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AROUND THE CONFERENCE

The Little Church That Could

by **Dr. Jason R. McConnell**, *Vermont Area Representative and Pastor of the Franklin United Church and East Franklin Union Church*

Once upon a time, 150 years ago, in 1860 to be exact, there was a small group of Christians who worshipped together in a little schoolhouse on Sunday mornings. The facilities were adequate, but the people desired a better place to worship. They had a vision to build their very own church building, which could be exclusively dedicated to the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. So the community gathered to design and make plans for just such a building.

The founding members bound themselves together and pledged resources in cash and lumber. The rest of the money was raised by auctioning the pews to current and prospective members. The whole amount raised was \$1,593.04, enough to complete the project. (By the way, the pews in the back brought in a lot more money than the pews in the front.)

In those early days, the church building was shared by three denominations — Methodist, Baptist and Universalist. This unorthodox union carried on for a number of years. The Baptist and Universalist memberships eventually died out, but the little church kept chugging along for over a century. It experienced many ebbs and flows and passed over many

mountains and through many valleys along the way, but it remained faithful.

Eventually, the membership and attendance dwindled to the point that it was only open during the summer months. After many decades of only ten people worshipping on Sunday mornings, the church wondered if it might be time to close its doors.

But in God's amazing providence, five people attended that meeting and they voted three to two to keep the church going, regardless of how futile it seemed. During the conversation, one member stood up and spoke with remarkable apocalyptic wisdom, saying, "If the church dies, the whole community is doomed." Their faithfulness persevered and they

chugged along, saying, "We think we can!"

Well, the little church's persistence paid off. God blessed their faithfulness and began to add to their number. By the early 2000s, the average attendance had trickled upward to 40 people; they voted to meet for worship all year long. With a renewed focus on biblical preaching, consistent prayer and intentional community outreach, during the past decade the church has exploded to an average attendance of more than 100 people every Sunday. On Sunday



CM COMMENTS

Alignment

by **Ron Hamilton**, *Conference Minister*



As followers of Jesus, we are called to conduct our lives in a manner that is consistent with our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is important to have strong convictions. It is even more important that our lives align with these convictions.

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. (Colossians 2:6-7)

Those who take their faith seriously continually evaluate their behavior in light of their beliefs. In a similar way, healthy churches assess their priorities in line with the call of Christ on their lives in this generation.

The leadership of our Conference has taken this seriously and is evaluating how the activity of the CCCC aligns with our passion for living in obedience to Jesus as we...

- Love God
- Love others, and
- As we go, make disciples.

We are also examining the structure of the CCCC to see how it aligns with our Seven Guiding Values:

1. A Culture of Believing Prayer and Intercession
2. Healthy Pastors
3. Healthy Disciple-making Churches

4. Healthy Church Multiplication

5. A Community that Lives Out a Shared Life and Shared Mission

6. A Culture of Peacemaking and Reconciliation

7. A Membership Reflective of the Harvest Field's Diversity.

The Board of Directors appointed a Structure Task Force to provide leadership in this task. This task force has examined our committee structure and ministries and has made preliminary recommendations to the Board on these matters. The Task Force is beginning a process this month to discern a process for leadership development at every level of the Conference. This is driven by our desire for every member of the Conference to live out a passionate faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

These are critical days for all followers of Jesus. We are called to live in a way that sets us apart from a culture that is consistently drifting away from roots of faith. We cannot waste our time or our resources. God desires that we live consistent lives in which our actions align with our beliefs. Please join me in praying for our Conference leadership as we move forward in this effort. ♦

NE REGIONAL NEWS

“The Little Church Around the Corner”

by Terry Shanahan, NE Regional Minister

He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 1:6)

Some time ago I wrote to you about this faithful church in Gardner, Maine, which was entering into a transition period, as their long-time pastor had succumbed to cancer. They began a journey seeking their next settled pastor. That journey was a difficult one which had many starts and stops, many bends in the road. However, through this journey the folks remained faithful and continued trusting in God. Last month I was privileged to be with them as they installed their newly-called pastor. Here is the press release from that special event. Praise God for His faithfulness which endures forever.

