

Dear Central Friends in Christ,

I bumped into a third grader from Academie Lafayette and her mother. They were enjoying the art on the walls of our church hallways. Then they turned the corner by the elevator and saw the pictures of our youth group from their summer mission trip.

The mother, Juanita, said what a refreshing sight it was to see our teens in mission, learning about immigration and serving others. She commented how wonderful it was to see youth in service, after a long day of seeing news stories of youth being gunned down in gang violence and the escalating high school dropout rate.

We continued the conversation about our church's commitment to growing up all generations in a faith that teaches love of God and neighbor. I assured her daughter that when she is in sixth grade, she could be a part of our youth group!

Her response? "Well, if you're here, I guess I could." "Of course we'll be here." I replied.

I had to reflect later. What does it mean to this family, to this community, that Central United Methodist Church is here? Would it make a difference if we weren't? What would be missing?

I invite you to spend some time in prayer with me, reflecting on those questions. I know for the student from India who finds a family here, it matters that we're here. I know for the couple with the newly baptized baby who wants to grow in faith, it matters that we're here. I know that for the older adult couple who relocated here to be closer to their adult children, and wanted a vibrant United Methodist church to be a part of, it matters that we're here. I know that for Newhouse, Swinney School, and Shepherd's Center, it matters that we're here. I know that for our partner congregation in Mozambique, Mukambe Feha, it matters that we're here. . .

Vital signs are taken by health care professionals to determine a patient's over-



2009 Youth Mission Trip (photos courtesy of Cara Megan Lewis)

all health. There are also indicators, or vital signs, of how a church is growing in vision and intentionally reaching out into the community and world. Our church's vision is to grow in worship attendance, baptisms and professions of faith and stewardship—all indicators of deepening discipleship and growth as a congregation. How are we doing?

Worship Attendance

Our goal: Grow 10% per year in average worship attendance (indicating present health, vitality and fruitfulness of our ministries).

Average Worship in 2008: **176**

Average Worship in 2009 (to date): **196**
(over 10% increase)

Professions of Faith and Baptisms

Our goal: Grow 10% per year in professions of faith and baptisms (indicating future health, vitality and fruitfulness of our ministries).

Prof. of Faith and Baptisms in 2008: **7**

Prof. of Faith and Baptisms in 2009: **29**
(24% increase)

Stewardship

Our goal: Individual spiritual growth, evidenced by increased faithfulness in worship, prayer, Christian formation, service, giving and tithing.

This is a goal about how we are practicing our faith beyond worship, through disciplines of prayer, education, service



and giving. Currently, we are \$36,000 behind in pledged giving, which prevents us from fully funding our ministry and mission goals. Many times, in early Fall, we need a reminder to honor our pledges and renew our commitments to the church's ministry. Please pray about fulfilling your pledge or making a new commitment of focusing your faith on the provisions of God through a discipline of regular giving and tithing. We can't do it alone, but together, in Christ, we can accomplish great things!

This is new day and a new time at Central UMC! These vital signs are affirmations of a people poised and on tip-toe to see how God will work through us to be the church that **is here, and alive, and vital** for generations to come!

Pray, witness, serve, give, and join us on October 11 at 12:30-1:30 p.m. for another significant step toward our church's future witness, as we gather to affirm a proposed Capital Campaign to raise funds for renewed and redeveloped ministry facilities.

See you in church on Sunday!

Rev. Amy L. Gearhart,
Senior Pastor

