

MEDITATION

A healthy church seeks God in every corner

My own spiritual journey has been both personal and public. On the one hand, my faith is centered in a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Yet, on the other hand, it is fair to say that my faith is an experience of participation in a community of faith.

Over the years I have come to feel that one of the most important qualities of a church is that it is a gathering of people who, when truly connected to God by faith and trust, are infused with the presence of the Holy Spirit. This certainly has a profound effect on everything that a congregation does, for whether they are eating, praying, playing, studying the Bible, or discussing doctrinal or ethical issues they face, everything they do is done in the presence and power of the Spirit of God.

It also is interesting that the Christian Church began with the gathering of the earliest disciples in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. This being the case, it makes sense to believe that a church can only be strengthened in our own day when the believers that made up that church commit themselves to seeking

out the wisdom and presence of God. Despite the fact that some may think so, the renewal and health of a congregation does not really revolve around the pastor.



**Jeff Hensley
Meditation**

Though this may be a blow to the ego of many pastors, I think we have to be honest that Christ is the head of the Church and certainly the source of purpose and well-being in any local congregation, and our focus should definitely always be on the presence of Christ in the activities and programs that are the daily "stuff" of ministry in a local church.

Along these lines, I am intrigued by the viewpoint of Thomas Long regarding the one element that is most important in a thriving congregation. Long was alarmed by the conflicts that have arisen in churches around the question of worship style, so

he studied twenty churches that were understood by most observers to be "thriving churches." What he found was that, although the worship styles of these churches ranged all over the spectrum, there were some common traits present.

Long's list of common traits among thriving churches included such qualities as warm hospitality, excellent music and a commitment to mission outreach and thoughtful preaching. Yet, it is interesting that Long found that every one of these thriving churches intentionally chose to "make room for the experience of mystery." This reality strikes me as clear evidence that a healthy church is one where the members seek out the presence and power of God in their gathering.

There are many good activities that can be a part of church life, but I wonder if the nature of our churches would be different if we emphasized that our essence as a church is that we are a body of believers who are seeking to encounter God in all we do.

Dr. Jeff Hensley is Pastor of Kings Mountain Baptist Church.

CHURCH BRIEFS

Cross Trainers Kids Ministry presents Kids Explosion 2008 for ages 4-12 from 1-4 p.m. and a Youth Explosion 2008 from 6-10 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 13 at the KM YMCA Walking Track. The Kids Explosion will feature music, dramas, puppets, inflatables, special guest performances from Victory Dog and Blaze Dance Team. The Youth Explosion will feature praise bands, guest speakers, dramas and mimes. Food and refreshments will be sold. Bring your lawn chairs. For more information, call Gabriel Thomas at 704-937-0770 or email gthomas2008@yahoo.com or call Richie Parnell at 704-477-1295 or email richardparnell@bellsouth.net

The women of **St. Paul United Methodist Church**, North Cansler St., will observe Woman's Day on Sunday, September 14, 2008 at 9:30 a.m., featuring guest speaker Rebecca Wright of Brown Summit, NC.

Kingdom Life Covenant Ministries, 114 S. Railroad Ave., is hosting a New Church Fellowship Unity Conference on September 19-20, 2008, at the VFW Clubhouse in Shelby. Friday night service will begin at 7 p.m., and Saturday services will resume at 9:30 a.m. with various

workshops. A luncheon will be held on Saturday at 1 p.m. Tickets for the luncheon will be \$12 for ages 14-up, \$8 for ages 4-13, and under 4 will eat free. Services will reconvene at 6 p.m. Saturday night. For more information, call the church at 704-734-0082 or Minister Marlene Jefferies at 704-914-8999.

Boiling Springs Baptist Church, 307 S. Main St., Boiling Springs, will be having its 2nd annual Fund Run for Missions starting at 8 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 20. Registration for the 5K run/walk costs \$20 for individuals and \$45 for families of four. The children's fun run, which will begin at 9:15 a.m., costs \$10 per child. To register or for more information, call the church at 704-434-6244.

Mary's Grove United Methodist Church, 1223 Mary's Grove Church Road, is having its Homecoming Worship Celebration at 11 a.m. Sunday, Sept. 21 in the sanctuary featuring a message from Dr. Greg Gordon, a historical presentation and special music by Wanda Gordon and The Fletchers. A covered dish dinner will follow the service with a Christian clown ministry show. For more information call Vickie Rudasill at 704-472-3292.

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