Mission Street Congregational Church officially began a new era last Sunday afternoon. The church installed David Bodanza as its new pastor. Although Pastor Bodanza has been ministering at the church since July 21, the official installation ceremony was scheduled for September 15 so area ministers could join in the celebration. The Rev. Dr. Lars Larson of the First Baptist Church of Leominster and Rev. Terry Shanahan of the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference participated in the service. Rev. Dr. R. Gary Heikkila, who himself pastored the church for 35 years until his retirement in 1997, delivered the sermon.

The church was led by the late Pastor Dana Witty until his death in 2011. Rev. Fred Swedberg then served as interim pastor un-

til Rev. Bodanza was unanimously selected to be pastor.

Pastor Bodanza lives in Leominster. He and his wife Brenda have four children. Pastor Bodanza is a graduate of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and New England School of Law.

Ministers and churchgoers from the Montachusett area attended the installation service. “It was a celebration like none other in the history of our congregation. This has breathed life into our ‘little church around the corner,’” said Marjorie Fischer, chair of the pastoral search committee. Claude Bourgeois, treasurer of the church agreed, “This is fabulous. We have never been through this before. We love our new pastor. This is great for the church and great for the community as well.”

Mission Street Congregational Church began in 1894. It has been at 15 Mission Street in Gardner since 1914. Known as the “little church around the corner,” Pastor Bodanza said that the church should also be known as the “little church with a big heart.” He also added, “The people of this church are a very friendly, down-to-earth group of people who want to serve Jesus Christ together. I am excited about what God will do in us and through us as we grow and seek to be faithful to him.” ♦



CHURCH DEVELOPMENT

High Expectations – Part 1

by John Kimball, *CCCC Director of Church Development*



One of the things I have learned after many years in the ministry is that the things you measure become the operational priorities in the church. Over the next two articles, I want to take some time to unpack some things every church should be measuring — but most do not. By placing these things out front and measuring them publicly, incredible kingdom changes can come to almost any congregation.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS OF LEADERS

The first place to focus in any church is on the expectations of leaders. Let me be clear: a church will never rise above its leadership in any area of fruit and ministry. Leaders must lead by example; therefore, the Scripture says they are to be held to a higher standard (e.g., see James 3:1). My “lens” here is focused on the pastor(s) and those who are the equivalent of Elders in your congregation — whatever your particular leadership structure may call them.

In most American congregations today, the role of leadership has degraded to more of a “director” on a board than that of a spiritual leader who guides the congregation in ministry by exemplifying Jesus Christ. This is a primary reason for most of the dysfunction in local churches across the country. Even a quick perusal of biblical chapters like 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 clearly demonstrate that all church leaders should primarily be prayerfully selected based upon proven spiritual maturity and Christ-like character. Not one of us is perfect in any of these areas, but there must be an obvious track record and noticeable growth. If not, then it doesn’t matter how “connected” the leadership candidate may be or how “important” their family is to the church, they are not qualified to lead God’s precious people.

If you were to ask me for some criteria for considering church leaders (and few churches have ever actually asked me for these), I would begin with the following:

1. How many people has this potential leader led to Christ?
2. How many people is this person currently mentoring/discipling one-on-one toward Christian maturity? How many of those disciples are now actively discipling others by the same pattern?
3. How does this person measure up against the criteria listed in 1 Timothy 3:1–7?
4. Is this person party to any ongoing conflict within the church? Outside of the church? Within his or her own family? If so, the conflict must be resolved before they can ever be considered for their leadership gifts. (see Matthew 5:23–24).
5. If the person is married, how healthy is their relationship with their spouse? Does their spouse support their candidacy for church leadership?
6. If the person is a parent, how well have they disciplined their own children? Ask them how they are discipling within the family environment.
7. Does this leader tithe? If not, why not? (Yes, ask the question — there are few other questions that can so clearly show how much a person trusts God and tests their level of commitment to the Immanuel Agenda). If they cannot because they are struggling with debt, then suggest they take care of that first and then come back to serve the church.

CONFERENCE CARE

Why Do Troubles Come?

by **Lenn Zeller**, *Volunteer Director of Conference Care*

Life can be very, very hard in this fallen world. Heartaches and difficulties abound, and there is no shortage of illnesses, conflicts, stressors, and hardships to burden us and weigh us down. Even in the church, where one might expect to find warmth and encouragement, there are sometimes disputes and differences that cause discord and hurt feelings. Nothing in the fallen world is what it was meant to be, and sometimes we feel that loss very deeply.

