



E-Connections

From the Desk of the DS: Charge Conference as a Spiritual Experience

Let's be honest: most of us would rather have a root canal than prepare for and attend Charge Conference. This annual requirement of the Discipline interrupts our fall schedules of productive pastoral involvement. We hardly notice the grandeur of fall leaves and the suspense of football week-ends. Sometimes we feel like the proverbial circus juggler on a tight-rope, keeping in the air at one time all those essential spheres of ministerial function. So, while preparing sermons, leading Disciple Bible, visiting the sick, providing orientation to the newest members, and cranking up a myriad of necessary committees; we have the additional burden of compiling perfunctory Charge Conference forms. Page fifteen of the 2007 instructional booklet lists as many as twenty forms that are to be registered with the Charlotte District office, preferably by the date of the CC event! Perhaps the Judicial Council should abolish the whole exercise by declaring it an expression of cruel and unusual punishment.



George Thompson, D.S.

It would be vacuous for me to mimic the words of a certain former-President by saying to each pastor, "I feel your pain." Charge Conference is endemic to our denomination. But what I can offer is a theological context for making this experience a creative, spiritual exercise of grace rather than a prosaic mandate of ecclesiastical law.

How can this uniquely Methodist phenomenon become a means of grace for the pastors and churches of the Charlotte District?

1. Charge Conference becomes an act of celebration and a means of grace when we make sure it is an event with a central focus. The Western NC Annual Conference has adopted a visionary, seven-facet plan for a Christ-centered transformation of our congregations. In the Charlotte District we shall focus upon only one of these visionary facets: **"exploring and practicing the spiritual dimensions of stewardship."** The various written reports submitted to the Charge Conference may well address a broad spectrum of activities and ministries; but our focus during the meeting will center upon stewardship. The written essay of the pastor should be a careful reflection upon the lectures of Kennon Callahan during the Spring Seminar. Pastors newly appointed in June of 2007 will be asked to reflect upon the culture of stewardship at their new appointment and share their vision for strengthening the spiritual foundations of stewardship and the spirit of generosity.
2. Charge Conference becomes a means of grace when we release the gifts of the laity. Assign the task of filling out the official written forms to lay leadership. Each year teach your laity in this task. The pastor's task is to instruct, oversee, and fine-tune the reports so that accuracy is assured.

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3. We shall once more include a sharing session, symbolically bringing the sacrifice of our ministries to the throne of God's abundant grace. Kennon Callahan encouraged each of our churches to "advance our strengths" and thereby "build a spiritual base for a stewardship of abundance." Each church has at least one favorite story that demonstrates why we are a grateful people, eager to share from the abundance of our spiritual and financial resources. Share a story that demonstrates why your church joyously participates in the mission of Christ by giving sacrificially. This may come in the form a personal witness by one of the members, a creative skit that tells your church's story about some specific mission, or even a video illustration. Give evidence of the joy of grace in your church during this brief time of sharing.
4. We experience grace by affirming one another, sharing resources, and lifting one another's burdens. This is why we shall have 28 cluster Charge Conferences. I have attempted to link congregations that are already working in concert on a shared mission—two to five in a cluster, with an average of approximately three congregations per cluster. When we do ministry in the context of isolation or competition, we experience the futility of joyless, legalistic religion. When we serve in a spirit of cooperation and collegiality, we truly experience the joy of grace in our Wesleyan connectivity.

Last year about fifty new United Methodist Montagnards who had joined Covenant UMC attended Charge Conference. One of the young men had just that week been united with his family after several years of separation in which each had followed a torturous path to America and had finally escaped from the vicious grasp of Communism. After the business and closing communion service, a life-long Methodists and member of Covenant said to me, "Rev. Thompson, I have never been as spiritually moved as I was tonight through the reports, the testimony of our Montagnard members, and our kneeling together at this altar." I looked at her moist eyes and impulsively said with a twinkle in my own, "Don't you know that you are not supposed to get religion at a Charge Conference!"

Come to your cluster charge conference once again this year. Perhaps you, or someone you love, will truly meet Jesus and authentically experience the spiritual dimension of stewardship.

