

The Charlotte District E-Postle

December 17, 2005



Often I have asked myself as a pastor, “In this sacred moment, am I truly worshiping, or am I merely leading others in the act of worship?” When I have sustained an open encounter with holy Otherness through the music, liturgy, prayers, and proclamation; I have been transformed and have become a more likely instrument for guiding others in the restorative encounter we call *worship*.

The context for worship during Advent and Christmas is indeed special. Our sanctuaries are filled with the occasional attendee as well as the disciplined faithful. Those seekers who approach the church in this season with their noses pressed to the window, looking in, are likely to experience the Church at its best. The music is exquisite, hospitality is wrapped in holiday cheer, a critical mass inhabits the pews of even our smallest churches, and our sermons are likely to have a clarion focus.

In this season people arrive with maximum expectation. Most of them are weary of the war in Iraq, frustrated by the absence of compassion in the market place, and anxious about the void in their lives. Worshipers come seeking that which is transcendent—something that connects them with a cosmic sense of purpose and a reliable source of hope. Thus, we have good news for all who enter the sanctuaries of the Charlotte District.

You have labored hard in preparation for this season, especially this cycle of seven years in which December 25th lands on a Sunday. While many of us are fighting spiritual indigestion from an over-load of carols and children’s pageants, many of those who come to the altar in these days will be strangers to our traditions and unaccustomed to our joyous liturgies. On each of these occasions, may all our clergy experience renewal through the observation of wonder in the eyes of guests, seekers, and skeptics.

Pat and I are immensely grateful for the generous gift we received at the Clergy Christmas Fellowship Meal at Myers Park UMC on December 6th. We decided before the event that we would contribute the full amount of the love offering to UMCOR for Hurricane Katrina Relief. You have blessed us immeasurably by allowing us to bless others in this way.

Thanks also in this season for your compassionate response to the news of my gall bladder surgery. Fortunately I have given little cause for anyone's anxiety, or even sympathy. My recovery has been so quick that even my surgeon this week pronounced the results to be extremely rare. The fingers that are typing this message to you now emanate from the hands of a grateful district superintendent.

January 5th, 2006, is the twelfth day of Christmastide and a sunrise away from Epiphany. We shall gather on that Thursday at Bethlehem Center for our Charlotte District Clergy Fellowship at worship. We shall celebrate Eucharist in a room where children are instructed and neighborhood families meet to receive the special care and compassion of the BC staff and volunteers. It is appropriate to come to Bethlehem as pilgrims at the season of our Lord's nativity. Our special guest on that day will be Rev. Elizabeth Crissman, President of Plowpoint, Inc. I have asked Beth to preach at the occasion of our first Eucharist in the New Year. She will be a consultant with us as we develop a program of education and mutual supportiveness in response to the seventh of our Annual Conference priorities—namely, *shepherding the shepherds*. Beth, through Plowpoint, has led the High Point District in an exciting adventure called ShepherdCare—a program designed to equip, empower and nurture pastors to be healthy shepherds among the flock. I am delighted about the opportunities we have as district clergy to participate in activities that will foster better physical and spiritual health for all our clergy.

I am very pleased that so many of our Charlotte District pastors maintain focus upon that which is central to our calling—making disciples of Jesus Christ. I firmly believe that the central purpose of the superintendency is to enable my colleagues better to facilitate the ministry of nurturing discipleship in each local church. To this end, we have initiated a legacy of spring seminars in which principal leaders in the field of discipleship development will visit our district. Thus, by popular demand, Doug Anderson will be our guest on March 2-4, a Thursday through Saturday series. We shall again structure these days in accordance with churches-by-size. But Thursday morning will be devoted exclusively for challenging all our pastors. The series of seminars will be held at Myers Park's Jubilee Hall. Begin now by recruiting a team of 5-10 leaders who will be exposed to Doug's informative and engaging presentations.

All of our churches need encouragement and motivation in regards to the issue of stewardship. One of our seven priorities as an Annual Conference is *to explore and practice spiritual dimensions of stewardship*. The March seminars of 2007 will be led by Dr. Kennon L. Callahan—a recognized authority in this field of practical theology. I encourage you to share with me and the Clergy Fellowship officers your suggestions for discipleship themes that interest you, so that we can bring into Charlotte recognized authorities who will equip us for the task of nurturing servant leaders and authentic disciples of Christ.

I am grateful to you for making the Cluster Charge Conferences such creative experiences in each of the ten geographical areas. Moreover, I applaud the initiatives that so many of you have instigated by reaching out to your fellow colleagues in connectional ways. The partnerships between struggling smaller churches and congregations that possess more abundant resources are enabling all our faith communities to be healthier and more resilient.

May the mystical presence of the incarnate Christ visit each of you in this season of his nativity so that you and your family will experience the fullness of his joy.

Grace and peace,

George & Pat