

Report of the Assistant to the District Superintendent

Mid-Atlantic District Conference

October 5-7, 2022

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. Colossians 1:15-20 ESV.*

I find it amazing, encouraging and astounding that in the middle of his description of the supremacy of Christ; Paul puts “He (Christ) is the head of the body, the church.” Is His headship of the church so significant that it should be listed with such grand themes as creator, ruler of the spiritual hierarchy, pre-existence, resurrection and reconciliation? I hope that your response with me is a resounding YES! The church is that significant! With that idea now strongly implanted in your thinking, let’s look at the major areas of my responsibility for the Mid-Atlantic District.

Church Health and the Church Health Team (CHT)

Since my last full report in 2018; our District has declined from 54 to 44 official churches. This number reflects churches that are on the records as either developing, accredited, affiliated or church plants. Our collective (all our churches added together) attendance has declined from 3,684 to 2340...that is 1/3 of our people are no longer worshipping with us. Our collective evangelism numbers: that is new believers, have declined from 326 to 184 ...that is a 43% decline.

Given the weight of this reality, the observable decline in numbers and in the health of our churches, we have chosen as a District to enter a “redeveloping” classification. Under this reclassification our leadership has rewritten and redefined our mission as follows: The Mid-Atlantic District exists...

To advance Christ’s kingdom by increasing the number of thriving community-transforming churches, that are training and sending disciple makers across the district and the world to do the same.

This newly reworked statement gives all of us some tracks on which to evaluate and operate. Let me address some key areas by using some simple, yet fully measurable questions.

1. If your church were to cease to exist tomorrow, how would your community respond, or would they even notice? Who was the last adult from the community that your church engaged with, because they did know Jesus, who has now become a follower of Jesus? In what ways would you describe your church as "community-transforming"?
2. What does your discipleship path look like? Does it have a clear beginning, definable growth markers and a projected end result? Are your people attending classes only to grow in knowledge of Jesus or are they fulfilling the clear instructions of Jesus to reach your community with and for Jesus? In what ways would you describe your church as "training disciple makers"?
3. Can you create a genealogy list of discipleship in your church? What I mean by that is, I discipled this person, who then discipled this next person, who then discipled this next person. In this replication, who was the last person from your church family who was launched into ministry by your church family, whether in full time official ministry or as lay person sent into their own workplace? In what ways would you describe your church as "sending disciple makers"?

Though these questions may be tough, please don't underestimate their usefulness. If you are trying to figure out what to do based on your answers to these questions, please let the Church Health Team assist you and your leaders. There is no reason to try and evaluate your ministry on your own. There is no judgement in how we assist you. We just want to assist you to health. You might be asking, "How can you assist?"

Over the last 6 years, the Church Health Team has been trained in multiple assessment and coaching tools.

1. Every CHT member is trained in the Alliance backed assessment system called PEAK. PEAK uses an online assessment tool completed by your church family. This tool gives a snapshot of the health of the church in 9 major categories. The CHT can help your leaders see your current situation and then help you answer the right questions around those 9 areas. PEAK is now offering a 7-month coaching system that will follow an assessment. Since this coaching system has just now become offered, only 2 of the CHT have been trained in this, but the rest will be trained over the next 2 years. So far 4 of our MAD churches have participated in a PEAK assessment with 2 just about ready to begin. The costs for this assessment are around \$500. The National Office, through the regional Church Advance leadership has gifted 2 of these assessments already and is willing to assist other churches who wish to have PEAK performed at their church
2. Every CHT member is trained in the 18-month system written by our current Vice President, Rev. Terry Smith. The Changing Course Consultation (CCC) book and system works with your leaders to help you see how to change the direction the church is headed in a way that considers the community and existing church members. Changing Course Consultation will use a church assessment tool, like PEAK, as part of the process. Grace Community Church

has completed the initial 6 months of this process and will be working with our team for another year. There are 3 churches considering this process at the moment as well. The costs for CCC are around \$1,000 depending on location in relationship to the coaches. The National Office has also assisted with the costs of this process.

3. The District used Dr. Bill Hoyt's assessment system to consider our current health: we still can assist churches with this assessment system as well. I have led 3 churches through the "revisioning" portion of this system over the last 2 years. This full assessment system cost is closer to \$3,000.

