

Annual Report of the District Superintendent

June 16, 2018

It is a joy and honor to report to the delegates of the 157th Annual District Conference of the Western New York District of The Wesleyan Church. One of the perks of my job is to travel to each of your churches through the year; to worship with you in different languages and styles; at times, to discern God's direction for your church during significant decisions; and to celebrate milestones, changed lives and also the hope of heaven. Today then becomes an extraordinary day, as we all come together to do many of these things as one body. My prayer is that you would feel encouraged as you interact with your brothers and sisters from various congregations; that you would feel inspired and even challenged as you hear what God is doing in other communities; and that God would work in this session to more deeply unite us.

This year, the Lord has laid on my heart the theme of unity within the church. Jesus' fervent prayer for his disciples was that we would be one. Unity is not all of us becoming uniform and not even always agreeing about lesser issues. But it is recognizing our common faith and the core values that shape who we are as a church. There are three priorities that I am discovering shapes our Western New York churches. We sometimes lose sight of these, but allow me to share them, not to tell you to become what you are not, but to remind you of what we are and what unites us today.

Focus on Lost People

We are churches who have been established to bring the hope and holiness of Jesus Christ to people in our communities who do not know Him. If you could go back and talk with the pastor who planted your church, there would doubtless be an evangelistic fervor prompting him or her to start your church. As the church matures, there will be additional tasks needed to reinforce the institution, but if these other demands cloud our central passion for lost souls we will have forgotten the drive that motivates us to move forward. This is not a value that is unique to our district. Our General Superintendent, Wayne Schmidt has challenged the denomination to focus on disciples making disciples. When this becomes the norm, the church will thrive and we will see a passion for churches to multiply themselves into other communities where a transforming presence of the gospel is needed.

Focus on the Local Church

As I have now been here almost 8 years, I am appreciating the fact that our district recognizes that the most significant work of the church is done on the local church level. Neither the district nor the denomination is the focus, but the district exists to support the local church. There are structures and positions that through the years we have found to be helpful to equip the local churches to be healthy, but these need to be continually reevaluated and kept to a minimum so as not to drain resources and energy from the local church. Just as in the local church, we need to focus on equipping God's people for works of service rather than expect the professional staff to do ministry. So also in the denominational structure, we need to support and equip local churches to reach lost people and make disciples. I have tried to structure this conference so as not to highlight only those things the district is doing, but to celebrate effective and creative ways local churches are fulfilling our mission.

Focus on Partnership

As I was driving through a village, I saw a large sign advertising a prominent church. At the bottom of the sign, in large letters was written two core values: "Biblically Centered . . . Independent." I know they were saying they were not affiliated with a denomination, but I believe the Bible calls us not to be independent, but rather to be

'Celebrating every time a disciple makes a disciple and a church multiplies itself until the Wesleyan Church has a transforming presence in every zip code.'

"I have given them
the glory that you
gave me,
that they
may be one
as we are one -
I in them
and you in me -
so that they may be
brought to
complete unity."
- Jesus
John 17:22-23

interconnected. We started intentionally in 1861 as a connection of churches working together to reach this area. The Church works best when congregations operate almost as if they were one church.

While we value the local expression of the church, this does not mean that each church is out there fighting against Satan and his armies in isolation. If churches perceive themselves to be fighting alone, they end up primarily competing with the other churches for the loyalty of a limited number of Christians. I have challenged each church to develop partnerships as a step towards this interdependence. Today, you will hear various stories of churches helping other churches in exciting ways. If your church has not yet pursued this partnership approach, you are missing out on a blessing. I am asking you to begin by setting aside a percentage of your budget for when a need arises. When God prompts you, go, give, serve, and partner with another church as if a family member were to need your help. They do.

Pastoral Changes

This year has brought us several significant losses for our district. It had been 27 years since an active pastor died in our district. This year we lost two. **Casper Farrow** was a church planter and pioneer taking our district back into the city of Buffalo. He had served as pastor of Grace Community Wesleyan Church and before that was on staff at Eastern Hills. As his wife, Barbara was speaking at his funeral, it became clear to me that she should continue the work at Grace Community as a lay pastor.

