Proposal for merger between Christ UMC and Bethany UMC

Questions and answers

Nov. 15, 2012

1) What’s going on?
Bethany UMC (410 – 8th Street, Rockford) has been looking for a congregation to merge with, and they have decided they would like to merge with Christ UMC.

2) Why is this happening now?
The congregation of Bethany UMC has been small for many years; however, they were able to remain in their large building due to a space-sharing arrangement with the Regional Learning Center (a program of the Regional Office of Education, supervised by Harold Sweeney). The monthly income from the Regional Learning Center (RLC) helped support their congregation. Unfortunately, the RLC has given notice that they will be moving to a larger space in the late spring. Without that extra income, it is no longer feasible for the congregation to remain in their building.

3) Why are we just hearing about this now?
The Bethany congregation was considering two options for merger: with Christ UMC or with Brooke Road UMC. We did not raise the issue with the congregation until Bethany had made their choice. They voted on Sunday, Nov. 11, to move ahead with Christ UMC, and we are notifying you now.

4) What happens to the building?
Bethany’s building would revert to the Northern Illinois Conference Board of Trustees. A merger of Bethany with Christ means that Christ UMC would receive the members and financial assets of Bethany UMC, but not the church building.

5) What needs to happen next?
We will enter into a process to explore the merger. We are in the process of drawing up a resolution for merger. Each congregation needs to vote on intent to merge, as indicated in the formal resolution. THIS IS NOT THE MERGER VOTE. Bethany will vote at their Church Conference on 11/28, and we will vote at our Church Conference on 11/29 (a simple majority of those present is needed to pass the vote). This vote means that we intend to pursue a merger relationship; however, either side could withdraw from the merger process after this resolution.

In late spring, we would hold a special church conference, at which time a vote to merge would be taken. That vote would need to pass by 2/3 majority of those present. Basically, this November we vote to become “engaged”; the “marriage” would take place in late spring.

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Between the November vote and the late spring merger, we would assemble a transition team, made up of the clergy and members of both churches, to work out the formal merger agreement. Once approved, the merger itself would likely take effect on July 1, 2013.

6) **What’s the down side for Christ?**

There isn’t any. Christ UMC would not be assuming responsibility for the building, and Bethany UMC has no debt. They have a mutual fund (created when they sold their parsonage) and several thousand dollars set aside for current needs.

7) **What about the furniture and other items?**

The disposition of their non-financial assets (besides the building) would need to be worked out over time. It’s possible that much of the furniture would be left with the building. Some items from the building might be available for Christ UMC; others might be given to other churches or organizations. The transition team would work out those issues, with the Bethany members providing strong leadership. Bethany has a remarkable set of historical items (including some records in Swedish); it’s possible that some of those might go to the Conference Archives, or we might need to find appropriate space for them.

8) **What else should we know about Bethany?**

They are working on cleaning up the membership rolls; the final figure is likely to be between 80 – 85 members. Weekly worship attendance is 15-20. Rev. Laura Barkley served this congregation part-time while she was in seminary, and Rev. Jim Moore served it before her. Members of Bethany were part of the formation of Christ UMC in the 1950s (we look forward to learning more information about this historical link). This small congregation includes some wonderful leaders, whom we would look forward to adding to our existing committees (just as was done when Our Master’s UMC merged with Christ).

9) **Why would this merger be a win-win strategy for both churches?**

Bethany UMC would be incorporated into a warm and loving church family with four worship service options each week, an array of programs and service opportunities, and a history of a previous highly-successful merger. Christ UMC would receive new members and their assets with no further responsibility for a building that is beautiful but much in need of repair.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact Rev. Jane Eesley (jeesley@christumc.cc) or Mr. Ty Unangst (co-chair of Leadership Team, ty@maplehurstfarms.com).