

District Superintendent's Report 2018

“In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths” so says Solomon in Proverbs 3:6.

Glenda and I have lived by the simple truth that we are happy wherever we are as long as wherever we are is in the center of God's will. And, here in Maine serving as your district superintendent, we are happy...very happy. You welcome us, affirm us, encourage us, pray for us, support us and love us. Thank you for being our district family and giving us the privilege of serving God and you.

When we came for the interview with the District Advisory Council, they shared four imperatives with me, which we later expanded to five.

The first was to create a vision that we could all embrace. To me, that meant that this vision could not be mine or come out of a small group of district leaders. It had to come from all of us. After the Vision Tour, attended by over 200 people, and the better part of a Saturday with a representative group from across the district, we have the vision statement you see behind me: “To be a Spirit-filled community, giving witness to Christ's Kingdom for the glory of God.” Out of that vision, we saw supporting core values emerge: Missional, Christlike, Prayerful, Transformational and Connected. Words are important; but we wanted to put action to our vision. The missional strategy is how we think you would want your vision and core values to take on feet and hands: “Our mission is to embrace God's Kingdom as we prayerfully disciple, equip, and empower others; transform through hope; unify around Christ's mission; love with compassion; and, become a Christlike community.” I can't wait to unpack the meaning of this with you in the days, months, and years ahead.

The second imperative is to build community. Community is both physical nearness and a feeling of belonging. We have been coming together this year in gatherings of the district family. More importantly, we have started to know and care about each other through the many ways we are learning about each other. Kathy Joyce keeps us informed of prayer requests. Glenda keeps us informed through the weekly email announcements. I post pictures and reports on where I travel and the people I am with across the district. Perhaps the most important thing we did is to establish our district center at our home in Greene. It is used nearly weekly for meetings and the conference room is set up for training small groups.

In the future, we will be starting peer-to-peer learning cohorts for pastors. We will develop training events and workshops that bring us together. We are looking for ways to have more fellowship and the NYI has already reserved the district center for a young adult cookout in late summer.

The third imperative is to enhance communication. We have a number of Facebook groups for you to join, including Maine Nazarenes that is open to everyone, Maine Nazarene Pastors which is open to our district clergy, pages for each of our auxiliaries and you can follow my journey around the district just by requesting me as a friend on Facebook. If you have email, you can request to be put on the announcement list and the prayer request list to stay informed of what is happening around our district. Our almost-a-year-old website is a great way to stay informed, especially now that the calendar is kept current. On a personal note, I try to respond to every contact within the shortest time possible...often within minutes. You know that you are being heard.

Given the challenges of travel and harsh weather, we see the need to develop video conferencing as an important tool for helping people stay connected and involved. More people will be able to come to meetings, gather in conversation groups, and join in webinar-like events without leaving their home. More voices will be heard. More ideas will be generated. A district donor is helping make this a reality and a simple version of the system is already in use.

The fourth imperative is to be personally available and accessible. I have traveled to meet with many, many of you as groups and individually. We have hosted some of you in our home. Glenda and I have worshipped or visited with every organized congregation this year. I've already mentioned our connections through Facebook and our availability through various methods of communication. By the way, this isn't just an introductory offer. This is in our nature and, besides, we like being with you.

The fifth imperative is one that we added after some conversation with district leaders and many of you. It is important for us to develop transparent financial accountability. There was never an intention to be anything but transparent and accountable. However, it didn't appear that way and this was a good time to clear things up as much as possible. If you have digested the new budget proposal, you saw some big differences between this one and ones of the past. This one reports every source of revenue and every item of expense. Unbudgeted and unfunded expenses are gone. Additionally, we have affirmed the commitment to not touch investment principal unless there is an extraordinary need or an extraordinary opportunity.

Here is where I'll mention something that is both an extraordinary need and an extraordinary opportunity. At the request of all the district superintendents on the Eastern field, our District Advisory Board spent over five hours considering how we might help fund a significant deficit that threatened the future of Eastern Nazarene College. In the end, we agreed to encourage each local congregation to double your allocation to ENC and make up the difference out of district funds for a total gift of \$200,000. ENC agreed to return the money if the school closed within two years. As we shared with you all when this decision was made, the district will fund its portion out of the principal in the Yarmouth fund. As you will hear later from the leaders of ENC, the promise of this money has given our school a future that it didn't have just about a year ago.

