



Atlantic Central District



District Newsletter

July 2015

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"Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts."(Acts 2:46)

Never omit meeting your Class or Band...These are the very sinews of our Society; and whatever weakens, or tends to weaken, our regard for these, or our exactness in attending them, strikes at the very root of our community. (John Wesley)[i]



I have been sharing my observations of a healthy church in the past few Newsletters:

1. The healthier the church the more it deals with the brutal fact without losing faith.
2. The healthier the church the more it concentrates on its strengths.
3. The healthier the church the more it has a focus and stops doing things.
4. The healthier the church the more it gives itself away.

The next one may be the key to a church growing in ways that help people mature in their walk with Jesus:

1. The healthier the church the more it makes disciples through small groups, class meetings.

Discipleship making doesn't just happen in worship. The Acts passage shows they met for worship at the temple, however they met in small groups in their homes.

If I could do it over again, when I started New Horizon UMC 34 years ago, I would have started with small groups or class meetings as Wesley did.

If I were starting a new church today, I'm not sure I would have Sunday School. I would rather emphasize meeting in groups of 4-6 in homes or in community places to share our lives together and hold each other accountable for our walk with Christ. As Wesley says in our opening quote, it is the class meeting (small group) that holds us together.

Kevin Watson, professor at Chandler School of Theology, Emory University, writes in his book The Class Meeting (which I highly recommend for every Methodist):

During the period that the class meeting was a basic requirement of membership, the Methodist Episcopal Church grew from a few thousand members to 2.5 million. But as Methodism began to distance itself from the class meeting, its growth also began to decrease, then stop, and finally decline. (pg. 30-31)

One of the healthier churches in our district is Community of Hope. By necessity they started small groups when they began because they did not have a building to meet in for 14 years. Today, they have over 900 small groups and over 1,300 in worship.

We would not be here as Methodist, if Wesley and Asbury (here in America) didn't engage discipleship making through small groups (class meetings). Also note class meetings, small groups, were not Bible studies or book clubs. They were places you share where your heart was with Jesus. Watson points out:

Rather than being focused on transferring information or ideas about Christianity, the early Methodist class meeting was focused on helping people come to know Jesus Christ and learn how to give every part of their lives to loving and serving Christ. (pg. 26)

What is your discipleship making based on?

To close let me suggest some questions your church might ask:

1. How many small groups, class meetings, do you have that focus on a person's walk with Jesus, (note, not Bible studies which are important as well)?

2. If you were to start a small group movement in your church, do you have 6 people who could help start the movement?
3. Would your church be willing to assign a staff person (full or part-time) or a lay volunteer to head this small group movement?
4. As a church leader, what are you doing to have a closer walk with Jesus?

My hope is every church will read Kevin Watson's book, The Class Meeting, and be open to how God is moving you to gather with each other to grow in your faith.

Remember, the healthier the church the more it makes disciples through small groups, class meetings.

Yours in Christ

Gary

P.S. Community of Hope, as a teaching church, will be sponsoring a small group workshop in the fall. Times to be announced.

[i] Pg. 19, The Class Meeting, Kevin M. Watson

IN THE DISTRICT

Could your church use a Courage Grant?

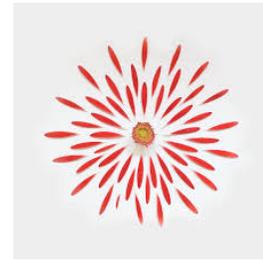
In order to assist local church in their commitment to making faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, the Atlantic Central District Committee of Church Development makes **Courage Grants** available. The **Courage Grant** enables church to develop innovative ministry beyond existing ministries of the church. Up to 50% of the funds needed for the project can be approved for a courage grant, with the commitment of the local church matching the allocated amount.



To receive the application, contact the District office at (772)299-0255. Grant applications are then taken to the Leadership Council for their review and approval.

AROUND THE CONFERENCE

Celebrating 35 Years of Amazing Grace
35th Annual Clergy Mates' Retreat



Calling all mates of Florida UM Conference Clergy!

Please make plans now to join with other mates at the 35th Annual Clergy Mates Retreat, November 5-7 at the beautiful LEC in Fruitland Park. The fall is such a great time to renew friendships, make new ones and connect with our Lord and Savior. Come enjoy the camaraderie of your sisters and be inspired by daily messages, fun, food and good fellowship. For more information, contact Amy Hill at amy12481@hotmail.com or Amanda Britt at aejbritt7@yahoo.com.

