

## PASTOR'S REPORT

Charge Conference 2002

November 7, 2002

*Reverend Ruth Harper Stevens*

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This year marks the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of my ordination as a United Methodist Pastor. I can honestly say that this past year has been the best in twenty-five. Duke Memorial is an incredible church. It's unique in many ways. Despite the fact that we lack large-scale racial and international diversity, the church is a melting pot of differing beliefs, opinions and world-views. We have religious conservatives bordering on fundamentalists, as well as theological and social liberals. We had a number of seekers from non-faith and inter-faith backgrounds. On any given Sunday you may encounter someone raised Jewish, Buddhist, atheist, and agnostic. We are blessed with a rapidly growing influx of young adults, many of whom have deep roots in the Christian faith, and others who have come to learn and grow and often become baptized and join. Last year Lisa and I baptized 18 individuals, 4 of whom were adult men. Forty-six persons joined the church, 22 on Profession of Faith, making their first profession of faith in Christ.

Our church is witnessing new life monthly. Last Charge Conference I reported that we had 8 births. Since then we have had 12 births, and we presently have 7 on the way.

Since we last met Duke Memorial has received 46 new members. I am happy to report that over the past five years we have experienced a net increase in membership each year. During that timeframe we have had a net increase of 32 even though we have lost 93 persons by death.

Often the numerical growth seems slow, but it is also steady and solid. Our new members have given vital leadership, in part because of their own enthusiasm, but also due to the established members willingness to make room for them to lead. This is a very healthy signal for the future.

Our growth in numbers and involvement is evidenced in Sunday School. We've started a class called LifeBalance, designed for parents and their babies. And we've begun Emmaus Study Group, another youth class.

Our growth is also seen in worship attendance and participation. Children's Sabbath held October 22, 2002 included 353 worshipers. Approximately 90 children and youth participated in the leadership.

We also are aware of the increased participation at Wonderful Wednesday. During the school year 2000-01 we had an average of 53 in attendance. From January-March of 2002 we had an average of 62. This fall we have been averaging around 80. We have also added an additional Wednesday night study group, a sequel to "Companions in Christ." It is called "The Way of Forgiveness."

Our DMYF has been growing at a phenomenal rate, and a new group for twelfth grade seniors formed this fall. We have 12 involved in Senior Senago. To better communicate with all our youth a new web site is up and running. Log on to [www.dmyouth.org](http://www.dmyouth.org). Our youth have become increasingly involved in the church through the F.O.G. (Followers of God) vocal and instrumental group. They have also added a new mission project which involves six youth, chosen on a rotating basis, who help with worship every fourth Sunday at Croasdaile Village.

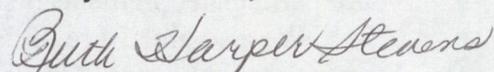
A new vision for our church is to deepen and enlarge our early worship service. CrossRoads at Duke Memorial, a Contemplative Service, is scheduled to begin on Sunday, January 5, 2003 at 9:00 A.M. in Whitford Hall. Tonight we held our first rehearsal of "Nine at Nine," the new music leadership team that will lead our early service. The major hurdle at this point relates to funding. Given the challenging financial issues that come at the end of this year, we will be forced to publicize this event through mail and media with the help of generous donors. Nonetheless, I believe this to be a meaningful new experience in worship for the unchurched, and one that needs to be undertaken at this time.

As a congregation we continue to seek new ways to serve our community and beyond. The list of mission outreach programs we presently support is lengthy as seen in our budget and our program book. A new opportunity has presented itself to us in the form of a grass-roots organization called Durham C.A.N. (Congregation Associations and Neighborhoods). Members of this church are meeting with the faith communities that have recently joined C.A.N. to determine if this might be a venue in which to work collectively on justice issues that impact our community, giving voice to those who have been voiceless in the past. We will continue to investigate and hope to have a report at next Charge Conference.

As far as my ministry is concerned, it has been full to the brim. My cup is regularly replenished by our senior members, who offer wisdom and advice and love and kudos. I am forever blessed when I hold one of our many babies in my arms, and baptize that little one into the family of God. I am overjoyed with the deepening of faith that is evidenced in the growing number of persons who are seriously studying the Bible. I am ecstatic when I see so many youth who are not just hanging around, but doing something for Christ and strengthening faith and community in the process.

I would be remiss if I didn't say how much I love those with whom I work. Duke Memorial has a fantastic staff. We do not only labor hard, but we are good at what we do. Best of all, we are dedicated Christians who observe our own spiritual disciplines as well as study and pray together. On behalf of all of us, let me say thank you to who you are and for all you do. How much we depend on your financial support and your volunteer service! Thank you all for making this report possible.

With you in Christ,



Ruth Harper Stevens  
Senior Pastor