

CGGC eNews—Living on Mission: Reach, Restore, Reproduce

July 29, 2016

It is 10:15 on Wednesday night and I'm fairly tired, but it's a good tired. The last three days of our triennial sessions have been long and full days; but good days! I'll try to share more next week as to some of the specific happenings of General Conference 2016, but this week I thought I'd share my report to the conference in session. The following is my written report which was submitted for the docket which delegates receive before the meeting, but my opening address on Monday afternoon focused primarily on the three themes of reach, restore and reproduce. It's my conviction that these three elements are crucial elements to living out Jesus' mission and that we're missing the mark if any one of the three is missing or neglected.



Executive Director's Report

It's been just over a year since I was invited to serve in this capacity and I'm grateful for the way in which you all have so graciously supported and prayed for our family as we've stepped into this new season of ministry. Brenda and I have appreciated your prayers, your kind and encouraging words, and your acts of kindness throughout this season of transition. It's our humble pleasure to serve you.

These are strange and interesting days in which we live. At every turn there seems to be a new sense of uncertainty, unsettledness and an increasing fearfulness in the hearts of our fellow humankind. Our world faces some major challenges as we look to the future and the possibilities of what may come. You see it on multiple fronts in our world: politics, economics, and education as well as business and geo-political relations.

Of course this is also a critical time for the body of Christ and for the Churches of God, General Conference. We live in a culture that is becoming more pluralistic and decidedly post-Christian. Our faith in Christ is no longer viewed as a virtue to be respected or as benefit to the larger society. Many of us are struggling to understand what it means to live out our faith in a context where we no longer enjoy "home field advantage."



Concurrently, our denominational body will celebrate its 200th anniversary in less than ten years from now. I believe there is a question that's not often spoken but ever-present in our hearts and minds: will our future be greater than our past? Are our best days behind us? There is a very real temptation of any institution that's been around for a while to celebrate and cherish the past more than we look to embrace the future. Will the Churches of God, General Conference survive in a post-Christian world?

Brothers and sisters, let's resist the strong temptation to focus on self-preservation. That is not the mission that we've been given by our Lord. The mission that we've been given by Jesus is much larger, far more significant than simply the preservation, growth or prospering of our own theological tribe. There is a real danger of making our own preservation the mission and as a result, miss out of the true mission of God in this world.

As we look to the future, to what the next ten years might bring and the next 200 years beyond that, let's set our aim and efforts solely on the mission of Jesus. We've talked about living "on mission" a lot over the past several years, but what does that mean for us?

I want to share three words that I believe capture the essence of Jesus' mission: Reach. Restore. Reproduce (these are not original to me and I need to give credit to Dave Ferguson of Community Christian Church [<http://communitychristian.org>] and New Thing [<http://www.newthing.org>] for Reach, Restore, and Reproduce and to some of my thinking around these themes).

If the Churches of God, General Conference is to fully embrace the mission of God, it's increasingly important that we both understand Jesus' mission and give ourselves in obedience to Him by reaching, restoring and reproducing. Our human tendency is focus on one aspect of the mission, but it is critically important that we embrace each aspect of His mission as we seek to live out a faithful witness.

Reach:

Jesus made it clear both through word and deed that reaching those far from God was central to His Mission (Luke 15, Luke 19:1-10). Jesus made a habit of reaching out to those who were considered to be beyond the reach of God. If we are to live on His mission, then we will have the same passion to reach those who are far from God.

While I believe this has been a key passion of the Churches of God, General Conference; the radical shifts in our culture are going to require new approaches to reach those far from God. This requires that we be willing to take on the role of a missionary, to leave our comfort and safety and go to those who have no knowledge of, interest in, or allegiance to Christ in order to share the Good News of the kingdom of God!



Restore:

Jesus demonstrated through His life and ministry and ultimately through His death and resurrection that the kingdom of God was restoring God's original design for the world and humankind (Luke 4:14-21, Revelation 21:1-8). Every miracle that Jesus performed was a restoration of life from the effects of the fall: the blind were given sight, the dead were raised to life, the marginalized were welcomed, sins were forgiven and death was overcome. Jesus was restoring everything that sin had tainted, harmed or destroyed.



I believe we're experiencing a reawakening of the importance of God's restorative justice through His church. Historically, this is why we've established medical works throughout the world and educational institutions to help people experience the full and abundant life that was God's original intent for all of humankind. This is why we are beginning to take seriously the call of Jeremiah 29:7 to "seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile" as we look outward to our communities to love and serve in a redemptive and restorative manner.



Reproduce:

Jesus poured Himself into the twelve disciples so that they would go and do the same (John 14:12, 20:21). In the book of Acts we see the disciples doing the same things that they had learned from Jesus. Jesus invested in a few who went and did the same things they saw Him doing.

This is discipleship in its most simple form. Disciples reproducing disciples. Churches reproducing churches. This is an area where there is much to learn and put into practice, but I believe it's necessary for us to play the role that God has for us in His mission. If we are to fully embrace the mission of Jesus, we must take serious the call to make disciples who make disciples. Let's work toward the day when our church planting efforts will just be natural results of our disciple-making: we will reproduce!

We have a King who has promised to never leave us or forsake us. Let us not be afraid in this time when so many are full of fear. Let's give ourselves fully to His mission and commit to reach, to restore and to reproduce so that the whole world might be filled with the Glory of God!

Christ's Peace,

Lance Finley, Executive Director

