

First Bethel United Methodist Church Beyond the Plate (October through December 2015)

This is our twenty-eighth report on beyond-the-plate ministries. This report is intended to highlight the myriad ways First Bethel reaches out in love and fellowship to witness, to be generous in our giving, to serve well, to teach with distinction, and to partner with those in need. We are told by a wonderful man of God, "The circumstances of your life have uniquely qualified you to make a contribution. And if you don't make that contribution, nobody else can make it." (Harold S. Kushner, prominent American rabbi, and author of "When Bad Things Happen to Good People" and "When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough".) Each of us is indeed qualified by singular, generous gifts of our God to do precisely as God would wish us to do in the manner in which God would have us do. We are assured that our Father God was the first to pay it forward.

October

Special Offering for October – "Fulfilling the Faith" was the target of this special offering. While there was no way to accurately account for the extra giving (as opposed to those monies already dedicated for "Fulfilling the Faith" on a weekly or monthly basis) rest assured that all donations are gratefully accepted in our efforts to pay off this outstanding debt. For those unfamiliar with this indebtedness, it was incurred when we needed to improve, upgrade, and bring into compliance our sanctuary, founder's hall, education wing, and parking lot. It's absolutely essential that we get "Fulfilling the Faith" debt behind us so that we can look forward to a sound financial footing.

Charge Conference - This important congregational meeting took place the evening of October 6, with District Superintendent Paul Taylor presiding. Paul began the gathering by expressing his gratitude for our prayer support during his recent health issues, and shared his delight at being with us because he did not expect to be well enough to do so. First Bethel is recognized within our conference as being a solid, caring, welcoming, passionate, church that is continuing to heal. Paul urged us to love each other, and to understand that we are more alike than different. He also urged that we continue to work together for the glory of God. Our church intends to pay 100% of our Mission Share (Conference Apportionment) for 2015, and we are committed to our future together as the body of Christ.

Music, Music, Music - October 11 was the date of a very special Sunday incorporating music into nearly every aspect of the worship services. The choir sang three beautiful anthems (favorites), Jeff Leonhardt led a group of instrumentalists and vocalists in the performance of the original faith

song "More Than Enough", which was inspired by one of Tom's sermons. Also sung were a congregational favorite – the rousing "I'm Gonna' Live So God Can Use Me", and Jeff's "One Church". What an inspiring morning.

"The Book of Forgiving" – Wednesday evenings in October were dedicated to a discipleship class led by Pastor Tom. The book was written by Desmond Tutu, South African social rights activist and retired Anglican bishop who attained worldwide recognition as an opponent of apartheid. Teacher of strength and forgiveness and love.

Violet Mutasa – On October 18, we were blessed to hear Ms. Mutasa, a teacher at the Nyadire Primary School in Zimbabwe, share her knowledge of the challenges facing Zimbabwe as the people in her country endeavor to recover from years of upheaval. She shared with us her background with Nyadire and the importance of the help provided by The Nyadire Connection (TNC). TNC is based in Pittsburgh, and is a faith-based, non-profit organization that endeavors to support and sustain the Nyadire United Methodist Mission in northeastern rural Zimbabwe. The Nyadire United Methodist Mission comprises a hospital, nursing school, preschool through high school system, an orphanage, a teachers' college, a farm, and also provides services to the surrounding community. First Bethel's involvement with TNC began in 2006 with the sponsorship first of Charles, then of Nyasha (see photos of the boys in the Narthex). Over the past few years, we've greatly supported the Chicken Barbecue, which has funded 80 to 90 teenagers in taking their O-Level exams (to the tune of \$100/each). Passing these exams is critical to these young people for furthering their education and securing their futures; inability to afford the exams or failing the exams is a dead end for them. It is nearly

impossible to measure how our gifts to this important mission are paid forward, but those gifts are blessed. We will hear further on the work of the Methodist Church through TNC on February 28, when Rev. Forbes Matonga, the pastor of Nyadire Mission, will speak to us from the pulpit. We look forward to making him welcome and hearing his message.

New Member Sunday – On October 25, we welcomed to our midst Sam and Luann Mudrak, Susan Amrhein, and Alyssa Stadelman. It is a privilege, an honor, and a blessing to receive new members to our First Bethel family.

November

Special Offering for November - Pastor's Aid gathered in \$552 needed dollars. Proceeds from this offering may be judiciously used to help provide support to churches and shelters for help with food and utility bills, or to provide direct assistance to neighbors and friends in dire need. Thank you for supporting this offering.

Fall Clean-Up – About 20 people showed up for this important work session on November 7. Gary Graney manned a crew removing dead trees along the driveway while some people raked leaves and performed general outdoor clean up. Many people were indoors, scrubbing all of the bathrooms, baseboards, floors, the kitchen, and washing windows. A group cleaned all of the pews. It was said, “The church was really clean and ready for any inspection from the State!!” It seemed like everyone was having fun! We are so thankful for good planning, good workers, and most excellent work!