Grace and peace,

George

George Thompson
Charlotte District Superintendent

Launching of Sanctuary Charlotte United Methodist Church

On November 4th Sanctuary Charlotte UMC will launch it's ministry in one of the fastest growing, and most diverse communities in the region – SW Charlotte. Sanctuary Charlotte— in partnership with The Charlotte District Mission Society, Congregational Development, Matthews UMC and the Royce and Jane Reynolds Foundation— is lead by Dr. Percy Reeves who was appointed by the bishop and cabinet as lead pastor at the 2007 annual conference.

Sanctuary Charlotte is a daring faith community located just below Westinghouse Blvd. on South Tryon Street. With core values based on what happened on the third day after Jesus died on the cross, Sanctuary has officially chosen the name: **Sanctuary Charlotte: A Third Day (3D) Experience**. The 3D's stand for: **Discovery, Discipleship, and Deliverance**. "Our purpose," says Dr. Reeves, "is to be transformed and simply do what Jesus did. If we meet people where they are and do what Jesus did, families, the community, and the world will experience transformation. Practically, this will take place in the form of 5 primary ministry initiatives:

1. Loving God's Creation
2. Loving the poor
3. Care for the sick
4. Care for the elderly, widows and orphans
5. Loving children/families

The leadership team of this new congregation is issuing this word of hospitality to the surrounding community: "**Come join us...**" Sanctuary Charlotte's next community event and grand opening will be held November 3rd and 4th as they continue the theme "It's All About Love" weekend. Bern Nadette "Thelma" Stanis from the 70's hit show "Good Times" will be the featured guest speaker on Saturday, November 3rd at 7 p.m. and Sunday, November 4th at 9 a.m. She will speak on her newly released book "Situations 101: Relationships: The Good, the Bad...and the Ugly."

"Join our team!" This is the message we want to communicate throughout the Charlotte District. We encourage all our 78 congregations to support the evangelistic efforts of Sanctuary Charlotte. Spread the good news about this bold, new adventure in faith. As the planners prepare officially to launch with an exciting worship service on November 4th, please send representatives from your church so that the facility is packed with attendance. Invite persons to join this dynamic community for Christ, if even for a season. Learn how you and your church can be supportive in specific ways by connecting with the church's website--www.sanctuarycharlotte.com .



Fellowship during Sanctuary's September 29th Community Carnival.



Montagnard Ministry at Covenant UMC

*“We humans make plans, but the LORD has the final word.
We may think we know what is right, but the LORD is the judge of our motives.
Share your plans with the LORD, and you will succeed.” - Proverbs 16:1-3 (CEV)*

From early childhood, I was active in the Methodist Church. I served as president of both the JIF and MYF, and sang in the adult choir while in high school. I started college in 1961 at Southern Methodist University. Along the way, however, I dropped out of church altogether. I also flunked out my senior year at SMU in the fall of 1964.



Montagnard Mission Men's Choir which is part of the ministry of Covenant UMC.

After working for a year on the docks at Red Ball Motor Freight in Dallas, I joined the Marine Corps in November, 1965. I was promoted to sergeant in 1967; and, within one month, received orders to be sent to Vietnam. I had no way of knowing at that time what an impact this experience would have on me. Neither did I have any way of knowing what God had in store for me when I returned, for I was to go back as a dock supervisor after a four-year leave of absence at Red Ball.

After arriving in I Corps, I was greatly impressed by some unusual people who lived several miles from my base camp outside of Dong Ha in the village of Cam Lo. These Montagnards (French word for “mountaineers”) came into our camp from time to time to meet with our superiors. They were a peaceful agricultural society of hunters and farmers who lived in small thatched huts built on stilts. In the early 1960's they sided with our country in a war against Communism in Indochina. The Montagnards were some of our most loyal allies in Vietnam and suffered terribly at the hands of the communistic Vietnamese government. According to anthropologist Dr. Gerald Hickey, approximately 85 of the Montagnard villages were destroyed or abandoned, and more than 200,000 Montagnards died as a consequence of the Vietnam War. Many thousands more were slaughtered when American troops pulled out of Vietnam in 1975.

