

Health, growth, completion

Vision



New Apostolic Church USA

District News

www.nac-usa.org

Summer 2014

Dear brothers and sisters,

I am happy to report that more and more congregations are experiencing unique and worthwhile midweek experiences. I have heard reports from our members that they are seeing the benefits of this initiative and are discovering new understandings regarding the main premise of this change in the midweek.

We see that in order to prepare for the Lord's coming, a more definitive method of teaching is necessary to fulfill what the Lord expects of us. We want to love Him more. The way to do this is to learn about Him and His Gospel more intensively. This learning happens interactively because, in our time today, it is the way people respond and learn. When we grow in our love for Christ, we perceive much more clearly the significance of Holy Communion and recognize that it takes more preparation to worthily partake of this precious element and extract the Godly strength that it imparts. This builds a strong longing for Sunday when we can celebrate this holy sacrament.

Further, we need to love our neighbor more. This can be accomplished in like manner - by learning more about our neighbor and connecting with them more closely. We learn how our Heavenly Father has influenced and blessed us all. In doing so, we build a stronger bond between ourselves and thus bring even higher praise and worship to our Father for all His goodness in our lives.

Our midweek experience opens up the opportunity for both of these vital steps. It also gives us a venue for bringing guests to a friendly, nonthreatening experience.

May we experience many precious moments in this fellowship of learning as we enjoy the season of summer.

With my best wishes and love,



GROWTH

The mystery of spiritual growth:

Perhaps you have heard the phrase, “where there is life, there is growth”! It describes the phenomenon we see, especially evident now in the springtime as the power of life explodes in nature all around us. The life force was almost invisible and unmeasurable for a season (especially here in the cold northern regions), but now we can see and measure it clearly. The result of healthy life is growth in due season. It’s difficult to separate health from growth because they are so intertwined. Growth is found in uncountable forms, shapes and colors. The sheer diversity of God’s creative power is often what makes us stop dead in our tracks in absolute wonder.

I think there is a strong lesson within this natural phenomenon that can help us understand the mysteries of spiritual growth as well. We have often described our plans for the future of our district in terms of creating healthy, growing congregations. I’m often asked the question, “when does the growth phase begin”? This is an excellent question, but it requires us to explore the mysteries of spiritual or inner growth. This growth also comes in different forms; some quite obvious and easily measured. Some forms are subtle and are only measurable when we know what to look for. Sometimes the evidence of their existence only becomes measurable in due season. We can examine this mystery from a few different perspectives.

The growth in disciples:

Often we define growth in terms of numbers. It is easy to define by counting the number of members, ministers, congregations and offering. Jesus gave the Church, through the first apostles the great commission: *Go therefore and **make disciples** of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you...* (Matthew 28:19-20).

Here we see growth defined as **new disciples of Jesus** and this is an important measurement of the Church as an institution.

The growth in discipleship:

But interwoven within this commission is a more subtle measurement of growth. How do we measure discipleship? This is a measure of the inner struggle to grow in the nature of Christ. It is interesting to see that Jesus defined how we should grow as well as how we should measure our growth quite precisely: *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind... You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* (Matthew 22:37-39) At the Last Supper, shortly before His death and resurrection, He provided further clarification: *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you,* (this is the measurement)... *By this all will know that you are My disciples...* (John 13:34-35).

Our Chief Apostle recently elaborated on this further:

"It is not my intention to criticise or caricature the past, but rather to show the way we have come. There was a time when we used to say that the Lord will return when "the last soul" was sealed. To be worthy meant to be sealed, to remain faithful, and to overcome the world. Faithfulness essentially consisted of attending all the divine services and of bringing one's offerings.

Today we have a different understanding of the preparation of the bride. Now our concern is to fight against sin and "the old Adam", to align our lives to the gospel, and to become like Jesus. As a result, the love of Christ has become the standard of perfection. The mission of the New Apostolic Church, as it is understood today, reflects this development. To begin with, this is a matter of reaching out to all human beings in order to teach them the gospel of Jesus Christ and to dispense the sacraments. However, the Church is also to cultivate a warm fellowship in which everyone experiences the love of God and the joy of serving Him and others..."

The growth in inner authority:

We also grow in something we could call "inner authority". The Chief Apostle Leber used this phrase in a meeting when teaching from Mark 1:22: *And they were astonished at His teaching; for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.* He then elaborated on the difference between outer and inner authority. Outer authority is important but relies on external factors such as title or position. Inner authority however is preferable. It is reflected within our actions and speech. It originates from that which we believe and know.

Jesus demonstrated a powerful inner authority. In this episode, He had no outer authority as defined by the norms of His time. But He could teach in a manner that captivated the attention of His contemporaries based upon His personally held convictions; His love for God, His understanding of His purpose within God's plan and His knowledge of the scripture. In fact we could say He not only knew the scriptures, He "owned them" in a very personal way because they testified of Him and He was committed to fulfilling them.

