

Church Council Update

A Monthly Newsletter for the Church Council of Baker Memorial United Methodist Church

September 2005

From Mark's Desk . . .

"When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do . . . Pray then in this way: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name . . .'"
—Matthew 6:7-9

Ever since Ellie was an infant, I've made a special point of handling the "bedtime routine" at our house whenever I'm home. It's changed a lot in the past 4-and-a-half years, from bottles and burping in the beginning to the tooth-brushing and stories today. But there has always been one constant: Gina and I have always made a point of prayers at bedtime. When Ellie was too small to talk herself, we prayed in her stead: *Dear God, please bless . . . thank you for . . . Please give us . . . in Jesus name we pray, Amen.*

**Our next meeting will be
Monday, September 19,
2005 at 7:00 p.m., in
Wiley Hall.**

Ellie adopted the same prayer form when she began talking, and used it every night, adding new people to bless, and new thanksgivings, and new supplications as they came along. And each night, the prayer got longer . . . and longer . . . and longer. But at the same time, the words were coming faster and faster. I wondered, was she really thinking about what she was praying? And then, it hit me: Do I? Or do I repeat prayers without thought, letting my mind wander as I "heap up empty phrases?"

But tonight (Wednesday, September 14), something different happened. I was putting Ellie to bed after her long day at home recuperating from flu-like symptoms. She started the prayer like she normally has, but then she stopped. "Dad, I want to do a different prayer," she said. I told her that was fine, and she began:

Dear God, thank you for making me better. Please help mama's diabetes, and make Far-Far better, too. ("Far-Far" is Katie Swenson's grandfather, Erik's dad.) I liked the sunshine you made for me, and the rain, too. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

It was much shorter than usual, but completely from the heart. After the Amen, Ellie looked up at me and said, "I think God liked that prayer a lot better."

As I kissed Ellie goodnight and slipped quietly from her room, I thought of Jesus' instruction about praying . . . how it should be from the heart, and not just a rote recitation while my mind wanders else where. And that brought to mind the prophecy of Isaiah: ". . . and a little child shall lead them." (Isaiah 11:6). And there ended my lesson. Thanks be to God!

Your thoughts and comments are always welcome.

Marsha Byers Retires

Marsha Byers, the Church Council's Recording Steward since 2003, has retired in order to undertake more volunteer work in the field of literacy. We are grateful for the fine work that she did, and we will miss her hard work and dedication to this task.

Even though Marsha will be difficult to replace, we will attempt to do so (at least on a temporary basis) at the beginning of our September meeting. If the Holy Spirit is calling you to consider serving in this position, please see Senior Pastor Ronni Verboom, who is the Chairperson of the Committee on Lay Leadership.

September Meeting Summary

In addition to our usual reports, we will be discussing several new items at the meeting:

- Senior Pastor Ronni Verboom is requesting the formal establishment of something that already exists on an informal basis: a *Pastor's Discretionary Fund*, which would permit the disbursement of funds at the discretion of the ministerial staff primarily to assist church member and constituents in need—for essentials of life, as well as for counseling assistance.
- Frank W. Bresemann is a Clinical Professional Counselor who is licensed by the State of Illinois. He is currently given space in the church to counsel Lazarus House clients for eight hours per week. Pastor Ronni and Pastor Rich recommend expanding the time to 16 hours per week, and also make his services available to church members at a sliding fee scale.

Ministry and Committee Reports for the October Meeting

If you have a written report for the October meeting, or have a major proposal to be decided at our October meeting, please get it to me in writing by noon on Sunday, October 9. You can leave it in the church council mailbox by the stairs to Pastor Ronni's office, or you can e-mail it to me at mdarmstrong@smartgate.com. I will distribute it to the council ahead of time.

Trivia

President Bush, a member of Highland Park United Methodist Church in Dallas, Texas, is the first U.S. president from Methodism in a century. The first Methodist president was U.S. Grant, a member of the (then) Galena Methodist Episcopal Church in Galena, Illinois. If you visit, Galen, be sure to walk up the hill to the brick church building. If it is open, you can see the sanctuary in which President Grant worshiped, and even sit in the pew where he usually sat—it's the one with the pennant on the center aisle end.