



# West Point United Methodist Church

M A Y 2 0 0 9

“But [the expert in the law] wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus,  
“And who is my neighbor?”

Luke 10:29

## Who Is My Neighbor

A recent Newsweek magazine article noted that the percentage of Americans who consider themselves to be unaffiliated religiously has doubled since 1990. More specifically, the Pacific Northwest and the Northeastern sections of the United States have huge numbers of folks who consider themselves unaffiliated. This is particularly sad in the case of New England because American religion was founded there. Coupled with this sad report is the equally sad fact that mainline denominations, including our own United Methodist, have steadily declined in numbers for decades. In June, with the former North and South having given way, our first annual conference as a united Indiana Conference of the United Methodist Church is scheduled to convene. In preparation for this event, we have been challenged to “rethink church.” In part, this challenge is in response to the realities addressed above. It is also a coming to terms with the question: “how can the churches in our new Indiana Conference be more effective in it’s disciple-making mission?” As Methodists, adapting to changing circumstances and compelling human need all around us without compromising our biblical center of gravity is in our DNA. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, was a dedicated Anglican Priest in the church of England. But Wesley was also a man who was sensitive to changing times. In eighteenth century England, thousands of people were moving from the farms into the cities to take jobs in the factories springing up in the midst of the industrial revolution. Many of these folks who left their homes also left their home churches and were either unwelcome in city parishes, or were unable to attend. For whatever reason, thousands were “unaffiliated with any church” (sound familiar?) and the Anglican church seemed ill equipped to respond. So Wesley continued to serve his Anglican church in all it’s rich tradition, but he also sensed God widening his view of what he felt called him to do. With that, Wesley began to see the “world as his parish.” Rather than seeing *church* as the four walls he was assigned to, Wesley took his ministry to where it was needed most by taking church to those, who for whatever reason, were out of the church. Over the course of his ministry career, he logged thousands upon thousands of miles on horse back, sailing ships, and even on foot in order to take the message of the Gospel to those who so desperately needed it, right where they were.

Do we need to “rethink church” right here in West Point? Given the facts quoted earlier, how can we not? Those facts represent both a great need, but also a tremendous opportunity for

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evangelism. I am pleased to share with you one of those ways we've already begun to "rethink church." On March 1st, several leaders of our church met in Monticello with clergy and laity leaders from other congregations in the Lafayette District. We were responding to Bishop Mike Coyner's invitation to come together to implement a process whereby our churches could expand the ministries we are already doing by exploring ways in which we could work together as churches, perhaps even creating new ministries in the process. The churches came together in "Cluster groups", groups of five or so churches who felt themselves to be affiliated by location, size and or ministry temperament so that together, they could be more effective in ministry in their areas. West Point has clustered with Attica and Stidham United Methodist Churches, with a two point charge, Weaver Chapel and Mt. Zion United Methodist Churches, and also with the Wesley Foundation on the campus of Purdue University. On April 15th, we had our first cluster group meeting at Attica UMC and I am delighted to tell you that our cooperative ministry has already begun. Working with Stidham United Methodist Church, we have agreed to share expenses, expertise and resources for our upcoming Vacation Bible School this summer. This has already helped us and Stidham by reducing the expense and stress of putting on this vital ministry for both churches. Attica opens their doors every Thursday night and provides a hot meal for the homeless and the hungry in their community and we here at West Point are committed to assisting them in this vital endeavor. With the economy the way it is, it should come as no surprise that Harrison Steel and other employers in the Attica area are feeling the pinch and projections for increased unemployment are staggering. Attica, on the other hand, has some graphic artists that can help us with some needs we have here. On May 3rd, folks from right here in our congregation and some folks from Attica will be preparing a meal to the kids at the Wesley Foundation to help them get ready for finals. We will worship with them at their 4:30 Sunday afternoon service on May 3rd and have a meal with them afterwards. Wesley students, on the other hand, can help us next fall with our youth and our music ministries. As your pastor, I am excited about the ministries opportunities, and yes, even the new responsibilities.

In closing, I am reminded of the story of the Good Samaritan from the Gospel of Luke. The teacher of the law seeks to justify himself in response to Jesus' command to love neighbor as self by asking: "Who is my neighbor?" Presumably, this man expected Jesus to basically say: "take care of your brother and sister Jews." But then Jesus told this compelling story of "the neighbor" being the person whoever is in need within your circle of influence. John Wesley took ministry in England and America to new heights because he followed the commands of Jesus to redefine "neighbor". Maybe it's time for us to get back to our Wesleyan roots and do the same. Who is my neighbor? Is it possible that for the time being, it's hungry people in Attica? Is it possible that for the time being, it's stressed and lonely college kids at Purdue? God has blessed us so richly in being able to take care of ourselves and each other in our church family. Maybe God is equipping us to do the same for others.

Blessings,

Pastor Jeff