We too can cultivate a strong personal inner conviction based upon our love for Jesus Christ, our appreciation for the grace of God that He allows in our lives and our understanding of our calling and purpose within the body of Christ. We can also know the Gospel, not as scholars but as those who understand its relevance and apply it to our lives continually.

This inner authority can be found universally within the body of Christ. Certainly it is available to those who hold ministry and those who serve in congregational leadership roles. But it also shines within the single moms and dads who teach their children the love of Jesus within stressful and uncertain circumstances. Likewise, it can be found within the quiet trust and prayers of our seniors, often confronted with loneliness and diminished health.

Continued on the next page...



It grows in our students as they profess their devotion to Christ in an increasingly secular society and within the workplace where brothers and sisters witness His teachings through their integrity and interpersonal relationships.

The growth in spiritual fruit:

Jesus also described the growth of discipleship in terms of being fruitful. In John 15 we can read:

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing... By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

As he so often did in his ministry, the Apostle Paul clarifies the words of Jesus and gives us a detailed understanding of spiritual fruitfulness.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

A healthy congregation should support the growth of this fruit. And the growth can be measured! It can be as evident as the explosion of nature's springtime growth!

Growing big and growing small:

So we see the possibility of an incredible diversity of spiritual life that grows out of a healthy congregation. Now let's look at our growth from a different perspective. Our congregations, in all their diversity of spiritual life, must grow big and grow small at the same time. Is this a contradiction? Let me explain by asking you to read the accounts of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 and compare it to the Last Supper as described in John 13-17.

Try and imagine the "bigness" of the Sermon on the Mount. Picture the power of the revolutionary and life changing concepts that Christ communicated in just the Beatitudes alone! You will recall an entire series of divine services revolved around this topic recently.

Continued on page 11...



OFFERING DURING THE MIDWEEK

Here and there questions have been raised regarding offering on the midweek, particularly if there is a group devotional and or small group discussions, which may even be conducted in homes or other locations.

Naturally, when we are at church, the offering box is always available for our offerings. However, let us take a closer look at this matter.

Our offerings are a result of the reaction in our soul when we feel the love of God and recognize His goodness in our life. I truly believe that our Heavenly Father sees this impulse and “measures” it in His unique way. We can see the evidence of this in the experience of the widow in the temple in Mark 12:41-44. Here we can understand that Jesus did not simply watch the offering box and measure the amounts that were offered, but that He was interested in and measured something far deeper – the motivation and the love of the offerers. Thus He explained to the disciples that the widow offered “more than all”. We can see that the times and amounts of our offerings are not what the Lord watches; rather He looks into the heart and measures the expression of love, trust, and thankfulness that we intend to bring to Him.

Brothers and Sisters, let us recognize that the Lord already sees when we are moved by His love and when we decide to bring thanks to Him. Our decision or will to offer already yields our Father’s good favor and blessing. The mechanics of how and when we offer is not the critical element. With this in mind, we can understand that our offerings may be done monthly, “Sundaily”, or whenever we have the opportunity to act on the impulse to give thanks by availing ourselves of eOffering.

-LRK





*From a different
Perspective...*

Apostle Schmidt has recently established a warm, ecumenical relationship with the Long Island Council of Churches. Upon sharing information about our church and the New York area congregations, he received the following letter from a local pastor. We too often see ourselves only through our own perspective. This report gives us an interesting view from a different perspective which we would like to share with you.

What I like about the New Apostolic Church...

At the National Workshop on Christian Unity in Arlington, Virginia, Rabbi Fred Dobb shared a concept he learned from a Swedish Lutheran bishop, Krister Stendahl, "sacred envy." Rabbi Dobb explained that sacred envy means saying, *"I am not going to convert, but I see something in your tradition that I really like."*

In recent weeks I have been getting to know people from the New Apostolic Church, which began a century and a half ago as a reform movement in England and Scotland that spread to Germany and Scandinavia and eventually to distant lands. While I am no means an expert in their history, I have heard that they have evolved into a denomination that resembles most Protestant free churches in doctrine, the liturgical churches in worship, and the Methodists in their structure. Sacred envy is quite different from pretending that there are no differences between faith communities. It means embracing our diversity and looking for things we admire in those who are not entirely like us.

