

## DISTRICT DAYS WITH BISHOP BICKERTON Spring 2018

### Mission, Vision, Core Values

- I. When I was last with you in the fall, I was pretty honest with you about the realities facing us as an Annual Conference. I threw a lot of statistics at you that were, and are, pretty sobering:
  - 434 congregations
  - 137 worship less than 25
  - 81% worship less than 100
  - A decline in baptisms & confirmations of over 50% in the last ten years.

We had a lot of conversation about that and it wasn't all gloom and doom. There were hopeful signs and determination in our voices that night. We knew then as we know now that we had to develop a renewed sense of purpose and passion.

We knew then, as we know now, that we needed to develop a deeper sense of "why" we exist and we needed to align ourselves more fully to our "why."

I came to you that night with the verses of scripture found in I Corinthians 12:14-31 with special emphasis on verse 31: *"But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a more excellent way."*

- II. Over the winter I traveled to all six districts with the same presentation and conducted the same conversations. My desire was to look for common themes and similar concerns, common passions and similar desires. How might we all come around these clear realities and approach them with a similar passion and purpose?

This past month I hosted our two Confirmation rallies. I was at Valley Stream out on Long Island. The theme of my time with the kids was: "We're stronger together than any of us are apart." As we dove into the conversation, the kids got excited and animated. These 12-13-14 year olds started talking about successful basketball teams and dance recitals, playing the piano, and winning a video game. You can be a great player but if you don't learn how to be a part of a team, you'll lose. You can have great music playing but if you don't coordinate your feet and your body to the rhythm you'll look foolish. You can have a great instrument but if your right hand and your left hand aren't in sync with each other, the keys won't reveal a beautiful song. If your eyes and your hands are coordinated with the screen, you'll never get the full essence of the game.

And I shared a story. Last month I was in Atlanta, Georgia for a meeting of the General Board of Global Ministries. I have the joy of being the President of the United Methodist Committee on Relief. In that meeting, we authorized \$46 million dollars in grants for Global Health & Disaster Recovery. \$17 million went to Puerto Rico alone. It was an unprecedented amount of money given at one time. When we approved the

grants, I said to the group: "I want us to pause for just a moment and reflect on two things. Let's think about the people – the faces of the people that many of us know in this room – who will receive the benefits of these gifts. And let's think about the people – the faces of the people that many of us know – who gave these gifts. The beauty of the UMC is that we know the faces of those who give and the faces of those who receive. The fear everyone had was around "donor fatigue." There is too much going on and people are tired of giving. The reality was that we received \$46 million dollars. How was that possible? 1) By giving it and combining it together and 2) By having a mission in front of us. When we have a clear mission in front of us, leaders can just stand aside and watch people run toward us. When we don't there is confusion and chaos. When we do, there is purpose and unity.

III. The natural disaster here in the New York/Connecticut Annual Conference is that we are dying. Our churches are not growing. Our relevance is declining. Our sustainability is waning.

Our opportunity is to come around a common purpose, a mission that will enable us to coordinate our efforts and hold one another accountable on the journey that lies ahead.

As I traveled around the six districts, we were listening for a common theme, a common passion, a common desire. We were looking for our "why."

What came out of that was this:

### MISSION

We strive to share God's love by creating safe places where all are accepted and welcomed, connecting the needs of people to the presence of God, and transforming the world through Christ.

We were all saying that we needed to create something, connect to someone, and be a part of a change around us.

Create safe places where all are accepted. There probably isn't a more theologically appropriate phrase than this. John Wesley & the New Room. Jesus and his invitation (come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest).

Connect the needs of people with the presence of God. John Wesley & the miners. God's purpose "And the word became flesh and dwelt among us." Communion liturgy:

*Your Spirit anointed him*

*to preach good news to the poor,  
to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
and to announce that the time had come  
when you would save your people.*

*He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and ate with sinners.*

Transform the world through Christ. John Wesley and the Anglicans. Jesus and the disciples. Paul blinded on the Damascus road. Lazarus brought back to life. People who are changed when God knocks on their door and says, through people like us, there is a different, a more better way.

