

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**  
**19<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
**REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON**  
**“INTENTIONAL FAITH DEVELOPMENT: GATHER,**  
**NURTURE, EQUIP”**  
**Ephesians 4:21-24**  
**October 23, 2011**  
**9:00 & 11:00 A.M. SERVICES**

This morning we are going to talk about three active verbs: **GATHER, NURTURE AND EQUIP**. As a church, that's the mission for which we exist:

To gather men and women, children and youth into the Body of Christ  
 To nurture individuals to become living, growing disciples of Jesus Christ  
 Then to equip the body for ministry and mission in the world so that,  
 through the life of this congregation, lives can be changed and we can model what  
 it means to be a 21<sup>st</sup> century New Testament church.

This is right in line with Paul's vision for the early church in the third and fourth chapters of his epistle to the Ephesians. He begins with the message of reconciliation through Jesus Christ. Through the blood of his cross, we have been reconciled to God and given the ministry of reconciliation; through him we are no longer strangers and sojourners, but brothers and sisters in Christ.

Mid-course, he shifts to the image of a household built on the foundation of Christ Jesus, and he encourages them to *“maintain the unity of the Body in the bond of peace.”* One spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and in all and through all.

Then he says that within that household, we have all been given various gifts—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. This morning I would like to expand that list to include:

- singers and secretaries and social workers
- builders and businessmen and bean counters
- doctors and dietitians and designers

- carpenters and carpet layers and contractors
- lawyers and lecturers and lovers of children
- athletes and actors and aerobics instructors

All gathered in the church, Body of Christ. All nurtured in their discipleship by the spirit of Christ. All working together with one clear purpose: **“To equip the saints for the work of ministry, building up the Body of Christ.”** That is intentional faith development: **Gather, Nurture and Equip.**

### **1. OUR MISSION IS TO GATHER INTO THE BODY OF CHRIST.**

There is an amazing story about the migration of the monarch butterfly, a lovely little creature who visits our gardens and forests in the summer. Every autumn, millions of monarchs from all over the eastern United States and Canada migrate thousands of miles to a small handful of sites in Mexico where they rest for the winter. Then in the spring, they begin their return trip to the north. The amazing thing is that no individual monarch ever makes the trip to Mexico and back.

A butterfly that leaves the Adirondack Mountains in New York will fly all the way to Mexico and spend the winter. In March, it begins the trip northward, but after laying eggs in the milkweed of Texas and Florida, it will die. Those butterflies will continue northward, laying eggs along the way until some of them, maybe three or four generations removed from the original, make it back to mountains of New York. But when August comes, they will head south, aiming for the exact place their great grandparents visited, a place they have never been.

We just celebrated our centennial. We gathered in this community we call Park Hill. Of the 400 plus individuals in the church that day, not a single one was present when this church started in a tent. Just like the monarchs, we represent the generation that completes the journey that was started by a previous generation.

Now here’s the thing to take note of; not a single one of us will complete the journey alone. We gather as a community, because it is in the community where we come to understand the fullness of God's plan for us. I pray for you and you pray for me. I can’t make it without you and you can’t make it without me. The church is a community of faith. The generations before us understood that. That’s why they sang:

**When we all get to heaven  
What a day of rejoicing that will be.**

**When we all see Jesus  
We'll sing and shout the victory.**

That's community! We don't make this journey alone. It's only in community where we discover what God has in mind for us. So we gather as an inclusive community of faith, embracing diversity, service, unconditional acceptance and the care and support of all people. This is a community where we welcome and include and receive all persons into the inclusive, life-giving, joy-filled Body of Christ.

We had an individual in our new member's class who said that she was here because her neighbor invited her to come to church with him. It is a powerful witness when you have members who are actively inviting others to join them in worship. Studies show that 80 percent of all first time visitors to a church come because a friend or neighbor invited them. Inviting, reaching and gathering; that is how we can make a difference.

In the movie, Brokeback Mountain, the Methodist church is doing just that. In the last scene, Ennis, the hard-scrabble, hard-working, sullen ranch hand, is meeting with his beautiful daughter (really the only symbol of hope in the whole movie) in his broken down trailer. She tells him she is going to be married and that the wedding will be at the Methodist church. She wants him to come.

At first, he hesitates, and you just know he is going to make excuses. **“They need me down in the Tetons.”** Then he pauses and says, **“But I guess they'll have to get along without me if my little girl is getting married.”**

Ennis is going to church...the Methodist church, the church with the motto which says: **“Open hearts, Open minds, Open doors.”** Well, I'll tell you, if he were to come here to Park Hill we would welcome him, receive him, and gather him in:

- With all of his pain and all of his brokenness
- With all the sorrow of his life
- With all the guilt and regret and grieving

**2. OUR MISSION IS TO NURTURE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST.** I mentioned the last scene in the movie, Brokeback Mountain. Well there's an earlier scene that also involves the Methodist Church. It comes early in their friendship when Jack Twist says to Ennis, **“My mamma, she believes in the**

**Pentecost.” “What exactly is the Pentecost?”** asks Ennis, in idle curiosity. Then, as if to excuse his lack of biblical knowledge, he says, **“My folks, they was Methodist.”**

Well, as you can see, Jack Twist didn't have it right. And Ennis's experience is too true of all too many Methodists: a lack of clarity about our faith, a lack of conviction in our beliefs, and biblical illiteracy. But our Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations is designed to change all that. And there's history there for those of us who are Methodists. John Wesley's genius in the early Methodist movement was the network of **“class meetings, societies and bands”** for spiritual formation, biblical reflection and care-giving.

### **3. AND FINALLY, OUR TASK IS TO EQUIP FOR MISSION AND MINISTRY.**

We enter to worship, but we depart to serve. That is the measure of a fruitful congregation. As we leave here today, let us go out to make a difference in the world. **WE GATHER, WE NURTURE AND WE EQUIP.** As a church, that's the mission for which we exist: it's called intentional faith development. If you are willing to join us on this journey, I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be your church.