When: Thursday, November 5, 2015 to Saturday, November 7, 2015

Where: FL UM Life Enrichment Center, 4991 Picciola Road, Fruitland Park, FL 34731

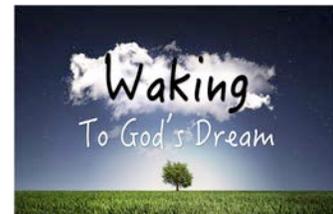
October Retreat Dates Announced by Florida UMM

Waking to God's Dream - UMM Fall Retreat - Weekend #1

October 9-10, 2015 - "Waking to God's Dream"

Friday and Saturday only. Speakers include:

- Dick Wills - Retired Memphis Conference Bishop
- Dale Locke - Lead Pastor, Community of Hope UMC - Loxahatchee, FL
- Russ Graves - Florida Conference Lay Leader
- Community of Hope UMC Praise Band -



Partnering With God - UMM Fall Retreat - Weekend #2

October 23-25, 2015 - "Partnering with God"

Friday through Sunday morning. Speakers include:

- Rev. Ed Diaz - Founder, 71:17 Ministries - Lakeland, FL
- Dr. Max Wilkins - President, The Mission Society - Norcross, GA
- Lighthouse Worship Band - Coral Gables UMC - Coral Gables,



\$165 per person includes room, meals and program.

\$62 Saturday only with lunch and dinner.

Family Campground Camp Site: \$44.00

Program: \$41 per person

Meals: \$48 per person

[Click here](#) for registration information

Great Expectations for Boomers & Beyond

One of the fastest-growing population segments is those beyond 50. Churches are struggling to keep up with and address the unique needs and wishes of this group. As a result, the Beyond 50 Ministries of the Florida Annual Conference and First United Methodist Church Winter Park (FUMCHWP) have partnered to present a special statewide event, Great Expectations for Boomers & Beyond.

This statewide conference is especially for:

- People 50 years of age and beyond.
- Members of the clergy interested in starting or improving their 50+ programs.
- Laity involved in leading ministries for those beyond 50.
- Anyone who wants to learn more about addressing the needs of this rapidly expanding population.

WHEN: October 22 - 24, 2015

WHERE: First United Methodist Church - Winter Park

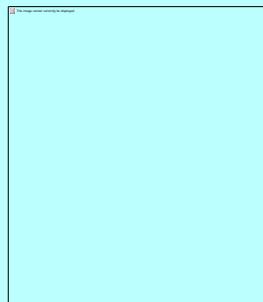
Cost: \$125 per person

Note: Early-bird registration by September 1st is \$100.

Questions: Rev. Gary Rideout, 407-644-2906x223, garyr@fumcwp.org

[Register here](#) or contact Kathy Marshall at 407-644-2906 ext 224

For more information [Click here.](#)



Fun at the Leesburg Life Enrichment Center

Want to help create meaningful experiences for your church's families this year? Want to encourage your parents to be more active in their kids' spiritual lives? Be sure they know about [LEC Family programs](#) !

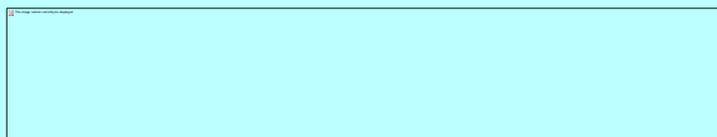
Grandparents and Me - [July 13-16](#)

Family Camp - [July 17-19](#)

Mom and Me Weekend - [September 18-20](#)

Email Melissa at melissa@lecfamily.org if you're interested in a group discount for your church's families!

Blessings,
Melissa
Rev. Melissa Cooper
Program Coordinator LEC
Family
www.lecfamily.org



CALENDAR

July

- 3 District Office Closed for Holiday
- 20 New Pastor's Orientation Part 1 - First UMC, Vero Beach 10:00 a.m.
- 28 North End New Preachers - Roseland UMC 10:00 a.m.
- 29 South End New Preachers - Community UMC, Ft. Pierce 10:00 a.m.

August

- 11 Facilitators meeting - Asbury UMC - time tbd
- 17 South End New Clergy - First, Port St. Lucie 10:00 a.m.
- 18 North End New Clergy - Suntree UMC, Melbourne 10:00 a.m.

September

- 2 District Clergy meeting - Lakewood Park UMC 9:30 a.m.