

Bishop's District Night Presentation

-Fall 2009

- I. At the Battle of Manassas on the 2nd Battle of Bull Run, Union General George Steadman addressed his troops with this dismal word:

"Gentlemen, I want you to fight vigorously and then run away. As I am a bit lame, I am going to begin running now."

Lame, hurt, and lacking in self-confidence, Steadman began his retreat before the battle ever began.

As I stand before you tonight, I want to make some very clear professions to you:

- I am a hopeless romantic.
- I am an eternal optimist, a glass half-full kind of guy.
- I have been born and raised in the church. It is all I have ever known and all I ever hope to be associated with.
- I am a life-long United Methodist. My parents are lay persons who taught me how to appreciate, embrace and live out my theology as a United Methodist Christian.

As I stand before you tonight, I also want to make some very clear confessions:

- I've been seriously wondering about us? I believe that we in the United Methodist Church are coming seriously close to losing our swagger. In other words, "Are we retreating or advancing?"
- I am nearing the point of wondering whether or not our church can make the necessary transitions to be a vital force in the 21st century. Much of that is based on some trends that appear to be dominating our landscape.
 - The amount of time the cabinet deals with problems rather than possibilities.
 - Issues related to buildings, traditions, human power struggles rather than matters of the spirit.
 - A leaning upon our own resources/power rather than bold moves of faith that demonstrate our faith in God.
 - A serious move toward independence rather than a clear understanding and appreciation for the interconnectedness that makes us strong.
- Like a Union General facing a critical battle, it appears that we are retreating because we are a bit lame.

- II. We are somehow convinced that the way we are doing things is the right way to approach our ministry. But the statistics are not bearing themselves out:

III.I share these statistics in this manner because we are at a point in our work that we have to begin to look at how we are impacting a region for Jesus Christ. It cannot nor should not be about one church – it should be about our work together.

Something is not working. What would YOU do?

18 months ago our denomination made a critical decision designed to impact the denomination with a positive, focused approach to ministry. This decision was made for two critical reasons:

- 1) The denomination realized that it was failing in the area of “making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” That failure was, in part, due to a lack of focus. For years we had a quadrennial emphasis – every four years a different issue. But in 2009, we are unable to solve some of the critical issues facing our church internally and our culture externally in a brief four year period. If we are going to transform the world for the sake of Jesus Christ and the mission he set forth, we have to:
 - a. Realize that what we are currently doing isn’t working, and
 - b. Organize ourselves around workable solutions, and
 - c. Get focused.
- 2) The denomination also realized that there were issues which were surfacing that were dividing us every time we gathered. Instead, we wanted to rally the church around some areas of emphasis that we all could agree upon.

For that reason, the General Conference approved Four Areas of Focus.

Developing Principled Christian Leaders for the Church and the World

(Leadership Development)

Creating New Places for New People

(Starting new congregations & revitalizing existing ones)

Fighting Poverty

(Engaging in Ministry with the Poor)

Stamping out the Killer Diseases

(Global Health Initiative)

And, in Western Pennsylvania, we have added a fifth area of emphasis, not as an add-on but as a necessary response to a critical issue facing us in this Annual Conference & in our culture:

Dismantling Racism *(Creating a Culture of Inclusivity)*

Now, whenever things like this happen, one of the first perceptions is “here we go again, another top down program from the hierarchy.” I’ve thought about this – when I was a pastor there were several things I did to bring vitality to my congregations and to own up to Jesus’ call to “Make Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World.”:

- A) I worked tirelessly to develop leadership. From the day I arrived in every congregation I was working for my departure. Why?
 - a. I did not desire a pastor-centered church.
 - b. I believed that every baptized Christian is called to ministry.
 - c. I believed that every local church had an ordained minister hidden just waiting to be called.
 - d. I believed that the best evangelists in the world are the laity – they just needed the tools/resources/and enthusiasm to invite people into the fellowship of the church.

