

First Bethel United Methodist Church Beyond the Plate (January through March 2016)

This is our twenty-ninth report on beyond-the-plate ministries. This report is intended to highlight the ways First Bethel reaches out in love and service. The first quarter this year comprises a liturgical season that walks a path that is arguably the most crucial to our Christian faith. A terrible death follows the beautiful stories of the birth, but the path to resurrection is sure. Christ barely wavers. And along his walk, he heals, performs miracles, preaches, teaches, provokes, prays, feeds, clothes, and provides a consummate example for how we should live our lives. Let the children come, feed my sheep, do good to those who harm you, turn the other cheek. Busy with God's message and God's work. A triumphant ride, a meal with beloved friends, a kiss, arrest, trial, agony. But...then, the glory of a resurrection morning! On a seemingly small scale, we attempt to fulfill a mandate from God to care for our brothers and sisters as Christ would have us do. That said, a glance at our church calendar will attest to the discipleship that has taken that message to heart for our neighbors near and far. "Thou that hast given so much to me give me one thing more, a grateful heart: not thankful when it pleaseth me, as if Thy blessings had spare days, but such a heart whose pulse may be Thy praise." (George Herbert - Welsh-born English poet, orator, and Anglican priest.) We at First Bethel are so blessed to have the compassion, strength, resources, facility, and willing hands to be able to give generously and joyfully and with grateful hearts.

January

Special Offering for January - The special offering for this month (\$686) went to Trustees for general repair work. An estimated \$7,000 was required for replacing pipes that broke in the walls last year, so these dollars will be both welcome and stretched. As a matter of interest, the contractor withheld his billing to allow us to gather together some funds. These bills will begin to arrive soon.

Conference Special Envelope - We gathered \$122 in donations for United Methodist Church Human Relations efforts for people in crisis, such as helping at-risk youth, strengthening community self-improvement efforts, and advocating for the oppressed.

Fifth Sunday - We are blessed to continue a tradition of special mission projects during months with a fifth Sunday. On January 31, we met in the Education Building to make snack bags for Daily Bread and to put together health kits for UMCOR and worked in the kitchen to prepare a meal for "Feed the Hungry". Many gifts, one spirit.

February

Special Offering for February - Our Trustees are the recipients of the dollars from this offering (\$765), which are intended for general repairs in our church and education wings.

Ash Wednesday - Come just as you are is the invitation of this service, and we are reminded that

our beckoning God calls us no matter our shortcomings, and loves us in spite of them.

Concert - In celebration of Valentine's Day, the Keystone Chorus brought their Barbershop style to First Bethel on February 13. Under the direction of our own Ken Williams, the guys presented an excellent eclectic program from the serious to the comedic. It was a wonderful way to kick off a series of concerts initiated by our men's group.

Easter Candy - Orders for our Easter sweets were due by February 21. The proceeds from this sale (\$413.32) will go to the Trustees in support of the efforts to repair the moldings and doors leading to the narthex from the Kings School Road entrance.

February Bistros - The dollars (\$916) from the first two of five Bistros went toward needed improvements for the Education Building. The flooring is breaking up and needs replacing, which is likely to be an expensive proposition. With thoughtful planning, our Kings School Kids stalwarts arranged "A Picnic in February" then "A Day at the Ball Park", with traditional picnic and ball park fare. Delicious food, fun decor, and lots of help. Thank you for support of these Bistros.

Leading Beyond Our Walls - This five-week Lenten discipleship study began February 17, led by Pastor Tom. Each week began with an excellent video presentation, followed by discussion. This study somewhat mirrored a program we were involved in a few years ago that was called "The Church Has Left the Building" in its encouragement to be intentional in carrying our gifts and

God's work from the sanctuary into surrounding communities and the world.

March

Special Offering for March - Children's Ministries is the recipient of this special offering. \$225 was given to support the efforts of this foundational ministry.

Conference Special Envelope - Our March donation for One Great Hour of Sharing totaled \$177. The United Methodist website states that our gifts to this effort lay the foundation for the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) to share God's love with communities everywhere. The offering underwrites UMCOR's "costs of doing business", helping UMCOR to keep the promise that 100% of any gift to a specific UMCOR project will go toward that project. None of this money goes toward administrative costs.

Daily Bread - On March 6 between services, we prepared a Daily Bread meal. That afternoon, we traveled to the former New Hope Methodist Church on the Pittsburgh North Side where we served the homeless or underemployed out of their kitchen. Daily Bread is a project of the United Methodist Church Union. It is interesting to note that the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank identifies Allegheny County as having a food insecure population of 176,360, which translates to a food insecurity rate of more than 14%. It is a real blessing to be able to extend a hand to these people.

