

Pastor Ray's Ramblings:



Planning for our future includes studying the landscape of the American church. There are numerous academic studies that have been undertaken and continue that seek to identify numerous aspects of church life including attendance trends, church growth and decline, financial giving statistics among different brands of American churches, denominations that grow and so on. There are some who believe America is going the way of Europe when it comes to religious practice; that is towards secularization. Yet, there are statistics that show that more people attend church in America today than at any time in its history. Over the next few editions of this column I will cite some research, some statistics, and what they could mean for us.

Somewhere around 15% of American congregations are growing, around 25% have remained about the same size for the past decade or so. That means about 60% of churches are declining in membership. Some studies put this last category higher in percentage.

Here are some discoveries in a recent Harvard University study; I will quote the study for accuracy. When the question is raised why there is such a difference in perception as to whether the practice of faith is growing or in decline in this country the study says: "It comes down primarily to what kind of faith one is talking about. Not the belief system per se, but the intensity and seriousness with which people hold and practice that faith. Mainline churches are tanking as if they have super-sized millstones around their necks. Yes, these churches are hemorrhaging members in startling numbers, but many of these folks are not leaving Christianity. They are simply going elsewhere. Because of this shifting, other very different kinds of churches are holding strong in crowds and have been for as long as such data has been collected. The percentage of Americans who attend church more than once a week, pray daily, and accept the Bible as wholly reliable and instructive to their lives has remained absolutely, steel-bar constant for the last 50 years or more, right up to today."

The Harvard Study simply reflects what countless others have already: that where people engage in Spirit filled worship,

where people are passionate about their relationship with God, where the Bible is trusted to be authoritative and compelling in matters pertaining to life and daily exercise of faith; that a community of faith will thrive and grow.

What does this mean for us? What we believe and how we practice our faith on a consistent daily basis matters in determining our future. Peter Drucker, a guru of American business management says that leaders are responsible to continually ask and answer this basic question - "What business are we in?" Leadership in growing churches consistently answer this question by saying the church exists to worship and glorify God, to disciple people of faith, and to witness that faith to others. Our attention to these things will really help us in 2019. Have a great New Year, one and all!

Announcing "ConGo Enjoy-Meant" Events

We are "ConGo" (Christians on the Go) and meant to go and enjoy good food and fun activities together!

"Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." Neh. 8:10

"Go and enjoy":

January 13- Hymn Sing and "Snow on the Mountain!" 5:30-7:00pm- "Snow on the Mountain" is an amazingly unusual combination of foods - rice, turkey gravy, cheese, celery, pineapple, almonds, olives, chow mien noodles, green onions and coconut that add up to a delicious meal! You build your own mountain so if there's an item you don't like you can skip it. This along with an inspiring hymn sing will provide a splendid time for all of fun, food and fellowship!

Please RSVP with Mat, 231-414-7501, and if anyone would like to provide one of the food items that would be great!



Women's Fellowship:

Once again, our Home Tour was a great success! Thanks to all of you for your part in this annual fundraiser. We will let you know our final proceeds once we have received and paid our bills, but we can tell you now that we did well. We couldn't have done it without all of you. Whether it be greeting people at a home, baking for Plum Pudding and the Tea, making quality crafts, designing arrangements and swags, preparing food for the luncheon, or any of the many other jobs your support was important. **THANK YOU!!**



Often during the new year people sort cupboards, drawers, and closets, clearing out things that are not needed. If you come across unused items that could be put in gift baskets, including gently used books, please bring them to the church and put them in the room off Fellowship Hall with Becky's name on them. They will be included in baskets to be sold at Plum Pudding during Home Tour 2019. These beautiful baskets have become quite popular and are pure profit for us. Thanks for supplying your like-new treasures.

Becky Tuuk

Plum Pudding:

With a great deal of thankfulness I would like to first of all thank my committee for all their help on 2018 Plum Pudding organization, set up, pricing and the actual sale. To all of the members of FCC - I want to thank YOU for your donations to the project. May you all have a Happy 2019.

Blessings, **Mary Butterick**

Our Church Family:

Health Concerns ~

Bob DeShetler has moved to Transitional Health Services.

Thank you

Your church staff thanks all who gave so generously to the Christmas Purse. We each feel truly blessed to serve in this caring church family.

Pastor Ray, Mat & Deb, Jack and Lorene

January Birthdays

- 9 Ponnie Foster
- 10 Erik St. Peter
 Anne VandeKieft
- 13 Collin Zeerip
- 14 Nathan McKivitz
 Terri Wahl
- 15 Lauren Stroschin
- 19 Don Potter
- 20 Marjorie Derks
 Ann Werner
- 21 Mat Emerick
- 22 Fran Stewart
- 24 Garrison Frei
- 29 Barbara Blass-Frisbey



January Anniversaries

- 2 Van & Judy Nadeau
 Robert & Anne VandeKieft
- 3 Jon & Judy Clapp
- 22 Steve & Karla Johnson
- 29 Jack & Mary Butterick

