

## VISION ADDRESS

Chapin United Methodist Church

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January 18, 2010

Brothers and sisters in Christ I am excited to be delivering my eighth *Vision Address* to you. 2010 was an unparalleled year of growth for Chapin Methodist, despite the fact that our nation continues to be at war against terrorism and in a serious economic crisis. We believe that now more than ever, people are seeking truth and purpose, and we must realize the urgency of our mission to glorify God as we partner with the Holy Spirit in the business of **connecting** (unconnected people with the saving love of Jesus), **growing** (in Christ's love, becoming more and more like Him), and **sharing** (Christ's love with each other and the world)!

Tonight we celebrate God's faithfulness in giving us a crystal clear vision and for empowering us to work toward fulfilling His vision for His church here in Chapin.

First, let me report on Sunday School and Worship Attendance for the past year. Worship Attendance in 2009 grew **24 percent** from the 2008 level. Our average worship attendance in '09 was **1048** per Sunday (846 in '08). Sunday School Attendance was also up compared with '08, to an average of **467** (432 in '08). These growth numbers are the most significant we have experienced in the nine years that we have been together. One obvious reason is the new sanctuary. (We can still call it "new" even though it's a year old now, right?) The additional seating capacity helped to enable the momentous growth of 2009. Church growth experts insist that when a worship service consistently averages more than 80% of its seating capacity, it will cease to grow. CUMC had become the poster child for that truth. The opening of the building did not come one day too soon.

God has blessed us with a beautiful place to gather to worship Him. And you can be doggone sure that one of our top priorities in 2010 will be to continue to increase those attendance numbers – because numbers represent souls, and souls are absolutely priceless to God and to us. Lost people matter to God and they matter to us! We are all about *drawing* a crowd so that we can *disciple* a crowd! Listen, if people don't *show up*, they can't *grow up*! Lessening or losing our passion for lost people is not an option! It would be real easy to say, "*We've got ours, now everybody else can get there's...*" The path of least resistance has a wide gate and is a broad road and far too many churches seeking their own comfort find it...while thousands of people within arm's reach continue to barrel down the same path leading them to a Christ-less eternity.

Turning to finances, you set another record in terms of contributions to the General Fund. Budget contributions for 2009 were **\$1,317,673** compared to \$1,136,619 in 2008. Your 2009 GFB contributions show a **16 percent** increase over 2008. The average weekly General Fund Offering in 2009 was **\$25,340** which is an increase of more than \$3,000 over '08 (\$22,307). In light of the fact that the economy has struggled significantly, coupled with wrapping up a major Capital Campaign, this is incredible!

I believe it would be very appropriate to give our faithful and generous God a roaring show of our appreciation to and love for Him!

Let me offer you some more snapshots of significant accomplishments during the past year...

## FIRST, LET'S BEGIN WITH HOW WE CONNECTED THE UNCONNECTED DURING 2009.

We are currently reporting a membership of **1,514** members, with a few more scheduled to join this Sunday. During 2009 we had a net membership gain of **121** people (up from 81 in '08). However, just 47 joined by profession or confession of faith. As you know, profession of faith gains are real advances for the Kingdom of God. The absolute highest buzz factor in the life of the church is when someone says “*yes*” to Jesus, becomes a Christian, and is baptized. We baptized **31** folks this past year (our first *Baptism Celebration* was awesome!) compared to 18 in '08.

**Other Praise.** (1) From a lady who has been at CUMC several months, "This church is the best gift I received this past year...you wouldn't believe how much my life has changed (YES!!!)...My friend invited me here and gave me this new Bible...I could never thank you enough..." This is from someone in their early 50s who had never even been to a church (except when they were a really small child, and then for just a few times)...**GOD IS SO GOOD!!!** Here's another: (2) "My family and I have been here about 2 months (moved from Ohio)...we just keep coming back to CUMC...our plan was to visit area churches before making a decision, but we don't want to go anywhere else..." (WOW!!!) "You asked people to 'Trust God and Try Something'...3 different folks did that and invited us...we even got invitations through FaceBook..." I've just got to say, that's just way too cool!!!

Our music ministries, led by **Nancy Bollman** and **Sue Odom**, continue to consistently help us connect with God in worship. Nancy's leadership and development of the orchestra has added another excellent traditional element to our 9:00am service. Sue has led the Praise band through a major transition, the “retirement” of drummer Boogie Weatherford and the coming on board of new drummer Patrick Brown. In the words of the Apostle Paul, we will continue (as long as I am blessed to serve as Lead Pastor) to try to be “*all things to all people so that by all possible means we might save some...*” by offering different styles of worship. We praise God for the work of His Spirit to bless our efforts!

## LET'S MOVE ON TO WHAT WAS BEEN DONE IN 2009 TO GROW IN CHRISTLIKENESS.

Seeing someone's flame of passion for Jesus burn brighter – seeing them grow in their understanding of the Word and their relationship with God – seeing someone who is hungry to go higher and higher...that's awesome!

Under the leadership of **Emily Wheaton**, our small group and short-term study ministries continue to expand and offer excellent opportunities for people of all ages to encounter the living God and grow deeper in their relationships with Him. **34** studies and groups were offered in 2009 with **543** participants (more than ever before!).

