



September 2017

Dear North East District Family,

The word “change” can send shivers down people’s spines. It means giving up things we like. It means familiarity and comfort might be sacrificed. It means different, which for many is synonymous with bad. Nonetheless, as the old proverb goes, “The only thing that is constant is change.”

Our world around us has changed...drastically. Somewhere during the 1960s, culture slowly began to change from a modern to post-modern world. This change continues to take hold as Builders and Baby Boomers grow older. For many of us, it won’t be completely effectuated until we are old or passed away. By and large however, people under age 50 – Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z – have a very different way of viewing the world. Much ink has been spilt on whether that’s good or bad, and I don’t choose to debate the merits of one generation over another. Good, bad, or neutral, the reality is that change has occurred and if the Church wants to be effective in carrying out its mission and purpose, we have to embrace new ways.

I’ve said it before, but I want to say it again: the message of the Church does not change. The culture might have shifted into a post-modern world, but our message is always Jesus Christ is Lord, crucified, risen, and victorious. The way we communicate that message and engage culture **MUST** change, however. This was true when the culture shifted from a pre-modern to a modern world from around AD 1450-1500. When that shift occurred, science and reason became the hallmarks of the day. At first the Church began to fight that culture (and in some circles of fundamentalism still does). Eventually, though, the Church figured out how to engage the modern culture and began to flourish again.

Years ago in seminary I figured out that my ministry would likely always exist in the tension between the ending of modernity and the birth of post-modernity. I told myself then that I better get comfortable with it because it was “such a time as this” that I was being called into ministry. I share that because I know it can be hard, especially for Builders and Boomers, to understand why the Church needs to change. I want you to understand that your DS gets why it’s hard. I also want to ask you to be willing to stand in the tension of this change and embrace that for our churches to be effective, we’re going to have to do ministry differently.

There is much that is positive about post-moderns. Xers, Millennials, and Zs are very service oriented. They want to help others and meet them at their point of need. They’re also very open to talking about Jesus. They yearn for authenticity and can smell inauthenticity a mile away. They can be, however, suspect of the Church (and most other institutions) because of the negative experiences and talk they’ve heard. The only way we can help change that notion is to live out what Jesus commanded us to do: Go! We have to find ways to go to them – where they live and work – show God’s love and grace – build relationship – and then help point them to Jesus.

I want to invite you to ask an important question in your leadership meetings: **What would I be willing to change if it means that my child or grandchild might come into relationships with Jesus?** When we frame

our current reality that way, my hope is that sacred cows begin to fall away. Our personal preferences don't matter as much. Whatever we need to do to carrying the saving grace of Jesus becomes far more important.

In your leadership meetings, I want to ask you to do two things. First, take time to go you're your church's vitality metrics. Celebrate the positives and begin talking about how you might address the areas where you're aren't vital. Second, spend some time talking about the question I posed above: **What would I be willing to change if it means that my child or grandchild might come into relationships with Jesus?** Think about what the answer to that question would mean for your faith community.

I'm praying for you daily as you work to engage our changing culture with the life transforming message of Jesus!

All God's love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jay Therrell".

Rev. Jay Therrell
Superintendent
North East District