





## Thoughts From the Pastor's Desk

I received a magazine in the mail the other day. The magazine cover was the picture of a broken piggy bank below the main article title that read "The GOOD NEWS about the BAD ECONOMY." The article was written by Bill Easum who is a church consultant. It appeared in the May/June Issue of ***Rev!*** (pages 42-46). Today I got around to reading some of the articles and I began with Easum's article. The article dealt with the reality that the bad economy has affected the vast majority of people around the world.

In the article, Easum makes the following statement. He writes, "Now is not the time to be hunkering down. Like everything else hard times have good and bad sides. Hard times can either bring great opportunities to serve and grow or they can bring great hardships to churches." I would add "and their members." What determines the difference, what determines the outcome is how the church and its members adapt to the hard times.

Easum goes on to list five positives to hard times. He states (1) Hard times cause Christians to refocus on what matters most in life. (2) Hard times tend to drive out irrelevant and obsolete ministries and practices. (3) Hard times cause strategic leaders to return to the basics. (4) Hard times often result in unchurched and once-churched people showing up in worship. (5) Hard times require special attention to spiritual formation.

This got me thinking about our ministry here at First United Methodist Church, as I have spent much time over the last few weeks with people suffering from cancer. As I visited, we would pray for God's healing and strength to face the future, whatever that might entail. Yet as we look around, we know these are not the only ones suffering and needing visits and care.

Any given Sunday morning we look around during church worship services or in Sunday school and everyone looks just fine. But let me tell you all is not fine.

We have people in our congregation and those in other congregations that we know who are suffering. People are being diagnosed with cancer and other diseases. People are suffering through divorce and families are being torn in all directions because of custody battles. Women and children are being physically abused. Families have loved ones in jail. And still other families don't know where their next pay check, let alone their next meal, will come from.

Do you realize this is happening in our church, in our neighborhoods, to those that we possibly come in contact with every day? If you know this I pray that you are ministering to those who are hurting. But if you are not, then why aren't you?

Now I realize sometimes we really don't know that a person is hurting. People have put up a wall and they have become experts at masking their feelings and emotions so that seeing the hurt and pain is difficult. But let me give you some advice if this be the case. The next time you ask someone "how are you?" really listen to what they say. So often we are preconditioned to hear the response "fine" that we miss what is really being said. Take a moment and really listen. Don't assume that just because the response was "fine" all is well. Let them know that you are there for them if they just want to talk. And that, my friends, makes all the difference in the world.

People, we are all in ministry and ministry can take place in person, over the telephone, through the mail or on-line. I pray that during these tough times you will reach out more in ministry to those you come in contact with, because believe me my friends, every one of us knows at least one person who is hurting and could use a word of encouragement, a heartfelt prayer, or just someone to sit a while and listen. And as you do respond, may your ministry flourish and may you be a special blessing to that someone in need.

Grace and Peace,

*Pastor Rich*