

NEW APOSTOLIC CHURCH USA

VISION Journal



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

9	Preface to Journal
	Introduction to Stepping Forward
15	Congregational Pilot Programs, Summer 2009
16	Cast Your Vision, Spring 2010
17	Town Hall Meeting Workshops, Spring 2010
18	District Wide Strategic Planning, Spring 2011
19	Strategic Planning, Autumn 2011
24	Strengthen the House, Winter 2011
28	Stepping Forward: Now and Looking Ahead, Winter 2012
35	Excerpt on Salvation and the Vision, Summer 2013
36	Vision & Mission: The Building Blocks of Our Future, Autumn 2013
	<i>Success Stories</i>
43	Stepping Forward: The Phoenix Experience, Summer 2010
45	Boise, Idaho: Stepping Forward and Coming Together, Winter 2011
	Culture
51	iServe3, Spring 2009
52	Perspective: Congregational Palette, Autumn 2009
53	Shared Leadership, Summer 2010
55	Introduction to the New Catechism, Spring 2011
56	A Culture of Learning, Summer 2011
59	The First Church, Autumn 2012
61	A Church in Which People Feel At Home, Autumn 2013
62	What I Like About the NAC, Summer 2014
	<i>Success Story</i>
67	Women's Ministry in Kalamazoo, Winter 2012
	Spiritual Perspectives
73	Excerpt on Advent Season, Winter 2010
74	Looking Back... Looking Forward, Winter 2010
75	Palm Sunday to Pentecost, Spring 2011
78	Excerpt on Joy and Hope, Winter 2011

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Spiritual Perspectives, continued

79	The Kingdom of Heaven, Summer 2012
81	Excerpt on Change and Renewal, Spring 2012
82	Two Parables, Spring 2012
85	2013 A Jubilee Year, Winter 2012
88	Equip, Emerge, Engage, & Edify, Winter 2013
91	Words From Our Chief Apostle, Spring 2014
94	Growth, Summer 2014

Thanksgiving and Offering

101	Keep yourself thankful in everything!, Autumn 2009
103	Thoughts on Thanksgiving, Autumn 2010
105	Perspective: Offering In A Contemporary World, Autumn 2010
106	Excerpt on The Widow's Mite, Summer 2011
107	Thoughts on The Widow's Mite, Autumn 2011
109	Excerpt on Sacrifice, Summer 2012
110	Perspective: Offering, Summer 2012
112	Thankfulness and Relationships, Autumn 2012
113	Perspective: Stewardship, Autumn 2012
115	Offering & Sacrifice: A Theological Perspective, Summer 2013
118	Excerpt on Thanksgiving, Autumn 2013
119	Tithing: A Theological Perspective, Autumn 2013

Success Story

123	Stories of Thanksgiving, Summer 2013
-----	--------------------------------------

Self-Responsibility

127	Self-Responsibility: Keep Yourself, Spring 2009
129	Excerpt on Self-Responsibility, Summer 2009
130	Self-Responsibility, Part 1, Summer 2009
132	Self-Responsibility, Part 2, Autumn 2009
133	A Life in Balance, Autumn 2011
135	Perspective: Thoughts on Halloween, Autumn 2011
136	A Journey of Self-Responsibility, Summer 2013

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Work of Ministry

- 143 Stepping Forward: Ephesians 4:11-12, Winter 2009
145 Stepping Forward: A Work of Ministry, Spring 2010
147 Perspective: Ordained Ministry, Winter 2010
149 Excerpt on Work of Ministry, Spring 2011
150 Expressing Your Giftedness, Autumn 2012
152 Work of Ministry – No Limits, Summer 2014

Success Story

- 157 Work of Ministry: Spiritual Gift Discoveries, Autumn 2011

World Relief Fund and re Charitable Organizations

- 161 Updates on the World Relief Fund, Summer 2010
162 A New Look at the World Relief Fund, Summer 2012
164 After the Water Recedes, Winter 2012
165 re: A Charitable Ministry of the New Apostolic Church USA, Spring 2013
167 re Charitable Officially Registered, Spring 2014

Divine Service Experience

- 173 Choir in Midweek Service, Spring 2009
174 Perspectives: Apostle Greetings, Winter 2009
175 To Our Children and Youth, Spring 2011
176 Perspective: Higher Ministries Sitting in Services, Summer 2011
177 Perspective: Holy Communion with Christ, Winter 2011
180 Year End Scheduling Changes, Summer 2012
181 Understanding NAC TV, Summer 2012
183 Why go to a Church Service when you can watch NACtv, Autumn 2012
185 Connecting Our Isolated Members, Spring 2013
187 The Midweek Experience, Summer 2014

Pastoral Care

- 191 Children, Summer 2009
192 Perspective: Confidentiality, Spring 2011
194 Building Faith at Home, Autumn 2011
196 New Developments in Sunday School, Summer 2012

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Pastoral Care, continued

- 197 Creating a Bethany...for Singles, Summer 2012
199 A Renewed Look at Church Leadership and Pastoral Care, Spring 2013
202 Perspective: Engagement Blessings, Summer 2014

Success Stories

- 207 MP3 Players - Puerto Rico, Spring 2009
208 Everyone Has a Story, Spring 2014
211 An Inclusive Experience, Summer 2014

Small Groups

- 215 Perspective: Small Groups, Spring 2012
217 Small Groups – A Deeper Look, Autumn 2012

Sustainable Structure

- 223 Financial Stewardship, Autumn 2009
224 Apostle District Reorganization, Special Edition
226 Property Management Update, Summer 2010
227 New E-Offering Option Available, Autumn 2010
229 National Rector Conference, Autumn 2010
231 Protecting Children, Youth, and Adults, Autumn 2012
233 Creating Flagship Congregations, Summer 2013
237 Our USA District, Summer 2013
238 Offering During the Midweek, Summer 2014

Success Stories

- 243 A New District is Formed, Summer 2010
244 2014 Highlights, Spring 2014

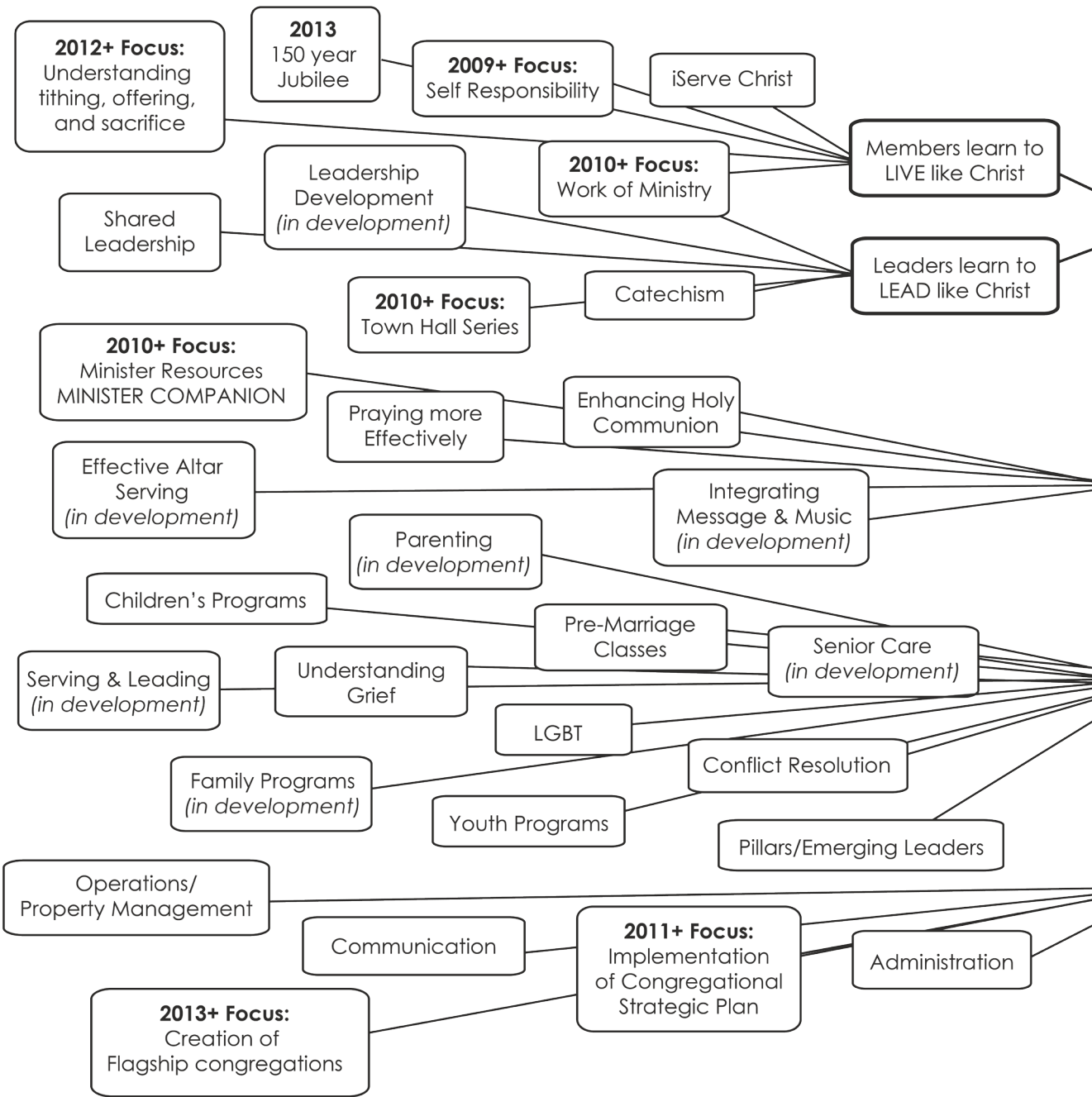
PREFACE

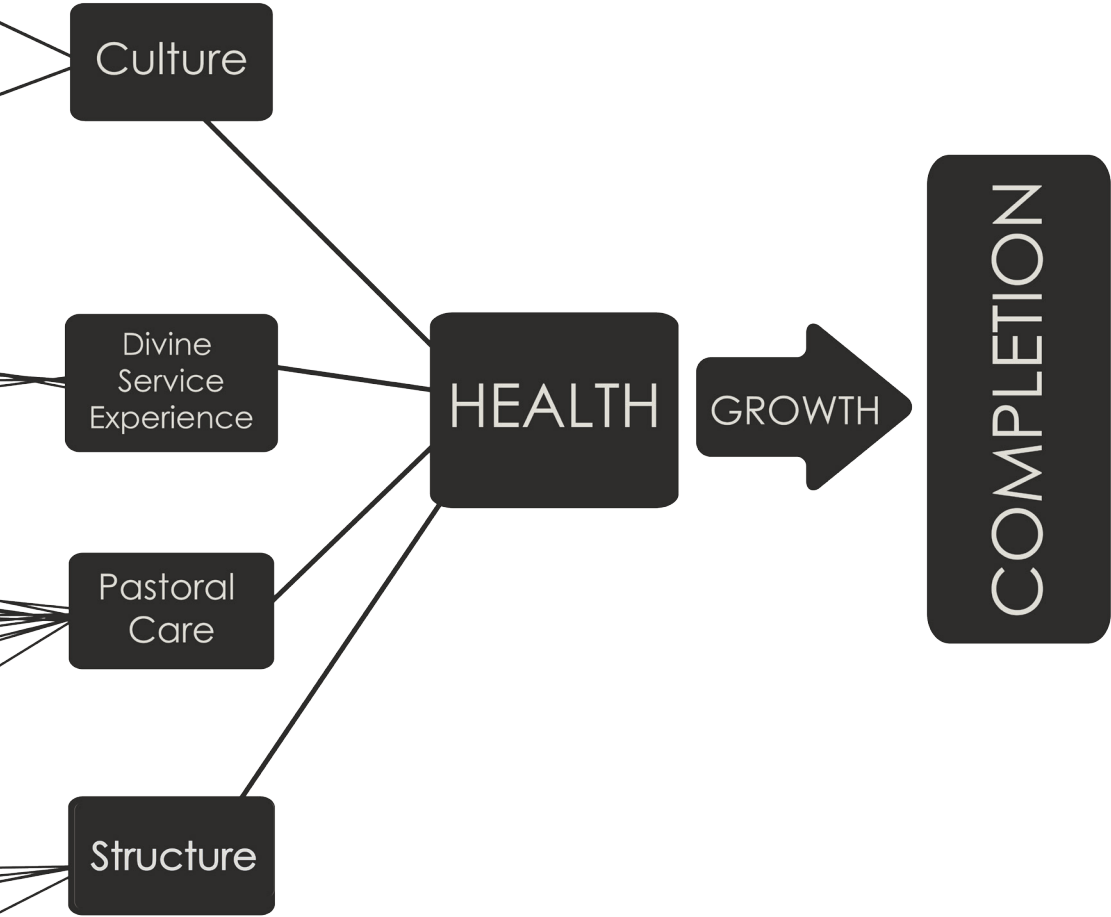
In the six years that we have been publishing the quarterly Vision Newsletter, the articles in each Vision reveal that they all have a place in the Stepping Forward process. This insight is useful in seeing the evolution and progress of the Stepping Forward initiatives since their inception in 2009. We have compiled the most important articles of the past six years into one journal. It is arranged by the four objectives of our Stepping Forward plan to have healthy and growing congregations: Culture, Divine Service Experience, Pastoral Care, and Sustainable Structure.

My hope is that you use the Vision Journal to answer any questions you might have about the Stepping Forward process and to see the plan set for the NAC-USA district coming together, piece by piece, as we align with the International Church's vision and mission.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R. K. Hall', is centered on the page. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'R' and 'K'.

Introduction to
**Stepping
Forward**





CONGREGATIONAL PILOT PROGRAMS

Dear brothers and sisters,

From time to time we will be implementing pilot programs in selected congregations; always in the interests of furthering our objectives of Health, Growth and Completion. Effective change is essential, but it often causes certain stresses and must be managed. A very important phase of any change, no matter how well planned, is the initial test or pilot program. This is how we will decide if a new idea will actually work and if so, how it must be modified to create the best possible outcome for some or all of our congregations.

I would ask your patience and understanding in this process as well as your active participation. For those in test congregations, you may be exposed to new ideas that frankly may be uncomfortable simply because they are different. Please discuss your feelings openly with the local congregational ministers. It is also quite possible that a pilot program will be tried and then discontinued giving some a feeling of inconsistency. This is an unfortunate but necessary byproduct of the process.

For those not in a test congregation, you may hear of a new idea and wonder why it can't be done in your location. Please understand that effective new ideas will be rolled out as quickly as possible after they have been reviewed, refined and approved by all the apostles.

I hope this will minimize confusion and misunderstandings and wish the very best to you as we step forward aggressively towards healthy and growing congregations that are being prepared for the return of Christ.

Reprint of Summer 2009 Vision Newsletter

CAST YOUR VISION!

Let me borrow the phrase, “Cast Your Vision!” and use it as the theme of our spring newsletter. This phrase is a popular slogan found in both contemporary religious and secular circles. It is often applied within a group of people that share a common bond (an organization, a nation and of course, a church) and describes their need to communicate clearly with one another about who they are, what they believe and perhaps most importantly, what they can become!

So, please allow me in the lead article of our aptly named Vision newsletter to describe in more detail our shared vision for the future of our district. Further, let us explore why our initiative for 2010, the “Work of Ministry”, is so essential to this vision. In this manner I would like to “Cast Our Vision” to every congregation so that all can embrace and help create it.

Additionally, I have asked our apostles, bishops and district leaders to take the lead in casting our vision across the country. They will be conducting a series of Town Hall Meetings in your area to share our future plans. What is a Town Hall Meeting? It is simply a more informal and interactive method of communication that allows for the sharing of new ideas and that encourages discussion. In this edition, you will find a report of some regional workshops and Town Hall Meetings conducted recently.

Reprint of Introduction from Spring 2010 Vision Newsletter

TOWN HALL MEETING WORKSHOPS

Since mid January, a team from the NAC-USA district office has been conducting regional workshops and Town Hall Meetings in selected locations. These workshops are held on the Saturday before the District Apostle conducts a district service with the intent to maximize the value delivered to local ministers, music leaders and members in a cost effective manner.

The 6 hour agenda includes individual breakout sessions for regional district leaders, local ministers and spouses, as well as music leaders. The district leaders, apostles and bishops participate in strategic planning meetings. The ministers and musicians join together for a workshop called "Integrating Message and Music" with the goal of collaborating more effectively and creating a higher level of spiritual experience for our members in each divine service. Ministers and their spouses come together for an enlightening and eye-opening workshop called "Praying more effectively" designed to assist all those that pray in a public setting.

After a quick supper, the day concludes with a Town Hall Meeting for all participants and local interested members wherein the District Apostle outlines his long term vision for the NAC-USA district called Stepping Forward. The presentation contains a blue print for enhancing the health and growth of all our congregations as well as an open forum for questions. In addition, the team facilitates a group interactive multimedia exercise called "The Potter" designed to illustrate the process of self discovery that each member may use to find their God given, unique "Work of Ministry".

These regional workshops will continue through June 2010. The apostles, bishops and district leaders will continue to communicate the finer points of Stepping Forward in each local congregation through further ongoing Town Hall Meetings providing each member an opportunity to interact freely and contribute meaningfully to our plans for healthy, growing congregations.

Reprint of Spring 2010 Vision Newsletter

DISTRICT WIDE STRATEGIC PLANNING

The NAC-USA district is currently engaged in a district wide strategic planning initiative. Your apostle, bishop and district leader are working as a team to analyze our needs and make recommendations regarding our future structure. Using a standardized decision making template, they will be developing the direction of the congregations for the next decade. All decisions must fit within our central objective of building healthy, growing congregations prepared for the return of Christ.

The process will be completed in a thorough, thoughtful and objective manner and tentative decisions may take the better part of 2011 to become fully formed and complete.

Your district leader has spent a great deal of time and effort in 2010 to gain insights into the conditions within each congregation at all levels. We know that good implementation of these decisions may take years to complete.

This process will also be transparent. Please be confident that all preliminary plans will remain tentative until they can be fully communicated and discussed with the congregations affected. Especially when they involve creating a new congregation via a merger or when existing church property modifications are required. Ultimately, we face the same pressures as all not for profit organizations and especially traditional Christian churches: We have finite resources that must be allocated in the most efficient manner possible and must make decisions that we believe are ultimately in the best interest of the church and its members.

Reprint of Spring 2011 Vision Newsletter

STRATEGIC PLANNING

I would like to communicate openly with you about the future of our NAC-USA district and your local congregation. As you know, we have begun a district wide strategic planning process that addresses the circumstances in each congregation and creates a road map to greater congregational health. The name for this planning process is Stepping Forward. By its very nature, this type of planning is proactive and far reaching. It will shape the direction of our church for years to come and position our congregations to thrive and grow.

As the process picks up momentum, I would like each member to feel included. This article may seem a bit unusual in its length and detail, but I wanted the entire plan to be summarized in one document and be transparent to all. It also may seem a little business like and corporate sounding. However, we live in demanding times that require us to utilize the most effective and forward thinking techniques available under the direction of our Chief Apostle and the continual prompting of the Holy Spirit. Everyone should understand the process we used in developing Stepping Forward.

At the conclusion of this article I am hopeful that we will all share a common understanding of the following questions:

Why are we doing this?

What are the benefits?

What are the steps in the process and how will it affect me?

How do I participate in the process and offer my suggestions and feedback?

So let us begin our exploration with a few thoughts about strategic planning. Many of you may have engaged in this process within your workplace and understand the steps. For those who have not, let me provide a simple summary:

A strategic plan requires us to intentionally visualize exactly what we want the future to be and then do only those things that will bring our future vision into reality as efficiently as possible. It also requires us to stop doing those things that will not bring our future vision into reality. We can be inspired by the verse from Proverbs in the King James Bible: *Where there is no vision, the people perish.*

A good plan has specific steps that must be taken in the right order and another verse from Proverbs will provide a useful perspective: *A man's heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.* (Proverbs 16:9)

Here are the steps that we must take together, always seeking the Lord's direction:

STEP 1

Clearly define who we are (or want to become), what we believe and where we want to go. This is often contained in a Mission and Vision Statement. With this knowledge, we can create measurable objectives to achieve.

As reported in the Spring edition of this newsletter, this process has been under way for some time and I would like to share our progress to date. Let me use the steps to the left to give you a progress report and describe what you can expect to experience in the future.

STEP 2

Determine where we are right now truthfully in relation to our objectives. Often a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis is used for this.

STEP 1: Our New Apostolic Mission and Vision Statements perfectly define the church we want to become. It is for this reason that we display them prominently in all our church buildings.

STEP 3

Make a detailed plan to get from where we are now to where we want to be as efficiently as possible.

VISION

A church in which people feel at home and, inspired by the Holy Spirit and their love for God, align their lives to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and thus prepare themselves for His return and eternal life.

STEP 4

Implement the plan.

MISSION

Reaching out to all people in order to teach them the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to baptize them with water and the Holy Spirit. Providing soul care and cultivating a warm fellowship in which everyone shall experience the love of God and the joy of serving Him and others.

STEP 5

Measure our progress continually.

We can distill these statements down to one overarching objective: Create healthy

STEP 6

Make course corrections where needed.

New Apostolic Christian congregations for our members because thereby we will grow (first in spiritual maturity and then in numbers) and be completed for the return of Jesus Christ. I hope you won't grow tired of seeing the Stepping Forward plan, but I feel strongly that this is the road map that leads us to readiness for the return of Christ!

Now let's get very specific. A healthy congregation should provide the following benefits to those who make up the body of Christ. These four bullet points describe the very essence of Stepping Forward and should guide our thinking, our actions and our decision making for the foreseeable future.

- Inspirational, worshipful divine services comprised of prayer, music, a powerful message authored by the Holy Spirit, and an enhanced Holy Communion experience with Christ.
- Warm pastoral care that provides the teachings of Christ and support for the daily challenges of contemporary life for members of all age groups.
- A culture that is based upon the Gospel of Christ; members who learn to live like Christ and ministers who lead like Christ.
- A sustainable structure where a critical mass (sufficient numbers) of dedicated ordained ministers and members engage their spiritual gifts and talents to serve one another and their community in the love of Christ.

STEPS 2 AND 3: Our district leadership teams (apostle, bishop and district leader) have been working diligently to objectively assess the condition of our congregations in relation to the four items above through the use of a SWOT analysis. We know we have room to grow in all areas and our planning will address these deficiencies aggressively. Over the course of time, one or all of the team members will be visiting your congregation to share their findings and present their preliminary plans to enhance congregational health. They will likewise answer your questions and gather your feedback regarding the proposed future direction of your congregation. We will create multiple ways for your voice to be heard directly and comfortably. Finally, they will then work with your suggestions to craft final decisions.

Let me pause for a moment and provide some caution and some clarification. Clearly, we are blazing new trails here and some may be uncomfortable or unfamiliar with the style or the methods we are suggesting. Let us be honest and address directly the areas that may cause us some anxiety.

Firstly, we are not accustomed to integrating the feedback of the membership into congregational decisions. In years past, this was not encouraged and thus, we are not experienced at being collaborative. It is a skill that we must learn in order to Step Forward and while our first steps may be shaky, I am convinced that we will grow together. Please be aware that gaining consensus is much more difficult than being autocratic (a fact that every parent will understand). Ultimately, this will test our culture of living and leading like Christ. Much compromise, peacemaking, tolerance and love will be necessary. At the end of the day, decisions will be made that we believe will benefit the greatest good, knowing of course that not everyone will agree with all things.

Next, please recognize that some of our deficiencies are rooted in or made worse by our unsustainable structure. In many areas, we are simply spread too thin. The result is not

healthy; lives spiral out of balance, and the quality of the divine service experience and our pastoral care is weakened despite often heroic efforts by our ministers and members. On the one hand, each congregation needs a minimum critical mass to be sustainable and to deliver the critical benefits that will transform us into the Bride of Christ. But on the other hand, we must also be sensitive to the unique circumstances of each locality; we cannot use a cookie cutter approach. Some of the planning will revolve around creating new congregations with improved structure.

STEP 4: The implementation stage will depend on the complexity of the plan and may take some time to fully complete. Plans involving new buildings or capital improvements will be evaluated and prioritized based upon our financial realities across the entire country. Not every plan can be fully implemented at the same time.

In addition, every plan will contain provisions to implement the Work of Ministry initiative, to provide preaching and pastoral training for our ordained ministers, to identify and support our youth in entering ministry and to begin the process of integrating our congregations more completely into our communities. These activities are ongoing with no completion date other than our spiritual completion and Christ's return.

STEPS 5 AND 6: Our progress towards our objectives must be continually measured. As circumstances merit, adjustments will be made to keep us on course.

Please allow me to conclude with this thought. I believe that we are in a transitional moment of great importance to our church in the USA. We have two distinct groups of members that are equally loved by our Savior Jesus Christ, and who can look forward to the day of His return with equal expectation.

Our more traditional members have built our church to its present stature and have demonstrated a single minded commitment to the Lord over many decades. You were born and raised in an era with sharply different norms and customs than we see in our contemporary world; both inside and outside the church. You are dearly loved and your expectations are respected. To this group, we make a commitment that our planning is 100% within the certainties of our New Apostolic doctrine based upon the Gospel of Christ, and the security of our Chief Apostle's leadership. Further, our plans are designed to make our congregations stronger and more impactful and meaningful to your children and grandchildren. You may feel secure that you are integral and irreplaceable members of the body of Christ. Your zeal and your spiritual gifts are needed more than ever for our completion.

Our more contemporary members should also feel that we fulfill our mission statement: to be "a church in which people feel at home and inspired by the Holy Spirit and their love for God, align their life to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and thus prepare themselves for His return and eternal life." To this group we make a commitment to "pass the mantle" and we encourage you to step forward and take ownership in the future direction of our congregations with the same dedication as your forbearers.

In addition, our plan is to make the future congregational tent as big, as tolerant and as all-encompassing as the grace of Jesus. Perhaps this is what Isaiah meant when he said: *“Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; do not spare; lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes. For you shall expand to the right and to the left, and your descendants will inherit the nations, and make the desolate cities inhabited.”* (Isaiah 54: 2-3)

To both groups, I would close with the words of Christ: *“that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”* (John 13: 34-35)

Reprint of Autumn 2011 Vision Newsletter

STRENGTHEN THE HOUSE

We find ourselves in the waning moments of 2011 and with much joy prepare to enter the New Year. Our faithful God has been so good to us and in this issue you will find a pictorial view of some of the many events that were memorable. However, for me 2011 has been characterized by our single minded focus on creating healthier congregations. Much time and work was invested into the planning of the future of our NAC-USA district and as you recall, these plans have four main objectives:

- Inspirational, worshipful divine services comprised of prayer, music, a powerful message authored by the Holy Spirit, and an enhanced Holy Communion experience with Christ.
- Warm pastoral care that provides the teachings of Christ and support for the daily challenges of contemporary life for members of all age groups.
- A culture that is based upon the Gospel of Christ; members who learn to live like Christ and ministers who lead like Christ.
- A sustainable structure where a critical mass (sufficient numbers) of dedicated ordained ministers and members engage their spiritual gifts and talents to serve one another and their community in the love of Christ.

As I mentioned in the Autumn Vision article on this subject, this plan will control our direction for the next decade. There is much to do as we prayerfully and thoughtfully seek to implement these plans in every congregation. So in 2012 we will strive for a seamless and natural continuation of the Stepping Forward process and look to experience a year in which our planning takes tangible form and shape. Our lives should be enriched as these concepts begin to jump off the drawing board and become the new reality within each congregation. We want to see, hear and touch the benefits in a measurable way.

My spirit has been captured by a small phrase found in Zechariah 10:6 where the prophet exhorts God's people to "strengthen the house". I feel this is a worthy exhortation for us as well and is a useful "short hand" phrase (that certainly dates me) for the task that is before us in 2012.

So early in the New Year, what tangible steps can we take to strengthen the house in a way that supports our four healthy congregational objectives above? Let me provide a few suggestions.

1. Strengthen our Holy Communion experience with Christ. This is such a fundamental component of the divine service and our very profession as New Apostolic Christians. I am convinced that the quality of each divine service and hence each member's life will be immediately improved when our understanding of this sacrament is enhanced. A Perspective article dedicated to this subject appears later in this newsletter with sample discussion points. I would recommend that this becomes the focus of congregational fellowships and pastoral visits.

2. Strengthen our understanding of the Gospel of Christ. In a recent meeting, the question arose: How exactly do we change our culture and learn to live and lead like Christ? Please give us specific details! This is an excellent question and I would suggest the following: Let us go directly to the source and become students (disciples) of the teachings of Christ. His gospel is the definitive word on how to live and how to lead. He didn't speak in vague generalities but gave us definition and substance that is powerfully relevant today. It has the power to change us.

Every member has access to this learning tool and further, congregations could organize small groups immediately to enhance our knowledge. In addition to His direct teachings (example: Sermon on the Mount), the groups should focus their attention on His parables, encounters (example: the adulteress facing execution by stoning), experiences (example: granting grace at the cross to the malefactor) and miracles. Within these dimensions we begin to better understand Christ. They provide a primer on healthy spiritual living.

Before going further, let me add one word of warning. In our busy world, the temptation is always there to approach this in a task oriented way. We like to check off items on our "to do list". Can we see that being a disciple of the teachings of Christ requires of us a lifelong ongoing striving? But with that said, we need to start somewhere and I would look specifically to gain a deeper understanding of His feelings on these topics:

- | | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| • Tolerance | • Love | • Compassion |
| • Judgment | • Anger | • Righteousness |
| • Revenge | • Servant hood | • Humility |
| • Forgiveness | • Reconciliation | • Repentance |
| • Peace | • Service to others | • Charity |
| • Pride/Arrogance | • Self-Centeredness | |

You will find additional information to assist you in your research and discussions on the new NAC-USA website in the Going Deeper section.

3. Strengthen our understanding and implementation of the Work of Ministry. Each congregation must function in a healthy, sustainable way. Fundamentally, it must provide pastoral care to each member that creates teaching, comfort and support. The early apostolic

congregations were communal. They ministered to each other and thereby edified the Body of Christ under the direction of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the apostles as described in Ephesians 4:11-13.

This is a precedent for us today born directly out of the gospel of Christ. The Work of Ministry is a method for leading and directing a healthy sustainable congregation. Everyone contributes their spiritual gifts for the benefit of all. However, this requires all to possess a knowledge based upon personal discovery: What are my God given gifts? What has God called me to do? What are my passions? What experiences has God engineered in my life that has shaped my ability to serve others? How will I best integrate these factors into my congregation while leading a balanced life?

This is a deeper understanding than volunteerism and again requires us to be students of the Gospel. If you have not investigated this yet, please consider this your personal invitation to take an enlightening journey of self-discovery. Your rector will have information to help you get started.

4. Strengthen our structure. There are actually two immediate action items that I would like to tell you about.

- The development of “Flagship” congregations as strongholds of health. These congregations will benefit from a size of 100 plus members. We hope to have at least one in each region. This will be an incremental first step in better supporting the smaller congregations surrounding them.

They will have technology and facility enhancements and will be the hubs for training, education and community outreach support from the NAC-USA district church. This structural change is not meant to create two classes of members or be elitist. Rather it is our attempt to bring the best of our teaching, training, support and ministerial capabilities as close to the most members as possible.

- A stronger support system to “link” all our members more closely. Particularly the small isolated congregations, our youth attending college campuses, our brothers and sisters in the armed forces, our members living at some distance from a congregation and those isolated by sickness, infirmity or travel schedules.

It will come as no surprise that the backbone of this support system is technology. Some of you have been connected to www.NewApostolicChurchUSA.tv, our system for broadcasting divine services to those not able to attend a live service via an internet connection. Currently we are working on broadcasting from at least one site in each time zone. Ultimately, this system will become the basis whereby our Flagship congregations support our smaller isolated congregations and members. It is expected that with time, most Flagship locations will broadcast their services to other sites.

