

EPISCOPAL ADDRESS/STATE OF THE CHURCH ADDRESS

May 22, 2008
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Baltimore-Washington Conference

“I have come that you might have life and that you might have it abundantly.” (John 10:10)
“For what does it profit a person to gain the whole world and lose their soul?” (Matthew 16:26)
“So the greatest thing in the entire world you can do is to love God with all of your heart and your entire mind and all of your soul and your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37) -- Jesus

After these teachings, Jesus could have posted, “only extreme disciples wanted.” Extreme disciples are believers who are willing to risk everything for a *kingdom* adventure; disciples who through the Holy Spirit are shaping the church to be the body of Christ. Extreme disciples take time to be quiet and listen to God with their hearts. They also speak through actions of justice and mercy. They are Good News, offering God’s grace through Jesus Christ.

Becoming Good News

The United Methodist Church has demonstrated extreme discipleship, Good News in every corner of the globe, by preaching, teaching and living kingdom discipleship.

Z Extreme disciples manifested Christ among the world’s most vulnerable in Uganda. United Methodists there adopted orphan children found in the streets of Uganda. They were known as the lost children but now because of Bishop Wandabula and the Ugandan Conference, they are known as the children of hope.

Z Extreme disciples in a rural Zimbabwe United Methodist Church demonstrated compassion for the victims of Katrina. After learning about the devastation a disciple in the congregation asked, “which way is New Orleans,” and then the congregation turned in that direction and prayed. After the “Amen,” the congregation took up an offering to send to the victims of the Gulf Coast. In a church struggling to feed their village in a nation whose inflation rate is over 50,000 percent, an offering is taken for people they do not know and yet they feel deeply connected with through the United Methodist Committee on Relief.

z Extreme disciples made up of Baltimore City and suburban pastors, gathered on a cold December night on the very intersections where gun fire took the lives of young people. They prayed with the families and released the murdered young people’s spirits from those street corners. They also committed themselves and their congregations to a plan of action, *Hope for the City*.

Faithful and Fruitful Disciples

In the churches where extreme disciples are formed, worshipers live out of abundance, rather than scarcity. These churches are giving their lives for the soul of God’s movement. They are loving God completely and their neighbors as though they were their own. These churches are birthing extreme disciples who have Christ in their hearts, minds and soul.

They follow Wesley’s three simple rules, *do no harm, do good and stay in love with God*.

These are faithful and fruitful disciples born in congregations that:

1. *Celebrate* in passionate worship,
2. *Connect* as one through radical hospitality,
3. *Develop* through intentional faith formation,
4. *Serve* in risk taking mission, and
5. *Share* God's extravagant story of grace.

These disciples and congregations

Z Discover God's abundance rather than accepting scarcity,

Z Profit from sacrifice rather than self indulgence, and

Z Demonstrate love rather than indifference.

These are the churches of the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

The world needs the church

The world needs Baltimore-Washington's extreme disciples and congregations. In our world, regardless of the corner of the globe one comes from, we share four major problems that separate us from God and one another. We live in a world of spiritual emptiness, unprincipled and even corrupt leadership, extreme poverty and pandemic diseases.

These four challenges demand the church's immediate recognition, unwavering commitment and uncompromising action. More than ever the world needs for us to live out of our abundance, to sacrifice for Christ's gain and to love extravagantly.

As United Methodists, we have been called by the leadership of the church to:

1. Develop principled Christian leaders for the church and the world;
2. Create new spaces for new people by starting congregations and renewing existing ones'
3. Engage in ministry with the poor; and
4. Stamp out the killer diseases of malaria, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis.

To be the body of Christ in the world, The United Methodist Church has chosen seven paths:

1. Eliminate Poverty in community with the poor;
2. Eliminate racism as we expand authentic racial/ethnic ministries;
3. Reach and transform the lives of new generations of young people;
4. Teach the Wesleyan model of forming disciples of Jesus Christ;
5. Develop new congregations;
6. Transform existing congregations; and
7. Strengthen clergy and lay leadership

This is an ambitious agenda. And it should be. The great ministry of God has not been accomplished on the wings of small thinking, nor by drawing the circle smaller. Resurrection occurs as we:

Z Discover God's abundance rather than the world's scarcity,

Z Profit from sacrifice rather than using God for our gain, and

Z Demonstrate love rather than indifference.

