

THE COMMITTEE ON CONGREGATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

As we anticipate the gathering of our Annual Conference in Florence there is some good news to report. Our new church starts in Rock Hill and Beaufort are making progress in the establishment of two new congregations. Waters Edge United Methodist Church has been meeting since January of this year in the movie theater on Lady's Island. It seems that since we have launched this new faith community that doors have continued to open. It is exciting to see what God is going to do in that beautiful place in our state. Mel Arant is offering courageous service and with the help of a dedicated team of lay people is building up a dynamic body of believers.

Randy Madsen is developing a launch team for what will become Grace Community United Methodist Church. Because of the lack of available meeting space this group of believers has been meeting in the Lancaster County Community Center in the Indian Land Community on Highway 521. Again, possibilities abound and there are some very exciting options that have recently been identified. The work, interest, and support of the Reverend Sara White and Dr. Ernest Etheredge have been invaluable as we go through the process of establishing these two churches. This has been a team effort for which our conference can be proud.

This year we anticipate the appointment of new church planters in Bluffton in the Walterboro District and the Clemson Road area of the Columbia District. Dr. Tim McClendon and Dr. Etheredge have offered their insight and wisdom into identifying these two new church sites.

One of the realities of starting new churches is that it requires our Annual Conference to make a significant financial commitment. In 2006, \$856,578 was given by our churches for Congregational Development. While this is a very generous amount it will not allow us keep up with what we must do in starting new churches in those areas of our state that are exploding with growth. For us to meet the need to have more United Methodist pews in those fast growing communities we will need to make every effort to fully fund the \$1,050,000 that is budgeted for Congregational Development.

Another aspect of the work of Congregational Development is the shared partnership with Connectional Ministries in Natural Church Development. Laura Hill, the administrative assistant for Congregational Development, has processed 131 surveys. Churches across the conference are working on what it takes to be healthy.

This summer we will train 24 persons to be certified coaches through Coachnet. Dr. Bob Logan will lead the training event. Those 24 will then offer Coachnet certification for others who desire to serve as coaches in our conference. We are already beginning to see the fruit of how coaching will positively affect our churches.

As we continue to grow in our understanding of Natural Church Development and how the Eight Quality Characteristics are so important in the life of the church, we will experience the "All By Itself Growth" that occurs when our churches are healthy.

It is a great joy to serve in ministry with the United Methodists of South Carolina. May we continue to do our very best, and trust God to do the rest.

Rusty Taylor, Director