In addition, the groups of isolated members above, starting with our youth on college campuses will be supported by their own dedicated “linked” ministry who will seek to overcome the

distances and separation students feel when away from home with an enhanced form of pastoral care, connection and divine services. For our members in the armed services, we hope to “enlist” the help of our ministers who are veterans and have experienced military duty.

In conclusion, another Old Testament personality comes to mind. The story of Nehemiah is fascinating reading at many levels that is both instructional and inspirational. Here we see the power of one every day, humble man who feels a divine calling to serve during difficult times. He rallies the people of God returning from their captivity to restore the walls of Jerusalem. The spark of calling becomes a tangible reality as the vision spreads from household to household and each family adopts a section of the wall or a gate to restore.

Let us likewise come together in 2012 and rally around our cause that will enhance the richness of our congregational life and prepare us for Christ’s return.

Reprint of Winter 2011 Vision Newsletter

STEPPING FORWARD: NOW AND LOOKING AHEAD

As we enter 2013 our focus will remain squarely on Stepping Forward, our strategic plan for congregational health and growth. This plan is designed to help us stay on course with our International Mission and Vision and to employ our God given resources; the spiritual gifts, energy, time, offering, and efforts of each soul as effectively as possible. The successful implementation of our plan depends upon clear understanding and our collective willingness and ability to measure our results with honesty and objectivity.

Our Vision statement reads: A church in which people feel at home and, inspired by the Holy Spirit and their love for God, align their lives to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and thus prepare themselves for His return and eternal life. Our Mission: Reaching out to all people in order to teach them the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to baptize them with water and the Holy Spirit. Providing soul care and cultivating a warm fellowship in which everyone shall experience the love of God and the joy of serving Him and others.

As described previously, we believe that the Mission and Vision Statements can be summarized as follows:

Create healthy congregations.

Healthy congregations can become growing congregations.

Healthy, growing congregations will lead to our completion; souls fully transformed into the image of Christ and the church prepared as His bride.

We began our strategic plan called Stepping Forward in 2009. Where we have seen positive results, let us bring God the glory. Where we have made missteps, let us be accountable and in Christian love hold each other accountable. And finally, where we have “followed at a distance” for a time like Peter (Luke 22: 54), let us renew our commitment to Him.

In the following pages we will elaborate on our plan, which is organized by the four objectives of congregational health, so that we can be clear on our future direction. It is followed by an assessment of our progress to date organized in the same manner. This assessment is meant to be objective and honest beginning with the admission that implementation, modification, and renewal will always be necessary but very difficult to accomplish in lock step across all congregations simultaneously.

While each location has its own unique circumstances and personalities we encourage every member to embrace this vision for the future and continue Stepping Forward.

Improving Culture

Culture is often defined as “the way we do things around here”. And if we are truly disciples of Christ, then we ought to do things the way He did and taught. Our congregations should support each member and minister in their personal, life long struggle to become Christ like; to transform our very being into His nature and image and to change our lives to reflect His teachings. Christ led by being the servant of all and commanded that we love each other and refrain from judgment. He lived a life of compassion, kindness and tolerance and thereby created the template for our own healthy lifestyle.

Improving the Divine Service Experience

What is this experience? It is everything a soul sees, hears, and feels before, during and after the divine service. This is the moment and the place when we meet with God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit within the community of fellow believers. It is divine Word and Sacrament. It includes the message, the music and intentional worship segments inspired by the Holy Spirit. This integration of these components within the divine service is the product of prayer, preparation and communication between those who voluntarily share their gifts with the congregation. While we accept that we are flawed and imperfect vessels, we reject the notion that we can't aspire to the highest possible level of quality; all to the honor and glory of God and for the edification of the body of Christ.

The experience should comfort, strengthen, inspire, teach, and testify of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It should bring each soul to the complete readiness to share Holy Communion with Him. It communicates a sense of welcoming and belonging to every person who enters the church regardless of their circumstances.

Improving Pastoral Care

This is how the congregation helps each soul experience the love of God within the unique circumstances of their life. From birth to death, the church can be a source of care and support that is relevant to our age group and individual journey of faith. It can help us cope with the stresses of contemporary daily life. It is also an admission that “we are the church” and all can be equipped to serve and minister to each other based upon our God given gifts.

Improving Structure

The resources of the church; all the goodness and value of a healthy congregation described above as well as it's physical assets must be distributed and managed in the most effective and sustainable manner. This includes the time, spiritual gifts, offerings, and efforts voluntarily contributed by each ordained minister and member. We are all stewards of His church and accountable to Him and each other. This means that where possible we must create congregations of sufficient size and strength that have the power, future vision, and health to grow.

In addition, our future plans must address an important reality for all our congregations: The proclamations of the Word of God and the Sacraments, and likewise many aspects of leadership, are supplied by ordained ministers serving in a voluntary capacity. Our structure must support this irreplaceable asset and guarantee that their efforts are sustainable in the long run.

CULTURE

Over the past few years a number of specific programs and initiatives have come our way to help us on our continual journey to live our lives and serve each other in the mind and teaching of Christ. These programs build upon each other incrementally to form a new foundation of understanding.

In 2009, a yearlong perspective on **self-responsibility** was introduced. This is a fundamental building block for our future and hinges upon a powerful understanding. Our salvation is not guaranteed merely by attending church or developing a close relationship with our minister. While these are good and necessary, the central purpose of a New Apostolic Christian life is much deeper. It must always be the very individual and life long struggle to become transformed by the Gospel of Christ into a new creation. The sacraments of Holy Baptism and Sealing are singular events and gifts from God that bring us a rebirth; childhood in God! Then each soul must shoulder the continuous and ongoing self-responsibility to know Christ, to follow Him and to be changed by Him. Healthy congregations support this journey of transformation.

Also in 2009, another pivotal concept was introduced called **iServe Christ**. It began as a youth initiative but has come to include us all. It established for us the understanding that as disciples of Christ we learn to serve others as He did. Specifically, we have the opportunity to serve Christ in our families, congregations, and communities.

In 2010, the concept of **Work of Ministry** was first introduced. Through multiple communication channels we have gained familiarity, then personal revelations, and finally practical experience in better edifying the body of Christ via our spiritual gifts, passions, and life experiences. As mentioned in the Autumn Vision, a lively Work Group specific to Work of Ministry has been established that has proven very effective in helping congregations reach new milestones. This concept has required a sustained investment of time and effort with a long learning curve but thankfully we are seeing powerful testimonies of changed lives. The Work of Ministry will remain a focal point of our cultural efforts in 2013.

In 2011 and 2012, sections of the **New Apostolic Church Catechism** were introduced to all ministers and teachers. Its integration into all teaching and church ministrations will be ongoing. Likewise in 2012, a Perspective series on offering, tithing and sacrifice was begun that will also continue into 2013.

Finally, a Work Group for **leadership** has recently been formed and is tasked with supporting the personal development of all those who serve their congregation in a leadership role. Healthy congregations require a culture of shared leadership with engaged and missional

members. The Work Group Leadership will mainly focus their short term efforts on finding resources that support existing leaders and emerging leaders of the church.

DIVINE SERVICE EXPERIENCE

A successful divine service experience is the product of various individual efforts woven and integrated into one under the direction of the Holy Spirit. It demands the highest level of preparation and quality as is possible given local circumstances.

Altar serving team: Across the country, our ordained ministers who bring the message from the altar are engaging in an ongoing effort to improve the quality of the sermons. This task has many components; sermon preparation, engaging the Holy Spirit, effective prayers, public speaking, a heightened preparation for Holy Communion, and knowledge of our liturgy are all key elements. Training and ongoing education are essential to equipping our ministers for this daunting task. To date, much of this training has been designed and implemented at the regional level with varying degrees of success. We are in the middle of a process to standardize this training support via multiple learning paths called Minister Development Institute (MDI) that is described in greater detail in the section on Structure which follows. This effort will be a high priority in 2013. A team of apostles has been tasked to lead this project.

Music and Worship team: We continually discover in new ways that the message can be powerfully enhanced by integrating it with creative methods of music and intentional worship. While this may include our traditional choirs, there are many additional techniques that can deepen our experience. To date, congregations have moved in this direction by individual experimentation based upon local talent and initiative. Again, we have experienced varying degrees of success. Often, there is the concern: "What is allowed?" There is a fine balance between pushing the envelope for the sake of novelty and creating an effective, quality driven complement to the spoken word of God. Our focus in 2013 is to share more completely the best ideas that have been developed across the country as well as resources and worship templates via the Music Companion Website. A national Work Group for music has been created to coordinate this effort.

Audio Visual team: Likewise the experience can be enhanced using creative audio visual techniques. Some congregations have installed wide screens and augment the message with Bible texts and short bullet points to enrich understanding. This also requires a fine balance so that the audio visual does not overpower the message and that the technology costs are realistic given local finances. With time we will share more standardized guidelines.

Greeter Program: Our Vision and Mission speak of reaching out to all people and a church in which people feel at home. To the new visitor, our services are quite structured with a liturgy that could be intimidating. We must consider how the experience will be for them as well. A greeter program is designed to overcome this discomfort and create a more welcoming first time experience. Some congregations have created or adopted good techniques.

Divine Service Journal 2013: The preparation of our members is also critical to this experience. Please see the announcement regarding the 2013 Divine Service Journal within this edition of the Vision for information on a unique new tool designed to help each member participate in the experience more effectively.

PASTORAL CARE

To understand our plan for improving the quality of our pastoral care is to grasp the concept of a “faith arc” that connects a soul to Jesus Christ through all phases of their life and provides the teaching that will be foundational to their personal spiritual discipline. While every age group needs pastoral care and Gospel teaching, our children, youth and young families are of particular concern as they have unique challenges. Currently we see learning gaps at certain age bands. Likewise, we have age gaps where the church loses its relevancy and thereby the ability to support our youth in a life of discipleship and security in Jesus. In 2013, we will focus our pastoral efforts on remedying these gaps.

The faith arc:

- **Parenting:** Parenting is an extraordinary responsibility requiring skills not often taught in a formalized way. The foundations of faith created in children ages 0-4 are irreplaceable. Currently we have no formalized Christian parenting program to support our young families. We recognize this deficiency and are researching solutions.
- **Children/Youth:** The Work Group Children and Work Group Youth are formed and functioning. Resources to support the teaching of our children are being continually developed. Efforts to make the divine service experience more positive and meaningful for our children have been created in many locations with success. However, from confirmation age forward the church struggles to provide age specific teaching and spiritual development that is relevant. College age youth have unique needs and challenges not easily solved by our traditional methods.
- **Pillars:** This is a new piece of the faith arc. Pillars are souls over the age of 21 and are either single, or recently married, and without children. While more loosely organized than the traditional youth group, they are enthusiastic workers engaged in mentoring the youth, missionary work and inspiring new ideas and perspectives.
- **Seniors:** Active senior groups have been organized with great success around the country. Their enduring zeal, ministry to each other and fellowship is a wonderful template for all ages.

Our Singles group is an ever expanding group of our members found within a broad age band. Their common characteristic is often their aloneness. The church has a decided focus on family life and singles may struggle with feelings of isolation or non-inclusion at all ages. In 2011 meetings were held with representatives of this group to better understand how the church can support them.

While not age based, it is noteworthy that our lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered members have established a chapter of Rainbow-NAC International to provide support to each other and supply resources to enhance understanding and promote tolerance and acceptance.

In addition, every soul experiences seasons of trials, stresses, and vulnerabilities. The church must be equipped to support and embrace each one during these moments. Here are some of the special pastoral programs that we are currently offering or supporting. You may learn more by contacting your local congregational leadership.

Programs:

- Pre marriage classes: PREPARE/ENRICH ®
- Understanding Grief and Grief Support
- Conflict Resolution: Peacemaking

STRUCTURE

We have dedicated a significant amount of time and resources to upgrade the professional management systems of the church as an organization. Enhancements have been made in all areas of finance, information technology, property management, and communications. The efficiencies gained in these areas have allowed us to significantly reduce our cost structure. In addition, a number of unused buildings have been sold and the proceeds earmarked to directly support the future vision of the church as described in this plan.

The national church is organized as a not for profit, 501(c)(3) entity. As voted upon at the 2010 Synod in Detroit, the organization's governance was restructured and a new constitution adopted. The Synod has been reorganized and an Executive Committee has been created to review financial reports and independently authorize large expenditures. The result of these changes is to improve the quality of our governance with greater oversight, accountability and transparency. This process is incremental and will continue into the future.

A number of technological and communication tools have been developed and released to improve the structure and management of healthy congregations. In addition to our main website, www.nac-usa.org, individual websites have been developed with dedicated resources for our music and worship teams (www.musiccompanion.org) and our ordained ministers (www.ministercompanion.org). Similar websites are being developed for our youth ministers and Sunday school teachers.

In addition, www.nac-usa.org contains the eOffering component first introduced in the Autumn 2010 Vision whereby offering can be sent directly to the church via a secure internet link. For many members this is the preferred way to handle all their financial transactions and has been embraced with success.

The www.ministercompanion.org website contains a wide array of resources to support our ordained ministers and is a continual work in progress. It has a section called Minister Development Institute (MDI) which contains training and continuing education modules to equip our ministers with skills to serve in all areas. New courses, articles, seminar material, and small group material are being researched and developed continuously. The ongoing commitment of our ministers to continually improve themselves is an investment that is central to our four objectives. This commitment is often made quietly behind the scenes but should be understood by all our members.

At the congregational level, there are two major developments taking place across the country. The first is the creation of flagship congregations in key locations where possible. The first locations are beginning this transition currently. We will describe this far reaching structural change and report on our progress in greater detail in an upcoming article within the Vision.

Likewise, the concept of shared leadership within a congregation is an important building block to our future health and will be described in an upcoming Perspective as well.

Reprint of Winter 2012 Vision Newsletter

EXCERPT ON **SALVATION AND THE VISION**

Taken out of Isaiah 62:11, Chief Apostle Leber proclaimed - "See, your salvation comes!" Let us hold firmly to this message about the Lord Jesus Christ; He will intervene! Perhaps not in a way we have planned, but nevertheless He will move according to His plan and we will then be able to perceive His actions and care. It is good for us if we can see this as a divine reality and look for the intervention of the Lord in our lives; in dark moments of loneliness and grief, in times of confusion and searching for solutions, in days of intensive activity and concern. In all times, let us be aware and watch how and when the Lord will come into our situations and bring His "salvation" or in other words, His resolution.

Further, Chief Apostle Schneider highlighted the Vision statement of our church and clearly stated this as our program for the future. As you well know, this simple statement is the foundation of our strategic plan, Stepping Forward. I am happy that our Chief Apostle will guide us further into this vision so that we all may deepen our relationship with Christ and ready ourselves for His coming. Part of this is the harnessing of the Godly power that is available in the gift of the Holy Spirit that we all have received. May there be an exciting "rustling" of the Spirit wind in all of our congregations to truly reveal God's love, awaken the gifts of the Spirit, and to establish a deeper interconnection of souls, as troublesome obstacles are blown away.

Reprint of Excerpt from Summer 2013 Vision Newsletter

VISION AND MISSION: BUILDING BLOCKS OF OUR FUTURE

My thoughts have returned often to Chief Apostle Schneider's Pentecost message. His firm and resolute statement about the future direction of our church continues to inspire me. He held up our New Apostolic Vision Statement and declared in simple and unmistakable terms: "This is our direction."

With this clear mandate, it is important that we fully explore this Statement as well as our Mission Statement. I am convinced that they were born out of the timely inspiration of the Holy Spirit. To me they form a roadmap that offers continuity and security, and also provide relevancy for our church within an ever changing contemporary world. This is not a fad or a flavor of the month; we can build a strong future for our church in the USA upon this foundation.

I ask every member to make understanding these Statements a high priority within their personal spiritual growth. There is much substance for one to absorb and understand. The discovery of this substance would provide an excellent journey to take with other brothers and sisters within a small group discussion format over the remaining months of 2013.

Please allow me to help you get started in your discovery. The Vision and Mission Statements are the very foundation upon which our strategic plan "Stepping Forward" has been constructed. I would like to provide you with further food for thought and explain more completely how putting these statements into practice can shape our culture, define our purpose, and substantiate the changes we are actively pursuing in every congregation. Let me begin with a phrase that you have heard me say often or have seen in various presentations describing our future plans:

"First health, then growth, leading to completion."

Let me explain the connection of this phrase to the Vision and Mission Statements.

I feel strongly that the Vision Statement describes healthy congregations and paints a picture of an ideal internal view of ourselves and our congregations that we have yet to attain. To grasp how far we sometimes are from this ideal is to also grasp why it is so critical that we continue to create a new culture of living like Christ. There are two distinct concepts of health within the Vision Statement that require both diligence to better understand and courage to achieve. The process is ongoing, but our diligence will be rewarded. Each new discovery

will inspire new wonder over God's infinite grace and love. Also, our lives as Christians will become more joyous and fulfilled as we experience the tangible evidence of what Jesus taught us to pray for: Your kingdom come! We can begin to experience already today the priceless benefits of His kingdom while on the path to an everlasting reconciliation and fellowship with God our Heavenly Father.

So let us begin with the first phrase of the Vision Statement: "A church in which people feel at home..." When do people feel at home? We generally consider ourselves to be friendly. We love fellowship. But this phrase goes far beyond coffee and cake. People feel at home within a community of believers when they are accepted without judgement and, of course, Jesus Christ is our ultimate exemplar in this regard. Look how He intentionally and courageously broke free of the cultural norms of His time to demonstrate His acceptance of every human being He encountered. To understand the many dimensions of Christ-like acceptance, we can study in detail His interaction with:

- **The 10 lepers** Luke 17:11-19
- **The adulteress** John 8:1-12
- **Zaccheus the tax collector** Luke 19:1-9
- **The malefactor** Luke 23:39-43
- **The woman who washed His feet at a dinner hosted by a Pharisee** Luke 7:35-50
- **The Samaritan woman at the well** John 4:1-26

And there are more of course, each with a special nuance and teaching. When we begin to truly understand the nature of Christ and have the courage to follow His example, we will never allow our cultural norms to define the love of God and to create barriers to His grace. We are not a European, Hispanic or Asian church. We are not conservative or liberal, black or white, democrat or republican, traditional or contemporary. These are human labels that may be significant within our temporal world but they have no meaning within the context of eternal salvation! A healthy congregation will form a new culture: living and leading like Christ!

Now we move to the next major concept: "and, inspired by the Holy Spirit and their love for God, align their lives to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and thus prepare themselves for His return and eternal life ..." This too is a profound statement with powerful relevance as now the focus shifts to the health of each soul as an individual. What discoveries can we make? Firstly, we see that spiritual health is a matter of personal responsibility. We prepare ourselves! There is no automatic free pass to life eternal that comes with church membership. There is no express line that avoids the daily struggle to live a God pleasing life and to be transformed into the nature of Christ.

Also, this phrase professes that salvation is predicated upon experiencing the love of God, being inspired by the Holy Spirit and aligning ourselves to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Hence

we see the power and significance of our Divine Service Experience; the communal worship, the divine truth of God's word and the life changing power of Holy Communion. Here we also see the importance of Pastoral Care that provides teaching and support to each soul in their unique and sometimes challenging circumstances of life outside the walls of the church building.

Lastly, both the Vision and Mission Statements have an intense focus upon the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is a source of continuity and security for us. The only constant in our contemporary world is change. Fads come and go as do styles, cultural norms, technological innovations and even people. But Jesus said "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.*" We find these exact words recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke. His Gospel, the good news of salvation, is as relevant today as 2000 years ago and will remain so until His return. This is the foundation upon which to build our future plans with confidence.

Where the Vision Statement is about health and an internal view, the Mission Statement is about growth with an outward view of our responsibility to profess our belief, to embrace our communities in the love of God and to serve our fellow man with kindness and compassion. It is a collective call to action. It is an invitation to become passionately involved with the greatest cause the world has ever seen. It empowers all of us to discover our spiritual gifts by which to edify the Body of Christ and to live a meaningful life of service to others.

"Reaching out to all people in order to teach them the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to baptize them with water and the Holy Spirit.... Providing soul care and cultivating a warm fellowship in which everyone shall feel the love of God and the joy of serving others." This is the very essence of being apostolic. Baptizing with water and the Holy Spirit requires the authority of the apostles and the ordained ministry, but we are all commissioned to reach out and teach the Gospel. Already the Chief Apostle Fehr declared that we are all missionaries. How will we reach out? How will we teach the Gospel?

Reaching out happens outside the walls of the church. It happens where we live, work, learn and play. While some may have the gift to teach by profession, others teach by:

Living an exemplary life based upon the Gospel. They radiate peace. They are kind, compassionate and merciful. They love God in a very visible way. They love their neighbour as themselves. They freely forgive, seek reconciliation, and turn the other cheek; they even seek to love their enemies. What a teaching! What a beautiful and rewarding way to live!

Reaching out in service to others as a tool to share God's love. People do incredible good works every day, but their motivations may vary. Let me focus our attention on the highest motivation; the beautiful expressions of kindness that originate out of the pure love of God. People who perform such good works allow their perspective to be redirected outward from the self to the needs of others. They reach out! They express their unique passions and giftedness in a very practical way that brings the light of Christ's Gospel into darkened lives when it is needed most. Often these passions are forged within the fire of life-changing

circumstances that God has permitted along their personal journey. Thereby they fulfil Christ's call to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and take in the stranger (Matthew 25:31-46), all in His name and for His sake so that everyone feels the love of God.

Isn't this a form of soul care? Within Stepping Forward, we call it Pastoral Care but the effect is the same. Within a "Missional church," there are no passive members. Everyone may find their calling to edify the body of Christ and to share the joy of serving Him and others. *As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.* (1 Peter 4:10)

This understanding of our spiritual gifts, our unique passions that God has engineered within our lives and the place within the body of Christ that He has called us to serve can be found within the journey of the Work of Ministry. This can be a powerful experience, an experience that helps us reach out to all people in a way that brings our life purpose and deep personal fulfilment. The Bible text for a recent midweek service came from Daniel where we read: *"and Daniel was purposed within his heart."* I hope that our Mission Statement can provide us with a renewed sense of purpose and that each member will find their place to express it with the full power and confidence of the Holy Spirit.

Reaching out as a servant leader. The Mission Statement concludes with a reference to the joy of serving. This brings us full circle to our cultural objective of not only living like Christ, but leading like Christ. He was the epitome of a servant leader. Despite having ultimate power and the greatest claim to entitlement, Christ dedicated Himself to the humblest path of servant hood for the benefit of all humanity. When teaching His disciples, He advised them that *"the greatest among you will be the servant of all."* This is the model for us as we edify the body of Christ. It is a beautiful balance when we can serve with the full power and confidence of the Holy Spirit combined with the humility of a servant leader. Then it is easy for all to feel the love of God reaching into their lives.

Reprint of Autumn 2013 Vision Newsletter

Introduction to
**Stepping
Forward**

Success Stories

STEPPING FORWARD: THE PHOENIX EXPERIENCE

The following article has been prepared by the Phoenix congregation communication team describing the evolution of a new congregation in the Phoenix area. As the article indicates, the congregation is enjoying a positive outcome and demonstrating the potential possible when we step forward towards congregational health. It must also be said that this process involved growing pains. The faith and commitment of the membership overcame many early obstacles. However, we can now see the tangible results of “serving Christ by serving others”. We include this report in the hopes that it will be instructional and inspirational to all. Likewise, we welcome reports from your congregation in the spirit of sharing successes and challenges.

The Phoenix Experience

When our District Apostle Kolb asked us to “Step Forward” to build a modern congregation, we began assessing the tools and processes necessary to achieve this ideal. What does a modern congregation look like and how do you go about building one? What an exciting time to be a New Apostolic Christian. Although change seemed daunting at first, stepping forward and putting into motion activities and programs using God-given talents is clearly the appropriate direction for a Child of God and a congregation who recognizes and values the unique gifts they have been given. Here in a newly merged Phoenix-Metro Congregation we have initiated some new programs to aid in shaping our community into an environment where everyone willing has a role. The vision behind the modern congregation movement is becoming a reality in our spiritual home.

Here are some changes that have become staples of our new environment. Firstly, we have merged two congregations, creating a critical mass that has produced a climate of idea sharing and growing participation. The youth and children are enjoying the benefits of being together each Sunday. A unique spiritual energy is noticeable and exciting. Recently, a member new to our area positively stated, “This is not the New Apostolic Church I remember....” A music team has been formed to further develop a congregational music program. Some changes include Wednesday night congregational all-sing evenings, Sunday morning singing with additional musical performances that include soloists and instrumentalists alternating with the choir.

Four sisters stepped forward and created a committee called iFUN (Fellowship & Unity Now) with a mission statement of “Creating unity by building relationships with each other

and drawing others through fun and interactive events.” iFUN has been the catalyst for our area newsletter – The Desert Voice, which is a vehicle to promote and report on these activities. Additional activities prompted by iFUN include NAC Attack, a men’s softball team, International themed fellowship events (held in member’s homes) for St. Patrick’s Day, Cinco De Mayo, and Oktoberfest, a Sunday School Teacher and Minister’s Appreciation Week, outreach into the local community including working with a local women’s crisis shelter, a homeless shelter, preparing and sending treats to our military troops and continual work with our food bank. Additional efforts include a young brother mentor program, where no visit or trip is made by a minister without a young brother in attendance; and co-ed and women’s bible study sessions. For two years, Town Hall Sessions (after Sunday morning services) have been utilized to inform the members of changes and help in the adoption process of a merged congregation and “stepping forward” activities.

A famous philosopher once said, “If we are to achieve results never before accomplished, we must expect to employ methods never before attempted.” The power of the Holy Spirit, as we recently heard on Pentecost, has been the force behind the inventiveness, energy and excitement within the Phoenix-Metro Congregation.

Reprint of Summer 2010 Vision Newsletter

BOISE, IDAHO: STEPPING FORWARD AND COMING TOGETHER

One of the Church's responsibilities is to bring Christ to the members and to promote a heart-changing journey with Christ. At times, it means stepping forward from traditions and doing whatever it takes to render effective service.

During the last Youth Convention, someone asked, "Has the Boise congregation ever experienced conflict?" My response was, "Of course! Conflict is part of growth." Look at the congregations of the early church as members struggled to break from Jewish customs. Conflict has been with us from the start. As part of the Church of Christ, how we handle conflict greatly influences our growth and maturity as Christians.

Candidly, one conflict reduced the attendance in our congregation to a mere two members for a Wednesday night service. At that point, we had to step out of the bounds of tradition. Souls need to have a divine service experience, but it made little sense to have one minister at the altar and one member in the bench. With bible in hand, we retreated to the fellowship room and sat down at a table for our first "interactive service." (*For those not exposed to this concept, it is a pilot program being tried in certain congregations involving an interactive discussion of key points from the Divine Service Guide, prompted by the Holy Spirit.*) After hearing of our dismal Wednesday night attendance, one brother asked if he could come directly to service in his "work clothes" due to his work schedule. Come as you are, just come! Soon midweek service had five, ten, then fifteen attending and we are still growing.

Now, we struggle to keep the midweek service to 45 minutes because the lively activity of the Spirit keeps everyone engaged. Our Wednesday group often stays and talks another forty-five minutes after the service! This living and active Spirit of Christ has also promoted Sunday morning attendance.

We are the body - Christ is the Head. A measure of this divine relationship occurs when His nature of servant-hood reveals itself in us. By God's grace, our congregation has been energized such that when a job needs to be completed, often the first to recognize it attacks it, whether a youth, senior, or those in-between. We see it as our service to Christ. This attitude of service has brought about an active Sunday School where children call for rides to come to church. It has promoted a more active youth group, which makes up much of our Wednesday night attendance. It has also promoted a more effective music program bringing new life to our worship.

One young family saw that our Sunday school rooms were drab and needed remodeling. We now have sunshine yellow, and lime green Sunday school rooms. The youth renovated an unused room into a 'hang out' area just for them. This spirit of 'service for the Master' promotes strong bonds among the members and within families.

After service on Sunday, we can't seem to stay long enough to enjoy each other's company. There are refreshments or brunch, after every service (frequently until 1 or 2 p.m.!). This time after service allows for great fellowship and sharing. Stepping forward in all these instances has produced growth! We are again beginning to have Holy Sealings and renewed life.

Finally, despite mention of all of these other things, much of our focus is on the divine service experience where God counsels, forgives, and gives us strength and hope for the future. A minister once said, "In the end, members come to be inspired by the sermon, the Word of God." Each service is special and can change our lives, if we allow it to. The full integration of music enhances our services and our ministers spend extra time preparing for a lively delivery of the Word.

We all hope, and are striving for the day of the Lord's return. We believe that through the strong, spiritual, loving, forgiving, and joyful nature of Christ, exhibited by the members of the Body of Christ, we will soon see that day.

Submitted by: Megan Flowers

Reprint of Winter 2011 Vision Newsletter

Culture

ISERVE3

Serving Christ in my family, my congregation, my community.

Within the iServe3 initiative, young people will experience “serving the power of Three” by engaging body, soul and spirit in choosing specific endeavors to serve Christ through their families, congregations and communities. To begin experiencing iServe3, consider the following:

1. Within your Families, create new family traditions in serving; commit to pray more with your family and for your family, read the bible together and talk to your parents face to face for 10 minutes every day. As Joshua said, “*As for me and my family, we will serve the Lord*”. (Joshua 24:15 NCV)
2. Within your Congregations, spend time with the Sunday school children, visit senior members, plan and serve at fellowships, musical presentations ... to name a few.
3. Within your Communities, serve at homeless shelters, host a food drive, initiate a 30 hour famine - www.30hrfamine.org, engage in Relay for Life - www.relayforlife.org, etc.

As an active participant in the iServe3 initiative, you will experience the joy of giving and growth in fellowship when you serve together as a group, develop servant leadership while living your faith and deepen your personal relationship with the Lord.

Reprint of Spring 2009 Vision Newsletter

PERSPECTIVE

CONGREGATIONAL PALETTE

In a recent meeting, our Chief Apostle carefully illuminated the concept of oneness. I would like to convey his thoughts to you and then ask that each one conduct a very personal introspection. Let us assess our inner convictions regarding this important concept inspired out of the gospel of Christ. Perhaps we are in need of further culture change.

For this meeting, the Chief Apostle researched extensively the many biblical references to Christ's teachings on the subject of oneness. His conclusions can be summarized concisely within the following excerpt: "We can therefore say: A perfect oneness with the Lord yields oneness with one another."

I would like to underline the Chief Apostle's conclusion: Our objective is to attain a perfect oneness with Christ. Why is this significant? In the past, our New Apostolic culture within the U.S. placed great importance on the concept of unity and oneness, but often the focus drifted from Christ and morphed to the idea of achieving a certain standard of perfect sameness and uniformity. The strict application of this standard tends to create intolerance for individualism and diversity. Can we see that perhaps when taken to the extreme, this quest for sameness has created an unnecessary barrier to many souls who love the Lord and are one with Him? Do we not see within the gospel of Christ His specific intent to include all souls in the offer of God's grace and to break down cultural and social barriers to redemption? He made the supreme sacrifice to open wide the door to salvation. Let us also then endeavor to make the congregational tent bigger, not smaller. (See Isaiah 54:2)

With this in mind, let me introduce the analogy of a congregational palette. The artist's palette is the tool whereby very different colors are combined with the intent to create a work of great beauty. Each work of art is a unique combination of these colors and the artist's interpretation, style and inspiration. Likewise, every congregation is unique. Each has its own colors, personalities, characteristics, talents and gifts. A healthy congregation will have enlightened leadership that has the ability to embrace the diversity and uniqueness of each member and weave them all into a masterpiece of Christian love and fellowship. Therefore, let us not be distressed when congregations look different from the outside, but rather seek an inner oneness with Christ that will be clearly evident on His day.

Reprint of Autumn 2009 Vision Newsletter

SHARED LEADERSHIP

In previous Vision Newsletters published this year, the main article has focused upon our 2010 initiative called a Work of Ministry. Within this initiative, each member is encouraged to discover their unique God given calling and gifts of ministry by which they can edify the body of Christ. I have enjoyed traveling to various locations around the USA during the past 6 months and interacting with our brothers and sisters in Town Hall Meetings where we explored the beginnings of this new and exciting component of creating healthier congregations.

