

The Charlotte District E-Pistle

September 11, 2004

Yesterday I participated with several of you in the Pfeiffer University experience—*Great Commissions: A Pfeiffer Missions Celebration*. The occasion was the opening student assembly welcoming the largest class of new students in thirty-five years at the Misenheimer campus. A new undergraduate degree in Christian Missions was launched—the only such major offered by a United Methodist college or university. The event enabled students and representatives from the participating churches to meet Dr. Philip Wingeier-Rayo, Missionary-In-Residence and the director of this new academic program. Dr. Wingeier-Rayo envisions a time in which this university will supply many of our churches with Hispanic missionaries and young adults who will embody the Great Commission, both near and far away. He is available for our churches that want to equip themselves for ministry within the ethnic diversity of this changing region.

Our new bishop, Lawrence McCleskey, put aside the task of setting up his office in order to be an integral part of the day-long proceedings. He is the key component in our cabinet-initiated process of discovering God's new vision for our Western North Carolina Conference. Thus, it was fitting that Episcopal Bishop Claude E. Payne was the keynote speaker for the convocation. He addressed the central issue emerging from his classic book, *Reclaiming the Great Commission*—namely, transforming a maintenance mode church into a mission outpost for the Kingdom of God. Bishop McCleskey was joined by a panel of very distinguished and experienced persons who responded to Bishop Payne's challenge. Norma Kehrberg, a very articulate former missionary to Nepal who is currently the Chair of UM Missionary Association, spoke with fervor about the importance of our denomination maintaining its focus upon evangelism. Rev. Rena Yocum from the General Board of Global Missions spoke with candor: "Missions is not a program of the church. It is what the church is all about."

After a lunch on the lawn with students and guests of the university, the entire Cabinet spent the afternoon with bishops McCleskey and Payne in conversation at the home of Pfeiffer President Chuck Ambrose.

When I encouraged you to read last September *Reclaiming the Great Commission*, I had a sense that the simple message of this book would have far-reaching implications for our district, and indeed our WNC Annual Conference. As we begin to respond to the greater vision that God has for our corporate lives in this region, Jesus' commission looms large before us. Our new Episcopal leader stated the matter well when he said to his Cabinet, "It's really not all that complicated. We as United Methodists have lost our focus and it's not too late for us to reclaim it."

Our process in the Charlotte District will be to respond faithfully to this compelling vision in such a way that we do not conduct business as usual. Let us begin

by envisioning the congregation to which we have been appointed as **a mission outpost of the Kingdom of God.**

Just know that, as your district superintendent, I am committed to our vigorous and productive pursuit of this vision.

In subsequent *E-Pistles* I'll continue to share how we as pastors of the Charlotte District can unite in covenant allegiance to a focused ministry of boldness in which the lives of many will be transformed and the mission of Christ will faithfully be administered.

9/11 is not a fearful symbol that compels us to retrench and turn our backs upon a hurting world. The anniversary of this great tragedy has a very different meaning for every Christian in this country. The memory of the many from around the world who lost their lives at the World Trade Center because of the forces of hatred compels us to a positive posture of aggressive evangelism, in obedience to the God who so loves this cracked creation.

Grace and peace,

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