We couldn't begin to think about this if our district was barely surviving. We considered it because our district is moving from surviving to thriving. I believe God is blessing us because we are a blessing to others...at the district level and at the level of your local church. God loves a cheerful giver and His blessing shows up as increased opportunity, more income than we give away, and more people added to our spiritual family. We are already seeing it.

Let me share some numbers with you.

This year, we have shown an increase in four of seven categories that our General Church headquarters measure. In the past year, we are up in new Nazarene church members, up in the number of baptisms, up in total membership, and, despite one of the harshest winters in Maine history, our people contributed more money to their local church. We stayed about the same in Sunday School and Discipleship attendance. Sometimes, staying the same is a victory. We do have two matters of concern. First, the number of reported conversions is significantly down from last year and about half of what we reported two years ago. Second, worship attendance showed another slight decline...a trend that hasn't changed in ten years when we had twice as many worshipping with us than now.

This year, we are going to work on reversing these two numbers. Clergy and laity are invited to Fairfield Church of the Nazarene on June 7-9 to learn an easy and effective way to share your faith with friends, family and neighbors. There is a flyer in your packet that has the initials "EMT" at the top. This stands for Evangelism Multiplication Training and Dr. Mark Bane, our denomination's director for Evangelism and Church Planting, is coming to help us be more effective in bringing others into God's Kingdom.

In a moment, I'll tell you about some other initiatives that can help us.

Okay, I'll do that now.

We have a bunch of healthy, strong congregations on our district. I am blessed to hear your stories of transformed lives. However, that's not a story every congregation can tell. To help strengthen existing congregation, we have launched Project RE: RE stands for whatever your church needs: renewing, reviving, refocusing, revisioning, re-whatever. We have two cohorts led by Kim Richardson and Bob McLaughlin. I will be starting a third cohort soon. These are small groups of pastors who have committed to 18 months of learning and teaching. They learn a concept one month and teach it to their lay leadership the next month. When they finish, they will start a cohort of colleagues. In three years, every pastor and every congregation will have gone through a process that is proven to help an existing congregation grow spiritually and numerically.

I've already mentioned the Evangelism Multiplication Training that is for clergy and laity. Another way we are helping clergy and lay leadership is through coaching individuals and teams using the Strengths Finder assessment tool to increase the effectiveness of our church leadership and help believers discover how God uniquely created them to do the work He is calling them to do. Passionate people who serve God passionately will transform a mediocre or declining ministry into something dynamic and growing. We are encouraging congregations to use people like Kim Richardson, Larry Cook, members of our Church Planting and Revitalization Board, and myself who are qualified to assess, consult, train and coach your congregation toward being a stronger, healthier congregation.

As we strengthen existing congregations, we will also be working to start new congregations. As you have heard me say, it is a "both-and" task. During the Vision Tour, you identified 34 communities that need a church like the Church of the Nazarene. I believe we will register at least five new works in the next twelve months. We will see at least three of those start a purposeful ministry that leads them to the next level of becoming a viable congregation. I believe we can organize at least one new congregation in the next year.

I realize that I am running and calling you to run with me. You knew that my time as your district superintendent is limited, given my age, and I believe you are depending on me to decisively lead you forward into the positive future that God has for us. In addition to what you have already heard, these initiatives aren't all and I'm not talking about more training, more programs, and more ideas. These won't change us enough or even in the most important way. In fact, these things will deplete us if we don't live and work out of a foundation grounded in our relationship with God. We need His Holy Spirit, or all of this will be just more work—for what? More awards? More recognition? God forbid!

As I have traveled across our district and listened to stories, I was struck by some of the stories that told of past hurts, sinful actions, unrepented behavior and unforgiving attitudes. It grieves me to hear these stories and realize that these stories still hold power over our people and hinder the work of God.