Therefore it is imperative that we grow deeper in our faith, wider with our grace and further in reaching those who have not experienced the fullness of God's love. Resurrection power does not shrink under the weight of a challenge or an ambitious mission, but

- Z Rises up with hope and daring in the face of spiritual emptiness,
- Z Rises up with hope and daring in the face of unprincipled leadership,
- Z Rises up with hope and daring in the face of extreme poverty,
- Z Rises up with hope and daring in the face of pandemic diseases.

In the Baltimore-Washington Conference, through the Holy Spirit, we have been rising up with hope and daring and we are growing deeper, wider and further. We will continue to use our resources to support the clergy, lay leadership and congregations to grow our mission, to grow spiritual leaders, to grow disciples and to grow congregations.

Grow Mission

As We Serve like Christ, we are being poured out for such a time as this. In the story of Queen Esther, Mordecai says to the Queen, who is facing of danger on the one hand and loyalty on the other, *you have been raised up for such a time as this* (Esther 4:13-14). We are faced with poverty and pandemic diseases and we are called for such a time as this to grow our mission.

In the next four years we will implement a 10-point *Hope for the City* strategy under the leadership of Superintendent Anthony Hunt, and the leadership of Baltimore Region pastors and the Hope Council. A plan that calls for starting new congregations, developing four empowerment centers, strengthening the minds of young people through church and school partnerships, developing neighborhoods by strengthening existing Shalom Zones and starting 20 more in Baltimore and more than 40 across the conference. Through the leadership of Rev. Bruce Haskins, this June we will begin the training of eight new Shalom sites in Baltimore. We honor the congregations of : Christ, Unity, Ames, Mt. Winans, John Wesley, St. James, Monroe Street, and Mt. Zion.

We will also strengthen our partnerships with faith-based community organizing efforts by encouraging congregations to participate in community organizing and we will support your community organizing efforts as we form partnerships around common goals. These organizations include WIN in Washington, DC, BUILD and BRIDGE in Baltimore, AIM of Montgomery County and PATH of Howard County. They seek a voice for the voiceless and influence for those at the margins.

We will support and encourage radical hospitality with immigrants as we *connect as one* with God's children who want to call our communities home. We give thanks for the leadership of Pastor David Rocha and the Camino de Vida congregation and minister Jena Myers and the Foundry congregation for their ongoing work of organizing day laborer ministries that demonstrate risk-taking mission. Today we call upon all of our congregations to host and/or recruit volunteers for English as a Second Language classes.

We will partner to end the killer diseases of malaria, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis which are killing more than four million people a year and drive people into poverty. This year, we will complete our \$200,000 Hope Fund pledge to the Global AIDS Fund. In addition to dollars, this year we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Quality of Life Retreats which has provided 79 retreats and ministered to more than 2500 HIV/AIDS positive attendees over the last 10 years. The ministry was started by Superintendent T.R. Chattin who has worked with others to bring spiritual and emotional healing to those who are dying. (*Rev. Chattin is honored with a dozen roses, like the ones Quality of Life retreat participant Bill O used to give her each year before he died.*)

More than \$19 million have been raised through the Nothing But Nets campaign, which will distribute 1.9 million malaria nets. We are saving the lives of 1.9 million children and pregnant

women. The Baltimore-Washington Conference has been active in raising funds for net distribution in Zimbabwe and last year a Baltimore-Washington Conference team provided malaria education and distributed 7,000 nets in Zimbabwe. Our denomination has now committed to raise \$100 million for a global health fund that will build clinics, train doctors, and educate people about the three killer diseases. Together we can end these killer diseases in our lifetime. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has given \$5 million to help in our fund raising effort.

Do no harm, do good and stay in love with God. Extreme disciples are leading the way.

We will continue to grow our partnerships with Zimbabwe and South Korea. At General Conference Bishop Eben Nihwatiwa and I renewed our commitment in a covenant signing. Last year in Zimbabwe we supported a pastors school and this year we added a laity component. During a very difficult time in the life of Zimbabwe, our commitment will remain firm and we will continue to build clinics, orphanages, and churches. Already you have raised \$558,000 toward our \$1 million Hope Fund goal. Sixty percent of these funds go to our Zimbabwe partnership. With your help we will complete our goal this year.

