

January 26, 2007

Electronic
Newsletter



Charlotte District

E-Connections

Charlotte District School of Christian Discipleship

I envision great things for the people called United Methodists, especially those who are members of any of our congregations within the Charlotte District. I visualize the time in which persons whose membership is within a small church are just as challenged to grow spiritually as those who belong to a large, mega-church. I am committed to pursuing the dream of such a connected, interrelated Methodism in this district that the spiritual and physical quality of neighborhoods in this region will be transformed by the compassionate outreach of vibrant, mission-driven United Methodist congregations joining hand and heart in doing the work of Jesus.



Charlotte District School of Christian Discipleship Board Members (seated) Fredrick Bowman, Bev Copley, Jenny Reilly; (standing) Talbot Davis, James Michael, and Chris Westmoreland.

In our first spring seminar, Doug Anderson convinced us that the quality of discipleship by which persons enters the membership of a church is likely the level that will be sustained throughout that person's life. If one begins with low expectation, that person will likely remain a nominal Christian, attending the *throwing occasions* in the life of the congregation—water at infant baptism, rice at weddings, and dirt at death.

When I accepted the appointment to be your district superintendent, I wanted to apply the insights I had gained as a veteran pastor for thirty-five years. Throughout those years I committed myself to the task of empowering laity to use their spiritual gifts to do the work of the Kingdom. Early in this job I began, therefore, to sense that my central calling as a DS is to enhance the quality of discipleship within the culture of each congregation. Within a few months I began to realize that we are not a denomination of scarcity; to the contrary, we are a people graced with immeasurable abundance. We simply need to insist upon a much higher level of expectation related to the claims of Christ upon our lives as God's resurrection people. We need to give the members of our smallest churches the same opportunity to learn, engage in exciting mission adventures, and participate in stimulating small group interaction as those in larger congregations. Likewise, we need to provide the same quality of intimacy experienced in our small churches in the corporate life of our mega-churches.

If we think and act congregationally, we shall never be faithful to this vision nor shall we truly empower the laity. The book of I Peter was written after the early church had become organized and had identified its leadership in a post-apostolic era. The writer wisely taught that salvation is not a singular emotional experience in the life of the believer. Salvation is a pilgrimage and a process whereby the believer grows in discipleship. The writer admonished converts with this challenge: "Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good." (I Peter 2:2-3 NRSV).

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All across the map of Methodism (small or large, rural or urban), we can say this about the quality of our faith and discipleship: if we do not use it, we lose it. If we are not growing spiritually, we shall become chameleons in a secular, seductive culture of materialism. If we do not practice the disciplines of our faith in the context of a community of accountability, we shall experience the evaporation of joy and a mission-driven existence.

The Charlotte District School of Christian Discipleship is a concept now becoming a reality. Through the development of this school, we envision a time in which every United Methodist in this area will have ample opportunity to grow spiritually as a follower of Christ. This year we are putting together a think-tank of participants on a Board that will bring concrete substance to this concept. This group has begun to pray, discuss, and strategize. They meet as a sort of *brain trust* for developing modules for teaching in a variety of geographical areas of the district. They will seek sponsoring local churches for cluster events. They will help communicate events, recruit a voluntary faculty, and coordinate the district schedule to incorporate the guest lecturers shared by our larger churches. Board members will serve as ambassadors for connectional ministry. Those attending a recent Board meeting (pictured on page 1) and others who will be appointed to the board, will want to receive your insights into how this *school* can assist your local church. Our central mission is to nurture faithful discipleship.



The Board has already projected two modules: an event for training Disciple Bible facilitators in August, 2007, and (in cooperation with the DLC task force) a comprehensive training for the major church officers in January of 2008. Of course, the annual spring seminar will continue to be on the agenda of the school. But our intention is to develop a more comprehensive menu of events. We intend to sponsor cost-efficient seminars or classes in five cluster regions of the district. These opportunities will provide growth experiences for churches of all sizes throughout the year. The school will encourage the training of more Disciple Bible facilitators and will encourage enrollment in classes as a connectional ministry so that a layperson in any of the 78 churches will be able to experience the full range of the Disciple Bible curriculum even if the classes are not held at the church of one's membership.



