

Cabinet Address 2010

Illinois Great Rivers Annual Conference

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God is good! All the time!
All the time! God is good!

Do you believe in God, the Father – Creator and Giver of Life?
If so, say “I believe!”

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Risen Lord and the One
whose life, death and resurrection saves all who believe from sin and
death?
If so, say “I believe!”

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the Advocate – whom Jesus has sent to
move among us, inspiring us, comforting us, directing us, and sometimes
even disturbing and distressing us in order that we might be faithful to
share the Gospel?
If so, say “I believe!”

Let us pray:

Without seeing you, we love you;
Without touching you, we embrace;
Without knowing you, we follow;
Without seeing you, we believe. - David Haas
Lord, we believe. Help our unbelief. Amen.

The Cabinet address this year may seem more like the coach's speech at the beginning of a season of renewal...and perhaps that is not a bad way to look at it.

We've all known basketball, football or baseball teams that have been winning teams. They have a really successful year or several years. They are champions – they excel at what they do.

Then, players change, circumstances change, and over time the team is less successful some years than they are in others. But one day the team finds themselves losing more games than they are winning.

That's when the realization sets in that something needs to change. The next season the coach calls the team together and says...its time to get back to the basics...let's practice the fundamentals of the game.

Today we stand before you representing the Cabinet – the “coaching squad” of the Illinois Great Rivers Conference.

Over the past several years, the Cabinet and the conference leadership team have been calling the laity and clergy of the conference to lead their local churches to return to practicing the basics of our United Methodist Way of being the church.

This year, we're going to repeat that charge. We're also going to strengthen and reinforce it even further with 2 additional strategic initiatives. It's time for the IGRC to remember that we are a winning team because the Church still belongs to God. We still have access to the same Life-Giving Spirit of Pentecost which blew through the Upper Room and enflamed the hearts of the confused, fearful, and direction-less disciples. When the transforming power of the Spirit filled their hearts, everything changed – they not only knew what to do but they did it with confidence and courage.

The same Spirit of Truth – the very presence of Jesus Christ – blows through our midst this day. (AMEN!)

Sometimes we also feel confused, fearful and direction-less, but when we engage the power of God working through the Body of Christ, we will also know what to do and will do it with confidence and courage.

To claim that Pentecost power which brings life to the Church, we need to return to the core of our identity as disciples of Jesus Christ and renew our understanding of what it means to be the Body of Christ. In fact, we are already in the process of returning to the fundamentals of the United Methodist Way.

Let's review those fundamentals:

1st – Our mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We do so by proclaiming the Good News of God's grace and by exemplifying Jesus' command to love God and neighbor. We seek, welcome, and gather persons into the Body of Christ. We lead individuals to commit their lives through baptism by water and the spirit and profession faith in Jesus Christ. We nurture them in Christian living through worship, the sacraments, spiritual disciplines and other means of grace. And we send these committed disciples into the world to live lovingly and justly as servants of Christ. This process of living out the church's mission is ongoing and ever in need of tending in a constantly changing world.

2nd - We live by 2 kinds of holiness – personal and social, both inward and outward. We're not talking about a "holier than thou" way of thinking and living. We're talking about disciples whose lives are so marked by inward wholesomeness and unparalleled devotion to God in Christ that their outward actions and personal witness reflect God's light and love and thus draw others to Christ.

To be holy means to be obedient to the Great Commandment: Love the Lord your God with all you heart, mind, soul, and strength...*and*...Love your neighbor as yourself.

3rd – The early Methodists encouraged holy living and held each other accountable to it through their practice of 3 general rules. Today, Bishop Reuben Job has helped us to reclaim this long-held tradition in his book, "The Three Simple Rules."

You should all know them. Say them with us:
...Do no harm,
...do good,
...stay in love with God.

Staying in love with God happens when we practice the means of grace: worship, prayer, reading and study of the Scriptures, sacraments, Christian conferencing in small groups, fasting, and actions that heal the pain, brokenness, injustice and inequality of the world. These spiritual disciplines open us to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

Bishop Job opens his book with this sentence: “There are three simple rules that have the power to change the world.” Do you believe that?