We are also beginning a Russian partnership through the leadership of Charles Harrell and a Russian Initiative Team and plan to sign a covenant with Bishop Hans Vaxby and the Russian Conference. We have set a goal to establish a Latin American partnership as soon as committed extreme disciples come forward to organize and carry out the partnership. Today, I invite you to prayerfully consider this calling.

We remain committed to Katrina Relief and have sent more than 100 new and returning mission teams to the Gulf Coast this past year. The Baltimore-Washington Conference has provided over 40,000 hours of volunteer service along the Gulf Coast. A group of 38 African-American pastors and three lay persons from the Baltimore-Washington Conference went to New Orleans to do relief work, establish connections and encourage African-American Volunteer-in-Mission teams to go to the Gulf Coast. This has had been a strong witness across our entire denomination. This year we will also complete our \$200,000 Hope Fund commitment to assist in the rebuilding of churches along the Gulf Coast.

The mission of the Baltimore-Washington Conference is growing as we seek to make disciples for the transformation of the world. We have been *poured out for such a time as this*. In addition to these commitments, we also call upon our congregations to work toward the defeat of slots this November and to contact legislators to end the death penalty in Maryland.

The United Methodist Church at General Conference continued its commitment against gambling and the death penalty. This November there will be a referendum to make slots a part of Maryland's constitution. This is not only bad public policy, but it does harm, does no good and diminishes our love for God. The State of Maryland is also organizing a commission to hold hearings on the death penalty. I urge you and your congregation to attend a hearing when they are announced and speak for life.

Grow Disciples

The future of sustaining and growing our mission is dependent upon growing disciples, spiritual leaders and Acts 2 congregations. Our mission needs a strong base of devoted disciples of Jesus Christ, risk taking spiritual leaders and passionate Acts 2 congregations.

Making and growing disciples has been a challenge for us, but I have faith in God, and you, and continue to see signs that by the end of 2010 we will reverse this trend. There are encouraging signs. In the past year, only 58 percent of the United Methodist churches in the United States had one or more professions of faith; but in the Baltimore-Washington Conference, 76 percent of our churches had one or more professions of faith.

We are leading the way of extreme discipleship. While over the last 45 years, we had fewer and fewer professions of faith, more and more of our churches are now receiving people by profession of faith.

I believe we will be a conference that is receiving more professions of faith in 2010 than we will receive in 2009. Let us all make a commitment to extend our congregations' reach to new believers.

Our future hinges on reaching new generations of young people, racial ethnic persons, and those outside our traditional beliefs and experiences. We have taken some initial steps to reach young people through a summit in which 200 young adults identified five areas identified as paths to make and engage young adult disciples. These include: service, leadership development, Bible study and reaching new young adults.

We will hire a staff person this year to assist young adult extreme disciple leaders as they engage our churches in these four action areas. We will reach new generations of young people to do good, do no harm and stay in love with God.

We will continue to strive and expand our reach to racial-ethnic populations. Under the leadership of Rev. Edgardo Rivera and the Hispanic/Latino Team, the I-270 corridor between Washington and Frederick will be an area of concentrated mission development that will include new faith communities with Hispanic/Latino persons. Our Hope for the City Plan in Baltimore also calls for starting new racial-ethnic congregations.

Resources for disciple-growing

Reaching those outside of our traditional values and experience will be an ongoing challenge for us. Reaching those outside our experience will be uncomfortable and non-traditional. Many of the persons we reach out to will not have grown up in the church and some are anti-church. Many of these persons indicate, *I like Jesus but I do not like the church*. Of course they are talking about the institutional church that puts: scarcity over God's abundance, self indulgence over sacrifice, and indifference over love.

The first challenge will be making the church more like Jesus - compassionate, humble, authentic and engaged in the things that matter to the world.

Over the next year, we are offering two new Immersion Series resources. These are resources that will assist your congregation in reaching new disciples, engaging the congregation in community outreach, starting new small groups and growing worship. They include resources in the areas of worship, preaching, adult small groups, youth groups, children's Sunday school, and community outreach projects.

The first series will be on Wesley's three simple rules: "do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God," and we invite all of our congregations to use it during October.

