



United Methodist Church OF GENEVA

State of the Church Address

By Pastor Rob Hamilton

June 15, 2022

Reflecting on January 2022 - June 2022

Siblings in Christ,

Today, I want to provide you with an update on the State of The United Methodist Church of Geneva Church address I delivered in January. I am recoding this address on a special day: June 15th. On this day in 1872, on the corner of Hamilton and Second Streets, a group a very devout and committed Methodists answered God's call to move beyond their established methods of being the church they knew in a 30x40 wooden building in order to reach new people and so they took a big risk on faith to build a new church, start new ministries to reach new people.



God's call on Methodists in Geneva hasn't wavered in 150 years since they built this building or since 1839 when the first three Methodists formed a class in Geneva, which was the seedbed to starting a church. Time and time again, with both excitement and hardship, very devout and committed Methodists have had the Holy Spirit move them to new methods of ministry, renew or build new buildings because they were reaching new people with the good news of Jesus Christ. God's call upon our generation of devout and committed Methodists is moving us to new methods of ministry, renewing our building to reach new people with the good news of Jesus Christ. For those of you who have been around UMCG 40 years or so, this might be your second go-around at this Spirit-led movement and so you personally know the commitment, change and excitement it takes to experience the reviving power of God's Holy Spirit at work in this church.



In this updated State of the Church address, I want to followup on the three main observations I made in my first address, talk about how those three observations are being addressed and speak about how I see the reviving power of God's Holy Spirit bringing renewed vitality to UMCG and how you can participate in what God is doing through Methodists of Geneva today.

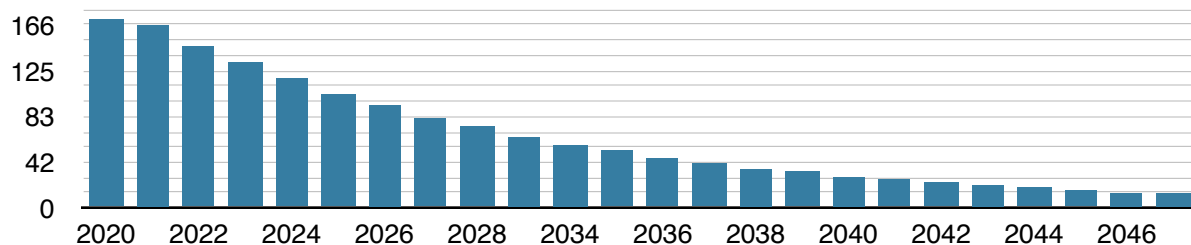
In my first State of the Church address, I named three concerning observations in returning to pastoral ministry at UMCG. The first I called is that "we are no longer



United Methodist Church OF GENEVA

Larry's big church" I mentioned the rate of church engagement that rose during Pastor Larry's years, peaked in 2000 and has been on a downward trajectory ever since. Through the Church-Wide Assessment in February and many conversations aside, I have heard agreement this observation even as it causes grief. I have also heard we are committed to caring for each other in our grief while committing to do something to change the downward trajectory of engagement in our church.

In that first address, I shared a chart of projected average worship attendance if our decline continues, according to that rate of decline average worship attendance this year should be down to roughly 148 persons in worship. I'm happy to share with you that we have failed to continue on our downward trend. Since reopening our doors in February our average attendance is about 160, all while still struggling with COVID. We're not



where we need to be, but we are not continuing on our downward trend. We're reaching new people. We're inviting people to church. People are coming back. I believe that's because God is doing something new in us and we are seeking to be church in new ways.

At our May Church Council meeting, our Church Council with financial support from our Endowment Fund, committed to an 18 month renovation process with Ministry Architects. I believe all want to build on the momentum we're experiencing. Mike and Merlynne from Ministry Architects will be on-site this summer and in September to help us reach new people, retain the new people God is sending our way, and learn new methods of ministry to being the good news of Jesus Christ to even more people. I hope you'll reserve September 9-10 (Friday and Saturday) for a special church-wide summit with Ministry Architects.

Additionally, we are working on the rightsizing our staff, governance and ministries to achieve the new vitality we seek. Our Staff-Parish Relations Committee just debuted a new staffing configuration last week and I am leading our Nominations Committee and Church Council in taking a similar first step in right-sizing our governance by the end of this year. I believe restructuring in these areas, it will help us



United Methodist Church OF GENEVA

focus our energy for ministry instead of feeling defeated because we don't have enough energy to do all the things we've always done.

