

Charlotte District E-Pistle

January 15, 2010

Spring Seminar, March 7-8

The Academy of Christian Discipleship's annual Spring Seminar will be held on a Monday-Tuesday, March 7-8, in **Jubilee Hall** at **Myers Park UMC**. Our special guest will be **Rev. Jerry D. Chapman** of Ocean Springs, Mississippi. The focus will be upon the concept of **cooperative parish ministries**. The schedule will be similar to the past two years, but the format will have considerable variations, as requested by critiques from some previous seminars. The sessions will not be dominated by lectures. There will be ample time for creative feedback and team discussion with specific application to the needs of our congregations.

Our leader is the author of the engaging book, *Together We Can: Twelve Ways to Start and Strengthen Cooperative Parish Ministries*. Rev. Chapman has been influential in giving leadership to a cooperative parish in Mississippi and has become our denomination's authority for guiding districts in the formation of this connectional approach to effective ministry. Jerry has written that "Cooperative ministry is not any one particular form, structure, or activity. Cooperative ministry is two or more congregations working together to share their ministry."

Six and half years ago I articulated the vision of a district that moved from competition to cooperation, a practice of our connectional identity as Wesleyans. When we participated in one fall's series of cluster charge conferences, I encouraged all our congregations to seek for ways to multiply our resources through shared ministries. Two or three churches that engage in a unified Vacation Bible School for children during a summer are participating in "a cooperative ministry." But the concept may be broadened in a variety of structural ways. A cooperative parish may be from two to nine churches that have a coordinated staff consisting of several elders, a few full-time local pastors, a part-time local pastor, a deacon Christian educator, a minister of music, one full-time secretary, one business administrator, and other program components that are shared in common. Each church continues to have an appointed pastor; but each clergy regards the whole parish as the unified mission. Through the cooperative parish concept, we become more cost-effective, mission driven, and mutually accountable for achieving measurable, realistic goals in a timely manner.

The **Cooperative Parish Model** is not for everyone or every church. We are interested only in exploring the concept, learning from an authority that has effectively spent a major portion of his ministry in the initiation and implementation of this style of ministry.

We are inviting teams of 3-5 leaders from any of our churches that would like to learn more about this concept. The Sunday sessions will be for clergy and a lay leadership team from their congregation. The Monday sessions will be a continuation of the conversation with the clergy, those laity who are available for week-day attendance, and program staff from churches that would like to explore this concept.

Cooperative ministry is not a mandate. Attendance is not required of our clergy. Not all our churches will want to send a team. But churches that are struggling with sustaining a viable mission that have limited resources will surely want to explore the concept. Hopefully several strong churches with abundant resources will want to discover how they can be a connectional lifeline and inspiration to their neighboring United Methodists.

The dates (March 7-8) have been on the Charlotte District calendar for over a year. If this topic addresses a concern of yours, discuss the matter with neighboring clergy colleagues and key laity. Then recruit a leadership team that will explore these matters with Jerry Chapman, our Spring Seminar facilitator.

Grace and peace,

George