

## Bishop: Focus on Vitality, Renewal

As United Methodist churches struggle with declining memberships, dwindling resources, and older constituencies, Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton says it's time to move out of a survival mentality fraught with fear and focus on giving God glory and demonstrating God's love.

"Large and small membership churches are facing increased competition -- and not necessarily from other churches," he said. "The competition is with a world and a culture that, on its best day, actually embodies some of the theology we preach about, and, on its worst day, tempts people to embrace ideas and movements that are more appealing than attending an 11 a.m. worship service full of tradition and liturgy, but empty of spirit and meaning."

There is apathy within the church, he explains. We need to renew our passion for God—God's goodness and God's blessing in our lives.

"Do we want the church to look different than it does now – nimble, and fresh, vibrant and alive – filled with all ages and races – a true glimpse of heaven?" the Bishop asks. "If we do, we can't just sit around and hope that it will happen."

As District Superintendent William B. Meekins, Jr. pointed out during the Western PA Annual Conference, "Vital ministry demands that we, as a people of faith, move away from a mentality that says, 'as long as the church is here for my

needs, then I am satisfied.'" We must eliminate the complacency that limits the potential of making disciples.

Meekins quoted John Wesley, Methodism's founder: "I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold fast the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out."



Although much of what we do, and the way we do it, just isn't working, Bishop Bickerton said, there are some significant things that are working. Among them:

•**Our theology** of grace that brings hope in the midst of despair, we believe that God will see us through.

•**Our outreach**, whenever there is need; and

•**Our people**--good people with a deep faith in God who do good things.

It's time to invest our resources, conversations and energies into local church vitality, renewal and revitalization, the Bishop says. "This is not a time to retreat, but a time to push forward with hope and possibility. We can do it!"

– Jackie Campbell

## Bible Study and Prayer

Join United Methodists throughout Western Pennsylvania in studying these Bible passages from the Revised Common Lectionary and praying for these congregations and pastors.

### August 7-13, 2011

*Eighth Sunday After Pentecost--Green*

**Read:** Genesis 37: 1-4, 12-28, Psalm 105: 1-6, 16-22, 45b; Romans 10: 5-15, Matthew 14: 22-33

#### Pray for:

- ✠Pittsburgh: Mary S. Brown-Ames UMC, Pittsburgh Dist., Jeffrey J. Lukacs, pastor
- ✠Wright's and Edwards Chapel, Washington Dist., Thomas E. Hoeke, pastor
- ✠Ambridge: First and Fellowship UMCs, Butler Dist., D. Renee Mikell, pastor
- ✠Barkeyville UMC, Franklin Dist., Mary Ann McConnell, pastor
- ✠Reynoldsville: First UMC, Indiana Dist., Thomas D. Carr, pastor
- ✠West Pittsburg and Wampum UMCs, Butler Dist., Todd M. Davis, pastor

### August 21-27, 2011

*Tenth Sunday After Pentecost --Green*

**Read:** Exodus 1:8-2:10, Psalm 124, Romans 12:1-8, Matthew 16:13-20

#### Pray for:

- ✠Indian Creek Charge, Connellsville Dist., Paul C. Freidhof, pastor
- ✠Fishertown Charge, Johnstown Dist., John R. Virgin, pastor
- ✠Greensburg: First UMC, Greensburg Dist., W. Stephen Morse, pastor
- ✠Johnsonburg UMC, Kane Dist., Jay P. Tennies, pastor
- ✠Speers/Dunlevy/Charleroi: First UMCs, Washington Dist., Ross A. Pryor, pastor
- ✠Allegheny River Charge, Indiana Dist., Thomas Bonomo, pastor; Sara Wrona, associate
- ✠Fairall Charge, Washington Dist., Ronald J. Geisler, pastor

### August 14-20, 2011

*Ninth Sunday After Pentecost--Green*

**Read:** Genesis 45:1-15, Psalm 133, Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32, Matthew 15: (10-20) 21-28

#### Pray for:

- ✠Cabot UMC, Butler Dist., Matthew R. Judd, pastor
- ✠Clymer Charge, Indiana Dist., Brian Keller, pastor; Dennis L. Marshall, associate
- ✠Diamond: Evangelical UMC, Erie-Meadville Dist., Terry T. Brown, pastor
- ✠Electric Heights UMC, Greensburg Dist., Emma L. Smith, pastor
- ✠Belle Vernon: First UMC, Connellsville Dist., David P. Zona, pastor
- ✠McMasters UMC, Greensburg Dist., Scott L. Gallagher, pastor

### August 28-September 3, 2011

*Sixth Sunday After Pentecost--Green*

**Read:** Exodus 3:1-15, Psalm 105:1-6, 23-26, 45c, Romans 12:9-21, Matthew 16:21-28

#### Pray for:

- ✠New Horizons Charge, Franklin Dist., Mark E. Goswick, pastor
- ✠Holsopple: Bethel and Centennial UMCs, Johnstown Dist., Edward C. Patterson, pastor
- ✠Anne Ashley and Hays UMCs, Pittsburgh Dist., Anthony S. Fallisi, pastor
- ✠Tionesta/Tylersburg/Helen Furnace/Scotch Hill UMCs, Kane Dist., J. Mark Hurst, pastor; Keith Martin, associate
- ✠Bridgeville: First UMC, Washington Dist., William D. Shaw, pastor
- ✠McKnight UMC, Pittsburgh Dist., Nathan W. Carlson, pastor

