

## Something Old, Something New

Okay, let's start with a disclaimer: United Methodists aren't perfect. As a church and denomination, we're sort of stodgy and slow-moving. We're larded with committees at all levels, to the point that we've been called "Fundamentalists of Structure." We record all that structure in a policy book called the *Book of Discipline*, which is Byzantine in organization and appears to have been written by people for whom Human is a second language.

Having said all that, though, we also have much to celebrate. The United Methodist heritage is one of mission and purpose. It is a heritage of strong lay leaders, creative solutions to difficult circumstances, and high standards. Where most denominations trace their founding to an angry doctrinal dispute, we don't. When the Wesley brothers founded the Methodists, they were only trying to inspire Christians to live out their doctrines in their whole lives. That's our heritage, and it's as relevant today as ever.

This is why, between now and the beginning of Advent, we will be turning our attention to the United Methodist heritage. We will be rediscovering and celebrating our unique message. Look for some changes in our worship services, as we explore traditional worship elements (see Susan's article on the Worship page of this newsletter). Look for sermons from Methodist history and teachings.

And look to the future. John and Charles Wesley revitalized the Anglican Church, and in their example, we can find inspiration for our own plans and dreams. Our conversation about our own direction as a congregation continues, but here are some of the thoughts that are crystallizing in our planning:

We are a church with a deep passion for community outreach and ministry. When I have asked people, "What are you proudest of in this church?" every answer, without exception, has had to do with service and ministry.

We are an aging church, but that is not necessarily a liability in our aging society. The over 55 population of Marathon County is expected to grow by almost 7% in the next twenty years. ("Lo! The fields are white-headed for the harvest!")

We are a church that is determined to be significant, to make a meaningful difference in lives. This conclusion I have drawn from the number of excited, passionate ideas that people are bringing to me. As a church, we are excited by the possibility of stretching and becoming more than we are, more than we've ever been.

How Wesleyan of us.