

“Identity Check – Who We Are As United Methodists: Part I – Diverse”

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Elkton United Methodist Church
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All Saints’ Sunday

Psalm 139:1-18

Today we begin a new, month-long sermon series on United Methodism, in honor of our church celebrating its 210th anniversary on the 15th. For the next few weeks, we’ll look together at who we are as United Methodists, how we got to be who we are, and how we live out who we are.

Let me tell you some statistical information about our great denomination. We are 11 million strong around the globe. We’re found in most corners of the world, with the largest contingent in the United States, but growing most rapidly in areas of Africa and Asia, specifically Korea and the Phillipines.

We number around 8 million members in the United States, nearly 90,000 of those members in our Annual Conference, the Peninsula-Delaware Annual Conference. Out of those 90,000 members, at last count 1,012 are right here in Elkton United Methodist Church.

We are a very diverse denomination. We have people of all ages in our pews, all races, many different levels of education and income. Some of our churches are huge - they actually occupy entire campuses. The church that Melinda and Sandy and I went to a few weeks ago for that continuing education event has 14,000 members, two huge buildings, and three separate locations, with a fourth forming even as we speak. And yet, our DS told us recently that he was going to preach in a church on our district with no indoor plumbing. I told you we’re diverse - from gigantic campuses to one room bathroom-less chapels.

We’re also diverse theologically. If we took a survey in this room alone, we would find fundamentalists, conservatives and liberals. I’ve sat in many a class or meeting where people are totally, absolutely at the opposite ends of theological and political spectrums, but they’re sitting at the same table.

So you can see, United Methodists are diverse in a myriad of ways, and I think that makes us special. And what is so special about it, is that our diversity doesn’t divide us, but makes us very rich indeed. We are able to live together and worship together and study together and live in ministry together even in diversity,

because in the end, there is one thing that we have in common - one very, very big thing - and it is that we have faith in the saving love of Jesus Christ. We all agree on that. We all deeply profess that. That is the one requirement for membership - faith in Jesus Christ.

I got on the United Methodist Church website and found some wonderful information there. I commend it to you. It's very simple - www.umc.org. At any rate, on the website I found this statement that I think says it all when it comes to our living together in the midst of our diversity. It goes like this: "We believe in God and in each other."

We believe in God and in each other. I love that, because that says it so beautifully. We believe in each other despite any differences between us.

Another place on the website I found this statement: "We aren't striving to be all the same, but we are striving to work together, to make a significant difference in the world." That we are.

The United Methodist Church - diverse in makeup, bound together in love of God and each other!

I love the hymn that we sing when new members join our church - Blest Be the Tie That Binds. In that hymn we sing these words: "Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love, the fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above."

But we also sing another stanza of that hymn that goes like this: "We share each other's woes, our mutual burdens bear, and often for each other flows a sympathizing tear."

Too often this year, sympathizing tears flowed here in this place, because we lost so many dear members of our wonderful, diverse church family. They were a part of us, and helped to make us who we are. They were husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers. They were bankers, clerks, government workers, homemakers, store owners, assembly line workers. They gave so much to this church - singing in the choir, caring for finances and construction, being a part of the United Methodist Women or United Methodist Men, knitting scarves and blankets for others, studying in our classes. They were gifted, each in his or her own way, and they were each a unique part of the diverse fabric of our church.

We are the lesser for their passing, but so very blessed that they were with us for as long as they were. And even though our hearts are broken at their passing, we rejoice that they have been welcomed home to those mansions prepared just for

them.

So today, we're going to remember them. First, we'll remember those who were members of our church through a wonderful video display made possible by the generous donations of pictures by their families, and the wonderful creative gifts of Deb Ingram who put it together. Following that, after a prayer, we will remember many others in your lives who have died by bringing flowers forward to those vases in memory of them.

Thanks be to God for our United Methodist Church, here and around the world. Thanks be to God for the millions of people, all fearfully and wonderfully made by God, diverse and yet one in Christ Jesus. And thanks be to God for these saints who have entered the gates of heaven. Let us remember them now with grateful thanksgiving.