

Tower Chimes Article for August, 2010

“Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”
Matthew 13:8, 9

July 1 was a new year's day for me. Unlike our calendar year where New Year's Day is experienced on January 1, each United Methodist pastor in the Wisconsin Conference experiences the beginning of a new appointment year in the middle of the calendar on July 1. So this past July 1 marked the beginning of my 8th year here at Wesley Church. Beginnings (and endings) are usually times that we pause to reflect on the past and look ahead to the future. We may consider what God has already done through us and what we sense the Holy Spirit is calling us to be about in the days ahead.

In a recent article by Will Willimon, who is the bishop of the United Methodist Church's Birmingham (Ala.) Area, and a teacher and author as well, Willimon challenges us to remember who we are. He writes that we are Wesleyans. That means we believe in *the growth of the Kingdom of God*--and not only growth in our denomination over all, but growth right where we are, right in our midst. This growth ideally takes places along three lines: growth in membership, growth in our ability to witness to our faith, and growth in mission and service to the world.

John Wesley experienced friction with the established church of his day (the Church of England) not only because of his spiritual enthusiasm, but because he refused to limit his ministry to inside-the-box thinking. Wesley was also a spiritual leader who held the people accountable for the growth of the church. According to the bishop's article, “as of 1781, Wesley marked with an asterisk those Circuits that had an increase in membership, which was the case with 32 of them, or exactly half. This method was used for a few years until the percentage of Circuits that experienced increases in membership was 75 percent of the connection.”

As we step forward together in this 8th year of my appointment to Wesley Church, let's look back to celebrate the new members we have received over the years, the growth we've experienced in feeling more comfortable to pray and lead devotions within our faith community, and our ongoing outreach into the world through our personal involvement and financial support. But let's also raise the bar for this new year by stepping out in new ways to grow our church even more in membership, witness, and mission and service. In fact, some new ways have already taken root and are sprouting.

For our Lord wants us to be fruitful. And he will help us to be so, even beyond all our expectations, as we step forward in faith and action.

Peace in Christ,
Pastor Ruth