

"Going to the Movies, Going to Church" – August 28, 2009

Last Sunday I preached at the Old Bethel UMC main campus and also at their outpost worship called "Movie Theater Church" - which is literally held in a movie theater. Both services were full, lively, but quite different in style. That is why Old Bethel is considering "launching" the MTC as its own church. This process is called by church experts the "birthing model" and it is one of the most effective ways to start new churches.

Being in the movie theater brought back a lot of memories for me. My home church, Anderson 1st, lost its building to a terrible fire when I was a kid in 6th grade, and so we started having worship services at the local movie theater. We also had Sunday School at the YMCA, and we were a church without a church building. For me as a youth growing up in a large congregation without a building, it was a wonderful lesson that the church is not a building, the church is the people. I know we say that and we all believe it, but our church lived it.

It is ironic that many of my Sundays are spent with churches for ground-breaking services, dedications of new buildings, or anniversaries of existing buildings. I don't regret that much of my ministry as a bishop has to do with buildings, and I look forward to our ground-breaking at Epworth Forest on September 20th as we prepare to build the first of the new buildings to expand that important ministry. I don't regret or begrudge buildings – we need good facilities – but I always remember that we can be a church without a building. This past Sunday, sharing in worship in a movie theater, reminded me of that important truth.

The "Rethink Church" campaign raises the question, "What is 'church' is not a noun but a verb?" I know that we can be church, do church, and have church anywhere – in a traditional sanctuary, in an open field, in a multi-purpose room, in a movie theater, or in our homes.

See you in church – wherever you live as the church and serve as the church.

from Bishop Michael J. Coyner
Indiana Conference of The United Methodist Church