

Congregational Development

2018 Report to the Annual Conference

Presented June 5, 2018

By Rev. Richard Reams, Chairperson

Conference Committee on Congregational Development



Good morning, Bishop Holston and members of the South Carolina Annual Conference. My name is Richard Reams, and I have the privilege of serving as the chairperson for the Conference Committee on Congregational Development.

Our written and submitted report can be found on pages 36 and 37 of the pre-conference materials. I'll trust those to your reading and offer them to the record of the Annual Conference at the conclusion of our presentation.

Now, I'm a bit of a nerd and was quite intrigued by this year's Conference theme: "In mission from anywhere to everywhere." At first glance, it seems safe and innocuous. Sure let's say we're moving in mission from anywhere to everywhere. But if we really sit down and think through this call, it's a BIG DEAL. Churches all over our state believe they are called to be in mission "anywhere God calls them."

But that's safe. That's an indefinite mission. That's a mission that does not require any follow through because it could be anywhere and nowhere all at the same time. Our state is full of churches that are in mission "anywhere" and they never leave their pews because it's "safe" there.

Now, to commit to our call and fulfill Christ's mandate to be in mission everywhere, that's all-encompassing, that's all-inclusive, that's all-hands-on-deck, we all have to be all-in. That's a more excellent way. And, honestly, that way can be a little scary.

Our goal and purpose at Congregational Development is to resource you as you move from being in mission "from anywhere to everywhere."

Whether it's an existing church grant, Leadership Academies, MissionInsite training, restarts, revitalizations, or a brand new church plant, we exist to give you the tools to engage in mission from the "abstract anywhere" to the "concrete everywhere" that exists in your own backyard.

Rev. Sara White is going to tell you a bit more about some of those resources we have available to you, your leadership and your church....

[Sara leads conversation about Administration, Appreciation, MissionInsite, Resource Table, Grant Application, Clergy Cohorts, etc.]

[Richard intros video]

Those resources are equipping churches to be in mission from anywhere to everywhere! From new church starts and satellites to funding and seeding existing ministries to a brand new multi-ethnic

partnership and worship service, this has been an exciting year when it comes to living out our calling! And instead of me standing up here and rattling off statistics and stories, we'd like to share with you a brief video highlighting some of the ways your dollars have been at work in changing the world, one life at a time!

[Congregational Development Video]

So what keeps us from moving from anywhere to everywhere? From the rubber hitting the road or putting teeth to our mission or whatever metaphor suits your fancy? Honestly, I think it's fear. I don't think we are that much different than a scared group of people in the desert who just sent some spies into the land that God has promised us.

We're all church folks and we know this story, right? Caleb comes back and says, "Let's go, we can do this!" But the others pipe up and say, "No, we can't! They're too big, and we're too small! They are the Nephilim and we're just mere grasshoppers..." And fear spread like a virus in the camp. It spread so much and so quickly that everyone wanted to go back to Egypt!

Now we preachers love to joke about a church's "Back to Egypt Committee," but are we willing to admit our complacency too? Are we willing to admit that we might not be pushing a trip back to Egypt, but we've allowed our narrative to be co-opted by fear?

Fears that sound like:

- 2019 is coming! 2019 is coming! What are we going to do? What's going to happen to our church? As if the destiny of the Kingdom of God is dependent on our ideas of organizational structure!
- NewSpring is just around the corner. Seacoast is so big. Grace has so many resources! Elevation is crossing state lines. How can we compare and compete with them? What are we gonna do? They're gonna take all our young people!
- No one comes to worship anymore. It's all those sports teams and their weekend practices and traveling tournaments. I remember when Sundays and Wednesdays were reserved for church. I just wish we could go back...watch it now...that's starting to sound like the Egypt committee...
- The Nones and Dones are growing and we don't know what to do! They speak a different language! They don't understand hymnals and doxologies and narthexes and sprawling sanctuaries! What are we going to do? The challenge is just so big.

If we're ever going to move our missions from anywhere to everywhere, then we're going to have to start living by faith instead of being paralyzed by fear.

Now I know we're up here to give a report and presentation, not to preach, so let me get back on track...

It breaks my heart to think how close they were in Numbers 13 to entering the land flowing with milk and honey. It breaks my heart to think how long they allowed their fear to dictate and trap them just outside of everything that God has promised and everything they needed. It also breaks my heart that so many of our churches are doing the same thing right now.

We are living in one of the most exciting and terrifying times in the church. Sociologists are saying we're in the midst of the next Great Awakening, this one just isn't necessarily overtly Christian. And it's been 500 years since the church last reformed and reimaged herself.

Some might say, we're in the middle of our own Numbers 13 moment and we have to choose. Fear or Faith. Anywhere or Everywhere.

We, as Congregational Development, exist to help you move from fear to faith, from anywhere to everywhere.

- Existing Church Grants are here and available to help fund new and innovative ministries. We're here to help sow extravagantly with you in your new ministry endeavors.
- We're putting together a pool of resources to connect pastors into leadership and coaching cohorts centered around common callings and settings. Satellites are daunting. Multi-layered, multi-ethnic worship and ministry is challenging. Small strong in the rural setting is quite different than large and urban. Restarts or mergers are unique animals themselves. You already know that and so do we. So we're putting together resources in partnership with the MAT team and Cabinet to resource various new ministry cohorts focused on topics just like this so we can learn a more excellent way together.
- I cannot say enough about the depth of information available at your fingertips through MissionInsite. And if you're not sure how to utilize it, talk to one of us and we'll get a training set up maybe for your church, your District or just a group of interested pastors and laity.
- And if your church is working through the Forward Focus or you are one of the Forward Focus leaders, don't be a stranger! We'd love to help resource you and dream new dreams about what could be in your particular context!
- If your leadership team, whether you call it a Council or Admin Board or COM, if you're looking for resources and vocabulary to challenge your fears and inspire your faith, reach out to me or Sara or your District Committee on Congregational Development. One of our major goals is to simply be that resource for you on the local level, to give you the tools you need in your context to stand up to the "Back to Egypt Committee," to be strong and courageous.

We exist to help you move from fear to faith, from anywhere to everywhere. That is the business we have been in over the last 12 months as you can see from just those few examples.

What about you? What are you doing? What is your church doing? What can it be doing? Let's dream big. Let's strive for that more excellent way. Let's be absolutely sure that these themes are not just clever platitudes for a few days of conversation but a lifestyle in our respective ministries.

Because friends, our God is big enough. Bigger than any Nephilim. Bigger than any fear. Big enough to push even a group like us in mission from anywhere to everywhere.