

Report of the District Superintendent

“Follow Me”

Dr. David Graves, Members, and Friends of this assembly. I bring you my 12th report.

GREETING

Today we celebrate so much good that has transpired through our churches and in our homes. Your lives are witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You are doing better than you know. Pastors and lay people alike, we are amazed by your sacrificial, giving ways. We are constantly reminded that this work is HIS work because only HE has the right to call any of us, including you, to such sacrifice and to give you such joy in the midst of it! Cheryl and I love you and we pray for you and we are so grateful for each of you in our amazing partnership in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As we “Follow Him” looking forward...

- Our District Family came together to help rebuild our ministry in Bloxom. God was also preparing the heart of a pastor many miles away. God brought to us Mary Jimenez. She is excited about the future of the Bloxom Community Church.
- A New Start has begun in South Stafford with Pastor Timothy Devine. A birth out of our Woodbridge Church. We are hopeful that through his ministry God will bless this community.
- The new ministries and relocation of one of our Hispanic churches has brought about excitement and new life into the Hispanic Ministries. Those added were Lorton Santidad A Jehova, Tidewater Central Renacer Con Cristo, and Virginia Beach El Shaddai.
- Two churches officially organized this year. Richmond Comunidad de Esperanza, Pastor Carlos Gomez and Verona Living Stone, Pastor Drew Ridder.
- We welcomed new pastors to our District: Nathan Burns, Leesburg; Mary Jimenez, Bloxom.
- We celebrate with the following pastors in their retirement and we thank each of them for their years of service: June Karen Clark, Timberville; R. Bruce Clark, Timberville; Gary F. Smith, Leesburg; Kenneth Rice, Portsmouth; and Thomas W. Taylor, Colonial Heights.

The good news!

- 1,353 people were converted.
- 412 people were baptized.
- Two churches newly organized.
- Countless New ministries launched.

District Event Highlights:

- Teen/Student Winter Retreat – more than 570 in attendance and a wonderful spirit.
- Hispanic Family Camp – 443 in attendance and many victories.
- DIG Campmeeting – great attendance and God-filled services.
- Youth Camps and Children’s Camps – lives are touched at a young age at camps!
- Ladies Retreat – continue to provide an opportunity for women across the District to worship together.
- Hispanic Youth Retreat – 214 in attendance with a powerful move of God.
- Zone Pastor Huddles in the Spring – great time of fellowship.
- Spring Ministry Team Retreat – great ministry of Rev. Ian Fitzpatrick & Wayne Ellis.

- The Teaching Church – (now also in Newport News!) continues to provide opportunities for growth in leadership, thanks to Kerry Willis.

Enlarging the District :: Ordained Ministers and Church Planting Training

In the last three years we have ordained 59 persons including those we recommend today. We continue to train every church and pastor with the principles related to Church Planting thanks to Reggie Phillips and our DCPI Champions. Our goal is that every pastor and a lay person from every church be trained in one of two training modules: Churches Planting Churches or Church Planting Essentials. A three-day course in church planting is now a requirement for ordination.

Thank you!

I wish to say thank you to an amazing district family. Special thanks to our District leaders including: District Staff, **Rigoberto Acosta**, Hispanic Ministries Coordinator, **George Stevenson** (Assistant to the DS), **Mike Brown** (NewStarts and Virginia Nazarene Camp (10th consecutive year in the black!)), **Todd Kern** (Treasurer). Special thanks to **Tracy Tucker & Camelot Shuff**, SDMI Chairs; **Julie Armbrister**, NYI President; **Charlotte Holter**, NMI President; **Charles Tillman**, Black Ministries Coordinator; **Kerry Willis**, The Teaching Church; **Joyce Grambo**, DIG Director; **David Woods**, Dean District Training Center, **Bill Dillon**, District Secretary, **Brad Billet**, Chair Studies Board; **Steve Guizar**, Secretary Credentials Board; **Reggie Phillips**, DCPI Champion; personnel in the district office: **Rachel Sherman and Cheri Sheridan**. The list also includes **Missy Bingaman, Jeffrey Hernandez, Suzanne Cook, Bucky Wince, Tammy Hensley, Mike Hancock, Vickie Dove** and an amazing **District Advisory Board** team. The list must include every Pastor, the spouse of every pastor and the amazing lay leaders of every one of our local churches. I am grateful for an amazing team who serve the Lord with an attitude of generosity and determination to excel for Him. Let me take a moment to introduce to you **Wayne Lynch** the newest member of the district team. He has accepted our invitation to Manage the Virginia Nazarene Camp and Retreat Center in Buckingham. We are so grateful!

“FOLLOW ME AND I WILL MAKE YOU FISHERS ...”

