



central conference of the evangelical covenant church

JULY 2016



From the Superintendent:

"LOOKING BACK, AS WE MOVE FORWARD"

LOOKING BACK, AS WE MOVE FORWARD, will be the theme and focus of the Central Conference Annual Meeting next year in April 2017. We'll be looking back over the past twenty years (1997-2017), as we consider important movements, actions, historical events, and other milestones that have helped to create the Central Conference as we know it now. We will also explore those things that have and will continue to prepare us to move into the new future that God has prepared for us to enter into.



My third and final term as Superintendent will end next year and the delegates to our annual meeting will be electing a new Superintendent. This process begins in late August or early September of this year. The elected members of the Executive Board serve as the search committee. More details about the process will be forth coming.

So over the next 10 months, I will be using this space in the newsletter to share with you some of the things over the past twenty years that I believe might help to prepare us for our new future.

By: Rev. Jerome Nelson



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Christ Covenant Church Celebrates Important Milestones

Part 8: We are a hospitable conference.

Ramelia Williams is a Masters of Divinity candidate at North Park Theological Seminary and a Preaching Pastor at New Community Covenant Church in Chicago, IL.



When I think about the hospitality of God, I am reminded of the authentic welcoming hospitality offered to a stranger, late one Wednesday evening at a historical African Methodist Episcopal church in Charleston, South Carolina. Cynthia Hurd, 54, Ethel Lance, 70, Tywanza Sanders, 26, Rev. Clementa Pinckney, 41, Rev. DePayne Middleton-Doctor, 49, Rev. Sharonda Singleton, 45, Rev. Daniel Simmons Sr., 74, Myra Thompson, 59, and Susie Jackson, 87. These are the Charleston 9, nine African-American Christian hospitable human beings who were slain in a racially motivated mass shooting by a racist white gunman. The criminal responsible for this heinous crime later communicated his

hesitation to proceed with the demonic plan because of the hospitable and pleasant way his anticipated victims embraced him for the hour he joined them in Bible study. I find eerie parallel in Jesus explaining the guidelines for how His disciples are to engage people as they set out on a trial missionary journey. “Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you” (Luke 10:8). The hospitable embrace of the townspeople was to be a signpost of their authenticity, a people of God with whom they could feel safe and find rest among. The hospitality shown to the disciples by the townspeople would subsequently be met with blessings of truth and healing bestowed upon their community. But the radical hospitality of the Charleston 9, offered to the Judas among them at the table, instead brought brokenness and their demise. Likewise, I am reminded the radical hospitality of God, embodied in the life of Jesus also brought His demise.

While hospitality is mostly a benign proposition, it *can* be scary or dangerous, but it’s necessary. To increase the attendance numbers on the church roll? Quite the contrary, hospitality is necessary; “to bear witness to the hospitable God to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). It’s necessary because we can’t establish a Church that unifies every tribe, every nation, and every culture if we will not welcome others into our spaces of vulnerability.

We might be tempted to consider the Charleston 9’s vulnerable actions unorthodox hospitality. We may render them a good example of why we ought not radically welcome strangers we don’t know and trust into our churches, homes or lives. But in the early church, this would not have been seen as unconventional. Gracious hospitality to “the other,” one of a divergent social class, different ethnicity or economic standing, was the mark of the early Christian whose heart and life had been changed by a Christ encounter. Boldness about their faith and exemplifying the radical love and hospitality of Jesus was a well-known life threatening risk. The black church has

likewise often risked being a target of racial hatred. But its arms of love and welcome remain open, through slavery and Jim Crow and segregation and cross burnings and lynchings and police brutality and racism...reminiscent of the vulnerable open arms of Jesus outstretched on the cross. Theologian Amos Yong penned it this way, “Christian mission is the embodiment of divine hospitality that loves strangers, to the point of giving up our lives on behalf of others as to be reconciled to them, that they might in turn be reconciled to God.”

The Charleston 9 presents a model for our reconciliation in the coming kingdom of God. They point our hope towards a Revelation kingdom with jeweled walls, a tree of life with succulent fruit and kingdom gates that are never shut and locked. Security video clips from the day of the attack reveal the villain entering the church through an unlocked side door. Revelation reads, “On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (21:25, 27). This is a picture of a kingdom where there is no threat of danger to the divine hospitality of God being offered openly and freely to all. The Charleston 9 provides a model of this future hope we can live into as Christians.

