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Three items immediately jump to my mind in thinking about the State of the Church Report; these are “Hands-on,” Evangelism, and Prayer.

Hands-on

Today the church has experienced an increase in the number of persons who desire to have a “hands-on” experience in ministry. This represents an exciting dimension to ministry, and is evident in the number of Volunteers-in-Mission teams that are mobilized for many different reasons/causes. This desire to be hands-on is also a cultural phenomenon. There are more people who vote in the American Idol competition than who voted in the 2004 and 2000 Presidential elections in the United States. The plethora of reality shows and the audiences they attract are also indicators of a desire to be hands-on participants in life experiences.

The mission of the Church, to make disciples of Jesus Christ, will be well served by an intentional effort to continue to provide many hands-on experiences for people to become involved in reality, touching lives for Jesus Christ, offering a cup of cold water in His name, etc. It may even lead people to become faith sharers, giving the reason for the hope that is within us!

Evangelism

As we approach the 40th anniversary of the 1968 merger between the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church, we can all look back and see what organizational and institutional changes have occurred. We also look back and see that while we were a 12 million member Church forty years ago, now we are just a thread above 8 million members. At one point in the history of the United States, one in four persons was a Methodist. Today it is one in 400! This statistic should be of great concern to the church.

Our work in the area of evangelism needs to be strengthened. The very word “evangelism” needs to be reclaimed and used in its biblical and proper context, enabling the telling of the good news of Jesus Christ to the point that persons can become reconciled to God and to each other through Jesus Christ. We need not be afraid of the word “evangelism,” for it is part of the historic vocabulary of the church. To ignore the work of evangelism is to ignore the heart of ministry. Every United Methodist is an evangelist, and should be reminded of this, and enabled and encouraged to always be prepared to give an account for the hope that is within them.

Prayer

Prayer is something that many people use like a zipper, to open and close things. When one looks at the church around the world, you will always find a connection between

Church growth and prayer. The Church in Korea will tell you that their rapid growth is due to their intentionality in the area of prayer, especially in praying for those who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The Church in Africa will say much the same thing.

Most people pray and hope that something will happen. Dynamic churches pray and *expect* something to happen. The United Methodist Church would do well to focus as much energy and attention on teaching people to pray with boldness as we do on other aspects of ministry. Prayer needs to become a way of life for us, not just something with which to open and close meetings. Failing to teach people to pray is to short-circuit the deep, personal, abiding relationship with God which Jesus refers to in the parable of the vine. A branch by itself will wither and die. A branch that does not bear fruit is worthless. A branch that remains connected to the vine will bear much fruit.

The question for the church is: Will we bear fruit?