The Board envisions sponsorship of two district-wide BIG EVENTS during the 2007-08 Conference year with high profile speakers. Bev Copley, our Director of the school, has suggested that our pattern of discipleship training will likely resemble a necklace strung together. The necklace will include a few big events (modules such as the two above that are always offered), the DLC, the Spring Seminar, and several localized modules in clustered regions of the district. Some of the big events may be financed by large churches and are merely shared with all the churches of the district. We merely "piggyback" in response to invitations from a generous host congregation. Popular teachers that are frequent visitors at local churches in the district, like Mickey Eford of Duke or Ed Trimmer of Pfeiffer, may be shared with a cluster of churches or the entire district. The School of Christian Discipleship will promote such opportunities. We especially look forward to partnering with the African American Church Initiative and the visionary leadership of Lillie Jones.

Our agenda in the coming months will include the task of producing a syllabus or catalog of potential modules and events. We shall draft a survey to be distributed at the DLC on February 11th. We invite your input, participation. Perhaps your local church will want to sponsor and host a cluster event.

The Wesleyan movement began as a high-expectation phenomenon. Our denomination grew rapidly because, in those years, people wanted to give their lives to that which is transcendent, eternal, exciting, adventurous, and costly. Something tells me that the explosive population that is moving into the Charlotte District is analogous to the masses that heard the message of costly discipleship articulated by John Wesley who spoke this clarion challenge:

*"Do all the good you can, By all the means you can, In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can, At all the times you can, To all the people you can,
As long as you ever can."*

Grace and peace,

George

Charlotte District Superintendent

Charlotte District Leadership Conference (DLC)



The Charlotte District Leadership Conference: Attendance on the afternoon of February 11th will be enhanced by the advocacy and attendance of our pastors. This time there will truly be something appealing for nearly everyone. That makes promotion an easy task. **Bruce Stanley**, our keynote speaker, has made an indelible, positive impact upon the lives of young pastors who trained through the field education program of Duke Divinity. He is known as a passionate motivator who knows how to engage and inform his audience.

Clergy may want to attend **Ben Witherington's** class, *What Have They Done With Jesus?*—the title of his latest book. He will preach at Providence UMC during the morning and comes to us by courtesy of our host congregation. This is a great opportunity for us to be challenged by a renowned and widely published biblical scholar. Clergy will especially find a class on clergy self-care led by **Mark Larson** to be also beneficial. Those in our churches who wish to learn about the role of Deacon will benefit tremendously by the session led by **Kathleen Kilbourne**.

Those who will be serving in specific ministries of the church will be inspired and instructed by our opportunities in children's ministry (**Jacob Golden, Jr.**), leaders in youth ministry (**Teresa Dunn**), youth (**Charlie Brown**), and youth ministry in small membership churches (**Beverly Parker-Reece**). We shall have learning experiences for those who serve on specific committees and boards: Trustees (**Bill Jeffries**), Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations (**George Thompson**), Evangelism (**Bruce Stanley**), Finance (**Bill Wyman**), Missions (**Mike Collins**) or Stewardship (**Jim Wollin**).

We shall teach churches how to initiate or strengthen certain ministries: Latino/Hispanic (**Alex & Ann Smythers**), Boy Scouts (**Gary Moore and Stanton Boyette**), Churches Uniting in Christ—participating in ecumenical dialogue (**Jim Ferree**—note the change in leadership), Deaf Ministries (**Marty Folsom**), Holy Friendships—ministries that celebrate our racial and cultural diversity as United Methodists (**Bart Milleson**).

This DLC has something of interest for every leader in our Charlotte District churches! Please print and circulate the attached brochure that describes each of these learning activities.

