

The logo features a stylized red flame or leaf shape on the left, partially overlapping a black cross. To the right of the cross, the text "Browns Point" is written in a large, bold, black sans-serif font, and "United Methodist Church" is written below it in a slightly smaller, bold, black sans-serif font.

# Browns Point United Methodist Church

Report of the Pastor – Written Report

2011 Browns Point Church Conference

November 28, 2011

2011 has been an incredible year for Browns Point United Methodist Church, full of growth, energy, inspiration, challenge, leadership, laughter, and more than our fair share of God's grace. After a year of transition in 2010, it was a blessing to settle into a more regular routine in 2011, focusing on congregational growth, leadership development, excellent stewardship of our resources, and discerning God's vision for our congregation and community.

The congregation has built on the palpable energy felt at the end of 2010 and continues to grow. We have welcomed 22 new members this year and anticipate adding even more to our number before year's end. We have established a new membership process consisting of informal dinners at the pastor's home once per quarter with both potential new members and long-time members in attendance, with time for informal fellowship and a formal outline of membership expectations, which are frankly quite high. So far, this has been a successful and fun way to incorporate new members into the congregation, and we are already reaping the benefits of the substantial gifts these new individuals have brought to our community.

In addition to our official new members, the congregation's average worship attendance has continued to grow this year, as well, with a current 52-week average of 123 between the two services, a 25% increase over the prior 52 weeks, with our historically highest-attended Sundays still to come in December. Additionally, the number of Sundays on which our attendance has been fewer than 100 has dropped from 29 in 2010 (56% of Sundays) to 7 in 2011 (only 13% of Sundays).

This increase is almost certainly due to the continued hospitality that visitors proclaim they experience at Browns Point. People who have attended church for years, and those who are new to the idea of corporate worship both attest to feeling welcome when they step in the doors of our beautiful facility, as our members are offering consistent warmth and non-intrusive follow-up with bread delivery to first-time visitors. A substantial number of our local first-time visitors return a second time, and the majority of those have pursued membership this year. I believe that, with our current culture of hospitality and theological diversity, our church is uniquely poised to offer genuine welcome to *all* people of Browns Point, which we will strive to communicate to the community in 2012.

In addition to serving the grown-ups of Browns Point and beyond, we continue to offer robust offerings for children on Sunday mornings, with as many as 30 children in attendance. We recently hosted our second annual "Learn to Use My Bible" class for our 3<sup>rd</sup>-graders, with 4 amazing young people learning what to do with such a wonderful book.

The youth group has successfully moved its weekly programming to Wednesday nights, allowing families to enjoy Sabbath time on Sundays. The youth are employing new curriculum and monthly "fun nights," building on the momentum found this summer when 13 members of the group participated in the first mission trip in many years, serving the population of Eugene, OR. The youth group continues to be led by the volunteer efforts of Kim Nagel, but is now joined by three other dedicated adults for an even more robust program, and even greater leadership and relationships for our young people. We look forward to offering confirmation for these young people in 2012, perhaps in a summer camp format.

In addition to growth in attendance and membership, one focus of 2011 has been on financial stewardship and stability, and we have made marked improvements. Not only are we “in the black” financially despite continued economic recession, job loss, and housing market decline, but we have also made giant steps forward in terms of financial stewardship in 2011. Our recent stewardship campaign, focused on responding to God’s grace with both hope and generosity, saw a 16% increase in the number of households completing commitment cards; and our proposed 2012 budget will show an 11% increase in projected contributions from members and constituents, to be supplemented by rental income. This is on top of a successful capital campaign conducted in the spring to complete the front entry project for our 2010 remodel/addition and fundraising conducted by the youth group for their mission trip in August. Perhaps the most significant change for 2012, however, is that our budget does not include a line item for fundraising – instead, we will fund our ministry through the annual budget without repeatedly going to the congregation asking for more money. There will still be special offerings for mission projects, but, beginning in 2012, we will be able to build a culture of confidence among members and constituents so that everyone knows, when they complete their commitment cards each year, that they can offer the full portion of what God is calling them to without worrying that the church will come back again and again asking for funds for special projects or mortgage payments. This is a huge step toward long-term financial stability.

