GETTING THE MESSAGE STRAIGHT

Throughout the Charge Conference season I have been reminding folks of our calling to be disciples who make disciples. I confess that on one occasion I found the words coming out of my mouth that if we didn’t do a better job of that the result would be that the Church would continue to decline.

On the way home from that meeting I had a little talk with myself. I realized that I had lapsed into language representing a mindset in which we often tumble– we share our faith as a means to preserve the church. But that is not the reason we are called to share our faith; rather we do so because we live in a world where people are often burdened with guilt, living unfulfilled lives, and Jesus wants them to be set free!

I believe that God has a vision for this world, not just for the one to come. That vision is a place of justice and mercy, grace and love, peace and harmony– and there is only one way for that vision to become reality. That is for people to know the forgiving, grace-filled, love of God brought into our world through Jesus Christ.

This is the season when we celebrate his birth and coming into the world. The scriptures tell us "His name shall be called Emmanuel, which means 'God with us.'" During this season let that wonderful good news be proclaimed again: God is with us. That is the good news. That is our message. That is our reason for being. That is our hope. That is something that needs to be shared. Joy to the world; the Lord is come!

LOCAL WOMAN BRINGS CHRISTMAS CHEER TO NURSING HOMES

In 2007, Carolyn Thompson's mother was in a nursing home. Visiting her mother at Christmas time, Carolyn noticed that several of the residents had few visitors and no festive decorations. Ms. Thompson, a member of the Berlin United Methodist Church, went home and made 12 small trees and distributed them to the residents she had noticed. They were so warmly welcomed that she made more the following year.

Carolyn has recruited several friends and some school age children to help with the project and this year 690 trees of different colors and styles were made -- enough for every Knox County care facility resident! Fellow church member, Raemarie Oatman, is organizing an effort to make hand-crafted greeting cards for each recipient. Carolyn says, "Each year we are richly blessed and we would love to see this great ministry spread to other counties." For more information contact Berlin Pastor Joe Beran at 740-507-9017.
The season of Advent teaches us the discipline and the gift of waiting on God. Advent is about inviting, waiting and expecting the Spirit of God to be radically at work in our lives and in the world – making all things new! It is not a passive waiting but an active waiting fully offering ourselves to be God’s agents of love, healing, transformation, peace, and justice in the world.

As I write, I am reminded of the words penned in Luke 3:4-6 (NIV):

As it is written in the book of words of Isaiah the prophet: A voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all people will see God’s salvation.’

As John the Baptist preached these radical, transforming words about leveling the mountains, filling the valleys and making straight the highway, he was not speaking about divine landscaping but was speaking to the powers to be – that which threatens the common good and the welfare of all of God’s people.

We, too, are preparers of the way of God’s love and redemptive work in the world. As followers of Christ, and as a people called United Methodists, we are bearers of the good news of Jesus Christ. We are those who are called to tear down the walls of hate, division and fear, and to be builders of authentic, loving community. We are those who are called to do justice, and to offer and restore hope where there is brokenness and pain. As baptized believers, we are called to “renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, repent of our sin and accept the freedom and power God gives us to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves.” If not us, then who and if not now, when?

As a United Methodist Church, we are seeking to be preparers of the way of God’s love, grace, justice and unity even among ourselves as a denomination. The 2016 General Conference gave a specific mandate to the Council of Bishops to “lead The United Methodist Church in discerning and proposing a way forward through the present impasse related to human sexuality and to explore options that help to maintain and strengthen the unity of the church.” In response, the Council proposed – and the 2016 General Conference approved – the formation of a Commission that will assist in helping us find our way forward. The Commission on the Way Forward has been named by the Council of Bishops, and the 32 members have begun their work.

Friends, finding our way forward is the work of the whole church. As United Methodists we believe in the power of prayer and holy conferencing. Every annual conference is asked to be active preparers of the way forward by making a commitment to pray for the work of the commission, and by engaging in meaningful dialogue. Every clergy and lay member of the East Ohio Conference will be asked to specifically pray for the work of the commission during a week in April, 2017. We pray that we are being faithful to being united in Christ and to fulfilling the mission of the church, which is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Even now you are encouraged to send forth prayers for the Commission as it begins its work, and I ask that you plan to participate in the 2017 all-conference week of prayer.
Following the week of prayer, every local church will be invited to engage in holy conferencing. Together we will reflect:

- on our shared mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.
- on ways to live together in our differences without presuming that we will resolve our differences.
- on discerning a form of unity that would empower us living together, and claiming what is our witness and what can be our witness to the world in relation to our differences.