**Web Ministry Praise.** “Hey Jody, Laura and I started a new Wednesday night tradition with a new show on TV. We found it at [www.chapinUMC.com](http://www.chapinUMC.com) and we just hook up the computer to the big screen, bible and notebook in hand, and catch your Sunday service. Definitely our favorite show on TV and wanted to let you know that your words have made their way to Connecticut now, and we loved the message. It was great to get to hear you speak again. You will likely never know the true extent to the role you have played in our lives, but we wanted to stop by and say Thank You from the bottom of our Hearts. and let you know that your reach continues to grow!”

Disciple Bible (headed-up by **Shirley Maybin**) is a thriving spiritual growth program. Listen to this comment from a recent Disciple participant:

How do I explain to you how you brought me out of darkness into "living water"? I know what you're saying right now--"It wasn't me..." It is the Holy Spirit who has shown you "The Way" ....However, without your patience, understanding, and even jumping on your "soap box" at times, I would have never known my Lord and Savior as I know Him today.

**Tim Walker** continues to offer excellent leadership to the Student Ministry. On a cold January night two Sundays ago, a record number of **93** students showed up – not for a party or a ski trip – but for a “regular” night of Fusion. Awesome! And we are blessed that **Robin Davis** continues to provide solid leadership for our Children’s Ministries. This past year’s Bible School had **178** kids which is a sizeable increase over previous years and the Day School is a growing vital ministry to the church and community. What happens with our children and youth is so, so important. George Barna states, “*The enemy’s strategy is to take out the opposition as early as possible... we must do a better job of reaching and growing our children in the things of God...*” Both Tim and Robin understand the significance and criticality of what they do.

NOW, LET’S TAKE A LOOK AT HOW WE HAVE **SHARED** CHRIST’S LOVE IN 2009. Whether it’s folks doing Adopt-a-Highway, or traveling to Mount Pleasant, or Juarez, Mexico or somewhere in-state with Salkehatchie or out-of-state with ASP, or right here in Chapin during the Community Service Day or volunteering at We Care, Good Works, The Hub or Christgate... we are truly growing in this area.

**Paul Allen**, minister of Congregational Care (is there anyone anywhere more cutout to do this job?) and an awesome team of servant-ministers share Christ’s love in tangible and life-giving ways on a daily basis in homes, hospitals, and nursing homes. Ministries such as “Friends,” “Jolly Christians,” “Methodist Misfits,” and “Singles” are also wonderful, wonderful sharing opportunities.

The Prayers and Squares Ministry (a part of the Prayer Ministry led by **Shirley Maybin**) continues to bless those in need with *prayer squares* and *prayer quilts*. If you’ve ever received one, you know the impact. Listen to these words...

We have sent quilts to many folks who are not members of CUMC. Besides those in the community, we have sent quilts to other states - 2 to California, 2 to Florida and 1 to Alabama. One of the most meaningful notes is from a cancer patient in California. "My prayer quilt has not left my side since it was received. When the weather is too warm, I sleep on top of it and at other times, it is on top of me. I am reminded that there are still people who love and care enough to reach out to others, even those whom they do not know. The beautiful, bright colors also remind me of God's love for me and have brought me into a much closer relationship with my Lord."

I just say a big **Praise God** tonight, for the ways Jesus’ love is shared so freely through His people!

Our administrative staff: led by **Caroline Fogle** and **Alice Furman** (along with a great team office servant ministers) do an absolutely terrific job! I love working on a day-to-day basis with Caroline and Alice.

CUMC’s Team of paid and unpaid servant ministers continues to grow, and I’m amazed at the incredible gifts they possess, and I’m honored to serve along side you all.

If you serve in any capacity, would you please stand. [*Please applaud all of our servant ministers.*]

NOW, LET'S LOOK FORWARD TO 2010 FOR A FEW MOMENTS.

Any old Rock-n-Rollers in the crowd? You guys may remember a band from the 70's – *BTO* (Bachman Turner Overdrive)... *Yeah, Dude, Rock on...* They had a song that I used to love (as a 13 year old) that I can't really say I love anymore because of some of the lyrics (bet you've got some of your old "favorites" that fit that bill). But I love the chorus. It's appropriate for us tonight...

*You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet.*

The past has been good...really good...but I'm telling you... *We Ain't Seen Nothing Yet!*

HERE ARE SEVERAL DREAMS THAT RELATE TO CONNECTING THE UNCONNECTED IN 2010: A voluntary, non-profit organization that exists primarily for the benefit of its members is called a **club**. But a **church** is different. CUMC exists first and foremost to reach those persons who are not yet in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Remember: ***It's not about me, it's about Him; It's not about us, it's about them.*** Our primary task is to continue Jesus' work of seeking and saving the lost. And we must in 2010 have laser focus on that mission! We cannot be merely *concerned* about lost people and helping them connect with Christ...we must be absolutely *consumed* – helping unconnected people connect with Jesus and His Church must become our *obsession*!

