

STATE OF THE DISTRICT

General Superintendent, Dr. Jerry Pence, delegates to this forty-first annual District Conference and guests; it is my pleasure to bring my 18th annual report to you as District Superintendent of the Indiana Central District of The Wesleyan Church.

Often, I end my annual reports with a challenge. This year, I want to reverse the order. Recently I read an address by Dr. Timothy Tennent, president of Asbury Theological Seminary, delivered at their fall 2009 Convocation. I was impacted by the introduction. Dr. Tennent said:

"In April of 1739 John Wesley was preaching in an upstairs room in London. About halfway into his sermon the supporting post that held up the floor of the room collapsed under the sheer weight of the number of people who had gathered to hear Wesley. Wesley remarked in his journal that the supporting post fell with a great noise. The floor sank, but it didn't cave in and, to Wesley's own amazement, everyone settled back down and he was able to finish preaching.

What do we do when it seems like the very floor under our feet is giving way? Many of the traditional props and supports which have long given stability to the world of theological education have fallen away with a great crash—what are we to do? How do we live in a time of disequilibrium, uncertainty and change? Never in history has the Church undergone such dramatic growth and change so quickly. When William Carey went to India in 1793, ninety-nine percent of all Christians in the world were white and lived in the Western world. Today, the vast majority of Christians live outside the Western world. We are witnessing multiple centers of Christian vibrancy, even as we see the Western world re-emerging as the world's fastest growing mission field and the home of the most gospel-resistant people groups in the world. In contrast, all of the most gospel-receptive people groups in the world are found in either India or China. We live in an upside-down world.

The floor is creaking beneath our feet."

To illustrate his point, Dr. Tennent gave several convincing proofs:

- *"Christianity Today reported, a few years ago, that 85 percent of the members of Yale University's Campus Crusade for Christ are Asian, whereas, 'the university's Buddhist meditation meetings are almost exclusively attended by whites.'*
- *The historic William Carey Memorial Church in Lester, England, is now a Hindu temple while the church in India, the traditional home of Hinduism, sends out over 41,000 cross-cultural missionaries.*
- *The most representative Christian in 1909 was a 47-year-old British male. The most representative Christian in 2009 was a 24-year-old Nigerian woman."*

What does this mean for the Indiana Central District, for our churches and for you and me? What would Jesus do? We all remember the WWJD bracelets: *What Would Jesus Do?* That is a fitting question by which to measure our actions and attitudes, to be sure.

A more foundational question would be *What did Jesus do?* WDJ? Jesus involved Himself. He came to the world and not just as a tourist. He came not for a visit but to *"seek and save."* Jesus concentrated His attention on the receptive and fertile field. People who were not very important by the world's standards were important to Him. He *"preached the good news to the poor and proclaimed freedom for the prisoner, sight for the blind, release for the oppressed"* (Luke 4:18-19).

What did Jesus do? He gave His life and commanded His followers to continue His mission of reaching and teaching, helping and healing, proclaiming and performing His will.

Another WWJD? *What will Jesus do?* Jesus will help us, inspire us, fill us, use us and bless us.

I read recently, an article by David Felter, editor of *Holiness Today*, official magazine of the Church of the Nazarene. He mentioned the distinction between renewal, revival and awakening.

- *"Renewal happens when God supernaturally touches the heart of a single individual.*
- *Revival happens when God supernaturally touches a community of faith.*
- *Awakening happens when society around us is impacted by God's supernatural touch."*

I'm convinced that renewal is happening to some people in our churches. We sense it in the testimonies they share. God is real in their experience and they are reveling in his mercy and grace.

A few of our churches are experiencing revival at any given time. The corporate experience is one of God's overpowering presence. People who visit such churches are struck with the fact that "something is different here."

But only occasionally do we see the desired results of revival, an awakening in the community. Our churches ought to be making a difference in our communities. I've asked the question before and will again: If your church closed, would anybody notice? Would there be a void? Would you be missed?

I am asking every local board of administration and every pastoral advisory committee to spend some time this coming year discussing and, if possible, implementing some new community ministry. The opportunities are great. It might be an after-school program, a tutoring program or a ministry to special needs individuals. Perhaps your community schools have cut out their music program or art program. What an opportunity for the church to offer something to fill the gap.

The goal, of course, is to reach people for Christ. But a first step is to find a need and fill it. I believe every church could offer some program that enriches their community and opens doors for the gospel.

The increasing ethnic diversity of our field, the Indiana Central District, compels us to reach out beyond ourselves, to others, with the gospel. Many of our churches should identify a culture group in their community and seek to offer ministry to that group. Already some of that is happening. A recent example is Indianapolis Evanston Avenue Wesleyan Church. On Sunday evenings the church hosts a Haitian service. The potential of doubling their number is very real for that church. Many other churches in our district have the same potential if they would identify a culture group, open their building to that group and bring them under the umbrella of the local church.

