

March 6, 2017

To Green Country District Clergy & Lay Leadership:

Thank you for the many ways that you faithfully serve God through the church!!!

This year, the Green Country District will be focusing on helping each church create or improve their "Discipleship Paths."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: "Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ." According to the 2016 Book of Discipline the mission of the United Methodist Church is "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." This is all in conformity with the directive of Jesus:

"Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20

Unfortunately, this doesn't always happen as well as we all hope that it will. In spite of our strong desire and hard work we too often don't see many people become transformed disciples who can help make disciples. I believe that Gil Rendle and Susan Beaumont captured part of the issue when they wrote:

"Most congregations don't know what they produce. Leaders of congregations are more likely to have a good idea of what they 'do' (the activities of the congregation) than of what these activities are to 'produce.' Keeping people in the congregation happy so that they don't complain is not an appropriate product of ministry. More people participating in what we are doing is not necessarily a product of ministry. Yet it is hard for leaders to get more specific about what is to be produced in ministry, such as introducing a new generation to the faith, deepening the life of individuals so that their faith makes a practical difference in their daily living, or building a 'bridge' into the community and the larger world that will introduce new people to faith."

We engage in many activities and have lots of programs in our churches. Reggie McNeal had a good point when he suggested that it is desirable for us to make a shift from program development to people development. This is important for the sake of those who have not yet experienced the transformation that is possible through Christ as well as for our most mature disciples.

It is not my belief that each church should be just alike. We are all different and work in different contexts. The best approach for one church and community won't be the best for another. Every person who enters into a transforming relationship with God

through the salvation offered in Jesus is a unique individual and will come through a path that is in many respects uniquely their own.

I do believe that churches can help people on the journey. It is important that we are intentional. Gil Rendle and Susan Beaumont ask an important question, "What is to be different in this congregation, in this community, and in the lives of individuals in the next one to three years because of our call to ministry?" The question then is, "how do we get there?"

There are several ways that we will work together to do better in our efforts at making disciples during 2017. I am encouraging each clergy person and the lay leadership in our churches to read three books and engage in discussion. These books are:

Shift: Helping Congregations Back Into the Game of Effective Ministry
Dec 4, 2013 by Phil Maynard

Connect!: Creating A Culture of Relationships That Matter
Nov 16, 2016 by Phil Maynard

Membership to Discipleship: Growing Mature Disciples Who Make Disciples
July 13, 2016 by Philip Maynard

In addition to the discussions in our local churches, I am asking each of our Missional Areas to be a place where churches can help one another tweak the Discipleship Path that each local church uses. At the same time that our Missional Areas are continuing with their current activities and plans we can help each other with this.

Green Country District will be having our Lay Servant Training at Camp Egan on April 28th – 30th. As a part of helping with our 2017 emphasis we will be offering an Advance Class which will be a continuation of the H.O.P.E. (Hospitality, Offering Christ, Purpose and Engagement) workshops recently offered by the Oklahoma Conference. People can sign up online here:

<https://okumc-reg.brtapp.com/GreenCountryDistrictLayServantTraining2017>

The District will be holding a Discipleship Conference on Saturday, May 6th at Claremore FUMC. I am asking every clergy person to bring a team from their church for the event. We will be led by a married couple who are on staff at the Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas. A flyer which tells about the event is attached to this email and can also be found here:

http://www.greencountrydistrict.org/pdf/2017_Discipleship_Conference.pdf

It is possible to register online at:

<https://okumc-reg.brtapp.com/DiscipleshipPathwayConference>

A good preparation for and follow-up for this event would be to read the book authored by one of the presenters: Jesus Apprentice by Jeff Kirby

We will continue the conversation through the year as I will give churches an opportunity to in some fashion share their Discipleship Path at our charge conferences. This will also be a topic I want to discuss when I have clergy consultations in the fall.

I believe that there will be many positive results of our endeavors but what I anticipate that we will most be able to celebrate will be lives that are transformed and the impact this will have on the world. It is worth giving ourselves to.

Let's partner together and covenant to do everything we can to "make it so."

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rev. Emery L. Mason". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Emery L. Mason
Green Country District Superintendent

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