

November 17, 2006

Electronic
Newsletter



Charlotte District

E-Connections



2006 Fall Charge Conferences

John Wooden, arguably the most prolific basketball coach in the history of the game, was fond of observing “Never substitute activity for achievement.” That statement came to my mind a few days ago when a very kind and conscientious lay member of one of our Charlotte District churches phoned to question the agenda of this fall’s cluster charge conferences. She indicated that the verbal reports representing her congregation were far too laconic. “We are doing so much more than our pastor’s brief report indicated,” she politely informed me. I assured her that I had read the supplementary reports from various groups within the church and that I am aware of the generous activities within the life and program of her congregation. Since she identified herself as one engaged with the evangelism committee, I asked her the question literally related to the initial visionary priority of our Annual Conference, namely, “What is your church intentionally doing to related unchurched persons to Jesus Christ?” We then engaged in some productive dialogue about the unique opportunities for sharing the love of Christ in the changing neighborhood where her church is planted. She confessed that presently this congregation is doing little in response to this challenge.

The United Methodist Church has by-and-large succumbed to the temptation of becoming more like an activist Martha, rather than a reflective Mary. Our Lord may; be addressing our denomination, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things: there is need of only one thing., Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.” – Luke 10:41-42.

I outlined the format for Charge Conferences this fall with the deliberate intention of sustaining the main thing as the main thing. The church exists for the purpose of making new disciples of Jesus Christ, nurturing those who are followers of the way, and fulfilling God’s mission to transform the world through vibrant worship and servant leadership.

I am grateful to each of you for your thorough reflections upon the question “How is your church developing an authentic culture of evangelism?” No two congregations are the same. I cannot answer that important question for your church; but I am grateful to the pastors who sit down with focus groups to ponder this inquiry. I am keeping a notebook with seventy-eight responses to that question. Review carefully what you have written. As the context and content of evangelism changes, please write an update and send this to me. I shall hold each church and pastor accountable for developing authentic ministries that are appropriate and effective in response to Christ’s Great Commission.

My notebook will, likewise, contain your assessment of the “Life Cycles and Stages of Congregational Development.” I shall not treat your work on this essay as a perfunctory Martha-like exercise. If your congregation is a church of advancing maturity, empty nest (few young adults), old age, or dying; I shall be eager to work with you and the members toward redevelopment, rebirth, and growth.

Most of our declining churches have stories of a glorious legacy, vitality, and relevance.

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Charge Conference (continued)

Our task is not to wallow in nostalgia or project guilt upon present leadership. Churches decline for a variety of reasons, some of which are beyond the control of lay or pastoral effectiveness. The gospel of Jesus Christ ripples with the message that NO situation is hopeless.

In January, 2007, the Council on Congregational Development (CONRAD) will train teams of laity and clergy in this district on how to lead a process for assessment of a local church's potential. (Read The Book of Discipline, 2004, paragraph 213, page 133.) We have many remissioning options for revitalization: Responding to partnering with a nearby; vital United Methodist Church, restructuring with a multi-person staff as a cooperative parish of several churches sharing resources with one another, or relocation. The results of prayer in a congregation may even lead to discontinuance as a flock, passing the property to the Charlotte District Mission Society, and using the value of the land and building as seed money for building a new church at another location. A legacy church is an aging congregation so focused upon Christ that the members affirm all their great contributions through decades of relevant service and then provide the financial resources for the grandchild – a new church in a growing city.

So, the purpose of Charge Conference is not to demonstrate how busy we are. I am sufficiently impressed with evidence of seventy-eight very busy congregations. The role of Charge Conference is to condense the voluminous reports, analyze the data assess our spiritual health, and discern God's call for our future.

By the way, Coach John Wooden won ten NCAA Championships in men's basketball – more than Dean Smith and Mike Kizyewski combined! But, in none of those years did he set out to accomplish that end. He merely wanted to develop disciplined men of character. In the process, he accomplished both character development and victory.

The Discipline states that “the function of the local church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is to help people to accept and confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and to live their daily lives in light of their relationship with God.”

Thanks for conducting your Charge Conference with your eye on the ball.

Grace and peace,

George

Charlotte District Superintendent



Emmanuel and Marilyn Morris after a vibrant service of worship at Spencer Memorial UMC. St. Stephen and Spencer will join in a cluster Charge Conference in order to celebrate the cooperative programs shared by the two churches.

