



SOUTH WEST DISTRICT NEWSLETTER

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December 2013

The Power of Being Together: Connectionality At Its Best!

Dear friends in the SW District –

Just hours before the celebration of the Thanksgiving holiday, I'm counting my blessings and praising God for His goodness, grace and mercy upon my life and the life of my family during this past year.

We truly serve an amazing God who always surprises with His mighty acts of love and compassion. Just by looking at how my Dad is doing after my Mother's passing, and being a witness of the way God keeps equipping and using my children Judy and Andy in their respective ministries is more than enough of a reason for being grateful to God for the things He has done and will continue to do in our lives.

I'm also very blessed by having Christians around me that are intentional in holding me accountable, but also have been there for me during my times of tribulation. I very much appreciate all of you who have expressed concern for my wellbeing and have been encouraging me to the practice of Sabbath and rest, particularly after a very busy Charge Conference season. Please, keep doing that!

Spending time with God this morning has helped me be more aware of His continued presence and support, particularly in a couple of recent events.

On November 19-20 at Life Enrichment Center in Fruitland Park, FL several of us had the opportunity to participate in a FL Conference Clergy Gathering where more than 400 pastors were in attendance. If you missed that, make sure you make plans for the next one: November 18-19, 2014. Churches, please, make sure your Pastor(s) are released of their daily duties to have this time of spiritual renewal with other colleagues in the ministry.

Amazing worship, powerful testimonies and high-quality teaching and preaching by Bishop Carter made our time a real blessing, a time of renewal and recharging of energies to continue facing the many challenges of our life as servants of Jesus Christ. We laughed together, cried together and spent time with God and with each other in a very meaningful, refreshing way.

I had the chance to observe how these pastors were so joyful of meeting friends and colleagues that they would use breaks and meal times just to enjoy each other, to update each other on their lives, their families and ministries. Everywhere I was able to hear the comment: “We were missing this”. Ask those who attended the Gathering how it was, and they will immediately take the opportunity to encourage you not to miss the next one!

There is power and blessing in being together! There is a healing and transforming power in spending time with people who are going through many of the same challenges and circumstances we are all facing in our daily lives. It is wonderful to hear them testify about the many ways God has answered their prayers and provided others who have been able to come along them and form healthy teams to fulfill the call to whom we have been called. There is power in experiencing our connection to God and to each other!

Another good example of the power of our connectionality was our SW District Clergy Team meeting held at Cleveland UMC, Punta Gorda, November 26th. When we gather together, worship God passionately, learn something that could help us be better leaders for God, and experience the power of the Holy Spirit in praying for each other, we are refreshed and renewed in a way that our pessimism and cynicism gives way to hope and expectation on God’s limitless possibilities.

I just so much enjoy looking around that Fellowship Hall and seeing the power of prayer for each other during the final moments of our gathering together. I’m blessed beyond measure just by watching our pastors connecting with each other and breaking the barriers of loneliness and separation from each other. We are all in this together and we definitely need God and each other to be more effective in what we do for God’s Kingdom.

Just wanted to share my thoughts today as I’m preparing to celebrate this holiday to express our gratitude to the One who made all things possible through the power of His Resurrected Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Happy Thanksgiving!

In Christ’s amazing love,

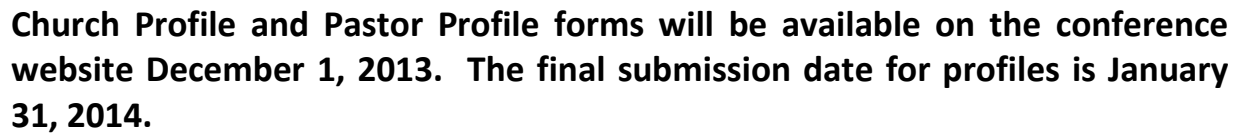
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CHURCH EVENTS IN THE SOUTH WEST DISTRICT

YOU CAN VIEW ALL LOCAL CHURCH EVENTS ON THE CONFERENCE WEBSITE – SELECT “LOCAL CHURCH EVENTS” UNDER THE ‘QUICK LINKS’ SECTION





The Church Profile and Pastor Profile will be accessible by clicking the Profiles link under Forms and Reports in the bottom grey section of the Home Page of the Florida Conference website www.flumc.org. This link will open to detailed instructions for accessing both profiles. Follow the step by step instructions to access the appropriate profile.

