

Late Summer 2008

## The Editor's Message: The Good Ground

If you were on Church on July 13<sup>th</sup>, you are exempt from reading the rest of the message below. With a few things removed (including the jokes – which you have to hear in person...you have to give a perk to seeing things live and in person) this is the message I preached that day. I think this was the third or fourth time I have done a sermon at West Hills Each time in the past I've spoken about whatever topic I felt like talking about. This time I thought I would actually try to come up with something that dealt with the lectionary for today. The Gospel reading this day is the oft heard parable of the Sower. In this story, we find the differing outcome of the seeds that are sown. Its one of my favorite parables, because not only does Jesus give the story, but, once everyone standing around doesn't get it, he then explains it.

According to our Lord, the seed along the roadside on the hard ground symbolizes those who hear the word of God but do not understand it. For those who don't accept it, Evil comes along and takes it away. The seed that falls upon rocky soil represents those who receive the word at first, but have no strong roots, and so when trials or tribulations arise due to the word, they abandon it. Then we have the seeds that fell among the thorns. In this instance, the word is heard, but the cares of the world strangle it out of the person, and no fruit is borne.

This is the one that fits many who claim to be Christians in our day. The many cares and snares of this world keep many Christians from being fruitful. They are Christians in name but after not too long, become merely "pew warmers".

Finally, we come to the good ground. In this instance the seed falls on good soil. This soil represents those who receive the word, understand it and apply it. This then leads to a bountiful harvest. Even though much of the seed was cast onto unprepared ground, much of it still falls on the good ground where it germinates and grows into a mature plant. A mature plant puts out many more times the seed required to grow it. Relating this to the Kingdom, when you plant God's Word into fertile ground it will germinate and produce fruit.

They do say that when you speak about something, you should speak about something you know. I am not much of a Bible scholar, but I do know a little bit about gardening. I was thrilled to see that this week's lectionary dealt with sowing. As I mentioned in my newsletter message last summer, I do enjoy gardening with my family. I don't think I will ever rise to the level of Helen, but I do it because I find enjoyment and relaxation in the beauty and simple magic of growing things. However, that doesn't mean I don't find challenges in it. Last year I had a slight issue with Early Blight on my tomatoes. For those unfamiliar with Early Blight, it's a fungus that attacks the tomato plant leaves, causing them eventually to fall off. It looks terrible, can spread quickly, is very difficult to stop and can cause you to lose your crop. One of the best ways to prevent it is to not grow tomatoes. Actually, it is to move your plants and not grow them in the same spot. This is because the fungus that causes Early Blight lives in the soil. So I moved some plants around in the off season and planted my tomatoes about 10 feet down from where I did the year before. Well, Early Blight attacked again this year, and I must have upset it because it was even worse than last year. I don't know if I'll get any tomatoes. So the question is, will I grow them elsewhere next year or not at all?

Ashley decided that she wanted to grow Sunflowers from seeds. So that's exactly what we did. I wasn't sure we'd get anything, but as usual I was wrong. I now have about a dozen 7 foot tall plants, just awaiting brightly colored flowers on top. I never would have thought to plant sunflowers, but they have indeed become the pride of the family garden. I really should start taking more advice from my 5 year old.

I think we can draw some parallels between this and our Spiritual lives as well as the efforts as a

church today.

At a personal level, the parable tells us about our own relationship to hearing the word of God. What kind of soil are we?

Which type of soil do you want to be when Jesus is the sower, coming along and planting seed in your life? I would hope that you want to be the good ground.

I would like to think that I myself am good ground, but sometimes I know I am the good ground right next to the ground filled with thorn bushes. It is very easy to let the worries of the world get in the way of living a spiritual life. It is a constant struggle to refocus one's attention on the things that truly matter for Christians.

How does one refocus?. For me, I find going to church can help make your soil more pliable. I have always said that you don't have to go to church to be a good person. However, in this society, I find it hard to keep focused on what matters without going. Taking time out of my busy schedule (getting away from the thorn bushes), being able to focus on the Word of God, and sharing a community with people who tend to their own spirit by doing the work of God.

This parable also has implications for us as a church. All institutions sow something. Product placement in tv shows by advertisers helps sow new customers. Schools try to sow educated citizens. Parents sow love in their children through example and encouragement. As a community of Christ, what are we sowing?

