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EMERTIUS
Rev. Curtis R. Clare

October 12, 1998

Rev. Robert Armstrong
United Evangelical Church
3200 Dillon Street
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Dear Bob,

Your anniversary celebration was truly a great day — from worship to the gala for eating, dancing and a bit of learning combined.

Here is a copy of the sermon which you requested.

Thanks for inviting me to be a part of your history.

Blessings,

Jo Siders, Interim
Associate Conference Minister

JS/glk

Enclosure

“CELEBRATING 125 YEARS” -- SS: Acts 2:41-47

125 Years!! What a great day it is to be able to celebrate the 125 year spiritual journey of United Evangelical United Church of Christ. Even though none of us can remember the beginnings of this church, we do want to remember and celebrate today some of what has made this church memorable. You know that it was formed in 1873 by German immigrants of the Evangelical faith who named the church Zion. I believe it is good that the name was later changed because, as you know, there are presently two Zion United Church of Christ churches still in existence here in Baltimore.

You come from a German heritage -- German was spoken in the worship services in the early days -- and the new name of the church reflected that heritage as you were named German United Evangelical Church. It was in the 1890s that English began to be spoken. Your church was known for its outstanding Christian Education program being one of the first Protestant Sunday Schools in the United States. It was important for children to be raised in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord” -- and to this day, that is important to this church.

There were also difficulties to be overcome -- like the fire that destroyed your building in 1885. But you continued to move forward with strong commitment to mission and service to youth. You affiliated with the Evangelical Synod of North America, your Sunday School was overflowing and you were known to have confirmation classes numbering 100. The 1930s, 40s and 50s were the great days of the church and the same was true for you. Vacation Bible school flourished and Scout troops were started and choirs were started.

In 1957 you voted to become a part of the United Church of Christ at the time of its historic merger between the Evangelical and Reformed churches and the Congregational Christian churches. And we celebrate that event today also -- for your name became United Evangelical UCC. Also in 1957 you dedicated this building and today your rebuilt lighted tower shines over this neighborhood in which you minister. And the neighborhood knows you as the church with the bells coming from that lighted tower.

Throughout this long 125 year history you have been a church which cares -- for you continue to care about children, about Christian education, about worship and the spiritual life, and about mission and service and you care about one another. With the strong spiritual leadership of your pastor, Bob Armstrong, spouse Priscilla, and Rev. Jollenbeck you work ecumenically with other churches in your neighborhood and you meet emergency food, clothing and shelter needs through your involvement with the South East Association Resolved to Combat Hunger and with the Center for Poverty Solutions of which your pastor is president.

You are a church with a great history and we celebrate that today. We of the Central Atlantic Conference and the Chesapeake Association feel great pride with you today.

The way your church began, faithfully following the call of God and Jesus, is similar to the story we hear in the Scripture from the book of Acts and how the early church was begun under the leadership of Peter following the death of Jesus. Hear that Scripture again and look for the

similarities and perhaps for what, in these present days of the church, needs to be considered:

So those who welcomed his (Peter's) message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

When we look at the state of the churches in Baltimore today, we see that we are no longer adding large numbers of members to our rolls. We no longer have Sunday Schools of 500 or confirmation classes of 100. As a German church in the late 1890s or early 1900s you could just open your door on a Sunday morning and people flocked through that open door. However, as you know, there no longer are large numbers of Germans immigrating to the Baltimore area and simply opening a door on Sunday morning doesn't bring in crowds. This is a fact which all of our Baltimore churches are dealing with these days.

The United Church of Christ Board for Homeland Ministeries has given a financial grant to the Baltimore Churches to attempt to revitalize churches and develop new churches for the future. We, in the UCC, want our churches to move into a bright and hopeful future. One of our UCC pastors, Rev. Ray Bird, who recently retired from the City Planning Department, has compiled information about Baltimore which we in the churches need to know. We need not only to know but to understand the effects on our churches when we hear that the population of the city is decreasing with many persons preferring a more "country-like" residential area, that jobs and shopping have moved out of the City with the virtual disappearance of heavy industry and traditional manufacturing, that the population is aging. These are but a few of the important issues that touch us as Baltimore city neighborhood residents trying to maintain a viable church.

With the leadership of your pastor you have worked very hard here in this neighborhood to make your church a spiritual center. And your pastor has invited Rev. Britt Minshall to speak to you this afternoon about ways in which you may bring new energy and growth to this congregation so that you will be able to celebrate many more anniversaries here at United Evangelical United Church of Christ.

Rev. Minshall not only will bring you some good suggestions, I expect he will do so in a very entertaining manner. And it is very important for this church to catch the vision that God has for the future of this church and to actively participate in moving toward that vision.

Now, I understand that you have a wonderful meal planned after this worship service. And that some of you have voiced a preference for dancing. Well, I think that can work wonderfully well

as a metaphor for how you will consider next steps for church revitalization -- you can dance into your future. That has a nice ring to it, don't you think? For as this church does take seriously the importance of a continuing vibrant ministry for the generations which will follow, your dreams and visions can be carried out as a dance, whether it be doing the mission polka or the new improved Sunday School samba.

For God's call to God's people continues through the ages just as in the early church--for you as the people of God to gather in community breaking bread together, praying, teaching and baptizing and fellowshiping, distributing what is needed to the poor -- all the while praising God. And if we but heed that call of our God, the marvelous ministry of this church will continue for years to come. Thanks be to God! Amen.

Message given by the Rev. Jo Siders,
Interim Associate Conference Minister,
for the celebration of the 125th anniversary
of United Evangelical United Church of Christ
September 27, 1998