But we are not there yet. We have plenty of work before us to get there. But we have to be able to picture in our minds what it is that we are shooting for. What is the target ahead of us that we see. What is our vision?

## **VISION**

We see strong leaders who develop vital congregations that eagerly make new disciples, actively nurture existing disciples, and passionately advocate for the needs and concerns of all people.

If we are ever to realize our “why” we must focus on how to create strong and courageous leaders and we must develop vital and relevant congregations. The manner by which we do that is different on Long Island than it is in Connecticut. It’s different in the Catskills than it is in Manhattan. But, it is the same in principle.

We see strong leaders, lay and clergy, who are eager to make new disciples (Forrest Burdette). We see strong leaders, lay and clergy, who actively nurture existing disciples. (Accountability and Christ-centered teaching). We see a group of people who passionately advocate for the needs and concerns of all people.

I don’t know about you but when I see that, when I paint a picture of a local church doing those things, I see a growing congregation. I see joy. I see engagement. I see a stretching of the mind. I see Jesus in the flesh.

In our conversations around the Annual Conference, in all those breakout groups with various teams and committees, these were the Core Values, the driving purpose that gave rise to that mission & vision:

## **CORE VALUES**

The values that drive us are deep love for God and unconditional love for all people. We value collaboration and partnerships that demonstrate God’s love to a world that divides and alienates. We value relationships that foster accountability, excellence, and an ability to engage in open, honest, and respectful conversations. We value the hope that we have in Christ that, when discovered, brings us a unity of purpose, a joy that enlivens our spirit, and a peace that surpasses all understanding.

Do you want to love God deeply?

How can we love unconditionally?

What does it mean to collaborate and partner together in a way that demonstrates a different way?

How can we know one another better in relationship?

Be transparent and willing to be held accountable?

Can we revive our hope in Christ, the only source that can bring us unity, joy, and peace?

IV. I have come today to talk with you about “Convergence” & “Alignment.”

One of the ways Webster’s Dictionary defines convergence is: *“A coordinated movement, like that of the two eyes, so that the image of a single point is formed.”*

I love that image. Our two eyes, created in the same body, are in similar yet very different positions. The positioning of our two eyes, and their coordinated movement together, focused on an image in front of us, creates the image of a single point before us.”

How might we converge our various viewpoints, our various realities, and our various contexts into a single point in front us, a point that we are working toward: creating safe spaces, connecting the needs of people with the presence of God, changing the world into the image of Christ?

Webster’s Dictionary defines alignment like this: *“The proper positioning or state of adjustment of parts in relation to each other.”*

That’s funny, isn’t it? Doesn’t that sound a lot like this?

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*

*<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? <sup>18</sup> But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.*

*<sup>19</sup> If all were a single member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many members, yet one body. <sup>21</sup> The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” <sup>22</sup> On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup> and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; <sup>24</sup> whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, <sup>25</sup> that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup> If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. (I Corinthians 12:12-26)*

Friends, we are, now more than ever, in need of convergence. From our different perspectives and contexts, we need to see a single point in front us: making new disciples, nurturing existing disciples, advocating for the needs and concerns of the world, and changing that world into the image of Christ.

But in order to do that, we have to be able to surrender ourselves so that we first can be changed into the image of Christ.

We, more than ever, need an alignment job: *“A proper positioning or state of adjustment of parts in relation to each other.”*

An alignment of prayer, scripture, purpose and practice in all that we do:

- Our Budget
- Our Staff
- Our Training
- Our Implementation

I want us to set our sights on a mission in front of us. We don't have much time. If our decline continues, we will fail at our mission. But if we can clear out the clutter and align our resources and our energies around that vision, we can find a new day of purpose and vitality. But we have to decide that we want to be different. And we have to let God have ultimate control of us again. This is complicated. There are lots of moving parts – but it is possible.

\$46 million. Keeping the vision in front of us. We are better together than any of us are apart.

*“But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a more excellent way.”*