

District Superintendent's Report to the 2023 Crossroads District Conference

Greetings to our honored delegates, guests, and friends of the Crossroads District of The Wesleyan Church. If you only take one thing away from our conference today, please let it be this truth: **GOD IS ON THE MOVE!**

For those of you who are parents or grandparents, you may have watched the screen adaptation of C.S. Lewis's classic book, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. There's a wonderful scene early in the movie that I want to watch with you. The children have fallen through the coats in the closet into a strange new world called Narnia. In this scene, they're having supper with Mr. and Mrs. Beaver. It is at this meal that they learn something thrilling. Let's watch the video together. **(VIDEO – scene from *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*)**

In case you couldn't quite make out the dialogue from the British accents, Peter has just asked if there's anything they can do to help Tumnus, who was captured by the enemy.

Mr. Beaver replies: They'll have taken him to the Witch's. You know what they say. There's few that go through them gates that come out again.

Mrs. Beavers: "...But there is hope, dear. Lots of hope."

Mr. Beaver: "Oh, yeah, there's a right bit more than hope! **Aslan is on the move!**"

The children discover that Aslan, the rightful and all-powerful Lion King, has returned to restore His Kingdom in Narnia. There is hope!

We too have more than a little hope. We have the blessed hope that our King is returning. I know that many of our churches took a hit during the pandemic. But the good news is that Covid didn't cancel the Kingdom. God's Kingdom is still advancing. **God is on the move!**

Did you know that the number of people gathering in person for worship in our churches last year grew by 8%, from 10,492 to 11,339? That is at least 5 times faster than our state is growing.

60% of our churches (64 of our 105) reported growth in their worship attendance!

Some of that growth was dramatic. For example, attendance at ReThink Church in Merrillville grew by 60% last year (from 50 to 80). Rising Hope in Muncie and Hillside in Marion both reported 50% growth in their weekend worship services. LifeSpring Church, our oldest congregation (planted in 1843) grew by 131 (17%) and The River Church, one of our younger churches (planted in 2007) grew by 204 (28%). Larger and smaller churches, newer and older churches, rural and city churches, can all testify that God is on the move!

The good news is that God has been moving in Indiana for generations. We stand on broad shoulders of faithful women and men who both bravely proclaimed and lived out the Gospel for more than 175 years. God was moving then as radical reformers and revivalists stepped out of

their comfort zones to make a difference. They preached against slavery and helped build the Underground Railroad. They preached holiness and demonstrated lives transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

These reformers and revivalists planted a handful of churches in 1843, including Fountain City LifeSpring, LaOtto Cultivate, and New Castle Mt. Zion. Church planting continued over the next 5 years to the degree that the Wesleyan Methodist Connection of North America established Indiana as a separate conference in 1848. God was on the move!

Dr. Bud Bence has a full calendar, even though he's officially retired. I'm grateful for his willingness to capture some of that history for us in this brief video. ([**Dr. Bud Bence video**](#))

1848 was quite a year. The Woman's Rights Convention was held in Seneca Falls, NY, in the Wesleyan Chapel that July with over 300 people in attendance. Wyatt Earp was born in 1848 and former President John Quincy Adams died in 1848. And in 1848, the Indiana Conference of The Wesleyan Methodist Connection was born.

We're here today because those early Wesleyans saw God on the move. They accepted the challenge to go to more places and to grow more leaders. That challenge is now ours.

There are so many ways in which you are stepping up to that challenge. To begin with, I want to thank you for being such generous churches. Last year, in addition to investing more than \$1 million in our denominational partnerships (Educational Institution Fund, United Stewardship, and District Stewardship), our churches gave over \$780,000 for local outreach. And \$1 million more was given to global missions. That \$1 million was invested in outreach beyond our neighborhoods, in places that are both far and hard.

Your faithful generosity makes it possible for the DBA to bring some exciting initiatives forward today. We are pleased to announce a special scholarship for PK's (teenagers who have parents appointed to local church service). Each of these students will receive a \$300 scholarship from the Thrive Fund to help them attend this year's FOLLOW Conference in Cincinnati (Dec. 28-30).

The DBA is also delighted to announce an initiative from our Property Fund that will provide \$50,000 in 5 challenge grants to match up to \$10,000 for vital facility improvement projects in churches where the need is great. A church will need to raise 50% of the required funding and will need to have been fully participating in USF for prior years. These grants will enable churches to better serve their community and may prevent costly repairs that might require the church to close. The DBA welcomes competitive applications for these grants starting today.

Furthermore, the DBA took the proactive step of granting the denominational exemption from assessment on the first \$50,000 to every developing church. That represents an additional \$4500 that can be invested for greater community impact. More churches qualify for developing church status than have currently applied so please reach out to my office if you'd like more information about this possibility.