That’s Leadership Development

- B) I worked to provide diverse opportunities for people to hear and respond
 - a. New worship services
 - b. Cell groups
 - c. Bible Studies
 - d. Storefront church

And I wanted to bring joy, enthusiasm, and a clear invitation to discipleship in each of those settings.

That’s starting New Congregations & Re-vitalizing Existing ones

- C) I wanted to provide a way for our church to be connected in significant ways to the community. This involved things like ecumenical relationships but it also meant engaging with the poor. Food pantries, after-school latchkey programs, housing, and inviting the poor to experience the same invitation to Christ that everyone else received were staples to our vitality.

That’s engaging in Ministry With the Poor

- D) I came to believe that the best way to focus a congregation on its own mission was to provide opportunities for the people of that church to think beyond themselves in world mission – relief for those who were victimized by disaster and engagement with a world in need of justice and equity.

That’s the Global Health Initiative

- E) I found out, all too well, that the culture drives our attitudes and actions. My job, as a spiritual leader, was to focus my congregation on justice, equality, and the ways of Jesus in all things. I came to believe that if we

were to consistently bear witness to the love of Christ in our lives we had to exhibit it with our actions in the places where we intersected with the world. The story of BJ Loudin and his racist jokes.

That's Eliminating Racism

F) You see, I didn't need the General Conference to send down four or five areas of focus. This is not just a top down dictate. These are vital areas of focus that can and should flow up from the people into a congregation and beyond. They are areas of focus that make us all participants in a revival of a "movement" within United Methodism that is absolutely essential if we are to position ourselves as a viable denomination in the 21st Century. They are, for me, the keys to transforming a church and re-positioning itself as a movement for Jesus Christ.

IV. As a result, the real questions we have to pose are:

- Do you and I have the drive inside, the want to, in order to really do it?
- Can we organize ourselves around our available resources?
- Can we find a way to cooperate with one another when our own resources are not enough to get the job done?
- Can we stay focused long enough to get the job done?

V. Here is an Illustration from Scripture: I Corinthians 12

¹²The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. ¹³For we were all baptized by^[c] one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

¹⁴Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. ¹⁵If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" ²²On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴while our presentable

parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

²⁷Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. ²⁸And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. ²⁹Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues^[d]? Do all interpret? ³¹But eagerly desire^[e] the greater gifts.

Paul uses a very clear illustration to make his point. The human body needs various parts in order for it to work properly. Does the body work best when it is separated into various parts OR do the various parts play their role, buy into the whole, and achieve the end result? When the human body takes the General George Steadman approach and retreats when a battle is impending, what happens? It dies. But when the body pulls together and plays off of one another, what happens? It lives and, as a result, remains one of the most significant miracles of life here on planet earth. How can the body function properly unless all the parts are included and work together?

Paul uses that illustration to make his point about the church. The church needs various parts for it to work properly. Does the church work best when it is separated into various parts OR do the various parts play their role, buy into the whole, and achieve the end result? When the church takes the General George Steadman approach and retreats when a battle is impending, what happens? It dies. But when the body pulls together and plays off of one another, what happens? It functions and, as a result, remains one of the most significant miracles of life here on planet earth. How can the church function properly unless all the parts are included and work together?

The real questions are:

- Do you and I have the drive inside, the want to, in order to really do it?
- Can we organize ourselves around our available resources?
- Can we find a way to cooperate with one another when our own resources are not enough to get the job done?
- Can we stay focused long enough to get the job done?

- VI. Let's look at another, more contemporary illustration. Let's take an issue that is very close to my heart and use it as an illustration.
- a. Here is the question: ***Do you really want to eliminate malaria as a killer disease?***
 - b. Here are the facts:

- i. Every year, 1 million people across the world die of malaria – 75% of those are children.
- ii. Every 30 seconds a child dies from malaria.
- iii. All of that happens from the bite of a tiny female anopheles mosquito.
- iv. And do you know the crazy thing? When it comes to the disease of malaria, we know how to prevent it.
- v. The justice issue is – why are we allowing innocent children to die every 30 seconds when we have the capability of preventing it?