Yankee Candle - The spring and summer catalog was available in the Narthex for ordering candles, accessories, seeds, etc. by March 6. 40% of the proceeds (\$761 in sales, netting us \$278) profited the Appalachia Service Project mission trip. If you missed that deadline, you may order until June 15. Catalogs are available at the back of the church. Go on-line to: yankeecandlefundraising.com and use Group #990076281. Incidentally, as of 3/29, on-line sales thus far amount to \$41.60. The items will be delivered directly to you and ASP will again receive 40% of the sale.

Hoagie Sale - Kings School Kids sold hoagies and earned (\$508) toward the replacement of flooring in their classrooms. The sale concluded in February for pick-up on March 10. The hoagies were delicious! Thanks to all who supported this effort.

Second of a Series - If you missed the Braddock Community Male Chorus (and Lillian Cannon) at

the concert held in Founders Hall on March 12, you missed a lot of toe tapping fun. Just under 50 attendees enjoyed the music of seven men, one soloist, a pianist, and one proud mom :o). They even accommodated a request for an encore of a delightfully rousing shout out to God ending with "Can't get enough of the Holy Spirit! Can't get enough of the power of God!"and we can't.

Palm Sunday - We had much to celebrate on this beautiful, energetic day. We exuberantly waved palms, received palm crosses, sang beautiful, uplifting music with the Chancel Choir joined by the Angels of God for the processional hymn and anthem, we heard an inspiring sermon, and were reminded of the solemnity of the week by a re-enactment of Christ's climb to Golgotha.

Confirmation Class - Tucked carefully into the Palm Sunday Service was the covenant service for the confirmation class as they became full members of First Bethel UMC. The class began in January and extended until mid-March, so their experience was fairly broad (and included pizza!). The young people who participated in the confirmation class were Kadin Gray, John Harmon, James Pauline, Alex Zahniser, and Lilly Zeminski. We extend congratulations to them, their parents and mentors, and are so proud to welcome them to this fellowship of the United Methodist Church.

Maundy Thursday - This day we celebrated Passover (the celebration of the liberation of the Israelites from slavery) with a Seder meal observance of the last meal Jesus shared with his disciples in the Upper Room. We shared the symbolic foods, remembered the bondage of the Jewish people and subsequent deliverance by God as they were led out of Egypt. Today, the observance serves also to remind us that many people continue to suffer repression, and we look to God for wisdom as we, in faith, strive to make a purposeful and positive difference in the lives of all people.

Good Friday - Central to the Tenebrae service is the gradual extinguishing of candles until at last and with a terrible loud noise, our Sanctuary is clothed in darkness - the Christ candle is extinguished. The moment is breathtaking and the depiction so vividly reminding us of Christ's sacrifice is wrenching. How broken the followers. No other service brings the awful truth of that moment into sharp focus with such emotion.

Easter Sunday - ...but, we have an awesome God. We are forgiven! Christ is risen! The Sanctuary is

radiant. Sunshine, warmth, beautiful flowers with heartfelt dedications, celebratory messages, and music fill the day with hope and our hearts with joy. This is a vision that will carry us.

Easter Festival - This festival for children featured all sorts of activities, including stories, working on crafts, a hunt for "resurrection eggs", and then got to enjoy a pizza lunch! Fifteen children attended the festivities and had a really good time. Thanks to the organizers and volunteers who kept our revelers safe and happy.

Home of Hope - The Lenten Home of Hope and Home of Hope Orphanage Giving Calendar was made available to us as a reminder of a giving opportunity for the children of Zimbabwe. If you have not yet had the opportunity to contribute, checks may be directed toward TNC (for The Nyadire Connection). Dollars from these donations will provide funds for the "O-Level" exam expenses, which the kids must pass to provide a lifetime of opportunities for them. Please continue to keep the children and the work of this mission in your prayers. Thank you.

Appalachia Service Project (ASP) - The venue, our cast of characters, and the people we serve may change each year, but the ministry remains focused on serving with compassion. This year, 15 volunteers (8 adults and 7 youth) will make up two ASP teams travelling to Virginia during the week of June 19 to build relationships and to make homes warmer, safer and drier. This is our 17th consecutive year of involvement in ASP! New youth participants and some of their parents will join seasoned volunteers for an experience of learning, working, and living for others. Blessings to share.

Bistro Addendum - The three Bistros held in March to support our ASP mission trip were an unqualified success - collecting \$628, \$627, and \$800 over the three weeks for a total of \$2055. We are most grateful to all who supported this effort. Many, many hands and hearts are involved in this outreach. Thanks to all for donations of time, talents, gifts, and prayers for ASP.

