

Health, growth, completion

Vision



New Apostolic Church USA

District News

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Winter 2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Incredibly, another year is drawing to a close and our thoughts turn to our plans for 2014. I would like to dedicate this article to our preparation for a very specific and bold step that we, the apostles, bishops and district leaders have discussed over the past months. We would like to invite you to take this step together with us in the coming year. When a group decides to journey together toward a common destination and arrival time, they must openly share their plans and preparations with one another. How much more so when our New Apostolic family here in the USA journeys together towards readiness for the return of Jesus Christ? Everyone must be on the same page!

We are not beginning a new journey in 2014, we are continuing on our existing path toward healthy, growing congregations. But our next steps together will take us on a new stretch of road that we must be prepared for. Specifically, we would like to make substantive changes to our midweek service experience. I am convinced that this road will bring us to a healthier church and a more vibrant and fulfilled life in Christ for each of our members. Our Chief Apostle has examined our proposed course in detail and given his approval. He agrees that this is good for us in the USA and has provided some specific guidelines that we will follow closely.

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We will provide a careful and detailed description of this plan during the month of January, 2014. On January 18th, we will broadcast an NAC-USA district wide informational presentation. I would ask every member to embrace this process with an open mind and a willing heart. Please be patient and allow the information to settle into your soul as it is distributed. Likewise, please pray diligently and ask God to enliven the Holy Spirit to bring us all to clarity, consensus and peace.

In preparation for the January broadcast explaining these changes, it is important to first understand why the changes are necessary. Let me explain our intentions this way: For the church to journey to health, growth and then to the ultimate completion of its mission, the preparation for the return of Jesus Christ, you and I must be transformed by Him. We must be changed! This is one of the great lessons of the Gospel. Embedded within the good news of salvation is the story of everyday people who Jesus called into a closer relationship with Him. Their journey was one of discipleship. They started as listeners which is somewhat passive, but under His mentorship, they transitioned to believers and then followers and ultimately to disciples who were both willing **and able** to take up His cause. Jesus not only inspired them, He **equipped** them.

And what is the ultimate characteristic of a disciple? They not only discover the personal joy of a new life in the Lord, they are equipped to help others find the joy of discipleship too! And so the church, when healthy, multiplies in a most unique cycle. Apostle Paul described this relationship within the well-known metaphor of the body of Christ: "And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the **equipping** of the saints for the work of ministry, for the **edifying** of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;" (Ephesians 4:11-13).

Apostle Paul is describing a progression or cycle of discipleship. Let us identify the steps or stages within this progression.

EQUIPPING Within this passage in Ephesians we can clearly see the beginning of the progression. It is the **equipping** of the saints. Here our Heavenly Father as He is revealed through His Son Jesus Christ and His church, calls out to us as everyday flawed human beings in need of salvation. He not only offers us the gift of His grace and eternal life **through the church** of Christ, He also asks us to become a vital component **of the church** (a member of the body of Christ) and its mission. For this purpose He Himself gave us apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry”. Look at the wonderful resources that God has made available to us and by which we are equipped:

- The Apostles who proclaim the Gospel and dispense the Sacraments.
- The prophetic direction of the Holy Spirit that leads us continually to a greater understanding of God’s will and direction within our lives.
- Pastors who comfort and console us in life’s difficult seasons and pray for our spiritual welfare continually.
- Teachers who help us discover the knowledge of the Kingdom and skills necessary to serve others within the body of Christ.

In between the beginning of this cycle of discipleship (equipping of the saints) and the end (edifying the body of Christ), there are stages of development that you and I come to individually. Each soul must decide how to respond to the call of Jesus. *It is a matter of personal responsibility.* Let me describe the next stages this way:

EMERGING Within this stage, the maturing soul awakens to the call of Christ. They are inspired by His message and seek to move beyond a listener and enter the community of believers and followers. Within this community, we interact with one another to gain greater clarity of the Gospel and find its relevance in our life. We

support one another in an authentic Christian manner and foster an increasing love for Him and each other. Together we discover the joy of an emerging new life; one abundant in peace, mercy, compassion and faith. Likewise, together we experience an urging to discover our God given spiritual gifts for “the work of ministry” by which we will edify the body of Christ.

ENGAGING Emerging leads to engaging. It is a prompting to serve and an expression of our love for Jesus Christ. To engage in the work of ministry is to live a life of service using our spiritual gifts. It is an intentional and individual calling by Christ and His church for which He has equipped us, combined with our intentional and mature decision to respond. It should not be confused with a life of obligation. It is a life of passion, purpose and deep spiritual abundance. As our Chief Apostle has described it in his 2014 message, it is “to Labor in Love”. It brings the rewards of God’s Kingdom into our lives now and eternally.

EDIFYING The preceding stages lead us to a state of readiness for service to the body of Christ. How incredible that God has found a way for us who are flawed and weak to be converted into coworkers who can take up the cause of His Son. This is quite a transformation. The **edifying** of the body of Christ brings the church to the state that God desires: *“till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”*

Of course, we are equipped to emerge, engage and ultimately edify the body of Christ during the divine services. God’s Word and Sacrament are powerful and irreplaceable forces of transformation. However, as we learn from the Gospel, Jesus invested many hours of teaching and conversation with His disciples in small, intimate and informal settings. In these settings He also equipped them and they emerged and engaged in a life of discipleship.

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So this leads us to our new plans for the midweek. I would encourage us all to view our lives in these terms. We also are on a journey of discipleship. We have been called by Jesus Christ Himself. We have started as listeners and then believers. However, He desires to equip us further for His service, to take up His cause, to edify His Body, “the church”, and to inspire new disciples.

Our new midweek experience has been designed to aid us in this journey. While we will retain some elements of our current divine service experience, we will intentionally add other options that are fashioned after the small, intimate and informal sessions which Jesus shared with His disciples. They will provide us greater opportunities for:

- Teaching and learning
- Spiritual discussions and conversations
- Prayer
- Worship
- Inspiration
- Fellowship
- Pastoral support
- Sharing the Gospel with friends

I would ask each member to ponder these thoughts prior to our informational broadcast.

Wishing you a blessed and joyous entry into the New Year,