

Looking Back...Focusing Forward

We are now just over two months into a new year. This is a good time for us in the Southeast District to look back with thankfulness, and to look forward with hopefulness.

First of all, I want to offer my deep gratitude for the good and faithful work that has been accomplished by clergy and congregations in 2014. We closed the year with a 97+% payout of Conference apportionments and a 100% payout of District apportionments. The importance of this cannot be overstated, allowing us to do together, what we could never do alone. I know that this doesn't happen without intentional effort and strong leadership. We have congregations, regardless of size, situation, or ministry setting, who always find a way to keep this vital connectional covenant. For that I am truly thankful.

In the current conference year, we have 8 district congregations who have signed on for some form of HCI (Healthy Church Initiative) consultation. As you know, this experience is designed to help congregations focus, with intentionality, on maximizing their ministry to the mission field around them. I'm thankful for the clergy and congregations who are willing to accept the risk of change and the challenge of moving in new and more fruitful directions.

This past year we saw the launch of the new Benton campus of La Croix Church in a region of the district (central and northern Scott County) that we had previously designated as an underserved area with significant potential for reaching new people for Christ and making a major impact. We can praise God that this new congregation now includes people from all over the targeted region (households: 60 Benton, 62 Cape, 13 Sikeston, 11 Scott City, 11 Jackson, 10 Oran, 6 Chaffee, 19 from Kelso, Diehlstadt, Bertrand, Annapolis, Morley, etc.) The point is that this congregation is now having a broad impact and making a real difference. I ask you to join me in celebrating this and in praying for the future ministry of this congregation.

In the coming weeks Renovate, a second site of First UMC in Sikeston will launch. This new Christian community has a vision of serving unreached millennials with the life changing message of God's love and grace made known in and through Jesus. Again, I ask that you join me in praying for our fellow servants, lay and clergy, who are leading this new ministry endeavor.

I'm filled with gratitude for the unique privilege of being in Christ's service with you. To use the well-known prayer of Dag Hammarskjöld: "For all that has been 'Thank You.' For all that is to come, 'Yes!'"

With You in Christ's Service,
Fred Leist