Our Website - **The new First Bethel website is up!** Check it out at www.firstbethelumc.org and return often because new information will frequently be added. Our website was completely redesigned to be more inviting to visitors, more informative for members, and more reflective of the church and its many ministries and opportunities for discipleship. You'll find details on how

to get involved, an interactive calendar of events, recent sermons, the Kings Light newsletter, Beyond the Plate, and Pastor Tom's blog! Let the church office know if you have ideas or items to share.

Library News - Our Church Librarian reports that more than 60 books, many of them donated, were added to the shelves in 2015. These books cover a broad range of subjects, including stories about Jesus, the Bible, Christian and historical fiction, inspirational works, biographies, devotionals, Newbery winners, sports, humor, self-help, children and families. Our Church Library has it all! In addition to many new and colorful children's books, there is now a specially designated area of a dozen or so Little Golden Books, thanks to a donation from one of our generous Moms.

SHIM - In February, South Hills Interfaith Ministry announced a new strategy expanding SHIM's reach to enable more people to work toward self-sufficiency. In concert with that strategy, adoption of a new name, South Hills Interfaith Movement, will reflect the expansion required to reach more community members with food, clothing, and services. In 2015, SHIM was able to help 4,000 residents. They, however, estimate that "nearly 9,000 people in the South Hills are struggling financially in the neighborhoods we serve". Doing the math reveals that 5,000 people are "fighting an uphill battle each day to get by" without knowing they have a place to turn to. They still struggle. The SHIM website states that "suburban poverty is on the rise, increasing nearly 5 times faster than in urban areas". SHIM's February press release announced several new programs and developments for 2016, including a new garden, volunteer opportunities, opening a food pantry in Baldwin, and expansion of its clothing room. Our trusty FB liaisons have reported that thus far in 2016, we have donated 336 lb of food. Please continue to pray and act generously, offering food, clothing, and dollar donations for this worthy family ministry. Blessings!

Water Bottles - Check out the table in the narthex holding the bright red bottles with the cross and flame logo and First Bethel UMC printed on them. The bottles are sturdy, inexpensive, and proceeds from the sale will support our teams going to ASP.

Church Entryway Refurbishment Encapsulation - Over the entire first quarter, dollars donated expressly earmarked toward the refurbishment of the Kings School Road entryway to the sanctuary were: \$180 in offering donations, \$780 from the

sale of Linda Barnicott's Christmas cards, a \$401 gift from our Martha Circle, and the \$413.32 from the Sarris Easter Candy sale. We're getting there!!

Financial Snapshot - First Quarter 2016:

Church Income YTD: \$65, 572

Church Expenses YTD: \$82, 917

KSK Income YTD: \$113,763

KSK Expenses YTD: \$72, 716

Fulfilling the Faith: Income \$9,425; Payment Made: \$12,102; Shortage: \$2,677

Around the Corner!

Bell'Art Ensemble - The next in the series of concerts our men have arranged for us will take place in the Sanctuary on Saturday, April 16, at 7:00 p.m., featuring the wonderful music of Central and South America. If you don't already have your ticket(s), I suspect you will be able to get them at the door (\$10.00 donation).

Mrs. D!! - In a single joint service on April 24 at 10:00 a.m., it will be our joy to honor Deb Dennick-Ream for her years of faithful service and celebrate as she retires as our Deacon. What a gift Deb is! We are delighted that she will remain at First Bethel to plan for and mentor our children's formative years since she has taken on the position of KSK Education Specialist. We are excited to see that our kids will continue to grow and develop under her tutelage. Following the service, a celebratory brunch will take place in the education bays. Please plan to be there to applaud Deb!

Taize Prayer Service - Look forward to the experience of this peaceful, meditative style of worship. Our first Taize service is scheduled for April 27 at 7:30 in a candle-lit Sanctuary.

The Pies are Coming - Orders for those delicious pies will be taken for three successive weeks (April 3, 10, and 17), and the pies are scheduled for delivery in early May. Watch for further information, and get those taste buds primed. Proceeds of this sale will support our ASP mission in June.

Relay for Life - On June 25, the annual Relay for Life will take place from 11:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. As usual, the KSK kids are planning their "Kids Edition", but the church is looking for people to help with the actual relay. Please call Deb

Dennick-Ream at 412-212-1414 for further information or to volunteer.

Annual Outing - Don't forget to reserve your tickets for the Pirate game on August 21 at 1:30 p.m. Tickets are \$24.00/person and space is limited (we have only 38 tickets available, and they'll go quickly after the weather warms up and we catch the baseball bug). Call Lynda soon at 412-835-6141 to reserve your tickets or for additional information.

Just A Thought - There's a great joy in my giving. It's thrilling. It's exhilarating. It's important to be a part of sharing. It is my love. It is my joy. (W. Clement Stone, businessman, philanthropist, and author)