Well, we know that we all come here so that the Word of God can be sown in our own life. Aside from that, our Sunday School teachers do their best to sow Christian values in our children. In the past we have done outreach to the community through our Christmas Pageant, Vacation Bible School, and even Christmas Caroling. These evangelistic opportunities helped sow the Word of God directly to others in the community. Unfortunately, it sometimes seems that much of what we do, whether it be the greater UMC, our own church here, or as individual Christians, bears no obvious fruit. And yet, surely our greatest calling is to faithfulness rather than to success. What we always must keep focus on is the reality that what we are about in the mission to which God calls us, is the incredible reality that God's grace is for all. To bring people to Christ through our words and actions.

Of course, in many an exposition of this parable we have found ourselves contemplating the difficulties of sowing God's seed. Lack of roots, troubles and persecutions, the lures of this world, all these things come to mind. Such things represent challenges and remind us that God's mission requires patience and a capacity to resist the temptation of quitting. Even in the recent edition of the Vision, Dr. Lovett Weems, Distinguished Professor of Church Leadership at Wesley Theological Seminary presented 10 provocative Questions for the UMC. They each dealt with the fact that the UMC has been shrinking over the past 40 years. Some disturbing trends:

- Less than 5% of the clergy is under 35
- The average age of Methodists is 60 years

In 1968 the NYAC had over 200,000 members. It now has about 120,000. That is a loss of 2,000 per year. At that rate, the NYAC will lose its last member in 2069.

Hard facts like these make it clear that our seeds are not germinating like they should. Unfortunately, grim facts like these can keep us from changes. As Bishop Park said at the NYAC Annual Conference, "We are all in favor of progress, provided we can have it without change". There are time-tested excuses for resisting change:

- We tried that before
- It costs too much
- Our church is too small for that
- The congregation will never go for it
- We've never done it that way before
- It can't be done

And my favorite: "Lets form a committee"

However, the reality of many of our churches in the NYAC is that no change means no future. "The United Methodist Church in the United States has a future only to the extent that it can find ways to reach more people, younger people and more diverse people". However, if I talk just about how the NYAC is losing members then I would be ignoring the elephant in the room. Our own West Hills reflects this downward trend. We boasted over 300 members in the early 1960s with two church services every Sunday. Now we have around 140 on the rolls, but those aren't real members. That's probably somewhere around half. With those kind of numbers, its amazing that we make ends meet here. But by the Grace of God, each year we seem to get by. But that is exactly what it seems. We just get by. Ironically, it may not be finances that eventually close the doors here. It may simply be a lack of participating members. You can't maintain a building like this, as well as run programs, without a sizeable, active membership. It cyclical. We can't offer new and exciting programs because we don't have the people. Since we can't run new programs, we don't sow the seeds that will bring new members. The attempts we have made in the past to sow new seeds, such as advertising in the Pennysaver and the Long Islander, putting door hangers on doors, creating an updated website, none have produced the harvest that we need to flourish and grow. We could change around the quote from the conference and say "The West Hills United Methodist Church in Huntington Station has a future only to the extent that it can find ways to reach more people, younger people and more diverse people". I wish I knew what that way was. I do know the only answer is for us all to pray on it so that God may grant us the wisdom to understand His plan for our church.

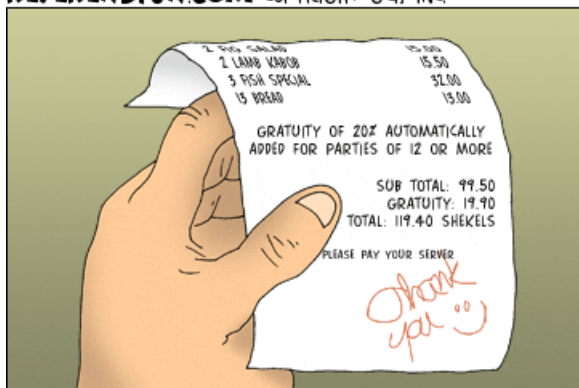
The moral here is that all Christians should broadcast seed. It is not up to us to make it fall on fertile ground, we are just to broadcast it. When you plant a seed, it may fall on fertile or infertile ground. That which falls on fertile ground may not germinate at once. It may take some time. Look at the disciples. Jesus was always trying to get them to understand his message and they always seemed to respond with blank stares. Yet those disciples turned out to be quite a harvest. So remember, you may not even be there when the seed germinates. Our job is to plant seeds wherever we go and find better ways to sow it.