In January I felt that our theme for the year was to be some clever version of “get on with it!” Frankly, in my own spirit, I feel that way, let’s get on with it! We have no time to spare. My initial selection for the theme was the Spanish word, “Adelante!” loosely translated into English as, “Forward!” or “Onward!” I decided to look for scripture to support this theme. Immediately the Spirit confronted me. Jesus didn’t call his disciples to leadership up ... “forward, eh?” “Leadership, huh?” What about following? I called my disciples to follow me. I called them to hear my voice. I called them to obey and trust. My heart and word haven’t changed. So “follow me” became the theme. Develop a heart for him! Develop a passion for Him. Get connected to his heart!

Following Jesus is about listening to his word, to his heart. It is to be guided by the same things that guide him. Luke 19:10 reminds us that the “Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.” His call to follow is an evangelistic call to become fishers of people, a call to love people.

“Follow Him”. God’s ambitious plan to redeem the world is counting on you where He has planted you. Hear HIS voice. Do HIS will. If you believe he is calling you to status quo then go for it, but you’ll have a hard time convincing me that the Jesus we see in the New Testament ever settled for status quo. As a gift I have provided this beautiful journal for every pastor of each of our 110 congregations. Thank you for your renewed effort to hear

HIS voice and to “Follow Him” into the challenges and opportunities he has for you. Let me remind us pastors that in the moment of our ordination it was said, “Take thou authority, Preach the word, endure affliction!” When you follow Jesus it is almost certain that affliction will come.

- “Follow Him” led Tim Divine to start a new ministry in Stafford.
- “Follow Him” led Marvin and Dianna Rankin to Crozet.
- “Follow Him” has helped Stephen Willis and Wynne Lankford.
- “Follow Him” has brought Nate & Kari Burns to Leesburg and Mary Jimenez to Bloxom.
- “Follow Him” has Jeffrey Hernandez and Julie Armbrister accepting pastoral calls.
- “Follow Him” has brought about the transformation of lives all across Virginia.

STATUS QUO

In the midst of the joys let’s take a realistic look at our district statistically. The stats are what they are. I could sum them up with two words: Status Quo. We have a few areas of growth and a few areas of disappointment. Some churches have experienced remarkable growth this year, for which we praise God, but for others we must find a way to close the open back door. Some of our churches have, quite frankly, had tough years.

- 70 (64%) reported at least one person converted, but that means 40 (36%) did not even report one person converted.
- 35 (32%) reported at least one baptism, but that means that 65 (68%) did not even baptize one person
- 61 (55%) gained not even one person by profession of faith.
- 63 (57%) Budgets Paid in Full.
- 51 (46%) churches decreased in attendance.
- Only 38 (34%) increased in attendance.
- Only 27 (25%) grew by 3% or more.
- I’m really concerned about anemic attendance growth ... a very clear status quo.

I’m with you. Status quo is not acceptable. Every church has struggles and it is true that the times are changing. The message of salvation and heart holiness is more relevant today than ever and the mission field is more ready for a harvest than ever. So I think I speak for all of us when I say that the status quo is unacceptable.

Let’s be clear about our mission ... to make Christlike disciples. A lot of emphasis gets placed on making them Christlike. And it should be. We have been entrusted with a message of heart holiness, of the full power of the cleansing, transforming, love-filling nature of the work of Christ through the Spirit’s indwelling. We should be like Christ with ever increasing glory. But the mission is not just about helping Christians become more Christlike, it is also about baptizing unbelievers and helping them cross the line of faith, to place their trust in Christ for their salvation and to enter into the journey of discipleship. By your report this year we saw the fewest number of conversions and the fewest baptisms. This is our mission.

Pastors, laypeople, ask yourself, “Am I following Jesus and how is he making me a fisher of people?” Brothers and sisters, there is no reason why at least 75% of our churches could report 3% growth at least and I see no reason at all for any church not to at least report at least one conversion and one baptism every year.

WHAT TO DO?

What can you do differently?

