

## **AWF Conference Leadership Summit**

**August 28, 2010**

It is my privilege as the Director of Connectional Ministries of the annual conference to represent the conference leadership team, which we call the CORE Team. CORE which stands for Connecting Our Resources and Empowerment was established as the leadership team of the annual conference in 2002. Dr. Steve Furr serves as co-chair of this team which consist of some 35 persons, including the chairs of the leadership, missional and administrative teams of the annual conference. In addition there are seven (7) at-large members and some ten (10) ex-officio members.

The CORE Team is the only collective body of representatives of the ministry teams of the annual conference. Because the CORE Team is the one common table around which the ministry leaders of the annual conference gather we have a key role in terms in mission and ministry of the annual conference.

As we operate as a CORE Team we seek to be mission driven, vision focused, context clear and symphony not solo-based. Alan Hirsch in his book, The Forgotten Ways, says when the church has been at it's best it has operated out of

missional DNA. He says that missional DNA in our day in many churches is dormant, it is there but inactive and needs reactivating and reclaiming. I believe his thinking is on target and that being missional DNA driven is vital as we go about our work as a conference, district, local church, and individual. So as a CORE Team we seek to be mission driven. We also seek to be vision focused, setting direction and painting that vision of the preferred future. In such a way we not only capture that vision but are captured by it. As a CORE Team we also seek to be context clear. We understand, for example, that of the nearly 3 million people within the bounds of the Alabama-West Florida Conference there are some 148 thousand United Methodists. These Methodist people are scattered among some 650 churches, 500 of which have an average worship attendance of less than 100. Those 500 churches represent about 25% of the membership of the annual conference. The other 140 or 150 churches that worship more than 100 on average represent 75% of the membership of the annual conference. As a CORE Team we seek to be context clear. Also as a CORE Team we seek to approach ministry in concert fashion rather than solo fashion. Thus the ministry model is not heirachal, that is neither top down or bottom up. Rather the ministry model is lateral, with the world we are seeking to transform at the top. This is the world that God so loved. This is the world that is the apple of God's eye. In this lateral ministry model, we are interconnected partners, clergy, laity,

churches, district, conferences, the United Methodist Church, serving, sharing, connecting, working with a common vision of a transformed world. So we seek to operate as a symphony not a solo.

More specifically the role of the CORE Team is to clarify and cast the vision of a transformed world all the while challenging one another to embody this vision and spread it among our ministry teams so that the work of the various ministry teams of the conference are always reflecting the vision. Also, as the CORE Team our role as we contribute to the annual conference is to align the resources with the vision. To work together in bringing all the resources to bear upon the vision before us. Our role and contribution as well is to constantly bring focus and help keep all of us from annual conference from local church level focused on the vision. In addition, our role and contribution is to move the mission forward throughout our geographical region we call the annual conference.

Our process as a CORE Team is to meet four (4) times a year and utilize a working rhythm of visioning, focusing on new and emerging ministries, reviewing ministries and affirming the budget process, and then at the fourth meeting formulating the budget recommendations to present to the Council on Finance and Administration.

In our work over the last two (2) years, two (2) primary needs have emerged. One is the on-going importance and necessity of developing the most effective leaders we possibly can among clergy and laity. We know that leadership is a key in most all of life and certainly it is a key in the life of the church. The second emerging need is to do all we can to develop healthier, missional, outreach oriented congregations. That is to develop the best ways and means to ultimately empower congregations to be about our central business of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The vision that has emerged to meet these needs is that of an academy for church leadership linked with the Duffey Institute at Huntingdon College to bring together the best principals of leadership and the best spiritual principals to develop spiritual leaders who lead generative ministries that multiply and grow through the local church to fulfill our mission. A steering committee is being put together to formulate this leadership center which we believe is of primary significance as we go forward as an annual conference. Beyond this there is so much more to say regarding the work of the CORE team about the array of ministries going on to drive our mission and accomplish and fulfill our vision. Suffice it to say that at the center of our work as the CORE Team is to ever be encouraging all of our representative ministry leaders to link the work of their respective teams with the

mission and vision of the annual conference. And ultimately to link those ministries with the mission and vision at the local church level.

We all know what a challenging day we live in. We know the economic challenges, we know the institutional challenges. We know that The United Methodist Church, for example, in the United States has declined in membership from 10 million people in 1968 to just under 8 million today. We know the many challenges of this ever-changing world and society in which we live. But what a day to be privileged to know God's call upon our lives. What a day to have God's claim on our time, talent, resources, and indeed, to have God's claim on all of life. What a day to be those who understand we are among those the apostle Paul referred to as "children of God, even heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ". What a day to be the sons and daughters of John Wesley and live and serve as the people called Methodist. What a day to reclaim our missional DNA and be disciple making, mission driven people. What a day to reclaim our transforming world vision and move toward that vision. What a day to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the world that is indeed the world that God so loves.

In this day we are called to be what I would refer to as “second line” Methodist. There is a New Orleans tradition dating back to the early 1800’s when slaves and free people of color created the Jazz Funeral. The “first line” was the family and friends walking slowly and mournfully to the cemetery. But when the burial was over the “second line” formed comprised of a jazz band and friends and family joyfully parading and dancing through the streets and celebrating the life of the deceased and the new life of resurrection.

We have some in this church of ours who are slowly and mournfully walking in the “first line”, a line which leads to death. But there are others in this church who have moved in to the “second line” and are daring to celebrate and joyfully move toward the new life of resurrection. There are those in this church of ours who live as if the “second line” will never overcome the “first line”. But I am reminded of a mid-1950’s Ingmar Bergman movie called the “Seventh Seal”. This movie is about a knight who returns from the crusades to his homeland only to find it ravaged with the plague. In the midst of the death and destruction he had experienced in the crusades and the death he is now experiencing in his homeland he finds himself in a very difficult place. In that place he encounters the personification of death and he and death begin to play a chess match. They make their moves on the chess board as the movie unfolds and at the end death

looks at the knight, and makes the final move and says ‘checkmate’. It is there that the movie ends. It is reported that young Bobby Fisher, the one who became the world chess champion, saw the movie and immediately responded when the movie was over ‘don’t give up Knight. Don’t you see. The King has one more move. Don’t give up. Don’t you see. The King has one more move’.

I submit the “second line” is forming and we as the people called Methodists of Alabama and West Florida are compelled to get in this line. Why? Because we dare to believe and bet our lives on the belief that the King has one more move.

So be it.