

PASTOR'S REPORT  
Charge Conference  
November 8, 1998  
Ruth Harper Stevens

MY FIRST FIVE MONTHS: According to my records, I have made 81 pastoral visits to 60 different families. I have also conducted three funerals. (That's one statistic I'd like to keep down in the coming year.) I have only baptized two children and have performed 0 weddings. (I look forward to raising that statistic.) We have received 11 new members into the life of Duke Memorial. (Evangelism is an area I hope to improve dramatically in 1999.)

Much of my effort thus far has involved learning the who, what, when and where of life here at Duke Memorial. Almost immediately, I went to work visiting the homebound and making appointments with the leaders who oversee ministries housed in our building: DCIA, Society of St. Andrew, the Community Life Center, AA and Alanon, the Durham Hispanic Ministry, the Weekday School, PMO, and the All Summer Day Camp. I must say this is one of the most highly utilized church buildings I have ever encountered.

Relationship building has also been a part of my focus since arriving here. Joe and I have opened the parsonage to a Staff Party, a Stephen Ministers' Dinner, a Spiritual Life Retreat and an Open House at which time approximately 130 persons toured the new parsonage. Also, in order to meet our many retirement home residents, I have had group lunches with the residents of the Methodist Retirement Center, Forest at Duke and Emerald Pond. These occasions I would like to repeat.

To get acquainted with our educational ministry, I have taught once in each of the adult classes (with the exception of the Seekers Class which is planned in the near future) and have visited the youth and children's classes. I have also spoken to the Senior Luncheon on "Learning to Grow Old," to the Agape Circle on "The Bishop's Initiative on Children and Poverty," to Wonderful Wednesday on "The Book of Revelation," and I did a portrayal of "Fanny Crosby" for Wonderful Wednesday. I spoke to Circle 8 about a woman of history named "Sarah Joseph Hale," and lead the Thursday Study Group on "The Book of Ruth." (Which included a shag dance demonstration by Ruth and Boaz.)

It has also been important for me to get acquainted with others in the community in order that we might collaborate on ministerial goals. To do this, I have visited with the leadership at Genesis Home, the West End Community Center, Durham Congregations in Action, Society of St. Andrew, the Community Life Center, the Ministerial Association, the ministers to Duke University, and the Reconciling Congregations Movement.

During this first year as your pastor, I have said "No" to many offers to preach, teach, supervise, and serve on committees. It is my intention to devote the majority of my time to the mission and ministry of this great church. Having said that, two conference related matters have demanded some of my responsibility: the Louisburg College Board of Trustees (We have been involved in a presidential search since my arrival, and have just secured Dr. Rosemary Gillett-Karam to be the next president.) and the Christian Unity Dialogue. (This group was appointed by the bishop and cabinet to discuss theological diversity in our Annual Conference particularly as it relates to the matter of homosexuality.)



Administratively, I have been working on a successful Stewardship Campaign designed to increase member's participation in the life of this church through their prayers, presence, gifts and service. Our minimum financial goal for 1999 is \$582,000. A part of this stewardship effort has been to work on finding the right persons for the leadership positions of this church, and then undergirding them with committee members who are given specific areas of responsibility. I am much more interested in task forces that meet to make things happen than I am in committees that convene without a specific purpose made up of members who have no role to fulfill.

STATE OF THE CHURCH: It is exciting to be a part of an old established church that is not a museum but the hub of activity. Duke Memorial is rare in that there is more happening here during the week than there is on Sunday. This is both good and bad. Good in that our facilities provide space to so many groups who reach far out into the community. Bad in that our own congregational life could be strengthened. What I mean to say is that other groups are often more consistent in their contacts with Duke Memorial than are the members of Duke Memorial. I have been concerned about worship attendance and Wonderful Wednesday participation and involvement in missional endeavors such as Habitat for Humanity. I have been a little disappointed in the hesitancy of church members to assume positions of leadership. Many are willing to take on short-term commitments, but the pool of those who will step forward and be leaders is small. This will hinder our reach if we cannot turn the trend around.

As with every institution there are areas that need shoring up. We need to get our financial commitments more in line with our congregation's ability to be generous. We need to take advantage of the great mission field that exists in the unchurched families that participate in our Weekday School and Parent's Morning Out. We need to reach the college and graduate students that are living so near our building. We need to streamline our operation in a number of areas. Most of all we need to hire a Secretary that can be here full-time. That may be a long-range goal, but one that must be realized if we are to more effectively utilize the great talents and visionary leadership we have in our wonderful staff.

Numerous things face us in the year ahead. I have dreams for this church that will enable us to bring more people into a committed relationship with Jesus Christ, that will see everyone having his or her own ministry to perform, that will enable us to interface with other organizations as we become a Community of Shalom. (This, by the way, is an official title for an interactive team of people from both the public and private sectors who will be planning ministry to meet the needs of this neighborhood.)

Despite our shortcomings, this is a strong congregation that gives off vibrations of wanting to become even more vibrant. We are positioned well to move into a new millenium as a force for good in Durham. We have the facilities, financial resources, talented laity, and gifted staff. Besides you have two of the best pastors to be found anywhere. Also, we have the Congregational Study coming up through the Ormond Center. Every resource is at our fingertips. All we need is the love of Christ to make dreams come true that are bigger than we can dream.

In the meantime, I just want to tell you that these are the most exhilarating days of my 30 years of Christian vocation. I came here anticipating a great church, and I have not been disappointed. My only prayer is that I will not let you down, and more



importantly that Christ will be lifted up by my leadership. I am wise enough to know that I can do nothing alone. So let's covenant to join hands, for "We are the Church Together."

*Geeth Harper Stevens*



