

June 16, 2016

SUPERINTENDENTS' REPORT TO THE EPAUMC ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
Tribute to God ~ Testimony of Thanks

Introduction

I am Anita Adams Powell, Superintendent of Central District and Dean of the Cabinet, one of 6 district superintendents who provide oversight for the congregations and clergy of Eastern PA Conference.

Today, we present this report as a Tribute to God who called us into service, and a Testimony of Thanks to you, as we share the many ways the Holy Spirit has moved over the churches and communities of our Conference.

We are engaged in a process called SLI: Spiritual Leadership Inc. The core components are on Loving, Learning, and Leading. One of our most recent efforts is to develop a Vision Statement reflecting who we would like to become as Conference leaders and as an Annual Conference. The first draft of the statement is: "To model the beloved community as we empower Eastern PA Conference to be spiritual centers for the transformation of lives, communities and the world." It is our prayer that the Spirit of God will lead us in this journey.

SING: Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on us  
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Melt us; mold us; fill us; use us  
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**We thank the Spirit of God for using Southwest District! I am District Superintendent, Bumkoo Chung.** We are thankful that God has called into being a fledgling new faith community that worships in a downtown art gallery on Sunday evenings. At the same time, an existing congregation has expanded its ministry to other campuses. Another congregation has embraced a much-needed weekday breakfast ministry for poor neighbors who have been going to an Episcopal Church daily for 30 years.

A United Methodist Women's group joined in on the "Umbrella Defense" to take a stand against human trafficking. The group became aware of the issue a year ago, when they hosted the founder of a Lancaster nonprofit that works to save women from sex trafficking.

We celebrate the Lifetree Café that meets weekly at a local Inn with about 15-20 people at every meeting. They have discussed topics such as: "How to have

a Healthy Argument;” “Schindler's Youngest Survivor Speaks;” “Taking God to Work;” “Are We Too Tough on Crime, or Not Tough Enough?” “Loving Those with Cancer;” “The Witch Next Door; How to Live to 100;” “Is the Devil Real?” Lifetree Café’s topics for June include: “Overcoming Life’s Obstacles”, “Political Correctness – Where do You Draw the Line?” “Tell Me the *REAL* Story – the Amazing Power of Honesty; and “Temptation: Why Good Men Go Bad.”

We celebrate the Mission Connexions who collected food for Thanksgiving baskets and for the local food bank; who gathered school supplies and other items for classrooms; who organized yard sales to benefit the food bank, as well as to support the community kitchen cupboard. For all of this, we give thanks!

**We thank the Spirit of God for using Southeast District! I am District Superintendent, Dawn Taylor-Storm.** The Southeast District participated in One Book: One District, reading *Kingdom Come* by Reggie McNeal. Reggie reminds us that Jesus called us to pray: “Thy kingdom come, not thy church come.” As we focus on building God’s kingdom, the Southeast District seeks to provide new places for new people. From Narcotics Anonymous Programs, to community clothing shop, to Juneteenth celebration in the city of Chester, to providing filled backpacks for children, the Southeast District is on the move, remembering that each and every life is worthwhile. Multiple churches are engaging the LifeTree Café model and gathering offsite to discuss faith in a relaxed, welcoming setting over dinner. Our two vital Latino Churches minister to first and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Latinos and call our denomination to prioritize ministry with the Latino community.

This year, the district began an intentional partnership with Lincoln University, our nation's first degree granting historically black college. The Southeast District also has a yearly international mission project. During the past two years, the 66 district churches on the Southeast District raised over \$106,000 to build and equip a pediatric clinic in Mpasa, Congo. This will be the first clinic for children for the United Methodist Congo Partnership in Mpasa, Congo and will provide health services and medical care to hundreds of children daily. Ground-breaking will occur at the site in the fall of 2016. As the early Methodists built hospitals, so too, we are returning to our Wesleyan roots as we bring hope and healing to the children of Mpasa, Congo. This project represents the best of who we can be as a connectional church. We are grateful that God’s focus for the Southeast District has enabled abundant life for all of God's people ... locally and globally.

**We thank the Spirit of God for using Northwest District! I am District Superintendent Gary Nicholson.** It is with thanksgiving that the NW District has initiated & completed major initiatives to bring renewal to the church, and transformation to the communities around us. A Mission ConneXion launched a Life Tree Café, an outreach to the unchurched held at a local restaurant. Life Tree Cafe provides a safe place for people to gather and reflect on important issues of their lives and their spiritual implications in a non-judgmental setting.

We are grateful that the NW District Small Church Team brings together pastors & laity from churches with 30 or less in average worship attendance. They meet regularly for mutual encouragement, resourcing, & strategizing. NW District celebrates what God is doing through small churches who connect the love of God to the people around them.

This fall sixteen NW District Churches will complete a two year self-study and strategic planning program called “Shifts” under the leadership of a consultant. Five workshops, followed by five coaching sessions, supplemented with special readings, have given teams of four laity with their pastor the opportunity to learn how to create actionable goals and move their congregations through five shifts: Fellowship to Hospitality; Worship as an Event to Worship as a Lifestyle; Membership to Discipleship; “Serve Us” to “Service,” & Survival to Generosity.