The culprit is this tiny little insect called a female anopholes mosquito.

Now we have this thing called “Nothing But Nets.” Anybody heard of it?

- a. One of the keys in the elimination of malaria is putting children and families under a simple insecticide treated mosquito net.
- b. For nearly three years now we have been sharing the story of how a simple \$10 bill can buy a net and save a life. People just like you, young and old alike have been energized and involved by this simple message.
- c. And, as a result, we United Methodists have raised nearly \$8 million dollars for this cause.
- d. But you know what? Eliminating malaria IS bigger than we in this room can handle. It’s even bigger than 13 million United Methodists can handle. \$8 million dollars is not enough to eliminate the disease. It has done good, worked wonders, and made us feel good in the process. But it isn’t enough.

SO, we have joined forces with groups like the NBA, WNBA, UN Foundation, Measles Initiative, Major League Soccer, Exxon Mobil, the Gates Foundation, Orkin, the Jonas Brothers, and Sports Illustrated precisely BECAUSE it is bigger than any one of us. Each of these partners, from a variety of different venues, share a common goal -- Eliminating malaria. Together with these partners the “Nothing but Nets” campaign has raised nearly \$30 million dollars.

But you know what? Eliminating malaria is bigger than even these partners can handle. It’s not enough! It takes commitment from governments, and coordination from secular partners, and the building of delivery systems, and the training of personnel on the ground to do follow-up, all working together in a concentrated, coordinated, organized effort to beat a killer disease!

Recently I attended a meeting with Tony Blair who called together 40 faith-based leaders from across the world – Lutherans, United Methodists, Muslims, Jews, and

independents like Saddleback Church to urge us to find ways to work together to beat this disease. The world community is discovering that the most trusted delivery system in the world is the church. There is an effort underway to mobilize people of faith across the world in a humanitarian effort to show the world that we can work together to beat a killer disease. We are putting aside the things that separate us so that we can eliminate a killer disease and, in the process, say to the world that people of faith can back up what they say and truly make a difference!

You see, eliminating malaria is only possible when we generate power in partnerships – when the “body” uses its various parts to function as God intended! Sacred partnerships with other people of faith, internal partnerships with sister churches in this Annual Conference, secular partnerships with businesses and governmental officials. It takes commitment, coordination, training, follow-up, and determination.

What is so overwhelming to us in this room (50 have died since I started) is SO VERY possible when we yoke our resources in a concentrated effort to make a difference.

Dr. Steven Phillips, a malaria expert who works for Exxon Mobil puts it this way: “The malaria parasite is winning a war against humanity. It is winning because of humanity’s lack of organization. Malaria has been eradicated in somewhere around 10 countries. It has been eradicated in places where there is coordination and cooperation. It has not been eradicated in places where there is an absence of these mechanisms.”

That is the theory behind our church’s Global Health Initiative – one of the four areas of focus for our UMC. If we are to solve some of the world’s critical problems we have to have a comprehensive approach – an approach that coordinates distributions and sets priorities, one that strengthens existing delivery systems and channels appropriate resources into those systems.

- A mosquito net is a key, there is no doubt. But “Nothing but Nets” is only a foot in the door in our quest to eliminate malaria.
- The Question is: ***Do you really want to eliminate malaria?***
- If the answer is YES, then here’s how it works
 - It’s done by continuing “Nothing But Nets” but it’s making it “Nothing But Nets” PLUS:
 - The existing infrastructure needs strengthened – hospitals & clinics (like the interstate road system in the US). A net means nothing unless there is a trusted, well-equipped delivery system in place.
 - A wider web of infrastructure needs created – clinics closer to where the people are.