❖ **Several things of particular note should be mentioned in this report:**

- Rev. John Freed is leading an ambitious church planting effort in Noblesville. Waterline Church is off to a great start. It boasts initial statistics that put it in the top 1 percent of church plants. We expect this church to be a vital part of planting other churches within our district, for the glory of God and the advancement of His Kingdom.
- The Sanctuary Church became an affiliate church on January 10, 2011. This relationship gives us an opportunity to know each other better and share in ministry concerns and resources. Rev. George Martin leads this marvelous inner-city church in downtown Indianapolis. We are pleased to have "The Sanctuary Church" affiliated with our district.
- Kokomo Mt. Zion voted to close on March 27, 2011. We are happy for the impact this church had during its years of existence. The life of a church, like that of a person, has a beginning and an end. Like a person, every church makes its impact and we are thankful for effective ministry and good memories.
- Our first annual Power Rally is now history. At the writing of this report I am praying that it will be both powerful and a rallying point for our district. We will be assessing this event and making adjustments as we move forward. Thanks are extended to the planning committee who worked under the direction of Rev. Eric Roemer to provide the Power Rally for our district.

❖ **In closing, I want to thank some special people:**

- First, I thank my wife, Carol, for the support that she is to me. I'd not be able to accomplish the things I do without her help.
- My office assistant, Debra Levite, is very capable and keeps things running in our district office. She has been especially busy getting ready for our annual district conference and a number of you have expressed your gratitude for her help to you individually.
- The District Executive Committee, consists of the assistant district superintendent, Rev. Paul Boss; district secretary, Dr. Mark Rennaker; district treasurer, Mr. Rod Benson; and member-at-large, Mrs. Martha Blackburn. I lean on them for direction and wisdom.

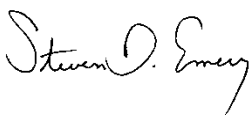
- The district board of administration has been especially busy this year. Our meetings have been longer and more intense than ever in my experience as a district superintendent. But the district board has risen to the tasks at hand and I thank God for their guidance. Each meeting closed with a sense of accomplishment and peace in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The other boards and committees of the district will have opportunity to report to you today. I know you'll receive their reports with appreciation for their dedicated service to the Lord and His church.
- A special note of thanks goes to the pastors of our district. We have a gifted group of clergy. Their dedication to the Lord and His Church fuels a passion to serve selflessly and lead courageously. We thank God for them.
- Finally, to the lay people of our district: Your concerted efforts are the most important ingredient in our success as a district. Without you, there would be no local churches, or district or Wesleyan Church. If we were to add up the hours that were involved in church life across our district this past year, the number would be astounding. In any individual church, the hours of planning, volunteering, leading, meeting, etc., would be many. Multiplied by sixty-six churches, one can only imagine the number of hours represented across our district. Thank you for being "The Church."

❖ **Finally, just a few words about our statistics:**

- Year past:
 - ≈ Membership
 - Covenant Membership increased, by 49 or 1.3 percent to 3,793.
 - Community Membership increased, by 123 or 26 percent to 589.
 - Student Membership increased, by 38 or 95 percent to 78.
 - ≈ 879 salvations were reported this year, down 36 (.38%) from last year.
 - ≈ 235 baptisms were reported this year, up 13 (.56%) from last year.
 - ≈ Primary worship attendance increased (including our affiliate church, The Sanctuary Church) by 327 or 5.6 percent to 6193.
 - ≈ Combined Stewardship Fund (60 percent General Fund/40 percent District Fund)
 - Payments were up 1.8 percent for a total of 95.4 percent.
- Year present:
 - ≈ I am hopeful we will see at least a 5% gain in membership and worship attendance this coming year.
 - I will soon be announcing a "Membership Sunday." This will be a Sunday when we promote membership and seek to add to our numbers.
 - ≈ I am praying that we will see a 10 percent gain in salvations recorded and baptisms recorded.
 - ≈ I trust we will see a continued upward trend in our Combined Stewardship Fund.
 - It is important that each church assumes its responsibility to contribute its fair share for the ongoing work of our district and general church.
 - ≈ To be vital, as a district, we must continually reaffirm our commitment to both church health and church planting.

May we know the Lord's blessing as we follow the leading of his Spirit, making us sensitive in our decisions, sagacious in our work and satisfied with the results of full commitment to the cause of Christ.

Respectfully submitted,



Dr. Steven D. Emery, Superintendent
Indiana Central District
The Wesleyan Church