We Christians sometimes view one another with suspicion, as if every quirk we find is a sign of heretical doctrine or practice. In the case of the NAC, they do indeed have some unusual

customs, but don't we all? Yours truly starts the day with chili peppers in my coffee and believes (or at least devoutly wants to believe) that the Mets might win again this year, so who am I to call my neighbor strange? So let me say that I love my own denomination, the United Methodist Church, and have no intention of leaving it, but there are some things I see in the NAC that I really like:

✘ I like the candor I see in the NAC. When they celebrated their 150th anniversary recently, for example, they gave an account of the divisions that gave birth to a new denomination without the one-sided editorializing with which Christians frequently embellish their origins. And, coming myself from a denomination that defeated, 49.5% to 50.5%, a resolution admitting we are divided on issues surrounding homosexuality, I found it refreshing that their Web site's page on this topic begins with, "The New Apostolic Church has lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgendered members who seek salvation through Jesus Christ." It goes on to note that those who are struggling to come to terms with their sexual orientation may benefit from some competent counseling and suggests a reputable counseling service. Wouldn't all of our churches have healthier discussions of sexuality if we

started with this sort of honesty and compassion? Wouldn't we be more likely to attract young adults, regardless of their orientation, who can't abide bigotry?

✘ I love the way the NAC uses the skills that their pastors, who are nearly all unpaid lay pastors without much theological education, bring from their experience in their daily lives. Their local judicatory official was an accountant before he was a pastor and used what he knew about finances to serve the church. One of the pastors of their congregation on Long Island is a computer security expert: don't you wish you had him around when your church pc catches a virus?

✘ At a time when many denominations seem to be withdrawing from others, the NAC is excited about forging ecumenical relationships and learning from other denominations how to engage their surrounding communities. Denominations that begin in an attempt to address a problem in the wider church sometimes become quite isolated from other Christians. About 15 years ago, the leaders of the NAC recognized that this had happened to them and decided to embrace ecumenism.

✘ Churches often become limited in vision to their own locality, and I love the way the NAC is connected to other Christians around the globe. As a result of their mission work in various nations, their local congregations are surprisingly diverse. And as we will explore at our May 27 Annual Meeting in Smithtown, diversity is essential if we wish to thrive in the future, as is local leadership that is able to shepherd diverse congregations.

✘ As befits a denomination that focuses on the work of the Holy Spirit, they seem remarkably open to new ideas. Many denominations are slowly closing tiny, struggling congregations and wishing they had more large churches that could deliver the sort of diverse options for worship, learning, and fellowship that attracts people today. The NAC is merging its smallish congregations into larger ones, selling the old buildings and building new ones designed for bigger, more diverse congregations. They also recognize that new congregations designed to invite a new generation may require new leadership skills. As one member of our Dialogue Committee said after meeting with NAC leaders recently, *"I was impressed with their sense of being on the cusp of new directions for their church."*

At our Annual Meeting on May 27 the Long Island Council of Churches will welcome the New Apostolic Church as our newest denominational member.



A PERSPECTIVE ON... *Engagement Blessings*

In the USA district the guidelines for engagement blessings have changed over time. Sometimes they were dispensed in a divine service, in the home congregation of one member of the engaged couple, or during a youth service. Sometimes they were given in the sacristy or at a private residence. Sometimes an individual was limited to one engagement blessing during his/her life. Other times an individual was allowed to receive a blessing each time he or she became engaged. To bring uniformity while still allowing flexibility for local customs and traditions, the District Apostles of the global Church adopted resolutions concerning engagement blessings. They resolved that these blessings could be dispensed at the wish of an engaged couple, if the couple is heterosexual and not already cohabitating, and if their engagement constitutes a serious promise to marry. The blessing can be dispensed even if one of the partners has already been married and has been divorced or widowed, or if he or she has already received an engagement blessing. In so doing, the Church leadership aligned these conditions with those required for a marriage blessing. These resolutions are effective in the USA immediately.

Beginning January 1, 2015, engagement blessings in the USA will be given at a location that offers privacy and the dignity appropriate for the blessing such as a private residence, the church sacristy, or church fellowship room, rather than at the altar during a divine service. As in the past, the blessing is to be given by a priestly ministry, preferably one who is familiar with the couple. The occasion is solemn but joyful and can be held with the couple alone or in the circle of family and close friends. While the couple may have every intention to marry when they ask for an engagement blessing, they

may find during their engagement that they are unable to make a lifelong commitment to each other. Because an engagement may end in a decision not to marry, it is distinguishable from other non-sacramental blessings that may be given in front of the altar (a wedding), or during a divine service (an anniversary blessing).

The NAC-USA engagement guidelines also acknowledge USA Christian culture. In this country Christian churches do not offer engagement blessings as a general rule, and if they do, it is not usually during a divine service. These guidelines also recognize that an engagement blessing speaks to a unique time for the couple as they focus on the mutual lifelong commitment their upcoming wedding vows require.

Written by:
E. Buehner



An Inclusive Experience..

Everyone wants what is best for their child. Preferably we want our children to be loved and accepted for who they are...to be included. For a child with special needs this is not always the case. Sometimes schools are overburdened by class size and lack of experience and assistance. Sometimes people are a bit narrow minded and can't recognize people's abilities. Some see a disability instead of an ability.

