships*. This material was developed by Peter Scazzero and his wife, Geri, founding pastoral couple of New Life Fellowship Church in Queens, NY. Together, these two 8-week courses provide necessary tools for living into the two great commandments that Jesus emphasized from his own Hebrew tradition and faith: (1) Love God with your whole heart, mind, soul, and strength and (2) Love your neighbor as yourself.

We begin our Church-wide offering of *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* in late January 2018, with plans to offer *Emotionally Healthy Relationships* in the fall. It is our belief that these two courses, offered consistently over a period of years will develop a congregation that is emotionally healthy and spiritually mature with a rich life in Christ that is not susceptible to the cultural whims of the day, whatever those happen to be. These courses will not only be offered within the congregation but will also be offered to the Grand Valley community through appropriated means of outreach and invitation.

I also have plans to bring related material to the discipleship offerings of the Church: *The Emotionally Healthy Leader* (for staff and non-staff leadership development) and *The Emotionally Healthy Church* (for a broader congregational engagement with this material).

2. A forum to teach and promote “beloved community” through the safe exchange of ideas in an informed and respectful setting, ideas that involve the intersection of faith and life as we live it here in the Grand Valley.

We are situated in an environment where there are many educated people of all ages, business people and other professionals, retirees, and persons of varied faith backgrounds, including those who commit to know particular faith traditions at all.

We are also at a unique point in history where divisiveness has been raised to an artform, not only in politics but in religion and culture, as well. The current state of affairs is one that silences conversation and connection – the building of “beloved community” – because persons are too afraid of censure, judgment, ridicule, and rejection to risk discussion of sensitive issues, much less the sharing unpopular opinions regardless of the issue.

And so, we live in an environment that could benefit from an approach to Christian faith and life that is informed by a solid Wesleyan understanding of theology and the Scriptures as an alternative to the divisiveness that is so much a part of our common life today.

Therefore, we will be forming an annual lectureship honoring the longtime and highly respected Grand Junction family headed by Herb and Laura Mae Bacon. This lectureship will be aimed at promoting the safe exchange of ideas in an informed and respectful setting, ideas that involve the intersection of faith and life as we live it here in the Grand Valley, in our state, our nation, even our world. It is being named after the Bacons because of their

commitments to First United Methodist Church, the Grand Valley community, and their embrace of faith in action as modeled by their support for The Iliff School of Theology and its mission. This will not be a forum for the promotion of specific political or social issues, positions, or candidates/officials but, rather, a forum aimed at building community through caring and respectful conversation and the sharing of ideas. As such, it is integral to emotionally healthy spirituality and relationships and can serve as a form of outreach to parts of the Grand Valley community that have not considered the Christian faith, much less “church”, to be particularly relevant for their lives.

3. Finally, renovation and expansion of our facility/building.

Our beloved and historic Church building/facility is in need of major renovation and expansion if we are going to meet the goal of making disciples of Jesus Christ in our 21st century setting. Our building was designed and built for an early-to-mid-20th century congregation and society; it is woefully inadequate for its mission 100 years later.

To that end, an investigative committee was formed in late summer of this year to explore options for renovation and expansion. During the months of August, September, and October, this group worked with an architectural firm and a capital fund raising consultant to derive a master plan for growth and funding of such work.

In the year ahead, we will be taking this to the next step of formalizing the master plan, identifying reasonable phasing of the work, and taking it to the congregation for endorsement. After this, planned for late summer/early fall (2018), we will begin the work of capital fund raising to begin the implementation of the plan.

There are some who will question how this can be done, given the opening paragraph of this report. I would point such questioners to the record of our congregation in the past, as it built for unseen needs far in the future with the current congregation being the beneficiaries of their faithfulness and trust in God to do a great work among them. I would also point them to the fact that if we don't do anything to bring our facility into the present age, they will be the custodians not of First United Methodist Church, the thriving downtown community of faith and discipleship on 5th Street and White Ave., but of the old, dusty museum of Methodism down on 5th Street and White Ave. which once housed a thriving congregation.

Great things await those who wait faithfully on the Lord and who follow him diligently!

CONCLUSION

In closing, I remind us of the words of Keith Bishop: “We got 'em right where we want 'em!” And I call on the leadership, the membership, and the constituents of FUMCGJ to draw deeply from the wells of courage, confidence, skill, excellent leadership – and, dare I say, more than a touch of divine providence! – as we look downfield at nearly the full length of gridiron before of us and see not the place of our inevitable demise but the setting of our exciting and faith-filled future!

I count it a great privilege to serve here as pastor of FUMC Grand Junction, and I look forward to what God will do in our midst in the year ahead.

Joyfully and respectfully submitted,

Rev. Steve Easterday-McPadden
Pastor, FUMC Grand Junction