We all have a choice to make. Will we choose to be hindered like the first three results? Or will we choose to be "good ground" that readily accepts God's Word and applies it? The choice is ours. By the power and authority given to us in Christ Jesus, with His Spirit in us, we have the power to choose to be "good ground". As "good ground", we can be fruitful. Look at the recent NYAC conference where Sundays Schools from across the conference raised over \$70,000 for the Heifer Project. That was quite fruitful. Could it have been done by one individual, no. But collectively we can be even more fruitful. By acting as a group we can scatter our seed and spread the word of God and show our love for our fellow man. Fruitfulness isn't just measured in converts and bodies in pews. We need to do more than show up on Sunday and call ourselves Christians. Since its inception, the Methodist Church has been actively involved in promoting Christ's love in society.

The United Methodist Church believes God's love for the world is an active and engaged love, a love seeking justice and liberty. We cannot just be observers. Christianity is not a spectator sport. We care enough about people's lives to risk interpreting God's love, to take a stand, to call each of us into a response, no matter how controversial or complex.

The UMC has been fertile soil for taking the Word and turning it into action since its inception. Being active socially here and abroad is another part of our complex and demanding job as Christians in sowing seeds. No one ever said being a farmer is easy. What does this all me for you and me? Two things: Keep tilling our own soil so that the word of God takes root in us. Like any plant, it is never done growing. Secondly, be more than just hearers of the word- be doers of the word. Be sowers ourselves. Spread the Word of God and love of Jesus Christ wherever we go. Just because much of the soil doesn't seem fertile doesn't mean to stop. If we were sowing our food and the soil was bad, would we stop growing our food? If the way by which we are sowing isn't producing the intended results, it may be time to re evaluate our methods. Amen.

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Thanks to Mikel Rice 07-11-2008

THE DISCIPLES WERE ALWAYS GETTING HIT BY THE MANDATORY TIPPING RULE

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07-04-2008

I BELIEVE THAT BY UTILIZING ROACH MOTEL TECHNOLOGY WE CAN SUCCESSFULLY ADDRESS OUR ISSUE OF DWINDLING MEMBERSHIP

West Hills United Methodist Church, Huntington Station New York

Save the Date!!

West Hills United Methodist Church



# Family Pancake Brunch September 7th

immediately after church in Jones Hall



## CHURCH RENOVATIONS



The Overbeck family, “Miss Elaina” from the Nursery School and your editor worked on renovating the downstairs “Miss Marion” Nursery School Classroom. Everything was removed from the room (thanks to a dozen parishioners), and the room was scraped and painted. The floors were stripped and waxed and everything was reassembled in time for opening day. Thanks to all those who moved furniture and to those who helped paint.



## Honoring Helen Rehfeldt

*In July, West Hills said goodbye and thank you to Helen Rehfeldt for her years of service to the church. Helen is moving to Connecticut to be with her family. Below is the beautiful tribute that Judy Knorr gave for Helen during our Sunday service....*

Today we are honoring Helen Rehfeldt. Helen has been a longtime member of West Hills and will be moving to Connecticut to be closer to her family. Helen has a long history of beautiful altars. When Helen was a child her grandmother raised flowers and decorated the altar in her church. Helen was a willing helper and learned much from her grandmother. When she grew up, carrying on the tradition of decorating the church altar seemed to be part of her family history. As a reminder of her most notable accomplishment – our Altar, here is video of some of her arrangements. We don't seem to take many pictures of the altar, we just expect it will be there and beautifully decorated. So, the arrangements mostly live on in our memories!



To assure you that Helen's accomplishments have included activities in addition to her flower arrangements, let me remind you of some of them. Helen served on the Altar Committee and was responsible for setting up for communion. And, she did it when we used the little glass cups so you know what that involved, washing all those little cups each time, and it didn't change when we began using plastic cups. Helen continued to wash them also. She was very active in the Rachel Sewers and the flannel nightgowns she made were a very hot item at the church fairs. Many of you have been warmed through winter nights wrapped in one of Helen's flannel nightgowns. Helen was active in United Methodist Women and participated in both Bible Study and Book Study. She is an avid reader.