My daughter was born 6 years ago with Down Syndrome. As she grew it was difficult to accommodate her needs in the Sunday School. Being the Sunday School teacher and music director I had little time to make sure her needs were met in the Sunday School learning environment. But as we know, the Lord provides. Earlier this year our congregation joined with others to create a flagship congregation. This new congregation is full of children, teachers, and resources. My daughter loves to sing and has joined our very large children's choir. Not only is she able to successfully be included in her Sunday School class and choir, she is able to participate fully. She does the crafts, homework, and prays with her friends and peers.

God has answered another prayer by providing a speech pathologist to aide her. Since my daughter has difficulty speaking as a result of her Apraxia, she has a communication device to help her. Our aide, a fellow sister and mom of four as well, programs the Sunday School memory verses and commandments into the device so that my daughter can say them right along with her classmates. I believe the children think this is quite "cool!"



Did I mention that this Speech Pathologist/Aide is my childhood friend who I got confirmed with, many, many years ago, but up until this year only saw on occasion? God made this world very big but very small at the same time! As I am busy with my life and family I often don't take time to acknowledge these miracles but when I take time to write them down it is clear to see that the Lord works in many ways to love and care for His children!

Submitted by:
A USA member



WORK OF MINISTRY

No Limits

As Work of Ministry has been introduced to more and more congregations, some have wondered whether this is simply a method of getting individuals to take on more tasks within their congregation. Now is a good time to address this misconception, and shed some light on the true nature of ministry.

Paul, who frequently highlights the importance of spiritual gifts, writes to the Galatians: *So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up. Therefore, whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone—especially to those in the family of faith.* (Galatians 6: 9-10, NLT)

Here, Paul illuminates two areas of focus for ministry: the family of faith (our congregation), but also everyone else. It is good when we can identify and use the spiritual gifts God has given us to glorify Him within our congregations; however, it is also good when we can share them with our neighbors and communities.

In doing so, Peter reminds us that we glorify God: *God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ.* (1 Peter 4: 10-11, NLT)

Wouldn't it be wonderful if everything we did brought glory to God? This cannot be accomplished if we try to place limitations on the use of our spiritual gifts. Work of Ministry is not a program – it is a way of life. When we are fully committed, it becomes a part of our identity, allowing us to serve as a living example of what it means to serve others as Christ serves us.

We want to hear about how you've put your spiritual gifts to work. Email the Work of Ministry Work Group at wgwom@NAC-USA.org to share your story.

Written by: A. Daehnke



GROWTH

continued...

He introduces the Kingdom of God to the masses of everyday people and pronounces God's desire that they enter and abide there with Him despite their flawed humanity. What a message! I'm sure the number of disciples grew from the power of this preaching!

Then feel the intimacy, the heart to heart conversation, the teaching, the praying, the profession, and the pastoral love of Jesus with His disciples as they communed together within the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday. Can you imagine the growth of the "inner man" that took place within this encounter?

We grow "big" on Sunday within the divine service. Here we experience the fullness of the church in word and sacrament and the richness and authenticity of the apostle ministry. The community of Christ's church is amplified by the prayers, worship, and music of the assembled congregation. The "bigness" of the Sunday experience is necessary for our growth.

But we also grow small. On the midweek, we experience the intimacy of our small groups. Every small group should offer our members all 4 of these incredibly important inner growth opportunities:

- **Teach discipleship.** It's more than Bible knowledge. It's how to bring the Gospel into our lives and be transformed by it.
- **Create fellowship** and the feeling of belonging to the family of God.
- **Provide pastoral care** - minister one to another.
- **Worship God and profess the power of His grace** within our lives.

Growing in seasons of strength and weakness:

Please allow me to conclude with one final view of growth. For the inhabitants of the northern regions during the harsh winter months or the southwest during the recent drought of 3 years, nature's life force seems dormant or diminished. One could easily assume that life, health and growth may never return. Christ's Church has had seasons of unfettered growth and seasons of stress, seeming defeat and dormancy. It has suffered under persecution and all forms of human weakness. Christ experienced all of this in His lifetime and He warned His disciples that they would also.

As we labor and struggle to create our healthy congregations, let us not be deterred or confused when our human expectations for outward growth are not immediately satisfied. The inner growth must be recognized and measured and the outer number of disciples will grow in due season according to our Heavenly Father's plan.

-LRK/WGJ





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EMERGING LEADER & PILLAR CONFERENCE

The New Apostolic Church USA is currently in the process of refining an Emerging Leader program that provides strategic resources and opportunities for younger leaders to get involved both nationally and locally. As a result of this process, and to adequately give the necessary time to development and sustainability, the 2014 Emerging Leader conference previously scheduled for September 26-28 has been canceled.