The metrics are all positive for Browns Point, but perhaps the most exciting things to report from 2011 are not readily measurable, as they are evidence of the Spirit’s movement in our midst and God’s work in and among us. One major change made by the leadership this year was the structure of Church Council meetings, which now begin with Bible study and lessons on church leadership. We have worked to move toward outcome-based planning and focused on striving for fruitfulness in righteousness, justice, and expansion of God’s reign. In doing so, we were able to discern three priorities for the congregation for 2012 – these three were arrived at by consensus, clearly through the Spirit’s leading. They are: a) ministries with families with children – expanding our already strong children’s and family ministries, providing resources and support for parents, and reaching out to families in our neighborhood, perhaps the greatest potential demographic group for church growth; b.) engagement with the community – moving beyond mission projects with sporadic or siloed support and toward real understanding of who is in our mission field, what needs exist, and how we might serve the community in a more public way; and c.) spiritual growth for all ages – moving toward greater commitment to corporate and individual spiritual growth through small groups, educational opportunities, retreats, etc. These three areas of priority are broad in scope, but still narrow enough to help shape the life of the church and focus some of our energy so that we might move forward together in positive ways.

Another place the Spirit’s movement has been made evident in our leadership is with our most recent nominations process. The church has been blessed by committed leaders for the last several years, most of whom are now ready to move on to new endeavors or take time to simply focus on their spiritual journeys as church members and participants. As such, the nominations team was faced with finding new leaders for many key positions in the life of the church this year, and when we first sat down to do this work, it was a little overwhelming. Many of the names that came immediately to mind for key positions were met with responses of, “Well s/he would be great, but I doubt s/he would accept...” We decided to take a leap and invite these people into service, anyway, and almost to a person, the response received was, “I’ve been feeling led in this direction;

I'd be happy to serve." It was clear that the Spirit had gone ahead of our work and prepared our new leaders to accept these roles; the result is an excellent slate of leaders for 2012 and beyond.

Another exciting venture begun in 2011 is our new small groups system called FaithGroups. These are groups that meet weekly in people's homes for 10-12 weeks at a time, focusing on different topics but all involving Bible study, prayer, and personal sharing. The first session of FaithGroups began in September with outstanding leaders and varied topics; the response from the congregation was outstanding: 30 people signed up for these first groups – almost 25% of our average worshiping attendance. The first session will wind down in a few weeks, and we are already lining up hosts and leaders for the second session, to begin just after the new year. This new system has the potential not only to help us reach our goals for spiritual growth in 2012, but also to integrate new members, invite non-church-goers to participate in community, expand our engagement with mission and service, improve our fellowship, and keep the community close even as the congregation grows larger.

All this has taken place even while we have continued to offer beautiful worship twice every Sunday morning, creating space for people to encounter God in comfortable and challenging ways. This has included lectionary-based Sundays, celebrations of the liturgical year, question and response sessions, and sermon series on the Sermon on the Mount, living without fear, Christian simplicity, the power of community, and extravagant hope and generosity. The importance and value of music in our congregation continues to be evident in the strong and varied musical offerings on Sundays and beyond, led by our incredibly talented accompanist, Andrew Larsen, and our tireless choir director, Darrell Pelley. We look forward to even more excitement in worship in the next month, as we experience our children's Christmas pageant, our choir cantata, our first Longest Night service, two Christmas Eve services, and of course, worship on Christmas morning.

There is no reason to doubt that God's movement will continue in our church and in our community next year, as we pursue the vision God has given us and work to be more faithful followers of Christ. There will be challenges, of course, including welcoming and transitioning to an interim pastor for ten weeks beginning in January, but the congregation is well-poised to continue growing and thriving in the next year and beyond, experiencing and sharing God's grace and love along the way.

I continue to count myself privileged and blessed to be the pastor at Browns Point UMC, and I am excited to see what happens in this partnership in the future. The potential for this congregation to have a significant impact on the community is stunning, and I look forward to being part of that impact being realized, even as the congregation takes more and more ownership of its own vitality and strength. As a pastor, I hope to continue growing in the next year through continuing education, focused reading around our discerned priorities, and work with my spiritual director, coach, and covenant group, that I might keep myself open to the Spirit's work; committed to best practices in discipleship, leadership, and worship; and healthy in mind, body, spirit, and relationship, that I might continue to serve this congregation with the energy, enthusiasm, hope, and inspiration they deserve for years to come.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Elizabeth Ingram Schindler