

Report of the District Superintendent

June 15, 2013

Recently, a lay person in one of our churches talked with me about the progress of the district. "I know that when you first came, you shared a passion for Revival. Do you see that happening in the district?" I appreciated the question, but it was difficult for me to answer. My heart has been yearning for revival for almost twenty years. In that time, I have preached hundreds of sermons, baptized dozens, and served our Lord to the best of my ability. But my hunger to see revival in our land has not yet been satisfied. In fact, I used to think that when it comes, it will be obvious, but perhaps it will not be until we are years into it. All we can do is prayerfully seek it, and then follow our Lord's commands whatever they may be.

Matthew tells the story of Jesus walking on the water near the end of an all night boat journey across the lake. The disciples leave first and fight the wind most of the night. Just before dawn, Jesus walks up to the boat - still far from shore. After the initial shock, Peter asks a strange request, "Tell me to come to you on the water." He wanted to experience the extraordinary for himself. Jesus, simply said, "Come." (Matthew 14:29)



I can identify with Peter in that I am eager to get out of boats that, because of such strong headwinds, are traveling slower than Jesus could walk. While it is not smart to jump out of the boat on our own, we can plead with God, "Tell me to come to you." Call me to a ministry that I cannot do on my own abilities. That call for me has been the prayer for Revival. Recently, this has taken the more specific form of the Great Commission. "Go and make disciples." Go across the street, build relationships with your neighbors, help them to grasp the gospel and point them to Jesus. The miracle I am hungering for is the lives of people across western New York and northern Pennsylvania being transformed by Christ: marriages being healed, addictions being broken, lives receiving a new purpose, and eternity being anticipated with hope.

In August, I traveled to China primarily to experience a church that I had heard was in the midst of revival. Despite unimaginable headwinds, the church in China has quietly been growing at more than 10% per year for more than two decades. The church has thrived, despite a lack of seminary trained pastors, limited use of buildings, and government persecution and harassment. There was an amazing joy and vitality among the Christians I met. The rest of the country exhibited a lavish prosperity, with vast construction projects and luxury cars. This shallow facade contrasted sharply with those I met in the church who had little in the way of possessions. Their faces beamed with newfound peace and they welcomed me as a brother. I worked with pastors who had been tortured by Mao, but were now seeing Christ victorious in their own land.

One of the great memories I have from the trip is being asked to conduct a baptism service while attending a house church service in an apartment building. Five women were ready to be baptized, most of whom were recent converts. Through an interpreter, I asked them to confess their faith in Jesus Christ and I poured water over their heads. It has since struck me that though the church in China is experiencing an extraordinary movement of God, perhaps exceeding in number all previous revivals, still the experience of these five ladies seemed

remarkably similar to most baptism services I have led in America. These were ordinary lives that had experienced the greatest of miracles - new life in Christ. This year, in the thirty three churches of the Western New York District, 222 new converts were baptized! While most of our churches may not be seeing explosive growth, each new believer experiences the miracle.



So while I pray for a movement that will transform our culture, I humbly submit to God's plan to transform the lives I encounter each day. I encourage you to join me in prayer for Revival. But, do not be surprised if God begins to answer this prayer in small imperceptible ways. Like the rain drops that have been falling most of this month, gradually they form creeks and rivers and before you realize it, the mighty Niagara.

My Work with Pastors

I consider my most important work to encourage and equip our pastors. I do this through individual meetings when I can. We also have monthly Leadership Development meetings for pastors. We have some amazing pastors in our thirty-three churches. I am not sure I tell them enough how much I admire them and appreciate the work they are doing. I hope you realize that Satan is seeking to undermine our churches by attacking our pastors. Some of his common enticements are discouragement, immorality, pride, and self-sufficiency. If he can weaken the pastors, he effectively paralyzes the church. This is one of the most demanding of callings. The expectations are so high and the tangible rewards comparatively few. Pray with me for healthy and pure pastors. This will result in healthy and powerful churches.

New Pastors

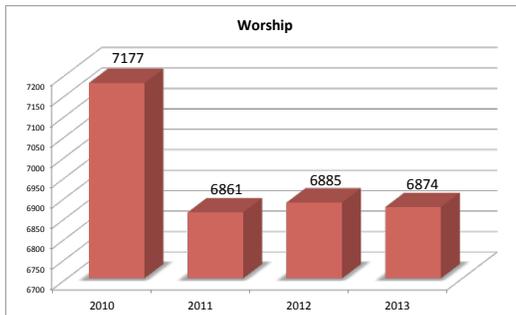
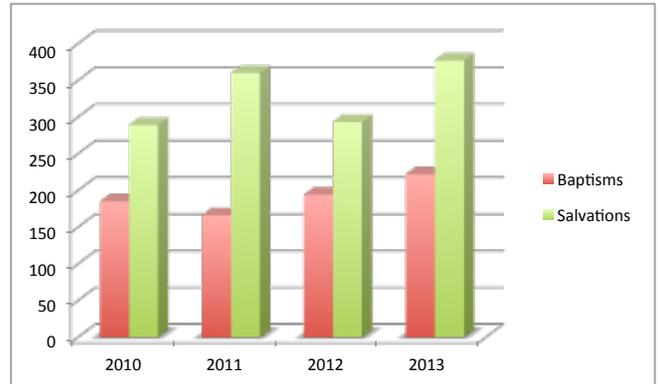
Another key responsibility I carry is to guide churches through pastoral transitions. As I met last summer with the board of First Wesleyan Church in Bradford, Pennsylvania, I didn't have a lot of prospects or solutions for this small church that was struggling financially. While I knew they were anxious to start looking at resumes, we spent several meetings primarily in prayer. At last, God led us to Chris TerBush, who took the church as his first assignment out of Indiana Wesleyan University. Though the church was only able to offer him a part-time salary, he brought Jeanette and their three kids into the parsonage, took another job to make ends meet, and worked to build the church. God is blessing as the church has experienced tremendous growth this year. The finances are up significantly and there is hope for great days ahead.