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The Montagnards remaining in the Central Highlands continue to suffer arrests, imprisonment, torture, and especially religious persecution. Many managed to get to refugee camps in Cambodia, and eventually made their way into the United States under refugee status. In our state, they have settled primarily in Charlotte, Greensboro, and Raleigh. We have been blessed at Covenant, as nearly three hundred Montagnards are now under the care and ministry of our congregation. We have learned more from them about faith than I feel they have learned from us. One young man, new to the United Methodist Church, cried as he celebrated Christmas for the first time in years. To do so in his homeland would have meant arrest and torture, if caught.



Speaking realistically, a wall exists between the Montagnards and us. It is a wall of confusion and misunderstanding, the result of little formal education in their home country and a language barrier here in the United States. We offer English as Second Language (ESL) classes at Covenant, but it is a long and tedious path for those who enroll. Even among our own people, there are five or more dialects. Some of the Montagnards have trouble speaking with and understanding each other.

Bol Siu was one of the first Montagnards to come to Covenant. He arrived here in August 2004, and his wife and six of his seven children - from whom he had been separated for more than six years - arrived from Vietnam via a Cambodian refugee camp in October 2006.

Montagnard Ministry at Covenant UMC (continued)

Generally speaking, Montagnards are doing all that they can to seek earnestly a better life for themselves and their families. They demonstrate that they are willing to do whatever is necessary to achieve this goal. Little by little, we are chipping away at the wall. You can help by supporting us with your prayers, even your presence, your gifts, and your service. There are not enough volunteers at Covenant UMC to go around; so, if you feel led by God to adopt a family and help them with menial tasks such as reading mail and paying bills or taking a trip to the store and help them know how to shop, you will serve them well.

I had plans for my life before Vietnam that did not include God. Afterward, I surrendered my will to God's, and I have to smile as I think back over these 37 years of ordained ministry, realizing how I was placed in situations time and again where God could use me. "Here I am; send me!" has been, for the most part, my battle cry. I urge you to take time to ponder God's call upon your life to assist in this vital ministry. We at Covenant sincerely and prayerfully hope that you will choose to join hands with us in this wonderful ministry to and with our newest brothers and sisters. I assure you that your life will be changed for the good, and you will grow to appreciate what you have as you see how others live on so little, and never complain.

May God bless you and give you peace as together we serve Christ in the Charlotte District through this opportunity to reach out to a very special people in our midst.

Gratefully,
De Hillyer, Pastor, Covenant UMC

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*Colleagues:*

*I have recently written an appeal for the churches of the Charlotte District to consider making specific contributions to the District Mission Society marked, "**Montagnard Fund.**" Such a designated offering would not be a substitute for the requested amount for DMS but is a request for additional missional giving. This is truly an opportunity the whole district has to bring the love of Christ to these very special brothers and sisters who have literally come to the doorstep of the United Methodist Church.*

*Grace and peace,*

*George*

*Charlotte District Superintendent*

### **CROP Walk Sunday, October 14, 2007**

Charlotte Memorial Stadium

Gates open at 1:00 p.m. ▪ 6K Walk starts at 2:30 p.m.

The 2006 Charlotte CROP Hunger Walk was held on Sunday, October 15th with approximately 6,000 walkers raising over \$259,000. This is the largest CROP Walk in the nation.

What does CROP mean?

C = Communities

R = Responding to

O = Overcome

P = Poverty

Communities Responding to Overcome Poverty.

Neighbors within this metropolitan area from different faiths, cultures, and ages, will be walking together and taking a stand against hunger in our world. On October 14th we shall raise awareness and funds for international relief and development, as well as local hunger-fighting agencies. Some 2,000 communities across the country take part each year. 25% of what is raised at the Charlotte Walk stays in Mecklenburg County and benefits Crisis Assistance Ministry, Loaves & Fishes and Second Harvest Food Bank. The remaining funds are used by Church World Service to provide global hunger education, disaster relief and self-help projects throughout the world.