The second series is on the Five Practices of the Fruitful Congregation and we encourage all congregations to use it during January of 2009.

As we use these resources together, we will encourage and strengthen not only our own congregations but also support and strengthen one another.

As we make new disciples among young people, racial ethnic persons, and those outside our traditional experiences, we cannot be divided. We can disagree on issues but remain unified in our quest to be the body of Christ in the world.

We can have a variety of ministries but all work toward a common calling to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. A spiritually empty world cannot afford to see a broken body of Christ.

Moving beyond mere diversity

The Baltimore-Washington Conference is one of the most diverse conferences within our denomination. We are one of the few conferences with all of the predecessor denominations – Methodist Episcopal Church, Methodist Episcopal Church South, Evangelical Church, United Brethren Church, and Protestant Church. We have the Old Washington and the Old Baltimore Conferences. We have several of the mother churches and former national churches.

We are diverse theologically, geographically, and racially. We celebrate our diversity but we have not always worked as companions in our ministry. Together let's build on the good work done in the past through the dialogue team, the Mosaic Project and the work of Erik Law and compliment it by developing a path for being in ministry together.

We can no longer approach matters as a single issue. Let's explore how we can practice biblical principles of unity that draw us together as companions in the face of our differences. This is not to say that individual issues are not important and not to be addressed, but what if we use biblical principles and Christ-likeness in the midst of our diversity so that we become companions in the adventure God has placed before us?

John Wesley in his sermon on a catholic spirit said it this way, *Although there are differences in opinions... need it prevent our union in affection? Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion?* In this quadrennium, we will empower a team to assess how to build on our rich and diverse history and on the good work of Erik Law, the Mosaic Project and the dialogue team so that we affirm our commitment to be of one heart and follow Jesus as a unified body of Christ. We cannot allow our differences to crucify the body of Christ all over again.

Martin Luther King, Jr said, *"I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality, and freedom for their spirits. I believe that what self-centered people have torn down, other-centered people can build up. I still believe that one day humankind will bow before the altars of God and be crowned triumphant over war and bloodshed, and nonviolent redemptive goodwill will proclaim the rule of the land. And black children and white children will join hand and hand and sing free at last, free at last, thank God almighty I am free at last."*

If we are to receive new young adult disciples, new racial ethnic disciples, and new disciples outside the mainstream of our tradition, then we must be an audacious church, extreme disciples believing our Savior transcends our differences and binds us together to serve as companions.

Grow Spiritual Leaders

New disciples are grown as we grow spiritual leaders and spiritual leaders have faith, fire and fruit.

Spiritual leaders with faith have conviction, character, and understanding.

Spiritual leaders with fire have calling, passion and vision.

Spiritual leaders with fruitfulness have gifts that are being expressed through the body of Christ.

John Wesley asked spiritual leaders, “have you faith, have you fire, have you fruit?” Wesley would be proud of the spiritual leaders in the Baltimore-Washington Conference. We are blessed with strong lay and clergy spiritual leaders throughout the Baltimore-Washington Conference whose extreme discipleship is changing lives.

Among these leaders are:

- z Denice Whalen-White, a member of Mt. Calvary UMC, who recently established a non-profit called "All Shades of Pink";
- z Milly Rivera and Maria Snody from Brook Hill UMC, who work with developing Hispanic ministries;
- z Judy Young and a group of first-time ever folks who went on a mission trip to the Gulf Coast, and made sure to include people from the Washington Grove community on their team
- z Courtney Jones, 13, who contributed her birthday money to the HOPE Fund and
- z My mother, who even though she didn't always intend to, led me to prayer.

Need for new pastoral leadership

I ask each of you to do your best and know when you have done your best it is good enough for God and I am convinced God will bless your efforts to bless the church and the world. Just as these persons have done their best, I know you are seeking to do your best.

We are also witnessing strong partnerships between lay and clergy spiritual leaders and greater risk taking to further the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the midst of strong, courageous and nurturing leadership, we seek to cultivate even more spiritual leaders.

On the clergy side, in the last three years, our system of commissioning, ordination and local pastor development did not meet the demand for pastoral needs in the Baltimore-Washington Conference. It fell short by more than 45 full-time pastors.

