

September 2017

Hello Friends,

This month I am forgoing a personal article to our newsletter in favor of calling us to engage in thought and prayer around our upcoming Charge Conference agenda. Below, you will find our District Superintendent's letter summarizing our Bishop's newly casted vision and outlining the way we will begin working at it in our District. I will say, that your love for our Lord Jesus Christ and your growing passion to relate others to Him and His church is the firmest of all foundations. Please give prayerful, thoughtful attention to the following guidelines--

June 21, 2017

Dear Friends,

Hello . . . I am excited for the profound way that the Holy Spirit spoke through our Bishop at this year's Annual Conference in Hampton! She has given us a vision.

In a very animated way, from the pulpit and while standing on a chair on the conference floor, she told us in no uncertain terms that all of us were to be in the business of developing a process for making disciples in our churches and communities. In fact, she set a goal of every church doing this by 2020. **This means that in the next two years, every congregation will have a process in place to intentionally make "disciples of Jesus Christ who are lifelong learners who influence others to serve."**

I believe it is critical to hold on to the still hot embers from Annual Conference and send this spiritual heat into our upcoming Charge Conferences.

This year, we are going to do our Charge Conferences differently . . . **we will be gathering in cluster conferences where each church will speak to their progress on the Bishop's vision . . .** . . Each church will share with the other churches in the cluster about their work and plans toward meeting the Bishop's goal for every congregation to have a discipleship process in place. We will also have a time of worship and Charge Conference business for each church in the cluster. My prayer is that this will be an opportunity for all of us to learn from one another as we continue the critical kingdom business of making disciples.

. . . I look forward to spending time with each of you this fall!

Sincerely in Christ,

Pete

August 2, 2017

Dear Richmond District Churches:

I hope and pray you are doing well this summer season and that these days have been a time of refreshment and re-creation for you!

As referenced in June, we are working our way towards a series of dynamic Charge Conference gatherings. In contrast to previous years, we will be gathering in clusters. You will recall how our Bishop, at Annual Conference invited us to a “new thing” with the goal that every congregation have a discipleship process in place by 2020.

These cluster conferences will be designed to facilitate the Bishop’s vision for us. I recognize that most if not all of you have discipleship work already in place. Indeed, you may have a specific process in place now.

The goal of this time is to walk alongside your efforts, and prayerfully encourage and enable you to go deeper in this discipleship and seek long term fruit.

“Making Disciples” has become a common phrase for us. It slips off the tongue and mission statements easily. The words are so often employed, however, that we can fail to process the meaning. **Scripture and history have proven consistently that no lasting effort at “new things” or revival occur without the church also going through a hard review and recasting of what we believe.** We might have spiritual fireworks for a brief season, but the real transformation that changes the world in accordance with our mission statement occurs only when we think deeply about our beliefs, grasping firmly to what has commonly been phrased as “live orthodoxy”. All that is to say that if we are going to develop a process around making disciples, let’s be clear about what a disciple is and why a process matters. This business is too important to simply go through the motions.

As a result, at our cluster conferences, I am asking each congregation to be prepared to speak to your work around three questions. I anticipate that you will want to spend some quality time with your leadership in the months to come to address the topic with some in depth conversation. A preaching series around discipleship may be in order to be prepared to address the following items:

1. How do you define a disciple of Jesus Christ?

Here I am asking you to think about a working definition around which you will gather in the coming years. When we make disciples, what are we, by God’s grace, trying to make?

2. What is the relationship between a disciple and the Gospel?

All of us recognize and celebrate that disciples follow the earthly teachings of Jesus. Certainly disciples employ the disciplines of the Christian life such as worship, prayer and study. But if Jesus is alive, and died on a cross so that we could enter into forgiveness and have this contemporary and eternal relationship with the Father which we are called to announce to others, it means all that and more.

3. What are the key things you will be doing between now and 2020 to ensure that you have a discipleship process in place for people in all ages and stages of life?

At the cluster conference, each church will present their discernment around these three questions. You will each share the fruit of your labors with other cluster congregations so that all of us may profit. The presentation should be from your pastor and a key lay leader.

After the presentation, we will ask your congregation to bring a “gift” to the gathered conference. This can be a song, a skit, a video, or an artistic creation that represents a central feature or theme to your coming discipleship efforts. There are so many inspirational folks in our midst and we will be humbled to have you share them from your congregation!

We will hear from all the gathered churches. **The presentation time for each congregation, including the creative gift segment will be ten minutes.**

After all of the eight or nine congregations have presented, we will have a break out time for each congregation to hold their individual conference. This should last approximately fifteen minutes. I will preside at the churches that do not have an elder. Churches with an elder for a pastor will have their pastor preside for this session. My hope to be able to have some time with each church at the gathering.

Group I—Sunday, October 1, 3-5:30

Asbury Memorial
Chamberlayne Heights
Greenwood
Highland Springs
Huguenot—host site
Laurel Park
Skipwith
St. Luke's

~ PASTOR TODD