But, until Christ finally comes to set things right, God in His sovereign wisdom allows those hardships and heartaches to come into our lives and even into our churches. Why? Could it be that it is through the conflicts and heartaches that He accomplishes His purposes in our lives? Could it be that He uses those very relational, physical and emotional difficulties to build in us Christlike character and to prepare us for eternity? Could it be that these very afflictions drive us to God Himself and cause us to find in Him our true hope and strength?

The Peacemakers materials encourage us to see conflicts as opportunities to glorify God, to grow to become more like Christ, and to go and be reconciled with our sister and/or brother. We want the pain and discomfort to simply go away. But what might God be doing in the midst of that pain?

A beautiful song by Laura Story asks ...

*“Cause what if Your blessings come
through raindrops?*

What if Your healing comes through tears?

*What if a thousand sleepless nights are what
it takes to know You're near?*

*And what if trials of this life are Your
mercies in disguise?”*

Certainly, when the difficulties arise we cry out to God for healing, protection and relief. But maybe we also ought to pause for a moment to ask Him, “Father, what are You trying to do in my life with this? What are You trying to teach me? How are You trying to correct or discipline me? How can this drive me closer to You and help me to trust more deeply in Your providence and grace?”

As the apostle Paul said it so well, *Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.* (Romans 5:3-5) ♦



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR AND READERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

We welcome your contributions!

If you have comments on what you read here,
please e-mail them to
kenandjoy@bellsouth.net.

If you have other comments or articles you wish
to contribute, including
“Something to Think About,”
please send them to the same e-mail address.

AROUND THE WORLD

Short Terms over the Long Haul

by Ted Bradshaw

(Retired CCCC pastor Ted Bradshaw, writes today: "Since 1993 I have gone on two to six-week trips to Slovakia, Pakistan, Micronesia (3X), Philippines, Russia and Bulgaria. "It is challenging and rewarding. It is fun and hard. The people you serve are heart-warmingly grateful for your ministry. It puts you in closer and more continuous touch with our Savior, depending a lot on Him. The money comes for those called. Never let the price tag hinder you from what God wants you to do!")

ANYONE CAN

Every time I read Isaiah's description of his vision of the Most High God in chapter six I am moved. First I am moved by the love of God that cleanses Isaiah of his sin, and, by reference, me of my sin. And then I am moved by Isaiah's response, "Here am I; send me."

For years, while moved, I thought it didn't refer to me, because I'm not an evangelist. Jesus and I settled that early in my Christian life. He gifted me as a pastor. Others are evangelists. Their direct witness is instrumental in saving people. After people are saved I build them up as believers. The mission field never appealed to me. The Holy Spirit has given me a desire to serve God. Every once in a while I'd get edgy, "I'm not really serving God in life-changing ways (mine or others)." So I would begin again to search for a full-time Christian work.

*"Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart."*

Author unknown

I found that each time I sang that song I'd have a sense of urgency to do what I'm singing. People have said to me, "You oughtta be a missionary." I pooh-poohed it as not for me. Instead I continued to look for full-time Christian employment.

Last spring, International Teams offered me the opportunity to

go to Slovakia in Central Europe for a six-week mission tour. The Lord confirmed it and I went. It was a marvelous and growing experience. I witnessed the progressive and sudden work of the Holy Spirit transforming people's lives, using our team to minister to them.

I had my opportunity. I spent all the money I could afford. If I was to take another mission trip, God had to do it. Back only a few weeks, I was asked to join the Sharing Of Missions Abroad team going to Pakistan. God is confirming that He is in charge by providing money.

No motivation, no money, these are not barriers to what God wants to do to bless us. Because He created us, He knows our needs. Because He knows the future, He knows how to bring fulfillment and blessing into our lives. The only barrier to God is "I won't."

All He seeks from us is our compliance. When we say, "Lord, use me," He takes the bit in His teeth and runs away with our lives. Yes, it can be scary, but it needn't be. As C.S. Lewis said in his Narnia series, "Aslan [a Christ figure] is not a tame lion." Neither is He a wild lion. He will take us where we never thought of going faster than we ever thought of getting there, and he will keep us along the way. He will take us for an agonizingly long time, through seven layers of hell perhaps, but the operational word is "through." We arrive on the other side not smelling of smoke, but the fragrance of accomplishment.