John Gallegos was relatively new to our district, leading Joy Community Church into an affiliate relationship with us several years ago. A week before he was to meet with our board in the final step of transferring his ordination, he died unexpectedly. He and his wife Judy had served as co-pastors since they planted the church and Judy has also received the anointing and strength to lead this church in her husband's absence.

Dan and Martha Duda retired in November after serving 30 years at **Cattaraugus Wesleyan Indian Chapel**. As they approached their departure, we prayed and it became clear that Kevin and Elaine Brooks were God's choice to serve as lay pastors of this work. Kevin and Elaine have both been in this church for 20+ years and are both members of the Seneca Nation.

Christopher and Tammy Baldwin planted **The Vine Wesleyan Church** thirteen years ago. After they felt God leading them to resign this spring, I and the board opted to have a transitional interim pastor for this year. We are grateful to Greg McClain for taking this interim with the transitional support of New Church Specialties.

Finally, Bill Lawson resigned from **Fillmore Wesleyan Church** this spring. Bill had experienced some health issues and felt God leading him away from pastoral ministry, at least for this season. The church is currently in a search process with several candidates.

Highlights from 2017-18

I have been thrilled to see the cooperation of churches to plant **Resurgence City**. This is a new church led by Elijah Shamenda and is coming from Orchard Park Wesleyan Church. Yet, it also has come with support from many churches. The Wesleyan Church of Hamburg held an anniversary service celebrating their 60th year of ministry. In 1957, Orchard Park, with the financial support of every church in the district at that time, planted Hamburg Wesleyan Church. At their celebration in November, Hamburg presented a gift to Orchard Park to significantly support their most recent church plant. Orchard Park will continue to oversee Resurgence City with administrative support for several years to allow Elijah and the core team to focus on making disciples and building the congregation.

I had the privilege of traveling to **India and Lebanon**, to speak at a pastor's conference and to see the significant impact of several of our churches through India Gospel League and two of Hamburg's partners ministering to

Syrian refugees in Lebanon. However, for me the greatest benefit of this trip was getting to see a genuine revival movement firsthand in India as churches are being planted by the thousands in rural villages of India.

One of my goals this year was to enhance our monthly time with pastors for **Leadership Development**. In the fall, we focused on the craft of preaching. Several of our pastors shared some of their best practices and I put together several videos of interviews with five gifted preachers from across our movement. In the spring, we spent four sessions studying the leadership roles of Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, and Pastor-Teachers from Ephesians 4. I know attendance at these meetings is a commitment for pastors and perhaps a sacrifice for congregations to send them. But these are valuable times for us to learn to work together and help each other to become better pastors.

A final highlight has been to work with a great team of leaders. You already know I like working with my wife. I have also relied heavily on Steve Dunmire as my assistant for the past two years. He is a sounding board to discuss various issues I am facing and I appreciate his excellent work with the Church Development Board and now Refresh. Kim Pecora is faithful to accomplish all that she is asked to do and to do it with a humble spirit. She is also putting together a great team to manage the district finances. Robin George is just fun to work with, as you can imagine. Thank you to all who lead our various ministries and serve on our various boards and committees. May your work continue to be anointed to better support our churches and pastors.

Final Challenge in a Changing Landscape

Our metrics this year are not encouraging. Last year, we had six churches receive awards as “Churches of Excellence.” This year, none met all of the criteria. Last year, our worship attendance, salvations, and baptisms were all at record highs. This year for some reason, most of our numbers are lower. I know we are working to help each of our 36 churches to become healthy, multiplying churches. I am looking for ways to be more effective at this.

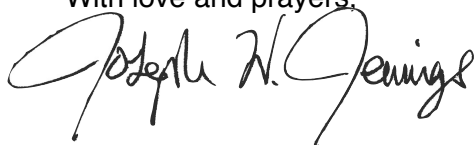
Across the Wesleyan Church, the structures and mission of districts are being re-imagined resulting in some creative solutions and several mergers. In our area, the Penn-Jersey and Northeast districts recently merged, and the Central New York and Western Pennsylvania districts will likely merge next summer. At this point, our district board has studied these moves, but believes that for us to merge with another district at this time would be more of a distraction from our mission than it would help us to fulfill it. However, we are exploring ways to cooperate with other districts in church multiplication, ministerial development, and any other way we can be better together. Also, if these new ideas or larger districts prove to be more effective, we will reevaluate with a willingness to do whatever it takes to fulfill the great commission.