- Personnel have to put in place – traditional birth attendants who are trained to go and see if the mosquito nets are being used properly. A net means nothing unless it is effectively distributed AND its use is consistently monitored!
- STORY: A generator at a hospital in Liberia that does not function. Good intentions, poor coordination.
- STORY: A hospital in Liberia that is only a shell. One church's dream cannot be fulfilled alone. It cannot be solved in isolation or with independence.
- Christof Benn, the head of the Global Fund, an effort from the UN designed to coordinate health issues on the world scene puts it this way: *The Global Fund has been an attempt to truly “blanket” a country with attention. The goal has been to help the countries achieve the millennium goals. It's a very difficult approach – much more than just helping a clinic or a hospital.*
 - Positive illustration – Rwanda (55% reduction of malaria-related deaths because of a coordinated effort of sacred, secular, and government),
 - Tanzania (60% reduction of malaria-related deaths).

When we join our hands and hearts, a huge difference can be made. You know what this is? It is a word that Paul talked about in Corinthians. It's also a word that emerged we coined when Methodism was a movement that was spreading scriptural holiness across the land in England and in the US. You know what we are beating malaria with? It's called connectionalism. The very word many United Methodists are de-emphasizing and even working to eliminate is the word that is giving hope and life to the Global Health Initiative across the planet!

This is the theory as well behind our Zimbabwe Partnership here in this Annual Conference. At Annual Conference in June we agreed to establish a partnership with our sister United Methodists in Zimbabwe. This partnership is designed to be a two-way street. Not a partnership FOR Zimbabwe but a partnership WITH Zimbabwe. What does that mean? It means that there are ministries that are desperately needed in Zimbabwe:

- Strengthening of hospitals and clinics
- Distribution of mosquito nets
- Training of personnel
- Agricultural development/growing of food for hungry people
- Training for clergy and laity

Our goal is to mobilize as many of our 900 churches and 190,000 people as is possible in a concentrated, coordinated, organized effort to send work teams, medical teams, training teams, goods, and resources in an unprecedented effort to make a meaningful impact. We have to blanket this country in order to truly make a difference. It cannot be just at a hospital or a clinic. It has to be a country-wide approach. But you know what? Zimbabwe is bigger than Western Pennsylvania can handle, even with the mobilization of our people and resources. For that reason, we are joining forces with the United Methodists of the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference and the Mississippi Annual Conference to create a unified strategy for this “blanketing” approach. It’s an approach that mobilizes our Local Churches, yokes our resources with the gifts found in other Annual Conferences, with a concentrated focus on a target area and specific needs, that works together on the continent in a strategic approach which ultimately will enable us to say: MALARIA NO MORE! We are not retreating – we are moving ahead, advancing toward the ultimate goal!

Malaria is being squeezed, eliminated from the top down and the bottom up – Zimbabwe is at the bottom of the continent and we are being asked to help squeeze it out there as others work to squeeze it out in other places. And that strategy fits into the denomination’s Global Health Initiative as we become a partner with other Annual Conferences to strengthen our United Methodist presence and witness on the continent of Africa. And that strengthening fits into the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations and the partnerships with other faith-based organizations and makes us a major player in a concentrated, comprehensive, well-organized approach to beating malaria and dealing with HIV/Aids and tuberculosis. Tim Shriver, the head of Special Olympics and the Chairperson of the Center for Inter-faith Action says, *“Children in Africa don’t need us to keep talking. We need to shift our action from later to now.”*

But you know, if it’s a true partnership, there is still a missing component. Zimbabwe needs us – there is no doubt. But you know what? Western Pennsylvania needs Zimbabwe. But it’s not just what we are going to do FOR Zimbabwe – it’s what we are going to do WITH Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe needs medical, educational, and organizational resources. But do you know what Western Pennsylvania needs? We need a spark of evangelism, an igniting of methods by which we make disciples, a stoking of spirituality that will once again place God at the center of everything we are and do, and a fire that will spark us to once again believe that we can make an impact in our communities for Christ. SO, Zimbabwe will help us to train pastors and equip laity and motivate us with the pieces of ministry that they do so well.

