

## 2010 Report of the District Superintendents to the Eastern Pennsylvania UMC Annual Conference

Rev. Dr. Christopher Jacob Kurien, Dean of the Cabinet

Grace and Peace to you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Tomorrow we will be celebrating Pentecost; and in that celebration we will hear (yet again) the awesome account of the advent of the promised Holy Spirit, who, with a rush of a mighty wind, filled a room, filled the believers gathered there, and sent them out into the streets to proclaim the mighty acts of God in Jesus Christ!

The following day marks the anniversary of John Wesley's Aldersgate experience. Wesley's journal entry describes a personal, life-changing Pentecost experience. He wrote:

*"In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while the leader was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away **my** sins, even **mine**, and saved **me** from the law of sin and death."*

When the Cabinet gathers, we take time to be centered in the Living Christ. We have a period of devotion, a time of sharing and an unhurried time of prayer. When we are on retreat, we engage in extended periods of Bible Study and worship, which include anointing and/or a celebration of Holy Communion. In the faithful practice of these spiritual disciplines we anticipate the presence of the promised Holy Spirit, whose wisdom and power is necessary in the ministry of the Cabinet.

The Cabinet is especially blessed with diversity...we're even a little more diverse than the disciples who experienced that first rush of a mighty wind.

We are racially and ethnically diverse

We have male and female colleagues working together

There's a wide variety of life & ministry experiences

Even our Myers / Briggs results are a little different from one another.....

In our times together we are constantly reminded to give God thanks for the gift of diversity in the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference and our Cabinet. We marvel at how the mighty wind of the Holy Spirit rushes in on us when we acknowledge, affirm, and celebrate our diversity.

This year, Dr. Dorothy Watson Tatem was appointed to the Cabinet and installed as the District Superintendent of the East District. We give God thanks for her wonderful witness.

The ministry of the Cabinet doesn't solely take place behind closed doors. Just as the Holy Spirit inspired the disciples of Jesus to take the message "into the neighborhood", so the Cabinet goes "into the neighborhood" to see and hear what God is doing there.

Although we usually meet at the Conference Offices, there are times when we met at various neighborhoods of the conference such as Simpson Meadows in Downingtown, Camp Pocono Plateau, Hebron UMC in Lebanon, Historic St. George's UMC in Philadelphia and Lancaster Theological Seminary in Lancaster. In addition we were able to involve in mission and ministry in two other neighborhoods. We cooked and served a meal in Chester, PA with the help of St. Daniel's church; and we led an interactive devotional period with the women's section of the Lebanon County Correctional Facilities.

When we're not meeting as a Cabinet, each of us go "into the neighborhoods" of our districts: meeting with Staff-Parish Relations Committees, convening Charge Conferences, meeting with clusters of Pastors, worshipping with congregations, attending special events, sometimes preaching and sometimes leading a workshop or two. During the "Charge Conference Season", which is from September through December, and "Appointment Season", which is from January through May or June, we're "in the neighborhood" just about every week night and several times throughout a weekend.

The Fall and Spring Bishop's Day on the Districts also took us "into the neighborhood". In the Fall Bishop Johnson met with various groups of clergy to address clergy self-care. This effort of Bishop Johnson included a meeting with clergy spouses, which resulted in the formation of clergy spouse fellowship groups on some of the districts.

The Bishop's Day on the districts in the Spring was a town hall meeting for the purpose of getting feedback from the neighborhood regarding the future ministry and structure of our Conference. Conference Director of Finance and Administration, Peter DiNofia and Conference Director of Pension and Health Care Benefits, Jo Fielding joined the Bishop to address financial and health care issues.

Prior to the town hall meetings, the Bishop and Cabinet spent untold hours with various official groups of the Annual Conference, as well as a focus groups, discussing and praying over the future ministry and structure of the EPA Conference.

Our district offices have also been involved with the implementation of a new website and data system.

We'd like to take a moment to give God thanks for Bishop Peggy Johnson. Her leadership has been invaluable to us as we have reviewed and examined the organization, mission, and future goals of the Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference.