Pat Thompson will coordinate the walk for our Charlotte District churches that participate in the city-wide effort. (Denver and other municipalities in the district promote additional walks.) Come to Memorial Stadium after worship for the opening ceremonies and gather as United Methodists where you see Pat and a United Methodist banner. Let's try to go beyond our previous congregation's record-performance in the amount raised. Pat has participated in every CROP Walk since 1978 and invites a great district response. Here she is seen in last year's trek with grandson Max. They raised over \$4,000 in pledges. If you have questions you can reach Pat at 704-366-9140 or contact 704/333-WALK (9255). To become an online walker/team or to contribute to an online walker/team [www.cropwalk.org](http://www.cropwalk.org).



*Pat and Max in CROP Walk 2006.*

*Around the Charlotte District—Highlights from Rock Spring Camp Meeting*

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Gathering crowd of approximately 1,000 worshipers.



Children's sermon brought many to the front of the arbor.



Preacher Susan Heafner-Heun. Susan is the pastor of the Fairfield-Bethel Charge in Denver.

## *Providence UMC Earns Second Year Recognition*

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*Providence* United Methodist Church has been recognized by United Methodist Communications (UMCom) as an official “Welcoming Congregation” for the second year.

“Welcoming Congregations” are a select group of United Methodist congregations nationwide that meets criteria including embracing newcomers and providing opportunities in discipleship. The recognition program is part of a larger effort launched in late 2000 by UMCom, the denomination’s communications agency, to use modern technology and the common language of television to spread the Good

News of Christ to a world in need.

Ken Carter, senior pastor, expressed his gratitude for the planning of two ministry areas, the Igniting Ministries team, chaired by Cathy Williamson, and Welcoming Ministries, led by Suzi Stephens. But in addition, he noted “the many positive ways in which new persons, people of all backgrounds and races, and young adults with disabilities” are welcomed into the life and mission of our church. Providence has also focused in the last two years on “Beginnings”, with a strong contingent of young adults beginning their second year as participants in this resource for seekers and disciples.

“Open hearts, open minds, open doors” is the theme of the denominational effort, the centerpiece which is a series of national cable TV advertising, supplemented by regional and local church participation. The overall aim of the effort is to invite people, particularly those between 25 and 54 years old, to enter into connection with the Christian community as they seek meaning and purpose in their lives.

Providence is located at 2810 Providence Road, Charlotte, NC 28211. If you would like more information about becoming a *Welcoming Congregation* visit the web site [www.ignitingministry.org](http://www.ignitingministry.org) or call toll free (877) 281-6535.

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### **The Charlotte District of the United Methodist Church invites you to the...**

#### **2007 District Program Leadership Conference**

Sunday, October 7, 2007—2:30-5:30 p.m.

University City UMC, 3835 West W.T. Harris Blvd., Charlotte, NC 28269

**Keynote Speaker, Dr. Richard P. Heitzenrater**

**Professor of Church History & Wesley Studies, Duke Divinity School**

#### ***Workshops – Worth your Time – Right here in our District!***

“Relevance of John Wesley for Evangelism in Contemporary Settings with Dr. Robert Tuttle”

“Work of God in You: John Wesley & the Holy Spirit” ▪ “From Interested to Involved”

▪ “Societies/Accountability: Small Group Ministries” ▪ “Chased by Grace: Children’s Ministries”

“Youth Ministry and Confirmation” ▪ “Introducing Wesley to My Generation: Young Adults”

“Music and Theology” ▪ “Discipline 101/Social Principles” ▪ “Leadership Wesley Style” ▪ “Older Adults”

An offering will be received for Africa University. Brochure and more details at [www.chardist.org](http://www.chardist.org).

**Visit the Western NC Conference website**  
**<http://www.wnccumc.org/min/ministries.htm>**  
**to obtain information about the**  
**various ministries throughout our Conference.**

**In search of various Conference publications**  
**visit <http://www.wnccumc.org/pub/publications.htm>**

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Subscribe to e-wnccnews, the brief, weekly WNCC e-newsletter, with convenient ministry links. Send your e-mail address to [webministry@wnccumc.org](mailto:webministry@wnccumc.org) with "e-news subscribe" in the subject line. The Conference Center does not share this email list with anyone.

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