Connect to God & Community (C2G&C)

www.connect2godandcommunity.com

SW DISTRICT CUBA CONNECTION

By Dan Christopherson, South West District Cuba Coordinator

Counting My Blessing from the November Trip

I just completed my ninth trip to Cuba; you would think that after nine trips it would be “old hat.” Nothing could be more wrong. Every trip God shows me more of his amazing power with the transformation of the travelers. I do my best to prepare every traveler for what they are about to experience in Cuba. What I do is like a grain of sand on God’s majestic beach of glory. Though every trip has similarities no two trips are the same.

This trip I was working for the first time with a new District Superintendent (Icel Acanda) in the Holguin Norte District. I have known Pastor Icel for years but he had many unknowns in making preparations for us for the first time. So my experience and number of trips were very helpful for him and his family. I am proud to say the Holguin Norte District is in very good hands with Pastor Icel.

This trip was represented by two churches in the Southwest District, (First Sarasota UMC and Fort Ogden UMC) both with new Sister church relationships and both their first experience in Cuba.

First Sarasota’s, sister church, Juan Vicente Loma was the last church in the district that was on rented property. They now have a permanent location and a beautiful Cuban home and holding church service in the back of the home. This I say so non-chalantly but just one year ago they were in a rented home, no sister church, no support at all and no American’s have ever been to their church! They have come so far. Many gifts were given to the pastor and the members. They had enough shoes for many of the members of the church plus more, much needed medicines, and toothpaste. Emotions were high on their departure that was very evident.

I asked the guys that night, “Do you realize what happened today? God has changed your life and the lives in Juan Vicente Loma from this day forward neither will ever forget what happened today!” There are no words that I can say that will prepare a person for what you experienced.

From here we proceeded to a Conference of all the churches in the District at Tacajo. Our entire trip was planned around our attendance of this event. This was the first opportunity for the group to experience a Cuban worship service. For thirty minutes Pastor Ernesto’s wife, Ani, charged up the audience and then handed it over Pastor Ernesto. After a two hour Cuban sermon from that point on Pastor Ernesto was named “the tornado” because he had the audience stir up for Jesus.

In between sessions we had the opportunity just to sit and talk and learn from our Cuban brothers and sisters. During this time I learned that the water in Tacajo is bad and makes the residents sick. When they showed me what came from the faucets it looked like used kitchen and bathroom water. I asked, “Is all of the water in the area like that? The answer was “yes.” I again asked, “what about cholera?” There have been some cases but not a serious outbreak at this time. What can we do to help? We need a new water supply and it cost a lot of money, oh a lot. How much is a lot, a lot in Cuba may not be a lot in America. After much thought the answer was \$750 to \$1,000 dollars. That would give us a big enough supply for the church and enough for the entire church membership and more. I asked for their prayers and I ask for your prayers to solve this dilemma in Tacajo.

Again El Ramon had never had a sister church visit them before. They had prepared a welcome committee for their new sister church. The three men from Fort Ogden and the rest of us were about to have our hearts opened to love and appreciation that words cannot express; you had to be there!! Before I even got to the church I must of had thirty to forty children hanging on me. With ever picture there were more all wanting their picture taken. You know that ride did not seem so long any more, the hours of fellowship seemed like minutes. God had given us another day that I could never prepare someone for. As darkness fell we all were aware of that long ride back. As we gathered to get in that wagon I know the darkness hid many tears knowing when or if I will ever return. But God gave me today and I will never forget it.

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I recently heard (on Facebook) from a former youth. She found a crocheted Christmas ornament I gave her years ago during an especially bad time in her life. She reached out to me with the thought that whenever she saw that ornament she always knew she was loved. It is times like this that all the lock-ins, teen drama eruptions, and midnight calls of woe are worth it. In youth ministry, we sometimes don't see the impact of our ministry until much later. Now, if some of the "Jesus" seeds I sowed can start to grow in this former youth's life, I will have done my job. Thank you, Lord.

The next FLUM youth leaders training session is the Refuel Retreat led by Leadertreks on January 13-14, 2014. The cost is only \$50 and registration is limited to 60 participants. This will be held at Warren Willis camp. Register by going to www.flumym.org

This newsletter gives an overview of some of the activities of the South West District and the Conference. Please make a note of these events and encourage your lay ministers and church members to participate.