

**University Heights Church
of Christ**
445 Columbia Ave.,
Lexington, KY 40508
(859) 255-6257
www.uheightschurch.com

WORSHIP SERVICES

Sunday

Bible Study: 9:45 AM

Worship: 10:45 AM; 6:00 PM

Wednesday

Bible Study: 7:30 PM (This is
immediately followed by a
short worship period)

First Friday of Each Month

Singing: 7:30 PM

LEADERSHIP

Elders

Garry Banks, David Collins,
John Thompson

Evangelist

Adam Litmer

Deacons

Troy Antle, Richard Brundige,
Matt Thompson, Adam
Litmer, Bill Morelan, Jim
Parsons, Pat Seabolt, Adam
Daniels, Jamie Powell

Adam's Office Hours

Tuesday-Friday (8:30-4:00)

Note

Louis Harrod suffered a heart attack last week. As of the time of this writing he is resting in room 3355 at Baptist Health scheduled to go home later this afternoon or tomorrow. We certainly need to keep he and Shirley in our prayers and see if there is anything else we can do for them as he recovers.

IN NEED OF PRAYERS

Jeff Howerton, Rhonda Boyd, Paul Atkisson, Janice Parsons, Barbara Matheny, David Morrow, Debbie Parker, John Bennett, Robert Brundige, Donald Dawson, Gail Stein, Sandy Childress, Susie Burton, Jacob Profit, Valerie and Barry Boyd, Jannett's mother and stepfather, Sandy Driver, Erlene Young, Doris Baker, Burnice Richardson, Ruth Poynter, Larry Sells, Christian Shadburne, Mattie Johnson (hip replacement), Evelyn Damron, Cassie Neel, Tony Tirey, Rose Curtis, Evelyn and Austin Skinner (both recovering from cancer surgery), Shirley Harrod's family, Andrew Westphal, The Ellis family

University Heights Messenger

Volume 7--Number 45

November 15, 2015

How Do Churches Grow?

Paul Earnhart

There is a great need today for Christians to remember what their business is in the world. You would think it is impossible for disciples of Jesus Christ to forget that He "*came into this world to save sinners*" (1 Timothy 1:15), "*to seek and to save that which was lost*" (Luke 19:10)—but it has been managed. Local churches now, as of old, can fall prey to a sterile orthodoxy that lacks both passion and compassion (Revelation 2:2-5). Christians who do not "live for the lost" in both their individual and collective lives have become as useless as road dust and can no longer justify their existence. The Lord has not been unclear about that (Matthew 5:13).

It is for this reason that my heart has thrilled at what seems to be a resurgence of evangelistic fervor among the disciples that I know. It may indeed yet be no larger than a man's hand, but it is there and it is filled with promise. This is as it should be, for there is a desperate need for us to be about our Father's business both at home and abroad, remembering all the while that this will be accomplished not by some institutional scheme, but by the awakened concern of individual saints who have come to know their Savior better and love Him more.

Given the fragile infant nature of this new evangelistic stirring among us, it may be premature and even risky to be issuing warnings, but memories of the past serve to edge with concern the joy I feel at this emerging sense of compassion for lost souls. I can still remember

the ground swell of missionary zeal that arose in the churches following the upheaval of a world war which scattered Christians from their previously narrow circles to new places in their own country and abroad. A rising post-war prosperity joined with a new awareness of the size of the world to produce an explosion of evangelism. The churches grew in number and wealth, and a heady spirit of self-confidence took hold of many disciples as they moved from their modest meetinghouses into larger and more impressive buildings.

It was an exhilarating time, but it was also a dangerous time. From a people compelled by humble circumstances to trust in the Lord, we were transformed into a proud-spirited institution that gloried in its newfound social status. Even as men were fanning out across the world to tell the story of simple undenominational discipleship, the gospel was in the process of being lost to presumptuous pride. Human wisdom introduced “better methods” of accomplishing God’s purposes and accommodations were made with the society to which the churches were more closely linked. It didn’t have to happen and it shouldn’t have happened, but we do well to note that it did happen.

My present joy at every new manifestation of zeal for perishing sinners is undiluted, but how bitter it would be to see this godly earnestness subverted by a repetition of old folly. So, while we are calling our brethren to the harvest field, let us give equal attention to the soundness of our faith and lives. This will happen as a matter of course if we maintain the humble spirit of our Savior and continue to know that the “*victory is of the Lord*” (Proverbs 21:31). As we enlarge the place of our tent and lengthen its cords, we need to remember to strengthen its stakes (Isaiah 54:2) by speaking “*the things which befit sound doctrine*” (Titus 2:1) and holding fast “*the pattern of sound words...in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus*” (2 Timothy 1:13).

The last thing I intend to suggest by all this is that we become paranoid about numeric growth. Sometimes I think there are as many

Christians who take pride in being few as there are that grow puffed up by being many. It is not the *number* that is significant but the *people*. People are lost one by one and they will be saved the same way. If we succeed in recovering every lost person we can, our numbers will of necessity increase, but it will still be the individual souls that are important and the glory and power will still be the Lord’s.

A friend of mine recently asked me why I am so skeptical of numerical goal setting in promoting growth in local churches. It was a new question for me, but he had read me accurately. I do have a real uneasiness about any great emphasis on statistics in measuring the growth of churches. I am skeptical because numbers can so often mask what is happening to the people. The ultimate goal of our Father for His children is both spiritual and personal. He wills that we be “*conformed to the image of His Son*” (Romans 8:29). Success or failure in this enterprise cannot be measured by mere statistics. A far more important question to consider as numbers change is how individual saints are fairing in their effort to be more Christ-like. Churches only truly grow as the individual members of those assemblies grow. What is the glory of our numbers if people are not prepared to go to heaven?

There are no ultimate concrete number goals to be set. God is not willing that *any* should perish (2 Peter 3:9). If our numbers increase, and God grant that they shall, let it be because we have shown compassion to one more lost soul who needs the gospel with its saving and transforming power, and not because we are trying to build “great churches.” This whole thing is about people going to heaven. May we never forget it!