Have you asked our Heavenly Father to reveal the gifts of ministry He has given to you? Have you listened for His calling to serve Christ by serving others? I would encourage each one to begin this journey now in sincere prayer and inner reflection.

It is my firm belief that this initiative will help us create healthier congregations. The congregation of the future will need your unique calling to provide our brothers and sisters with a rich spiritual experience leading to our completion. However, our congregations must first prepare themselves for a change in perspective. One such change is the way we perceive our congregational rectors.

Currently, our culture contains a commonly held and deeply engrained expectation of congregational leadership. Over time we have evolved an unrealistic job description for our rectors. In our minds he must be the ultimate authority in every congregational decision; a person who is responsible for everything and everybody. Let us explore the effects of this further.

The rector holds the majority of the divine services. The members look to him for spiritual guidance and pastoral care; often requesting his opinion on situations of life and death as well as everyday matters. In dark times he comforts and intercedes. He is a teacher, a coach and a motivator for the other ministers.

To the youth, the children, the single parents, the newlyweds, the seniors, the grieving, the lonely and the suffering, he is a trusted advisor and confidant. Administratively, he cares for the local church finances and building upkeep. All while working a full time job and caring for the critical needs of his family.

While we thank God daily that we have ministers with such willingness to serve, we must accept the fact that this expectation, in the extreme, is unsustainable and unfair to both the minister and the congregation.

Clearly, the answer is not to minimize or diminish the expectations of our members; far from it! We seek an enhanced spiritual experience from a healthy congregation in terms of worship, altar serving, music and pastoral care. Rather, the solution I propose is a new model of congregational leadership.

The apostles presently are creating a new job description for the emerging rector and a new blueprint for congregational leadership. While this is a work in progress, we feel strongly that our new model should and will deliver the following:

- A collaborative, inclusive congregational culture that integrates all the gifts and talents of the body of Christ into the congregational mix. The “emerging rector” will be sensitive to diversity and skilled in helping our membership discover their God given calling and develop their talents (A Work of Ministry). More than asking them “to do”, he will be helping them “to become”.
- The introduction of shared responsibilities within the ordained congregational ministry based upon gifts, talents, education and training. It should not be considered unusual to see one minister specialize in altar serving (perhaps not the rector) and another in pastoral care. A third could care for administrative matters. Specialization allows each minister to pursue their calling to a deeper level and enhance the spiritual experience of the congregation while achieving a healthier balance in their personal lives.
- A rector with a life in balance; ministry, family and occupation revolving around the central and core foundation of serving Christ.

Reprint of Summer 2010 Vision Newsletter

INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW CATECHISM

As you may be aware, a project group of NACI (New Apostolic Church International) has been working on the New Apostolic Catechism for a number of years. We are happy to report that this extensive document is now in its final stages and in the initial roll out phase worldwide.

We have recently sent a team to Germany to participate in the initial training and have reviewed the first installment of this document and the training materials that accompany it. Clearly, this is a comprehensive body of work designed to provide a much deeper and clearer understanding of our doctrine and beliefs. It will provide the foundation for our future teaching (Sunday school, confirmation and religious instructions).

Specifically, let us address the following points:

- The term Catechism may have a somewhat distinctive connotation in the USA that is not shared by the rest of the world. Let us clarify in advance that it is not a Catholic term (however, many of our adolescent Catholic friends may have gone to Catechism school). In reality, the term comes from a Greek word with a rough translation of “teaching”. Many churches have a Catechism and ours will be the definitive word on our New Apostolic teaching.
- This document is challenging. It provides much more detail than we have experienced previously and will inspire a deeper level of spiritual understanding.
- In the NAC-USA district, we will work closely with the NACI project group to conduct training for ordained ministers and those who teach our children and youth over the course of the next year.
- The initial training material focuses on three excerpts from the Catechism. The full book will be available to all members in English in 2012.

Reprint of Spring 2011 Vision Newsletter

A CULTURE OF LEARNING

We live in a dynamic time where the body of knowledge necessary to keep pace and thrive continues to expand at a breathtaking rate. Recently, one of our young college students told me of a lecture they attended where the professor advised them that they needed to learn how to learn. Upon graduation, they will be employed in jobs that haven't yet been created and which will require knowledge and skills that don't yet exist. I see this as a striking analogy to those who will be worthy to assist the Lord Jesus, the King of Kings, in His coming Kingdom of Peace (and will leave this as a subject for your further contemplation in a quiet moment).

But continual learning is not just for our young people. Older individuals are not spared this challenge either. Even the most accomplished men and woman, those who have reached the highest levels of expertise and acclaim in their field, must continually reinvest time, energy and resources to learn and update their skill sets. Thereby, they wisely reject the all too human notion that they know everything there is to know.

And yet, we see from time to time individuals who resist advances in their field and cling to outdated techniques or tools that they mastered during their formative years. Likewise we find individuals or even societies who reject new discoveries and cling to flawed theories, perhaps in the field of health and science, sometimes to their own harm.

So what should we learn from this that will benefit our spiritual development? I see two distinct advantages:

Firstly, as the world evolves and our environment changes, a quest for continual learning and renewal keeps us from becoming obsolete or irrelevant. Here, within a biblical context, we might consider the reaction of the Pharisees to the teachings of Christ. Some resisted Him completely. They remained mired in their traditional understanding of God's plan as they knew it; the law, the prophets, the rigid hierarchy of the temple and their exclusivity as a people. They were not bad people, far from it. Yet despite living exemplary lives and attaining the highest levels of outward conduct, they became obsolete.

God introduced the next phase of His offer of salvation to mankind. He offered new commandments, a new template of grace, mercy, compassion and peace and ultimately the offer of redemption and eternal life through the gift of Jesus Christ.

His plan moved forward but only for those who were wise enough to embrace the change and immerse themselves in a new teaching.

Secondly, a continual, life long quest for Godly understanding and a healthy spiritual curiosity is a sign of humility; an acknowledgement that we struggle to truly grasp the will of our Heavenly Father. His ways are higher than ours and often a mystery to us. Saul was a well intentioned man of deep convictions who thought he understood the will of God.

He experienced a crash course on the road to Damascus. He was willing to acknowledge that his previous understanding was flawed and humble enough to change his agenda. This turn around must have cost him every ounce of his pride and ego, but it was an investment that made him an extraordinary apostle for the first Christian congregations.

This then leads me to ask (firstly of myself) the following questions: Today, is our current understanding of the gospel of Christ a static event? Relative to our goal of becoming a New Apostolic Christian prepared for Christ's return, does there come a day when we know all there is to know? I believe we all agree that the answer must be no!

While the teachings of Christ are well recorded, the Holy Spirit sent by God to comfort and lead, continually testifies of His timely word and intentions. It is a fountain from heaven that brings exciting revelations to those who seek the truth.

Likewise, the Chief Apostle and the apostles of today, the ambassadors of Christ, teach us His gospel and bring clarity and inspiration. So while many consider the Gospel of Christ a constant, it is a much bigger body of knowledge than we can ever grasp, especially in its application to our own personal and unique circumstances. Perhaps, much like an iceberg, the full dimensions are only apparent when we make the effort to look below the surface. In Ephesians 3:17, the Apostle Paul sums up this lifelong quest with the words: *“that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”*

Thus, the new understandings that each soul must gain individually as part of a personal journey of faith continually develop over a lifetime as we gain greater insights into the Gospel of Christ. And with time and diligence we more and more grasp the mystery of our own calling and the unique gifts that God has given each of us to serve the body of Christ.

In conclusion and in preparation for our upcoming New Apostolic Thanksgiving Day, let me suggest that we be students together creating in our own lives of faith and our congregations a culture of continual learning through the Holy Spirit. Let us focus our immediate attention on the following “courses”:

- **Effective Prayer:** Continuing on the theme from the National Day of Prayer, what percentage of our prayers express thankfulness and adoration to our Heavenly Father

in comparison to our daily petitions and supplications? *The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.* (James 5:16) Can we learn to “intensify” our prayers, not with more words, but deeper thoughts and expressions of praise?

- **Worship:** Abraham, Jacob and others of the Old Testament, worshipped God by creating an altar of stone, by sacrificing a clean animal and by prayer whereby they expressed their feelings toward Him. Could we learn to “intensify” our worship by creating an altar (a sanctified time and place), sacrificing (investing our time, talents and resources) and expressing our love for God via our prayers, singing, Bible reading and testifying?

- **Thanksgiving/Thankfulness:** True thanksgiving is not born out of obligation but out of sincere love. Love for God deepens when we become increasingly aware of the kindness and benevolence of our Benefactor. Searching inwardly during our experiences of faith, meditating on the words of a divine service and quietly contemplating the remarkable mercy of our Savior the Lord Jesus, opens this awareness. Our deeper love for Christ then urges us to express our thankfulness in serving Him and offering to Him.

Reprint of Summer 2011 Vision Newsletter

THE FIRST CHURCH...

MODEL OF APOSTOLIC CULTURE

My attention has been captured recently by the scriptural account of the first Christian assemblage as described in Acts 2. Here we see a glimpse into the conditions within a healthy church during a period of explosive growth and development. I would like to highlight a few key points for our consideration:

- In the oft quoted Acts 2:42 we read of their steadfastness in the apostle's doctrine. Let us understand this correctly. This is not a doctrine about apostles; it is the doctrine of apostles which is their profession of Christ's gospel. They proclaimed the person of Jesus Christ as the outlet for God's love towards mankind. They taught the first Christians how to live according to His teachings and to find salvation through the power of His sacrifice and resurrection. It was a potent combination of word and sacrament.
- These first Christians were quite ministerial. They cared for (ministered to) each other's needs. Can we see a similarity between their sharing their earthly possessions and our sharing of our spiritual gifts?
- In addition to ministerial, they were quite missional (rather than passive) church goers. Their worshipful testimony of God during their continuing interaction with one another formed "the church". The body of Christ was a state of being more than a physical location. It was an active state of worshiping, teaching, and ministering to each other within the daily flow of their lives.
- They had favor with all the people. This is an intriguing description. They were not considered odd or peculiar.
- Acts 2 concludes with this illuminating statement: *And the Lord added daily those who were being saved.* Can we see the significance of this simple yet powerful summation? It describes the correct order of things. The church focused itself upon the key elements of spiritual health, and then God added to (grew) the church daily.

When reading the scriptures, we seek the relevance for our time and our lives. I see this account of the early church as a cultural template for our contemporary church. I hope that you can see it reflected within Stepping Forward, our strategic plan for the NAC-USA district. When we collectively follow this template within our congregations, the church becomes healthy. Then God will add to the church those who will be saved. So let us be specific:

Our congregations must equip each member to come into a close fellowship with Jesus Christ. To understand His gospel more and more; to be reconciled with God by His sacrifice

and transformed by the power of His resurrection. Here and there some may feel that this focus diminishes the role of the apostles and I strongly disagree. As in the first church, the apostle's doctrine today is the profession of Jesus Christ, the clarification and interpretation of His Gospel and the dispensation of His sacraments.

Likewise, we are called to minister to each other today as in the first church. God has given unique spiritual gifts to each one whereby we may edify the body of Christ. I ask each member plainly and directly; have you discovered your calling and your gifts via the Work of Ministry? The body of Christ requires your giftedness. This is more than a book to read, it is a fundamental way to view our calling within the church of Christ. It is a blueprint to become strong in Him for the sake of others and to fulfill His command to love one another.

Closely related is a feeling of mission that connects our faith with every aspect of our life. Sadly, the experience of the first Christians has evolved for many in our time to a passive and superficial "visit" to a church building. One leaves their secular life for a brief moment of spiritual life. It is uncomplicated and compartmentalized, but often also sterile and joyless. Without judgment, I ask you to compare this to a singular and continuous life in the Lord. It is a life of intensity; a life of deeply felt love and peace that comes from discipleship. But the comparison cannot be made theoretically, it must be experienced. Why simply come and see the church when you can be the church!

Lastly, I believe that we have a misconception about our place within our communities. Our old culture was preoccupied with remaining separate from "the world". Often the justification for this came from the following Bible verse from the Kings James version: *But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people.* (1 Peter 2:8-10) We interpreted "peculiar" to mean "odd". But it's difficult to "have favor with all the people" as the first church did if you're odd. In the New King James version we see a different perspective. The word "peculiar" becomes "special". While this is quite different than "odd" we must also take care not to interpret this as "exclusive".

Not surprisingly, the right balance can be found squarely within the teachings of Christ. If we truly are His disciples, we will live lives of love, honesty, compassion and service to others just as He did. Isn't that a unique or special occurrence in a cold and self-absorbed world? And it is unique in a way that finds favor with people rather than distances us from them.

So in conclusion, as we engage ourselves in building healthy congregations, let us embrace this cultural template from the first church. It is easier to focus on the structural elements of Stepping Forward such as building new churches or merging congregations. But let us be convinced; our health is absolutely and unequivocally dependent on attaining an apostolic congregational culture and then our God will add to the church those who will be saved.

Reprint of Autumn 2012 Vision Newsletter

A CHURCH IN WHICH PEOPLE FEEL AT HOME...

One more thought regarding this phrase from our Vision Statement: On the one hand, we may not feel at home within our congregation because of the various changes or adjustments that are taking place. I don't feel at home with more contemporary music, or congregational singing, or the manner in which the Sunday School is being taught, or, or...

But let us look at this expression a little more closely. The word "I" is problematic. Our VISION says a church in which people feel at home. Thus it becomes a collaborative effort to feel at home. For example, when two people marry, each formerly felt at home in their own living conditions, styles, habits, etc. Now, however, they must work together to build a new "at home" feeling that fits them as a couple. This evolves again if children come, so that the family feels at home together. A congregation is more complex yet, it is an entire community of believers. An individual cannot remain isolated and insensitive to those around them and expect to feel at home within this community. It is incumbent upon me to work together with the whole family of my congregation to be at home and in peace in the presence of Christ.

After all, we must remember it truly is His home! The more we grow in Him, the more we feel at home with Him and with all those whom He loves. Hence this simple expression gives cause for a fair amount of struggling and adjustment prompted by the love and thankfulness we have for the Lord.

Reprint of Autumn 2013 Vision Newsletter

WHAT I LIKE ABOUT THE NEW APOSTOLIC CHURCH

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.

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, bisexual 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.

Reprint of Summer 2014 Vision Newsletter

Culture

Success Stories

WOMEN'S MINISTRY IN KALAMAZOO

The following report was submitted by our members in the Kalamazoo, Michigan area describing a trend that has been taking shape in many locations across the USA District.

Over the course of the last several years, the Holy Spirit has prompted many wonderful programs and initiatives in our district as part of the Stepping Forward plan. One of the blessings in our Kalamazoo congregation has been the implementation of a women's ministry which incorporates sisters from our Paw Paw, Vicksburg, Otsego, and Kalamazoo congregations working together to grow closer to Christ, closer to one another, and closer to our communities!

These sisters come together the last Monday of every month to have a spiritual discussion that brings them closer to Christ through Bible study, prayer, and small group support. Sometimes this is done at one of our church buildings, other times the meeting is held in one of the sister's homes. Wherever it is held, a wonderful spiritual discussion takes place that highlights Christ centered principles and looks at how these principles can be incorporated into their personal lives and daily walk of faith.

The group has also enjoyed coming closer to one another...it's been wonderful to see new and old friendships develop, new understandings experienced, and mutual respect formed. Conversations are open and yet confidential and bond the participants into a wonderful spiritual family that encourages them in their daily walk and inspires them to be a greater blessing in their homes, families, congregations, and communities.

Finally, the sisters strive to use this opportunity to grow closer to our communities through compassion, outreach, and prayer! From sending cards to the sick, making blankets for children in the hospitals, hygiene packs for the homeless, shoe collections for an area Christian camp, to making warm hats, gloves, and scarfs for the gospel mission our sisters have found joy in serving our community and reaching out to those in need by being a living testimony of the love of Christ.

In conclusion, they really enjoy learning more about our amazing God and His wonderful Son while growing in their love and appreciation for them. This is their greatest joy and highest priority! They treasure the friendships and sisterhood that has developed through personal testimonies and compassionate conversations that these evenings have inspired.

And perhaps the greatest blessing that has come from this beautiful ministry has been the passionate prayers that have been shared in the midst of their gathering...prayers for a greater oneness with Christ, prayers for each other, and especially the prayers for those in need within their families, their communities, and our church! We thank God for this very special ministry.

Reprint of Winter 2012 Vision Newsletter

Culture

Spiritual
Perspectives

EXCERPT ON **ADVENT SEASON**

I ask all rectors to limit the number of formalized activities on our December schedule so as to permit us all to enjoy ‘informal fellowships’. I remember these from my youth when our family would visit with various other families, seniors, widows, etc. to share the Christmas season. These were more than just a social visit and included warm conversations, sharing cookies, singing, playing games, and at the conclusion, praying together. These moments enrich us and create deeper bonds of friendship and love. In such ways we can celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ as we engage each other in conversations highlighting our Heavenly Father’s goodness over the past year and looking for His grace for the coming one.

Reprint of Excerpt from Winter 2010 Vision Newsletter

LOOKING BACK...

LOOKING FORWARD

During the coming year let us commit ourselves to a culture of continual learning; a pursuit to discover and elevate our Savior and Redeemer within our lives and to be transformed by His gospel. The Chief Apostle described this lifelong striving so succinctly and convincingly in a recent divine service: “He [Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease.”

That is my message today as a servant of God and I ask you to please take it to heart. Jesus must increase and we—egotism and selfishness—must decrease. Jesus must increase. What does that mean? Where shall He increase?

- First of all, Jesus must grow greater within us.
- Secondly, He must grow greater in the congregation.
- And thirdly, He must grow greater in those around us.

That clearly describes our tasks. Jesus must increase within us means that our love for Him must grow. It must not decrease. Every day we must feel that we are coming a little closer to the Lord Jesus. That is growth.

Reprint of Excerpt from Winter 2010 Vision Newsletter

PALM SUNDAY TO PENTECOST

We are quickly approaching the Easter season. Much as we celebrate an entire season of advent preceding Christmas, so we can celebrate Passion Week, the period of time that stretches from Palm Sunday through Easter, and then Eastertide, the time period beyond to Pentecost. Within this 6 week period we find the most extraordinary and impactful events within God's plan to offer salvation to mankind: Events that should not be confined to the pages of the Bible but must come alive within us and be experienced anew within our congregations in a most contemporary and relevant manner.

We also are witnesses within this season to another extraordinary and life changing event. Our young adults experience the wonderful transformation of their Confirmation and make one of the most impactful and far reaching decisions of their lives. But I would suggest that we can be more than witnesses. Perhaps this is an opportunity for all of us to be a strong and positive influence within the lives of our young people as our Chief Apostle advised us on New Year's Day.

So my dear brothers and sisters, as we approach Passion Week, let me ask you to do three things:

- Firstly, let us intentionally and purposefully grow deeper in our personal understanding of this season; the mystery of God's love for us, the magnitude of Christ's sacrifice and victory, the power of the Holy Spirit, the wonder of our redemption and ultimately the hope for Christ's return.
- Secondly, please make this season come alive today in a joyous and worshipful celebration within each congregation.
- Lastly, create a warm and ongoing relationship with the newly confirmed young Christians in your congregation.

Enlivening the Gospel

We find varying accounts of this time period from the different perspectives of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John as well as the first two chapters of the Acts. Beyond the well known portrayal of Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter, let us dig deeper to enhance our understanding of the nuances of God's plan for our salvation and to gain insights that will help us in our life of faith today.

For instance, within the accounts of the Last Supper we can find much illumination. We see how Christ dealt with disappointment (the knowledge of Peter's denial) and betrayal (Judas). We find His description of the costs, the requirements and the rewards of discipleship. We learn how to serve one another in humility by His washing of the disciple's feet. Christ reveals the coming of the Comforter and the knowledge that He and His Father will love those who keep His commandments and will make their home with them. *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.* (John 13:34, 35) We are also disciples of Christ.

Are our congregations characterized by love one for another and thus a testimony that we follow and serve Him?

At numerous junctures, we see how the perfect Son of God struggled continuously with the weakness of His human form. We can learn much from His intense life of prayer. At many points He reconfirmed His decision and calling to make the supreme sacrifice that we might find salvation from our sins and a victory over death and separation from our Heavenly Father.

Do we consider the magnitude of His sacrifice and our redemption every day? This is cause for endless worship.

Between the despair and grief of Good Friday and the joy of Easter Sunday lies a Saturday of much uncertainty for the disciples. Those that stayed near the Lord during their time of anxiety and fear experienced the wonders of His resurrection; even Thomas's doubts could be patiently assuaged.

Everyone experiences moments of disappointment and anxiety; but do we stay near the Lord during times of tribulation and stress?

How useful and comforting for us today! We can continue to deepen our understanding by delving into the wonders of Ascension Day and Pentecost in the same manner.

Celebrate within our congregations

It will be to our greater joy and spiritual development if we also share these moments of discovery with each other within our congregations. Here are some suggestions:

Please consider the introduction of a Passion Week worship evening. This is an informal gathering dedicated to music, Bible readings and personal reflection and experience. It is designed to heighten our understanding and share our feelings of love and appreciation toward our Heavenly Father and His Son. Samples of worship evening format and content may be found on the Minister Companion and the Music Companion websites.

Also, please consider the use of Easter banners, preprinted song bulletins and invitation cards. They are available for order from the Minister Companion website as well.

Lastly, please utilize the Devotional. It contains weekly thoughts taken from the words of our Chief Apostle and has been organized according to the Christian calendar.

Confirmation

Our confirmands are approaching a unique, spiritual mile stone very similar to the caterpillar's transformation to a butterfly. These are our children who we love dearly! They are now emerging from the safe chrysalis of their adolescence within the shelter of the congregation and are stretching their wings of faith. Is it not a joy to celebrate the unique and beautiful colors of their wings and support them as they take flight?

How can we make this memorable for them? Again, here are a few suggestions:

Confirmation services have been scheduled throughout the Eastertide season so that friends and relatives may travel easily and attend all the congregational celebrations for these young people. This would not be possible if every confirmation was held on Palm Sunday or Easter.

Build a friendship: Perhaps there is a young person in your congregation with whom you have not formed a relationship. It's not too late to start! To make an investment of love and friendship is a positive act of strength and good courage that may have lifelong, if not eternal effects on a young soul.

I wish you a joyous and enlightened journey through Passion week and the Eastertide season.

Reprint of Spring 2011 Vision Newsletter

EXCERPT ON **JOY AND HOPE**

I would like to take this opportunity to wish each one a blessed and peaceful Advent season and a joyous entry into the New Year! In fact, let me describe this as a “joy of hope” for what we will experience in 2012 out of the hand of our heavenly Father. This joy is not an event driven emotion but rather is bound to a Christian awareness of these wonderful facts:

- **Christ was born!** He left His Father’s side and took on the burden of human form for the sake of mankind.
- **Christ lived!** And successfully established His church and gave apostles to teach and proclaim His gospel.
- **Christ died!** And provided the eternally valid sacrifice for our redemption.
- **Christ arose!** He overcame death and every human weakness. He was and remains an exemplar to those who follow Him and wish to become His bride.
- **Christ ascended!** And waits with His Father for the day when He can fetch us to our eternal home. He is both our advocate in heaven and present with us through the Holy Spirit, guiding us daily.

These fundamental facts, all of them, should cause us a true joy and an abiding sense of hope regardless of the circumstances we may have to live through.

As we feel the joy of anticipation and hope, may we heed the words of Christ, “*Occupy till I come.*” (Luke 19:13 KJV)

Reprint of Introduction from Winter 2011 Vision Newsletter

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

What is the kingdom of heaven? This question has been asked for centuries. It was the subject of much interest and debate at the time of Christ and much of His teaching is dedicated to bringing clarity and understanding to His contemporaries and future generations of believers. To this day, many differing beliefs and opinions exist and it would be good for us to enrich our understanding as well. I invite you to delve more deeply into the Gospel within your small group discussions across all congregations over the coming summer months regarding the following questions:

- Where is the kingdom of heaven?
- Is it a physical location or a state of the soul?
- Does it exist now or is it a future reward for good deeds here on earth?
- Who can enter this kingdom?
- What are the requirements for those who wish to abide there?

This article can only scratch the surface and by no means should be considered an exhaustive treatment of the questions above. Perhaps it will serve to whet our appetite for further research and discussion. Let us begin with the question asked of Christ by the Pharisees as reported in the book of Luke: *Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."* (Luke 17: 20-21)

From this conversation we gain insight into a number of our questions. We see that the Kingdom can be here with us now and it can exist within our hearts. Christ further described this state of being when He prayed "Your kingdom come" followed immediately by "Your will be done".

This is an indication that the kingdom is gained by embracing the rule and authority of God's will. Christ's singular and wholehearted embrace of His Father's purpose, to redeem mankind from sin, resulted in victory over hell and death and brought His kingdom within our reach.

Likewise, we abide in the kingdom when Christ rules within us and His purpose becomes ours. We thereby transition from a "dual life" (a church life and a non-church life) to a singular

one. A singular life still has balance. But regardless of where we find ourselves; in church, in school, in work or at play, we are within the kingdom of God if Christ is at the center of our life.

Now let us be very specific. God's kingdom has a purpose and guiding principles. Again, the Gospel gives us much to consider.

- **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; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:19-20)
- **The Great Commandment.** *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”* (John 13:34-35)

Let me conclude by directing your attention to another teaching that relates to the kingdom. This is the kingdom yet to come commencing at Christ's return where He will rule all the nations in glory and power. In the example of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-44) we are given a clear and stunningly graphic view of Christ's expectations.

It is my strong conviction that this passage is hugely relevant for our time. Again, within our small group discussions, let us delve deeply into its meaning. Is it literal? Is it figurative? I would like to refrain from commenting at this time in the hope that each congregation will actively wrestle with Christ's words. Let us prayerfully engage the Holy Spirit in finding a deeper understanding and real life applications that are meaningful in 2012 and beyond.

Within this passage, we see the future, eternal implications of a life of serving others (“the least of mine”) contrasted to a life that is dedicated to serving one's self. May we choose to dedicate our lives to His kingdom.

Reprint of Summer 2012 Vision Newsletter

EXCERPT ON CHANGE AND RENEWAL

Often we may hear the expressions – “we are all creatures of habit” or “I just don’t like change!”

I must admit, though, that I have never heard these words from any children. For them, change is good and sometimes even wonderful. When rooted in a stable home life, they live in a culture of learning, ever grasping for new ideas and exploring new things.

In Matthew 19:14, the Lord Jesus says – “*Let the little children come to Me....for of such is the kingdom of heaven*”. Can we see from this episode in the life of Christ an indication that the “child-like” nature of children is necessary for living in the kingdom of God? Isn’t this attitude epitomized in their feeling that if I want to grow, I must learn and change? As children of the Most High, can we see that it is our duty, even more, our privilege, to adopt this urge in our soul life? We must realize that we are not at a state of worthiness presently and we want to continue learning and growing in Christ’s nature. Being rooted in a stable life of faith is foundational to growing in Christ’s nature. We are on a journey and part of a dynamic process which the Lord Himself has ordained for all of us individually to prepare us to be His bride.

As we in the northern hemisphere begin to experience the changing season of Spring, where the whole earth moves through a renewal process of incredible change, let us be encouraged to follow the instructions that Apostle Paul gave the Romans to be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:2). Thereby, we adopt a culture of continual learning in our personal soul life and in our congregations to advance closer to the goal of our faith. This will bring change, but this evolution is necessary and we want to embrace it in childlike faith.

Reprint of Introduction from Spring 2012 Vision Newsletter

TWO PARABLES

In our last edition of the Vision newsletter, I introduced the concept of “Strengthen the House”, an exhortation declared by the prophet Zechariah (Zechariah 10:6). Within this continuing theme, please allow me to reference two parables of Christ that will help us strengthen the house in each congregation.

New wine in an old wineskin:

This parable is described in Mark 2:22. *And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins.* How does this teaching of Christ help us strengthen our congregations?

Let us begin by exploring the analogy that Christ created with this example. At this time, wine was stored in wineskins, not bottles. New wine poured into skins was still fermenting and this process produced gas which expands. New wine skins were elastic enough to expand with the pressure. But old wine skins often burst because they were hard and inflexible.

And the point to this parable is? Christ’s mission was to bring salvation to all mankind. This was the new wine. However, this mission was much too big to fit into the old wineskin or understanding of His contemporaries. Their understanding was formed out of Old Testament values with a fixation upon the law and judgment and the assumption that God’s goodness was reserved solely for their nation. Christ needed to create a new wineskin or understanding before He could offer salvation. He needed to introduce the concepts of love, grace, mercy, tolerance and forgiveness for all people or else redemption and salvation would have no room. In essence, it would burst the old wineskin and be spilled or wasted.

Today, as we continually strive to create healthier congregations, this parable becomes ever more insightful and relevant. We are implementing changes to improve our divine services and pastoral care as well as enhance the long term sustainability of each congregation’s structure. This also is “new wine”. However, these changes become meaningless if they are constricted within an old understanding or culture. Please join me in reflecting on the following questions:

- How will a new congregation “reach out to all people”, “teach the Gospel of Christ”, “cultivate a warm fellowship”, “experience the love of God and the joy of serving Him and others” and become a “church in which people feel at home” (new wine) if it does

not first learn to live and lead like Christ (new wineskin)? This new wineskin is built on His teachings of unconditional love and acceptance of all people. It requires us to profess and demonstrate these qualities in an open manner within our communities.

- How will a congregational merger (new wine) bring long term sustainability without a new understanding of shared servant leadership and a deep exploration and implementation of the Work of Ministry whereby all members of the body of Christ are empowered to serve one another from their God given gifts, their passions, their unique life experiences and the inspirational qualities that others see in them (new wineskin)?

Wheat and the Tares:

In Matthew 13: 24-30, Christ teaches the following: *The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn"*.

In the time of Christ, tares were a reference to a specific weed that looked very much like wheat in the early stages and was distinguishable only at the time of harvest. It was poisonous to people so it was important that it was removed from the harvest. What is the relevance of this parable for us and how will it serve to make our congregations stronger?

The tares represent the imperfections that always have been and always will be found within each congregation. Often we are aggravated by these conditions and feel that such weaknesses and deficiencies should not exist. Or we may focus on perceived past mistakes or inconsistencies found in our history. Perhaps this gives some reason to doubt their calling. Perhaps this prompts some to remain passively on the sidelines and uncommitted in their service to Christ waiting for the day when the church is more to their liking.

In response to this attitude, let us look at the reality of Christ's church; even from its first moments. At the high point of Christ's mission, the very moment when He won the victory over sin and death for all mankind, how did He appear to His contemporaries? By human standards, He appeared to be a rejected and defeated man with few remaining followers. Yet from this perceived weakness came the triumphant moment of resurrection and the means of salvation.

Likewise, what was the experience of the early apostolic congregations? They were also characterized by human weakness and far from perfect. Apostle Paul was prompted to give this explanation to the congregation at Corinth. *But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to*

shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. (1Corinthians 1:27-29)

We can see that God consistently chooses to confound the wisdom of mankind. He creates wondrous, eternal outcomes out of our weak and often dysfunctional state. In our new Catechism, we read that the Church of Christ will only reach its perfect, triumphant state at His return.

So as instructed by Christ in this parable, let us be undeterred by the presence of the tares for God allows them until the time of harvest. Instead we may rejoice that He has called us and equipped us with the spiritual gifts needed to serve His Kingdom. We can exchange passivity for passion and increasingly engage ourselves in “strengthening the house”.

Reprint of Spring 2012 Vision Newsletter

2013 A JUBILEE YEAR

I'm thinking about 2013. It is the 150th anniversary of the New Apostolic Church International and this fact is significant for us as we make our future plans. The following impulses have been moving within me and I would like to share them with you as we begin a new year.

