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"Take a deep breath . . ."

A message from your District Executive Minister

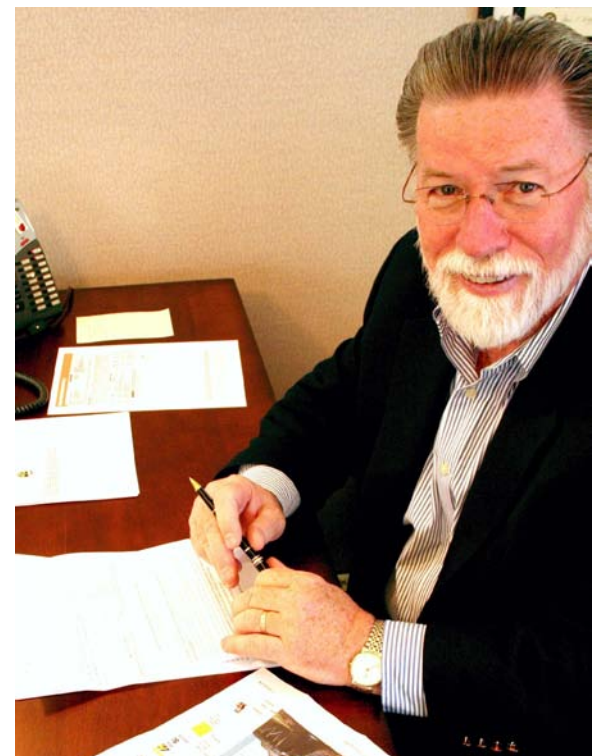
Take a deep breath. *Breathe in . . .* hold it, hold it, hold it....now slowly release the air and let your lungs contract. Now, take one more deep, deep breath. Hold it....and exhale. Now that Annual Conference is over we can all take a deep breath and relax. Hosting the 2009 Annual Conference was huge for the Pacific Southwest District (PSWD). And believe me, the countless volunteer hours of planning and preparation did not go unnoticed by many of us. There are lots of people who stepped up to help PSWD open our arms to welcome the Brethren from across the denomination. I heard many comments such as, "Be sure to thank your people for being such gracious hosts" and "I have never attended an Annual Conference with such nice people as PSWD folk" or "You all did a fantastic job of welcoming us to PSWD".

It is dangerous to begin naming the various people from PSWD who provided leadership but please allow me to try (forgive me if I missed you). Those persons providing major leadership were: **Sara & Bill Haldeman-Scarr and Ernie & Martha Snyder**, *site event coordinators*; **Karen Walters and Martha Snyder**, *hospitality center*; **Michael & Mike Wolfsen**, *information center*; **John Price**, *head usher*; **Don Shakster**, *chaplain*; **Stephen Reddy**, *choir director*; **Linda Williams**, *children's music director*; **Myrna Wheeler, Mary Kay Ogden & David Castenholz**, *registration*; **George Sparks**, *busses*; **John Davis**, *first-aid*; **Eric Davis**, *PSWD brochure & unity pin design*; **Dot Hess**, *event ticket sales & early evenings with the arts*; **Jeff Glass**, *multi-culture evening worship*. Age Group Leaders: **Annette Martin**, *pre-K*; **Janet Hart**, *K-2*; **Sharon Sparks**, *3-5*; **Russ Matteson**, *jr.*

high; **Angie Lahman Yoder, sr.** *high*; **Jeremy Schaub**, *young adults*; **Julia Wheeler**, *single adults*. Worship event participants: **Erin Matteson**, *music coordinator / song leader*; **Joe Vecchio**, *Monday worship leader*; **Valentina Satvedi**, *Tuesday worship leader*. Musical groups and soloists from the **Circle of Peace, Bakersfield, Bella Vista, Imperial Heights and Principe de Paz congregations**.

The leadership provided by PSWD was exemplary of the high quality people that we have in this district. I think we can be proud (not a Brethren trait, I know) for the way PSWD extended the hand of welcome to our brothers and sisters and we did it peacefully, simply and together.

Don Booz



"What is Stewardship?"

Finance & Property Manager / General Counsel Message

Stewardship. We hear the word frequently – at church, in casual conversations, at District Conference, even at Annual Conference. “We need to be better stewards,” someone will say. “That church needs to have better stewardship”. It seems that everyone has an opinion about stewardship, but we all seem to grapple with the concept. Just what is stewardship?