In my youth I considered saints as people long ago that were especially holy and had some supernatural gift. When I was saved I learned that all Christians are saints. As I mature in the faith, I am learning that all Christians are especially holy and have supernatural gifts. Thus anyone can serve the Lord. Anyone can evangelize. Anyone can pray, or preach, or teach. God created us, through the shed blood of Christ, a royal priesthood. Every Christian has the authority of royalty and the intercessory power of priests.

WHAT DO YOU DESIRE?

Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit to work in and for you. You can do it! Your Heavenly Father has placed all His resources at your disposal. You can do it! He challenges you to submit and say with Isaiah, "Here I am, Lord, send me." And you know what?

You can do it! ♦

CHURCH MULTIPLICATION

An Old Church Plans for Multiplication

by **Ron Hamilton**,
CCCC Conference Minister

The Congregational Christian Church of Los Angeles celebrated its 125th anniversary on Sunday, August 18, 2013. The day began with a worship service, a youth cantata and a meal. The special events concluded with an evening worship service. Rev. Dr. Ron Hamilton, CCCC Conference Minister, brought the anniversary service message.

A history of the church was presented in the anniversary service. The members of the church were reminded of God's faithfulness to the church in many ways:

- The church was started by a group of farmers who came to California from Iowa.
- It endured the changes in the community when the Hollywood Freeway was built near the church and many members were forced to relocate.
- It was forced to rebuild after the Sylmar earthquake in California in 1971.
- It made the transition of leadership with a primary focus on leadership from a growing Filipino membership.
- It went three years without a pastor under the leadership of faithful members of the church.

While the church looked back and celebrated God's faithfulness, they also looked forward with a desire to live in faithful obedience to the Lord Jesus in this generation. The evening concluded with a statement of the church's vision.

"It is an important part of our vision statement that we send out missionaries and plant churches. This vision statement is the reason why we exist as a church. That is to preach

the Gospel to the lost, to equip the saints for the ministry and to send out missionaries and plant churches. And all for God's glory.

We are heading in this way now to send out missionaries and plant churches. It is really encouraging to see how our church has existed for 125 years as we took that path of obedience to Matthew 28:18–20. Our church strategy is to plant churches in the Philippines, Africa, Russia, India, China and other countries in the 1040 Window. We will support church planters full-time, help them build their pastoral libraries and develop resources for ministry, and help them build self-supporting churches that make disciples and multiply themselves. We are committing our resources to this mission.



We are also going to give our support to the CCCC and their ministry of planting churches. We are going to begin partnering with the CCCC in celebration of our 125th anniversary. We now want to give the CCCC something to demonstrate that support at this time and we ask Rev. Dr. Ron Hamilton to receive this gift as a token of our support."

The Conference rejoices with the church in this wonderful celebration and thanks God for the example that they are providing to our member churches at this time. ♦

EXPECTATIONS *cont. from pg 4*

8. Determine this person's command of the Scriptures. Does their personal theology match that of the church and pastor? Is it Biblical? Have they memorized Scripture?
9. Have this potential leader take the time to describe their calling to church leadership in detail. Do they desire to lead God's people? If not, they are not a candidate. If yes, ask them why. Church leaders must serve based upon a sense of calling.
10. Is this person willing to completely rearrange their life's priorities and schedule to make leading the Immanuel Agenda among God's precious people a high priority? Will they sacrifice hobbies, weekends away (e.g., at the cabin), and an appropriate number of evenings to be an active and consistent example for the congregation during their season of leadership? To refuse is to communicate to the congregation that other things are of higher importance. There are certainly other considerations, but these are a good start. It is critical that we raise the bar for church leadership because we believe that this particular work is of utmost importance.

It occurs to me that some churches may look at the above list and say, "Kimball, you have just eliminated all our candidates!" I understand. But then I would ask the church family about the way they are intentionally preparing people for leadership. Perhaps your leadership development is emphasizing the wrong priorities? Or maybe leadership development is missing altogether? Then this is where the first changes must take place.

