

STATE OF THE WORK REPORT
Board of Bishops
to the Board of Administration
presented by Richard D. Snyder

Two years ago, a friend of mine with glasses that looked like the bottoms of coke bottles, had laser eye surgery — no more glasses. He can see perfectly. Perfect vision is a huge blessing. We as leaders in the Free Methodist Church hunger for the day when there will be no blurred vision among us. We want every pastor, missionary, lay leader and executive to have a clear focus of this God-shaped vision.

We realize that the essential element in vision is that we **BE** the vision. In other words, we must be holy; we must be Biblically healthy members of our community of faith; we must be multipliers of disciples, leaders, groups and churches.

This requires that our vision be clear, compelling, convincing, captivating, consistent and courageous. Your Board of Bishops for many years has looked for what the Bible calls “gold and pearls and precious stones,” that which will withstand any fire. Along with you and all serious followers of Jesus and members of the Free Methodist Church, we have attempted and are attempting to consistently set aside all “wood, hay and stubble” so that as holy disciples we shall not miss the mark to win the prize for which God has called us.

Over these years a vision has been hammered out which we believe flows from the heart of God, connects perfectly with the passion of our founders, John Wesley and B. T. Roberts, and paints a picture of that which is so desperately needed in our world today. We rehearse this constantly. It resounds in our prayers, our hearts and minds. Instead of growing tired of the refrain, it grows on us and grips us, grabbing our attention and imagination. When we meet we talk about it; when we preach it informs our thought; when we write, it finds its way onto the page. For us, it is a compelling vision for the Free Methodist Church, here and worldwide. We hope it is in your prayers and dreams – that you can see what we see and long for:

A HEALTHY, BIBLICAL COMMUNITY OF HOLY PEOPLE,
MULTIPLYING DISCIPLES, LEADERS,
GROUPS AND CHURCHES.

This is our passion. It is all about knowing God and glorifying Him by making Him known.

Time and space do not permit a full-blown description of what such a vision can produce, but think for a moment about a few pictures:

- Healthy, biblical community: Free Methodists joyously and enthusiastically joining together in worship of God; standing shoulder to shoulder ministering God's grace in their neighborhoods; sitting face to face listening and speaking with one another ensuring that relationships are clean and whole; kneeling side by side interceding for the church, the city and the world.
- Holy people: Free Methodists setting aside every weight and every sin so that love for God and for people is obvious; studying the Word and applying it to every facet of life;

looking always to give a helping hand to the poor and disenfranchised.

- Multiplying disciples, leaders, groups and churches: Free Methodists committing time, talent and treasure into ministries that produce fruit; training to discover the best ways to go into our neighborhoods; going into our neighborhoods to invest in need-meeting initiatives; resourcing our leaders so that every pastor and lay leader is growing in godliness and competency; focusing on establishing a healthy Free Methodist Church in every community.

And this vision is materializing. It is unfolding in places where local churches are becoming healthy churches with Spirit-filled leaders who are working a plan to fulfill our expected outcomes, viz:

1 Prayer-Saturated Congregation

- speaking to God on behalf of a lost world
- praying first, acting second
- interceding for individuals, rulers and nations to yield to the ultimate victory of Christ
- listening to God and obeying Him

2 Worshipping Congregation

- celebrating the saving grace of God in singing
- encountering God in prayers
- reading and obeying the Word
- preaching the Word
- observing the sacraments

3 Discipling Congregation

- connecting all who wish to know Christ to groups and cells
- nurturing believers toward Christ-like, obedient love
- enfolding believers, welcoming them into membership
- bringing disciples to a life pattern of holy living
- taking and sending disciples into the world to serve

4 Evangelizing Congregation

- befriending lost people
- presenting and explaining the gospel in culturally relevant ways
- inviting lost people to trust Christ as Savior

5 Reproducing Congregation

- developing the next generation of pastoral and lay leaders
- establishing cells as core groups for new church plants
- planting new congregations

6 Culture-Engaging Congregation

- seeking justice for all
- showing mercy to the poor
- empowering the disenfranchised

7 World-Mission Congregation

- engaging in Free Methodist (FM) World Missions
- giving vital resources
- sending cross-cultural evangelists
- providing diverse support teams

8 Purpose-Driven Congregation

- organizing for essentials only
- focusing on mission and vision to shape all ministry
- surrendering to Christ's mandated Great Commandment and Great Commission

All of this is hard to measure. It is hard to put health and holiness on a chart. Numbers mean little or nothing if not preceded by and accompanied by holiness and health. After all, there are growing churches all over the world where little holy behavior is found. It is possible to be a

club and call it a church. It is possible to be a religious organization and call it a church.

The task of writing a state of the work report based on our vision is hard to do. We can be anecdotal on both sides of the coin, illustrating health and dysfunction, holiness and division, growth and decline. We can show you statistics (which we do) but accurately analyzing them is open to speculation.