South Africa Experience

A Pilgrimage of Pain & Hope – A Personal Experience from South Africa

Written by Reverend Fredrick B. Bowman

Pastor of Burge Memorial – Rock Hill of the United Methodist Church

Charlotte District



In July of this year 2006 I was privileged to be chosen to experience a once in a lifetime opportunity to participate in a pilgrimage to South Africa. Duke Divinity School sponsored this pilgrimage through the department of Black Studies directed by Reverend Tiffnay Marley (whose name has changed since she was married in October). We the pilgrims were also blessed to have as our leaders the Reverend Dr. Peter Storey and his wife Elizabeth. Dr. Peter Storey was the Bishop of the Methodist Church of South Africa and served as president of the South Africa Council of Churches during the anti-apartheid struggle. This couple's experience and knowledge was priceless as they shared their personal stories and hopes for each pilgrim participating on this journey.

The pilgrims consist of a variety of people, such as first and second year Duke Divinity students, graduates and alumni of the divinity school, and one graduate of Hood Theological Seminary, totaling 25 persons. We were also diverse in age, color, and backgrounds. This was intentional because a pilgrimage is to experience different insights within the group as well the journey. This was evident as we experienced the tears, emotions, and expressions as we journeyed through the entire pilgrimage. Two elements in this journey were required daily: that we journalize as God provided daily insights beyond ourselves and worship which enable us to take our daily experiences within the context of God's word and God's grace.

We left Raleigh-Durham airport for Washington Dulles for our connection to Johannesburg, South Africa on Friday, July 28 to return on Friday, August 11. Each day of the two weeks were fully packed from meeting ordinary people who have done remarkable ministries in the anti-apartheid struggle. We spent a couple of days in Soweto where we visited the Apartheid Museum and the Hector Pieterson Museum, named for the first child shot and killed in the Soweto student uprising in 1976, a peaceful protest of the requirement that schools use Afrikaans rather than indigenous languages. We visited the Nelson Mandela home and spent some time in settlements commonly know as shantytowns. These homes were made of corrugated tin and wood with concrete blocks on the tin roofs to keep them from blowing off. We visited several people who are dying of HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, which we could offer a warm hand and prayer. We visited several schools and pre-schools operating with minimal resources. That same night we went out to the streets with the Central Methodist Mission in Johannesburg to serve soup and bread to the homeless people. The count in the homeless experience in Johannesburg is unknown but the images of people lying everywhere is still vivid in my mind. It was also the coldest night in Johannesburg since 1982 with snow flurries.

Our first church worship was at Pimville Methodist Church in Soweto. The service interwove three languages-Zula, Xhosa, and English with translators. The pastor, Reverend Sephapo told us it will be an abbreviated service for us. It was four hours of enthusiastic worship with a wonderful meal prepared by the church before leaving. The second Sunday we worshiped at Calvary Methodist Church with Reverend Alan Storey, the son of Peter and Elizabeth. It is a historically Caucasian congregation, but has done a lot of work of intentional integration. We left the church after another great meal to the airport to fly to Cape Town and visited more programs working with refugees from Zimbabwe, Zambia,

South Africa Experience (continued)

Namibia, and the Congo. We visited Robben Island where Nelson Mandela and others were imprisoned. Eddie Daniels who was imprisoned fifteen years in the same cell row with Nelson Mandela led us on our tour. We visited the District 6 Museum that commemorates one of the horrors of the Group Areas Act of the apartheid regime in which the government could simply decide what areas were white only and forced others out.

In the middle of our pilgrimage we were able to do a couple of fun events such as take a game drive at Bakubung Bush Lodge. This consists of riding in a large open jeep with a guide (carrying a weapon) in a large preserve. We saw elephants, giraffes, hippos, rhinos, zebras, several kinds of antelope, wart hogs, wildebeasts, some saw lions, and a variety of other animals. We went to Table Mountain, which ascends 3,200 feet and rode in a large cable cart to the top and spent time enjoying the view and the shops. We were able to see the beauty of the land that is South Africa even through plenty struggles-- economically, socially, theologically, and politically that come with the change from the oppressive apartheid regime to a democratic society. I feel there is hope in its future.

Finally, this brief summary is just a tiny morsel of a rich experience I will cherish for the rest of my life. But, this would not have been possible without the generosity of those who made donations to assist me. I sent many thank you notes but those words cannot fully express my gratitude. I would like to thank the Duke Divinity School Black Studies Department, the Duke Endowment and their mission to support rural churches, and last but not least the congregations of Burge Memorial and Rock Hill. I am thankful for these two congregations who supported and encouraged my time away, their sacrificial donations, and mostly the love and support for their pastor. I remain deeply humble.