Charlotte District Spring Seminar, March 1-3

For over a year now we have planned for the coming of **Dr. Kennon Callahan** as the facilitator of our annual seminar. All clergy have been mailed packets with schedule and registration forms. You will note that we shall begin on Thursday morning with a clergy session led by **Glenn Kinken** of the Methodist Foundation. He will provide an introduction to our stewardship theme and inform us about some initiatives of the Foundation. Dr. Callahan will join us and teams from each of our churches after lunch in Jubilee Hall of Myers Park UMC. His presentations will take place on the afternoons and evenings of Thursday and Friday. Dr. Callahan will not be present for the Saturday session especially designed for small-membership churches. **David Snipes** from the Methodist Foundation will meet with teams from these churches. We feel that the seminar each year should address the unique needs of the small, medium, and large-sized churches.

Some of our small churches are predominantly African American in membership. Long after our scheduling the spring seminar, the African American Initiative planned for a gathering for leaders in all African American congregations of the Conference. That event will take place on March 3rd at the nearby Park Road campus of Pfeiffer University. Some of these churches will want to send a team to both events; but others will only have enough for one delegation. We encourage pastors and teams from these small membership African-American churches to select the meeting at Pfeiffer, sponsored by the African American Initiative. Conference-wide events will often conflict with local schedules, even with advanced planning.

**Mission to Ministers: Finch-Hunt Lectures on Preaching,
Tuesday, February 6, 2007**

The mission this year will be packed into a one-day gathering at Providence UMC here in Charlotte. While this will provide a marvelous geographical convenience to those of us in the district, the real benefit will be the quality of the program. Dr. Alyce M. McKenzie is the Professor of Homiletics at Perkins School of Theology. She has published widely on topics related to wisdom literature and the art of preaching. The program will also feature Dr. Nancy Grisham, an associate pastor of evangelism and discipleship for a congregation of over 6,500 members. Bishop Lawrence McCleskey has told the Cabinet that he will use the occasion to share with the clergy his appointments to the Cabinet, effective at the June, 2007, Annual Conference. He will announce this information to the current Cabinet just prior to the clergy gathering on February 6th. This alone will be worth making the trip across town.

Grace UMC

On Christmas Eve Rev. Sheila Bishop preached a sermon of hope and joy to a grateful congregation at Grace UMC. Here Sheila stands in the narthex with her husband, Bob, greeting worshippers.



Congregational Development

Nancy Rankin addresses approximately 75 persons on the afternoon of December 7th who attended the Charlotte District workshop at Harrison UMC, preparing assessment leaders who will work with teams from several of our district's churches.



Baptized

During the worship service at Plaza on January 14th, George Wilson, the young man pictured here with his family, was baptized. The congregation celebrated this holy occasion with a fellowship meal in the newly refurbished fellowship hall at the church.

Denver UMC

The sanctuary was packed for worship at Denver UMC on January 7th. Here the worshippers are greeted by associate pastor Steve Knopp (in bow-tie) and Jeff Johnsen (black robe). The church has just celebrated another record year in attendance, new members, and financial performance. A major building project is underway.



WNCC Martin Luther King Celebration

Members of St. Mark's UMC were among those who attended the Martin Luther King birthday celebration. They came together to High Point on the church's bus.



Connectional Notes

February bulletin insert highlights stewardship of giving

Stewardship is not about giving to the church to meet the budget. Stewardship is the way of life of the Christian disciple deepening one's relationship with God and other people. The February bulletin insert, from WNCC Communication Office, focuses on stewardship and its impact upon the life of one United Methodist. It is now available for and may be reproduced for your church bulletin to help tell the story of how you are involved in ministry beyond the local church.

<http://www.wnccumc.org/stw/allyearlong.htm>

Lenten calendars provide a fun way to raise funds for Africa University

With the Lenten season approaching, consider the new versions of the Lenten Calendar for Africa University to help raise money for our conference initiative to establish scholarship endowments and build a dorm. Calendars for both children and families communicate information about Africa University and include suggestions for giving each day. Be creative and create a special bank or container to hold each day's offering.

Children's Calendar <http://www.wnccumc.org/vsn/pdf/07ChildrensCalendar.pdf>

Family Calendar <http://www.wnccumc.org/vsn/pdf/07FamilyCalendar.pdf>

Africa University Initiative <http://www.wnccumc.org/vsn/au.htm>

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