

“Intentional Faith Development: Growth in Christ”

Acts 2:42-47, Matthew 13:33

October 5th, 2014

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Fair Oaks United Methodist Church

Our stewardship campaign is over now! I want to thank again our stewardship campaign team and you all for your preparation, participation and generosity to the church. We have already received 41 pledge cards and are expecting to receive more as soon as you are ready. Our finance ministry team will set our 2015 year budget based on your estimated giving and they will present the budget at our Charge Conference, which is tentatively scheduled on Sunday, November 23rd. Your time, talent and giving are definitely powerful sources of engine fuels to drive our Fair Oaks UMC train. Thank you so much!

This morning we will explore faith development. This is about growing in Christ. Let us begin with a clear definition of faith. Faith in God is not a scientific principle but it is your personal choice. When you believe in God, you choose God as your center and guide for your life journey. We, Christians are people of believers who find God in Jesus Christ. The goal of Church is to make deeply committed Christians through spiritual practices. Look at our mission statement on the bulletin cover. It says, “Our mission is to promote the love of Christ and nurture our spiritual growth.” One of the important church’s missions is to develop faith by providing programs and activities. **How can we grow our faith and become a committed Christian?** For examples, our choir, adult Bible class, Sunday school for children, support groups and our Sunday worship are opportunities for faith development. But we have to remember the basics: church ministries are ways to develop and nurture your spiritual growth. These should not be a task to get your job or duty done.

It is important that our faith needs to grow and develop. Pastor Adam Hamilton of the Church of Resurrection in Kansas City helps us understand the process of our faith development. He states three stages: Knowing God, Loving God and Serving God. He describes faith development using our body: we know God by our minds, accept Jesus by our hearts, and serve others by our hands and feet.

Some of you may say that I know God and trust God. So why do I need faith development? Developing our faith leads us to want to learn more about God and allows us the eagerness to build a better understanding and relationship with God. How do we better know God? For example, through Bible study, we are able to know the Bible’s story of salvation and understand the divine/human

nature of the Bible. The Bible is not merely an ancient document or a reference book of spiritual answers, but for personal spiritual growth. Studying our church United Methodism is a conduit to help us learn about the Body of Christ, about God's people journeying in community, and understanding something of the Methodist movement, holding together grace and holiness and holding together personal salvation and social justice. One more important tenet is to know God's will. It gives us a broad scope of God's purpose for human beings, helps us to understand how to discern God's will for our life through prayer, studying the Bible and learn the wisdom of other Christians.

Once we really know God in our minds, we move to the second stage, Loving God. It is about surrendering the control of every aspect of our life to Jesus Christ. We continue to practice and discipline ourselves attending Sunday worships, to pray and join church ministries as a means of surrendering to Jesus and to open our lives to the Holy Spirit's transformation work within us.

The last stage is serving God. It is about service to others, sharing your gift, time and talent not only for yourself but also for others. Our stewardship is the best example of this stage.

I feel strongly about how important it is to develop our faith through the growth of new small group activities. Christian community is all about relationships. The more years I have been serving church, the more confidently I feel this is true. Our faith will continue to grow when we build our relationships. In the near future, I envision creating new small groups and leadership training so that our church offers more opportunities for building our relationships. I am not suggesting more task oriented ministries, but more life sharing, spirituality deepening gatherings. I believe these ministries allow us to build relationships with God and one another. I hope that you find true faith development through small group interactions.

What is this purpose of faith development? Faith development is not only for our growing but also for sharing with others. Jesus taught us faith in God not for us but for others. Jesus was the example of "a being for others". The purpose of faith development is to imitate Jesus' faith. In our reading today, Matthew, Jesus describes the Kingdom of God as the work of the wild yeast. Jesus says, "The Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a woman making bread. She takes a measure of flour and mixes in the yeast until it permeates every part of the dough." Please notice the role of yeast in making bread. I have a loaf of bread and sourdough starter, wild yeast in my hand. Imagine you are making sourdough bread. You need some ingredients; for example, flour, sugar, water and for sure, yeast. Before we make a loaf of bread, we mix up flour and

water with starter. And we leave them for a couple of days until the bread mixes it up and is rising with some bubbles. In the mean time, the yeast is well fed and grown to get ready for baking delicious loaves of bread.

Pastor William Reeves, of First UMC in Arkansas, shares his insight with me about the purpose of faith development. Our faith in Jesus Christ is similar to sourdough starter. First, for it to work, it has to be fed. We have to nourish our faith, or it will die, just like the starter. But when our faith is fully developed, just like starter that is made into bread, it is really good. And finally, our faith is like sourdough because it is meant to be shared for others. He says, “Sourdough starter can be kept for generations, and the more you give it away, the more it makes. I suppose if everyone gave and received sourdough starter to its full capacity, eventually everyone in the world would have a loaf of bread.” So it is with faith. May God touch our spirit and faith and continue to guide us to grow as committed Christians. Amen.