

## **Covenantal Blessings**

*By Rev. Dale Kennedy*

*A presentation to the 2007 WNCA Annual Meeting, 10/27/07*

### **Where we are in the discussion?**

For the past year or more, the Southern Conference Board of Directors has been looking at the financial situation of the Conference and the implications for our future. Though there has been some improvement in O.C.W.M. giving over the last couple of years, there is still concern that if the level of support does not increase, changes may be necessary. You may remember the discussion and presentation at our annual meeting this past June. Since this affects all of us, the Conference Board has broadened the discussion to the Associations, which resulted in the meeting on September 8 of the Conference Board and all three association boards of directors. The discussion is continuing, as all three associations have dealt with this at their association meetings. The Conference Board will meet this weekend and continue to receive information on how things are and will discuss how we proceed. The presentation today in our meeting will be a beginning point for us in Western North Carolina, and you can be assured that we will have an important role to play as we work out what our future will look like as a Conference. Our Vice President, Warren Casiday will join me in presenting you with some helpful information and a challenge.

In the United Church of Christ, we value connections and covenant. That is, we value how Jesus Christ has brought us together, and we celebrate the choices we make to faithfully live out our connectedness to God and to one another.

In the Southern Conference, we are especially blessed as we experience our covenant connections. Over 230 congregations are bound in loving and energetic fellowship as we bear witness to the work of Christ in and among us.

Over the last several months, we have been challenged to hold onto the things we cherish and value as a people united in Christ as we face uncertain times. Now, more than ever, is the time to focus on the positive, to celebrate these covenantal blessings. Now is the time to bear witness to and renew our commitment to what we value in our life in the Southern Conference. Now is the time to celebrate...

- The fellowship and camaraderie of sisters and brothers working together and in diverse ways to share the love of God with the world.
- The help and guidance churches receive from Associate Conference Ministers when there is a search for new pastoral leadership.
- The expertise of Associate Conference Ministers when our churches need conflict resolution and problem solving during difficult times.
- The work of a Conference Minister seeking to keep us on the leading edge of a faithful, prophetic and ecumenical witness for justice as we bear witness to Jesus in our Conference and beyond.
- Resources and training when we are looking to be better equipped for the work of ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

- A strong and solid credentialing process for pastoral leadership which links churches with qualified and worthy leaders.
- Access to educational opportunities for clergy and lay people seeking to be better equipped for ministry.
- Participation in the broader ecumenical work of the body of Christ as we join hands with sisters and brothers across our nation and across the world.
- The accumulated wisdom and insight of many as we seek new and creative ways to meet the challenges of our day.
- The joy and assurance that as we face challenges and obstacles we are not alone, but we are part of a mighty chorus of voices speaking forth the good news of the still-speaking God.

These are but a few of the blessings we value in our covenant life together in the Southern Conference and Western N.C. Association. Today is a good time to celebrate and commit ourselves with renewed energy and joy to this wonderful adventure in faith together.

Where do we go from here in this covenant?

From the beginning, the walk of faith has been one of mutual trust and dependence. Jesus called his disciples into a trusting relationship in which they depended on one another to do what they were called to do. Their faithfulness produced a wonderful future, a future in which you and I are rejoicing and participating today. In our time, we depend on one another, and we trust one another to be faithful. As we face our future, our covenant connections must and will serve us well. The Southern Conference Board of Directors has been working hard and will continue to work on how we can move faithfully and responsibly into our future, and certainly our own Western N.C. Association Board of Directors will be working on how we here in our association fit into the whole scheme of things. And finally, it will be each of us, each of us covenant partners as we step up and do what is necessary to make it work. We don't know how the future will look. There may be changes to our structure and to how we do things and to how many staff persons we have working with us and helping us. Circumstances may require these and other changes. Time always calls us to change as we face God's call in our day, but only change that is in step with the Spirit and not forced upon us by a lack of our own faithfulness. Yet, let us be sure of this one thing, God is with us, God is still faithful, and God is still speaking. Let us hold onto one another and to the things we value in our common life, and let us hold onto this promise of God: "I have a future for you. Just follow me." Together, let's do it. Amen.