It’s all about Drive, Organization, Cooperation, and Focus!

It’s partnership and connectionalism making a difference!

It's a realization that whether it's transforming the church or transforming the world it's bigger than any one of us. The problems besetting your local church are bigger than your local church. In all likelihood, there are only a handful of churches in your District that have the resources and the capability of dealing with the problems facing us in this region.

- We have to pull together to train leaders and discuss creative ways that we can invite people to consider ministry as a vocation.
 - Is your church pastor centered?
 - Is it dominated by a few people who have served for a long time?
 - What is your approach to developing new leaders?
 - What is the message you can provide that will help everyone sense that they are called into some form of ministry?
- We have to unite our forces to cause a wave of determination to flow among us in an effort to revitalize our churches
 - Do you want your church to be revitalized?
 - Are you willing to make the sacrifices necessary?
 - If so, let's unite and work on them together?
 - D.S.'s list of those willing
 - Let's look at:
 - A Concentrated effort to reach children and youth
 - Joint conversations on how we evangelize our communities
 - Training opportunities and forums of accountability that will hold us to the fire and keep us moving forward.
 - I've asked your District Superintendent to identify regions in this district where a new church could be planted – a place where new people can be reached with a new effort to give this region Jesus Christ. And what would it look like if:
 - We didn't see that place as a place of competition but a project we could all support together.
- We have to analyze and mobilize our ministry WITH the poor. Notice I didn't say FOR the poor but with the poor. It's not just about feeding and housing the poor (which needs to be looked at in every community in this district), it means inviting the poor into our fellowship, offering them Jesus as an alternative to their current lifestyle, and valuing them as equal partners as we continue our journey of faith (the Global Fund approach)
 - What are we doing in ministry FOR the poor?
 - What will we do in ministry WITH the poor?
- We have to realize that this world is getting smaller every day. And if we are going to live in this world we have to become responsible for our sisters and brothers around the world.

You may have noticed that I have talked about partnership and connectionalism but did not mention anything about "Mission Share." Maybe I should have. I never served a church that didn't pay its mission share. Never saw it as a tax – never has been a tax.

It's an opportunity to see the world beyond the walls of your congregation. It's a responsibility that owns up to our partnership to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with the world.

And, you may have noticed that I didn't mention a thing about "tithing." I testify to the joy of tithing. I celebrate the awareness that my resources are not my own, that God has created me, sustained me, blessed me, and forgiven me and that my spiritual life is dependent upon my ability to give myself away to my Lord, which includes my financial resources.

I didn't emphasize these two critical issues. Maybe I should have – because both tithing and Mission Share are about priority setting, investing in God's plan, cooperating with God's direction, and collaborating with United Methodist Christians all over the world in a concentrated effort to "Offer Them Christ."

I stand amazed at the power of people when they are motivated. Illustration: Growing of the Green \$500 on an altar – growing of the green – criticism that it's a waste – but amazed at a \$10,000 profit.

All of that is to say – we have to once again realize the power of being connected. Secular partners are seeing it and responding. Faith-based partners are witnessing it and testifying to its amazing impact. There's something about being connected that witnesses an amazing story of how different people from different places with different passions possessing different gifts can come together and change the world. The real issue is: Can it happen with us once more?

One day, Paul said to the church in Corinth:

¹²The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. ¹³For we were all baptized by^[c] one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

¹⁴Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. ¹⁵If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹If they were all one

part, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

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²⁷Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. ²⁸And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. ²⁹Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues^[d]? Do all interpret? ³¹But eagerly desire^[e] the greater gifts

Eagerly desire the greater gifts! What does that mean?

"It means, Gentlemen and Ladies, I want you to fight vigorously and keep on fighting. As we all are a bit lame, let us also begin running to Jesus for our strength."

May it be so!