In the January address, I also observed wounds of past conflicts haunting the present. Indeed, past conflicts have caused trauma and grief in some. This was confirmed in the church-wide assessment and in many a conversation. Our Church Council held a few special meetings early this year to identify these wounds. Those who participated were able share pain in safe and healthy ways. It seems to me that the healing process for these wounds is underway and it is something we will continually attend to with pastoral and congregational care as we move forward.

To help us from repeating these past patterns of behaviors that wound, our Church Council will host two different workshops, one this fall and another in the early spring to help us with healthy relationships and dealing with conflict. The skills we will learn in these recommended workshops will not only benefit the church, but will help us lead in our families, workplaces and communities in healthy ways.

The final observation I made in January was the large internal and external cultural barriers we face to experiencing vitality in our church. Sadly, I can't say the world has become more receptive to the church, but the need for the church of Jesus Christ is only increasing. By addressing our internal cultural barriers through Ministry Architect's Design Thinking Process over these next 18 months and our commitment to reaching new people, I believe we can engage in what will be the hardest work of change our thinking and behaviors as a church in order to reach new people. The Methodists who came before us experienced the transforming power of the Holy Spirit to do new ministry and reach new people by learning new ways of thinking and doing ministry. God's call on our generation is no less and God's ability to change lives is the same today as it was yesterday and will be forever more.

So God is doing a new work in us! Jesus is transforming the people called United Methodist for a new era of vital ministry in the Fox Valley. I see the renewed vitality in our collaborative Confirmation and Youth program with Baker Memorial and Batavia UMC. Our baptisms have now out paced our funerals. We will be having exploration classes for new members again and first-time guests - most of whom have been worshipping online - are continuing to connect at UMCG. Praise God. Please continue with your prayers, presence, gifts, service and your witness to God's renewing work.

Another ministry worthy of celebration comes from our Trustees Committee, the people who volunteer to care for our assets. Their vision for caring for our property and planning for renewed vitality is hard at work. This group of strong leaders are using designated dollars to ensure our building as a sustainable basecamp for relevant ministry

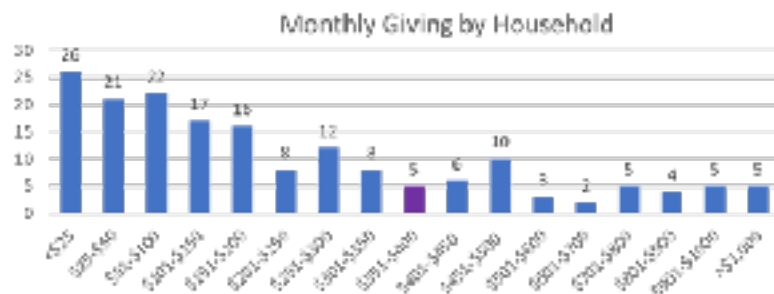


United Methodist Church OF GENEVA

for the next 50 years. We're still adding detail to the first phase of the church beautification project that gave us new flooring and paint. Our entire HVAC system will be replaced this summer with a geothermal system that will save us significant operating dollars and do our part to preserving our environment. Technology upgrades in the sanctuary will move both at-home and in-person worshippers into a more relevant, accessible and engaging worship experience. They are also beginning to dream about continuing the church beautification project into the 1870's building. This is not only worthy of celebration, but of appreciation of the labors of many.

While we have funds designated for the capital needs of the congregation to do some amazing projects that will help lower our operating costs, our operating budget is facing a significant deficit. We have roughly 176 household that generously support UMCg with the day-to-day

expenses and our commitment to missions beyond the local church. With the budget that was passed for this year, each household would need to contribute roughly \$4,400 to support that budget. Roughly 20 percent of our households



give at that amount or more. As we reduce the budget and add more people, we'll also need increased donations from those who can afford to be more generous. I know everything costs more these days and the church is just one more example of this. If you can make a step closer to that \$4,400 per year, \$367 per month or \$85 per week donation that would be a big help to build on our emerging momentum for ministry, instead of scaling back at such a crucial time. Even with rising prices, with careful planning my family will add at least \$100 per month to our giving because we believe God is working in our church. I hope those who can also increase their giving because they see God at work in our church will join us. I remain grateful for all gifts and understand that not all can give even a little more at this time.

Thank you for participating in this update and for your generous support of UMCg. Please remain in prayer and continue your generous support of UMCg. I look forward to seeing you this summer and at our church summit on September 9-10. May God continue to work in mighty ways through us, in us, and when necessary, in spite of us all to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to the people of Geneva and beyond.