Square Dance! - Our Second Annual square dance was held November 8. We were requested to bring a non-perishable food item for donating to support friends and neighbors. Around 30 adults and kids attended, everyone seemed to enjoy the evening, and there were many requests to have another one! Great job planning and organizing!

King School Kids Thanksgiving Dinner - On November 17, the gift of a dinner was donated and provided by members of the First Bethel congregation for the children and families of KSK pre-school and day care, and in thankfulness for our peerless KSK staff for outstanding service and dedication.

Women's Retreat – Twenty-four women attended the retreat held November 13-15 at Olmstead

Manor. Ruth Higginbotham, who was our leader this year, did a marvelous job leading the sessions based on the book “Created For Happiness – Understanding Your Life in God” by Cynthia A. Bond Hopson and Sarah Heaner Lancaster. Several women participated in the retreat for the first time this year, and many relationships were formed or deepened while the ladies explored the many facets of happiness. There were thoughtful discussions and interesting activities surrounding definitions and theology of happiness, how happiness might be achieved, and how the Bible and popular culture depictions of happiness differ. At any given moment, one might have witnessed tears of sadness or joy, silence, lively group discussions, singing, or roaring laughter. It was a refreshing, relaxing time of reflection, renewal and friendship, with great food, and fun to top it off. Now if that doesn't make you happy... ;^)

Yankee Candle Fundraiser – This fall/winter fundraiser raised dollars for our Appalachia Service Project in June. First Bethel received 40% of the profit toward the ASP trip, earning \$294 to help us bring light and hope to our neighbors in need.

Thanksgiving Service - On November 24, we held our annual Thanksgiving Service. The service was one of gratitude, special music, with a call to embrace our future. We do have much to be grateful for.

December

Special Offering for December – The dollars from this special offering (\$910) were directed toward supporting the East German Partnership. The Partnership is a world mission fund cooperating with the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) to help our partners who are assisting refugees. As winter sets in, this assistance becomes critical.

Advent Study – “Sent” was a five-week Scriptural study held on Wednesday evenings (beginning on December 2) that endeavored to help us to understand how, where, and why we are sent into the world by Christ. These studies seem intended to help us to understand how the oldest of stories remains fresh, new, inspirational, and instructive.

Head to Toe Tree - We were encouraged to bring new or newly made gloves, mittens, scarves, and socks to decorate the tree for presentation to those in need at The Melting Pot in the South

Hills. We're told that the young people at The Melting Pot were overjoyed!

Angel Tree - The Angel Tree begins in a decorated state, and we are asked to remove angels printed with specific requests, many for Ward Home or South Hills Interfaith Ministry. Also included were angels bearing opportunities for our church kitchen, KSK, ASP, and our Quilting Ministry. Deb reported that we received many gifts for all of the groups! Great response.

Advent Evening – This well-planned and festive evening was held on December 6, beginning with a meal (main course, rolls, and beverages provided by the generous and energetic women of our Martha Circle, while the rest of us were asked to provide salads, side dishes, or desserts.) We moved on to crafts, then to the sanctuary for carols and a service. An all-round good time!

Jesus' Birthday Party – On December 12, our kids were invited to learn about and celebrate the real meaning of Christmas – Jesus' Birthday. About 14 kids from the age of 2 through the 8th grade joined the party. They were invited to bring a baby gift for SHIM or for The Washington Women's Shelter. They heard the story "The Night Before Jesus was Born!", and were encouraged to join in the games and crafts and to enjoy treats, a cookie cake, and a pizza lunch. A truly fun time was had by all.

...and then, and then - We went caroling! On December 13, a group of 34 people (kids and big people) visited three nursing or assisted living facilities: Meadowcrest, Mt. Vernon, and Kane. We were joined very enthusiastically by residents more times than we thought might be possible. We had a blast!

Service of Light – On December 15, First Bethel held a Service of Light. The service is a quiet one of sharing, prayers, scripture, and healing hearts - acknowledging God's presence in the midst of loss, pain, illness, insecurity, or isolation during what is largely considered to be the most joyous of seasons.

Christmas Dinner – A tongue-in-cheek "non-progressive progressive dinner" was held on December 19 at the home of Zane and Deb Dennick-Ream. The dinner was open to youth in grades 5 through 12. We are so appreciative of the warmth and generosity of the hosts and the support of Amy Scott in keeping these kids active and energized within the arms of our fellowship.

Special Sunday – December 20 was the date of two very special worship services. At the 9:00 a.m. service, the Chancel Choir presented Alan Pote's cantata, "He is Born!". The narration, joyful ensemble offerings, and beautiful solos flow beautifully to tell the story of Christ's birth. We are thankful to our skilled accompanist, patient director, soloists, narrator, and our full choir for a lovely offering of a beautiful story.

At the second service, our young people presented their annual pageant, "A Christmas Present", by Allison de Kanel. The heart of the story was that Jesus came at Christmas to love everyone that God created. That truth remains to this day. Twenty-six children and seven adults brought this pageant to life for us. A hearty thanks to the kids who worked so hard to prepare the pageant and to their teachers and mentors who demonstrate Christ's love to them and to us without fail.

