

## Honest to God (and to Ourselves)

On August 22, Rev. Dan Dick, the Director of Connectional Ministries for the Wisconsin United Methodist Conference presented the program "Planning Strategies for Transformation" to our congregation and circuit. It was a sobering presentation.

Working from census data, analyzing demographic trends, and offering tentative projections, Dan described the Wisconsin we can expect in twenty to thirty years. Culturally, ethnically, generationally, we can expect changes. Then he described the key challenges that these changes will present for a church that wants to remain relevant to its context. He concluded: In 2035, we will be older, more diverse, wealthier, in smaller facilities, with cutting edge technology supporting high quality music and worship arts, collaborating with other churches in specialized ministries, or else we will be gone . . .

As I said, sobering. But, from my insider's perspective on the Church in America, this has the ring of truth. Unwelcome truth, perhaps, but urgent. As we digest this data and mull over our own path forward, we must be honest with ourselves. We had great successes in the past, but we cannot plan for the past; we must plan for a dimly perceived but very different future.

## Honest to God (and to the World)

Continuing the theme of honesty, have you heard the sort of things that people outside the church are saying about us? That we're all a bunch of hypocrites, that the Church has been responsible for acts of terrible cruelty and hatred, that the Church is still stuck in the Middle Ages in its attitudes toward things like science and women's roles and so on. Doesn't that sort of stuff make you angry? When you hear someone saying stuff like that about the Church of Jesus Christ, don't you want to just stand up and deny it? One problem, though:

They're right.

At least, partly right. Unfortunately – let's be completely honest – there's a grain of truth in all those accusations. Sure, there's more to the story than that, but before we can tell the other side, we need to be open about the fact that sometimes the Church has blown it. So, in September, we're going to be open. In that month's sermon series – When the Church Gets It Wrong – we will not only be honest about our mistakes, but we will talk about what the Church should have been doing if we had been following the teachings and example of Christ.

Who is this sermon series for? Anyone who has ever struggled with these questions. That means church members who have wondered about them or have wished they had a good answer to such attacks. But that also includes the people you know who have leveled these accusations. Bring them along. Let us reason together. Honestly.