Webster’s dictionary defines stewardship as the conducting, supervising, or managing of something; especially the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one’s care (e.g. stewardship of our natural resources). It is responsibility for taking good care of resources entrusted to us. In a Christian context, stewardship refers to the responsibility that Christians have for the gifts that God has bestowed.

But what does all that mean for us and our district of churches? Well, for starters, I think it means living within our means and being careful with our resources. It means first knowing how much we have and then making sure we don’t spend more than that. As it relates to our churches and the district, it means looking at our past years’ income and expense statements in order to prepare a budget and a strategic plan which will ensure that we don’t spend more than we bring in. It means looking at and understanding our balance sheet, understanding the amount and nature of our assets, and then having a plan to preserve those assets so that we don’t spend them but rather allow them to grow.



Stewardship is all of that, but ultimately, I think stewardship is about planning for the future so that we can ensure that we will have enough not only for today, but also for tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, for next week and next month and next year, for the next decade



and the next millennium and forever.

I think God wants us to succeed, to grow and flourish and prosper. And God knows the way and tries to show us the way. Will we listen? Will we put aside our own notions of what we want or think we want or think we should have?

I, for one, think God has a great plan for the congregations in our district. The future presents a unique set of challenges for us, but it also promises a unique set of benefits and blessings. Let’s work on our stewardship so that we can ensure our continuing existence. Let’s make sure we live within our means as congregations and a district of congregations. Let’s make sure we have a plan which will ensure our continued success. And let’s do the work – sometimes the hard work -- so that we can implement our plan and realize the fruits of our labor and God’s plan for us.

Blessings to all,
David Castenholz
909-392-4053
fpm@pswdcob.org

New Harvest Community Fellowship Church of the Brethren

Pastor Marty Sondermann
www.newharvestcf.org

Over the past few years we have made it a high priority to reach out into the communities around our church. We have been involved in various children's and youth ministries including Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Good News Clubs, Christian Motorcycle ministries, and other wonderful outreach ministries. We have also been privileged to have a weekly radio program and a weekly podcast on the internet. It has truly been fun to see what God has done.

As we look ahead we plan to do much of the same, but we also want to broaden our approach. We are currently looking at starting a weekly recovery program

in the city of Exeter. This would be a weekly meeting for anyone who is struggling with an addiction. We are also looking to work together with another area church to develop more family friendly sports programs. We would teach Christian values and sportsmanship, and we would share the Gospel with all who participate. These would be programs that take less time for busy parents to have to travel, and it would be a free program so anyone could afford it. We would allow donations by those who could give, but we would not require any payment for a child to participate. This would be a fairly large project. As I have mentioned, we are doing this with the help of another area church, but we are going to continue to seek support from other churches as well. Working with other ministries and like-minded churches has been our focus, and we want to continue to do that.

We have some other exciting projects in the works as well, but only God knows if they will happen. We are praying and seeking God's direction and hoping for the best!

God bless!
Marty





A Place that Offers Life

by Daniel P. Smith , Mary K. Sellon

“Finances are tight, and our numbers are dwindling. The congregation is looking to me to turn things around. So is my denomination—that’s exactly what I was told when I was appointed here. And, frankly, that’s my expectation too. Isn’t that my job?” says a pastor of a congregation that has been experiencing decline for many years, voicing the belief of many congregations, denominations, and pastors that when a congregation is declining, it is the pastor’s job to fix it.

Here’s the hard truth. If you’re a layperson in a congregation that’s experiencing decline, whether the congregation thrives is ultimately up to you and the other members. Your pastor can teach, guide, lead, support, inspire, even cajole. But in the end, congregational health is a function of how people in the congregation relate to one another, to God, and to their community. A congregation is a microcosm of the greater church, a local embodiment of the body of Christ. In John’s Gospel, Jesus says, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). We believe this is one of the primary messages that a healthy congregation embodies for its members and its surrounding community.

A congregation that is truly being *church* brings people into a loving, life-giving relationship with God and others that is transformational. This is the nature of the kin-dom of God, where covenant relationships model the best aspects of family. People find hope. They experience belonging; they extend and receive forgiveness. They discover a sense of purpose and direction. They learn to live with appreciation and joy no matter what the circumstances. Although a pastor can preach and teach this message, the message has power only to the extent that the people in the congregation live it and practice it with one another. Practicing loving, life-giving relationships transforms congregation members. Witnessing such benefits draws others who want something similar for themselves and their families.

