

**Oak Meadow
United Methodist Church**

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Laity Notes

by
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AUTUMN

When, at the end of the first chapter in Genesis, God looked at His new creation, He was pleased: “And God saw everything that he had made, behold, it was very good.” (1:31) At the time, He must have been looking at South Texas at this time of year, for our beautiful fall weather must surely remind us of the goodness of God’s creation. There is such freshness in the air and the signs of fall growth are everywhere present. Surely God must have designed fall in South Texas in order to erase the memory of summer heat, so that people would choose to remain here at least one more year. Having survived what often is a long and brutal session of dry heat, one suddenly emerges to discover a South Texas fall. The eye is greeted with fresh new color, and there is an extra spring in our step. The weight of summer has given way to the pleasure of fall. Thanks be to God!

FALL FESTIVAL

Our annual Fall Festival is scheduled for Saturday, November 1st, four weeks away. Tickets are being sold for a raffle and there will be two prizes, both created by members of our congregation: a water color painting and a work of stained glass. Once again, we are reminded of the talent in our midst. The Festival will open at 9 and continue until 4, with the drawing for the prizes held at the end of the day. Many raffle tickets have already been sold, but there is still time to buy one for yourself or a friend.

During the day there will be activities for all. Children will be able to have their faces painted by a member of our congregation before going to a huge plastic balloon to jump and play. A huge tent will be erected outside our church and underneath will lie a host of items for sale at a silent auction. A host of paintings will be available for purchase inside our church, and variety of vendors will take their places both under the tent and inside our church.

The smell of barbeque will be in the air. Chicken and sausage with all the trimmings will be available for \$5 a plate from 11 until 2. Barbeque equipment will be provided by the Boy Scouts who weekly meet at Oak Meadow, and for this we thank them in advance. For those with a different taste sandwiches, tea and coffee will be offered at a tearoom inside.

In short, you can have a great time shopping, eating and visiting, and all the while be supporting our church. Our Fall Festival is our single biggest fund raiser in the year. And this is a prime opportunity for each of us to grab a friend by the hand and bring them along. Many hands have worked long and hard to organize our Fall Festival, and we can best offer our thanks by attending. We encourage everyone to find a moment between 9 and 4 on that Saturday to spend some time at Oak Meadow.

PASTOR/ PARISH RELATIONS COMMITTEE

The “parish” of Pastor/Parish is but another reminder of our English heritage as members of the United Methodist Church. Stretching as far back as the Anglo-Saxons in the seventh century, the parish was a territorial division under the charge of first a Catholic priest and then, after Henry VIII, an Anglican priest or presbyter. Every parish had its priest, but not every priest had his parish. John Wesley was ordained first as a deacon and then, in 1728 when he was 25 years old, as a presbyter (priest) of the Anglican Church (the Church of England). Wesley held but one assignment as a parish priest, and that was in Savannah Georgia in 1736 and 1737. His experience in that post was not particularly fruitful, and he slipped out of the colony and back to England shortly before an indictment by his parishioners would have led to a trial. Never again did Wesley serve as a parish priest. Instead, he took the position that, “I look upon *all the world as my parish.*”

The practical side of Wesley's position gave him the freedom to roam the English countryside and preach in any parish, although careful to do so neither inside the local church nor during the time of normal church worship. By these methods, he skirted, with varying success, the wrath of local priests of the Church of England in whose parish he would instead find a field for preaching outside.

We must recall that Methodism under Wesley was a movement and not a church. It was a movement within the Anglican Church. Methodists under Wesley formed their own societies, set up their own general rules, sent lay preachers on circuits, carved out their own doctrinal standards (which Wesley insisted contained no doctrine that was not in the Book of Common Prayer, the Homilies, and the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church) and in general created a very disciplined and organized system which laid the groundwork for the later church. But for the sacraments they turned to the Anglican Church. To baptize their children or to participate in the Lord's Supper, they turned to the Anglican Church. Throughout his long life, Wesley had to skirt the issue of separation from the Anglican Church. As the Methodist movement grew more distinct and recognizable as Methodist, the argument became more difficult to sustain. Only after the Revolutionary War did Wesley agree to a plan for setting up a Methodist Church separate from the Church of England, and this only in the United States. That decision paved the way for the famous Christmas Conference in Baltimore in 1784 which established the Methodist Episcopal Church. At that time, Wesley was 81 years old and he had been an ordained priest for 56 years. He continued to live until 1791.

When the Methodist Episcopal Church was established in 1784 at the Christmas Conference in Baltimore, there were approximately 15,000 Methodists in this country and some 50,000 in Great Britain. At the same time, the total population of the United States (excluding American Indians) was approximately 4 million, and that of Great Britain about 12 million. Within seven years the number of Methodists in the United States surpassed those in Great Britain. When Wesley died in 1791, there were a little over 80,000 Methodists in the USA compared to a little over 70,000 Methodists in Great Britain. In 1773, the year of the first

Methodist Conference in this country, there were 1,160 Methodists of record.

The older relationship of priest and his parish has come down through the Methodist system expressed in the pastor and his pulpit. Oak Meadow has no territorial claim, but no one can occupy our pulpit other than our pastor without his explicit invitation. As the parish priest once ruled his parish, today the Methodist preacher rules his pulpit.

After the Revolutionary War, what parishes there were in the United States gave way to the more secular counties (with the exception of Louisiana, where the parish in its old Catholic version still exists because of French influence). Since counties had no say about church matters, we were spared the Pastor/County Relations Committee, and continued instead with the Pastor/Parish Relations Committee.

Be that as it may, our own Pastor/Parish Committee met this past week to review our past year and anticipate our next, and to prepare a report covering both. All this is in preparation for our November 30 Church Conference, where we will among other things approve the church budget and committee positions for the coming year. Last year's Church Conference was delayed until January of this year because of our effort to determine whether to remain autonomous as Oak Meadow or to merge with University UMC. This year we will be returning to the normal timing of the church administrative cycle.

THE POWER OF OUR PRESENCE

As we look about on Sunday morning we can never be certain about what pain might lie behind a friendly smile. Each of us carries our burdens, and on some Sundays they weigh more heavily than on others. Each Sunday someone is watching us and in some fashion draws strength from our presence. They might never tell us, but it surely happens every Sunday. This is an important reason to resist the temptation to sleep in or take the Sunday off. Our presence heals.

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

Please email comments or suggestions to cjhall_45@yahoo.com or leave a telephone message at 404-1894.