I'm reminded firstly of the Old Testament concept of a jubilee year occurring every 50 years. God instituted this concept in the very beginning of His original plan to divide the Promised Land among the 12 tribes of Israel. Every tribe had a region assigned to them and every family within the tribe had also their plot of land (Book of Joshua). But God foresaw that with time and human frailties, this plan could become unbalanced. Some families would lose their land due to debts they could not pay. Some would be sold into servitude along with their children to satisfy the judgments of the law; perhaps even unjustly.

So God remedied this and brought His plan for the habitation of Israel back to its original balance via the jubilee year (Leviticus 25). Every 50 years marked a time of renewal and restoration. Homesteads were returned to their original owners, debts were cancelled and families were reunited from servitude. We should really stop for a moment and try to personalize this experience. Can we fully understand the power of this moment to those who were restored? Can you imagine the emotions that welled up as this year approached?

But how did God rationalize this redistribution of wealth to the rest of His people? It would be quite controversial by today's standards. I'm certain that some were critical of His solution. How did He answer His critics? Quite simply! The right to prosper within the Promised Land was His gift to His people. The land and His people belonged to Him and it was His right to return everyone to their original state of blessing and belonging.

In this way, I see 2013, our 150th year anniversary, as a year of jubilee. It can be a year when our joy is renewed as congregational health is pursued.¹ It can be a time when families that were divided or separated from their congregations can be restored and reunited when greeted by a renewed sense of inclusion and belonging. Salvation through Jesus Christ is God's greatest gift to mankind and He alone determines the breadth and height and depth of His love and grace. In Philadelphia this past year our Chief Apostle reminded us of the words recorded in Revelation - *See, I set before you an open door and no one can close it.* Let us remove all humanly imposed divisiveness and judgment and seek to love one another unconditionally as He has loved us. This is a culture of living like Christ and it will be the first indication that our congregations are becoming healthier.

So renewing our commitment to our plan for congregational health in 2013 can bring us much reason to celebrate. As you know, our plan is called Stepping Forward. We have included a special section with this 2013 “beginning of the year” edition of the Vision to clarify our plan and to give an honest report card of our progress to date. As you can see, there is room for all of us to renew our commitment. It must remain the single central theme for this year and for our foreseeable future.

The 150th anniversary also reminds me of our New Apostolic beginnings.² We were a people of fervent renewal in 1862; we see it in our very name. Our forbearers pleaded with God for a renewed outpouring of His Spirit and a restoration of the apostolic ministry which testifies of the Gospel of Christ, and teaches and baptizes all nations in His name and with His Spirit. Thereby the church of Christ was restored to its original fullness in an authentic manner according to God’s salvation plan.

Since then, our church has grown by the testimony of souls whose lives were transformed by the power of the Gospel.³

The many and varied testimonies of hundreds and then thousands of everyday people drawn by God to His Son. In this year, we should share our stories with each other. Let us be witnesses of the marvelous grace of God and account for how we found this “open door” and came into the fellowship of believers and followers of Jesus Christ. There is great power within the testimony of lives that are transformed by His Gospel. We will celebrate our common history over the course of 2013 with a special initiative called ***What’s your story?*** and I encourage you to contribute.⁴

Lastly, can we say that a longing for a continuing renewal still lives within our congregations today? Do we still plead for the activity of the Holy Spirit in every divine service? Is there a burning within us to be taught the Gospel of Christ, to become empowered by His victory and resurrection within Holy Communion, and thereby be transformed into a new creature?⁵ *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.* (2 Corinthians 5:16-18) Is there a revival each day of our hope for the return of Christ? If not, then let us become a people of renewal in 2013. Returning to our New Apostolic roots and living joyous lives that testify of His presence within us does not take us backwards, but is the foundation for Stepping Forward.

FOOTNOTES FOR 2013 A JUBILEE YEAR

¹ I see this as a “Jubilee Year” for us; a time of renewal, reflection, and focus. This is epitomized in a Bible verse the Chief Apostle used in Johannesburg from Psalm 119:105, *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.* From this we can understand that under the illumination of His word and activity, we recognize two states of being: “Where am I now?” (my feet, the present) and “Where am I going?” (my path, the future).

² In January 2010, an initiative was started in order to document and preserve the history of the congregations and USA districts. Over 40 volunteer historians from the various districts worked diligently to gather narratives, pictures and video clips of their respective congregations. This huge gathering of data was completed in 2012. In 2013, the

last phase of the project began; to build a museum to house and display the histories, as well as artifacts that some members so graciously donated. A decision was made to locate the museum in Chicago's North Side Church, which was built in 1917 and is part of our history. The museum will contain a timeline, stories of each congregation, with a slide show of the pictures that were gathered and some video presentations. It will also house an artifacts area displaying music, jewelry, periodicals, books and more.

³ The question, "Where am I now?" implies a comprehension of where we have come from. It is important for us during this Jubilee celebration that we ponder the great engineering of our Heavenly Father in our lives and further, how He brought us into a relationship with His Son. To help us speak more openly of this great wonder, we have set a slogan for our Jubilee year – ***What's your story?*** By speaking of our history to others in the family, congregation, and community, we accumulate the history of God's work here in the United States. Let us bring along the good things of our heritage and also embrace the newness of Christ's work today.

⁴ In this Year of Profession it is important that all of us give expression to how our Heavenly Father's guidance and love has touched our lives. Our baptism with water and Spirit as well as the continual blessed celebration of Holy Communion together, are a vital foundation of this expression. Please take the time to meditate and remember the incredible journey we have taken – designed and navigated by our Father's hand. Truly He has brought us through difficult moments, but has also permitted us joyful days. This journey is our story. Let's share these stories with our families, friends, acquaintances, coworkers, neighbors, and all who will listen. This is the testimony of our faith, i.e. how we experience our God throughout our life.

⁵ "Where am I going?" Truly the goal of our faith, the Lord's coming, stands always before us and as we approach this great day, it is incumbent upon us to continue to grow in the mind of Christ by deepening our relationship with Him and serving according to our spiritual gifts.

Reprint of Winter 2012 Vision Newsletter

Footnotes are from Introductions on What's Your Story, Reprints of Excerpts from the Winter 2012 and Spring 2013 Vision Newsletters, and Introducing the Museum of the New Apostolic Church, Reprint of Excerpt from the Spring 2013 Vision Newsletter)

EQUIP, EMERGE, ENGAGE, & EDIFY

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.

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.

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:

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| <i>Teaching and learning</i> | <i>Spiritual discussions and conversations</i> |
| <i>Prayer</i> | <i>Worship</i> |
| <i>Inspiration</i> | <i>Fellowship</i> |
| <i>Pastoral support</i> | <i>Sharing the Gospel with friends</i> |

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

Reprint of Winter 2013 Vision Newsletter

WORDS FROM OUR CHIEF APOSTLE

NIAGARA FALLS AND MIAMI

The Chief Apostle's recent sermons in Niagara Falls and Miami contained some new understandings that I would like to highlight. Please create opportunities to discuss these concepts within your congregational settings. – LRK

Chief Apostle Schneider in Niagara Falls

The Apostle Paul compared the Church with the temple saying that God builds the temple, He builds the Church. It's a nice image and we have to think about when you are building a house. You do not use the same workers and the same tools to lay the foundation then when you build the walls or when you paint them or when you fit the lights inside the rooms. It's not the same worker, it's not the same skill needed and you do not use the same tools.

So somebody may be disoriented saying, "Oh everything changed because in the time of District Apostle Kraus it was absolutely different." The methods were different, the doctrine was different and so on. For sure building goes on. We are not in the time of the foundation now, we are in the time of the completion. We do not use the same workers and we do not use the same tools. But what's important? It's still the temple of God. It's still God's work and it's my task as a Chief Apostle, it's a task of the District Apostles, to make sure that everything goes according to the plans of God. Because He established the plan of the Church, He established the plan of the building of the temple.

It's our responsibility to make sure that everything is done according to the plans of God using the methods of the Holy Spirit. That was the reason and the content of the meetings that we had last week. Just to make sure that all is done according to the plan of God and everything is inspired by the Holy Spirit. And I tell you we are fighting and praying for that to make sure that the will of our Lord Jesus is done in His work. Again I tell you that the Lord Jesus will complete His work in North America too. We believe it and we'll experience it shortly.

Holy Communion for the departed:

It's a wonderful feeling to celebrate Holy Communion with our departed; with our brothers and sisters from the yonder world. Together we celebrate the victory of Christ over death. They do not just belong to the past. They belong to our present. They are here. When we look back to the past we are thankful and I'd like to use the opportunity given to me today to express on your behalf our gratitude for their labour, for their victories, for their prayers, for the great deeds they did in the past. But I'd like also to rejoice with them in the yonder

world by telling us don't forget that those who were faithful are still faithful. They didn't stop going towards Jesus Christ. They didn't stop walking on the way leading to eternal life. Sometimes we see them as they were when they left, when they passed away and then the thought comes, "oh what would they say if they would see what happens today", because in our mind they still remain as they were. Brothers and Sisters, our fathers and mothers are faithful, they are in the service, they listen to the word of God and you know what? They follow the word of God. And they do what the Holy Spirit tells them to do. That's my confidence in our fathers and mothers, in those who go before. They didn't stop at the point they were when they passed away. They go on. They follow the preaching and the words of God today. So if we would ask them what do you think about this? They would say, I agree with the Holy Spirit as they always said.

Let's change our mind about our predecessors, about our mothers and fathers. That will be a special joy to them if we stop considering them as they were and consider that they go forward as we go forward. They belong to the present time of the church, of the word of salvation and together we prepare for the future, together we want to go to our Lord Jesus Christ. Remember Moses and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration? They didn't talk about the past, they talked about the future and that's the way our brothers and sisters do in the yonder world. They talk about our future, their future. It happens that it's exactly the same. They pray for us and we pray for them. That's our joy and that's our trust in the future. That's why we are confident for the future. We will meet again.

Chief Apostle Schneider in Miami, Florida

1 Thessalonians 4: 16–17 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us be prepared for the return of Christ. We want to fulfill the prerequisites. We want to be in Christ, and we are in Christ with the rebirth of water and Spirit. We want to remain in Christ. Remain faithful in our faith; faith in God, faith in the return of Christ. We believe in the church. We believe in the apostle ministry. We believe in the sacraments. We want to remain in love so that we can abide with God. And we are aware that we need grace. We have this strong desire. We want to become like Jesus and we suffer because we are not yet like Jesus. We ask for grace and we are humble towards God and towards our neighbor. They can be absolutely sure because God is good and Jesus is faithful. They will find grace.

The very last point, that's nice too, it says, "And they who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." We are caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. What does it mean? The change Paul speaks about in another letter; we have to be changed. This change of the Bride of Christ will not take place on earth. It will take place in the air... In other terms, we cannot see it. Nobody can see it. The change of the Bride will take place in heaven somewhere. I do not know where, but I know something - I cannot see the Bride today. Sometimes people tell us, "You believe that's the

Bride of Christ? Look at them, look what they are, look how they treat each other.” But that’s normal. I cannot see today the Bride with my eyes. The change will take place in the air, as Paul said. So, brothers and sisters, even if we cannot see the Bride because all of us are sinners and we remain sinners. I cannot see your longing for grace. I cannot see how you suffer because you are not yet like Jesus, but I believe one thing: when the Lord will come, the Bride will be prepared. That’s absolutely certain. My concern, our concern is we want to be part of it. If we remain in faith in Christ and we are longing for this grace, if we remain humble, I tell you, Jesus will return and He will catch us up with Him.

...We want to be saved together. I not only want to be saved myself, I want my brother and my sister to be saved with me. I want you to be with me in the eternal fellowship with God. That’s also part of our New Apostolic faith. We do not want to be saved alone. We want our brother and sister to be saved with us. We want to be caught up together. That’s the oneness of the people of God. May this strong desire go through the whole people of God in the United States and all of the countries served by your District Apostle. We want to be saved together. You know that will solve a lot of unnecessary problems. If all of us have this strong desire, whatever happens, whatever I have against my brother and my sister, the most important thing is I want him to be with me in heaven.

Reprint of Spring 2014 Vision Newsletter

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 measureable 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. 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. 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 four 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 three 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

Reprint of Summer 2014 Vision Newsletter

Culture

Thanksgiving
and Offering

KEEP YOURSELF THANKFUL IN EVERYTHING!

Across the nations that comprise our district and within our New Apostolic culture, there exists a rich tradition of Thanksgiving. The Thanksgiving holiday revolves around a recognition and festive celebration of God's goodness and bounty. Often we think in terms of the things for which we are thankful.

As our children and youth have rightly reminded us of so artistically in this issue of our newsletter, we may "count our many blessings" and tie our thankfulness to treasured possessions, warm relationships and pleasant experiences.

As we approach this special season of Thanksgiving, however, I would like to add another dimension to ponder: a deeper level of Christian faith. In Thessalonians 5:18 we can read: *In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

We can see within this verse the same principal of self-responsibility that has guided our inner reflections over the past year. Using our familiar theme for 2009, I would add to the exhortation from the Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians a more modern version: Keep yourself thankful in everything!

Clearly, to become and remain thankful is a matter of personal choice. It transcends reacting positively to good things and is a decision to be thankful in all things.

Let us look at two contrasting biblical examples of personal responsibility and decisions regarding thankfulness. One of the earliest Bible verses gives us a glimpse into the inner conflict of Cain. His internal perspective towards his Creator was skewed by his lack of thankfulness. It diminished his perception of God's providence and spawned a jealous comparison to his brother. This personal decision led to events that were tragic and far reaching.

Let us contrast this to the extraordinary example of Job, who decided to bless the name of God in spite of the loss of his possessions, family and health. This personal decision preserved Job during a period of horrible circumstances and formed the basis for his recovery.

For many, 2009 was a year of difficult circumstances. Many experienced unemployment and financial hardship in addition to sickness, loss of loved ones and the ever-increasing stress of contemporary life on families and relationships. Should our thankfulness then be

diminished? The decision to “keep yourself thankful in all things” will preserve us as it did Job and will also form the basis for recovery and renewal “for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

The phrase “in everything” encapsulates the entire human experience; the good and the bad, the joyous and the disappointing. In everything, let us give thanks because:

- We still look forward to the return of Christ and life eternal, the greatest destiny ever offered to anyone.
- We still are under the grace of God and partakers of the merit of Christ. He has not withdrawn from us.
- We still have been able to keep our faith for another year.
- We still can serve Christ by serving others.

Lastly, dear loved ones, let us be cautious of attitudes that can erode thankfulness. One such attitude we might call “entitlement.” In Matthew 20, we read the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. Some of the laborers, hired early in the day, complained to the land owner because their compensation was the same as those hired later. In effect, they concluded that they deserved the reward of the landowner based upon their deeds. However, Christ rejected such thoughts and instead directed their attention to the overwhelming grace and goodness of God. He will give a reward, but regardless of our deeds, His reward is beyond anything we are entitled to.

From this parable, we also see that a feeling of entitlement leads to comparisons between brothers and sisters. Instead of basking in the joy of their election and calling, some laborers (like Cain) chose to dwell on the perceived unfairness of their circumstances compared to their fellow laborers. Where this attitude becomes pervasive, a congregation becomes unhealthy and is no longer “a church in which people feel at home.”

Come, my dear ones, as we approach this blessed season together may we more and more discover that everything that falls from our Father’s hand is reason for thanks. Our willingness to bless the name of God, to praise His kindness and mercy and to embrace each other in the love of Christ will inspire a worthy and acceptable thank offering.

Reprint of Autumn 2009 Vision Newsletter

THOUGHTS ON THANKSGIVING

Within the NAC-USA district, our spiritual heritage contains a deep tradition of expressing our profound gratitude to our Heavenly Father. This tradition is the product of a wonderful teaching over many decades. It has formed a vibrant foundation of faith and a beautiful culture of joyful giving. It is my hope that we will continue this tradition while broadening and deepening our understanding of the scope of God's grace and His providence - to fully grasp the effect it has upon our daily lives as well as our eternal future.

We also must perceive and embrace the future vision of our church: The place whereby God will continue to provide both eternal redemption and relevant, day-by-day pastoral care for us, our children and our grandchildren. Our enlightened commitment to this vision will create a wonderful future legacy.

So let us begin, once again in the spirit of self-responsibility, by examining more closely our personal feelings. Can we see that our thanksgiving, and thus our giving, is a product of a mature understanding at many levels? The first layer of understanding is the most obvious. It is our recognition of God's daily kindness: His protection, His providence that supplies our daily bread, His deliverance in times of trouble and His wise direction of our path through life. This layer also contains the rich fabric of our family relationships, our fellowship with our brothers and sisters, and the comforting care of those who minister to our daily needs within our congregations.

But there is another level of understanding. Therein we try to grasp the enormity of God's grace within the gift of His beloved Son Jesus Christ for our redemption and eternal life. This concept is too big to be considered only randomly, sandwiched between the busyness of daily life. At key moments we choose to intentionally create a quiet space to contemplate and worship the One who has woven us into His family, redeemed us from sin and death and given us the promise of life eternal. From this perspective, it becomes a privilege to offer the best that we have willingly and joyfully, never begrudgingly. Offering becomes purely an expression of adoration; it cannot be compared to God's gift of salvation to us, and it can never compensate Him for His loving kindness. Likewise, our offerings are not given with the hopes of some immediate reward but rather the understanding that God knows our needs. We trust Him and are thankful for His care and direction in both good and difficult days.

In a recent divine service the Chief Apostle described this simply and profoundly: *"If we truly love the Lord, we will not have the heart to disappoint Him. We will want to have fellowship*

with Him, to be close to Him. And we will bring our offerings, not out of obligation or duty but because our heart urges us to do so. This is the law of love.”

How will we adequately express our adoration to our Heavenly Father? Here again are differing levels of understanding. In Nehemiah 10:32 we read the words *“to exact from ourselves.”* This means we give up something, we do without, and we sacrifice in order to offer. As parents, we do this already for our children. In 2 Corinthians 8:3 we read of the Macedonian congregations who gave freely and joyfully during times of great affliction and poverty. This can be both comforting and illuminating to us today during a time of economic struggle.

There is another level of understanding within the teaching of the prophet Nehemiah regarding the necessity to care for God’s house. He gives the admonition, *“we will not neglect the house of our God”* and within the 39th chapter, reminds God’s people of their promises of support to the temple and all the activities found therein.

How critical this is today! Many of our churches need “refreshment.” But also within the “house of God” are found the pastoral care programs for our children, youth, music, and seniors. Here are our Vacation Bible schools, our weddings, our funerals, our Peace Making seminars and our minister training programs. Here will we find the pastoral programs of the future: pre-marriage classes for couples, parenting resources for young families and grief management for those who suffer loss, to name a few. I intentionally cast this vision out to all once again, in the hopes that you will perceive and believe in the potential for our future when our vision for healthier congregations becomes realized. In addition to our investment of time and effort, the realization of this vision will require financial support.

In conclusion dear brothers and sisters, I wish for you a most wondrous and joyous feast of Thanksgiving Sunday as well as a warm and loving celebration of our national Thanksgiving holiday surrounded by family and friends. This is a beautiful door by which we enter the Advent season.

Reprint of Autumn 2010 Vision Newsletter

PERSPECTIVE OFFERING IN A CONTEMPORARY WORLD

When considering the subject of offering, it is important to remember that some of our past teaching created a strong connection to the physical offering box within our church building. Our faithful mothers and fathers taught us the value of this at a very young age. District Apostle Kraus advised us to never pass the offering box without contributing. When coupled with sincere thanks and a worshipful attitude, this advice served us well and created a beautiful legacy. I do not want to disturb this teaching.

However, we may broaden our understanding of offering given certain developments that have taken place within our contemporary times. For instance, it is now customary for some individuals to make all payments and purchases electronically. This is especially true of our younger members. Offering may also be transacted this way and soon we will be following the lead of some NAC districts in Europe and South Africa in making this an option for our members.

The more traditional of our members may feel that this is not in line with our past teaching. It may seem too cold and transactional - too distanced from the divine service experience where we view placing our offering into the offering box as part of the experience. I understand your concern. You may continue in your current practice undisturbed. But I also feel that our God is omniscient. He knows and sees everything. He will understand the e-offering process also and will recognize the same worshipful heart's attitude of the giver. Further, I believe the offering prayer and blessing covers these offerings even though they are not physically in the church building.

Reprint of Autumn 2010 Vision Newsletter

EXCERPT ON **THE WIDOW'S MITE**

Recently, I have occupied myself with the thought of the “widow’s mite”, a term that the District Apostle Kraus often used to symbolize the true value of the widow’s offering as related in Mark 12:41-44 and Luke 21:1-4. In this occurrence in the temple, Christ witnessed a widow who gave two mites, the equivalent of a few cents. Yet He taught that she *put in more than all...because she “out of her poverty, put in all that she had”*. It is an example of true giving; that is to say sacrificial giving. While insignificant by human measurement, it was highly valuable when weighed on God’s scale.

In my mind, the “widow’s mite”, given by a thankful, trusting soul in the midst of her economic uncertainty and vulnerability, represents the highest and most treasured gift of love to God. Surely, our Heavenly Father loved her in return and Christ was moved by the experience.

It also creates the weightiest burden of ongoing stewardship for the church. I am convinced that Christ, her Savior and Redeemer will require of the church leadership an accounting of how this treasure was cared for. It is the motivation for our financial controls and strict budgeting initiatives as well as a key element in our district wide strategic planning project.

So as we enter the second half of the year and ponder our New Apostolic Thanksgiving Day, may we approach our faithful God with this example in our hearts and with the knowledge that our offerings are sacred to Him and to the church.

Reprint of Introduction from Summer 2011 Vision Newsletter

THOUGHTS ON THE WIDOW'S MITE

As we enter the harvest season in our nation, many feelings of thankfulness move over our hearts. Even though we are experiencing a difficult economic time, we still perceive the bounty of our Heavenly Father's creation and His continual providing of our daily bread.

In preparation for Thanksgiving, I would like to take a closer look at the story of the widow highlighted in our Spring edition (Mark 12: 41-44 and Luke 21: 1-4). We have seen that a seemingly insignificant gift, measured in human terms, was not only "acceptable" to the Lord Jesus, but also held at a very high value. Let us examine this great example of giving.

- How did a "little" become "more than all"? It is interesting to read that she had no conditions or attachments; she asked for nothing in return. This is a pure giving out of unconditional love.
- Further, we do not read of any tangible results of her offering; there was no visible blessing or reward. Giving out of deep gratitude and pure love to the Lord is a result of our awareness of His limitless goodness and grace to us. This widow did not seem to pursue "something", only offered thanks. Isn't this similar to our relationships with one another as husbands, wives, partners, children, and friends? Does not the expression of our love for each other stand on its own with no expectation of reward? Do we need to be compensated for loving each other? Should we not address our heavenly Father in an even humbler, more worshipful way, not seeking something from Him due to our small gifts? This is true worship and thanks!
- What does it mean to give "out of poverty"? We can understand this to mean sacrificial giving, not only with our financial resources, but also with our time and effort. Our Chief Apostle once related that sometimes when tired or overwhelmed and tempted to give up on a task, he has pushed himself a little harder and continued forward. In doing so, he always has found a special surprise which led to his joy and blessing.

We can be sure of our Father's ongoing blessing. We can trust completely in what comes from His hand. It is sometimes seen, but often the true scope of His faithfulness, deliverance and protection remains invisible to our mortal view. Sometimes later in life, glimpses of His wise guidance and ever present care are revealed to us. After seasons of hardship or injustice we may discover the hidden gem that Joseph described to his brothers: *You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day.* (Genesis 50:20)

And far greater still, but yet not seen, is the everlasting and eternal blessing found in the Holy Communion where we celebrate an invisible bond to our Savior and in the book of Life where He has written our names with His perfect sacrifice.

So as we celebrate this Thanksgiving season, let us truly celebrate the wonderful relationship Christ has created for us with Him and with one another. This will prompt an acceptable and highly valued expression of thanks before His throne.

Reprint of Introduction from Autumn 2011 Vision Newsletter

EXCERPT ON **SACRIFICE**

We have now passed through the exciting season of Eastertide in our celebration of Holy Week and Easter, the welcoming of our young brothers and sisters into the congregation through Confirmation, the visits of our Chief Apostle to our nation, and the Pentecost feast. May the wonderful impulses we have received inspire us in new ways as we continue our journey of faith forward.

I have occupied myself with the theme of offering and sacrifice over the past months. These truly are deep elements of our faith with which we express our thankfulness and adoration to our Heavenly Father. Further I have read in Proverbs 3:9 – *Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase*. Here we can understand that offering is also a way to honor the Lord, i.e. to give Him acclaim and esteem. In this way, our offering and even the sacrifices we make, become a part of our worship which expresses how much our dear God means to us. I feel this to be an essential element that actually precedes thankfulness. In other words, we must first express to God what He means to us and articulate the benefits we receive from Him before we can fully perceive the scope of our thankfulness. Tobit is wonderful example of this and is highlighted in this edition.

In another perspective, sometimes our possessions actually become stumbling blocks or dangers in our life. Honoring the Lord with them allows them to be blessings for us and our future generations.

Reprint of Introduction from Summer 2012 Vision Newsletter

PERSPECTIVE OFFERING

The story of Tobit comes from the Apocrypha. While this may cause some to question its authenticity, it holds a special place in my heart because there are pearls of wisdom embedded within the account of Tobit's life that bear closer scrutiny. It illuminates the attitudes and emotions of a God fearing man who chose to live his life according to timeless principles of faith. In anticipation of the coming season of Thanksgiving, perhaps we could engage in some summer reading of Tobit's adventures and gain new insights into the subject of offerings.

The book of Tobit takes us on the journey of a pious man who encountered adversity, uncertainty and injustice. Perhaps many of us could relate to this personally. He responded with kindness to others, a willingness to give of himself and a renewed trust in God even when it was not expedient and led to his persecution. I ask you to take special note of the following:

- Tobit was moved by the suffering and tragedy of others and sought to remedy it at his own inconvenience (Tobit 1:16-18).
- He felt compelled to support the house of God and the activities that cared for the well-being of those in need. He voluntarily created a unique formula of offering out of his love for God that greatly exceeded the traditional law of tithing (Tobit 1: 7-8).
- He worshiped and praised God even during times of personal hardship (Tobit 1: 11-12).
- God accounted for Tobit's anonymous kindness to others.
- God befriended Tobit via a stranger (the arch angel Raphael) and accompanied his son Tobias on a journey with many twists and turns. God engineered an elegant solution to the seeming insurmountable difficulties his family encountered.
- Tobit transferred his wisdom and principles of faith to his son. He created a legacy for Tobias by sharing his experiences and his beliefs. This led to an upward evolution from one generation to the next. Tobias was moved by this teaching and his own experiences to share his inheritance when he experienced God's help and benevolence in times of need.

This is not so much the story of a man who was rewarded by God for offering: that is a concept that I would like to discourage. Rather, we can see a story of a man overcome with love for God who needed to find an expression for his gratitude and who felt a personal responsibility to support the activities of God's house and to care for those in need. Once again we recognize the common thread described in Christ's parable of the sheep and goats and the reward for that which is done to the "least of His", referenced in our lead article.

And finally we perceive that God measured Tobit's willingness to give regardless of the amount. Tobit was not limited by the tithing tradition of his time. In essence he gave three tithes when he went to Jerusalem because he perceived there was a need. His example must have influenced his son. Tobias was willing to share one half of his inheritance with the angel Raphael during a season of abundance in gratitude for his help (Tobit 12: 1-5). On the other hand we remember the widow's mite who gave what she could in her season of poverty and Christ was moved by her gift.

So our seasons may change and likewise our ability to offer, however our desire to please God and our willingness to express love and adoration for Him remains. Like Tobit and Tobias, our understanding of offering can evolve to a higher plane and form a blessed legacy for our children and future generations.

Reprint of Summer 2012 Vision Newsletter

THANKFULNESS AND RELATIONSHIPS

The words of our Chief Apostle at the Canada Youth Summit still remain in my ears – “Let us always be thankful! Everyone has reason to be thankful!”. May this feeling always have a permanent place in our lives.

When thankfulness truly becomes an element in our spiritual character, life changes. Our way of worship becomes more sincere in that our prayers start to have new expressions and our hymns take on new meaning. Our perspective changes. Spouses filled with thankfulness communicate without criticism to one another; parents filled with thankfulness care for their children without harshness and thankful children honor and respect their parents. Ministers that appreciate the congregation cherish all and are humbled to serve. A thankful congregation recognizes the sacrifice of all who serve them and receive this service with joy.

Something else also changes. We begin to grow in our personal relationship with our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ and thus become more self-responsible. [Ref. Vision articles 2009]. As this matures, we seek His counsel in our prayer life and trust the impulses that He gives us - sometimes directly in our thoughts, sometimes in an experience of faith, sometimes in the divine service, sometimes in a Bible verse, and sometimes in the advice of those who minister to us. It is vital that we can recognize all the various ways the Lord wants to touch, strengthen, and counsel us. God's people should not be needy and indecisive. We stand with Christ, our Savior and Helper! A thankful attitude toward Him equips us to stand firm in our faith and causes this connection with Him always to be open and available.

I encourage all to “exercise” this intimate connection with Christ. Perhaps at times we are tempted to default to an easier path of simply asking someone for advice. Let us always first seek the Lord and allow Him to direct us in the way He pleases. Remember the words of the Psalmist – *But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases*. Such effective prayers will open new ways of understanding and we will truly find our Father's will, if we seek it.

We are not alone! This further gives us cause for thanks because we intercede for each other and serve each other as we continue our journey together. Please set aside some time during this Thanksgiving season to allow thoughts of gratitude to flood your soul and thereby enrich your relationship with Christ.

Reprint of Excerpt from Autumn 2012 Vision Newsletter

PERSPECTIVE STEWARDSHIP

As we approach our New Apostolic Thanksgiving celebration, let us look more closely at our understanding of offering and related concepts. Often times, words that are used repeatedly become cliché and lose their impact. Sometimes we use words interchangeably without grasping the nuance and subtlety of their actual meaning. A deeper understanding can create a more powerful and transformational experience. The following is offered in the hopes that it will generate further contemplation and discussion.

Let us start at the beginning. Everyone has some material, natural wealth; it is the sum total of our possessions and income. The amounts are relative. Obtaining wealth is a necessary lifelong pursuit because it creates our earthly security; the food on our table, the roof over our heads and the investment we make in raising our children.

Because we must toil for our earthly security, it is tempting and natural to assume that everything we earn and obtain is “ours”. It is easy to forget that everything is still actually God’s. He made this clear throughout the scriptures. To Job, He replied emphatically: *Who has preceded Me, that I should pay him? Everything under heaven is Mine.* (Job 41:11)

Could we see that in reality we are not owners but rather stewards over God’s property? Can we recognize that our wealth whether large or small comes from Him and is simply within our temporary custody? A steward is an old English term describing a person responsible for managing the property of another. Our responsibility is to manage “all things” to the glory of God. Peter further described the responsibility of stewardship in the following manner:

As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.... that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ... (1 Peter 4:10-11) With this understanding as a starting point, let us continue our exploration. What would prompt us to offer some portion of the wealth under our stewardship to God?

There are a number of reasons. The primary motivation is one of worship. It is an expression and a confession of our ever expanding awareness of God’s greatness and goodness. It is one method by which we honor Him and glorify His name. We voluntarily and joyfully return to God a portion of our (His) wealth, knowing full well that it reduces our comfort and security, in the hopes of communicating our feelings to Him.

Additional but related emotions move us:

- The overwhelming awe that He chose to offer salvation to us via the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
- Our thanksgiving for His help and deliverance in so many circumstances of daily life.
- An appreciation for God's house. In the Old Testament it was the temple. In the New Testament it is the outlet of salvation and pastoral care that we find within our church; a congregation of fellow believers and disciples. This is the place where so much of God's spiritual abundance, word and sacrament, is shared with us.

In our next installments, we will delve into the related topics of tithing, sacrifice, blessing and fasting. We would welcome your thoughts as well as the further findings and conclusions of your discussion groups for the good of all: submit to communications@nac-usa.org.