What priorities does your church communicate when considering leaders for your ministry? Do you need help in this area? The CCCC's *LifeFlow* Church Development process makes such leadership development a huge priority. For more information on how we can help you, call our office at (651) 739-1474. ♦

CHANGES & OPPORTUNITIES

PASTORAL CHANGES

Aurora, MN	Palo Congregational Church* Jerry Kosanovich
Hillsboro, WI	First Congregational Church* Isaac Fleming

PASTORAL OPPORTUNITIES

LaMoille, IL	First Congregational Church*
Seward, IL	Seward Congregational Church*
Haverhill, MA	West Congregational Church* (<i>Worship Pastor</i>)
Haverhill, MA	West Congregational Church* (<i>Children's Pastor</i>)
Cook, MN	Ashawa Chapel* (<i>Part-time</i>)
Bertold, ND	Berthold Baptist Church (ABC)
Scottsbluff, NE	Emmanuel Congregational Church*
Inwood, NY	Community Bible Church* (<i>Part-time</i>)
Sardis, OH	St. Paul's Church* (<i>Part-time</i>)
Beaver Springs, PA	Christ Church (EFCA)
Reynoldsville, PA	Paradise Community Church (UCC)
Warren, PA	Good News Community Church* (<i>Part-time</i>)
Orwell, VT	First Congregational Church (Independent) (<i>Part-time</i>)

* = Conference member

+ = In process

HEALTH NEWS

What Are You Saying?

by **Betty Mitchell RN BSN,**

Parish Nurse, Emmanuel Bethel Church, Royal Oak, MI



Hearing loss can occur at any age. It is important to protect and have healthy ears to know what people are saying and be aware of what is occurring in your environment.

Ear canals blocked with ear wax or infections may cause hearing loss. Have your ears checked by your doctor to clean the ear wax from your ear canal to avoid an accidental puncture of the eardrum.

Heredity and chronic exposure to loud noises are other factors that cause hearing loss over time. Wearing sound-deadening ear protection any time you are exposed to loud noises will help prevent hearing loss. If nerve cells that carry sound signals to the brain are damaged, hearing is decreased.

Some medications may also cause hearing loss by damaging the inner ear. Check with your doctor or pharmacist for possible side effects of any new medications prescribed for you.

Quality of life can be affected with hearing loss. Depression, anxiety and feeling others are angry with you may be among the problems experienced.

Once diagnosis of the cause of hearing loss is determined and treated, quality of life may improve. Self-confidence increases and better relationships with people are noticeable when people have successful treatment of hearing loss.

After talking to your doctor about any hearing loss you may notice, tests will be done to determine the cause and the proper course of treatment. If a hearing aid is suggested you may need to try more than one type of device to find one that works best for you.

To make conversation more meaningful if you have any hearing deficit, try to face the person you are talking to. Sometimes you may simply have to reduce background noise by finding a quiet setting. ♦

Source: www.mayoclinic.com; www.asba.org

LITTLE CHURCH cont. from pg 1

October 17, 2010 the church received 30 new members at the same time. But even more important than the attendance and membership, the church has experienced authentic conversions, meaningful discipleship and growth into a healthy church community.

This is the story of the East Franklin Union Church, which is nestled among the hills of East Franklin, a small agricultural hamlet located along the northern Vermont border, just two miles from the Quebec line. Like the children's book, *The Little Engine That Could*, this little church remained faithful through times of difficulty. Despite its remote location and poor population density, God continues to bless this little church that could. God does not measure the success of a church by attendance, membership, buildings or budgets — he measures it by its faithfulness!

By God's grace, the East Franklin Church will officially join the CCCC's later this year, along with at least two other churches in Vermont. Please help us pray for these and other churches as we try to remain faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ in the least "religious" state in our nation! ♦

Jesus Film Project DVDs Available

At the Annual Family Conference in Minnesota last July, Nancy Weigel led a seminar on the Jesus Film Project. A super deal is now available until the end of the year — 200 of the children's version of the Jesus Film for \$100 — **only 50 cents each!** A donor of the Jesus Film Project is underwriting the offer, making it possible to offer at such a low price. It's great for kids, and for immigrant families as well, because it is in 24 languages on the one DVD.

Nancy says, "We've been encouraging churches to get these out to those in the congregation interested in giving one to a neighbor, co-worker, etc., as a gift at Christmas — perhaps with a plate of Christmas cookies as well!"

The address for the offer is: www.ourfamilytoyourfamily.org."

WE WANT OUR CONFERENCE TO BE AWARE OF THIS OPPORTUNITY FOR MINISTRY.



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