Do you believe that God could work through us in mighty ways if each one of us practiced these 3 simple rules every day? ...Do no harm, ...do good, ...stay in love with God. Do you believe there will be revival in the IGRC if all of us pledged to practice these rules and pledged to go back to our churches to remind them of the basics of the faith?

4th – One of the gifts we have as United Methodists is the world-wide connection of the Church. No local church is ever alone in ministry – there is an organizational structure which connects us all together. This connection allows us to stand in support of one another as local churches and as mission and ministry agencies all around the globe. In addition, it allows us to accomplish ministry endeavors that a single church could not do on its own. The General Conference of 2008 called all United Methodists around the world to focus our ministry efforts in four areas:

- a. Developing principled Christian leaders for the church and the world.
- b. Creating new places for new people and renewing existing congregations.
- c. Engaging in ministry with the poor
- d. Stamping out the killer diseases of poverty by improving health globally.

We challenge you to ask yourselves how you and your local church are contributing to the transformation of the world that will result as all United Methodists work together in these 4 focus areas.

5th - And, finally, as a way of ensuring our effectiveness as congregations, we actively hold ourselves accountable to strive to be at our best in 5 identified practices. Fruitful congregations...that is, those congregations who are effective in carrying out their disciple-making mission...consistently are strong in all five areas. Those practices are:

- Radical hospitality
- Passionate worship
- Intentional faith development
- Risk-taking mission and service
- Extravagant generosity

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 - 5

These are the basic elements of the United Methodist Way:

1 – mission

2 – forms of holiness

3 – simple rules

4 – areas of focus, and

5 – fruitful practices

These are not just programs or studies to do and then put on the shelf.
(repeat)

This is our identity as the Body of Christ and the fundamentals of what John Wesley called “scriptural Christianity.”

Your Bishop and Cabinet expect that every pastor and congregation in this conference will not just be studying these basic elements of the United Methodist Way, but that you will be implementing them in the life of your congregation and holding yourselves accountable to living out this ecclesial identity.

These are the basics of the United Methodist Way. Now let us turn to consider the ways in which your Cabinet will lead this conference in the coming year.

The overarching purpose of superintending is to equip the Church in its disciple-making ministry. In rapidly changing times, constant evaluation is needed with course-corrections as necessary. We must be increasingly nimble in our work – able to respond quickly when opportunities for ministry present themselves. Over the course of the past year, the Bishop and Cabinet have spent much time in prayer, reflection, and vigorous dialogue about how to carry out our superintending work effectively in the context in which we find ourselves. We are not yet clear about all the changes that may mean for us as we seek to effectively lead this conference. But we, too, have been working on practicing the basics as we seek God’s direction for our future. And, we are confident that the Spirit of God is still working among and within this conference.

The Bishop has already introduced 4 new initiatives that he will lead in the coming year. We, as the superintending Cabinet, will do all we can to co-lead those initiatives with our Bishop. We are introducing two additional strategic initiatives.

The first strategic initiative is a streamlined assessment process. The assessment tools used for the past several years by Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committees and in clergy self-assessments have been cumbersome and have not resulted in increased production of the fruit we seek.

Therefore, we are committed to delivering a streamlined assessment process for this year which will help to focus clergy and local churches on their disciple-making mission.

The Cabinet has identified three fruits for which we will be looking. If we are effective in our leadership of pastors and local church, then these fruits should be evident throughout the conference.

Three fruit we seek are:

1. Community and collegiality among the clergy
 - a. *Robust community that builds up strong, effective spiritual leaders to serve local churches and the connection*

- b. Robust community that encourages clergy to be healthy in body, mind, spirit and relationships.*
- c. Robust clergy community that blesses the clergy and their families...and in turn, the local churches they serve.*

The Cabinet will be working in partnership with the Chairs of the Orders and Fellowship and the Care Guides to support clergy and to develop robust clergy community.