- Start with confession. Admit that the mission of the church, of making Christlike disciples in Virginia and beyond is not going so well.
- Continue with an incredible passion for people. Passion for people. Follow me, Jesus said, and I will make you fishers of men. Our focus is people. Our priority is people. Our passion is people. Pastors, laypeople. We count people because people count.
- Determine to change to be healthy. Choose to leave status quo behind. Make changes for a healthy mission. Dream big dreams for God. Starting something new!
- Establish minimum goals! Please pastors and laypeople. Set goals that stretch you.
- Be bold in your message. Love God and love people.
- Be willing to step out of your comfort zone. My college Bible professor, Dr. George Lyons, taught me that my role as a minister was to, “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.” Because following Jesus is not about how comfortable your circumstances are but rather how faithful God is to you. It is not about what you have going for you, but WHO you have working IN you. You can live with a bold faith. You can live with a bold passion. You can live with a bold kindness.
- I’ve heard of a DS of a generation ago who in district meetings and would say things like, “Pastors, if you are not willing to pay budgets and if you are not reaching people, let me remind you that I have a stack of resumes of pastors who are hoping to come to this district.” Let me just say this, “I have a stack of resumes and I am constantly receiving more!” Let me go on to say that we already have the best of the best. I love you. I believe in you. So I challenge you to set at least these minimum goals to be reported at next year’s assembly: At least one person converted; at least one person baptized; at least one person joining the church by profession of faith; and at least growth in attendance by an increase of one person over the previous year; and full payment of denominational apportionments.

What can the district do differently?

We need to learn what it means to do district differently. This past year we analyzed a request to reduce the district budget percentage allocated to each of our churches. Your leaders have wrestled with this idea and we have determined that before we can realistically change anything about the district budget system we need to decide upon and clarify what kind of district we really need. I am tasking the DAB to work with me and district leaders throughout this year to help us renew and clarify our mission and vision for the work of the district. Our Manual indicates this to be our primary work:

“We are agreed on the necessity of a superintendency that shall complement and assist the local church in the fulfilling of its mission and objectives. The superintendency shall build morale, provide motivation, supply management and method assistance, and organize and encourage organization of new churches and missions everywhere.”

Our task will be to identify the best ways that we can do each of those things. Even now as your superintendent I spend a majority of my time on administrative functions such as pastoral reviews, church visits and honestly other administrivia. There were more than half of our churches that did not receive a new member by profession of faith. More than half of our churches that did not report even one convert and about a third that didn't pay apportionments in full. Obviously, to me, the superintendent (or someone) needs to spend more time with these churches, pastors and leaders to "build morale, provide motivation and to supply management and method assistance." What is the best way to do this very thing? As a district entity we need to refocus our methods, retool our district ministry to provide greater emphasis on the mission and a greater return on our investment. So in this coming year, with the help of your Advisory Board we will launch into this conversation. We will look at the way we receive and spend the District Unified Budget, the way we are organized as a district, and we will consider steps that may very well move us beyond some comfort zones so that we will ensure the mission of making Christlike disciples is being accomplished. Just because we always did it that way should never be reason to keep doing something.

YET I WILL PRAISE

This has been an amazing year of dependence upon God for our district and for me personally. Our family says thank you to you. Cheryl and I wish to express our deep gratitude and appreciation to the District family for your love and support to us during this difficult season. You have prayed for us when we found it challenging to pray for ourselves. We covet your prayers for my father, Roy Fuller, and his health and care needs. We covet your prayers for our son, Jon.

During the darkest moments of our unexpected loss of mom, at the end of May, I found myself repeating this phrase over and over, "Waves of grief are no match for the wonders of grace!" This does not mean it has been easy. On the contrary we've known sorrow, but our hearts and eyes are steadfast on the horizon of God's future. We believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and he is the first fruits of our own bodily resurrection. We are so grateful for your outpouring of love and kindness to us during these days. Thank you for praying for my father, Roy Fuller. He plans to join us for DIG Campmeeting and we hope you will receive him with the warmth and family hospitality of our great district.

These words have sustained me:

Yet I Will Praise *(Words and Music by Andy Park)*

I will praise you, Lord, my God.

Even in my brokenness, I will praise you, Lord.

I will praise You, Lord, my God.

Even in my desperation, I will praise You, Lord

And I can't understand all that You allow, I just can't see the reason.

But my life is in Your hands and though I cannot see You, I choose to trust You.

Even when my heart is torn, I will praise (trust) You, Lord

Even when I feel deserted, I will praise (trust) You, Lord.

Even in the darkest valley, I will praise (trust) You, Lord.

And when my world is shattered, and it seems all hope is gone,

Yet I will praise You, Lord.

*I will trust you, Lord, my God.
Even in my loneliness, I will trust You, Lord.
I will trust You, Lord, my God.
Even when I cannot hear You, I will trust You, Lord.
And I will not forget that You hung on a cross.
Lord, You bled and died for me.
And if I have to suffer, I know that You've been there.
And I know that You're hear now.*

*Even when my heart is torn, I will trust You, Lord
Even when I feel deserted, I will trust You, Lord.
Even in the darkest valley, I will trust You, Lord.
And when my world is shattered, and it seems all hope is gone,
Yet I will praise You, Lord.*

©1999 Mercy/Vineyard; CCLI Song # 3033258; CCLI License #3260133

Respectfully Submitted,

J. Phillip Fuller, *District Superintendent*