



SOUTH WEST DISTRICT NEWSLETTER

Rev. Dr. Rinaldo Hernandez, District Superintendent
Julie Bullerdick, Business Administrator
Sandy Voigt, Administrative Assistant

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November 2013

Go over and walk along with them

The story of Philip and the Ethiopian has been a very compelling one throughout my Christian journey. What never ceases to amaze me is the fact that Philip was elected to be “a deacon” (Acts 6:5), to run the food program and he then ends up going to Samaria (of all the places in the world!) to share the Gospel of Christ with people considered to be the least, the last and the lost in the minds of pious orthodox Jews.

When the seven deacons were elected, the apostles (the leadership team) set the standards by which deacons should be elected: “well respected, full of the Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3). It’s very interesting to find out that they had such high standards even for people whose leadership responsibility was to run the food program, making sure there was equality and no discrimination in the distribution of food.

What does this characteristic mean? What exactly would they be looking for?

- (1) Well respected people, leaders whom the rest of the believers would look at as role models and people they would like to imitate because they were imitating Jesus.
- (2) Full of the Spirit, leaders showing a passion for the Kingdom, people with a burning desire to lead others in Christ’s footsteps and exhibiting “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22-23) in their dealings with human brokenness.
- (3) Full of wisdom, common sense, sound judgment in decision-making, not trying to fit into anybody’s agenda, but led by the Spirit and willing to be held accountable by the leadership team (the apostles).

So here is this guy that was originally elected to help with the distribution of food, moving out of Jerusalem because of the persecution against Christians there, and going to the place where nobody would want to go, serving where others would make excuses for not having to deal with “impure, contaminated people” who had betrayed all of God’s commandments and Rabbinic dispositions and had married foreign women and served the gods of their wives as if they were their own.

Samaritans were, in the eyes of Jewish people, the ones who were morally and religiously “unacceptable” or excluded from the worshipping community. And yet, Philip felt this distinctive and compelling call to go to them and share the good news of salvation for all by the new covenant in the blood of Jesus.

And believe it or not, Philip's ministry in Samaria was incredibly successful: "But now the people believed Philip's message of Good News concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. As a result, many men and women were baptized" (Acts 8:12). Even Peter and John (the apostles) were sent to Samaria to see with their own eyes how the Samaritans were open to accept the Gospel and were able to lay hands upon them for them to receive the Holy Spirit (v. 17).

Now in the midst of this highly vital ministry, Philip is sent to the desert (literally from pews to streets). Can you even imagine how perplexed Philip should have been? “Now that I’m serving a great appointment here, why do I have to go to the desert?” But there he found this very influential Ethiopian, who was the treasurer of Queen Kandake and had been in Jerusalem to worship the God of Israel and now was coming back to his country, reading the book of Isaiah and in serious needing of some intentional discipling.

Then “The Holy Spirit said to Philip: ‘Go over and walk along beside the carriage’”, Acts 8:29. Isn’t that amazing? Philip left crowds in the worship place to go out to the desert for one person, to walk alongside the carriage until he was invited to step in and sit with the man.

To me that is a paradigm of something we should be able to do better: to go over to the desert out there, where people are disoriented, clueless and exposed to great harm; to walk along beside them until we are invited to enter into their lives and engage in fruitful conversations about Jesus, salvation and life transforming power through the Holy Spirit that would hopefully end with them asking us: “Why can’t I be baptized?” (v. 37) and them entering into the covenant of grace and life abundant through Jesus our Lord.

My exhortation to you all today is: let's keep ourselves open to the move of the Spirit. Let's leave the worship space and go to the desert in order to find the Ethiopians there who are desperately trying to make sense out of their lives and to find meaning and purpose in what they do.

Once again, the Holy Spirit is speaking to the church and saying: “Go over and walk along with them”. Be Christ for them, so that they might ask at some point: “Can I also be part of the Kingdom?”

May God give us the courage and the wisdom to do so.

In God's service,

Rini



Church Profile and Pastor Profile forms will be available on the conference website December 1, 2013. The final submission date for profiles is January 31, 2014.

Church Profile and Pastor Profile forms should be reviewed and updated annually by all church SPRC Committees and all Clergy in the Florida Conference. Though a move may not be anticipated, it is important that both the Pastor Profile and Church Profile be current and up to date at the appointment-making session of the cabinet. Profiles should be an honest reflection of the pastoral ministry and the profile of the church. If a pastoral consultation is scheduled with the DS, both the Church Profile and Pastor Profile should be completed online no later than one week prior to the consultation appointment. The final date to update the Church Profile and Pastor Profile is January 31, 2014.

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)

C2G&C will engage, inform and inspire our congregations and the broader Christian community in outreach that connects us to God and community.

Be inspired and challenged by nationally known and local speakers who have experience in reaching out.

Worship God and celebrate our calling to make disciples.

3 DYNAMIC speakers

Rev. Dr. Michael Slaughter (Transforming Pastor and Church Leader)

Rev. Dr. Brian McLaren (Dynamic Speaker and Popular Author)

Rev. Dr. Rinaldo Hernandez (Internment Camp Survivor Turned Influential Christian Leader)

Music from Top local Praise Bands

Congregations from all over the state

Bring canned food! We are partnering with the Harry Chapin Food Bank! Start a collection in your church now!!

COST: Only \$25 per person or \$20 each for groups of 20 or more.

For more information, visit www.Connect2GodandCommunity.com.