Detailed plans of the week of prayer and the invitation to holy conferencing will be communicated via E-News and the conference website to ensure an opportunity for conference-wide participation.

In these desperate and anxious times in which we live, I remain convinced that the Gospel of Jesus Christ and His Church is still the hope for the world. Let us fully embrace our role in helping to prepare the way of God’s love, grace, peace and justice, both in the church and in the world. Each of us has a part in the Kingdom-building work.

May the Spirit of God continue to take up residence in your life and lead you to places where you have not dared to go, to people you have not dared to meet, to love where you have shown no love before, and to do good where you’ve shown no mercy.

As we seek to remember who, and whose, we are as followers of Christ, I invite you to read “Division and Discord,” a letter to the people of The United Methodist Church from Bishop Bruce R. Ough, the president of the Council of Bishops.

Grace and Peace,
Bishop Tracy S. Malone

HISTORIAN OF THE YEAR NOMINATIONS/CHURCH ANNIVERSARIES REQUESTED

The East Ohio Commission on Archives and History in conjunction with the United Methodist Historical Society of Ohio is seeking nominations for the 2017 Historian of the Year. This is an opportunity for local congregations to recognize the work of those local church historians who go far “above and beyond” what is expected to preserve the rich heritage of the local church. It is helpful to include samples of the work that has been done. It is also beneficial to say if the work has been done by an individual or a group of people.

The Society is also seeking anniversary information for those local churches that are celebrating special anniversaries, such as 50, 75, 100, 150 or 200 in 2017 with an attractive commemorative certificate. Local Church Historian nominations and anniversary information should be sent to Rev. Don Trigg, P.O. Box 32, Seville, 44273 by March 1, 2017. The awards and certificates will be distributed April 22, 2017 at the UM Historical Society of Ohio meeting at Bowling Green Trinity UMC, 200 N Summit St., Bowling Green, 43402. If you have questions please contact Rev. Trigg at DLT419@aol.com, or 330-769-2836.

Dear Three Rivers Clergy and Retirees,
Thank you for your generous Christmas gift. The money will be used to help with travel expenses to Florida this winter for a family celebration. I am grateful for a job that allows me to connect to various mission and ministries throughout Three Rivers. I wish each and yours a truly blessed and joyous Christmas season.
With deep appreciation,
Joy Snyder
DEVELOPING OUR VITALITY
Saturday January 21   9:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Coshocton Roscoe UMC

1. KNOW YOUR SIZE (LAY LEADERS)  Carole Burdette, Tippecanoe UMC; former District Lay Leader
   Being an effective lay requires that you "size up" several things within your local church and community.

2. PASTORAL CARE Diane Moreno -EOC Pastoral Care Office
   Understanding the balance between caring for others and caring for yourself.

3. JUST A LITTLE TALK (DEVELOPING PRAYER LIFE)  Arlene Mayhew, Christ UMC; former District Lay Leader
   Talking with someone requires that you listen part of the time. And to really listen you must be invested
   in the conservation. Are you willing to spend some time getting ready for the "little talk"?

4. MORE THAN PHONE CALLS:  Dan Bryant, Mahoning Valley District Superintendent
   Understanding the importance of your role as part of the Leadership and Nominations committee in
   selecting people to serve in the church through prayer and discernment with consideration of their gifts.

5. ASSISTING THE ABUSED TO RESILIENCE  Carolyn Baker, Mulberry UMC; Knox Co. Domestic Violence Shelter
   How to identify the abused (adults or children) and respond to them with care and tenderness in Christ.

6. STAFF/PASTOR-PARISH RELATIONS COMMITTEE  Brad Call, Three Rivers District Superintendent
   Every S/PPRC member in the district--new or continuing--should attend this workshop designed to enhance
   the effectiveness of this important component of every local church's administrative structure.

7. TESTIFYING FOR KINGDOM GROWTH  Jill Rock, Fredericktown UMC
   Do you have difficulty sharing the Good News? Learn how to recognize opportunities and develop the
   confidence to share the Gospel to those around us and in our communities.

8. MAXIMIZING THE CHILDREN'S MESSAGE  Chasity Opphile: Christ UMC & District Youth Director
   This workshop will include tips and hands-on ideas for presenting children’s messages that are to the point,
   biblical, participatory and engaging.