2. Conspicuous practicing of the means of grace by United Methodist disciples in community
 - a. First of all, we as a Cabinet will hold ourselves accountable to practicing the means of grace in our own covenant groups
 - b. Next, we expect that all clergy will be actively involved in covenant groups in which they are being held accountable to practice the means of grace
 - c. And, we anticipate that local congregations will be encouraging all their members to active practice the means of grace by providing settings in which those who choose to deepen their faith can participate in small groups for study, prayer and accountability
3. Professions of faith connected to and as a result of passionate worship.
 - a. When local congregations are worshipping in Spirit-filled ways that engage the hearts and minds of the worshippers, people are drawn to Jesus Christ and can be invited to commit their lives to Him
 - b. At this conference, you are participating in passionate worship and you are learning how to lead and participate in worship that invokes the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. We trust that you will take these resources back to your local churches and offer leadership as your congregation continues to strive to offer rich, meaningful worship

These 3 desired fruits - robust clergy community, conspicuous practice of the means of grace, and professions of faith connected to passionate worship - are the drivers of the streamlined assessment process.

We will start rolling out the new assessments within the next 4-6 weeks.

Our second strategic initiative is a call to prayer and fasting.

Ministry in our current circumstances is not easy. With Charles Dickens, we could say that we are in the best of times and the worst of times. Yet history has shown that in hard times, great churches grow stronger. And great churches have grown stronger because of their commitment to prayer.

In fact, isn't that the story of the birth of the Church. Peter and the disciples might have been feeling the same way after Jesus' death as they waited in the Upper Room some 2,000 years ago. Those were also the best of times and the worst of times.

The scriptures gives us clues as to what happened as they waited together but doesn't give us full details. We can guess that as they waited, they continued to try to figure it out together. Perhaps they blamed the officials, the crowd, or even each other for what had happened. Maybe they felt guilty for deserting Jesus. But I also believe that they must have rehearsed all of the events of the preceding months and tried to remember every word that Jesus taught them. They went back to the basics. I imagine they also spent much time in prayer and encouraging one another in the face of the unknown future.

And then on the day of Pentecost On the day of Pentecost everything changed...

The 2nd chapter of Acts records that when the day of Pentecost had come Peter was no longer bewildered and confused. He boldly preached the Gospel and 3,000 persons were baptized and devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:41-42)

When the day of Pentecost had come, the Holy Spirit came upon them in a mighty way, so focusing their energy and their words that their present circumstances were no longer obstacles. They were able to communicate

exactly what Jesus had taught them; and everyone to whom they spoke understood. The disciples were no longer bound by the constraints of this world. They were freed and empowered by the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus had sent.

The power of that Pentecost moment is still available to us today... Do you believe it?

Thus, our second strategic initiative is a call to prayer and fasting. We're calling it "First Thursday."

Every month between now and next Annual Conference - on the first Thursday, we invite all of you, clergy and laity alike, to join us in a day of prayer and fasting in which we call upon Christ to send the Pentecost power of the Holy Spirit upon the Church.

We encourage you to invite your local congregations and even your communities to participate. Be creative...do something different each month.

The Bishop and Superintendents will be holding special events around the districts. Details are still unfolding.

The First Thursdays in July and August will probably be more low key due to the vacation season, but we want you to make those personal days of prayer and fasting, too. Throughout the coming weeks and months, there will be for more information on the new conference website and in your district newsletters.

Revival has begun in the IGRC! Now is the time for us to return to the fundamentals of our faith. It's time for us to pray for a fresh wind of the Spirit. We invite you to join us as we pray that the Spirit will move upon us. In fact, we ask for your commitment to do that:

If you will commit yourself to First Thursdays - to these days of prayer and fasting, we invite you to stand.

We are the IGRC.

We have...

- 1 – mission
- 2 – forms of holiness

- 3 – simple rules
- 4 – areas of focus, and
- 5 – fruitful practices

These are the fundamentals that grounded the winning team.

If you will lead your congregation in practicing the basics of the United Methodist Way - including participation in First Thursdays, say "Amen!"