Bible Study

Hospitable Hearts

I did a lot of travelling this summer. As a student on a strict budget, it was imperative that I depend on the hospitality of family and friends in order to enjoy as many trips as I did. Without their gracious hospitality that provided local travel, food, bedding and warm showers, I could not have afforded so many trips. None of these hosts welcomed me with a sense of obligation. Instead, each of these hosts invited me as guest and received me in their home to share time and space with them for a few days. Hospitality is about making space for others in your life. To welcome others this way costs you something. It can cost you time, attention, food, patience, discomfort, inconvenience and interruption to your normal routine.

Jesus’ ministry in the earth placed Him quite often in the position of guest to numerous hosts, including Mary’s womb and a borrowed tomb. He was accustomed to depending on the hospitality of others as was typical in Jewish culture. Jesus even instructed the disciples to depend on welcoming hospitality in the places where He was sending them to minister to the people (Luke 9:1-6; 10:3-9). The hospitality of the welcoming host was to be a sign that this was a place they were called to bless the people with truth and healing miracles. Theologian Amos Yong said, “Those who welcome Jesus into their homes become, in turn, guests of the redemptive hospitality of God.” The hospitable heart is necessary to extend authentic hospitality to others.

One way that we define the Central Conference of the ECC is as a hospitable people. What does it mean to live fully into that part of our identity? Are we willing to sacrifice in order to extend a radical welcome that exposes the lavish hospitality of God? Let’s look at 2 passages of Scripture that can give us deeper insight into the heart of people that offer this kind of lavish hospitality.

Mary and Martha: Luke 10:38-42

The Good Samaritan: Luke 10:25-37

A major theme of the Gospel of Luke is that acceptance of “the other” is an indication you understand the reality of the kingdom of God and its goal to bring salvation to the masses, not just a select few. Through Jesus’ ministry we are introduced to an inclusive and welcoming faith tradition. Luke shows us the willingness of the oppressed, foreigner and outcast to accept this alternative religious worldview more quickly than the dogmatic Jewish religious leaders. This book highlights one of the categories of outcasts by portraying the significant role women played in the life and ministry of Jesus against the backdrop of a misogynistic society. “The other” and the outcast are emphasized because of Jesus’ compassionate eye toward the sick and suffering, which He always sought to be near and heal. In the face of our sinful heart condition, which does not allow us to always instinctively welcome others in this way, Luke also exposes us to a theme of repentance; a humble turning back to God to realign our hearts with God’s will for us to live in authentic community.

Living in authentic community was difficult for Jews and Samaritans who had deep disdain for one another. Samaritans were considered Jewish “half-breeds,” being born from the union of Gentiles and Jews that inhabited Jerusalem during a time of exile. Authentic communal living was also a challenge for women who were treated like property more than complementary partners in life and ministry. It was shameful for women to be taught, especially by a rabbi as he was teaching other men. Jesus welcomed individuals His societal context determined didn’t deserve to be welcomed. His heart of compassion compelled Him to welcome them.

Questions:

1. In the story of the Good Samaritan, the lawyer expresses perfect knowledge of Scriptural law. But Jesus communicates that more is required. What is the more that is required as expressed in verses 28 & 37? How does this contradict what Jesus allows in the Mary/ Martha passage in verse 39? How do you reconcile what Jesus intended His audiences to understand by these seemingly mixed messages?
2. The hospitality of God should be evident where the truth of the Gospel is being preached. How and by whom is the hospitality of God displayed in the Good Samaritan passage? How and by whom is the hospitality of God displayed in the Mary/Martha passage? In what ways do you display the hospitality of God in your life? In what ways does your church exhibit the hospitality of God beyond the church community?
3. Look up Psalm 27:4 and note how it relates to the “one thing” Jesus emphasizes in Luke 10:42. How does this further explain the “one thing” Mary chose? How does this relate to the hospitality of God?
4. Look up Matthew 9:36 and note how it relates to Luke 10:33. What does this teach you about the motivation of hospitality?