We have to break the chains that bind us. Some of these chains stretch back 20, 30 years and longer. You've lived with these chains so long that you don't even notice them. You don't see the effect that the past has on the present and will continue to have on the future, if we don't do something about it.

Over the next three years, we are going to experience deliverance out of the bondages that keep us from being faithful and fruitful servants of the Lord. When three out of every four people in Maine are unaffiliated with any spiritual group—Christian and unchristian, we can't just punch pinholes through the fabric of spiritual darkness. We have to take the very fabric of darkness and rip it to shreds. We can do that if we have the power of the Holy Spirit in us and working through us. The past has prevented this and it has to stop.

This year, we are going to pray and pray hard. I will call you to join me in some special times of prayer, including at least one all night vigil of prayer. We will ask God to help us confess any part we have had in the chains that bind us. Yes, we can be guilty of imprisoning ourselves. We will ask God to help us forgive and ask forgiveness. We will ask God to identify the specific evils that inhabit our lives, congregations, and even the buildings so we can confront them and expel them in the powerful name of Jesus.

In 2019, we are inviting two Nazarene couples to come and spend four weeks with us. They are called a Forerunner Team and God has used them to speak healing into bodies suffering from chronic physical, mental and emotional illness. They have been used to identify supernatural strongholds and to begin tearing them down through the power of the Holy Spirit. I haven't figured out the logistics yet, but I think Satan and his demons are getting very nervous. I expect an increase in spiritual oppression and that's why we will continue our prayer efforts into 2019 and beyond.

In 2020, a trusted friend and one whom God is using to scatter the forces of evil is coming for two weeks. Rev. Dan Bohi will hold a series of meetings across our district and I believe God will use him to send every demon back to his master in utter defeat. You are probably thinking that Steve is starting to sound a little crazy or a little desperate. I'm thinking that myself. I have not thought much about spiritual warfare or thought to turn over rocks looking for devils. Yet, Maine is the most godless state in America for a reason and our congregations are flickering lights for a reason. Your stories...most of which sound like they happened yesterday...are the evidence that God needed to show me that we don't have an organization problem or a financial problem or an outreach problem. We have a spiritual problem. It has roots in the supernatural world of the powers and principalities that have captured us and stolen our ability to experience the power of God. We are going to see the chains broken and our imprisoned souls set free. Dan is going to help us.

We are going to start in the simplest way I know how. We are going to make an investment in a restored future. We are going to start with the number one and ask God to help us with ONE MORE.

This year, God is going to help us start ONE MORE new congregation. God is going to help us strengthen ONE MORE existing congregation. God is going to help us say ONE MORE prayer for deliverance and then ONE MORE PRAYER for the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. God is going to help us tear down ONE MORE stronghold that has kept us weak and powerless. God is going to help ONE MORE person to experience healing through the powerful touch of Jesus. God is going to help repair ONE MORE broken relationship. Wherever you look you are going to see ways that God is going to help us with ONE MORE.

Not the least of which is the help God is going to give us to win ONE MORE person into our family of faith.

As the allied armies were marching toward the death camps of Nazi Germany, a group of Jewish prisoners gathered to express their love and thankfulness to their captor. Oskar Schindler is credited with saving more than a thousand Jews from the gas chambers. As he prepares to leave the camp at the urging of those he had saved, Schindler's heart is broken at the thought of just ONE MORE.

Oh, how our hearts need to be broken at the thought of just ONE MORE. The ushers are going to hand out a reminder to you that we, Maine Nazarenes, are going to be people of ONE MORE. As they do, here is the scriptural context and closing word:

³ Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴ "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵ And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶ and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' ⁷ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over ONE MORE..."

⁸ "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins^[a] and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?⁹ And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' ¹⁰ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over ONE MORE..."

¹¹ Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

¹³ "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹ "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

²² "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate."

And I think the Father looked at the elder son walking away from the party and thought, "ONE MORE."

Respectfully submitted in the powerful name of our Savior who can go beyond ONE MORE,
Dr. Steve Dillman
District Superintendent
Maine District Church of the Nazarene