Karen Cleveland helped to fill the pulpit at East Leon, a small church in one of the most remote locations in our district. But God called her to make herself available to lead this small core of believers. I appointed her as interim in January and by April, the church unanimously called her to lead them as their next pastor. The church is growing by reaching the children of their community and by allowing Karen's passion for evangelism to influence everyone around her. On July 14, the church plans to baptize fourteen new believers!

This spring, we have two different churches in transition, North Collins and Angola. Both are trusting God to provide through this time of change. God seems to be working and they will each have a candidate preach at their church on June 23. Pray with me for God to give them discernment and to lead these churches in this next season of their ministry.

Statistical Signs of Progress

This year, our churches reported an increase in the number of salvations: 377 (+29%) and baptisms celebrated: 222 (+14%). Also, the offerings are up (+5%) and we gave more away to missions and other benevolences than ever before: \$1,846,793 (+5%). The metric that continues to show stagnation is our average worship attendance. This has been steady for the past three years. This year our district average attendance was 6,784 (-0.16%). This should not negate some outstanding growth in some churches. Almost half of our churches (15 of 33) experienced growth. Seven churches experienced growth of more than 10%. But as many churches experienced decline for a variety of reasons.



As we will hear in the State of the Church video from Dr. Jo Anne Lyon, the Wesleyan Church in North America is experiencing unprecedented growth in worship attendance. We can use our region's decline in population as an excuse when we are not growing. But, I believe God is calling us to increase our influence in our communities. In this conference, we will conduct the necessary business and conduct our elections. But I want to use this time to challenge you to one of two action steps that will help us reach more in our communities. The first is to plant new churches.

For reasons difficult to understand, new churches are our best tool to reach unreached people. The second is to focus on personal evangelism and baptisms. In our existing churches, we have one baptism for every 31 people in attendance. The District Board discussed this trend and are seeking for our district to work toward at least a 5% annual increase in worship attendance. Pray with me that we will be able to increase our influence in our communities.

Challenge

I believe Christ is calling us to seek the miraculous . . . to walk on water. God is calling us to trust in His supernatural ability. Each one of us is living in the midst of people who need us to be operating in this realm. One of the challenges I want you to take away from this conference is to hear from God regarding what he is desiring from your church and specifically your ministry. Will you call Jesus to ask you to walk on water? If He calls you, will you get out of the boat? Specifically, I will be asking you to pray about people you can influence for Christ and whom your church can lead to the public profession of their faith.

For the building of His Kingdom,

Joseph W. Jennings
District Superintendent

Summary of Work

- Preached and/or shared in each of our 33 churches.
- Led 7 monthly Leadership Development meetings.
- Conducted 9 pastoral evaluations, meeting individually with pastors and LBAs.
- Met individually with numerous pastors for coaching and/or mentoring.
- Led District Prayer Event in October, 2012.
- Led District Pastors & Spouses Retreat with Dr. Wayne Schmidt in January, 2013.
- Chaired 4 meetings of the District Board of Administration.
- Attended 4 meetings of the Houghton College Board of Trustees.
- Chaired various district boards and committees throughout the year.
- Officiated the funeral of Rev. David Hill.
- Lead a Vision Tour with four district pastors through Pennsylvania and Maryland.
- Led Pastoral searches at East Leon, Angola, and North Collins.
- Met with each Local Board of Administration at least once throughout the year.
- Met several times with other District Superintendents and General Superintendent Lyon.

Official Acts of the District Superintendent

- August 5, 2012 – I signed loan papers for the Wesleyan Church of Hamburg to borrow \$150,000 to purchase additional property on the east side of their property.
- August 8, 2012 – I signed papers requesting permission from the State of New York to sell the parsonage at 4608 Union Road in Cheektowaga.
- October 16, 2012 – I signed papers agreeing on price for land behind Ashwood Wesleyan Church for \$31,500.
- November 9, 2012 – I signed credit agreement for Gui's Lumber for Building Committee purchases.
- November 14, 2012 – I signed a Sale of Easement for The Vine Wesleyan Church for \$50,000.
- November 26, 2012 – I purchased a 2013 Honda Accord on behalf of the district. With the trade-in of the Ford Fusion, the cost was \$17,000.
- November 29, 2012 – I signed renewal of District's Health Insurance Plan for \$939.28/month: family, \$354.60/month: single.
- January 4, 2013 – I appointed Rev. Karen Cleveland to serve as Supply Pastor at East Leon Wesleyan Church for the remainder of the 2012-13 church year.
- January 22, 2013 – I signed contract with Pyramid Brokerage Company to seek to sell vacant land owned in trust for The Vine Wesleyan Church at 5335 William Street, Lancaster NY. The church is attempting to sell all or part of the remaining land at that property.
- February 19, 2013 – I signed the loan agreement between Christ Chapel and Wesleyan Investment Foundation for the church to have a line of credit for renovation costs at the church.
- March 13, 2013 – I signed papers to sell the 20 acres of vacant land adjacent to Ashwood Wesleyan Church for \$31,250. After surveys, commissions, and legal fees, the district received \$26,015.70, which went into the Church Development Fund.
- March 27, 2013 – I met with John Gallegos to discuss cooperation between Joy Community Church and the WNY District with the possibility of them becoming an affiliate church.