The experiences of being "in the neighborhood" inspire and inform our more-cloistered meeting times.

We also give God thanks for the Director of Congregational Transformation, Lillian Smith and Peter DiNofia who are the Extended Cabinet members. They also bring their experiences of being "in the neighborhood" to keep Bishop Johnson and the Cabinet informed about what God

is doing “in the neighborhood.” Conference Lay Leader, Dr. Mary White periodically brings the voice of the laity to the cabinet.

Bishop Johnson is also noted for “hosting the neighborhood”

She has opened her doors and given access to just about anyone who’d like an audience or a conversation with her. And she has taken each encounter seriously.

It’s amazing that she knows as much as she does about our neighborhoods for the couple of years she’s been our Bishop – and while having similar responsibilities for the Peninsula-Delaware Annual Conference.

Being “in the neighborhood” has helped us identify how we as a Cabinet and we as a Conference need to be equipped for ministry in our neighborhoods.

This year we attended the School of Congregational Development along with Rev. Lillian Smith and the High Potential Churches of the EPA. We also participated in the Bishop’s Mid-Winter Retreat and an Effective Ministry Training, which included training in the Myers/Briggs Personality inventory. And we attended and gave leadership to the annual Cross-Cultural Appointment Workshop with pastors and churches in cross cultural appointments in the Philadelphia episcopal area. This summer several of us will be returning to the School of Congregational Development; and this fall several of us will begin Interim Ministry Training. We attend these trainings with the intent to resource ministry in our neighborhoods.

One of the ways for equipping local churches for ministry in the neighborhood is the “Tools for Ministry Training”. The Cabinet partners with the Conference Board of Laity to determine the workshops to be offered. Each district was slightly different in the format of the day and in the workshops offered. This year the format included plenary sessions, which were well-received. Usually the workshops of “Tools for Ministry” are meant to equip those elected to leadership in a local church. This year’s plenary sessions and workshops were determined by two things:

What is needed by our churches to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world,

And the four focus areas of our General Church are:

- Developing Principled Christian Leaders
- Creating New Places for all God’s People
- Engaging in Ministry with the Poor
- Stamping Out Killer Diseases By Improving Health Globally

A number of churches also had representation at the stewardship training arranged through a partnership between the Parish Resource Center of Lancaster, PA and the EPA United Methodist Foundation.

We were especially excited to lead a Call to Ministry retreat this January for fifteen of our middle and high school youth at Gretna Glen camp, who are exploring their call to ministry. The purpose of the event was to inform and equip the youth for taking the next steps in responding to their call. We are committed to making this as an annual event so that the Bishop and the cabinet could stay in touch with youth who received the call because these youth may one day be leading our churches.

The Scriptures tell us that when the day of Pentecost ended, about 3,000 entered into a relationship with Jesus Christ and began a life of Christian discipleship. Their waiting, their praying, their rehearsal of the teachings of Jesus, and their going out into the neighborhood with the life-changing message and works of Jesus made a difference in their neighborhood.

We want to commend you for all that we have seen and heard in your neighborhoods. We have seen the presence and power of the Holy Spirit at work in and through you. When we gather for a Cabinet meeting we share this good news with Bishop Johnson; and do so with grateful hearts. Your vision and passion for ministry will increase the Kingdom!

Before we conclude, we would like to thank the District Resource Assistants, whose work is greatly appreciated by the Superintendent and churches of the districts. We would like to thank Amy Botti – Executive Secretary to the Bishop and David Fife – Assistant to the Bishop for resourcing the Cabinet. And we would especially like to thank our families, who pray for us, support and love us through many a long season.

Please join me in concluding this report by singing, “Spirit of the Living God”  
And let this be our prayer as we enter a new year of mission and ministry in our neighborhoods.

Spirit of the living God Fall afresh on me  
Spirit of the living God Fall afresh on me  
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.  
Spirit of the living God Fall afresh on me

Amen.