

Pastor's Report

St. Paul's United Methodist Church

Pawleys Island, South Carolina

Charge Conference

November 12th, 2019

Rev. Dr. Wm. H. Phillips

Pastor

It has only been a few months since my arrival, and the people have been warm, kind, and generous. The SPRC scheduled some cottage style meetings as "*get to know each other*" socials. Gail and I greatly appreciate the effort and the openness which we received.

I am still learning. Each church has its culture, interests, rhythm, and concerns, and I am getting a sense of who St. Paul's is as a family of faith. And of course, struggling with all the names.

I see many strengths here. The church looks outside of itself. It is serious about ministry and mission. The concern is not only to those at the door of the church, but the community, and the world as well. It appreciates worship and is engaged on Sunday mornings. There is also a concern for growth not for a numerical increase, but the souls of those outside the family of faith. However, the church does want to thrive and be more than it is.

St. Paul's UMC is located at a tremendously busy intersection, which makes the church highly visible. Repair to the old antiquated sign and a refurbished web site and email system will further this visibility. Hopefully, these are accomplished soon.

The congregation is older and mostly retired. Right now, we are losing more members than gaining. It is quite challenging to attract young families with children and youth when you are caught between two dynamic churches like Belin UMC in Murrells Inlet and the Community Church in Pawley's Island. These two churches have resources we do not have, and children and youth tend to follow their friends to church.

I understand there was a time when the congregation was younger, and there were many youth and children here. At some point, the church stopped attracting young families. It was probably slow at first and went unnoticed. Members who were present then still remember those days and would like to have that again and the excitement that came with it. There is energy when children and youth are present, and we remember when we were younger and had our children and youth with us in church. Nostalgia itself causes to seek to recreate those days.

Housing is expensive in the immediate area of the church, and it makes it quite difficult for younger families with children to locate here. There are, however, unchurched children and youth in the larger community. Thus, we need to rethink our ministry and missional goals toward children and youth.

If the emotion of nostalgia is removed and our chief concern is a spiritual one, we will realize children and youth do not have to be in St. Paul's for us to put an indelible fingerprint upon their souls. The challenge is for

us to increase our focus upon taking the Gospel to them, where they are. Continually opening the campus to outside groups who minister to youth and children is a ministry for the church. When Saint Paul's UMC opens its doors to Scouting, Sports dinners, and after Students in the Word it is doing just that. And like the Good News Club in which several of our congregation participates the church goes to where the children are. We need to create more of those ministries and missions.

Saint Paul's UMC need not feel guilty for not being like other churches. We need to claim and celebrate who we are. Let us be the best version of ourselves. Let us be faithful to the Gospel and loyal to the Kingdom and grow and thrive where God has planted us. Let us claim and celebrate who we are and not feel guilty over what we are not.

Who are we then? We are basically a fantastic retirement church located in a vast and ever-growing retirement area. Every week more and more come here to retire from all areas of the state and regions of the nation. We need to claim this and decide and develop ways to minister to this community. Even though we do not have children and youth, we cannot ignore the tremendous opportunity to share the Gospel with those of retirement age. If we focus upon who we are not, we will lose the possibility to grow who we are.

Evangelism has changed over the years. It used to be going door to door, or giving tracts to strangers, or putting an ad in a newspaper. Those days are gone. Evangelism today is invitational. You invite people, not just to worship but to all church events as well. Evangelism at its best is done through relationships.

So, the best thing we can do as a church is to think how we might form new relationships with residents of Pawley's Island. This is done by doing the things that meet the needs of the community—serving the needs of the community. We could sponsor events. We might have an assorted array of classes taught. We could welcome groups and organizations into the church.

Along those lines, there are two things I would like to see started that might begin this. I would like to see them started as soon as possible after conscientious planning. One is A Snowbird/Sea Gull ministry. The program would run from Mid-January to late March. It targets both locals and visitors. Hopefully, we will promote in the Litchfield community (where both locals live, and visitors stay) and the State Park. It would be comprised of outings like golf, topical (*secular*) group meetings, a spiritual course of study, and a Wednesday meal with a topical speaker.

The second is similar to the first but geared primarily to the retired locals, although visitors are encouraged and welcomed. It would run twice a year—Spring and Fall. It would last one week each session and run from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm. There would be a spiritual study, a secular class, a speaker, and a meal. I would love to see this started this Spring.

Except for providing the place to meet, there would be no continual expense to the church. A minimal fee for both the Snowbird/Sea Gull ministry and the Shepherd Center will be necessary. There might be some initial start-up costs and that might be donated. The congregation must support these events with intentional attendance. That attendance gives something upon which to build and do outreach.

I am concerned for the Leadership. It seems burned out in many ways. The eighty/twenty rule is certainly at work. Eighty percent of the work is accomplished by twenty percent of the willing. Many seem to have retired from the work of the church, too, and need to be encouraged to engage and take on their responsibility. We

never retire from doing ministry and mission. Some of the best volunteers I have seen were well over eighty and regardless of physical limitations, some responsibility can be assumed.

Volunteerism is low, and several areas are either un-performing or not performing at all. Some committees have crossed over to other areas to ensure things not fail. Hopefully, we will be able to streamline the structure and minimize the systemic. Minimizing the number of meetings will also ease some pressure on the leadership. Hopefully, this will not only increase morale but also incite some who do not want to meet so often to volunteer in some capacity throughout the year.

St. Paul's has two distinct worship services. Like most churches with multiple worship services, it easy to begin thinking "*Us*" and "*Them.*" Yet, there is no "*us*" and "*them.*" Pentecost taught us that. When the Spirit of God blew in that upper room it united people of different races, cultures, ages, sexes, and languages into one family. The family of God. They kept their uniqueness but were one family with one mission.

St. Paul's is a single-family who celebrate two types of valid worship. One is traditional. The other is casual. Both have the same theological culture but express it differently. To merge them would be a disservice to both and the larger church general. In other words, nothing would be gained while losing much.

I do believe, however, that it is good to come together as a family of faith from time to time and worship together in combined services. I was encouraged when the Worship Team decided we would do this on 5th Sundays and follow the service with a family meal. Hopefully those type services will help us feel as one. Then too, if "*You feed them they will come!*"

Gail and I feel blessed for being part of the life of St. Paul's and having it a part of our lives. We are excited about the future together and look forward to the ministries and missions we can share. God is good. God is good all the time.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rev. Dr. Wm. H. Phillips