



Hillcrest United Methodist Church

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September 2005

Dear Saints

A new season of exciting opportunities to grow and to be a blessing is upon us. School is starting or has started. Does that ever bring back memories of times of challenge and excitement as well as sometimes great and strange responsibilities? For the rest of us September marks a new season of Bible Study through the Disciple program, an opportunity to identify and discover ways to use our spiritual gifts to realize God's vision for us, or a chance to get involved in a community or small group experience. Let us be about the business of encouraging one another in our Christian walk as we grow to be more like Jesus.

We have ordered a set of chimes (similar to hand bells but easier to master and more "user friendly") and are looking forward to further developments in our music ministry. Please consider sharing your musical gifting with us, at least on a part time basis. Speaking of talent, Mary Aylor has indicated a desire and willingness to work with a team of people to put together a special event for the Christmas season such as a play or mini musical. We certainly have enough raw talent in the church to do something pretty exciting, so plan to give her your enthusiastic support.

I suggest that we come prepared to share some of our thoughts regarding the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 as we worship on September 11, 2005. Dramatic changes have been made since that unbelievable day four years ago. It would be prudent for us to evaluate where we are today as individuals and as a community of faith.

Plan also for the big "last bash of summer" as we picnic at Loriella Park (Leavells Road) on Sunday, September 18 from 4 p.m. until dark (or the bugs get us). There will be a grill to cook whatever you bring, a chance to share a favorite summer dish or dessert, and a lot of fun activities for all ages. Check the church bulletin for more details as the date nears. This has always been a great event for all the members and friends at Hillcrest. Be there!

Progress continues on our plans for an Annual Open House and Fall Family Fun Festival (F⁴) on October 1. Many other worthwhile events are occurring in the community that day including the Bethany Walk for Life, the Hike for Hope and a satellite presentation (which we will record) of the special program on "How to Become a Contagious Christian." Because this Open House is so important to our ministry to the community it would be good to give this your top priority. This is also the last chance you'll have this year to "pie the pastor" as a fun fund raiser. Oh, joy!

We need also give serious thought and prayer to our Christian Education Program. As good as the Disciple courses are, they cannot substitute for the regular devotional study that is possible on Sunday morning. If you are not involved in a class on Sunday - - - you are missing one of the great opportunities to grow in faith and fellowship. Please make this a priority. Chuck Rainford, our DCE, is working to put together some alternative styles of learning that should prove to be adventurous and rewarding. I am sure he will be providing us with all sorts of information as these plans finalize.

Our Finance Committee reports that our offerings, though less than we had anticipated needing, are sufficient to cover the expenses we have had. This indicates we are being good stewards of God's bounty. Your faithful giving is up over last year and continues to astonish many people who still have not grasped the truth that you clearly understand: All our giving is to the Lord. I find it fascinating that God's clear word is so readily discounted by many of our secular friends who can't believe God means it when it comes to God's economic principles. The blessings accrue to those who believe.

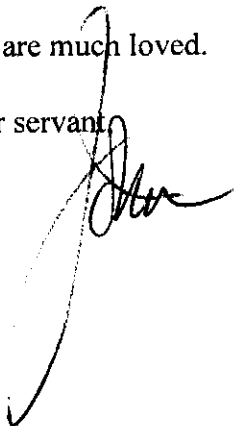
Thanks again to all of you for your prayer support and encouragement. Every so often some one will say to me that I must have had them in mind when I did a particular teaching or sermon. The truth is, I do not have anyone particular in mind except myself. I do not use this privilege to "get" people. I believe it is a sacred trust from the Lord to be used to teach, edify and encourage His people to righteousness. On the other hand, these things of the Lord are meant for all of us and we should be challenged to hear them and make the changes that are clearly to be made.

An unexpected joy was mine when the end of the worship service at 8:15 was punctuated by a rousing chorus of "Happy Birthday" and the grand entrance of a birthday cake, replete with candles and accompanied by bouncing helium balloons. (Glad it was not a fast day for me.) Thank you to all who were in on the surprise. I was truly blessed.

There is much more to be said but I'll leave that to another time and perhaps another venue. Meanwhile remember that you are blessed to be a blessing. "Rejoice always. Pray ceaselessly. In every thing give thanks. For this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus."

You are much loved.

Your servant

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "John", written over the text "Your servant". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long vertical stroke extending downwards from the end of the name.