When I was making the altar arrangements for today's service Dave kept asking me questions about them. I found myself replying, "that's something I learned from Helen!" We will miss her wonderful flower arrangements; not only on the altar each Sunday, but the ones she also did for church dinners, the UMW Cookie Walk, the Morrison Room and church weddings. Helen was also responsible for decorating the church for Christmas and we spent many happy times talking as we put up the Christmas tree and hung the wreaths.

I know you all have favorite memories of special times with Helen. I hope you will share some of them with Helen and her family when you join us downstairs for a reception after church. We are happy that Jane, Lucille, Emily and Helena could be with us this morning. We are making arrangements for a brass



plaque to be attached to the altar saying: "Special thanks to Helen Rehfeldt for 40+ years of glorious decorations on this altar"

A special thanks to Harriet Matus, with help from Todd for the booklet with Helen's little Christmas messages we all enjoyed and pictures Harriet had taken of the altar. Thanks also to Dave Knorr for putting together the video of altar flower arrangements Helen has done over the years.

We will miss you Helen, but we know you will be happy closer to your family.

# Words of Wisdom By Helen Rehfeldt

Selected passages from Helen's Christmas Cards



## December 2003

“Life is short, art long, opportunity fleeting, experience treacherous, judgement difficult,” said the ancient Greek sage Hippocrates. Well, I have reached the difficult stage. I have decided to stay put, make the most of what I have and hope for the best. The best is exactly what I hope for you, too. I look forward to hearing from you, and I wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

## December 2007

On or about October 30th, magazines, periodicals and advertisements for November appear on the news stands, in the mail and on TV. Headlines read:

Affordable Entertaining

Hassle Free Preparations

Gifts under \$50

Fake it, Don't Bake it

Merry Easy Christmas

It is enough to make you apprehensive about what lies ahead, namely, “The Holidays.” Time was when the excitement, secrecy and anticipation was half the fun.

We looked forward to singing “Silent Night” in church, coming home to family and friends and finally savoring the goodies we had lovingly concocted in the kitchen

Coming from a stoic, Austrian, never-say-die, God-forbid-complain environment , I am determined to make the most of the season.

One thing I am sure of, I will enjoy going to the mailbox and finding a card from you. Merry Christmas, Happy New Year

## December 2005

I always look forward to writing you a holiday note as it gives me a chance to look back over the past year. It has been a pretty good one for me. While I am not as active as I once was, I enjoy thinking about how far we have traveled and how many changes we have seen. I have experienced so many new beginnings in my lifetime —moving pictures, the talkies, Technicolor, the phonograph, the radio, the TV, the computer and the changes in lifestyles and occupations these inventions have brought. But the most heartwarming and exciting things remain the same like love, friendship, and Christmas. I look forward to hearing from you, and as always, wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

## December 2006

As the Christmas season rolls around again and I get ready to write cards, I think of some of the things I have accomplished with time and have come up with the following list:

I have been doing altar arrangements in my church since 1959. I can finally transport the flowers without tipping the vases or getting water all over the car.

I have been planting tomato plants and growing tomatoes either to sell at our farm stand or for home use for many years. Setting out the plants so they remain upright and start growing within days is a skill I have mastered.

A really good Austrian dinner includes spaetzle and gravy. Dipping the spaetzle batter into the boiling water without it sticking to the spoon is a trick I got onto.

My good friend Judy and I share a play date once a week. We have a great time shopping for things we could probably do without. Usually we wind up with a hot fudge sundae, one of my lifetime favorite treats. At last I can manage one fairly well without dripping it all over myself.

I would really love to hear about some of the skills you have acquired on your own over time.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

PS. For tips on growing tomatoes and dipping Spaetzle, see next year's Christmas card.