Reprint of Autumn 2012 Vision Newsletter

OFFERING & SACRIFICE: A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Dear brothers and sisters,

Over the past year I have shared various thoughts and writings with you regarding the subject of offering. My intent is not to create a mandate on how each member should give to the church. Rather, I would propose that this is a matter of personal responsibility where each member comes to a richer understanding of the biblical and theological foundations regarding:

Worship, thanksgiving and praise

Offering, sacrifice, and tithing

Support of those in need based upon Christian charity

The higher purpose of wealth vs materialism

The practical financial realities of supporting the mission of the church

With this information, we can then give of free will and in a manner that reflects our personal feelings toward God as well as our perception of the value of the church within our daily lives.

So within this culture of continual learning, we have asked our New Apostolic Church International theologian, Dr. Reinhard Kiefer, to provide a synopsis of the theological basis for offering, sacrifice, and tithing. We have used his research to compile the following discussion points that we hope will fuel our small group and congregational discussions for the next months. Part two of this discussion will appear in the Autumn edition of the VISION. -LRK

In the Old Testament, we see offering as a sacrifice; a material gift as a means of atonement. It's purpose was to strengthen the fellowship between God and man and to remove the impairments/obstacles which have come into being through man's sinful behavior. Here a variety of offerings/sacrifices were carried out: the sacrifice (the offering of animals), food offerings (the offering of baked goods), burnt offerings (the burning of incense). In a broader sense, material gifts were also included in offerings (precious metals, materials, money, food) for the purposes of supporting the maintenance of the priests and the costs of the congregation (Exodus 30:10, Nehemiah 10:33, 38).

Tithing, however, was the tax of the Levites, who first exercised their priestly service among the tribes of Israel, but later became helpers to the priest at the temple in Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 25:26). In Malachi 3:8-10 Jews were criticized for sacrificing incorrectly and for neglecting their tithes. The Old Testament saints who lead a God fearing life, also fulfilled these duties, which were understood not as a requirement of man, but as God's commandment. In contrast to ancient Judaism and paganism, the early Christian congregation no longer recognizes the idea of a sacrifice for atonement given the context of Jesus' death on Calvary. His sacrifice is unique and has a lasting atoning function, making all other sacrifices unnecessary. It is eternally valid.

Sacrifice as surrender

Although through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Old Testament sacrificial system has lost its basis, the term "sacrifice" is not only found in connection with the death of Jesus, but also with the new spiritual life of the Christian. An example is Romans 12:1: *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.* Here, Apostle Paul requests in response to the mercy of God, the offering of a sacrifice by the believer and from those who are freed from sin. In the Greek translation it speaks of a "physical sacrifice", it is a sacrifice of myself, my person, my entire being. Further the sacrifice goes beyond the physical man; God's mercy urges man to devote all aspects of life to Him. This devotion is spiritual, but also is expressed in concrete attitudes and behaviors towards others and has clear material aspects. Based upon this verse (Romans 12:1), we should ponder the consequences of a New Apostolic understanding of sacrifice.

Sacrifice as a category of Christian life

Romans 12:1 has a direct impact on the lives of Christians. In this verse, the concepts of sacrifice and service to the church as a form of divine worship are transferred directly to the life of the believer. "Sacrifice" and "divine worship" are now not only the responsibility of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, but have a prominent place in the midst of our everyday lives. The ritual sacrifice has been replaced within the Christian faith by a personal and voluntary self-sacrifice.

Sacrifice as a material gift

The devotion of the body, of which Apostle Paul speaks in Romans 12:1 evolved in different ways in the early church. The first Christian congregation in Jerusalem contributed all their earthly possessions for the common good. The community property of the first Christians, which is reported in Acts 4:32-35, has its basis in the consciousness of the Christians of that time, that God is Lord also of the material goods and therefore the believer brings his belongings to the congregation for all to benefit: *Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.*

This concept of community property was not sustained and is believed to have been relinquished relatively quickly within the congregation of Jerusalem. Nevertheless, the

believer was not released from the obligation to contribute some of his property to the congregation. Apostle Paul organized a money collection for the needy congregations in Jerusalem in the Christian churches of Macedonia. Even the Corinthians were asked to contribute.

Here, Apostle Paul makes it clear that the wealth of faith and knowledge should lead also to generosity in giving and indicates the extent to which love works in the believer: *But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also. I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others.*(2 Corinthians 8:7-8) The right kind of love, it is suggested here, is one of physical sacrifice, material gift for others and for the needs of a functioning community. ... *but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality.* (2 Corinthians 8:14)

Further, material possessions should not be used to fulfill selfish desires, but rather used responsibly:

Personal responsibility with regard to myself, so that wealth does not destroy faith due to an unrestrained materialism.

Personal responsibility to others that I perceive their need and decide to serve them in love. Material possessions cannot be separated from faith and from the focus on the Gospel of Christ.

The material sacrifice is one of good works, which by itself does not bring salvation, but all the same is an expression of faith and love. Therefore, Apostle Paul says, *“He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.”* (2 Corinthians 9:6-7)

Sacrifice as inner devotion to God

Lastly, sacrifice as written in Romans 12:1, represents an inner devotion to God. Proper sacrifice requires a “right attitude” towards Him. The requirement that sacrifice, behavior and attitudes are coherent, is already found with the Old Testament prophets. They called this sanctification.

When Christian life is understood as a “sacrifice” and “divine worship”, an internal and systematic focus to the will of God is established. A life of sacrifice, divine devotion and worship is valid when lived according to the standards of God. In practice this means that the Christian “sanctifies their sacrifice.” Sanctification of the “sacrifice” may mean, for example, that one asks whether a life dedicated to materialism, extravagance and self indulgence is in agreement with a life committed to Christ. It may be necessary to change ones internal alignment. – RK

EXCERPT ON THANKSGIVING

As we approach our season of thanksgiving let us consider how this beautiful expression relates to our self-responsibility. We can start in the beginning with Cain and Abel. We read in Genesis 4:3 that *Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord; Abel brought of the firstborn of his flock.* We are well aware of the outcome of these two offerings. In verse 6 the Lord counsels: *“If you do well, will you not be accepted?”* From this we can ask ourselves the question, what does it mean to “do well” with regards to offerings and thanksgiving?

Recently our Chief Apostle referenced a word in Colossians 2:6-7: *“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.”* Can we see that having a deeper relationship with our Heavenly Father through His Son, Jesus Christ, is really the basis for His acceptance of our offerings and our thankfulness? How could we profess thankfulness to God while at the same time being ambivalent, unmoved or unchanged by the greatest gift He has given the world?

Those who have received Christ develop an intimate connection and live in Him through:

- Praying fervent prayers that are dialogues, not monologues.
- Truly seeking Him in preparation for a divine service experience.
- Becoming aware of the thousands of blessings and acts of goodness received constantly from His hand.
- Appreciating experiences of faith, even through heartache and difficulty, and realizing that He is always present.
- Feeling His touch and influence in our daily lives.

In these ways, we are both “rooted and built up” in Christ and become deeply “established in the faith.” That is our firm belief and trust in Jesus Christ as our way of salvation and as the solution to every matter. This results in “abounding in it with thanksgiving.” Hence it becomes our responsibility to deepen our bond with Christ through living with Him and being transformed into His nature. In this way we become more conscious of His limitless love and magnanimous grace and thus become consumed with only thankfulness. This, in turn, prompts a thanksgiving offering that “does well.”

TITHING

A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Below please find the continuation of the Offering and Sacrifice article from last quarter, written by our New Apostolic Church International theologian, Dr. Reinhard Kiefer. This portion focuses on tithing. -LRK

The Tenth (Tithing)

Tithing is referenced to in the Old and New Testaments. However, in the New Testament tithing is neither explicitly requested nor extensively commented on (cf. Mt 23:23, Lk 11.42, Luke 18.12, Heb 7.1 to 10). Tithing has also prevailed within the Christian congregations of most denominations, albeit in very different shapes, to this day. Tithing serves to maintain the congregation and its development. This also includes the payment of ministers who can no longer exercise their civil profession because they are employed by the church.

In the Catholic Apostolic Church a clear distinction has been made between tithes and offerings. Whilst the tithings served towards the support of the ministers, voluntary offerings should be given to the church for other tasks. The necessity of tithes in the new covenant/testament has been highlighted, among other things in Hebrews 7:1-10. If already Abram gave the High Priestly-King Melchizedek a tenth, how much more it is necessary that Christians give Christ these tithes.

Tithing is also used in our church to finance the church buildings and the church organization. When we tithe, we express our desire to participate in a church that can exercise its mission. In this respect, we also understand tithing in connection with Rom 12:1, because it is an expression of man's devotion to God and the gratitude toward God for the establishing of the church and the ministers active therein. - R. Kiefer

Reprint of Autumn 2013 Vision Newsletter

**Thanksgiving
and Offering**

Success Story

STORIES OF THANKSGIVING

Last year, as Thanksgiving approached, a congregation in the St. Louis district had the idea to share experiences of faith that highlighted thanksgiving and thankfulness.

On the Sundays leading up to Thanksgiving Sunday, a different person in the congregation would come up after the divine service was finished and share their experience. Although the actually storytelling only took about five minutes, the conversations would always continue afterwards as people would share and reflect upon their own experiences.

Not only did the sharing of stories create a heightened awareness of thankfulness which built to a wonderful crescendo on Thanksgiving Sunday, but the stories also provided hope and reminded them that our gracious Father provides in His time and that He is always with us.

Although we're halfway through 2013 and the Year of Profession, there is still a lot of time to share and celebrate our history which is made up of all our stories.

How has your congregation integrated ***What's Your Story?*** into your activities? Please submit your ideas to communications@nac-usa.org.

Reprint of Summer 2013 Vision Newsletter

Culture

Self-
Responsibility

SELF-RESPONSIBILITY: KEEP YOURSELF

Pure: Keep yourself pure in heart. How do you know if your heart is pure? Here is a question you may consider asking yourself: *When our Heavenly Father looks into your heart and thoughts, do you try to hide those thoughts?* Answer: If you feel your thoughts would not be pleasing, that's a sign that your heart is not completely pure.

Humble: Keep yourself humble. In Revelation 1:17, Apostle John saw the Lord Jesus and "fell down as dead." An indication of God's nearness in your life is represented when you fall down and realize that you are nothing and God is so great. Humbleness is also indicated through your behavior towards your brothers and sisters. Continue to possess the power to ask for forgiveness and admit your mistakes.

Joyful: Keep yourself joyful. To be a child of God is wonderful; it is a treasure, more than anything else in life. There are times when you rejoice and other times when you may be depressed living through situations of life where joy seems absent. Then strive for this joy and remind each other of this!

Watchful: Keep yourself watchful. There are many opinions today and circumstances that could influence you in your life of faith. Always be aware of the different spirits, and do not let them enter your heart. Continue to pray! Jesus said "Watch and pray." This makes you strong and gives you the possibility to be watchful until the end.

Active: Keep yourself active. From a child to a senior member, everyone can be an active participant in the family of God. For example, giving testimony is a life long task. Also, ask the Lord to show you how to put your talents to use in the congregation and continue serving Him even when difficulties arise or situations come about that you do not like.

Waiting: Keep yourself waiting for the day of the Lord. You might have the feeling that Jesus has put off His coming for too long. It's not your task to think about when He will come; your task is to be worthy and to prepare for Him every day. Don't allow yourself to become impatient or think it may be another 20, 40, 50 years. The wise servant waits for the Lord every day.

Empathetic: Keep yourself empathetic. When you keep yourself in fellowship, you grow in understanding of one another. To go even deeper than understanding, empathize with one another. This isn't sympathizing where you feel sorry for one another. Empathizing is

when you put someone else's shoes on, step into his life, and begin to see the world and the conditions he is living in just the way he sees it.

Renewed: Keep yourself renewed. Continue to, search for your talent and renew your gifts of grace that have been given to you by God. Not that you feel you have to do all the work, but that you remain inwardly tied in, inwardly connected in your prayer life, and concerned for each other.

Servant Mindedness: Keep yourself servant minded. *"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more ... "* (1 Corinthians 9:19 NKJV, italics added) The Message Bible is even clearer: *"Even though I am free of the demands and expectations of everyone, I have voluntarily become a servant to any and all in order to reach a wide range of people ..."*

In your daily activities, you may feel at times "free from all men;" that is to say independent, perhaps even a little "aloof," from those who sometimes plague you with requests and questions in your life. However, a measure of "servant mindedness" and responsibility is necessary in order to accomplish greater things and to do a more far reaching work.

Reprint of Spring 2009 Vision Newsletter

EXCERPT ON **SELF-RESPONSIBILITY**

We enter the summer fresh from our Pentecost experience with our Chief Apostle in Chicago. May the Bible verse *“Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”* (2 Corinth. 3: 17) remain within our thoughts. I sincerely wish that our Pentecost fellowship inspired by the Holy Spirit will remain a source of inner strength and accelerate us on our journey home. In this summer issue, we will continue our study of self responsibility and self control. I hope that discussing this topic in various circles will further our understanding of this important issue and help us counter the manifold influences that surround us daily. Recently, our Chief Apostle spoke of deceptions or specifically the thought “It doesn’t really matter”. This seemed to be evident in the people of Israel as they built a golden calf when Moses was up in the mountain.

Mistakenly, they reckoned the idolatry of other nations would not really matter to the Lord. Sadly, this action greatly displeased God [ref. Genesis 32:7-10]. Let us be personally cautious (exercise self responsibility) in perceiving what matters most in our faith life and avoid this type of deception from the evil one.

Reprint of Introduction from Summer 2009 Vision Newsletter

SELF-RESPONSIBILITY PART 1

KEEP YOURSELF – 1 JOHN 5:18

In keeping with the theme of self responsibility and the admonition to “Keep Yourself” as found in 1 John 5:18, we might consider the following application: Keep yourself in control (self control).

“Chief Apostle Urwyler once imparted the concept of self-responsibility. To this I would like to add self-control. Self-responsibility and self-control - this is how we advance on our path of faith.”
- Chief Apostle W. Leber; divine service 2/09/2009, Magdeburg, Germany

Everyone experiences dark moments in their lives and times of temptation and indecision. The temptation of Christ gives us useful insights that may help us attain a blessed outcome and avoid being misled by evil. The reader may want to reacquaint themselves with the different accounts of this event as described in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

1 In this critical and defining moment, Christ was completely alone. Temporarily, He had no external support system to provide direction or guidance. In terms of our everyday life, there was no minister to call for instructions; no admonishment from Mom, Dad, or the Sunday school teacher. The answers needed to come from within. Additionally, we can note that the evil one had a certain measure of control over Christ’s external environment. Furthermore, God did not intervene by changing this environment.

Questions: From time to time, does our environment cause us to feel as though our life is out of control? Are we sometimes frustrated because God does not immediately change our circumstances?

2 While the Biblical text does not use this contemporary terminology, could we not say that Christ possessed a strong internal or core belief structure? He seemed very decisive; very sure of His “identity” and His “mission” despite His weakened physical condition. He also possessed sensitivity and wisdom from the Holy Spirit that allowed Him to determine the identity of the tempter and the consequences of accepting his offer. His rejection of Satan’s offer was immediate and absolute.

Our New Apostolic Mission statement has been prominently communicated as of late in all congregations.

Questions: Can we say that we have “internalized” our mission statement? Does it accurately reflect who we are and what we believe? Do we routinely engage the Holy Spirit in our decision making?

3 Notice the subtlety of Satan. His initial offer was not extreme. It was actually quite defensible; perhaps even reasonable given Christ’s hunger. Also notice his tenacity and his attempt to manipulate Christ through human vanity and greed. Lastly, note the timing of the temptation. Was it coincidence that the tempter chose the moment of great weakness to make his offer?

Questions: Have we ever made a poor or even tragic decision in life that started with a small, seemingly innocent or easily rationalized choice (it seemed like a good idea at the time)? Have we been especially tempted during episodes of personal difficulty, stress, depression or turmoil?

4 Finally, let us not lose sight of the extraordinary conclusion of this episode in the life of Christ. The outcome was quite wonderful. Not only was Christ victorious over the temptation, but the devil left Him and God the Father sent angels to minister to Him. That must have been quite the dining experience!

Questions: In addition to temptation, have we experienced the joy of being ministered to by God’s angels? Lastly, have we ever found ourselves called to be an angel whereby God ministers to others in need?

Reprint of Summer 2009 Vision Newsletter

SELF-RESPONSIBILITY PART 2

KEEP YOURSELF – 1 JOHN 5:18

Within the final installment of our year-long theme of self-responsibility and the admonition to “Keep Yourself” as found in 1 John 5:18, we might consider the following applications:

Keep yourself in Patience. In James 5:8 we read: *You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.* This verse can be viewed from different perspectives. Universally, we all must exercise patience while waiting for the Lord’s return. Without a continual effort to renew and replenish our patience, faithful waiting may turn cynical, especially for those waiting a lifetime.

We may view patience from another, more contemporary perspective. Within many congregations, we are stepping forward in new directions. For some members, change can’t happen fast enough, and impatience may lead to frustration. For others, the pace of change is too rapid, causing discomfort or aggravation. For both groups “you also be patient” may be an exhortation to be patient with each other. Empathy and understanding is created, despite our unique personality styles, when we recognize that we share a common future: *“the coming of the Lord is at hand.”*

Keep yourself in Fellowship. Congregational life is enriched and enhanced by the contributions of each individual member. Everyone has something exceptional and indispensable to add to the mix. The decision to participate in a meaningful way is truly a matter of individual choice and personal responsibility. How should we make this decision?

First, our fellowship should be born out of love for one another. This is the hallmark of New Apostolic Christians. Second, let us pray for one another! Our intercessions form a critical network that draws us closer together, deepens the bonds of love and strengthens us in times of trouble or temptation.

Last but not least, let our fellowship be inclusive. From Christ’s teachings and His exemplary life we can see His love for all. With clear intent He reached past the cultural norms of His time to embrace all members of society. No one was excluded from salvation. Let us likewise care for all equally, including those on the borders of our fellowship and those in difficulty. Then all, especially those most vulnerable and in need of compassion, encouragement and refreshment, will feel sheltered in the love of Christ.

Reprint of Autumn 2009 Vision Newsletter

A LIFE IN BALANCE

But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD; I say, "You are my God." My times are in Your hand; Deliver me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who persecute me. Make Your face shine upon Your servant; save me for Your mercies' sake. (Psalm 31: 14-16)

A life in perfect balance: most would aspire to such a concept. This would be a wonderful and unique experience, where all aspects of life fit and move in a perfect harmony. To appreciate this idea, let us consider the universe; an overwhelming handiwork of our heavenly Father. Scientists have found that the universe comprising uncountable stars (our sun), planets, and moons, rotate and move in a perpetual "homeostasis." God created such an intricate balance that has stood the test of time for millennia.

It may be difficult to imagine such precision or perfection in our own lives. Perhaps this was the inspiration for King David in the verse above. He recognized that when his "times," or all the aspects of his life, were placed into God's hand, good things would happen. But this was not the result of a passive approach to life; it required an active, intentional decision to order his life in a certain way.

Perhaps this is a formula that would also work for you and me in our modern life and times. How do we place our times in God's hand and in the mind of our Savior Jesus Christ? Firstly, let us examine this concept of time more closely and practically.

Time is such a precious commodity. We often lament over the stress that can be so prevalent in our lives. How much of this stress is the result of too many demands on our limited time? At the beginning of our day we look at a long list of objectives and wonder, "How will I make time for all these things?" The important people in our life; husband, wife, children, parents, brothers, sisters and friends look to us and ask, "When will you make time for me?" In the end, it is these daily decisions about the things, and the people we make time for, that equal a life well lived.

But is it really possible to "make" time? Can we somehow add more hours to our day to fit everything and everyone in? Of course not, and everyone knows that this is really about making decisions. We have only the time that God has given us; no more, no less and we decide how to spend it.

Further, we must acknowledge that every decision contains two parts: A decision to say yes to one thing always means saying no to something else. They can't occupy the same time. We see the truth and the simple beauty of this in the vow we make on our confirmation day; we both renounce and surrender simultaneously. In effect, we decide to say yes to the Triune God and no to the Evil One and his influences, all within one decision. Both cannot occupy the same time; nor can they receive the same allegiance.

What is the basis or criteria for our decisions? Even with the best of intentions, we often find ourselves reacting to the loudest and most urgent voices, those who demand that we satisfy their needs and purposes often by spending a disproportionate amount of our time. Sometimes this leads to a life that becomes one dimensional and out of balance. It can be done for a while, but we must recognize that in the long run, it is unhealthy and unsustainable. Often this decision comes at a high cost that is only apparent much later in life. What are these costs? They are the opportunities that were missed during a lifetime!

At a basic human level, they may be opportunities to improve ourselves and enhance our life experiences. But at a much higher and soulful level, they are the opportunities to do good (please remember our Chief Apostle's 2011 New Year's Day advice), to serve Christ, to develop deep and lasting relationships with our loved ones and ultimately the opportunity to secure life eternal with God the Father and the Son.

The experts in time management tell us that we should prioritize our time based upon those activities which create the greatest and highest good. This brings us back to the bible verse from the Psalmist. King David recognized that the hand of God contained the greatest good; blessing, protection, deliverance in dark days and ultimately, the appearance of the promised Savior and Redeemer of Israel. He certainly led a full life. At a minimum he was a shepherd, a warrior, a king, a father, a husband, a writer, a musician and a prophet. When he decided to fit all things and all his times within the hand of God, he experienced the goodness of God. In honesty, like all of us, he also made some poor decisions and experienced consequences that he lived to regret.

Let me conclude by being very practical and specific. Can we make time to...

- Read the Bible and broaden our understanding of the Gospel of Christ?
- Pray more intensively and thereby inquire into the will of God seeking guidance on our journey of faith?
- Experience each divine service in a humble, thankful and worshipful manner?
- Build deeper relationships with our loved ones; our natural families, our brothers and sisters within the household of faith and our communities?
- Serve each other in love as befits true disciples of Christ?

All these decisions will fit nicely within the times of our life and the hand of God.

PERSPECTIVE

THOUGHTS ON HALLOWEEN

As we approach the autumn season, questions here and there arise regarding how we should observe the Halloween tradition. I would like to offer the following suggestions:

Firstly, the tradition of Halloween has no official significance to our church; it is not a holiday that we acknowledge or observe. It is a secular observance that for most Americans revolves around children trick or treating. As such, I believe that it is a matter of personal responsibility between parents and their children.

In addition however, it also can be a teaching moment between parents and children that may revolve around the following key concepts, introduced at the right time in their life.

- The Halloween tradition is observed within the same general time frame as our Service for the Departed. This may be significant if it interferes with our preparation for this very holy celebration.
- Often the argument is made, “What is the harm in celebrating Halloween?” Perhaps a better question would be: “What is the value?” For this we may investigate the advice of Apostle Paul. *“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify.”* (1 Corinthians 10:23)
- Similarly, as our children mature, it may be wise to teach them the value of acting in accordance with their true convictions even when it means bucking the mainstream. This builds strength of character that will serve them well in all aspects of their life. Our Chief Apostle described this clearly in a divine service in 2009: *“Chief Apostle Urwyler once imparted the concept of self-responsibility. To this I would like to add self-control. Self-responsibility and self-control, this is how we advance on our path of faith.”*

Reprint of Autumn 2011 Vision Newsletter

A JOURNEY OF SELF-RESPONSIBILITY

Recently, I was asked to write an article for the 2014 Our Family Yearbook on the subject of “peace”. This article contains an important thought that I also wanted to share with you in this edition of the Vision. It is prompted by the writings of Apostle Paul to the Romans. In the 12th chapter he gives advice that is now 2,000 years old but is remarkable in its freshness and relevance within our contemporary struggle to live and lead like Jesus Christ. I offer this article to you in its entirety as the first in a continuing series of perspectives with a common theme that revolves around our self-responsibility to transform our lives according to the gospel of Christ. -LRK

So much of peace is an attempt to resolve conflict requiring the reconciliation between two minds. For example, there is conflict in families as parents attempt to teach their children values and establish rules of the household. A form of peace may be attained when children conform to their parents’ wishes. Naturally, the tension and conflict increase as children grow older and begin to assert their own minds. Likewise, this can happen in a community where laws are established for the peace and welfare of the residents. Interestingly, in the USA the police who enforce conformity to our laws are sometimes called “peace officers”. Sometimes there is conflict between the peace officers and those who assert the right to be “free minded” and who reject conformity.

This word conformity is quite interesting. In a sense, we acquiesce to the wishes or demands of another outwardly. Conformity does not require us to change inwardly; our mind can remain locked within our original thinking and often the very act of conforming against our will takes our peace away and leaves us with inner conflict. Indeed, we might raise a legitimate question:

Does conformity create peace or does it simply create order?

This leads me back to some of my early memories within the congregation where I grew up. We often sang during our fellowship: *“Behold, O how pleasant when all the brethren dwell, on earth in peace and oneness and love each other well.”* This simple hymn links peace with Christian oneness or being of one mind; the mind of Christ. Now that is a wonderful ideal to strive for! But how does this unique “state of mind” take place?

Growing up, my youth leaders and ministers, motivated by their love for my soul, often used an excerpt from Romans 12:2 as an exhortation to keep us safely sheltered within the walls

of the congregation. *“Do not be conformed to this world!”* they told us. But they defined “this world” as physical locations outside the church; places that we shouldn’t visit and activities that we shouldn’t engage in.

There is of course wisdom in avoiding influences that bring evil into our lives and I am eternally indebted to these faithful men and woman who, out of the love of Christ, counseled me and wanted to protect me. However, I am convinced that God intended a deeper understanding and a higher path when He prompted this writing from the Apostle Paul via His Spirit.

Firstly, the power of this Bible verse is found when read in its entirety: *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.* (Romans 12:2) To transform within the spiritual context is a much larger and complex process than to conform. It is the process of inner change; a self-responsible journey and a metamorphosis producing a new creature with a new mind, the mind of Christ. The old creature is Christ-less, the new creature is Christ-like.

Next, “this world” in this sense is not just an external location; perhaps the Apostle Paul was also describing the condition of our inner self, our “old mind” which is the product of our humanity. It has been tainted by sin and the influence of evil. It contains our inherited predispositions, as well as the biases, judgments and prejudices we have learned from our earliest days. Our old mind is self-serving and self-promoting. It is where our human arrogance and self-righteousness reside. Is it any wonder that peace and oneness are so elusive? Perhaps from this perspective we can also understand more clearly the enigmatic warning of Christ: *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* (John 3:3)

So what is this journey of transformation; the process of “becoming Christ-like”? Perhaps it can be compared to the caterpillar that changes and “becomes” a beautiful butterfly also through a unique metamorphosis. Although gradual and continual, the scientists have charted the stages of this transformation. Likewise our transformation has necessary stages that together bring us to a renewed inner state:

Rebirth: The first stage of being reborn is to receive the Spirit of God through Holy Sealing. It is the immeasurable gift of a divine new life and the seed of change.

Knowing, understanding and believing the Gospel of Christ: We embark on a life long journey of discipleship that requires a thirst for knowledge and a source of Gospel teaching. Jesus gave us the source in the Great Commission: *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations ... teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.* The apostles are thereby charged with the task to proclaim and illuminate the Gospel.

Courage to struggle against ourselves and fight the good fight: We must be brave to squarely face and recognize “this world” within us while perceiving the new creature described within the truth of the Gospel. We become dissatisfied with the way we are, renouncing

the old and striving to become the new. Apostle Paul described the personal inner honesty required for this struggle.

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

(2 Corinthians 3:18)

Absolution and Holy Communion with Christ: In a remarkably intimate moment within each divine service, He grants us forgiveness and shares His body and blood of the new covenant, a combination of grace and the divine power that made Him victorious over sin and death. Thereby we too have the strength to be victorious over our old self.

Without this divine empowerment, we would be left to our human resolve and capabilities. At its best, mankind has proven incapable of changing in this way to satisfy God. But with this precious combination of grace and power, every soul can be assured that they can change, according to the “perfect will of God”! No inherited trait is too powerful, no cultural norm or tradition is too binding and no spiritual wound suffered in the harsh moments of life that has darkened our mind and shaped our thinking is too debilitating. The perfect will of God for you and me is a wondrous mystery. He has offered His grace for that which is truly beyond our capabilities. It compensates for our individual differences and the unexplainable injustices that we may experience during life.

What is the result of this transformation? It creates a visible change within all aspects of our life. We do not need to leave “this world” and live a cloistered existence. Instead we have renewed our minds and transformed our lives in a very measureable way wherever God has placed us. Our story of a changed life becomes a personal, living testimony; a profession of the power of Christ’s victory and it’s relevancy in today’s contemporary world.

When we strive to become Christ like, are we not of one mind? Oneness with Christ creates oneness with each other. Let me conclude with one last excerpt from the writings of Apostle Paul. In Romans 12: 9-18 he describes how a renewed mind in Christ leads to peace with one another under the simple caption “behave like a Christian.”

Let love be without hypocrisy... Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; ...rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble... Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. (Romans 12:9-18)

Reprint of Summer 2013 Vision Newsletter

Culture

Work of
Ministry

STEPPING FORWARD: EPHESIANS 4: 11-12

Shortly we will enter a new year together. As I consider the year 2009, a multitude of images flood my soul accompanied by an overwhelming gratitude toward our good and loving Heavenly Father. Together we have experienced in so many ways, His providence and abundant mercies. I would like to echo the emphatic exhortation that our dear Chief Apostle engraved within us on Pentecost in Chicago: “Thanks be to God!”

Also, I want to express my deep appreciation for your many acts of kindness, your prayers and your dedication in serving Christ. Our congregations are enriched daily by your soulful investment of time, effort and love towards one another.

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. (Ephesians 4:11-12)

In 2009, we carefully examined the concept of self responsibility. In 2010, it is important to retain this important teaching and build incrementally on the foundation of self responsibility as we Step Forward toward healthy congregations.

In fact, our 2010 Devotional (available now on our web site) is entitled “Keep Yourself...” and contains related excerpts from our Chief Apostle’s writings and divine services. As discussed in our recent worker’s meeting broadcast, we would like to pursue a teaching in 2010 called “A Work of Ministry”. This theme comes directly from a meeting that our Chief Apostle held where he illuminated this oft quoted concept in a fresh and innovative manner.

In the past, we often focused our attention on apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers particularly in their role as ordained ministers. Each of these offices represents a certain unique gift of ministry necessary for the edifying of the body of Christ. However, let us examine the specific sequence of this Bible passage. Notice that these ministries have been given “*for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry.*” What can we conclude from this? The saints (all the members of our church) also must have a work of ministry that results in the edifying of the body of Christ!

It is my firm belief that every member has an indispensable role in this process; we are each the recipient of a unique gift of ministry from our Heavenly Father. Likewise, he has given each member a calling; an opportunity to dedicate their unique gift of ministry to their

congregation which collectively constitutes the body of Christ. Here we see another, deeper nuance of the phrase “serving Christ by serving others”.

Now we come to the central, all important question: ***What is your gift of ministry?***

Once again, this is a matter of self responsibility, because only you can answer that question. I would encourage us all to take a journey in 2010 of introspection and self discovery. God will surely reveal this mystery if we search within ourselves honestly and courageously.

In the interests of helping each soul find and develop their gift, throughout 2010 we will provide resources and an ongoing series of workshops to all interested members designed for just this purpose.

Additionally, each member’s journey may be aided by enlightened and sensitive support from our ordained ministers. We will also provide specialized training and resources in the interests of creating a culture of shared congregational leadership, collaboration and learning.

In conclusion, let us consider how healthy each congregation will be when every God given gift is employed in the service of Christ. How light and joyful the work will be when jointly we engage everyone under the impulses of the Holy Spirit. My hope is that all may feel the benefits of Stepping Forward together.

Reprint of Winter 2009 Vision Newsletter

STEPPING FORWARD: A WORK OF MINISTRY

In November of 2009, we announced our plans to launch a new initiative for 2010 called A Work of Ministry for all congregations within the NAC-USA district. As the New Year progresses, we would like to provide a clearer picture of this initiative in the hopes that each member will perceive the value and consider participating with an open heart.

