



Mulberry Presbyterian Church
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Covered Dish Luncheon, September 26



*Sponsored by the Men of the
Church and the Fellowship
Ministry Team*

*Join us in the Fellowship Hall
after worship on September 26
for food and fellowship. Meat
and drinks will be provided -
just bring a side dish to share.
Come and enjoy a great meal
and spend some time with your
church family!*

Or Current Resident

*Mulberry Presbyterian Church
5600 Tuckaseegee Road
Charlotte, NC 28208*

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Mulberry Messenger

September 2010

Building a Healthy Church at Mulberry By Rev. Chris Carrasco



First, thank you to the entire congregation for your attendance and participation in our Building Healthy Churches class so far. We have had some great thought-provoking sharing and discussions as we move forward in our process together. Realizing that not everyone can come to these gatherings, I'd like to share a short summary of our first five classes and what we will be talking about in the next few weeks.

- Class #1 – As an introduction we acknowledged that most mainline churches in America are at a plateau or are declining. Average church attendance nationwide is 75. This is due to a change in the culture and suspicion or negative experiences many people have had with institutional religion. We also talked about the change in community in our area and how church is no longer a priority in people's lives.
- Class #2 – We talked about the #1 purpose of the church and what we believe it is. Most agreed it revolved around understanding and sharing God's Word. Jesus' Great Commission says it all: "Go and make disciples." On a scale of 1 to 10 we ranked ourselves around a 5.
- Class #3 – Every living thing has a life cycle, including churches. The good news is that churches can have more than one life cycle. We placed ourselves about one third to one half of the way down on the declining side of the cycle. We also talked about the four key parts of a church: Vision (changing the world), Relationships (people connecting with people), Programs (ministries in the church), Management (how the church is structured). Ideally, vision is the motivating factor, with relationships a close second. Most agreed that currently either relationships or management are our motivating factors.
- Class #4 – Our focus was on why we do what we do. Churches are either inward focused with ministries primarily for themselves, or outward focused with ministries primarily for others. Our general consensus is that we are or have recently been an inward focused church that is becoming more outward focused, with our Hot Dog Lunch and Thomasboro Adoption as the two main examples.
- Class #5 – Vision was this week's topic, with discussion about what our current vision is, what we want our vision to be, and how do we define our community. We generally agreed that our vision is to be more community oriented, with our community within a 5 mile radius or driving distance. Our target group is unchurched people in that community,

possibly including the children at Thomasboro and/or the Hispanic people in the area. We hope to reach between 100 and 300 people in the next five years.

In the future our topics will be:

- Class #6 – What are our most basic beliefs that affect our everyday behavior and how we do ministry as a congregation? In other words, what are our core values?
- Class #7 – The importance of relationships. What is the difference between a “friendly” church and a “friendship” church? How might we foster making new friendships with our visitors?
- Class #8 – Evangelism is central to a healthy church. How do you define it? How do you do it?
- Class #9 – Summarize the last eight weeks and ask any questions about what we have learned so far.
- Class #10 – Share hopes, fears, doubts, excitements, dreams, and questions about the transformation process.



August Session Highlights

- Annette shared an opening devotion, prayer, and shared her faith journey with us after we read from scripture and prayed for our congregation.
- Most Session members will be attending the next Leadership School on September 18 from 8:30 – 12:30 in the morning at Hickory Grove Presbyterian Church. All are welcome.
- The next communion will be celebrated on October 17th, Homecoming Sunday.
- Jack Guy and Phil Egel were elected to be commissioners at the September 21st Presbyterian meeting.
- Nick Cheek was approved to preach on Men’s Sunday, September 26.
- Permission was given for Kris O’Reilly to sell Hymnal Angels to raise money for Mulberry. These angels are made from our own old hymnals.
- A congregational self study is being conducted by the entire Session involving information about our history, building, staff, programs, and structure. A congregational survey is part of that study.
- The Session will be on retreat on Saturday, September 11 from 9:00 – 3:00 at Paw Creek Church.

Why Transformation Matters at Mulberry

by Mike Hood

On the day over fifteen years ago when Sue, Mary and I joined Mulberry, we were interviewed by Bob Bohler in his office along with another couple joining the church on the same Sunday. After we had answered questions about our faith, the other young man who was joining volunteered to the group that he was looking forward to his new life in Christ. I was struck at the time by his response against the backdrop of what seemed to me to be a rather pro forma or routine occasion. What he said, of course, was precisely the correct response. In fact, change-transformation- rebirth are all at the very heart of the Christian experience, and what we celebrate at Easter makes that perfectly clear. Perhaps one of the most famous transformations is Augustine’s conversion described toward the end of the *Confessions*. After struggling for years with carnal desire which he did not want to give up, he finally relinquishes his own will to God. Sitting in a garden in Milan, he randomly opens the Bible to Romans 13:13. “As I came to the end of the sentence,” Augustine writes, “it was as though the light of confidence flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled.” Nothing was the same for him after that moment.

One of the fundamental narrative patterns in world literature, according to Joseph Campbell (and others), involves a hero in separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return. Although Jesus is *not* a literary hero, the pattern nevertheless applies to him. Jesus is separated from the world at the time of the temptation, and his ministry in Galilee is an extension of that separation, for he is in the world but not of it. Those whom he ministers to seem to be aware of this in ways others, even his disciples, are not. The source of Jesus’ power is clear to readers of the Gospels from the very beginning, since God claims Jesus as his beloved son at the time of his baptism. Jesus turns to that source of power throughout his ministry, for it not only comforts him in time of need, but makes him aware of his place, his purpose in the larger scheme of things. The “life-enhancing return” occurs when Jesus meets with his disciples in Galilee after his death and resurrection. What makes that meeting life-enhancing, at least as I understand it, is that through his agency, Jesus has made God (and God’s forgiveness) available to all of us, which explains why the image of the torn curtain in the temple is so powerful.

So why make disciples of all nations? Why should the church turn outward and be concerned about those who are not yet members? Here are two reasons among many. First, and foremost, it seems only natural to want to share the joy and enrichment that comes from Christian spiritual life with others. Augustine’s conversion stands as an example of what is possible. And second, service has the potential to promote a transformation in those who are engaged in serving. When Sister Helen Prejean (*Dead Man Walking*) visited Belmont Abbey College several years ago, I asked her how, given her busy schedule, she managed to practice the spiritual disciplines. I was thinking of prayer, contemplation of scripture, and fasting. She said the greatest of the spiritual disciplines was doing something to help others. When that is in order, she added, everything else falls into place.