The Western New York District exists to support our churches and foster partnerships in carrying out the Great Commission.

We need to keep our focus on this mission,
to aspire to reach more people in our communities,
to pray for lives to be changed and seek to celebrate this transformation with baptisms.
and to choose to be more generous, Kingdom-focused and interconnected.

When we do all God calls us to do, He will bring the fruit. Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)

With love and prayers,



Joseph W. (Joey) Jennings

Summary of Work

- Had approximately 120 meetings with pastors for coaching, counseling, or mentoring.
- Preached and/or shared in 35 churches/campuses/congregations.
- Chaired 5 meetings of the District Board of Administration & 1 Executive Committee meeting.
- Planned and Presided over 7 Leadership Development meetings with our pastors.
- Conducted 8 pastoral evaluations, reviewing the evaluation with pastors and the local boards.
- Led or participated in 4 memorial services and 1 wedding.
- Led 4 meetings of a Restoration Team that recommended restoration of ordination for Stan Kent.
- Participated in Refresh Family Camp at Houghton. (July)
- Worked through pastoral transitions at The Vine Wesleyan Church and Fillmore Wesleyan Church.
- Met with most local boards as part of my annual visit plus 18 additional LBA meetings.
- Met 3 times with the DBMD to interview 32 ministerial students, licensed ministers & candidates for ordination.
- Participated in 3 meetings of the Houghton College Board of Trustees (October, February, April)
- Met with leaders of seven Great Lakes districts to discuss possible partnership/merger. (June)
- Attended Global Leadership Summit - video venue at The Vine Wesleyan Church. (August)
- Met with leaders of a church in Salamanca, NY to discuss a possible affiliation with the Wesleyan Church. (August)
- Met with leaders from Central NY and Western PA districts to discuss possible partnership/merger. (August)
- Visited Mission partners in India and Lebanon with several district pastors. (November)
- Participated in a consultation at Eastern Hills with Mark Gorveatte and Laurel Buckingham. (December)
- Attended Wesleyan District Superintendent Institute (January) and Roundtable (May).
- Participated in a consultation at Valley Wesleyan with Matthew Pickering, Steve Dunmire, Doug Jones. (February)
- Attended Exponential Conference on Church Multiplication. (March)
- Miles Driven on District Car -12,712 miles (*from 10,390 - 23,102*)
- Vacation Days Taken - 14

Official Acts

- June 4, 2017 - Installed Rev. Dan Butcher as Pastor of Little Valley Wesleyan Church.
- June 9, 2017 - Recommended Rev. Dan Todd to be Pastor of Hillside Wesleyan Church
- June 17, 2017 - Chaired Annual District Conference.
- June 19, 2017 - Met to discuss partnership between ZionQuest Christian Fellowship and Doing the Will of God Church and the two churches sharing the district building in Cheektowaga.
- July 30, 2017 - Installed Rev. Dan Todd as Pastor of Hillside Wesleyan Church.
- August 27, 2017 - Installed Rev. Rob Grimes as Pastor of Bellville Wesleyan Church.
- September 10, 2017 - Signed agreement between WNY District and Houghton College allowing Steve Strand to teach at the Houghton Buffalo Campus as part of their work for the district.
- September 13, 2017 - Signed document selling small parcel of land near Houghton, NY.
- September 16, 2017 - Signed document extending the contract to purchase land in Lancaster, NY.
- November 21, 2017 - Authorized renewal of Health Insurance with Independent Health
- November 29, 2017 - Authorized District Life Insurance policy with AXA Advisors, switching from Guardian.
- January 29, 2018 - Signed contract for The Vine Wesleyan Church to sell house and 5 acres of land. (*not completed*)
- March 8, 2018 - Signed contract for Wesleyan Church of Hamburg to lease land for cell phone tower.
- April 2, 2018 - Appointed Greg McClain to serve as Interim Supply Pastor at The Vine Wesleyan Church.
- April 20, 2018 - Signed contract for The Vine Wesleyan Church to contract with New Church Specialties for interim.
- May 16, 2018 - Approved for Orchard Park Wesleyan Church to lease land for cell phone tower.