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Mending the Soul



Mending the Soul 2-day Facilitator Training sponsored by New Community Covenant Bronzeville and Women Ministries' AVA was an amazing success! We had 10 males, most of whom are pastors, to attend, acknowledging the reality that abuse is not just a woman's issue. We had participants from Covenant churches as far away as St. Louis, MO and South Bend, IN.

26 participants were trained to begin small support groups to serve abused persons in their ministry contexts. They participated in small group discussions, engaged abuse narratives and in a small amount of time built a safety and trust in community that allowed the freedom to discuss sensitive issues of pain and abuse. We are anticipating good news from these new facilitators about how God is using them to bring healing to their communities. Please keep these 26 individuals in prayer as they embark upon this new ministry.

By: Ramelia Willams



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Glory Comes in All Sizes

I'm fascinated by the story of Ezra and the building of the temple in Jerusalem. The narrative in the 3rd chapter talks about the foundation being laid. Once the foundation was laid the priests donned their vestments, and with trumpets and cymbals led a celebration because, "the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid."

All Ezra reports is that the Levites and elders from families who had seen the former temple wept aloud when they saw it. Ezra leaves us guessing as to the reason for the weeping. Haggai suggests that the weeping was because the former temple was significantly larger in their memory. It was to them a sign of diminishment. The trajectory did not seem hopeful.

Often, a block to our own vitality, can be found living in our romanticized memory of past success. The church hey-day of crowded pews and passionate preachers leave a precious memory that becomes unattainable for the following generations. Every new venture is imprisoned by the memory.

But for the remnant that mourned, the new generations had appreciation for the establishment of the new foundation. They shouted for joy. They sang and celebrated with energy and courage. The foundation of the Lord's house had been laid.

Haggai reminds the mourners of their sorrow, "doesn't it seem to you like nothing?" Delivering a word from God he adds, "The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former." "And in this place I will grant peace."

Do you hear the word of the Lord? "The glory of this present house will be greater?" Do we believe this? Do we have reason to? The world that Ezra returned to was a different world than they left. The world that faces our congregations these days is also different than what we experienced 4 decades ago.

Interestingly enough, from a distance the noise of celebration and the noise of distress could not be differentiated. All those who heard the noise from far away knew was, "something is going on." Could it be the Glory of God?

By: Rev. Peter Sjoblom



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The Central Conference, New Zion Covenant Church and School District 205 in Dolton, Illinois



The Central Conference, New Zion Covenant Church and School District 205 in Dolton Illinois partnered to bring a water borehole to the girls section of school campus of Zorko in Ghana West Africa. As the representative from the Central Conference, I along with Pastor Lance Davis and LaNiece Flagg from New Zion travelled to Zorko in the northern part of Ghana for the

Commissioning Ceremony on Monday, June 6th 2016. We were greeted by the Head Master of the school, the President of the PTA, several political officials, and over 800 students from the school. What a gift it was to see so many excited for water, something we in the United States tend to take for granted.

Our partnership ministry goal is to bring another borehole for the boys section of the school campus of Zorko, plant the first Central Conference Covenant Church in Ghana West Africa in this community and bring water boreholes to many of the other water deprived areas of Ghana.

If you are interested in making a donation to this ministry initiative in Ghana West Africa, please contact Rev. Debbie Griffith Samuels at the Central Conference office for more information.



By: Rev. Debbie Griffith Samuels



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2016 CMJ Ministry Grant Committee

The 2016 CMJ Ministry Grant Committee reviewed 17 ministry grant requests for outreach ministry initiatives from Conference Churches which totaled over \$25,000.00. Some of the wonderful ministry initiatives included: Writing Camps for Youth, Community Outreach Dinners and Breakfasts, Prison Ministry, Health Fair partnerships, etc. Grant funds and or notification of Grant Awards will be received by July 20, 2016

By: Rev. Debbie Griffith Samuels

Covenant Community Bible Experience

The Evangelical Covenant Church is excited to announce a Covenant-wide effort launching in 2016 to be "People of the Book" together! We encourage you and your church to join us on an unforgettable journey-to reignite our passion for the Scriptures.

[Learn more at http://cbe.covchurch.org/](http://cbe.covchurch.org/)

Impresione <http://www.covchurch.org/cbe-spanish/> para español.

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