

District Superintendent's Report to 2011 Annual Conference

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Southeast District Superintendent, Dean of the Cabinet***

“Trust in the Lord with all of your heart and lean not to your own understanding in all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your paths.” Prov. 3: 5,6

At the 2010 Adjourned Session of Annual Conference we made some decisions regarding structure and finances which we trust is a God-directed path for us. These decisions reduced the number of Conference staff positions (incl. Dir. of Camping and Retreat Ministries, Human Relations, and Support staff), reduced the overall budget to 2008 figures, and emphasized the need to do programming/equipping on the district level more than ever before.

Every Annual Conference has had to make similar difficult decisions based on current trends in membership, giving, and mission outreach. In a document entitled “A Call to Action: Reordering the Life of the Church” the Council of Bishops has outlined a plan to address these trends. This plan will inspire and lead us to become the church we aspire to be. We are trusting God to direct us down a path that will strengthen and grow our churches, and our United Methodist witness throughout the world, and especially in the United States.

There have been many changes in the Appointment and Extended Cabinet for 2011. Gary George has been appointed to Philadelphia: Grace UMC, Bob Wilt to Lima UMC, Lillian Smith to Tindley Temple, and I have been appointed as the Director of Connectional Ministries. We are welcoming Thomas Haugh as District Superintendent of the Southeast District, Anita Powell as District Superintendent of the Central District, and Gary Nicholson as District Superintendent of the Northwest District. As we know, David Fife longtime Assistant to the Bishop is retiring from the position, effective July 1, 2011.

Many of our local churches will likewise experience a change in pastoral leadership. We've had 22 retirements this year, and we have thus far made close to 70 appointments – and there's a few more to be done. As these pastors and congregations prepare for the transition, we commit to keeping them in our prayers.

A few congregations will be going from full time status to less than full time status or merging with other congregations; and in three or four cases discontinuing or closing and thankfully in two cases with a new church start in mind.

We are deeply concerned when a church closes its doors in a community where there is still need for ministry and potential to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Both pastoral appointments and changes in a church's status were made with the goal/hope to establish a healthy ministry; and in some cases revitalize a congregation or bring about something totally new.

While some have experienced decline, there are congregations growing in membership and ministries. We thank God for their vision; and the passion to make it happen.

The Cabinet is committed to resourcing congregations eager to be and to make disciples of Jesus Christ in their specific context for ministry. This past year we have partnered with Conference program staff and the Board of Laity to bring the Adam Hamilton follow-up event (Leading Beyond the Walls) to every district, as well as the Staff-Parish Relations Committee trainings and Tools for Ministry. These offerings were tailored to each district's needs. We celebrate the fact that this year's Tools for Ministry event was attended by more laity than ever before.

In addition we have kept our commitment to providing an annual Call to Ministry Retreat. This one day retreat is intended to encourage young people to hear and respond to God's call. Nine youth attended this year and fifteen the year before. We invite you to discern whether or not God may be calling a young person in your congregation. If so, urge them to explore their call by attending this event.

In the future we will continue our commitment to offering Tools for Ministry; in addition we have made plans to offer a one-day Conference-wide Stewardship training by Horizons Stewardship (Not Your Parents Offering Plate), as well as a three day workshop for those who have a call and passion for new church starts (Path 1). In fact we have entered into a covenant with Path 1 –a resource of the General Board of Discipleship, who will give leadership to this workshop, as well as ongoing support/coaching to those who have been trained.

We will also continue our efforts to establish and resource cluster groups throughout the Conference. There are pastors and churches that are gathering in clusters for fellowship, trainings, worship, mission and even charge conferences. We encourage participation in these groups – they are a building block of our districts and Annual Conference.

In order to provide this resourcing Cabinet members have been equipped in Conflict Resolution, Interim Ministry, Congregational Development, and Leadership Development.

Bishop Johnson has provided excellent leadership to the work of the Cabinet. She has led the way in helping us make difficult decisions in financially stressful times. A task force has been established to create a 5 year plan with financial stability as the goal. CCF&A, Conference Trustees, Board of Pensions and Health Care Benefits, and Cabinet will be working together to develop a strategy.

I would like you to know that the Cabinet has worked hard at being a team- respecting and appreciating each other's gifts; and supporting one another as a team should.

We especially want to thank God for our Resource Assistants: Doris Dalton, Clarita Krall, Sheila Milz, Christine Eddy, Lin George and Marianne Unangst. They are an invaluable support to the district offices and the local churches we serve. We also thank God for the Bishop's Executive Secretary, Amy Botti. She is a tremendous gift to the annual conference.

Finally, we want to thank our families for their love and support.

We give God thanks for the privilege of serving Christ and the Annual Conference, and covet your prayers for the year to come. Let's trust in the Lord together; discern the path together ; and take the journey together.