The DBA is bringing forward one more recommendation made possible by your generosity. This afternoon we'll be voting on reducing our Crossroads District USF assessment rate from 10% to 9%. Each church will be challenged to build their own Church Multiplication Fund.

That 1% fund will be kept in trust by each local church. Your board will determine which DBA-approved church plants you want to help fund. You'll decide whether to invest in a new campus. Your church's investment will be matched by dollars from our district's Great Commission Fund. In fact, we will set aside \$200,000 from that fund each year to match those local church initiatives. With 3 million people unreached in Indiana, we need every Crossroads District church to be passionately engaged in church multiplication.

I want to thank you for your commitment to fulfilling the Great Commission in the Spirit of the Great Commandment. Last year, we celebrated 1148 professions of faith. That's up from 851 in the previous year, **an increase of 35%**. Together, we baptized 620 people last conference year. That's up 27% from the previous year (488) and the **highest number of baptisms since 2016**. Praise God for lives being transformed by the power of the Gospel!

Sadly, thirty of our churches reported no baptisms last year and 17 of our churches reported not a single new believer won to Christ in the past 12 months. **May God never allow us to grow comfortable with empty altars and dry baptistries.** Pastors, before you get home today, book at least two Sundays on your calendar this year for baptisms. If you don't have any baptism prospects, ask your leaders to join you in fasting and praying that God will move in your church!

Last year we talked about going to at least one new place to share the Gospel. These new places would be outside your four walls, beyond your zip code, maybe even beyond our borders. Let's see how some of you have been doing just that. (**Jarod Osborne video**)

Thank you for rising to the 1-2-3 challenge. Go one more place and grow two more leaders over the next three years. We'll spend more time on that challenge this afternoon, but I want to affirm the way many of you have been inviting people to answer God's call. Last year, you reported a record of 156 people who heard God's call to become disciple-making leaders. What a joy to welcome these women and men into the life-long adventure of equipping each of God's saints for their ministry. Few things that you ever do will leave a greater legacy than mentoring people God is calling into ministry.

I could fill a few more hours with stories about how God is moving across our district team but you've read most of that already in our weekly team updates. However, I can't close without saying "thank you." Thank you to God for His grace and this sacred calling to serve Him by serving you. Thank you to the amazing people with whom I'm privileged to serve. Dr. Chris Williams (Assistant DS), Rev. Matthew Trexler (Treasurer), Dr. Craig Thurmon (Secretary), Rev. "soon-to-be Dr." Carla Working (DBMD Chair), the incomparable Michael Wood (District Administrator), and Rev. Kalina Carlson (our newest staff member).

Thank you also to Rev. Mark Atkinson, Dr. Jim Lo, Rev. Neftali Lopez, and Dr. David Smith, our powerful team of Circuit Riders. And, most importantly, thank you to Dr. Sherry Gorveatte.

May I share one last thought with you. When I began writing this report, there was a small submarine stranded somewhere in the north Atlantic ocean under more than 12,000 feet of water. That tiny vessel was experiencing about 6000 pounds of pressure per square inch.

Rescue teams were searching desperately. Oxygen was running low. Time was running out. Today, we know the heartbreaking end of that story. But this story is all the more tragic because it didn't have to happen.

The CEO of OceanGate, the firm that built the submarine called Titan, had been challenged about safety issues back in 2018. A concerned employee raised a warning about the sub's lack of physical safety scans. What was the result? The employee was fired and the CEO publicly complained about excessive regulations. In fact, he told one reporter that "at some point, safety is just pure waste."

Today, that CEO, Stockton Rush, is buried beneath 12,000 feet of water along with four other dead passengers and the shattered remains of the submersible that exploded under pressure.

Other than being heartbreaking, what does that tragedy have to do with us? Pastors and their families are under pressure too. Maybe even more than 6000 pounds of spiritual pressure per square inch. The enemy knows that if he can strike the shepherd, he can scatter the flock. In the past five years, we have had three pastoral families rocked by marital infidelity. One would be too many. Three is an epidemic.

Pastors, guard your hearts. Keep up or begin intentional accountability. Go deeper in your prayer life, Bible study, and personal times of worship. Take your sabbath. Prioritize your date nights. Make memories with your children and grandchildren. See a counselor. Hire a coach.

We have resources available, both at the district and denominational level, but you must make the decision that it matters to you. You must be willing to ask for help. The stakes are too high. The consequences eternal. Please, for heaven's sake, for your family's sake, for your sake, guard your heart. What we do matters for eternity.

God is on the move. Let us keep pace with Him, running well and finishing strong.

Respectfully submitted,
Mark Gorveatte
Crossroads District Superintendent