

From the Pastor

Jan/Feb 2018

In the year 1818, James Monroe served as the 5th U.S. President. The first steam vessel to traverse the Great Lakes was launched. The 49th parallel formed the border between the United States and Canada. The Mentor United Methodist Church was formed. A 9 year-old Felix Mendelssohn performed his first public concert. "Silent Night, Holy Night" was written. Handel's Messiah premiered for the first time in America.

Did you catch that Mentor UMC was formed in the midst of national and world history? We don't even know the exact day, but sometime in the year 1818 the church was chartered. The exact date was not important; the event was hardly noticed as eight charter members just agreed to be a church.

I was reading a piece of Mentor history and another event happened in 1818. It read like this, "Mentor Township loses its southern boundary to newly established Kirtland Township." I thought there was a bit of irony in that statement. Here's what I see, in the year Mentor Township lost its boundary, another boundary expanded. Let me explain...

For the 200 years since 1818, the Mentor UMC has pushed its boundaries. This congregation is marked by faith-based risk taking and disciple-challenging surrender to the work of God. Just think, what started as four couples/eight individuals grew to over 1,700 members. Eight individuals and one pastor grew to a 600 weekly worshipers. This congregation has brought people in, brought them up in faith, and sent them out into the world. This congregation has sent several into a vocation of ministry, and many more to short-term volunteers in missions. Mentor UMC has expanded its borders from Mentor Township to the entire region. And the borders have pushed out from the region to touch and serve lives from Maine to New Mexico to Florida; and beyond to Puerto Rico, West Africa, and elsewhere. The borders of the church have moved out and impacted the world for Jesus Christ.

A few years ago there was quite a stir over the book entitled, The Prayer of Jabez. It was based on the following verse: "Jabez cried out to the God of Israel. He said, 'I wish you would bless me. I wish you would give me more territory. Let your power protect me. Keep me from harm. Then I won't have any pain.' God gave him what he asked for." (1 Chronicles 4:10) Many felt that the message of the book could lead to some false assumptions and perhaps dangerous expectations based on self-centered ambition. I look at this congregation as having lived into the heart of that verse with a desire to be used of God in selfless and serving ways. It has resulted in expanding borders.

Throughout 2018, we will take moments to celebrate and share our history. But when I go back 200 years to a house church of four couples, I have to wonder, what was their vision for the next 200 years? Did they see their borders expand? That we don't know, but we do know that they stepped out in faith. That's our calling as we stand on their shoulders. As we walk in faithfulness, God can use us in ways we would never imagine.

- Pastor Kurt