Businesses are based on the premise of offering

something of value—goods or services—to a customer in exchange for money. Successful businesses “give value for money.” Gimmicks and fancy features may bring people through the door, but people won’t buy unless they believe they’ll receive something of worth. And they’ll return and recommend the business to others only if they receive something of value. Congregations are not businesses, yet they can fall into a similar trap of thinking that it’s the features and the gimmicks that people want. A congregation’s greatest asset, the unique gift it offers, is the people who make up the congregation and the possibilities for transformation they embody.

When we talk about congregational renewal, we mean a renewal of the people’s ability to notice and experience God in their midst, a renewal of the congregation’s desire to partner with God in achieving God’s aims for the world. The term renewal implies that the congregation knew how to do this at one time and that the work is a reclaiming of a lost skill. We find that’s not always the case. Some congregations we’ve worked with have no memory of ever having been a church that talked openly about God and matters of faith. The people have no memory of the congregation’s ever having had an evangelistic bent. However, we have yet to encounter a congregation that, when asked to recall moments when its church was really “being church,” couldn’t name sacred moments when God seemed present and people found healing and hope.

The church-growth movement is often blamed for leading congregations down the path of thinking that bigger is better and that increased numbers equal health and growth. That movement did, however, help raise the question of how to measure congregational health. If the measure is not dollars in the bank or people in the pews, what is it? We hear congregations and pastors wrestling with questions that weren’t on the table twenty years ago. “What’s the fundamental purpose of church? What difference is a congregation supposed to make in the lives of its members and in its surrounding community? What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? What does it mean to be spiritual? What difference do spiritual practices make?”

These challenging questions are the foundation of renewal, the building blocks of a new future. They are not, however, the point at which most congregations start. Fear of having to close the church or to reduce the services offered to members typically prompts a congregation’s desire for renewal: “We need to do

something now, if we're going to still be open a decade from now." This desire to avoid death drives many renewal efforts, and it certainly provides energy. But if the congregation itself doesn't ultimately trade its fear of death for a longing for life, the efforts will end as soon as the danger has passed.

The aim of renewal is not a bigger building or high-tech worship or a slew of professional programs but a new way of looking at church, the work of a congregation, and what it has to offer the world. Congregational renewal is a renewal of the people's understanding of their relationship with God, their relationship with their community, and their calling. In the most fundamental sense, congregational renewal happens through "people renewal." What's renewed in congregational renewal is the people's understanding of their relationship with God, their relationship with their community, and their sense of calling.

No pastor, no program, no resource can make renewal happen. On the other hand, almost any pastor, program, or resource can help renewal unfold when the people of a congregation deeply desire a new and better life and are willing to do what it takes to get there. The hard part can be developing that desire. As long as life together is satisfactory, there is little impetus for change.

Over and over we hear congregations wishing that the people in the community would become active in their church. What drives that desire is revealed in their response to the question "Why?" Any time a significant number of people answer, "To keep our programs running and our doors open," we know that the congregation is in trouble. It has moved to the point at which the people beyond its doors are valued primarily for what they can bring to the church. People in the community are seen as the congregation's salvation, rather than the other way around.

Attempting to lure the new population group, the congregational leaders add programs and make changes they imagine will appeal to the people. Surprised and frustrated when their changes show little result, they redouble their efforts to find the right program. This work is misdirected. The congregation is not declining because the community around it has changed, or even primarily because the church's form of ministry and worship feels foreign to those in the neighborhood. The real and deeper issue is that the congregation has lost connection with a Christian church's basic mission: helping people experience God and connect with the gospel message of life and hope.

Declining congregations have lost connection with the Christian church's basic mission of helping people experience God and live the gospel message of life and hope.

Without this sense of mission to keep the congregation focused beyond the doors of the church, the congregation turns inward and loses connection with its community. Before others will turn to a congregation as a life-giving resource in their lives, the congregation has to be a place that offers life. When traveling by plane, passengers are reminded that in the event of an emergency they should put on their own oxygen masks before helping others. In congregational renewal, a congregation reminds itself of and intentionally engages in the basic practices of Christianity. It realigns itself with the basic outward-focused mission of church.

"A Place that Offers Life" by Daniel P. Smith and Mary K. Sellon is reprinted from *Alban Weekly* (No. 259, July 13, 2009), with permission from the Alban Institute. Adapted from *Pathway to Renewal: Practical Steps for Congregations*. Copyright © 2008 by The Alban Institute, Inc., Herndon, VA. All rights reserved.

Our new Logo

Based on the Unity Statement from the 2007 District Conference Eric Davis designed a special pin and brochure to share the unique "Witness" of PSWD. The flowing colors suggest the waves of the water of baptism, the fabric of our lives, the "eagle's wings" we are borne upon, the dove that settled on Jesus when he came up from the Jordan. We are woven together by God's spirit.



