

The Episcopal Address
June 2009
Bishop Julius Calvin Trimble

Increasing Our Level of Enthusiasm
FIT Challenge

“And whatever you do, in word or deed do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Colossians 3:17

As Paul talks about new life in Christ, he instructs believers in the Church to, Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, patience. “Bear one another, forgive one another...May the Peace of Christ rule your heart.”

There is much to be thankful for: Nine months and a few days, have passed since I was assigned as your Bishop. Racelder and I have come to live, lead, pray and worship with you. We will continue to come to you in your space which is God’s space to celebrate and challenge.

Dr. Charles Smith our conference treasurer and statistician has the data:

- 424 churches reporting one or more Professions of Faith
- 525 churches baptized infants, children and adults
- 514 Volunteer in Mission Teams and a 45% increase in individuals who gave time in direct service following the flooding of last summer
- Increase in weekday ministries

Rev. Karen Dungan and Dr. Art McClanahan can share many stories of mission and ministry engagement

Bev. Nolte can chronicle our 20 year Iowa Nigeria partnership that we celebrate this year.

Becky Woods and those pastors and laity who have been working since day one of flooding and tornadoes, can give account of current reality and present opportunities.

Your Bishop wants to do three things:

1. Ask some questions
2. Extend an invitation
3. Give encouragement

Is it well with your souls? Is it well with your bodies?

Are you connected with the true Vine, Jesus, who frees us to worship and witness and live in ways that balance our mission to make disciples of Jesus, transform the world and honor the gift of "Sabbath".

I realize that talking about self-care does not change reality. Just as talking about hospitality, does not make it radical or real.

Our words matter most when they are connected to our willingness to hold each other accountable and enthusiastically, give our best in the name of the one who gave his all!

Bishop will you tell us where your vision for the FIT Challenge came from?

God revealed to me that when we are at our best, we give our best. Pastors who carefully keep their own spiritual wells replenished, take Sabbath, walk, run, bowl, fly fish, farm, travel, camp, retreat, are better able to join others in productive ministry and equip the saints for ministry.

Focus on a few things that matter most and attempt great things for God and expect great things from God. Self-care is important as we honor the gift of life. Walking Clubs (early Gatherings of John Wesley called Holy Club), Runners, Bikers, invite others. ***Focus*** not on problems, neglecting the problem solver. ***Focus*** on

our commitment to long term recovery. Living the United Methodist way based on Scriptural and Social Holiness. **Focus** on what we have, as opposed to what we do not have. Let's come to next annual conference in better shape physically and spiritually.

Invest: Friends, we don't have forever to save souls and transform the world. I am encouraged by an 11% increase in youth participation and a modest increase in weekday ministries. We have, right now, an opportunity to join the UMC in providing leadership in starting 650 new congregations by 2012. Three million residents in Iowa. As soon as we leave annual conference, new outreach efforts, strengthening and revitalizing existing congregations needs to ramp up. Too many churches have given conflict top billing and honoring the wishes of those long-time members, while neglecting the hunger of seekers and new members who want to know Christ in ways that anchors them amidst the storms of life.

Telling the Stories of Jesus

"God who is rich in mercy out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ."

Ephesians 2:4-5

I don't think we have a shortage of people or resources or things to do. United Methodist are too often lacking in joy and enthusiasm. Leonard Sweet, quoting Bono, **"Religion is what is left when the Spirit has left the Building."** The Holy Spirit is what gives life to radical Hospitality.

Missional Communities, rooted in love for Jesus, are less concerned with attracting people to the church and more enthusiastic about being the church that lives in the world. It does not yet appear what we shall be.....

- 1876 - a Western Union memo said, "The telephone has too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication. This device is inherently of no value.
- 1899 - Charles H. Duell, who was at the time the commissioner of the U.S. Patents office, said "everything that can be invented has already been invented."
- 1927 - H. M. Warner of Warner Bros. asked the question, "Who in the world wants to hear actors talk?"
- 1943 - The chairman of IBM announced that, "There could not possibly be more than five people in the world who would want to own a computer.

Too often I hear people say the United Methodist Church is losing members, influence and young people. Focus on too many things. Council of Bishops and General Conference affirmed four areas of focus for 2008-2012

1. ***Developing principled Christian leaders.***
2. ***Creating new churches and renewing existing congregations***
3. ***Eradicating poverty and embracing the poor***
4. ***Improving global health***

The FIT Challenge is a call to focus our commitment in Iowa Annual Conference. *Long term recovery, new opportunities with a sense of urgency for reaching new people. Embracing innovation as we do ministry. Evangelism without apology. Self-care with accountability.*

\$2 Million dollars staring today. *Is the time right and ripe for buying damaged homes and rebuilding them to provide affordable housing in flood ravaged communities?*

There is a need for pastors to be trained to

- ***start new churches,***
- ***revitalize churches with trained teams of laity***
- ***helping healthy churches start satellite worship and plant new congregations***

- ***support creative ministries that bring hope to rural communities and city neighborhoods.***

When I fly in and out of Des Moines, when I drive throughout Iowa Annual Conference, I see signs of our great colleges and universities. I am reminded that I don't have US Cellular, but I like their billboards. Pioneer seed, Principal Insurance. I am unapologetically Christian and unashamedly United Methodist. I told Communications, "people need signs from the United Methodist Church that encourage during these days of stress and strife.

Above all, I want us to pray.....***Much Prayer, Much Power. Little Prayer, Little Power.***

Some time ago, someone was criticizing the church and framed their comments with the phrase, "I'm just playing the devils advocate".

The devil does not need an advocate. As my wife is prone to say, if you are going to be an advocate:

- Be a child advocate
- Be an advocate for Hospitality
- Be a senior advocate
- Be an advocate for those hungry and homeless
- Be an advocate for church renewal in the Iowa Annual Conference
- Be an advocate for "Nothing But Nets"
- Be an advocate for Women at the Well
- Be an advocate for those who are weary and heavy laden
- Be an advocate for School for Lay Ministry
- Be an advocate for Disciple Bible study
- Be an advocate for justice and mercy