



December 3, 2015

Dear Central Conference Churches:

The privilege is once again mine to bring you greetings from the Staff and the Executive Board of the Central Conference; as you meet for your congregations Annual Meeting. We are deeply grateful for your faithful support of our common ministries here in the Central Conference.

I am pleased to say that we are experiencing growth in the Conference in both attendance and also in the number of confessions of faith made in our churches. We continue to see growth in our planting of new churches. At the same time, we have seen a significant number of our churches take advantage of ministries that we now offer in church renewal and revitalization including having six (6) churches that participated in "Navigate," one of our church vitality pathways. In addition, the growth in diversity and inclusiveness in our Conference Churches has been significant.

We will face the challenges of this coming year in faith, because we are called to be people of faith. And I still believe that God can do far above anything we can ask or think. I believe that we will be able to find ways to reduce expenditures but yet continue to provide those services that support the ministries we provide to you. We will continue to make every effort to connect with you and to be of service to you. We will continue to plant new churches and we will continue to work with you in your effort to be a healthy missional church through our revitalization efforts.

I am excited about our Annual Meeting in April 2016, which will be held at First Covenant Church in Iron Mountain, MI. I ask that you please remember to elect your delegates at your Annual Business Meeting.

Our ministry is first and foremost to be one of support to our member churches. And we thank God for the good ministry that is taking place all over this Conference! Please know that we are here to offer our support in any way possible and that you continue to be in our prayers as you move into a new year of challenge and opportunity.

Your Brother in Christ,

Rev. Jerome Nelson
Superintendent



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Our Convictions

Part 1: We affirm the centrality of the Word of God.

Jerome Nelson is the Superintendent of the Central Conference of the Evangelical Covenant Church



In the Central Conference, you can still hear someone ask the question, "Where is it written?" And that is because, we still hold the view that: "the Holy Scripture, both the Old and the New Testament is the Word of God and the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct."

We affirm that the Bible is the Word of God and the Word of Truth. It is the message of God to humankind. It reveals that the evil that is in the world today is the result of unbelief; that it is the result of the self-will of lost individuals who are blinded by Satan and who are living in sin; that it is the result of humankind's disobedience to the commands of a Holy and all-wise God.

We affirm that the Bible is the only book that can give a satisfactory explanation and a clear understanding of the cause and the meaning of the turmoil and the fear of these troubling times; and it is the only book that can give the remedy for this turmoil and fear. It is the only book that reveals Jesus Christ, the Savior of humankind.

Contrary to the belief of some, the Bible is not a magic charm, fetish or a thing that will work wonders by its very presence without any engagement with it. The Bible does not claim to be any such thing. But it does claim that if one will study and practice it that it will work wonders in the life now and in the life after. It will not benefit anyone by its mere presence any more than a spring of cool water to a thirsty person in the desert will benefit them if they refuse to drink from it. And neither is the Bible a book that conforms to the tastes, customs, or habits of any one group of people, or for any one age or period of time. It is a book to which all people in all ages can conform, and yet retain their own peculiar customs and habits that are not sinful and contrary to the will of God.

The Bible is God's inspired revelation of the origin and destiny of all things. It is the power of God unto eternal salvation and it is the source of present help for body, soul, and spirit (Romans 1:16, John 15:7). It is God's will and testament to humankind in all ages, revealing the plan of God for man here and now and in the next life to come. It is the record of God's dealings with humankind; past, present, and future. It contains God's message of eternal salvation to all who believe in Christ and of eternal damnation to those who rebel against the Word of God.

The Bible contains the mind of God, the state of mankind, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts binding, its histories true, and its decisions immutable. It should be read to become wise, believed to be saved, and practices to be holy. It contains light to direct you, spiritual food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. Christ is its grand subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end.

Dwight L. Moody, when he was asked from whence he had obtained such lasting power and strength in his life, said, "I have power insomuch as my soul is saturated with the word of God."

Bible Study

2 Timothy 2:15; 2 Timothy 3:16

Because God will examine what kind of workers we have been for him, we should build our lives on his Word and build his Word into our lives. It alone tells us how to live for him and serve him. The Bible is not a collection of stories, fables, myths, or merely human ideas about God. It is not a human book. Through the Holy Spirit, God revealed his person and plan to certain believers, who wrote down his message for his people.

Questions:

1. What happens to believers who ignore the Bible?
2. What is required in order to be able to understand and explain the Bible to others?
3. Who were the Scriptures inspired by?
4. What are the Scriptures good for?



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Two Day Workshop: How Goes Your Walk



Several members of Community Covenant Church in Menominee MI participated in a two day workshop October 2nd and 3rd entitled "How Goes Your Walk". The first evening consisted of the Spiritual Discipline of prayer followed by an understanding of how journaling provided a deeper meaning of self. The following day, participants were taught the various ways Spiritual Direction helps deepen their walk with the Lord and ended our time together in role play; Director - Directee Direction and Triads.

Pastor Tom Lock shared a couple of take always from the weekend; adding the links regarding the week of prayer to their website and the suggestion to use journals to pray was valuable and that it will become a regular part of his journaling time.



Several members were interested in learning more about becoming a Spiritual Director and the difference between Direction and Counseling.

By: Rev. Debbie Griffith Samuels



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Musing On the Acts: Part 3

It's hard to plan for what you don't know. Reading the later part of the first chapter of Acts, I see the apostles trying to determine what might be next. They were told to wait for the Holy Spirit.

Waiting is among the hardest challenges in our culture of instant gratification. Approaching advent we celebrate the challenge of waiting. I wonder if the apostles "waiting" in the book of Acts provoked some anxiety. How do they respond? They respond by getting busy. There is apostleing to be done. First order... Replace Judas. Two qualified men. (Of course they wouldn't acknowledge a woman in apostleship even if they shared the same qualifications. It just wasn't done.)

While preparing devotions for our Central Conference staff several months ago, I asked what they thought on this passage.

Question... If there are two qualified why not make the number 13 instead of 12? Yes, I get the correlation between the twelve tribes and the 12 apostles. The argument just doesn't convince me. Of course it's in the bible so it must have been the right thing to do. But I still can't help but muse on the possibility that institutionalism comes in subtle forms. We got comfortable with 12. Jesus chose 12 so that must be how many He wanted.

Both are qualified so let's cast lots, draw straws, play rock paper scissors, whatever it takes to get the right one.

Jesus said, just wait. What the passage tells us is that when they returned to Jerusalem and gathered there they "joined together constantly in prayer". That's a move we commend and recommend.

These are needy times of transition for the church. The anxiety calls us to get busy, strategize, and organize. But what would Christ's command for us to "wait for the Holy Spirit" look like in these days? How would we know when the Holy Spirit shows up?

The apostles were days away from an explosion of growth, three thousand. (Wonder how the 12 leaders were working then?) God was preparing them for what they didn't see coming.

Is God preparing the church these days for what we don't see coming? I wonder.

Application: Many churches are being challenged to divide leadership meetings into three parts. First... How do I see God working in my life? Second... How do I see God working in and through the church since we last met? Third... What decisions do we need to make to resource what we see God doing in and through our church?

Finally... Pray.

By: Rev. Peter Sjoblom



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Dinner with the Central Conference Church Planters at Midwinter

Are you interested in learning more about church planting in the Central Conference? Is there someone in your church who is discerning a call to church planting? During Midwinter, the church planters will have a dinner and we want to welcome anyone who is interested in learning more about planting. Please email David Swanson and he will send more information as we get closer to the date.

By: Rev. David Swanson