Myrna Wheeler

As many of you know, Myrna Wheeler was recently diagnosed with acute leukemia. She is living out her days at her home surrounded by family and friends.

Many of us know Myrna from the different roles she has faithfully carried out for many years in the Pacific Southwest District.

Myrna is a member of the La Verne Church of the Brethren, minister for older adults at the church, as well as Chaplain at Hillcrest Retirement Community, TRIM Coordinator, and the Policy Board chairperson for the Pacific Southwest District.



Myrna has a web page on CarePages.com: www.carepages.com/carepages/MyrnaLongWhealerspage, and a new e-mail address that she can access from home: myrnalwheeler@verizon.net.

While our hearts ache with sadness, Myrna is in a great place emotionally and spiritually.

Thank you for your prayers for Myrna, her family, and friends.



THE PARISH PAPER

IDEAS AND INSIGHTS FOR ACTIVE CONGREGATIONS

Coeditors: Herb Miller, Lyle Schaller, Cynthia Woolever – www.TheParishPaper.com

July 2009 - Volume 17, Number 7

Bill Couch

Lay Testimonials Strengthen Financial Giving!

Question: Which of these methods increase financial giving in congregations? (a) Sermons, (b) Effective annual stewardship programs, or (c) Lay people's convictions?

Answer: All of the above!

Many helpful sermon resources* and annual stewardship programs** are available. But how can lay people encourage increases in financial giving?

Monthly lay testimonials during worship that stress "the need of the giver to give for his or her spiritual benefit" increase financial giving far more than monthly reports that say, "We need money to pay the church's bills." or "Please help balance the budget."

Small Congregation Methods

Select lay people who believe in and practice giving 10 percent of their incomes to God's work. Once a month, invite each of them to make a three-minute presentation during worship (prior to the offering) that answers four questions: 1. What is my name? 2. How long have I been participating in a congregation? 3. When and why did I first begin giving 10 percent of my income to God's work? 4. What spiritual benefits have I experienced from tithing?

Larger Congregation Methods

Handpick people who are tithers and good communicators. Write them the following letter.

Below the date, put "TO: [list everyone to whom you are writing]" and "FROM: [Senior Pastor's Name]."

Would you consider being part of something new that can powerfully impact our church and transform individuals' lives?

Beginning Sunday, January 26, I would like you to become one of the lay persons who gives a brief meditation about the joy of giving, right before we take the offering. Before your heart stops beating at the thought of speaking to hundreds of people, let me tell you what I expect!

1. I expect people to listen to another layperson talk about giving far more readily than they listen to me. People expect preachers to speak about giving. They don't expect to hear from people like themselves who have discovered the joy of giving. Your testimony can change someone's life as they begin to follow Christ in the area of giving.

2. I expect to give you specific and detailed training about how to present your story. We'll meet together

on Tuesday, January 21, at 7:00 p.m. in Room S101. I'll help you know "what and how" to say a two- or three-minute message.

3. I expect you to do this no more than once or twice this year. Then, if you want to continue, that would be great. Or, if you decide you would rather not continue, that is fine.

4. I expect us to see giving increase significantly due to these testimonies. Some churches report 10 or 20 percent increases, just by implementing these lay testimonies.

5. I expect you to say "yes!" But, if after prayerful consideration, you do not feel led to do this, please call and let me know. If I don't hear from you, I'll expect to see you January 21.

6. I expect God's blessing upon this important ministry!

The Training Meeting

Prepare a handout agenda something like the one below. At the top print your congregation's one-sentence mission statement and one-sentence vision statement.



A. Opening Prayer/Share Time.**B. Why Witness to Your Stewardship Convictions?**

- A planted seed can transform a life.
- The beliefs of laity powerfully influence other laity.
- The need of givers to give is greater than our church's need to receive.

C. Understand What Motivates People to Give

Money to a Congregation. A survey of 26,184,335 people from 15 denominations revealed the seven greatest motivations for giving money to a church: (1) I am grateful to God. (2) Giving is part of my spiritual relationship to God. (3) I feel privileged to serve. (4) God asks for an appropriate percentage of my income. (5) I like to help other people. (6) I want to help my church. (7) Giving adds meaning to life.