Together with the circle of our apostles, I see the future of our district revolving around vibrant, healthy congregations. This would be a good moment to carefully read the NAC Mission and Vision statements. For me, these statements are not catchy phrases that make a good plaque for our walls. Rather, they describe precisely what we want to create together and to experience together. More specifically, please visualize with me a future where every member participates in creating and enjoying the following benefits in their local congregation:

- **Culture:** An atmosphere of peace and belonging where each of us feels we are an integral and indispensable member of the body of Christ. A place that radiates the acceptance, understanding, compassion, selfless giving, reconciliation and hope that Christ and His apostles exemplified and taught.
- **Divine Service Experience:** In addition, I see all of us experiencing in every service a moving, relevant message authored by the Holy Spirit, integrated with inspirational music and culminating with the high point of forgiveness and communion with Christ.
- **Pastoral Care:** Lastly, I see all of us enjoying the benefits of enhanced pastoral care; relevant programs for children, youth, seniors, parents and singles delivered by caring “ministers”, as well as access to assistance for the sick, suffering, grieving, hungry and lonely via informed and appropriate collaboration with our local communities.

Clearly, these ambitious expectations require a multi faceted plan. By now you know that we call this plan “Stepping Forward”. One very critical component of this initiative is the Work of Ministry. As I described in the recent Winter edition of the Vision newsletter, the Chief Apostle outlined the blue print and the rationale for this strategy within a meeting using the text from Ephesians 4:11-12. Therein he suggested that each of us have a unique God given calling to minister as well as the gifts by which we can help edify the body of Christ.

I realize that use of the word “ministry” within this context may be unusual for us as we have associated it exclusively in the past with ordained ministries. Perhaps it would help to think of our “ministry” as the gifts and the calling to serve Christ by serving each other.

Central to this initiative are the following questions:

What is my calling?

What are my God given spiritual gifts?

How will I integrate my calling into the larger body of Christ?

How will I develop my gifts to best serve others?

There are no easy answers to these deeply personal questions and no one can answer them for you. Further, let us not rush into quick, shallow self assessment or hasty decisions. Rather, in 2010 let us all take a journey of introspection, self responsibility and discovery whereby we inquire diligently into the will of our Heavenly Father and His plan for us. Let us also examine honestly our conviction and resolution to help Him edify the body of Christ.

Self discovery does not mean travelling alone. The Work of Ministry initiative will revolve around an ongoing process in each district with a menu of resources available to each participating member.

Additionally, members can select their own level of participation based upon their comfort level and interest. At the most basic level, an individual will have access to resources exploring the various gifts of ministry and their Biblical origins.

For those members who are interested in a greater level of interaction, we foresee ongoing group sessions where the discovery process can be shared with and supported by brothers and sisters. Where this has been implemented successfully, participants experience a new understanding of their calling to serve Christ, develop stronger bonds of Christian love between congregational members and share a more joyful appreciation for the wisdom and grace of our Heavenly Father.

Finally, it is our hope that this initiative will inspire a desire within some to take their calling and gift to a whole new level. These members will have an opportunity to collaborate closely with their rector about where their gift fits into the larger congregational plan.

Clearly, the implementation phase will take us into 2011 and beyond.

Reprint of Spring 2010 Vision Newsletter

PERSPECTIVE ORDAINED MINISTRY

*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.*
(Ephesians 4:11-12)

Over the past year, we have given the introduction of the “Work of Ministry” a high priority and much attention within local congregational life. It is an important component of our plans to improve the health of each congregation and a resource for rectors to more effectively lead the congregations they serve. This critical initiative revolves around the concept that each member has a divine calling and a God given gift of ministry to edify the Body of Christ. We will continue to support each member in the discovery of their unique gift of ministry and to help them weave it into the fabric of their congregation.

However, our focus on this initiative may raise questions or reservations within one or the other that I would like to address. Let me state simply and clearly that in no way does this teaching change or devalue the role of our ordained ministers. Quite the contrary! The same Bible verse in Ephesians illuminates the role of these individuals; they are to equip the saints for their work of ministry!

Let us revisit a fundamental understanding of our faith. Although we have many ministries, they can be grouped into the following categories based upon their primary characteristics:

- **Apostles:** These individuals are called to be the ambassadors of Christ. They are charged with teaching and proclaiming Christ’s gospel and leading God’s children to a spiritual readiness for His return. They are commissioned by Him to dispense His sacraments and to ordain additional ministries that serve the “Body of Christ”.
- **Priestly Ministries:** This includes all ministers from priests to bishops. They speak the word of God in the divine services, inspire repentance and reconciliation, and forgive sins in the commission of their apostle.
- **Deacons:** This ministry is primarily pastoral. They assist the priests in caring for the many needs of the members and stand as examples; true men of God with exemplary character in the midst of the congregation.

While ordained ministry gives no one a special path to salvation, I would ask that you join me in thanking God for calling these men to serve Christ on our behalf. More and more we recognize the importance of their ministry and appreciate the indispensable investment they make.

Likewise, we can heed the advice of the Apostle Paul to the Philippians: *“Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.”* (Philippians 3:17) By answering our own call to minister to others, we can all share in the communal spirit so evident in the first Christian church (Acts 2:44) and, together edify the Body of Christ. By sharing commonly in ministry to each other, we can help our ordained ministers live a life that is in balance and sustainable.

Reprint of Winter 2010 Vision Newsletter

EXCERPT ON WORK OF MINISTRY

Happily, we are leaving the cold of winter and entering into Spring! God's creation begins stirring again and we feel naturally rejuvenated. May this season of change also cause inner stirrings to our ongoing spiritual development.

Serving our Bridegroom the Lord Jesus is truly the greatest privilege we are permitted in this life. We are inspired to this out of an inner calling stimulated by the Holy Spirit. He gives us an awareness of God's greatness and His goodness which then compels us, out of thankfulness, to honor and serve Him with our life's actions, words, and lifestyle. This calling is much more than volunteering because it is never completed nor fully achieved; nor is it limited to a prescribed time period. Rather, it constitutes a lifetime quest for ways to serve Christ by serving others in our families, congregations, and communities. This dynamic opens for us a joy that transcends anything this world can offer, as it results in finding our Father's good pleasure and blessing. The true reward is not on this earth, but will be the opportunity to be with the Lord forever.

Come, dear ones, I encourage you to continue your journey of discovery to find your God given gifts using the tools provided by your rectors so that we all may engage them in the Lord's service. I cannot imagine anyone belonging to the Bride of Christ who did not learn to serve Him in some way during their life. This must be a prerequisite because in serving, we grow and our nature changes to become more and more like Him.

Reprint of Introduction from Spring 2011 Vision Newsletter

EXPRESSING YOUR GIFTEDNESS

As you approach this time of harvest and Thanksgiving season, the abundance of our heavenly Father's love for you may be evident all around – from the food on your table to the family and friends gathered around it. And as you reflect on those tangible elements, be also thankful for your God given spiritual gifts given to each one through the Spirit (ref. Corinthians 12).

The farmer plants seed in preparation for harvest. In caring for his seed, the farmer anticipates the opportunity to harvest the product of that seed, the result often resembling something entirely new. The simple flower seed produces a beautiful flower; the apple seed produces life sustaining fruit. Consider your spiritual gifts in a similar fashion – the gift as a seed planted into us by God Himself. The spiritual gift is that seed that germinates within you and develops into times of harvest and not just a single harvest, but many. These harvests are the fulfillments and expressions of your spiritual gifts.

Evangelism: The divine enablement to effectively communicate the gospel to unbelievers so they respond in faith and move toward discipleship in Christ. *Harvest: The Gospel of Christ is spread according to His great commission.*

Shepherding: The divine enablement to nurture, care for and guide people toward ongoing spiritual maturity and becoming like Christ. *Harvest: Souls made secure and strong in Jesus Christ.*

Creative Communication: The divine enablement to communicate God's truth through a variety of art forms. *Harvest: An engaging message of salvation capable of connecting with all souls despite their diversity.*

Hospitality: The divine enablement to care for people by providing fellowship, food, and shelter. *Harvest: An atmosphere of acceptance and abundance.*

Wisdom: The divine enablement to effectively apply a spiritual truth to meet a need in a specific situation. *Harvest: An outlet for God's guidance.*

Administration: The divine enablement to understand what makes an organization function, and the special ability to plan and execute procedures that accomplish the goals of the ministry. *Harvest: An atmosphere of peace, confidence, and sustainability.*

Consider the potential harvest if everyone in your congregation and community utilized these additional spiritual gifts: apostleship, craftsmanship, discernment, encouragement, faith, giving, healing, helps, intercession, knowledge, leadership, mercy, prophecy, and teaching.

It is now a time of harvest. What are your spiritual gifts producing?

Work of Ministry initiative is designed to help you discover your spiritual gifts so that we, as the saints, are equipped to edify the body of Christ. (ref. Ephesians 4:11) We not only have an opportunity, but also a responsibility to ignite our spiritual gifts to produce a harvest, an expression of our giftedness. Perhaps we have previously volunteered to do things in the congregation out of obligation. While this can also be the case today, we continue to shift the focus to become servant minded. To continue to edify the body of Christ through the work of ministry, we are equipped with our spiritual gifts to serve Christ by serving others in love; we do whatever it takes to glorify Him. When this is accomplished, we can truly feel fulfilled in our serving. And in our serving, we grow closer in relationship to Him.

Allow this Thanksgiving and harvest season to be a bountiful one for you as you express your giftedness in the congregation, within your family, and your community.

The Work of Ministry – Work Group

In order to support Work of Ministry throughout the USA District, a work group has been established. This work group, can help answer your questions, share best practices and address any concerns you may have surrounding the contents, implementation, and sustainability of Work of Ministry.

Questions or comments concerning Work of Ministry may be directed to the email address wgwom@NAC-USA.org.

-WG Work of Ministry

Reprint of Autumn 2012 Vision Newsletter

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

Reprint of Summer 2014 Vision Newsletter

**Work of
Ministry**

Success Story

WORK OF MINISTRY: SPIRITUAL GIFT DISCOVERIES

The following are stories of members who have discovered their spiritual gifts, shared with us from a west coast district. If you have heard stories of “spiritual gift discoveries” or have one of your own, please send it to us via communications@nac-usa.org.

JP’s background in barbershop quartet singing was discovered when he joined the choir with a passion that later developed into an assistant choir director’s role. However, there is another “ministry” that has emerged. JP prays, reads, and studies the Bible verse of each divine service*, and creates a list of songs for worship. Every song, every service! He submits the list of songs to the congregational music leader who prepares handouts and incorporates instrumentals throughout the month. JP has color coded the pages of his hymnal by spiritual theme which may seem strange, but it demonstrates his passion for his spiritual gift. We are experiencing his gift of “administration” in action.

One day, PR began taking notes in divine services after seeing someone doing the same. This soon turned into a source of blessing for many. She began typing up her notes and very kindly forwarded them in an email to a few who could not be in the service. She decided to broaden her audience by sharing notes from divine services with members and friends of hers. She always does this with the intention of sharing words of encouragement, comfort, and strength. One of her friends liked the service summaries so much, she came to a church service one day. PR absolutely loves the Word of God and sharing it which reveals her gift of “teaching”.

JS grew up playing the organ and singing in the choir. Now, after 40 years of playing the organ and singing she told her rector she wanted to take a break. With compassion and understanding he supported her request. He was also quick with a reply, “What else is there in the congregation you feel strongly about? Is there something else you would like to help with?” After some conversation, JS landed the role of Sunday school leader. She does not teach a Sunday school class, but supports the teachers. She loves getting things for the Sunday school teachers, coaching and helping them plan and prepare. JS was a great follower for a long time, but now her gift of “leadership” is emerging.

**The bible verse, message and summary of the divine service guide can be found at www.musiccompanion.org.*

Reprint of Autumn 2011 Vision Newsletter

Culture

World Relief Fund
and re Charitable
Ministry

UPDATES ON THE WORLD RELIEF FUND

While attending to the spiritual needs of members in the United States as well as in over 30 countries in East Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, Central America and the Pacific, NAC USA has encountered many humanitarian emergencies and catastrophes, both natural and man-made. In order to better respond to these events, District Apostle Freund created the NAC USA World Relief Fund, LLC (WRF) in 2006, to focus its humanitarian efforts and the resources needed for them.

As a separate entity from NAC USA, the WRF has a distinct, independent profile for the purpose of raising and attracting the funding needed for its projects, though its work is a living expression of the Church's Christian values. As a result, NAC USA allows that its own employees, administrative structure and volunteers are used to manage projects for the WRF, reducing the need to use donated funds to cover administrative overhead.

The WRF makes it a goal to ensure that the highest percentage possible of its funding is put to direct use in its projects. Besides relying on the administrative structure of NAC USA, it relies on volunteer participation by Church members and other non-members when implementing emergency and disaster relief projects within the geographic range of NAC USA domestic and international missionary work. For specifically chosen projects outside of this range, the WRF depends on partnerships with other organizations, for example the Church's NAK karitativ organization based in Europe.

Recent major projects of the WRF include: Peru Earthquake Relief—2007, Dominican Republic Hurricane Relief—2007, China Earthquake—2008, Kenya Drought Relief—2008, American/Western Samoa Tsunami Relief—2009, Kenya Civil Unrest Relief—2009, and Haiti Earthquake Relief—2010.

Anyone wishing to make donations to the WRF may do so by sending a check payable to NAC USA World Relief Fund to: **New Apostolic Church USA, Attn: World Relief Fund, 3753 North Troy Street, Chicago, IL 60618**

Reprint of Summer 2010 Vision Newsletter

A NEW LOOK AT THE **WORLD RELIEF FUND**

The NAC USA World Relief Fund (“WRF”), founded after the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina, has assisted with multiple disaster relief efforts around the globe.

Whether in an independent and direct role, or in cooperation with the church’s international humanitarian entity NAK Karikativ (www.nak-karikativ.de), (Hurricane Katrina, the 2007 drought in East Africa or the 2010 earthquake in Haiti), or through local partners in the affected areas (2010 Pakistan Flooding Emergency, 2008 China Earthquake and Hurricane in the Dominican Republic) the WRF has made an impact in more than 10 major disaster events since its inception.

With its more than five years of international disaster relief experience as a foundation, the WRF will be expanding its mission and scope of activities, to include a proactive domestic USA presence. This strategic decision was made by the WRF board to support the community related projects of our NAC-USA congregations across the country. Thanks to the activities of our members, our congregations have become increasingly integrated within their communities and have created opportunities to demonstrate the teachings of Christ, particularly to love and care for those in need. This community collaboration is seen as both a method to further the Great Commission and the Great Commandment of Christ as well as the humanitarian mandate of the WRF.

At the same time it is important to understand the WRF’s strength and limitations. As a small micro-NGO (non-governmental organization) the WRF will have to be careful not to enter into commitments, whether of a financial or resource-based nature, that go beyond its abilities to support them on an ongoing basis.

To avoid any misunderstanding – the WRF will continue its disaster-relief work as in the past. In fact, donors may stipulate that their gift be used for a specific relief purpose if desired. However, going forward this focus will be complemented by a tiered system of programs that support interested members and outside partners in more local and ongoing Christian-humanitarian involvement. All programs must have one core requirement in common: They must possess a strong and sustainable volunteer component before the WRF will become involved:

Small, one-time local projects Domestic

Under this program, a limited number of micro-stipends (up to \$100/each) will be made available each year to assist (one-time) local community activities of our congregations and members. A simple application will be required.

Extended local projects Domestic

Making a lasting and sustainable impact in our communities often requires a more long-term oriented, ongoing commitment. For congregations, youth groups and similar member activities the WRF will provide a limited number of one-year stipends of up to \$2,000. A formal application, quarterly reports and other deliverables are required for participation in this program.

New programs Domestic & international

Over the next years, the WRF plans to carefully develop and set up a limited number of volunteering opportunities abroad. Participation in this program will require substantial commitment of time and funds on behalf of each volunteer, in particular to cover their travel and local living costs. Stipends by the WRF will then be available to fund the cost of the actual local project. Further information will become available over the course of the next months. Participants in this program might at times be required to have specific skills in order to support a specific project (e.g. teaching support in a school).

In addition, the WRF is looking for volunteers to serve on its Program Management Committee. This committee will be responsible for selecting and approving applications throughout the course of each year. Volunteers would be asked to commit for either a one or two-year period to achieve staggered terms and thereby ensure smooth transitions between the members. If you are interested in serving in a voluntary capacity on this committee, please submit a brief introduction of yourself as well as any prior humanitarian experience to nacusa-wrf@nac-usa.org. Candidates will be selected on an ongoing basis.

Lastly, with the expanded scope of the WRF's activities we also would like to ask interested members to submit their ideas for a new name that more accurately reflects this new scope of activities. Please submit your ideas either by email or mail to NAC USA World Relief Fund, c/o Stefan Heinzemann, 3753 N Troy St, Chicago, IL 60618

Reprint of Summer 2012 Vision Newsletter

AFTER THE WATER RECEDES

It has been about 2 months since Hurricane Sandy devastated the eastern coast of the United States. The amount of shattering damage from this hurricane, both physical and emotional, is incalculable. Many people lost everything as floods rushed into their homes. Buildings crumbled after being pummeled for hours with persistent rain and wind.

Although some of our members experienced damage to their homes in the form of floods and trees falling, none of them had any physical injuries or required medical attention. Immediate assistance was provided from the World Relief Fund so those affected could buy basic necessities and start time sensitive clean up.

An impromptu district service was quickly organized the very next Sunday where the New Jersey district and surrounding areas came together for a service dedicated to hope and comfort with District Apostle Kolb in Newark.

Since then, relief efforts have started in the affected areas. Roads have reopened, buildings and homes are being assessed for structural damages, and many places require mold testing. There is much clean up happening that will continue into the months ahead. Some families and congregations around the USA have collected cleaning supplies, food, clothing, and blankets to help the relief efforts. Delivering these supplies to the affected areas has required dedication from members, some even driving from as far away as Cleveland to deliver truck loads to the Brooklyn supply center.

Additionally, through the World Relief Fund, donations have been made to the firemen of Battalion 50 in Breezy Point that lost their homes. The firemen are using these donations to clean up and rebuild.

Although the hurricane has passed, the journey to recovery has just begun and will continue well into 2013. Donations are still being collected and make all these efforts possible.

Visit www.nac-usa.org to read specific experiences from the relief efforts, to make a donation to the World Relief Fund, and to find additional ways to get involved.

Reprint of Winter 2012 Vision Newsletter

RE: A CHARITABLE MINISTRY OF THE NEW APOSTOLIC CHURCH USA

re Charitable Ministry is a new outreach effort within the New Apostolic Church USA combining three strategic focus areas:

Disaster Relief

Humanitarian Missions

Grassroots

Firstly, inspired by the events of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the New Apostolic Church USA established the NAC USA World Relief Fund (WRF). To this day, the WRF has continued to coordinate and implement the Church's response to natural disasters.

Next, and shortly after the WRF's five year anniversary, a broader review and discussion of the WRF's mission and future began. The church's Vision and Mission direct us to initiate and support a more comprehensive humanitarian effort. These efforts would be designed to build long-term relationships and make lasting, communal changes in areas of need.

Lastly, a need was identified to support small, grassroots programs. The objective of these programs is to inspire and strengthen the activities of our members and churches to express the love of Christ in their local, domestic communities.

Together, all three strategic focus areas, disaster relief, humanitarian missions, and grassroots projects form the new re Charitable Ministry. The name re Charitable Ministry is based upon the following core values:

recognize We recognize that every person is created in the image of God. Because of this realization we recognize the need to create a relationship with the people we serve in order to determine their need and work to serve them effectively.

respond Jesus came to *"proclaim good news...bind up the brokenhearted...proclaim freedom...and comfort all who mourn."* (Isaiah 61:1-3) We respond to His call to serve in the same way.

relieve and restore We strive to relieve people's physical needs and work to restore and strengthen people spiritually.

renew As we work to relieve and restore people, the result is a reciprocal growth in faith, hope and excitement. This work brings us to new perspectives and a renewed relationship with Christ.

With the formation of this new ministry and the unveiling of re.nac-usa.org, members everywhere can donate to relief projects, sign up for mission programs, and learn how to turn “loving our neighbors” into real world service.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at **re.charitableministry@nac-usa.org**.

Reprint of Spring 2013 Vision Newsletter

RE CHARITABLE MINISTRY

OFFICIALLY REGISTERED

After more than a year of preparations, January 1st 2014 saw the official launch of the new charity of the New Apostolic Church USA – re Charitable Ministry. re Charitable Ministry will continue the work of the NAC USA World Relief Fund, which primarily focused on disaster relief, and also expand these efforts, either directly or in cooperation with other charitable and humanitarian organizations around the world.

As indicated in the name, re Charitable Ministry will have a more personal, ‘ministry’-focused approach to charity, reflecting our growing understanding of the Gospel. Jesus Christ commanded us to love our neighbor as ourselves. Often, however, the question of how to put this into action is more challenging. In the 2nd Chapter of James we find a very practical overview of the close and inseparable connection between faith and charitable deeds (verses 14 to 20). Where such a culture of charity already exists, re Charitable Ministry intends to support members in their congregations and communities in continuing to show love towards their neighbors within, and in particular outside, of our church. In other instances, re Charitable Ministry invites those who desire to engage in meaningful charity to join in a journey of discovery and learning. Ultimately, charity should not be something that is done on a ‘project’ basis once or twice a year – but something that is a key part of the fabric of our faith and our striving to live like Christ.

Charity must reach those we intend to help in a meaningful, lasting and transforming way. This is reflected in the underlying core values of re Charitable Ministry:

- **recognize:** We recognize that every person is created in the image of God. Because of this realization we recognize the need to create a relationship with the people we serve in order to determine their need and work to serve them effectively.
- **respond:** Jesus came to *“proclaim good news...bind up the brokenhearted... proclaim freedom...and comfort all who mourn.”* (Isaiah 61:1-3) We respond to His call to serve in the same way.
- **relieve and restore:** We strive to relieve people’s physical needs and work to restore and strengthen people spiritually.
- **renew:** As we work to relieve and restore people, the result is a reciprocal faith, hope and feeling of excitement. This work brings us to new perspectives and a renewed relationship with Christ.

Following the thoughts described in our Winter 2013 Vision Newsletter, re Charitable Ministry will be one of the outward expressions of our faith journey.

Through its Humanitarian Projects Program, re Charitable Ministry offers interested participants the opportunity to experience carefully selected charity projects, within as well as outside of the United States. Typically ranging in length from a couple of days to a week, these projects have a clearly defined deliverable for our recipients. Complemented by group discussions and devotional evenings, this program intends to equip our participants to become active in local charity once they return home.

True charity starts and takes place at home! re Charitable Ministry aims to have charity emerge in our local congregations as a key expression of our faith. Unlike the re Humanitarian Projects Program, our re Grassroots Program does not 'offer' projects, but is entirely built and dependent on the pro-activeness of our local members. Micro Grants are available, where needed, to take the all-important first steps.

Where charity is becoming part of our congregational and personal lives it will invariably engage others, not just for a weekend once or twice a year, but continuously. Relationships are being formed, opportunities for faith experiences are being created, and transformation and renewal are taking place on an ongoing basis. Each year, a limited number of Annual Grants are available to support selected projects around the United States where our members take the initiative and commit themselves and their local teams to long-term charity engagements.

In all these activities it is the objective and desire to edify God. True charity towards others is not about how we feel in the end or whether it has a direct, measurable impact on our congregational attendance. True charity should be done, without hesitation or calculation, simply because the Gospel encourages us to!

While affiliated with the New Apostolic Church USA, re Charitable Ministry is intended to support itself independent from church offerings. Voluntary donations made directly to re Charitable Ministry, contributions by our participants as well as grants from third-party donors form the core of its financial support. Annual programs and grants offered by re Charitable Ministry will be based on available funding and full financial transparency will be provided. Over the course of the next year it is planned to register re Charitable Ministry on leading non-profit websites like CharityNavigator®

Later in 2014 the NAC USA World Relief Fund will merge into re Charitable Ministry and cease to exist. However, during disasters and catastrophes we will continue to support the church and community under our Disaster Relief program. As was the case in the past years, the church will continue to donate limited logistical and administrative support to re Charitable Ministry in order to minimize overhead expenses. Implementation of its core activities, in particular the re Humanitarian Projects Program as well as the re Grassroots Program, is accomplished by dedicated teams of volunteers. District Apostle Kolb and Apostle Thomas Schmidt will represent the church on the board of re Charitable Ministry.

re Charitable Ministry will grow organically, in line with its financial and volunteer resources, and will only expand carefully and deliberately over the next years to ensure the impact, sustainability and success of its activities.

For further information about re Charitable Ministry, details about its programs, available projects as well as application forms, please visit re.nac-usa.org or email us at re.charitableministry@nac-usa.org.

Reprint of Spring 2014 Vision Newsletter

**Divine
Service
Experience**

CHOIR IN MIDWEEK SERVICE

At a meeting held in January, district leaders discussed the idea of allowing the choir to wear attire other than black and white for midweek divine services. This may aid those that come directly from work and opens a palette of possibilities for our choir members. Naturally, out of respect for our Heavenly Father, the sanctuary, and our brothers and sisters, we want to dress in manner befitting our Church. This does not change our program for Sunday nor does it compel anyone to not wear black and white. This will be discussed with the area apostle, bishop, and/or district leader and implemented as desired in each district. Further, we understand that slacks are acceptable for our sisters to wear in our church choir. Please do not mistake this as “all should wear black slacks.” Either black slacks or black skirts are options for services.

Reprint of Spring 2009 Vision Newsletter

PERSPECTIVE

APOSTLE GREETINGS

In the interests of clarification, I would like to address the subject of apostle's greetings issued at the beginning of a Divine service. It is common practice for our ministers to begin the service with greetings from the apostle. It has been done with such consistency over the years that some may assume it is an official part of the service. It is not. Biblically, we can see the origins of this practice within the letters sent by the early Apostles, particularly the Apostle Paul. Often they began or concluded their letter with their personal greetings in the form of an endearment to the recipient.

After a discussion with our Chief Apostle however, it is clear that this practice is somewhat unique to our USA district. I would ask our ministers to refrain from issuing these greetings as a matter of course and limit their use only to those occasions when their apostle has specifically extended them.

I mention this to you so that you will not be concerned by their absence. It in no way indicates an absence of unity by the minister with his apostle or that the service is lacking in foundation. The connection with the apostolate of Christ is created through the opening prayer. If the minister receives greetings from his apostle he will add them to the divine service and they will serve as a special endearment for the congregation.

Reprint of Winter 2009 Vision Newsletter

TO OUR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

In the early 1960s, the Bishop William Fendt communicated with the parents of our Sunday school children and suggested that they provide their children with piano lessons. This wise advice led to an entire generation of future organists within our congregations; a development that brought much joy to our brothers and sisters across the entire USA. During their tenure, the District Apostles Wagner and Freund also promoted the further development of musical training to support our concert choirs and orchestras.

Let us revisit and expand on these themes! I strongly encourage our parents to open ways for their children to discover their musical talents. Many have suggested that early lessons in leadership and team building can be learned from participating in sports and athletics. I see a similar advantage within musical training. It can produce a lifelong source of joy for the individual and is a unique expression of worship. It can also be a source of joy to share with others within our congregations.

Likewise, I would suggest that the pursuit of languages and Biblical studies within higher education can be a similar goal for our children and youth that will create much benefit within our congregations in the future. Clearly they will contribute to a more enriched life with a broader perspective for the individual. And they will be wonderful gifts to share with fellow brothers and sisters that will enhance their joy and improve the quality of the divine service experience within our congregations.

Reprint of Spring 2011 Vision Newsletter

PERSPECTIVE

HIGHER MINISTRIES SITTING IN SERVICES

Dear brother and sisters,

Our current congregational culture contains an expectation that the individual with the highest ministry in attendance will always conduct the divine service. While this will continue to be our general practice, our Chief Apostle in the recent District Apostle Meeting in Buenos Aires, expressed a desire for some flexibility under certain circumstances. His thoughts are as follows:

Our higher ministers conduct almost every service each month. Given the time demands of congregational and pastoral duties, occupations and families, the preparation required to achieve a consistently high level of effectiveness is difficult to sustain. It will be a welcome opportunity and a source of spiritual refreshment if occasionally these ministers will sit in the congregation or behind the altar and be served by another minister. Of course, this may also be done during circumstances of illness.

When this happens, we should not be concerned or think that something is wrong. Special care will be exercised by the ministers involved to plan these arrangements far enough in advance so as to maintain a high quality spiritual experience for our members.

Reprint of Summer 2011 Vision Newsletter

PERSPECTIVE

HOLY COMMUNION WITH CHRIST

A fundamental component of a healthy congregation is a powerful and inspiring divine service experience for all its members on a consistent basis. And within the divine service, Holy Communion with Christ stands as the high point.

The more we journey toward congregational health, the more I feel that the key to unlocking the full potential of this holy sacrament lies not in one single big step, but rather many small ones. Some lie within the work of our ordained ministers but some revolve around the understanding, the expectations and the preparation of the individual members who comprise the congregation itself. Let us examine this congregational link more closely.

A good way to organize our thinking is to use the teaching on Holy Communion found in a newly released excerpt from our New Apostolic Catechism. The sacrament is explained using an analogy of 5 meals. It is simultaneously a meal of:

- Remembrance
- Thanksgiving
- Fellowship
- The Future
- Profession

All of this in one moment during the divine service! How can this be? Perhaps it would be helpful to further expand the analogy. As we experience the holiday season, we often partake of large festive meals with many courses. Each course is different but complementary. Each course builds upon the previous one and adds to the joy and satisfaction of the total experience. Such a feast can't be rushed. Time and attention must be taken to fully savor each course. Likewise, much preparation is necessary in advance.

So let us now take a journey together of greater understanding. Both in moments of personal introspection and in discussions with one another, let us explore this feast in deeper detail and discover a more satisfying, inspiring and joyous Holy Communion with Christ in every divine service.

A meal of Remembrance: Here we acknowledge that Christ has paid the ultimate price for our salvation. His innocent death stands forever as a unique and ever valid event.

Contemplation: In every divine service, do we visualize the suffering and death of Christ and stand in awe of this moment of Holy Communion?

A meal of Thanksgiving: Within this meal there is much to savor and perhaps much we still need to understand. Here we firstly express our worship and praise for God's limitless grace and Christ's willingness to sacrifice His innocent life for us. But likewise we must grasp that He alone is our Redeemer and His victory over sin and death provides the means for forgiveness and the power to be transformed into a new creature with a restored eternal relationship with God.

Forgiveness is possible for all, but it has conditions. Christ had much to say about these conditions through His teachings. Further knowledge and discussion of His Gospel is essential to our understanding of repentance and forgiveness.

Contemplation: At some point before or during the divine service, have we tried to fully express our profound gratitude to the triune God? Do we understand that salvation is truly beyond our capability to do for ourselves? In the light of the word of God, do we clearly see our deficiencies? Our sin often injures others. In addition to asking for forgiveness, have we made things right with them?

In all matters of sin, are we sorrowful and repentant? Are we truly committed to changing? Have we abandoned judgment of others? Are we willing to forgive others in greater measure than we seek forgiveness? Sometimes the sins of others have caused us a deep hurt that is not possible to forgive instantaneously. Are we actively working towards reconciliation?

A meal of Fellowship: This meal is not merely about Christ; it is with Christ and He is present. It is also experienced together with the family of God, our brothers and sisters.

Contemplation: As we prepare in advance of divine service, do we visualize going to church or meeting our Savior? Prior to divine service do we invite Him to be in our midst? During Holy Communion, do we feel His presence, and His love? Likewise, do we feel love for our brothers and sisters that surround us?

A meal of the Future: Each celebration of Holy Communion is a foreshadowing of what is to come. There will be an ultimate moment of Communion with God the Father and the Son. We will be transformed into the image of Christ. Our joy will be amplified by our reunion with our loved ones who have preceded us and will no longer be tempered by sin, remorse, sickness or sorrow. God will wipe away all tears.

Contemplation: Does our personal faith contain a hope and an expectation of an eternal blessed future with the triune God? Do we strive that each celebration of Holy Communion be transformational on our journey to this day? Do we sense a change within us from the old nature of Adam to the new creature in Christ?