There are people all around you and all around me crying out for us to help them find hope, help them find peace, help them find LIFE. And yes, we thank God for all those who have been connected with Christ and His saving love. But as long as there is one (even just one) within driving distance of CUMC who has not been reached, we cannot rest until they find their rest in Jesus! And if anyone ever says about this church, "*We've gotten too big...*" I want you to respond Biblically...

**Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy!"**  
-Matthew 26:65

Jesus stayed true to His mission and we must too! He did whatever it took to see lost people find the Father, and we must too!

Here are 3 points to help sharpen our focus on our primary mission...

(1) **Pray.** Make a list of 4 of your unchurched friends and neighbors and pray that they will get connected to Christ through a local church in 2010. *Invest* in their lives and pray for opportunities to *invite* them to join you here.

(2) A team of leaders (SS / Worship / Children / Youth / Music / SPRC / AdBd/ COM / Staff) have spent time meeting and praying to discern how we might maximize this "window of growth" God has opened here at CUMC. While we celebrate the **24%** increase in worship attendance in '09, we missed our goal. The experts say that when you move into a new worship facility you can expect to see a **30-33%** increase. We missed that mark. The question we've wrestled with is "*Why did we miss it?*"

The conclusion we've come to, after study and prayer is "*We're not sure...*" However, the Leadership Team has decided to try a **summer worship schedule** this summer. The summer schedule will begin on May 30<sup>th</sup> (Memorial Day) and run through September 5<sup>th</sup> (Labor Day). The new schedule: **Traditional Worship at 8:30, Sunday School at 9:30, and Contemporary Worship at 10:30.**

Let me emphasize two things – [1] this is a summer schedule...we will return to our present schedule on September 12<sup>th</sup> and [2] this is a return to a previous tradition of CUMC, which was well received in the past. We will monitor attendance carefully and prayerfully we will see less of a summer slump than we did in '09.

(3) The possibility of a **third service**, beginning as early as September 2010, is being prayed about. This service would be contemporary in style and would quite possibly be held in the Fusion Student Ministry Center during the 9:00 am hour. (Much like we used to do when we had an 8:30 traditional service in the old sanctuary and a 8:37 contemporary service in the fellowship hall.) Please hear me when I say this is not a definite...this is a possibility...We will keep you informed of any developments if and when they take place.

NOW, LET'S MOVE ON TO **GROWING IN CHRISTLIKENESS**. Once a person receives Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, it is essential that he or she find a small group in which to grow in the faith. We believe that life-change happens best (accepted and known and loved to be all that God created us to be) in the context of a small group.

Sunday School and Disciple Bible Study (along with various other groups such as the thriving Thursday Morning Men's Group) will continue to be at the core of disciple making at CUMC. However, we envision more and more folks utilizing the internet to help facilitate their spiritual growth. With soldiers in Iraq and couples in Connecticut already benefiting from our service, we need to improve and enhance this area of outreach and discipleship. I am so excited that our IT Team, led by **Jimmy Earley**, is beginning the process of a total overhaul of our website, making it more interactive, efficient, and user friendly. This is be a great step forward in 2010.

Our vision is to have **3000** people connected in worship and **3000** people connected and growing in some form of a small group. As we continue to grow larger in worship, we must continue to grow smaller in small groups. This will grow us spiritually and connect us relationally.

NOW, LET US MOVE ON INTO **SHARING CHRIST'S LOVE**. We have some dreams for that too.

Just imagine if we could get more involved in missions – both here and abroad. I am so excited about the direction of Missions here...our partnership with The Mission Society...and the growth of an already strong core of folks with a heart for Missions stirs my heart!

Congregational Care is expanding to keep in step with the ever-expanding needs of an expanding congregation. The implementation of *Stephens Ministry* here in 2010 is a dream of Paul's that is coming to fruition and I'm very excited. More and more of the precious people God has entrusted this church with will receive even more of the care they need.

We must continue to hold up the dream of "**Every Member in Ministry**." *The Spiritual Gifts Ministry* is committed to seeing this happen. Pray that God continues to bless this ministry by drawing more and more people who discover and deploy their God-given gifts for His glory.

The fact that you are sitting here tonight means that you are a leader in Chapin UMC. Please join me in taking that leadership role seriously. I ask you to do four things. First, **pray**. Take a copy of this address home with you. Copies are on a table just outside the door. In your daily prayer time, lift up one specific ministry of your church. Second, engage in **godly gossip** about your church. Spread a buzz of excitement all over the Chapin Community and the Midlands Region about what God is doing

in and through CUMC. Make sure the “Chapin Tom-Toms are beating out a pleasant, God-honoring tune. Third, **Invest** in the lives of those who are unchurched and look for opportunities to **invite** them to CUMC. Finally, **give** to this church at least 10 percent of the money that God has enabled you to receive.

And I’m just saying...if we put all of our hearts into this deal...

***“Bu-bu-bu-Bay you just ain’t seen nothing yet!”***

To serve alongside you in this great enterprise is a privilege for which I thank God, the United Methodist Church, and you. May God’s glorious hand of favor continue to be upon Chapin United Methodist Church, as we leave this place to go and light our world for Jesus in 2010.

*Jody Flowers*

*January 18, 2010*