This complements the district wide emphasis on being intentional and strategic, examining current practices and asking whether they are still effective. Each year churches are asked to develop specific, written, multi-year strategies in each of these five areas basic to the life of every church: Leading people to faith in Christ; Growing people in Christ’s likeness; Engaging every person in mission in the community; Pooling the financial resources entrusted to us by God for the work of God’s Kingdom; and Gathering people for worship which becomes a transforming encounter with God. For this, we praise God!

**We thank the Spirit of God for using Northeast District! I am District Superintendent, Irving Cotto.**

The NE district is geographically the largest district covering several urban centers and many rural areas. The District Churches sponsor Two Mission Projects. First, for the Mpsa initiative, \$4,500 was collected in order to feed 300 children weekly. The second project is the Campership Campaign. Over \$5,000 dollars have been raised to send kids to any of our four Eastern Pennsylvania Conference camps.

The Northeast District is presently spearheading three Latino Ministry Initiatives: An ecumenical shared ministry in Easton, PA; an Allentown downtown new church start and community; and a Hazelton Latino Ministry.

Every year we conduct quarterly Clergy Breakfasts for the purpose of fellowship, prayer, continuing education and recognitions. Our last gathering featured a faculty from Drew University who led us in a creative Bible study.

At least three times a year, the DS leads a Mission Connexion Facilitator's meeting centered on prayer, study and updates. There are at least 10 active Mission Connexions engaged in very creative ministries bringing together the talents and volunteerism of the participating churches.

This year, the Tools for Ministry was centered on poverty. The centerpiece of this event was a poverty simulation which raised people's awareness concerning the realities surrounding the poor.

The NE District Teams of Transformation and Connectional Ministry Team provide support to the local churches in various ways: sharing of expertise, financial assistance, especially the recently created clergy benevolence emergency fund. We thank God for these blessings!

**We thank the Spirit of God for using East District! I am District Superintendent Tracy Bass.** The East District has embarked on a plan to revitalize, regenerate, and restart one of its urban churches. The restoration is part of the district's "One Church at a Time" initiative. The District is coming together to renovate and improve the worship space and the common areas of the church, and with the assistance of the city's watershed project to beautify the edifice grounds. The water department will install a cistern and construct water gardens on the church lawn. District churches have been asked to donate their time, talent, or tithe as a way to participate in this district initiative. The restorative and beautification work comprise only one phase of the initiative which has become a district mission project.

Contemporaneous efforts are being made to reach out to and develop ministries with the over 300 children who attend the public school housed at the church or use the gymnasium. We are also endeavoring to partner with the hundreds of additional children and families throughout the surrounding community. We invite and covet your prayers as we seek to maintain Christ's presence through this UMC.

Additionally, the East District will continue its focus on spiritual growth as we:

- Consider what it means to live out our lives as faithful Christians and United Methodists;
- Begin our yearlong emphasis on the church, small groups and individuals as spiritual centers; and
- Fortify and shore-up our Mission ConneXion groups for our witness in the local communities and around the world.

We look forward to the coming year as we continue to look for new and exciting ways to live out the Great Commission and the Great Commandment for the glory of God!

**We thank the Spirit of God for using Central District!** The past two years involved the development of a “CD Missional Strategy,” a comprehensive framework within which to capture the ministry of the District. Jeremiah 29:11 is the Scripture that serves as its foundation: “For surely I know the plan I have for you, says the Lord. It is a plan for your future; and it is a future with hope.” Within this framework, clergy & lay serve together in 4 organizational teams to help guide Central District into God’s vision & into our purpose.

Together, the focus is to strengthen congregations by **encouraging, equipping, empowering & engaging** in ministry within the local church & into the community. This emphasis takes the form of (1) Building stronger relationships through vital conversations & effective communication; (2) Conducting local church assessments leading to the development of ministry action plans, with implementation supported by coaching; (3) training congregations to connect with communities; (4) providing district funding for clergy/laity to attend learning events, followed by coaching to implement identified new ministries. All for the purpose of making disciples & expanding the kingdom of God!

God continues to equip & empower congregations even as we are already encouraged & engaged in relevant ministry! We thank God for congregations who “Love mercy, DO justice, & walk humbly with our God” ... who faithfully engage in worship experiences & feeding programs with the poor; organize food pantries; distribute clothing; participate in social justice initiatives related to poverty, homelessness, public school education, employment, immigrations, domestic violence, gun violence, incarceration; AND support missions in the US, as well as in Haiti, Africa, Asia, India & North & South America. Finally, we are thankful that the Building Project for one of our urban churches is almost completed; with Central District having contributed \$180,000 in addition to church furnishings and equipment! We are truly grateful for the faithfulness of God!

### Conclusion

As you can see, the Spirit of the Living God is, indeed, moving in the congregations and communities of Eastern PA Conference ...

melting us  
molding us  
filling us ... and  
using us ...

all to the glory of God!

This is the Cabinet's Tribute to God and Testimony of Thanks to you! We are grateful for the privilege to serve as we endeavor to be the beloved community, empowering YOU to be the spiritual centers to transform lives, communities and the world.

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