Live Nativity Scene – On December 20, First Bethel recreated the first Christmas in Bethlehem – a visit to the manger. A trip to "The Bethlehem Marketplace", was offered inside a transformed founders hall, where it was warm and welcoming. Bustling activity inside was inexplicably quieter than the boisterous outside. Foods and drinks were available, giving us a chance to meet and greet others. Many thanks to the organizers of and participants in this wonderful evening.

Christmas Eve Services

4:00 – The ABC's of Christmas took each letter of the alphabet and told something about the event – past and present. Eight young people served as liturgists. Each member of the congregation received one of four cards upon arrival to the sanctuary. The cards contained single words with a corresponding response. When their word was used in the sermon, they were told to hold up their card and respond. The response to the word "Shepherds" was "Let's go see"; the response to the word "Angels" was "Hallelujah!"; the words "Wise Ones" elicited the response "Look a Star!", and finally the word "Baby" received a response of "Our Savior". Thus, the story of the first Christmas was told and everyone in the congregation was involved! The Angels of God sang, and the Youth Bells rang with delight!

7:00 - This special musical service was a delightful mix of instrumentals, vocal anthems, carols, scripture, candles aglow, message of hope, and an overwhelming abundance of excitement, antici-

pation, and congregational participation. Extraordinary, thoughtful presentation!

10:00 - Our traditional service was a lovely mixture of word, carols, anthems, candles, poinsettias, smiling congregants, and a wonderful feeling of peace and expectation.

Bell Ringing Service – Our bell service on December 27 was filled with joy, song, hopeful message, and a bit of hilarity provided by our pastor. He'll need a new bell maker before next year we're thinking. You just had to be there....

Christmas Cards – Our very own Linda Barnicott offered sales of her Santa Claus card "Shhhh!" as a fundraiser to benefit an effort to replace weather-beaten wood trim around our entry doors to the Sanctuary, and to refurbish the doors. Our sharing of Linda's extraordinary gift has garnered \$780 for First Bethel by selling 65 boxes. Blessings to all who supported this effort.

Sarris Candy Sale – This sale earned \$495.54 toward the programming for the Youth of First Bethel, and to enable their participation in retreats and/or conferences. Thank you so much for supporting this delicious and valuable fundraiser.

David Zahniser's Eagle Scout Project – We have been watching with anticipation David's efforts and are happy to report that his Eagle Scout project is complete, except for installation of a hand rail to be completed in the Spring. Nine benches and a pulpit have been constructed and installed. A path was constructed, and the entire area was graveled. The cross was refurbished and repainted. Some landscaping around the entire area has been done, with many heavy rocks removed during digging and excavation.

David expresses thanks to the entire congregation for generous support during his project! And we in return would like to thank David and his family for diligence and dedication. Congratulations, David. We are blessed.

Appalachia Service Project (ASP) – ASP has been called "...a relationship-building ministry 'with construction on the side'." Paraphrasing from our November/December King's Light ASP information, we see that ASP is more than a "construction program". Faith is put into action while relationships are built with the families served and with each other. Lives are touched and transformed. Disciples are made and strengthened. This year, the ASP teams will travel to Kentucky during the week of June 19, 2016. We have new youth

participants and some of their parents as volunteers this year, as well as returning youth and adults, so it's bound to be a great experience. Watch for information on the ASP Bistros during Lent. We will again have delicious meals and wonderful fellowship as we raise funds and gather support for our work week. The ASP volunteers will be asking for your help to cook, serve, set up or clean up, so please just say YES to help us make homes warmer, safer and drier in Central Appalachia.

During the Christmas season, we received six gift cards to Giant Eagle, Home Depot and Walmart totaling \$140 from the Angel Tree. The gifts will be used to offset costs for the ASP trip including common supplies, safety gear, food and drinks to supplement lunches, and other incidentals for the work crews. All gifts were anonymous and greatly appreciated.

There are so many reasons to get behind this worthy project. Thank you for your prayers and participation.

Daily Bread – This program works to serve meals to the homeless or under-employed in Pittsburgh's North Side. Please get in touch with Sally Irick if you would like to help with this outreach. Her land line number is: 412-833-9324. Needed are dollar donations, people for prep work in our FB kitchen, and volunteers to take the meal to the North Side for serving. Volunteering to support Daily Bread in any way will absolutely warm your heart.

Library – Check out our rather extensive Library. For any questions or to find a resource, please ask our dedicated and very knowledgeable staff.

Financial Snapshot:

Church Income YTD: \$255,303
Church Expenses YTD: \$327,151
KSK Income YTD: \$388,429
KSK Expenses YTD: \$292,495

Fulfilling the Faith December: Income: \$2,855
Shortage (\$1,179)

Pledge Commitment Card Info:

Commitments: 87 pledge cards returned
Total Pledge Amount: \$178,209

Just A Thought - From Desmond Tutu, "Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world."