Fortunately we have been able to recruit 41 pastors that possess faith, fire and fruit from other conferences and denominations to serve most of those fulltime open churches. During this challenging season in which we will retire an average of 30 pastors a year over the next 10 years, what if every church asked, what are we doing to call, equip, send and support every worshiper to be in ministry? Further ask, what will we do to raise up future pastors?

At this annual conference we will honor and bless 41 men and women who will receive their local pastor's license, or will be commissioned, or will be ordained. They each have a place that they call home, a church that has nurtured and supported them into the ministry. Here are the places that have nurtured our new clergy into ministry.

Grow Congregations

Growing risk taking mission, passionate disciples and fired-up, faithful and fruitful spiritual leaders requires growing congregations. Strong and vital congregations are essential to the growth of mission, disciples and spiritual leaders.

In the Baltimore-Washington Conference we are growing passionate Acts 2 congregations who are noted for growing mission, growing new believers and growing congregations. Already 272 churches have achieved all three of the Acts 2 fruits we are measuring. This is a 200 percent increase since 2004 and puts us almost half way toward our 2012 goal.

This is a movement of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is at work in small, medium and large congregations. The Holy Spirit is moving across urban, suburban and rural congregation. The Holy Spirit is moving in conservative, middle and liberal congregations. The Holy Spirit is demonstrating what God wants to do in our midst.

Other congregations are showing healthy movement in growing commitment, love, humility, worship attendance, new believers and outreach, including 100% apportionment payment. In the congregations that are growing commitment, love and humility we are seeing distinct patterns.

They strive to:

1. Celebrate in passionate worship,
2. Connect as one through radical hospitality,
3. Develop through intentional faith formation,
4. Serve in risk taking mission, and
5. Share God's extravagant story of grace

We also commit to grow new congregations. This year the Bel Air congregation through a pastoral and lay leadership team will begin to nurture a new campus/faith community. I am grateful to Rev. Stan Cardwell, a spiritual leader with faith, fire and fruit who has successfully grown congregations and now accepts an appointment as an associate on the staff of Bel Air Church to start the new faith community.

In 2009, we plan to start two new congregations. In 2010 we plan to start three new congregations and in 2011 and each year there after we plan to start four new congregations. Today I ask, are you or is your congregation being called to start a new congregation? Do you want to explore starting a new congregation? I urge you to contact Rev. Matt Poole at mpoole@bwcumc.org if God is calling you to start a new congregation.

'Offer them Christ'

600 Acts 2 congregations are possible as we commit ourselves to Jesus Christ. Committing to Jesus Christ is our ultimate aim. When I served in Philly

Z We were able to get people off of drugs. But if we did not offer them abundance, God's grace, forgiveness and reconciliation, then what did we really achieve?

z We were able to get people jobs. We trained and placed 50 adults and 75 youth in jobs each year. But if we did not help them to live out of abundance, God's grace, forgiveness and reconciliation, weren't they still poor.

z We were able to get people into homes as we built and rehabilitated more than 100 units of housing. But if we did not offer them God's grace, forgiveness and reconciliation weren't they still homeless.

We offer homes made of hands, but also with hearts. We develop lives free from addiction and addicted to God's love. We prepare people for work that puts bread on the table and offers bread for the soul.

Practicing Extreme Discipleship

And Jesus said: "I have come that you might have life and that you might have it abundantly." "For what does it profit a person to gain the whole world and lose their soul?" "So the greatest thing in the entire world you can do is to love God with all of your heart and your entire mind and all of your soul and your neighbor as yourself." - Jesus

Jesus' words are for extreme disciples, those willing to risk for a Kingdom adventure, disciples who are becoming the body of Christ.

I give thanks to God everyday for the pastors, lay leadership and congregations of the Baltimore-Washington Conference. You are a blessing. Thank you for being a part of the Adventure.

Let us continue to work together so that throughout the Baltimore-Washington Conference extreme disciples will help the world to do no harm, do good and stay in love with God.

Together, let us also continue to pray for:

- Zimbabwe
- Korean partnership
- Russian partnership
- Latin American partnership
- People with diseases
- Baltimore city
- New church starts
- Future pastors
- Present pastors
- Lay leadership
- Young adult ministry
- Youth ministry
- Unity within the church
- Gulf Coast
- Nothing But Nets campaign
- Immigrants
- Day laborer ministry