## **News from the Columbia Clan:**



The Columbia family is proud to announce the ordination of Reverend Jeffrey Campbell at the New Jersey Annual Conference on May 30th. Jeff is the Pastor at the Wharton Community Church at St. John's, in Wharton , New Jersey. Rev Campbell's wife, Caroline Columbia Campbell was ecstatic as well. Though that would be enough excitement for one year for most families, the Campbells's are also expecting their third child! "Baby Campbell the Third" is due August 23 ( PS: It's a girl )

If you wish to send any well-wishes, their address is : Rev, Jeffrey & Caroline Campbell  
44 E Central Avenue

Wharton , New Jersey 07885-7981

**Go West, Young Man:** Meanwhile, James Columbia has successfully relocated to Bakersfield California. Jim accepted a promotion to be the cemetery supervisor at the new " Bakersfield National Cemetery", scheduled to open in 2009. It's a job that "to die for". Sorry, couldn't help it.

James Columbia 8200 N. Laurelglen # 1312 Bakersfield, California 93311

**East Meets West:** Beth & Jeff Harrison have moved back east from Colorado ! Jeff Harrison has accepted the position of "Director of Worship Arts" at the Hillside Lutheran Brethern Church in Succasunna, New Jersey . Jeff received his Masters degree in "Ministry Leadership" from Crown College in Minnesota and a recent graduate of the "New Life School of Worship Leadership" In Colorado Springs, Colorado

Elizabeth & Jeffrey Harrison 64 North Hillside Avenue Kenil, New Jersey 07847-2582



## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Sunday, September 7: Regular Church Hours Resume  
Sunday September 7: Sunday School Begins  
Sunday September 7: Pancake Brunch right after church  
Wednesday, September 10: Trustee Meeting at 7:30

Check the website for update times and dates!!!

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### The Long Island Council of Churches' Annual Convocation Rising Up Out of Poverty

Saturday, September 27, 2008 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

**First Baptist Church** 1018 Northville Turnpike, Riverhead

8:30 Registration and Coffee

Program begins with Bible study: "A prophetic word regarding poverty"

Led by Rev. Lorraine De Armitt

Speakers: Karen Olsen of Family Promise [serving homeless families]

Rev. Charles Coverdale of Long Island Organizing Network

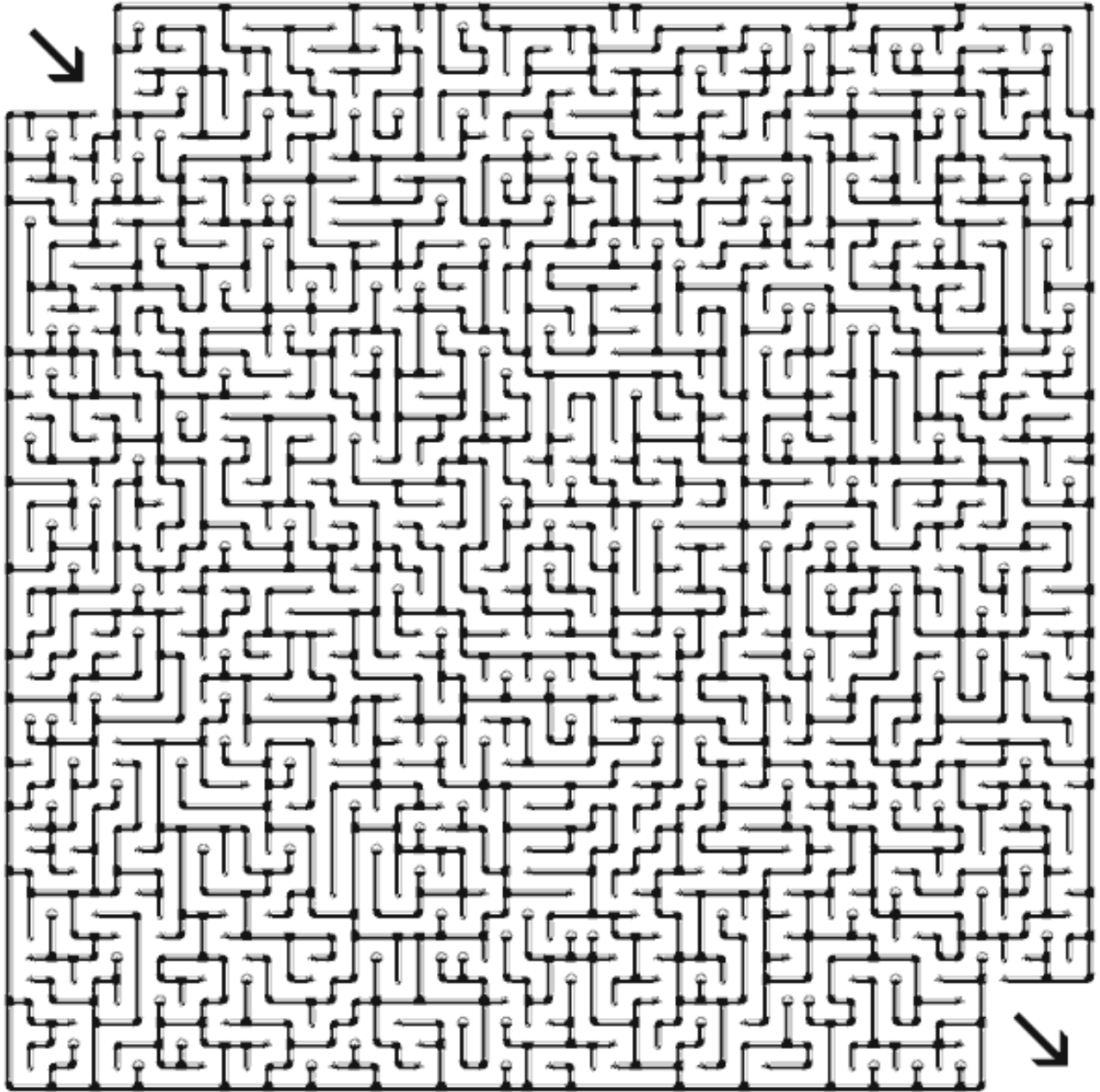
Dr. Richard Koubek, Huntington Housing Coalition