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News story questionnaire seeks local church input

The Florida Conference Connectional Relations staff has been making an intentional effort on our news page to highlight the innovative ideas and fruitful ministries of our local churches across the conference. And **we need your help**.

We are looking for ministry information that will help us reach out to congregations with diverse membership, in different parts of our conference and of different sizes in order to include as many voices as possible in our news coverage.

Local churches are invited to fill out a questionnaire that will let us know the types of ministries that are ongoing in the Florida Conference and where we can find them so we can write about them. The questionnaire has been designed to be quick and easy to complete. For most churches, it should not take more than three or four minutes.

Please go to <http://www.flumc2.org/surveys/TakeSurvey.aspx?SurveyID=ILH788> and take a few minutes to fill out the questionnaire by Friday, Dec. 6.

Thank you for helping us tell the great stories of Christ's disciples in the Florida Conference.

Susan Green, Managing Editor, Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church

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By Dan Christopherson, South West District Cuba Coordinator

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I am reminiscing this morning. By the time you read this article I will be back in Cuba with another group of first time travelers to their “sister churches.” I was looking at pictures and videos from previous trips. Last November’s trip was a very difficult trip because our arrival was just days after the Holguin Norte District took a direct hit from Hurricane Sandy. What ever our plans were before our arrival they changed immediately to hurricane relief and emotional comfort. We saw home after home with destruction, roofs blown off, walls blown in. Nineteen of the thirty-two churches in the district either had damage to the church or the parsonage or both. As Pastor Jose Ramon says, “not necessarily strong wind but weak house.” Interesting how God planned our trip the way He did.

As I look through the pictures and videos two factors stand out, *smiles*. Picture after picture shows destruction yet these humble people have a smile on their face. In that same picture are the American travelers with stern and concerning looks on their faces. Yes, I am one of those American's. Why, is this? I am not saying I have all the answers but I know our Cuban brothers and sisters very well. Their faith is so strong in our Heavenly Father; they know God is in control they place the entire situation in his hands. They place their whole being in His hands, knowing nothing is too big for him to handle and they smile!

I said there were two things. What's the second? American smiles! Every picture taken in a church all the travelers have the biggest smile on their faces. You can tell they are totally engrossed and enjoying the church service. Some of the pictures they are dancing with their Cuban brothers and sisters. To say a Cuban church service is infectious is an under statement. Once you have experienced a Cuban worship service your heart is different. They have the faith we long for and it puts a smile on your face knowing our God is in control.

If you want to know Cuban faith, read Hebrews 11: 1-40.

Dan Christopherson
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YOUTH LEADERS

Report from Mike Edwards, SW District Youth Coordinator

October is always a busy month for youth groups. (Come to think of it though, August and February are the only months my group isn't super busy.) There are Fall Festivals, Pumpkin Patches, Confirmation classes, planning sessions for the spring events, fund Raisers, and even getting ready for next summer's mission trips. So, how come everyone thinks our job is just to hang out and play games with the teens? I spend 2 hours getting ready for every hour I spend with the teens. Does anyone else find they fall into this pattern?

Our next district youth leaders meeting is on November 4, noon, at Cracker Barrel at SR80/175 in East Ft. Myers. We will be finalizing details for the district youth retreat, "Stoked", March 7-9, 2014. There are only 104 youth slots and 20 adult chaperone slots available for this retreat. The cost is \$75 each. There will be worship, small and large group lessons, games, food, and lots of fun. To register, contact Chelsy Hernandez at Riverside Retreat at chelsyl.anderson@gmail.com.

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.

If your youth group is having an outing, lock-in, or other event that you would like to invite other FLUM-SW District youth groups to join, please email me at medwards@faithum.com and I will forward the info. If you are a SW District youth leader and do NOT receive my email blasts, email me to get on the contact list.

Your servant in Christ,
Mike

Contact info: Mike Edwards, FLUM SW District Youth Coordinator
Youth Director, Faith UMC, 15690 McGregor Blvd., Ft. Myers FL 33908 -- medwards@faithum.com.



Apportionment payments for 2013 must be received either at the Conference office or in the lockbox at Regions Bank by Friday January 10th 2014. This is not a postmarked by date, but is the last day by which monies must be received in the Conference or our bank lockbox to be included in 2013 apportionments receipts. Any payments received after that date will be applied to 2014 apportionments. Any payments received between January 1 and January 10th must be clearly marked as to which year they are to be applied.

To be included in the Florida Annual Conference "Report of 100% Churches", 100% of 2013 apportionments must be received by January 10, 2014, and all outstanding Ministry Protection and Health and Benefits obligations must be received by December 31, 2013.

Conference Christmas Open House is Dec. 3

The members of the Florida Conference (lay and clergy) are invited to attend a Christmas Open House at the Florida Conference Building, 450 Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue, Lakeland, FL 33815 on Tuesday, December 3, 2013 from 1:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.



We look forward to having you drop in for fellowship, refreshments and sharing the joy of the season as you visit the staff and offices of our Conference, Foundation and Credit Union ministries. Please RSVP to Sherri Lingle, Program Coordinator, Florida Conference, at slingle@flumc.org by November 15, 2013 so that we may adequately plan for refreshments and parking. We hope to see you!



- Don't forget to check the Conference website (www.flumc.org) to find job postings, items for sale, donations, etc. Just select "Classifieds" on the left side of the homepage.*

CALENDAR NOTES:

May 20, 2014 – Clergy Team Meeting & Clergy Spouse Gathering

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.