Registration Form for 2017 TR Leadership Event
(Please fill out one form per person: you may use same form if same person coming both days)

Name: ___________________________________________ Church: ______________________________

Address: _________________________________________ Phone: _________________________________

E-mail: ___________________________________________  REGISTRATION DEADLINE: Friday, January 13, 2017

Place the NUMBER of the workshops on the day(s) that you will be attending as well as an Alternate Choice

SATURDAY  A. _______________  B. _______________  ALT________________________

Mail registration & money to: Three Rivers District, 415 Walnut Street, Coshocton, OH 43812 memo: Leadership Event
Cost: $5 per person with a $20 per church team cap ONLINE Registration will be available soon on the district website.
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SMALL TOWNS & BIG CITIES (Part 4 of 4)

Factor #4: The “Ten and Done” Principle
A pastor in a small town offered this observation about relationships in small towns, “ten and done.” The “ten and done” principle is when people in a small towns typically make room for ten slots in their life for friendships, and once their ten slots are filled, then they are done building friendships. They aren’t necessarily done being friendly, but they are done inserting new friends into their slots. Each person’s slots consist of permanent and non-permanent friendships. The permanent slots are friendships that are poured in cement; consisting of family, a few childhood friends or other people they’ve grown close to along the way. The nonpermanent slots may rotate depending on circumstances and stage of life. For example, young mothers with kids in the same play group followed by a replacement of different mothers for these non-permanent slots when the children begin playing sports or engaging in other activities.

Keep in mind this is only a principle, not a rule. It’s not equally true for everyone who lives in a small town. Some people might have a meager amount of non-permanent slots while others might have an abundance of them. Some might have considerably more than ten slots but they’re all permanent, while others might have less than ten slots, due to their personality and social sensibilities. Moreover, cultural climate can breed unspoken expectations for people to have higher or lower amounts of slots. But even though each person and place is different, the “ten and done” principle generally holds true for small towns across America.

The “ten and done” principle creates paradoxical challenges when it comes to mission in small towns as relationships are the foundation of outreach in small towns. But open avenues still exist such as meeting the new people in the town. They are the “low-hanging fruit” because not many of their slots are filled.

Make room for non-permanent slots in YOUR own life for the sake of mission. Take account of your relationships and ask God how he wants to organize and prioritize your friendships. Be devoted to praying about which non-Christians God might place in your slots. Pray for wisdom to build reciprocal friendships.

People who are single typically have more time and available slots than their married counterparts. Singles often have the potential to be some of the best missionaries in town.

Small town folks often live near extended family resulting in full slots that reduce opportunity for new relationships. A strategy for these folks may be to consider their workplace as a mission field. Some non-Christians simply have all their permanent slots filled. Therefore, pray that God would boldly bring individual people like this to Christ so they in turn can in mission to the network of family and friends who fill their slots. Many small town residents have testimonies where God saved them and powerfully used them to reach their family and friends. Let’s pray that this would happen more often!

If your family takes up all your slots and they are already Christians, consider holding a family-wide discussion about what doing mission in your town should look like. Family is good and a blessing from God, but is your family’s mission focused on community with each other or are you a community that’s focused on mission?

Excerpts from Small Town Mission. Author Aaron Morrow is pastor of River City Church in Dubuque, Iowa and is associated with M.A. Moody Bible Institute. http://gcdiscipleship.com/2016/07/31/4-differences-between-small-towns-and-big-cities/
## DECEMBER 2016

**FOR A CHILD IS BORN TO US, A SON IS GIVEN TO US AND THE GOVERNMENT WILL BE ON HIS SHOULDERS. AND HE WILL BE CALLED: WONDROUS COUNSELOR, MIGHTY GOD, EVERLASTING FATHER, PRINCE OF PEACE. (ISAIAH 9:6)**

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**JANUARY 2017**

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<td>Year-end Local Church Reports Due</td>
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**JOY on Vacation:** Limited Office Hours

*Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.* (Isaiah 60:1-3)
EAST OHIO CONFERENCE PROJECT A SUCCESS

Many of the youth and adults from Three Rivers and surrounding districts came together in November to Change the World - One Meal at a Time. As part of the Stop Hunger Now Program, 25,000 meals were packaged for those in need in developing countries. Joining the local churches was Dr. Brad and Sue Call as well as Bishop Malone and her daughter. A concert by Rapture Ruckus concluded the productive day. Over 400 youth from around east Ohio Conference participated in this two-day event.

Thanks to all who helped.