

Smoky Mountain Reflections

November 2010

Plant? Grow or Go? These are questions about which we all need to be in prayerful consideration over the coming months. Our church council and building committee will be examining the work done over the past few years on our expansion project. I am writing this article to get us all up-to-date and praying about these things, seeking God's guidance as we look at how best to manage our current rate of growth.

The first question is one of **planting**, a question the church should always be asking, and we will continue to examine this possibility as we seek to be good stewards of God's blessings. It is clear that the Kodak and Newport areas could use a good confessional Lutheran presence. However it was determined in past discussions (and little has changed since then) that we are probably a number of years away from being able to make a concerted effort to plant a church in either of these areas.

The second question concerns **growing or going**, expanding our current location or relocating, or some phased combination of both. How did we get here? In July of 2006, the Portier family was blessed to become members of this congregation. Since that time, God has blessed our fellowship with over 120 new faces. And we have bid farewell by transfer, death or removal to 75 members of our church family. We live in a very transient community and our church family reflects that reality. If we do the math, it shows a few things. First, only 50 of us have been members for more than 4 years. That means 70% of our congregation have been members for less than 4 years. This is a growth rate of over 7% in our membership. This really should not surprise us because Saint Paul has been on a steady rate of growth since its early days in the Holiday Inn wedding chapel 15 years ago. But the rate of growth in our weekly attendance has started to increase a little faster than we anticipated. Our worship attendance has been at a steady growth rate of 7% over the past 5 years, however in the past 6 months, that rate of increase is closer to 9%. A larger percentage of a larger number means we are experiencing overcrowding in our 11 AM service. This is about 2 years earlier than we anticipated. And this does not even take into consideration our Sunday School attendance which has doubled in the past year, adding 2 additional classes. Because of this, we have one room in our current facility that is serving 4 purposes: Sunday School classroom, nursery, office, and vestry. These are good problems to have, but if we do not start to deal with these issues soon, it will affect our ability to share and spread the Gospel.

This brings us to our current set of issues. At this current growth rate, in less than 5 years our congregation will be over 245 members and we will have over 170 a week in worship. At this rate our current expansion plan will no longer be sufficient to meet the needs of our congregation by the year 2018. If we are going to spend 2 to 4 hundred thousand dollars on an expansion, we would need to get at least a decade of use out of that expansion in order to be good stewards of such an expense. Additionally, the city just installed water lines on Pullen Road, so we need to reconsider the cost of installing a water sprinkling system which will allow us to expand beyond the 299 limit we have in our current plan. This means we need to reexamine what our new maximum capacity is for this 3 acre plot of land, considering all issues such as sewage, parking space, worship space, classroom space, office space and all the other variables that were considered for the previous maximum in order to figure out what is the most effective use of what God has blessed us to be stewards of.

None of this is a crisis, quite to the contrary. God is in control. We just need to calmly be proactive in caring for and ministering to all whom God has blessed us with the opportunity to serve. Blessed to share the blessing is a way of life—not a slogan. In the meantime, you can expect a phone call from your elder soon as we try to find a logical place to put another service in order to take pressure off our 11 AM service.

As we at Saint Paul embark on this grand endeavor to make the most of our God-given time, talents, and treasures for the purpose of fulfilling "The Great Commission," and while seeking to do this in accordance with His will, let's work together as a church body to be good stewards of all God's blessings. The list of blessings is long and we need to press forward together taking inventory and being proactive about sharing the peace and love that Christ has placed in our hearts.

So in this season of thanksgiving, please take some time to examine how God has blessed you in your daily walk with Him and add to your regular prayer these critical decisions we need to make in the coming

months. And do not be shy... all members are invited to attend all business meetings and submit any ideas you have to deal with God's abundant blessing on our congregation.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Portier

I believe our growth rate slowed with the economy and due to the size of our facility
As of January 2019 St Paul is a congregation of 225 with attendance at 125