A meal of Profession: To profess is to declare our belief publicly. *"For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes."* (1Corinthians 11:23-26) In this one sentence we profess our firm belief in the death, resurrection and return of Jesus Christ.

Contemplation: Are we completely aware of and do we firmly embrace this public commitment of faith when we partake of the bread and the wine? At times do we perform a ritual without fully considering what our actions mean?

There are resources available that can help us to work through these questions and grow in our understanding. I urge you to be a continual learner and recommend the following sources of inspiration and knowledge:

1. The Gospel of Christ contains His teachings, descriptions of historical events and the further illuminations of the first apostles.
2. The 2012 Devotional is a compilation of 52 thoughts from our Chief Apostle all revolving around the theme of Holy Communion. You may purchase this publication in a printed booklet form or access it weekly via the new NAC-USA website.
3. The Peace Making seminar materials. This initiative was introduced to the congregations some years ago (2007). These materials are practical and effective in teaching techniques of reconciliation and forgiveness. They may form the basis for future congregational small group discussions. Please consult with your rector if interested for access to these materials.

Reprint of Winter 2011 Vision Newsletter

YEAR END SCHEDULING CHANGES

At a recent meeting with the Chief Apostle and all District Apostles, it was decided that divine services should align with Sundays as much as practicable. Additionally, there needs to be flexibility when scheduling holiday services to better match the cultural norms of each region. Adjacent district churches could therefore collaborate to determine the optimal scheduling for their congregations. With this in mind, District Apostle Woll and I have agreed to a new end-of-year divine service schedule for 2012. We would like to share this with you now in the hopes that it will help you plan your holidays more effectively. Starting with 12/23/2012, divine services will be on the following dates only:

Sunday, December 23, Normal Service Time

Christmas Day, Tuesday, December 25 at 10:30 AM

Year-End Service, Sunday, December 30, Normal Service Time

Year-Beginning Service, Sunday, January 6, Normal Service Time

Our normal divine service pattern will resume after 1/6/2013. I am hopeful that this schedule will create the opportunity for peaceful worship and loving fellowship with family and friends.

Reprint of Summer 2012 Vision Newsletter

UNDERSTANDING NAC TV

Over the past 2 years a new concept called NACTV has been evolving and gaining popularity. We would like to provide background information on this new tool as well as share our future plans for its further development and best use.

In actuality, NACTV is an internet based system for broadcasting divine services to remote users within the NAC-USA district. The initiative was begun by Priest Russ Gee in San Francisco, in coordination with Apostle Orlofski. Early broadcasts originated from the San Francisco and Milwaukee areas. Since then additional congregations have been added to the mix in all time zones and to accommodate the needs of our Spanish and Chinese members.

Currently, the services are broadcast on a dedicated web site www.newapostolicchurch.tv and are accessible without a password. The original intent was to provide a connection for our NAC-USA members only who are unable to attend the divine services; specifically those who are sick and infirmed and those at great distance from a congregation.

Additionally, there are congregations currently without an ordained priest who receive the broadcast either in our church buildings or a member's home.

In the near future, its role will be expanded to support our linked members around the country, our college students at their campuses and our members in the armed services. It may also become a tool to link smaller congregations with our newly formed flagship congregations and as a more efficient replacement for the satellite transmission broadcasts of special services.

However, as usage continues to grow, it is important to keep certain cautions in mind. This system is for internal communications only and is not intended to be accessed by international members or as a tool for outreach. Likewise, the viewing of a divine service via webcast should never be considered an alternative for attending the service within the local congregation, when possible.

The experience of sharing the word of God and His Sacraments in fellowship with our brothers and sisters cannot be substituted. It is a vital component of New Apostolic life.

With these factors in mind, NACtv will soon be converting to a user profile system. The new method will be explained on the NACtv and NAC-USA websites with plenty of lead time for our members to make the transition and create profiles that will allow them to watch the services when logged in. A special help line will be created to assist those with technical difficulties. Please walk with us as we explore new methods and continuously evolve.

Reprint of Summer 2012 Vision Newsletter

WHY GO TO CHURCH WHEN YOU CAN STAY HOME AND WATCH **NACTV**?

Dear readers,

In our last edition, an article appeared describing NACTV, our online divine service broadcasting arrangement. One of our apostles has since forwarded an article written by Tim Stevens, a minister in Indiana. His article provides some excellent insights into the role of on line church services verses the benefits of communal worship within a congregation. We publish it here for your contemplation with a few editorial changes by our District Apostle, with the author's permission.

The church needs you – I'm not talking about the building or the organization. Rather, the people of God need what you can offer. Your physical presence, words of encouragement, and acts of service—combined with what others bring, is what makes the people of God. When you “go to church” with missional eyes opened wide, you arrive early and stay late, you engage in conversations with other followers of Jesus, you look for people who need encouraged and you lean into “coincidental” conversations with people that God will bring along your path.

It's not just about spiritual food – if going to “church” twice a week was just about gaining what you need spiritually to make it through another week, then tuning in online would be just fine. You could get what you need on Christian radio, reading books, studying the Bible or watching your favorite TV preacher. But the purpose of church is so much broader than that. It is about corporate worship, praying and studying the Bible together, serving one another and reaching out in mission together. This can't be done in isolation.

You need the church — You need the “church” (those people who are followers of Jesus and gather together with your congregation) more than you think you do. There is so much in Scripture about the relational aspects of the church—love one another, be devoted to one another, encourage one another, instruct one another, greet one another—and these can't be done as well in a virtual environment.

The church is a living organism — You remove your pancreas or esophagus or left arm, and it will cease to live outside your body. The New Testament knows nothing about a Christian who is not connected to a church. Your gifts, skills, ideas, service, leadership, resources, love—everything you have to offer—is a crucial part to a congregation thriving.

Your presence matters more than you think — Many times we think we won't be missed. I don't vote on election day because it doesn't really matter. I don't show up for my kids basketball game because he won't even notice. I commit to the work day, then stay home, because surely they have enough people. I stay home and watch the service online, because in a church with 100 people, who will even notice that I'm not there? But that is so short-sighted and inaccurate. You underestimate the significance of your presence when you think it doesn't matter. You undervalue the power of the Spirit of God residing within you when you believe staying home is just as good as showing up. You possibly miss what God wants to do through you and for you when you stay home.

So, Why Provide Online Church Services?

Because there are lonely, isolated people in the world, and it provides a bridge to them so they can eventually take a step into a community of faith.

Because the internet reaches billions of people all over the world, some who are not close enough to participate in a vibrant church.

Because there are times when you are out of town, on vacation or away at college and it gives you a link to stay connected to your church.

Because it serves as an easy invite tool for your friends who aren't ready to step into a physical gathering, but they are hurting and need Jesus, and an online service can help you reach them. -T. Stevens

Reprint of Autumn 2012 Vision Newsletter

CONNECTING OUR ISOLATED MEMBERS

Over the past decades the “bread letter” was created and mailed to provide elements of pastoral care for geographically isolated members. It has provided an important link between the church and our brothers and sisters during times of separation from their congregation.

This practice still continues today but has gone through a few iterations. It remains a vital part of soul care for our linked members; those individuals separated from a physical congregation. At present, roughly 180 packages are prepared and mailed each month. If you know of someone that qualifies for this mailing, but is currently not receiving it, please contact your apostle.

The contents of the packages include:

- A letter written by one of the USA apostles
- The divine service guide so that the members know the essence of the services being conducted in the congregations
- Consecrated Holy Communion wafers for the entire household for one month

and on a quarterly basis:

- DVD of a Chief Apostle or District Apostle service
- VISION newsletter

Questions may arise regarding the validity of sending consecrated Holy Communion wafers via the mail. Our new catechism sheds light on this subject and explains our understanding that the consecration remains valid until it is received by the soul for which it was intended.

Therefore each month Apostle Orlofski visits the Chicago office and in a solemn ceremony in the Chicago Northside church, consecrates the Holy Communion wafers to be mailed. For these linked members the consecration remains valid for the entire month as intended. However, in our congregations, the consecration is repeated in each divine service because there is an intention to celebrate the offer of Christ according to our liturgy.

Ultimately, we recognize that the eternally valid sacrifice of Jesus Christ as offered within the sacrament of Holy Communion is only really valid to the degree it is believed by the recipient.

We believe in the power of our omnipotent and loving God. He is big enough to solve our human limitations of time and distance.

It is our sincere wish that this process, coupled with the possibility of connecting to live divine services through NACTv, will bring our linked members into our spiritual fellowship, further their relationship with Jesus Christ and prepare them for His return.

Reprint of Spring 2013 Vision Newsletter

THE MIDWEEK EXPERIENCE

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.

Reprint of Excerpt from Summer 2014 Vision Newsletter

Pastoral Care

CHILDREN

Here is an idea for our children that may prove useful in creating a positive experience and perception of their congregation. This concept, called “Children’s Place”, is currently being used successfully in various locations. It is offered only as a suggestion that may be adopted in whole or in part based upon the unique circumstances and resources available within each congregation. A careful assessment of available resources should be conducted by the Sunday school coordinator in collaboration with their Rector prior to implementing such an approach. Here are the highpoints:

1. A child’s world is full of color, imagination, pictures, shapes, and designs. They are naturally drawn to places where they can explore, discover and create. Children encounter these elements of stimulation everyday within their “world” of school, daycare and play.
2. By providing a creative place within the church for them to gather, children attain a sense of “belonging”. A place where they feel safe, learn, share and grow with their friends. Children’s places assist in making our church approachable. It encourages them to develop a positive view towards the congregation and a place where their friends are welcome.
3. Children’s places have been the creation of the members within the congregations. Parents, youth, seniors and the children themselves have combined to provide the creative, artistic and financial efforts required. They can be created in the fellowship hall, lower auditorium or Sunday School room.

It is recommended that the children’s place be staffed. Adults rotate their time with the children and monthly schedules are created to keep this managed. Children’s places are usually open before and after service. Before service, Bible stories are read, games are played and crafts prepared that have significance to the divine service. The children are encouraged to make their way into the sanctuary 10 minutes prior to service and to shake hands after the service before heading back to their area. This arrangement may prove useful also during hours of fellowship or adult meetings.

Reprint of Summer 2009 Vision Newsletter

PERSPECTIVE

CONFIDENTIALITY

The relationship between church members and ministers is central to one's life of faith. At the heart of this relationship is the Obligation of Confidentiality under which all ministers, and people in leadership positions, should be acting. Simply stated, it should be possible for a soul to have the confidence that the things they share with a minister (or person in a leadership position) will remain private. This concept is laid out in the new constitution that was recently adopted for the USA District Church and is also part of a document that all ministers are required to sign upon ordination.

Although the concept appears to be simple, there is some confusion surrounding it. In years past, the understanding was that a minister should not disclose confidential matters to anyone, with the exception of a higher office holder. However, in recent years some individuals have come to understand this concept to mean that what they share with a minister will be shared with no one – including higher ministry bearers without explicit approval.

The key in this entire matter is that assumptions cannot be made by either the individual or the minister. Assumptions will lead to disappointment. For example, a rector might assume that he should not disclose confidential information to a higher office bearer. At some later date the individual may encounter their apostle, assuming that he already knows about their problem. Upon discovering that the apostle has not been informed of their situation, the individual may feel that their rector has failed them. On the other hand, we can take the same scenario where the rector assumes that he should share the confidential information. In a subsequent meeting with the apostle, he might ask the individual about their problem. Upon discovering that he has been informed against their expectations, the individual may well feel that their confidence has been breached.

When an individual shares confidential information with a minister, the individual should overtly give the minister permission to share this with a higher office bearer. One may also specify which higher minister the information may be shared with, ie 'I don't mind if you mention this to the apostle or bishop.' The minister may also ask the individual for permission to disclose the information to a higher office holder. This would be done with the intention of opening the way that this higher office holder can pray and/or give council, regarding the matter.

Therefore, I ask that both members and ministers take note. Please do not make any assumptions regarding confidential matters. Ministers, when an individual speaks with you and it is a weighty matter in which you feel you would wish to refer to a higher office bearer, ask permission before doing so. Members, when you speak with a minister, tell him explicitly what your expectations are relative to confidentiality. In this manner, proper respect will be shown to the souls who seek council and support, and the relationship between individuals and their ministers can be strengthened.

Written by Apostle John Fendt

Reprint of Spring 2011 Vision Newsletter

BUILDING FAITH AT HOME

Since 1991, the United States population has grown by 15 percent and the number of adults who no longer attend church activities has nearly doubled. The health of the American family has been shaken over the past 4 decades giving rise to high divorce rates and an ever-increasing pace of life. The culture and practices in our places of work, at home, within social circles and within our congregations has shifted. And now, further economic difficulties pull families into new life paths.

Our Chief Apostle has a strong interest in the focus that our families place on faith in your home. The church has been rich in Sunday school, youth, and even senior valued-added activities. Various publications have been dedicated for years at serving these demographic areas. While we continue to serve in these areas, new programs and materials are appearing with the design to aid our families in creating the possibility of healthy marriages and healthy family lives.

Prepare & Enrich ©

The PREPARE/ENRICH program is available for those that would like to participate in either evaluating their current relationship in preparation for marriage or for a married couple that would like to assess their marital health. The program is scientifically validated as a foundational program for premarital classes, marriage enrichment, couples therapy, marriage mentoring and marriage education. We are searching for couples interested in becoming certified facilitators that would guide interested couples through the process. For more information on this program, please contact your local apostle. You may also find additional information about the program at www.prepare-enrich.com.

Parenting

Current day culture has moved our lives into high gear and many of our church programs may become appealing to the parent that wishes to use the church as a venue to bring elements of faith and spiritual life to their child(ren). While the church can be a vital instrument to bring faith into a child's life, it has been far more successful where acts of devotion and faith are practiced at home in unison with an active church life. In short, faith becomes more relevant when children experience a consistent message from parents about faith in the home and in church.

“You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.” - Deuteronomy 6:7

Soon after the launch of the new USA website, additional information, articles and resources will be made available for parents and families interested in enhancing family life and faith at home.

Reprint of Autumn 2011 Vision Newsletter

NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN SUNDAY SCHOOL

In years past, Christmas gifts including new Bibles, devotionals and resource materials were sent to our Sunday School children each December. The children will continue to receive a small package of candy around Christmas time as a gift from the Church; however the funds that were traditionally used for such gifts will instead be used toward a new initiative within our Children's Ministry.

Beginning in September 2012, each child of Sunday School age will be receiving a new age-appropriate Bible to be used for the duration of their time in their current Sunday School class. Beginner children (ages 4-5) will receive the My First Hands-On Bible, Primary children (ages 6-7) will receive the Hands-On Bible, and Primary children (ages 8-10) will receive the Adventure Bible. Religious Instruction students will receive a Student Life Application Study Bible to be used throughout their Religious Instruction and Confirmation classes, as well as for their time in the youth group. This will be a working Bible for the children to make their own as they grow in their faith and biblical studies. This initiative promotes our children to become familiar with their Bible, resulting in an increase of Biblical knowledge, and a greater relationship with our Heavenly Father, the Lord Jesus and Holy Spirit.

Local districts and congregations are encouraged to present the Bibles in a special ceremony after a Sunday morning service before the 2012-2013 Sunday School Kick-Off Day on September 9th. In subsequent years, children ages 4, 6, 8, and 11 will receive the next Bible each fall, as they continue their spiritual education.

The Work Group Children has also recently released the first edition of the Building Blocks newsletter. This quarterly publication will be a resource to our Sunday School teachers.

Reprint of Summer 2012 Vision Newsletter

CREATING A BETHANY ... FOR SINGLES

As you know, one of the cornerstones of the Stepping Forward plan for the NAC-USA district is to improve the quality of our pastoral care. I would like to write to you about a unique group of members within our church requiring their own brand of pastoral support. Often, our pastoral programs are organized around the needs of certain age groups; i.e. the youth, the children, and the seniors. Their needs tend to be similar as the groups are homogeneous. This is not true however with the pastoral group that we refer to as the “Singles”. What is noteworthy about them is that their circumstances are so very diverse.

We recognize that each single adult has their own unique and rich experience in life. Some were never married, some are divorced, some are raising children as a single parent, some have said farewell to their loved ones and are widows or widowers, and some have been single for one month and others thirty years. The very nature of this diversity brings me to the first point; that our serving and culture all begins with the understanding and the love of Christ.

Everyone experiences moments of loneliness and isolation from time to time, but let us take a moment to expand our understanding for those who are more vulnerable than others. How does it feel to wake up every morning alone? How does one start their day, eat their breakfast and prepare for the challenges of the day? With whom do you share successes and failures, strengths and weaknesses? How do you celebrate your free time? How do you deal with the joy and pain of past experiences and how do you keep hope alive for the future? Our single members understand these feelings all too well; and those who have not experienced this have the opportunity to reach out in love and understanding. It is quite possible that being single will touch all of us at some point in our lives. Let’s not wait for this moment in life to take notice.

We turn to the Lord Jesus, whom according to Scriptures was also single. We could hear the despair in His words *“Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.”* (Matthew 8:20) Almost in response, we see how God provided His Son with a wonderful place in Bethany in which He could share warm fellowship with Martha, Mary and Lazarus.

As we can read in Luke 10 and John 11, they not only enjoyed a good meal but also discussed the kingdom of God and the resurrection. It became a place of love and reassurance; a necessary human connection, even for Christ, that supported Him. Because of this

relationship, the very word “Bethany” now carries a powerful connotation that we instantly grasp. When Lazarus died, Christ was clearly grieved by the loss of His friend. The end result was the commentary of the people: *“See how He loved him!”*

May we also learn from the example of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. With growing understanding we can provide a warm fellowship and share the love that Christ taught us. This can occur in a telephone call, a home visit, around a dinner table, a car ride together, in private or joint prayer and even a nice smile. After a good measure of listening, the Lord can also inspire us through the Holy Spirit to say the right words at the right time. Our time together does not only touch the earthly but most of all promotes the assurance we have in the promise of eternal fellowship with our Heavenly Father.

In our renewed culture of learning, let us continue to seek understanding by being aware of those around us. In the love of Christ we want to be approachable so that we can stimulate heart to heart conversations. These efforts and our constant prayers will create a Bethany for our singles so that no one feels alone. In so doing we serve Christ by serving each other.

- Submitted by Bishop Walter Schmidt

Reprint of Summer 2012 Vision Newsletter

A RENEWED LOOK AT CHURCH LEADERSHIP AND PASTORAL CARE

In this edition of the VISION, I would like to elaborate further on the subject of our strategic plan for the NAC-USA district called Stepping Forward. The previous VISION newsletter (Winter 2012), contained a detailed review of our plan as well as a candid assessment of our progress toward our goal of congregational health. Today, let us focus our attention on two very important concepts that are foundational to our future plans but require a change in the way that we have done things in the past.

With this in mind I offer the following Perspectives. They should be the subject of honest and transparent discussion over the next months within our congregations. If these concepts are to be truly foundational and worthy of our confidence, they should withstand our scrutiny and inspection. If you have questions or comments, please send them to communications@nac-usa.org.

Before we begin, it is important to visualize our four objectives that lead us to congregational health. Everything that we do must pass through this filter. These objectives once again are:

Improve the quality of our Divine Service Experience

Change our Culture: learn to live and lead like Christ

Improve the quality of our Pastoral Care

Create a more sustainable Structure

Shared leadership and why we are realigning our ordained ministers

With the exception of the apostles, our ministers work in a lay capacity and are not financially compensated for their service to Christ and their congregations. Therefore, they are employed in outside professions and volunteer their time, spiritual gifts, and efforts. And like all of us, they must care for the spiritual needs of their own families within their home life.

Their voluntary ministry is an indispensable and invaluable asset of the church; and like every asset it must be preserved, developed, and maximized. Often in life, we are tempted to consume our assets out of current necessity or want. But we find we have satisfied ourselves today at the expense of tomorrow (the fable of the goose that laid golden eggs comes to mind).

This in no way minimizes the incredible investment of previous generations of New Apostolic pioneers that built our congregations by self-sacrifice. Their work speaks forever to the honor and glory of God and to their love of Christ and His church. However, in every great movement, the efforts that sustain are different than the efforts that created; not wrong, just different and necessary for their time. We look to the continual impulses of the Holy Spirit and the direction of our Chief Apostle to determine what is right for our time and our environment within the USA.

From this inspiration, we have created a congregational leadership model that supports our current needs and we call this “shared leadership” (first introduced in the Summer 2010 VISION newsletter). While every congregation will have a rector, he will share the leadership responsibilities with broader teams of ministers and members organized according to their spiritual gifts and servant profile that were discovered through the Work of Ministry assessments. This requires a culture of mission-filled members who are empowered to serve and share their gifts and passions within the body of Christ. Interestingly, this is not a new culture; this is an authentic culture that we can see demonstrated in the first apostolic church and in our renewal as the New Apostolic Church 150 years ago.

Likewise, the congregation is where we need our ordained ministers. Therefore we are realigning our ministries across the USA. Many district evangelists, shepherds and evangelists will be reconfirmed into a priestly ministry and take a shared leadership role within local congregations.

There is no stigma to this reassignment; rather quite the opposite is true. Our ministers have voluntarily engaged in this strategy in the most humble and effective manner demonstrating their nobility to serve Christ above all other motivations. Jesus Himself created the servant leader model by His personal example when He washed the disciples’ feet, and in His teaching: “...called the twelve, and said to them, *“If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.”* (Mark 9:35) It is this servant leadership role that creates the true inner authority and credibility of our ministers and inspires our love and respect.

With more ordained ministers within each congregation, there will be the opportunity to specialize; each according to their spiritual gifts. In the past, it was customary for every ordained minister to serve at the altar, engage in pastoral visits, and care for administrative matters. In some congregations, we may now experience priests who do not serve at the altar but focus their time and attention on pastoral care; of huge benefit and value to our members and equally important to our future health and growth.

Visiting and pastoral care

Historically, our ordained ministers, as well as interested members, would meet at the local church and then go “visiting”. It was the staple within our understanding of pastoral care. Members were visited and matters of faith were discussed. In the best of circumstances, this was planned in advance and the whole family would gather with their minister for an evening of spiritual teaching and fellowship.

When we fast forward to the current day, we often hear from our older members that this is done with less frequency and is missed. The connection to their minister and the fellowship is welcomed. Within the time challenged lives of our younger members, this practice is not so expected and hard to schedule.

In addition to this purpose, there are also the visits made necessary by the critical needs of life; sickness and specific trying circumstances requiring a pastoral connection. Visitation was also a means to testify to nonmembers and invite them to attend the services.

Is there a new model that replaces the old? Yes and no. Clearly, there is no substitute for a pastoral visit, made necessary by an urgent situation like a critical illness. Additionally, it is still important that our members have a pastoral connection with their minister that is proactive. This connection is not driven by crisis or emergency, but is a moment whose purpose is to strengthen and equip the soul for a closer relationship with Christ. In today's fast paced world, it may require more planning and creativity to make this work.

There is also a need for a change in culture. Our member's expectation should be realistic regarding the role of our ordained ministers. We should not become overly dependent upon them for advice in matters of daily life or intercession over routine matters of faith.

In addition to the pastoral visits of our ministers, some benefits of pastoral care can be found within our small groups, first introduced in the Spring 2012 VISION newsletter. Although the primary focus of these groups is the discussion of matters of faith and spiritual development between group members, there is a strong pastoral bond that develops naturally under the direction of the Holy Spirit. A prayer network for specific needs begins to form and with time the group begins to minister to one another in a very biblical and authentic Christian manner.

Likewise, Small Group has an element of Christian outreach based upon the purpose of creating disciples. At the completion of its term, it is customary for the members to begin their own small group and add new members often from among interested friends and acquaintances who also seek spiritual discussion and fellowship.

The creation and support of these groups is an important focus for 2013. A Small Group Resource kit has been developed to help supply study material on various topics of interest. It can be found on Minister Companion and is accessible by your local ministers.

Reprint of Spring 2013 Vision Newsletter

PERSPECTIVE

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

Reprint of Summer 2014 Vision Newsletter

Pastoral Care

Success Story

MP3 PLAYERS PUERTO RICO

Today technology is all around us and we can see how children enjoy using it on a daily basis at school and at home. With this in mind, the Puerto Rico congregation purchased mp3 players for each child in the Sunday school and loaded an audio version of the New Testament on each one. Their goal was to have the students listen to the New Testament in preparation for this year's Vacation Bible School (VBS). They gave mp3 players to them in January with the goal of completing the New Testament by May 30th. The New Testament has 27 books which have 23 hours of audio. In order to complete this goal, they will need to average an hour a week. To keep the students on track, a worksheet has been developed that will be completed after listening to each book of the bible. This gives the students the opportunity to review, discuss and understand the books of the bible better. A Certificate of Completion will be given to each student to reward his or her accomplishment!

Reprint of Spring 2009 Vision Newsletter

EVERYONE HAS A STORY

Since the Winter 2012 VISION newsletter, members have been encouraged to share their stories with each other in the congregations as well as on our website through our **What's your story?** campaign. Throughout the year, experiences were shared on our website and our office received reports of people sharing their stories. By sharing their stories, people were able to get to know each other on a deeper level all while bringing glory to God and showing how He has orchestrated their journey of faith. To culminate our year of profession and our "What's your story?" campaign, we would like to feature the story below, submitted by a young New Apostolic sister. This story was submitted as the context for the featured poem and demonstrates God's merciful power and faithfulness as He guides us on the stepping stones that lead us to a deeper relationship with Christ.

Four years ago, I had just finished my first degree in college. I was busy with youth, pillars, choir, singing, directing, and playing for services. My life was busy and heading full steam ahead. Through a series of unfortunate happenings my ship came to a stalling halt, or so I thought. I found out that I had contracted a serious infection that almost took my life. The infection was responding to the medication but my health was being put through the gauntlet since I was allergic and my body was rejecting it.

Going into what all transpired is not what is important. I also experienced blindness and the inability to walk during this time. The Apostle came to me when I became blind and prayed at my bedside, and a week later my eyesight returned. I went through one year of treatments and my ability to walk returned about four months into it. I found out I had one more obstacles to tackle and that was the word most people fear.

At that time, God had built me an arsenal of the best doctors I had met during my time, I knew God hadn't lead me so patiently over the previous two years to not see me through this last trial. By God's grace I am healthier than ever. During the three years this took place God was allowing me to be made new. When you think of a cure you want it to be quick and fix the problem, but with healing there is a process. So it is with our faith.

This poem I began when I found out at the beginning of these complications with my health. I finished four years later after I walked my journey hand in hand with our Heavenly Father. I had no guarantees I would become healthy again but I held tightly to my faith and the word, "you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good."

Dear friends when we are permitted to walk down stony and narrow paths in our lives and may think; "this can't be what the Lord had planned for me", we become scared or unsure. In moments of strife you may be tempted to ask the question, why me?

The real question is, why not me? Did our Lord not labor over us and continues to labor along with us to see us transformed into the bride? Each stone along our path leads us closer to our goal of faith, these are our stepping stones but in order to reach that great day it is sometimes necessary to go through moments that try us in the fire. The experiences we face in those times may seem unpleasant but when we come out of that fire we are then able to shine brighter and purer.

Our stories shape us and allow us to share and uplift one another when we face a situation that may sometimes be unpleasant. However, remember we are not our stories, they are a mere moments in time in which God permitted our spiritual growth and regardless of the outcome we have the promise that God will make all things new.

We as His children are unique and precious, He knows what we face and He knows the secret thoughts and desires of our hearts. Always trust our Heavenly Father is right there pulling us along to our completion. I was permitted to see many things through this journey and I can reassure you our angels and loved ones from the beyond are also at our side. What I have personally lived through inspired me to write this poem.

The time of the Lord's return is imminent and before God's completion we must have internal transformation and renewing of this continual growth. Let's keep in mind the Lord holds you and me in His hands and with Him we will see this great day soon.

I heard it! Can it be? A sound so glorious, so alive and free,
Is everyone ready? My heart's beating fast -
We knew this day would come.
But why do I see faces gloomy, scared, numb?
It's not too late - quick! Tell Him how much you cared;
Though you ignored the signs...
And the burdens you carried; all in His time!
Hurry! Yell it out! You're losing time. We're losing ground!

And that sound! What a glorious sound!
What do you mean you don't hear?
Listen with your heart and all of your soul;
That was your greatest power all along you know!
He urged us to keep moving forward, never draw back,
To keep ourselves and release all negative and bad.
Yes I know you're been through a lot, and so have I,
But all will erase with one glance of His eye.
He's held you in His arms close and tight,
While sometimes you wondered, Can I face the day?
He was always there guiding your way.

Yes you're hearing right, don't you see?
That sound has been His voice calling
All along to you and me.
He speaks to us as one, yes;
But to each it sounds a little differently.
It's up to you to decode your message.
There in your heart is where you two meet.
Take this new joy, He gives it freely. Send it on to the next.
For there is still a little time, and others need a chance.

Our time here has been our learning plight;
Every trial added another feather.
Soon we will homeward fly,
A diamond, a ruby, there is no measure,
He has labored much,
His children, they are His treasure!
But it is up to us to complete our crown,
For soon we will hear that glorious sound.

Reprint of Spring 2014 Vision Newsletter

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

Reprint of Summer 2014 Vision Newsletter

Divine Service Experience

Small Groups

PERSPECTIVE

SMALL GROUPS

In the winter 2011 edition of the VISION newsletter, I made reference to the organization of “small groups” within the Strengthen the House article. Below are a few of my thoughts that may bring clarity and a new perspective to this concept “small group”.

The Lord Jesus had many disciples. However, He chose out of the many, a small group of twelve disciples to work with intensively. In many areas of the Bible we read of commands for Christians to minister to one another.

Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of His return is drawing near. (Hebrews 10:24-25 NLT)

While we may consider the community of the New Apostolic Church a rather large group across the nation and throughout the world, we have benefited from small and intimate environments in many of our local congregations. Looking into our near and distant futures, as part of the USA District Strategic Plan, some locations will get larger as a result of congregations merging together to create a healthier and more sustainable environment.

However, it is equally important that we maintain the personal and intimate settings that we’ve enjoyed so much over the years. Small group will be an opportunity that will allow those in all congregations to enjoy spiritual growth and intimate fellowship. Small group will allow us to counter the feeling that “big” will bring upon us coldness and separation.

Small groups are intentional efforts that allow us to care for each other, grow in our understanding and apply God’s direction to our lives. You may already recognize the term “small group” as an ever growing term within the Christian community around you. The benefits of small group include the following:

Fellowship - Moves people into fellowship and out of isolation

Application - Helps develop spiritual ripening through practical and relevant application of God’s Word

Accountability - Allows people to share and fulfill their God-given mission in their lives, within the congregation, and throughout the world around them

Guidance - Draws upon the background and experiences of group members and the Holy Spirit to contribute to each other

Encouragement - Helps people to continue moving forward spiritually

I encourage you to explore the Gospel of Christ, His teachings, parables and miracles in a small group and discover where the Holy Spirit leads your understanding and how It can make the teachings of Christ relevant in our lives. Another resource for small group discussion is our new 2012 Devotional that is focused on “grace”. It is a compilation of thoughts from our Chief Apostle that will guide your small group to an enhanced Holy Communion experience with Christ.

Reprint of Spring 2012 Vision Newsletter

SMALL GROUPS

A DEEPER LOOK

Let's go into greater details concerning the benefits of developing a small group experience in your congregation. You may have noticed that the concept of "Small Group" was introduced in the Vision newsletter Winter 2011 edition within the section entitled "Strengthen the House". Here you are encouraged to use the small group approach to enhance your learning of the teachings of Christ.

Small Group is a cultural movement within our Stepping Forward plan that leads to congregation health, growth, and completion. The mission of the New Apostolic Church and its objectives are experienced through Small Group. These objectives include:

- **Broadening our mission**
- **Enhancing Gospel teaching**
- **Renewing our ministry**
- **Enriching our worship**

The benefits of Small Group include...

