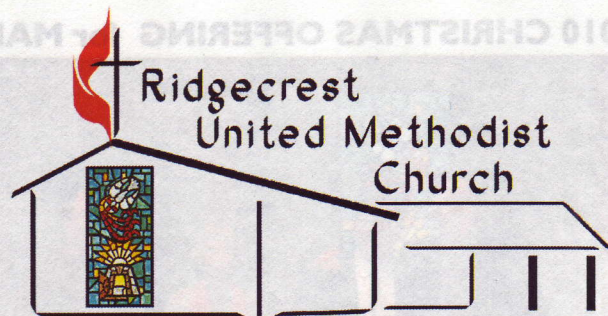


The Messenger



Newsletter of the Ridgecrest United Methodist Church

February, 2011

PASTOR'S POINT

Last October 2, a Saturday, Kathy and I were driving home from dinner at China Garden and I turned on the car radio. It happened to be around 6 pm, the hour for Garrison Keillor's "Prairie Home Companion" on Public Radio. We used to listen to the show when we lived down in the big city, mostly for the news from Lake Wobegon, Keillor's mythical home town in Minnesota. You know, where the women are strong, the men are good-looking, and the children are above average. Then, when Keillor's humor got a little too morbid for our taste, we quit listening.

Well very unfortunately, we tuned back in on the night he had decided to unload on the Methodists. You may already know that Keillor regularly makes fun of Lutherans, Catholics or Unitarians, but fairly gently. Not this time. He explained that a listener had written him a letter accusing him of romanticizing churches too much. He said he resolved to stop doing that beginning with the next song, an amusing little ditty titled "Methodist Blues."

I'm only going to quote a few of the stanzas from the song; several of them are really too offensive to repeat in a church newsletter. If you wish, you can get the full dosage on the Prairie Home Companion website.

I go to church every Sunday morn
I've been going since I was born
starting to think there's something I missed
by being a Methodist.
I got the Methodist blues

Our theology gets thinner and thinner
we don't talk about saving the sinner
sometimes I wonder if God exists
but I can't because I'm a Methodist
I got the Methodist blues

The minister is way to the left
the organist is almost deaf
the choir is getting long in the tooth
got no youth director cause there ain't no youth
I got the Methodist blues

—And I've saved the worst for last—
Got no purpose, got no mission
just layers and layers of tradition
just another retail business
everything picks up around Christmas

I got the Methodist blues

That really ticked me off. I know I should have done something before this, but I sort of got absorbed doing actual ministry in the busiest quarter of the year. So last Wednesday, I wrote and sent the following letter to Garrison Keillor:

"Dear Mr. Keillor: As a United Methodist and pastor to a highly effective United Methodist congregation in Ridgecrest, CA, I am deeply offended by your supposedly satirical song 'Methodist Blues.' Your decision to include this stereotyping song in your October 2, 2010 program reflects an extreme bias against one of the great branches of the Christian church, and not only that, you seem obtuse in your misapprehension of who we are. Have you visited a United Methodist congregation for worship lately? I doubt it. If you did, you might learn something.

I serve a Methodist congregation of roughly 300 members who share a powerful purpose and a mighty mission. We have a vibrant music ministry with a large and excellent choir, including singers and instrumentalists of all ages. We have many youth in our congregation, and yes, we have a full-time youth director on our staff. Our membership is growing. We value tradition, yet we do not dwell on it. The topic of God saving sinners occurs regularly in my Sunday messages. Our hearts, our minds and our doors are always open to all.

What is more, this is the most mission-minded church I have ever had the privilege to serve. Last year, we finished a 3-year fundraising campaign that covered the full cost of a new Habitat for Humanity home, as well as doing a significant portion of the construction work ourselves. I would like you to witness the amazing list of mission projects we supported in just the last 12 months.

Mr. Keillor, I know that you are just a humorist, but you picked the wrong church to de-romanticize, and you went too far. The United Methodist Church is alive and well in North America, with over 30,000 congregations, and our churches in Africa are experiencing explosive growth. Our mission, for your information, is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. You might wish to write that down. It's the real deal.

Come and visit us sometime in sunny Eastern California. Winter is almost over here. You would be welcome; everybody is.

Yours Very Truly, Pastor Rich LaShure."

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rich".