Neelofer Chaudry, Advocacy Director of MICAH

We will concern ourselves with how churches can help people get out of poverty. Beginning with Bible study, listening to the work of advocates in the field, we will finish the morning looking at existing resources in *your* location, and help participants think in new ways about escaping poverty.

\$10 donation, RSVP Contact: the Rev. Thomas W. Goodhue, LICC 516-565-0290 Ext. 206

## Sunflower Maze



REMEMBER WHEN....



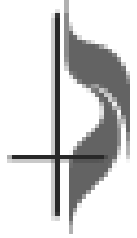
# SUMMERTIME

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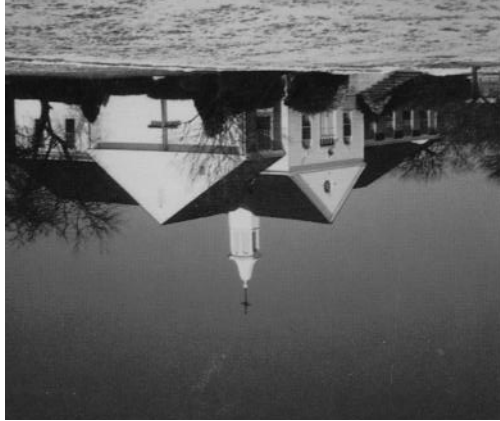
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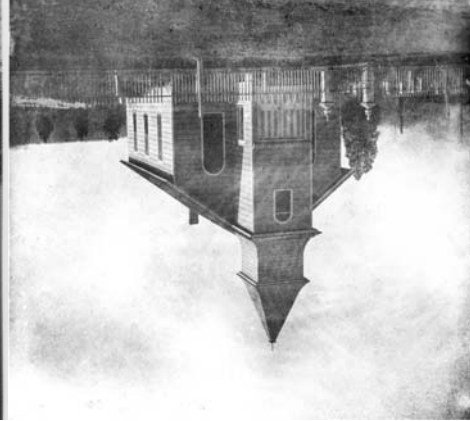
Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors.  
The people of The United Methodist Church®



West Hills Today



West Hills, circa 1800's



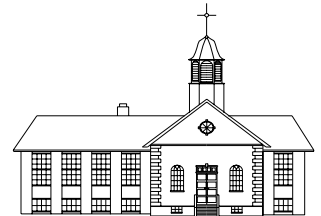
[www.westhillsumc.org](http://www.westhillsumc.org)

Newsletter also available online at:



West Hills United Methodist Church

# Newsletter



Bruce Anspach, Pastor

Todd Winch, Newsletter Editor

Late Summer 2008

West Hills United Methodist Church

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