

The Annual Conference Reflection:
“See What You Have, See Your Neighbors, Too”
Psalm 119:1-6, 57-60, 105, Colossians 2:6-7
August 25th, 2013
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Our Christian faith is simple and straightforward. It is all about our relationship between God and us, the church and neighbors and the church and the world. Jesus Christ is the excellent role model as the bridge builder between God and our human beings. He restored our relationship with God through his death and resurrection on the cross. As we received Christ Jesus, rooted and built up in his grace and love, we continue to grow and serve our community. This year, our annual conference cast a roadmap for the local churches using a “**Relationship Driven Ministry**” approach to help take the individual churches from a **business model** to a **spiritual model** based on “**Holy Currencies**”. This morning, I want to explore with you how this model can help each of us to deepen our relationship with God and enhance our ministry. The strength of our relationship with God is a driving force to make “**Holy Currencies**” flow increasing the cycles of blessings in all of our relationships.

The Annual Conference was held this past June. Judy Shearer, lay member to the annual conference, and I attended the Annual Conference at the Sacramento Convention Center. The annual conference members voted and approved an important change to the apportionment formula. I am going to briefly present Judy Shearer’s report regarding a new apportionment formula which is called the “**Congregational Tithing**”...and it reads; *“In the California-Nevada Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, a church or fellowship’s congregational tithing amount shall be calculated as a tithe of ten percent (10%) of the total income received by the local church operating budget.”* What impact does this change mean to our Fair Oaks United Methodist Church? We anticipate some reduction. The ministries of the United Methodist Church extend beyond our local churches to endeavors throughout the world. We fund these endeavors through our “**Congregational Tithing**”.

The theme of this year’s annual Conference 2013 was “**See what you have, See your neighbors too**”. The annual conference put an emphasis on the role of relationships. The key word of the whole conference was “Relationship” and “Relationship Driven Ministry”. Dr. Eric Law, the speaker, gave us special sessions about “Holy Currencies.” He described the cycles of blessings presenting the values of **Holy Currencies**: Currencies of Time and Place, Gracious Leadership, Relationship, Truth, Wellness, and Money.

The Holy Currencies flow through with “mutually respectful relationships”. In the church, he emphasizes the “gracious leaders” who are guided to create gracious environments where “mutually respectful relationships” are built among the church members. And he suggests a new model of “Relationship Driven Ministry” for the local church ministry. He compared **Task Driven Ministry** with **Relationship Driven Ministry**:

Task Driven Ministry is linear, Talking, Convincing, Doing, Instructional Giving, but

Relationship Driven Ministry model emphasizes circler, Listening, Trust-Building, Connecting and Story Telling.

He suggests “Respectful Communication Guidelines” for the Bible study, any small group and church’s gatherings...defining **R-E-S-P-E-C-T** meaning:

R -Take *Responsibility* what you feel without blaming others.

E -Use *Empathetic* listening,

S -Be *Sensitive* to differences in communication styles,

P -*Ponder* what you hear and feel before you speak,

E -*Examine* your own assumptions and perceptions,

C -Keep *Confidentiality*,

T -*Trust* ambiguity because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong.

He took a new approach to the currency of the divine truth with “mutual relationship perspective”. He reminds us that Jesus’ approach to revealing the truth begins with the raising the self-esteem of the powerless and the divine truth exposes the system of oppression. This truth ultimately restores the community of Christ. The fifth and sixth stages talk about currency of **Wellness** and **Money**. **Wellness** means spiritual, physical and financial health within the church, the neighborhood, town and the earth environmentally. And we need **Money** for the maintenance cost of the building facilities and utilities and expenses to keep our ministry running. He also added “sustainable missional ministry” for supporting these Holy Currencies.

Our conference made a proposal to shift our mindset from committee basis to ministry basis and the way of running our church ministry from the **business model** to the **spiritual model**. The change of the **apportionment** to the **tithe** has a spiritual emphasis on the relationship between God and us following the ancient Jew’s spiritual discipline. In the Bible, Moses’ law required that the Israelites give one-tenth of the produce of their land and livestock, the tithe, to support the Levitical priesthood (Leviticus 27:30-33).

The key of Jesus' ministry was to bridge the gap and bring reconciliation and reunion between God and us and restore the community of Christ. In this point of view, our Scripture readings assure us of our relationship with God. The Old Testament reading reminds us of our relationship with God. It says, "Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD.² Happy are those who keep his decrees, who seek him with their whole heart,³ who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways.(v.1-3)" **"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (v.105)"** Our God is a lamp to our feet when we cannot see in the darkness and God shines the road and shows us a way for a next step. Imagine if you were lost in the darkness, without a flashlight, we become helpless. Our strength and excellence won't help at all. Our God is the guide when we need a light to our path and continue our journey.

Recently my little baby Jacob learned two new words, "Dinosaur" and "Scary" after he was overwhelmed seeing a big dinosaur at the science museum in San Francisco. He is scared to go to a dark place, even home, but he doesn't feel scared if he has a flashlight. Now he likes to go out at night with his flashlight. He enjoys shining a light to his way. This can be a metaphor of our faith. Our God is a lamp to our feet and Jesus is a light to our life journey. God provides strength and faith to "the scared", the weak through the church and the living words.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul assured the Colossian congregation that Christ Jesus is our Savior and the Son of God. And he encouraged them to continue to love and live their lives, "rooted and built up in Christ."

I am thankful and grateful for our church leadership and for our spirit filled ministries. Even though we haven't heard about "Holy Currencies", our church already has been practicing the "mutual respectful relationship model" in our ministries. Many outreach ministries are signs of reaching out to our neighbors and community practicing "Relationship Driven Ministry" model for our neighbors and community. When a member is sick and ill, we share our empathetic feelings through sending cards, meals and prayers. Our proclamation of "Reconciling Congregation" symbolically reveals who we are and what we do in the name of Jesus Christ. I believe that God calls us to be "bridges" to fill the gap and "re-connect" one another in the Spirit of God's love. Let us continue to love, grow and serve one another and our neighbors in Jesus' teaching and love. Amen.