Items at the top of that list motivate far more people to give than do items at the end of the list. (Douglas W. Johnson and George W. Cornell, *Punctured Preconceptions* [New York: Friendship Press])

D. Group Sharing. In groups of three people, ask these questions, one at a time. Each person shares his or her answer. (1) What motivates me to give? (2) When and why did giving become important to my spiritual life? (3) Can I recall a specific experience when giving impacted my life?

E. How to Write What You Plan to Say. Decide on the main point you want to get across. Limit yourself to one point. You'll have another opportunity to do this, so don't feel like you have to say everything!

- Your main point is more effective when it comes from personal experience. What motivated you to begin giving? What benefits have you experienced from giving? How has your relationship with God grown through giving? How do you feel when you give?

- Choose feeling words that touch the heart: joy, love, grateful, thankful, transformed, etc.

- Optional: Choose a Scripture verse that captures how you feel about giving.

F. How to Prepare to Say What You Write. Write it out, word for word. Read it aloud and time yourself. Please respect the three-minute limit! Complete this step by Thursday evening.

- Revise as new ideas come to mind. Some people prefer to read their manuscript aloud to their family and ask for constructive feedback. What was my main point? Did I keep your attention? Did anything NOT make sense?

- A day later (Friday) get by yourself and read the manuscript aloud. Read to absorb the content, without trying to put expression into it.

- Read the manuscript aloud again. Underline nouns and verbs that sound like strong emphasis points.

- The next day (Saturday), get by yourself and read it aloud for a third time. Try to visualize the picture-words and action-sentences. See what is happening in your mind's eye and you sound conversational in a speech.

- In these practice readings, raising your voice slightly higher than normal releases nervous tension and helps you to sound more natural. Read slightly faster than seems normal. You sound slower to others than you sound to yourself.

- Read your manuscript out loud, by yourself, once or twice on Sunday morning. Warning! Practicing your manuscript more than four or five times may cause you to work too hard at emphasizing specific words and thus reduce your ability to sound conversational.

G. How to Say What You Have Written. Sit in one of the chairs behind the pulpit. Concentrate on relaxing your hands, fingers, and facial features. Before you walk to the pulpit, take two deep breaths and smile. This feeds the brain needed oxygen and makes you look relaxed even though you don't feel relaxed.

- Go to the pulpit, armed with your notes, prior to the offering. Adjust the mike so it points directly toward your mouth. Say, "Will the ushers please come forward as we prepare to worship with our tithes and offerings."

- Begin speaking as the ushers come forward. They will stand at the front of the aisles until you finish speaking.

- Smile during your delivery. Make eye contact with congregants as much as possible. Don't concentrate on reading the words with feeling. That produces a preachy sounding "pulpit inflection." Instead, try to visualize every picture-word and action-sentence in your mind as you say it. This brings you close to a conversational style.

- Close with a two- or three-sentence prayer, thanking God for His blessings. Never pray: "Lord, bless this small portion we are returning to you."

- Place your contribution in the plate as the usher comes to the platform.

The Bottom Line. In one congregation, these lay testimonials increased total annual giving 23 percent!

*Bill Couch, How to Talk with People about Financial Giving: Biblically Based Messages that Motivate (this is Volume 30 of the Herb Miller's Nuggets Series). To obtain a contents-description and order form, go to the www.TheParishPaper.com Website. (Note: the contents-description and order form is available ONLY from www.theparishpaper.com and NOT in response to requests by E-mail, U.S. Mail, FAX, or telephone.)

**New Consecration Sunday, Revised Edition: Stewardship Program with Guest Leader Guide and CD-ROM (Nashville: Abingdon Press); www.cokesbury.com or telephone 800/672-1789.

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We are interested in your thoughts.....

Please respond to the following questions:

From your knowledge and/or understanding...

1. Describe the purpose of the District and what is needed to fulfill that purpose.
2. Describe how the wider District and its staff is or could be a part of the ministry and mission of your congregation.
3. Share how your district could better serve your congregation.
4. Describe the ministry of your District staff.

Mail your responses to:

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- ✓ A monthly email version that will contain current events. The distribution list will be formed through email invitation and subscription forms. The email will have an unsubscribe link at the bottom. We expect that all of our board members and credentialed ministers will enjoy this and support us in prayer.
- ✓ A quarterly paper copy through the post office that will have highlights of the email version and items of broad interest. We will begin with our current mailing list. After a few issues we will remove those who have not “renewed” their free subscription.
- ✓ *Based on time spent in content creation, mailing / printing costs, email subscription software / service fees, etc., PSWD spends about \$10 each for the 1,400 people worshipping in a district church each Sunday.*

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