

# Changing for Good

As I write this, it's been only a few days since we celebrated Pastor Karen's ministry with an inspiring day of music and scripture. But it was also a day signaling change for us all. Your pastor for the past seven years has left that role, beginning incapacity leave. Now First United Methodist Church has one pastor instead of two. Some things are going to be different.

A few changes are obvious. When you have only one pastor, that means when that pastor is unavailable, no pastor is available. When I'm out of town or on my day off (Friday), no pastor will be around to deal with routine business. When I'm gone on a Sunday, you'll have a guest speaker. (For instance, on July 31, Rebecca and I will be away celebrating our anniversary, and you will hear our own Mary Virginia Quarles, a certified Lay Speaker in the Wisconsin Conference).

But the changes will be deeper than that, in more ways than we can see at this point. When a church suddenly has half as many pastors, that means that some of the things that used to be done by a pastor will either not be done at all or will have to be done by church members themselves. In effect, we have to become a different kind of church, and have to learn to think of ourselves differently.

But this is all good. These are changes toward health. A vital church is one where the church itself, the people, are the ones who make the church run. In a vital church, the congregation shares a common goal which everyone understands and can articulate. That goal will look outward as well as inward: it will involve making a clear impact both in the community and in the lives of the congregation. The vital church measures success not in terms of numerical growth but in terms of spiritual depth and impact on lives.

For most churches, these are huge changes, and for us to become that kind of church will be tremendously difficult. I wouldn't even know where to start. Fortunately, in the Wisconsin Conference, we have a wonderful resource in the person of Dan Dick, Director of Connection Ministries. Before coming to Wisconsin, Dan worked at the General Board of Discipleship, where he conducted a multi-year study of hundreds of churches. That study resulted in his book *Vital Signs: A Pathway to Congregational Wholeness*. Excerpts from that book are scattered throughout this newsletter, and I'll begin teaching from the book on Wednesday nights, beginning July 20, at 6:00 pm.

And on Monday, August 22, Dan Dick will spend the entire day with our church. Watch your bulletins for specific opportunities to hear him and to think together. Clear your calendar for that day and plan to be part of the change process. Change is coming; we can make it a change for good.