Upcoming ...

All clergy and their families are cordially invited to the **Charlotte District Clergy Christmas Party** on Thursday, December 7th, 6:15 p.m., at Assurance UMC. This celebration is always a special time of shared joy for all in attendance; so, clear this date on your crowded calendar for December. The cost of the dinner is \$10.00 per person. Child care is available at the church by reservation. Send in your reservations for the meal by December 1st to Hubert Clinard, Charlotte District Clergy Treasurer; 2224 Cardinal Loop; Stanley, NC 28164.

Monthly Clergy Fellowship Communion: The clergy of the Charlotte District have the opportunity to celebrate the Eucharist with their colleagues at least once a month, except during summer. Last week several traveled to the Salem UMC sanctuary where Jan Hermanns led in both music and liturgy, and Ray Surratt provided a provocative and inspirational homily for the November Eucharist. Our next scheduled clergy communion will be on Tuesday, December 5th, at First UMC, at 8 a.m. You will want to park in the Odell parking garage next to the church.

Clergy Fellowship at beginning of the New Year: Bethlehem Center will host the clergy at their main assembly building on Thursday, January 4th, 9:30 a.m. We shall want to meet the new Executive Director, William McDonald, and experience a time of inspiration through worship. The Center will provide lunch for all in attendance; but the staff will appreciate an accurate count of anticipated attendance. Let our office, through DeEtta, know of your attendance and plans for lunch.

Around the Charlotte District



Pat Peacock and Jim Langstaff are leaders in the forty years of ministry at Sharon UMC. This picture was taken upon the celebration of this milestone in the church's history.



Charles and Catherine Page were honored at the Sixtieth Anniversary of Commonwealth and greeted as a former pastoral family on September 24, 2006.



Luci Blizzard is pictured here with her family on October 22, Homecoming Sunday at Homestead. Luci, son-in-law Billy, daughter Michelle, and husband John Blizzard.



Reverend Timothy Reimer, Associate Pastor of Mt. Zion UMC, after preaching one of his first sermons at the church.

CROP Walk: Pat Thompson (a member of Providence UMC), and grandson Max, raised over \$4,000 in donations to this annual mission for hunger relief.



Eric Reece is the new pastor of Webb's Chapel and is seen here following the worship service on October 15th.



More News

Jobs

WNCC local church positions, as submitted to the communication office. For listings and submission instructions, see <http://www.wnccumc.org/nws/jobs.htm>

Local Church News

Have an item to submit that may be of interest to the wider community?
See <http://www.wnccumc.org/nws/localchurches.htm>

PowerPoint tells Mission/Outreach story

Interested in Mission/Outreach, but don't know where to start? Use the new PowerPoint presentation with talking points on the WNCC Mission and Outreach ministries. District Mission/Outreach representatives have the presentation. Additional copies are available from the Mission/Outreach Office. Contact Laura Diviney at ldviney@wnccumc.org or 800-562-7929 x121.

Message from Armenia cites progress, need

If you can't imagine a hospital with mold on the walls, read this one-page newsletter from the Project AGAPE team in Armenia. While much progress has been made in renovating the hospital, much remains to be done. Read more about this urgent outreach to people affected by natural disasters and war at <http://www.wnccumc.org/mis/agape.htm>

WNCC UMW announces new web address

The WNCC UMW website address has changed to www.wnccumw.org Check it out for the latest news and information.

North Carolina churches to pray for WNCC, others in November

Each month, the North Carolina Council of Churches ask congregations across the state to join throughout the year in prayers for the council's member bodies and their leaders. During November, congregations are asked to pray for the WNCC UMC, Bishop J. Lawrence McCleskey, resident bishop; Southern Province of the Moravian Church in America, the Rev. Dr. Robert E. Sawyer, president and Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, Chapel Hill, the Rev. Dr. Jack McKinney and the Rev. Dr. Nancy Petty, pastors. These prayers may be personal or included in corporate congregational prayers. Also, they could be listed church bulletins and/or newsletters. A unity prayer, an adaptation from a prayer by the Rev. Dr. Diane C. Kessler, Executive Director, Massachusetts Council of Churches is offered at <http://www.wnccumc.org/eth/unity.htm>

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