Fellowship

Moves people together and out of self-centered isolation. As we have experienced, where two or more are gathered, God is more present than when we are in isolation and more present is His transforming power. You learn to care about others and share the experiences of others in an environment of unselfish and sympathetic love.

And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. (1 Corinthians 12:26)

Application

Helps develop spiritual ripening through practical and relevant application of God's Word. It is difficult to grow to spiritual maturity by attending divine services alone and being a passive observer. We need painstaking, patient, and careful application of Scripture to our daily lives. Small Group is an active environment that draws on each other's love and support to apply God's will to our life.

By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (1 John 3:16)

Accountability

Allows people to share and fulfill their God-given mission in their lives, within the congregation, and through the world around them. When Jesus walked the earth, the disciples became His small group. Today we are the body of Christ. Through our God given gifts we serve Christ through serving others. While we are accountable in our ministries, we can also support and serve others to be accountable to their ministries.

He creates each of us to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing. (Ephesians 2:10 MSG)

Guidance

Draws upon the background and experiences of group members and the Holy Spirit to contribute to each other. In each congregation, there are those who must make choices about vocations, ministry involvement, relocation, relationships and much more. Small Group is an environment where through prayer and listening, the Holy Spirit's presence can speak.

Following Christ's ascension, the apostles did as they were instructed and remained together in prayer and supplication as they waited on the Holy Spirit. (Acts 1:12-14)

Encouragement

Helps people avoid spiritually backsliding. Everyone falls into sin and together we help keep each other on track. In James chapter 5 we read of instructions to not write people off who have wandered, but rather go after them and get them back. We need to know that someone is committed to us and loves us. That cannot happen when we are alone, and it cannot happen in a large gathering. It can happen through smaller communities.

Encourage one another daily...so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. (Hebrews 3:13 NASB)

Your small group is a place God designed for you to discover, develop, and use your spiritual gifts and talents. Through Small Group, we have the privilege of loving and accepting human beings for whom Christ gave His life.

Reprint of Autumn 2012 Vision Newsletter

Sustainable Structure

FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

The New Apostolic Church-USA is guided by a strong operating principal of fiscal responsibility. Within every decision is the understanding that the church is in a fiduciary role and must manage the offerings and contributions of the membership as trusted stewards. In addition, the district church would like to provide financial transparency to inspire the ongoing confidence of its members.

In the past decades, missionary activities have taken up a significant portion of the church's resources. However, future planning calls for a gradual shift of focus to domestic congregational activities and programs without neglecting our members in the missionary areas. Strong and healthy domestic congregations are the cornerstone of the district church's future.

Like all organizations and families, the economic difficulties of the past year have also affected the church. Naturally, it is then necessary and prudent to manage our cost structure accordingly and reduce our expenses where possible. Significant progress has been made to date via cost cutting initiatives, outsourcing and innovative technology applications.

In order to allow for stable and uninterrupted operations even during difficult economic times, the church has historically applied a proactive financial planning strategy. For example, a contingency reserve fund was created during more stable economic times that has provided the required funding during this economic downturn.

Reprint of Autumn 2009 Vision Newsletter

APOSTLE DISTRICT REORGANIZATION

This reorganization is the product of much careful and prayerful analysis and deliberation. The following factors were particularly weighty in our decision:

1. Given my responsibilities and travel schedule as District Apostle and in fairness to the brothers and sisters in all districts, it is necessary to reassign the care of the Los Angeles, Buffalo, Erie, and Cleveland districts, for which I am currently responsible, to another apostle.
2. Our current arrangement is less than efficient with apostles and bishops caring for areas at great distance from their home location. This is a difficult puzzle to solve given the number of apostles and bishops living on the East coast.
3. Over the next two years, the Bishops Milligan and Freund will be retiring.
4. The desire to equalize the distribution of members within apostle districts where feasible while minimizing the number of districts experiencing a transition to a new apostle and or bishop.
5. Our concern to establish a focused effort to serve the spiritual needs of our Chinese congregations in the New York area.

With these factors in mind, we have created a reorganization plan to be implemented in early 2010 as described in the following chart.

Please note the creation of the Chinese district found within the Apostle Schmidt's working area. This district will be cared for by the District Elder Slade.

With the retirement of the two bishops, we anticipate that additional adjustments may be necessary in the future.

In addition, we will be adopting a more consistent district name convention based on cities rather than regions. For example, the Carolina district in the future will be renamed the Charlotte district.

All of the above changes will be implemented by Pentecost 2010. The apostles will work together to introduce this new arrangement and organize a smooth transition.

Clearly, and for good reason, we attach great respect to the ministry of an apostle of Christ. Additionally, I realize that close personal relationships have formed between you and your apostle and bishop over the years, often forged through their ministrations and intercession at critical moments in your life. I don't take the disruption to this relationship lightly. Within the districts affected by this transition, I ask you to retain your affection and prayerful support for your current apostle, while opening your hearts to a new relationship and an opportunity to discover how our Heavenly Father can serve you through a new vessel.

Apostle	Bishop	District
Apostle Fendt	Bishop Milligan	New England Pennsylvania New York Upstate
	Bishop Schmidt	New York (East/West)
Apostle Orlofski	Bishop Morse	Chicago Milwaukee
	-	Saint Louis Texas
Apostle Hammer	Bishop Fendt	New Jersey South New Jersey Virginia
	-	Cincinnati South Bend North South Bend South
Apostle Hoffmann	Bishop Fuerbach	Denver Kansas City Montana Northwest North Northwest South San Francisco
Apostle Hecht	Bishop Freund	Carolina Detroit East Detroit West Florida East Florida Spanish
	-	Florida West Georgia
Apostle Schmidt	Bishop Whited	Buffalo New York Chinese Cleveland
	-	Erie Los Angeles

NOTE: Bishop working areas will be defined by the apostles.

Reprint of Special Edition 2010 Vision Newsletter

PROPERTY MANAGEMENT UPDATE

Reducing energy costs is a key objective of the Property Management Department of the New Apostolic Church, USA. Utilities are one of our largest expense categories given the relatively large portfolio of buildings we have across the United States. Following extensive research, we have entered into a five year contract with LPB Energy Management (LPB). LPB is responsible for assisting us with the management of electricity, natural gas, water and sewer bills in order to assure billing accuracy, identify opportunities to lower utility prices in deregulated markets and enhance conservation. Approximately 60% of our USA congregations are included in the scope of this project.

The Property Management Department, partnering with GSYEnergy, will also be initiating a pilot program to determine the viability of creating passive revenues from the installation of vertical axis wind turbines (VAWT). VAWT's do not suffer from many of the negative perceptions attributed to traditional wind mills found in wind farms, and will generate income from the sale of excess energy. As property managers, we simply cannot afford to sit still. Our mindset is nicely expressed in this Chinese proverb, "When the winds of change blow, some build walls and others build windmills."

Reprint of Summer 2010 Vision Newsletter

NEW E-OFFERING OPTION AVAILABLE

Beginning in the 2nd half of October, a new e-offering option will be available to all members and guests of the New Apostolic Church USA. For years, we have received an increasing number of requests about such an option and we are excited to be able to announce this new service to you.

The new e-offering service will be available via the Church's website at www.nac-usa.org. A link will take you to a secure site of a partner selected specifically for this purpose. E-offering can be made a number of ways and can be done as a one-time offering or repetitive on a regular basis.

While making an e-offering you have the opportunity to specify the congregation to which you would like your offering to be credited to. This will ensure that your congregation will continue to show your offering, regardless of how it was submitted. For those members who in the past already have asked for and received a unique, individual Donor Identification number (Donor ID or DID), we encourage and recommend for them to use their DID when making an e-offering. By doing so, their e-offering will be automatically credited to their home congregation unless specified differently by them during the e-offering process.

The new e-offering service provides the following practical advantages to the donor: Your offering is submitted immediately without the possibility of a check being misplaced or lost in the mail. The processing of your offering receipts, in particular for Thanksgiving, will on average start one week earlier than if the offering is put into the offering box.

There is no need for paper checks anymore; members have told us in many of their inquiries that their offering check is the last paper check they are writing.

Upon completion of your offering you will receive a temporary receipt from our administrative partner. This receipt is fully acceptable for tax purposes, in particular for offerings under \$250. For offerings over \$250 you will continue to receive a formal receipt from the church as in the past.

Should you have any further questions about this new service please feel free to contact the team in the Chicago office at www.offering@nac-usa.org. This new service will be available as of the middle of October so please check the church's website regularly if you are interested in using it.

Let me conclude by addressing another broadened perspective of offering. Recently, we rolled out a new initiative called the Minister Development Institute. This is a formalized training and education program for all our ordained ministers to help them improve the quality of our divine service experience, congregational leadership and pastoral care. A portion of the future cost of this program will be funded by an endowment created by a bequest from one of our members. The funds are to be used specifically for this purpose according to the member's wishes.

While it is true that these types of gifts provide certain unique tax, retirement and estate planning opportunities for the donor, just think of the legacy that has been created for our future! How many lives will be impacted with eternal consequences by this bequest? The gift flowed from the passion of this member to find and support a specific program that would edify the Body of Christ. Perhaps you have such a passion as well: Is it our children? Is it our youth? Is it our music? Is it your congregational building? The list could be as extensive as the many gifts of ministry found within the family of God.

Reprint of Autumn 2010 Vision Newsletter

NATIONAL RECTOR CONFERENCE

From September 2-4, all ministers across the nation from rectors to apostles, gathered in Detroit, Michigan for a conference. This was a unique experience which provided our ministers with new resources and inspiration to support their ministries.

In addition to the joy of fellowship, the participants experienced the following highlights:

- On Saturday, September 4th, the Chief Apostle Leber addressed the conference, conducted a question and answer period and participated in a workshop with more than 350 participants.
- The District Apostle Kolb addressed the conference and described our forward vision revolving around healthy congregations and our three main objectives of: (1) enhancing the quality of our divine services; (2) learning to lead like Christ; and (3) improving the quality of pastoral care. In addition, he addressed the need for healthy ministers and therefore methods to help them live a balanced life.
- The introduction of a nationwide minister training and education curriculum called the Minister Development Institute. This curriculum will provide a consistent level of training and education to all USA ministers on subjects that will help them accomplish the three objectives above.
- A training session on implementing “The Work of Ministry” initiative in each congregation. This initiative is designed to help a rector more effectively assist members in finding and developing their God-given spiritual gifts and talents and then integrating them into congregational leadership for the benefit of all members.
- A training video illustrating the new divine service liturgy, from beginning to end, was used by the District Apostle to conduct a training session.
- A Rector Synod was convened to vote on changes to the NAC- USA constitution. The changes bring our existing constitution in line with those used by many of the NAC districts internationally. It will provide more transparency, a more active role for the Board of Trustees and the Synod as well as greater checks and balances on the role of the District Apostle in matters of church administration. The changes were adopted by the Synod by an overwhelming majority.
- A description of our new e-offering platform.

- Rector-only breakout sessions where rectors of like sized congregations could discuss common problems, issues and solutions.
- A continuous technology training and help desk to assist our rectors with the Minister Companion Website.

Reprint of Autumn 2010 Vision Newsletter

PROTECTING CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND ADULTS

My dear brothers and sisters,

I would like to share with you the following information on a topic that is not only dear to my heart as a father, but also as a minister and member among all of you.

The utmost protection of our children and youth, as well as adults in vulnerable positions, is a major concern for every parent, and likewise all ministers and teachers who are active in the New Apostolic Church USA. The potential for abuse is a serious issue that every organization dealing with youth and children must address. The headlines of the media report on the tragedies that are possible when the proper vigilance is not exercised.

As an organization inherently built on trust and faith, we therefore should and must take formal steps to ensure that our youngest and most vulnerable members experience their faith in a safe and appropriate environment. These steps will come at a price; part of our privacy. However, all will agree that safeguarding our membership is worth any inconvenience.

These formalized policies are now well documented and legal and insurance requirements demand that such safeguards be put in place. After careful research and collaboration with the apostles, bishops and district leaders, I am announcing the following changes in our internal policies regarding those ministers and members that teach and counsel our youth and children. While I understand that this may cause difficulties for some, I invite you to join me in pride, with the confident knowledge that we are doing what is right and necessary.

Beginning this year, all ministers, youth leaders and teachers in Sunday school, Religious Instruction and Confirmation must undergo a criminal background check. This requirement will extend to all new and existing volunteers in these positions. This background check does not gather financial information, but rather searches only for criminal convictions.

Due to the number of volunteers involved, we expect the roll-out of this program to take approximately one year. Given the enormity of the process, we will initially begin with ordained ministers and then proceed to the remaining groups. Thereafter, we will periodically update existing background check information to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of this safeguard.

Implementation of this program will be conducted with the utmost concern for each volunteers' personal information. Besides me, only one designated apostle and one member of the administrative staff will have access to the findings, which will be kept secure and locked. The actual background checks will be conducted by trusted third-party providers, specializing in such services.

Members requiring additional information about this program should direct their inquiries and questions to communications@nac-usa.org. All requests for information will be kept confidential.

Given the requirements of our insurers, a program like this requires the mandatory participation of all volunteers who are active in one or more of the functions listed above. It is not possible to have partial compliance and therefore no exceptions can be made.

Members who decide not to participate in this program will be asked to discontinue their ministerial, youth care or teaching responsibilities until further notice. This is a matter of personal responsibility and conviction and there will be no stigma attached, however I encourage all to approach this decision with the best interests of our youth and children and the future of our church in mind.

I sincerely thank all our ministers and members who have dedicated time and effort to serve Christ and each other.

Reprint of Autumn 2012 Vision Newsletter

CREATING FLAGSHIP CONGREGATIONS

The purpose of this article is to provide a clearer understanding of the concept of flagship congregations. Please remember that the goal of our plans called Stepping Forward is to create healthy, growing congregations that prepare us for the return of Jesus Christ. It has four distinct and very spiritual objectives:

Improving the quality of the divine service experience

Improving the quality of our pastoral care

Creating a congregational culture of leading and living like Christ

Creating a sustainable structure

We are planning the formation of flagship congregations in every region of the NAC-USA district. It is an important tactic to better achieve these four objectives above in every congregation, large and small. Some have misunderstood our direction in creating these congregations. We are not abandoning smaller congregations. The flagship model is designed specifically to better support our smaller, more isolated locations in addition to providing a higher quality spiritual experience in locations where we have the greatest number of members.

For this reason, I ask that our members and ministers take the time and effort to correctly understand:

- the purpose of a flagship congregation
- the benefits they will create for all members in all congregations throughout their region and
- the thoughtful process that we must follow to establish them

Likewise, as in all matters requiring change, we must be willing to see our challenges with an objective and truthful eye as well as have the courage to journey beyond our traditions and cultural attachments that are comfortable but may hinder our future progress. This requires the “renewing of our minds” as described in further articles within this issue of the Vision.

Specifically, I strongly encourage each one to see beyond the physical buildings. Some flagship projects will require the relocation of smaller congregations. Some will require the

sale of old buildings and the acquisition of new ones. It is easy to become overly fixated on property issues. As a builder by occupation and engaged with the NAC-USA church construction efforts for many years, I must admit that this required a transformation of my own thinking. But we must ask ourselves the following question: Are we really grasping the full spectrum of what we should and could be experiencing within a healthy congregation? If we did, the significance of the physical building would diminish to its proper priority. It is a necessary and practical requirement that complements our journey towards salvation, but the building never overshadows nor defines our “church”.

Let me elaborate. The external building is not the church of Christ; it does not forgive one sin or transform one life into His mind and image. However, what you and I choose to do within these buildings; to experience the fullness of God’s word and sacrament, to give and receive divinely inspired pastoral care, to learn to love one another and to base the very fabric of our lives and leadership on the Gospel of Christ, has everything to do with our salvation and should be our overwhelming preoccupation!

After these introductory comments, let me now provide the details of our future plans:

The purpose of Flagship Congregations is to create:

Larger, regional congregations that have the scope and resources necessary to support all the aspects of congregational health; ministers, children, youth, young families, seniors, music, worship, technology and rich programs that support a culture of Christian living. These congregations should in most cases have a minimum size of 100 plus attending members. In this way our children and youth share their life with a larger cohort of friends. The music and worship team has the talent and scope to provide a rich and varied program. Effective and relevant pastoral programs can be created and supported by our ministers and members in a sustainable and balanced manner.

A broader shared leadership team that integrates the flagship with all the smaller congregations within the region to better overcome the isolation and lack of resources found often within our current structure. Currently, our congregations operate in “silos”; they are connected vertically to the apostle and bishop and the resources of the NAC-USA district church via a long chain of ministers arranged in our hierarchy. However they tend to be disconnected from their neighboring congregations. A surplus of gifts and resources in one congregation can’t be easily shared with other regional congregations.

The flagship model will connect all the regional congregations into one entity with common leadership teams and shared resources. Instead of redundant congregations operating independently, think of one congregation with multiple locations. Even the problems caused by large geographic distances can be minimized in this way via advances in technology.

A more direct flow of all the value and goodness of the entire church to every member; the leadership of the apostles and bishops as well as the resources of the national church office can come more directly into both the flagship and smaller congregations.

An engine for future growth with sufficient vision to lead change and support greater integration with our communities. We must be relevant to our next generation of members; our children and grandchildren as well as the broader range of fellow Christians seeking salvation.

Flagship congregations will be:

Created intentionally by merging existing congregations into one larger congregation where feasible even though they (the individual existing congregations) may seem viable currently. These will not be mergers of desperation nor evidence of failures! The new congregation will represent a leveraging of our strengths and opportunities.

Here we will have a challenge with our old culture. It will be natural for some to resist the process feeling that they will be “closing” a congregation unnecessarily; one that they or their family has worked faithfully to establish and sustain over years and decades. Under our old tradition, this would feel like a failure. We must transform our thinking and support one another in embracing a new model.

Led by a shared leadership team; a rector and a group of team leaders. There will be one team for each Stepping Forward objective. This will allow each ordained minister to focus their time and attention upon one specialty. The result can be a higher level of quality combined with a more balanced and sustainable life.

The formation and ongoing development of these teams is of the highest priority. A flagship congregation can't be formed without this foundation in place. The chart above further explains this foundation and the necessary parts of each team. It makes clear just how many spiritual gifts are necessary to support a healthy congregation. Some congregational leadership roles are not restricted to ordained ministers. All members can feel encouraged to answer their calling to minister to the body of Christ. The Work of Ministry is the engine for the discovery and development of these gifts and I'm hopeful that this initiative is moving forward in every location.

This team will connect seamlessly with its counterparts (similar teams) in all the connected congregations within the region to create one entity. Every congregation, regardless of size, is integrated directly into the leadership of this entity and resources are more easily shared.

Connected directly to their apostle and bishop team. The existing hierarchy of ordained ministers currently found at the district level will be integrated into the local flagship leadership teams where possible (see the Spring 2013 issue of the Vision). Like every member of the body of Christ, these ministers have unique spiritual gifts. We are not losing the power of their gifts or the zeal of their ministry. Quite the opposite! They will pursue their calling to minister but directly within the congregation. Decision making and communication processes will be streamlined by this new model.

Connected directly to all the resources of the national church. These resources flow directly to the leadership teams rather than through one, time challenged rector. For example, the local youth ministers can consult directly with the national Work Group Youth and directly access resources on the Youth Companion site. The best ideas from around the country, with the full approval and support of the national church office, can be shared freely within the flagship and all connected locations within the region.

Based upon our research, we plan to create roughly 50 flagship congregations across the USA over the next 8 years. Where possible we will remain within our existing buildings. If our existing property is insufficient for our needs, new capital expenditures will be authorized to purchase or lease new building space. However, the property discussion is only relevant when it follows and supports the spiritual objectives of congregational health and when it is realistic and sustainable financially.

The apostles and bishops will support and monitor the spiritual readiness of a new flagship congregation and the Executive Committee of the national Synod will analyze the financial readiness and authorize needed capital expenditures in a transparent manner.

I realize that for some these are unsettling times requiring change. We are on a journey to become the church described in our New Apostolic Vision statement (I was quite inspired when our Chief Apostle read it so emphatically within his message on Pentecost). Just like the first church, we believe in the continual inspiration of the Holy Spirit that leads us into new understandings. In the book of Acts, we can read about the divine inspiration of Apostle Peter to take the Gospel to the gentiles. In hind sight it seems quite easy to see that this was the correct direction for the church, but at that moment in time, this new understanding caused angst and dissension among the believers. I'm sure they had some shaky moments when traditions clashed with the urgings of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps this caused them to prayerfully search their recollection of Christ's words and rediscover the truth of His gospel; *go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...*" (Matthew 28:19)

For those who "renewed their minds", it was a transformational event. And while they had no user's manual and perhaps made their share of missteps, those who were transformed became passionate in their love for Christ and their sense of mission. The church grew by God's grace in a wonderful manner contrary to all human expectations. This is a good model for us to continue. Let us be transformed also by the renewing of our minds, passionate in our love for Christ and His mission. By God's grace we also will become a healthy, growing church prepared for Christ's return.

Reprint of Summer 2013 Vision Newsletter

OUR USA DISTRICT

Historically, the NAC-USA district has supported a number of church districts outside the domestic USA. We sometimes called them “mission lands”. An entire generation of ministers dedicated their time and energies to the growth and development of these churches on the African, South American, and Asian continents as well as numerous island locations. Likewise, a portion of church finances were dedicated to this purpose over the years.

Over the last decade, the NAC-USA district in collaboration with the New Apostolic Church International, has implemented an ongoing policy of geographical efficiency, self-responsibility and independence. The results have been quite positive. We have witnessed the birth of the new District of East Africa comprising the countries of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania under the leadership of District Apostle Lubasi. This planned transition was conceptualized by retired District Apostle Freund and completed in 2012.

Likewise, the responsibility for the Pacific Island countries of Samoa and American Samoa was transferred to the district of Australia. This transition made sense given their geographic location. The same is true for the UK which was given into the care of Northern Germany.

Currently, the NAC-USA district includes congregations in 5 countries of South America, all of Central America as well as islands within the Caribbean with the exception of Cuba. District Apostle Helper John Fendt supports 6 apostles within the South and Central American areas. Apostle Karl Orlofski cares for congregations within the Caribbean islands as well as Guyana. Apostle Thomas Schmidt and Bishop Manfredo Stegmann care for our brothers and sisters in Mexico and Belize.

Reprint of Summer 2013 Vision Newsletter

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

Reprint of Summer 2014 Vision Newsletter

Sustainable Structure

Success Story

A NEW DISTRICT IS FORMED...

The history of the work in New York among Chinese-speaking people began on Sunday, February 11, 1968. On that date, the first ever Chinese translated service was held in the Uniondale church -- held by the late Evangelist Ray Strang, and translated sentence by sentence by his barber at the time, Brother Jackie Chan. Through the hard work of many brothers and sisters, and through the receptive hearts of many God-fearing Chinese people, 58 souls could be sealed on August 17th, 1969. By that time, services were being held in Chinese in both Uniondale on Long Island and in Chinatown, in the heart of Manhattan.

In November 1970, the first Chinese-born minister -- Deacon Ng -- was ordained into that ministry. Sadly, the Lord called him home only two months later, in January 1971. Eight years after Deacon Ng's ordination, the first Chinese-born priest was ordained, our present-day Evangelist Leung. Since those early beginnings, two more congregations have been established, and the newly-created New York Chinese District consists of four congregations, located in Chinatown, Flushing (Queens), Westbury (Nassau County) and Amityville (Suffolk County). Each of the congregations has its own unique characteristics, but in all congregations there is life and growth; there are over 350 registered members in these four congregations, and there are routinely 30 or more guests attending services on a Sunday morning district-wide.

What makes the New York Chinese District unique? Each service is translated, sentence-by-sentence, into Chinese, either Mandarin or Cantonese, depending on the members present. And the Lord's Prayer is spoken twice in each service -- once in English, and once in Chinese. Adopting this approach to the Lord's Prayer has allowed all of our members to better appreciate the value of the Absolution and Holy Communion, and draws us together in a wonderful way. Our Chinese-speaking priests receive a translated copy of the Divine Service Guide. In our New York Chinese District we also focus on two special events during the course of the year that are not celebrated elsewhere: we always have a big fellowship for Chinese New Year, and a big guest service for the Harvest or "Moon" Festival that occurs in the fall of the year. Our orchestra is growing and thriving, and our overall music program recently received a great boost with the addition of a new Chinese-based hymnal.

The New York Chinese District also strives to support Chinese-speaking congregations in New England, New Jersey and Chicago.

2014 HIGHLIGHTS

“...different tools, methods, and workers, are needed for different phases of building God’s temple but it still remains according to the plan of God... we are fighting and praying to make sure that the will of our Lord Jesus is done in His work.”

-Chief Apostle Schneider, Niagara Falls Canada, 2013

This quote from the sermon of our Chief Apostle is an excellent starting point for our first Vision article of 2014. As our journey towards congregational health and growth continues across the NAC-USA district, we are happy to report progress toward our goals in a number of areas. But before sharing our report, it is good to reflect on the words of our Chief Apostle and remind ourselves of why we are “stepping forward” so decisively.

We are in a different phase of God’s plan, but it is still His plan. It is our daily task to fight and pray to understand the will of the Lord Jesus firstly within our individual lives and then collectively within the direction of our church. For this we engage the constant direction of the Holy Spirit. But the direction of the Holy Spirit is incomplete within our lives unless we are sufficiently courageous to take the action and make the changes that transform us. We must be equipped with the tools and methods that are right for this phase of God’s plan and likewise, we must emerge as workers and disciples for Christ.

So as we take the next steps of our journey together in 2014, let us be reminded of our goal: We must build healthy, growing congregations where we are prepared for the return of Jesus. Our objectives leading us to this goal remain the same:

- To improve the quality of our divine services.
- To improve the quality of our pastoral care.
- To create a culture of discipleship and continuous learning; how to live and lead like Jesus Christ.
- To create a sustainable structure where all members serve each other and edify the Body of Christ with their spiritual gifts.

We are happy to share progress in two key areas that will impact our ability to reach these milestones. The first area is the creation of flagship congregations and the second area is the new direction of our midweek experience.

New Congregations

As previously described in past editions of the Vision newsletter, the creation of flagship congregations is an intentional reversal of our past expansion into small decentralized locations. Where possible, we are creating new congregations of strength and scope via the union of existing ones. The new congregations are centralized and bring the maximum number of members together on the Sunday divine service as is possible. The intent is to enhance the experience of preaching, music, worship, and Holy Communion with Jesus Christ for every member and age group. The larger numbers also enhance the possibilities for meaningful pastoral care among our key age groups of children, youth, young families, and seniors. The concept of an enhanced community of believers reflects the teaching of our Chief Apostle in his recent sermon in Miami: "We want to be saved together."

The formation of a flagship congregation is a huge and exciting ongoing process. It requires much planning and preparation to ensure that the new congregation reaches its full potential. Most of the preparation involves the wonderful personal journey of the members to explore their calling and purpose within the Body of Christ and then to come together to form a new congregation that has the power and resources to more effectively transform lives to Jesus. Some of the preparation revolves around a new building as you will see in the accompanying photos.

In January, 2014 a number of new flagship congregations were dedicated.

Woodbury, New York: The new Woodbury congregation is located on Long Island, NY. It was formed by the union of the Bayside, Dix Hills, St. James, and Uniondale congregations. Currently, 250 members attend on a Sunday morning. There are some unique attributes of this location.

- *Business park location:* The church was built within a nontraditional location conveniently located at the intersection of major expressways. Businesses within the office park employ over 10,000 people during the work day hours.
- *Day time utilization/conference center:* The attractive new building has multiple uses. In addition to our worship and teaching space, the facility has extensive conference center and office capabilities to allow us to interact in a positive way within the local community as well as provide the opportunity for additional daytime utilization.

Chicago (Schaumburg): This new congregation was created by the union of six existing Chicago congregations. Currently, 300 members attend on a Sunday morning. The congregation gathers in a leased facility also within an office park. The open configuration has been converted to separate worship and gathering space. The offices have been converted to Sunday school classrooms, music rooms, and a dedicated youth space. The entire facility is located on one floor with ample room for gathering and fellowship. All landscaping, washrooms which are in a common space, maintenance and snow removal is cared for by the landlord.

Ann Arbor, Michigan: Likewise, the new Ann Arbor congregation dedicated leased space within an office park on January 5th. It was formed by the union of 3 congregations. The new congregation has also converted open space to an interesting configuration where 120 members gather on a Sunday morning.

New Midweek Experience

Now it came to pass when Jesus finished commanding His twelve disciples that He departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities. (Matthew 11:1)

In addition to the formation of flagship congregations, the district began its first steps in January 2014 toward a new midweek experience for all congregations. Where the Sunday divine service experience is all about the power of preaching within a central location, the new Midweek Experience is all about teaching and bringing the church closer to its members and their communities. It is an intentional effort to equip our brothers and sisters to engage and emerge as disciples of Jesus Christ.

To understand the direction of the new midweek experience, we must compare it to the Sunday Divine Service. Both are necessary for our spiritual transformation, but they accomplish different things. When we experience them together, the Sunday's powerful combination of Word and Sacrament and the Midweek's more intimate moments of teaching and pastoral sharing, we will be better equipped to live and share a life of Christian joy, to edify the body of Christ and ultimately to prepare ourselves for the return of Christ.

Sunday Divine Service: So let's review the template for the Sunday Divine service. The Sunday experience is centralized. We have adopted a policy of bringing the maximum number of members from a geographic region together as we can into one location. The Sunday morning allows for this. For most members, it does not involve the same pressures as the workday week. Traffic is generally reduced making the commute easier.

By combining our members and their strengths, talents and spiritual giftedness, we maximize the quality of the experience for all. It revolves around organized communal worship coupled with a formalized sermon as prescribed by our New Apostolic Liturgy.

Within the sermon, ordained ministers authorized by an apostle of Jesus Christ and inspired by the Holy Spirit, preach the truth of God's Word that prepares the congregation for absolution and the joyous celebration of Holy Communion. The experience is a celebration of our love for God, His love for us and our love for one another. The celebration should be enhanced by the richness of the full congregation in all its manifestations: Preaching, music, worship, prayer, children, youth, young families, and seniors.

Finally, within the Sunday divine service we perceive the Holiness of God's Word. He is speaking to us and His Word is complete. It is one way communication. It comforts, restores and uplifts. It reveals the truth by which we can be changed and it brings us to repentance and reconciliation. Our Chief Apostle is quite adamant in his conviction; the preaching of the Word of God is required for the worthy celebration of Holy Communion.

The Midweek Experience: The importance of the new midweek experience is to connect or link the Sundays like a spiritual bridge. It will not attempt to duplicate the Sunday but should be the complement. The template for the midweek experience is found within the small intimate experiences of Jesus with His disciples as described within the Gospel. Here, the communication was two way. Jesus interacted with them. He responded to their questions and their need for clarification and support; often in a very personal way. He taught them.

This two way communication or interactive model also provides the opportunity for our members to share the promptings of the Holy Spirit and profess the effect of the Gospel within their lives. On this subject, the Chief Apostle was also very clear. In a recent sermon in Brisbane, Australia he said the following:

“It is my wish that we talk a little bit more about our faith...I wish that the New Apostolic Christians would talk more about God, about the deeds of God, about the grace for God, about our experience with Him, about all the things He does for us. Let us give the Holy Spirit more room in our conversations...”

..When we talk about the deeds of God... we learn what God has done for our brother and our sister. And then we realize how good, how kind, and how powerful God is and we feel a need to praise Him. Then our gratitude will grow...”

So in summary, it is our intent to dedicate the midweek experience to these very special opportunities:

- Teaching
- Prayer
- Pastoral support
- Profession
- Worship
- Sharing the Gospel with our community

You will find a more detailed description of the options available to each congregation on our website. Your rector will discuss these options with you and create a plan to implement them in your congregation. Please take the time to investigate them fully and embrace the experience with an open heart. In all new endeavors, faith, courage and effort are required to make the vision become a reality. Once again, *“we are fighting and praying to make sure that the will of our Lord Jesus is done in His work”*. - LRK

Reprint of Spring 2014 Vision Newsletter