Why is this important? We are ready to help you and your leaders evaluate whether or not your church is in a healthy position and, if not healthy, to begin to establish a plan that will move you to a place of health. Currently we have 5 churches that are classified as "redeveloping". We have at least 6 churches more that could be classified as "redeveloping". What this tells us is that approximately 23% of our established District churches see less than 30 people on a Sunday morning! They cannot fully financially support themselves! 23% of our churches have not yearly led 1 adult into a new relationship with Christ! (BTW 1 church was responsible for 38 of the 108 new believers I mentioned above, and their average attendance is 40)

Let me remind you that in Colossians 1:15 the church was significant enough to be included in Paul's list! Friends, we must humble ourselves enough to allow the family of God to help us improve our Church health.

#### Missions Mobilization Team (MMT)

GOOD NEWS!! Let's talk about our global reach! Is the church significant in her sending of international workers? In 2018: our total global team numbered 14 but we had 8 in the process of joining the team. Our team swelled to the size of 32 official IWs and has now settled down to 26 due to retirements, adjustments, and new ministry callings.

Our GCF giving has improved from \$742,652 all the way to \$848,566 in 2021. Our giving and sending has greatly improved! Perhaps this is due to the connection each of our churches have had with the 26 on our global team? We are more closely connected today than we were 4 years ago.

I believe we can track our connection increase through several reasons. The ones that have joined our global team have mostly come from our own churches and had served throughout District for 6-10 years prior to going abroad. The new tour system has shifted our focus more towards our own team members, meaning, OUR family returns to OUR churches to reconnect and share their vision. The new changes in funding have caused us to ask ourselves, "can my own family member continue to serve at the current funding level?" Lastly, technology and social media have enabled us to have immediate connection and contact with the IW with whom we are closest.

I need to take 1 moment to encourage each one to remember the Great Commission Fund. In the new funding system, we need to continue to give to the GCF while supporting our own International family. Our new system is a "both/and" system and not an "either/or" system. We NEED both in order for our entire team to remain fully supported in their area of service. Jonathan Thornton, who has consented to serve as our District Mission Mobilizer, is more than willing to help your leadership understand the new funding system and anything else missions related.

Though all of this is good news, I am concerned with one question, "Who will go this year?" I would like to challenge each person who reads this report to return to their church and present this question to your own leadership. We are working closely with the District Youth team to ensure that one of our IWs attends our District Youth Retreat for the sole purpose of challenging our teens to consider ministry either at home or abroad. When was the last time someone stood in front of your church and encouraged both the young and old alike to consider God's call to serve? Answering this question will raise the significance of the church's impact around the world.

#### Licensing, Ordination and Consecration Council (LO&CC)

If the church is significant enough to make Paul's list in Colossians, then we need to also address our District's process of leadership development. We have adjusted to several self-initiated changes in our Licensing, Ordination and Consecration processes. The changes seem to be working well. The National Office has moved the process from accreditation to ordination/consecration to be reported online. They are keeping the full database and we no longer keep these files in house. This means we must adjust to their system and way of doing things as best as we can.

As you experience the different venues of this Conference watch for the following people so that you can congratulate them on their ordination since my last report: Kamy Hanna (2019), Eddy Raymond (2019), David Chappell (2019), and Bruce Persons (2020). During 2021 Amy Simpson successfully passed her oral examination for the Christian Ministry Worker License. Congratulations to each of these incredible leaders.

#### CONCLUSION TO THE REPORT

The church IS significant. Christ is the head! We serve by leading others to follow HIM as we ourselves follow Him. As a District, there are many things to celebrate as we look back over the last 4 years! Yet, there are things to ponder and ask the Head of the Church to reveal His answers to us, as we strive to live into the incredible significance He has given to HIS church.

Thank you for allowing me to serve the District as we strive to advance Christ's kingdom by increasing the number of thriving community-transforming churches, that are training and sending disciple makers across the district and the world to do the same.

## THE POST REPORT – OR - NOT MY RESPONSIBILITIES BUT I HAVE TO SAY IT

As I travel from church to church and engage in conversations, many of them find their way to how the recent pandemic has caused most of the negative numbers listed at the beginning of my report. I would absolutely LOVE to have a discussion with you on this topic. So that you know, I disagree wholeheartedly with this idea that a pandemic caused our churches to decline. What I fully believe instead is that the pandemic revealed how truly ineffective our current way of doing church has become in our modern, changing culture. I will also argue that if we have returned to doing church like we were prior to the pandemic, we haven't learned a thing. How will you reach people for Jesus when the next pandemic hits? What are you putting into place now that will enable you to effectively transform your community WHEN culture trumps routine and tradition again? How have you changed your discipleship model to address isolation and separation? Let's talk about it.

Sincerely submitted for Conference 2022

*Ira Towns*

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