We offer the following reflections which emerge from our observations, studies, prayers and conversations.

I. Healthy, Biblical Community

Jesus told this parable:

“A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any.” So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’

“‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”

The opening verses of this parable tell of the poor state of things – no fruit. And in despair the man who planted the vineyard only had vision from the standpoint of the law, so his solution was “cut it down.” But Jesus entered the picture and offered a solution based on health.

He carved out a transitional space and called it GRACE. We should be cut down but in God’s mercy, he offers grace. Then he says, “I’m going to do some digging around,” and in this he applies TRUTH. God likes to give us reality checks. David observed that, “God wants truth in the innermost being.” Jesus went further. He said, “I’m going to fertilize.” In other words, grace offers nutrients while truth is being faced. If we only have truth, we get legal and hard and carnal. If we only have grace we get mushy, and soft and sentimental. The nutrients blend truth and grace, and reflect Jesus who is full of grace and truth. Jesus continues, “give it a year” and here introduces the idea of TIME. He knew that truth and grace do not work without time. And then, notes Jesus, all this takes place in the vineyard – in COMMUNITY.

This develops into a nice formula which we discover is much more than a formula – it is divine truth.

TRUTH + GRACE + TIME in COMMUNITY = HEALTH / FRUIT

(a fuller treatment of this can be found on the Free Methodist web site under Leadership, Richard D. Snyder.)

How healthy is the Free Methodist Church? Here are some things we know.

- 1) The very idea of Healthy, Biblical Community and the formula, truth + grace + time in community = health/fruit is often repeated, reflected upon and applied in places where

dysfunctions have crippled ministries. We believe this vision is compelling and is catching hold across the church.

- 2) The Expected Outcomes Quotient provided by the Board of Bishops, and a simplified version provided by Seattle First Free Methodist Church is being used widely by individual churches across the country (copies attached).
- 3) Parish Profiles are being used by superintendents when we have a church between pastoral appointments. This profile enables a church to look carefully into its soul and is having a strong impact on our securing godly, competent leaders to shepherd our people.
- 4) The new Ministerial Education and Guidance Board Manual has been completed, providing many helps toward securing and appointing godly, competent pastors.
- 5) Many conferences are now participating in health surveys on an annual or semi-annual basis, working on their "minimum factors" to bring them into a stronger position of vitality and life.
- 6) Healthy, biblical community produces excellent churches. We praise God that seven Free Methodist Churches were named among the 300 excellent churches in a nationwide study underwritten by an Eli Lilly Endowment. In light of the fact that there are over four hundred Protestant denominations in the United States, we see this as an indicator of movement in a positive direction. (Check the Free Methodist web page for the full story and a listing of our seven "excellent" churches.)
- 7) The work atmosphere and relational ethos at the World Ministries Center has shown marked improvement over the past three years. There is a sense of team and a servant spirit that causes us to give praise to God and thanksgiving to our faithful and godly staff.

II. Holy People

The Free Methodist Church cannot ever lose sight of our original mandate to spread scriptural holiness across these lands and to reform society. Our whole theology is built on the foundation that God is holy and that God is love. Holiness, described as perfect love – a heart undivided in its love for God and people – is the centerpiece of our vision for it produces healthy, biblical community and motivates the work of multiplying disciples, leaders, groups and churches. We offer these notes regarding the state of the work in reference to holiness.

- 1) We observe a deepening hunger and interest among our pastors to live, teach and preach the holy life. Books such as John Oswalt's "Called to be Holy" are widely read among our teachers and pastors.
- b) Seminaries like Northeastern Seminary, Asbury Theological Seminary, and Wesley Biblical Seminary are growing. We see this as an indication of an emerging hunger for Wesleyan teaching and as a recognition that profession of faith without practice is destructive and has contributed much to the undermining the stability of our American culture.
- 3) The Free Methodist Communications video "Living Holiness" has been well received. Our

prayer is that it will be used extensively with the study guide over the year ahead. Superintendent Allan Ellershaw and Bishop Snyder are in dialog with a church in England which wants to be a part of the Free Methodist Church. Pastor David Carr, serving the 1000 member Renewal Christian Centre, wrote, "We have recently shown the 'Living Holiness' video, together with our own Power Point presentation, to the whole congregation. I was deeply moved by their response in that I have not received any negative thoughts from any of the one thousand people who saw the presentation – they all feel this is the leading of the Lord."

- 4) We are pleased to announce that Dr. Ajith Fernando, a graduate of Asbury Theological Seminary from Sri Lanka, practitioner and scholar on holiness will bring our keynote address at the 2003 General Conference and will teach the way of holiness during special sessions of the conference.

III. Multiplying disciples, leaders, groups and churches

This vision really starts at the end. Planting churches is essential and is the fastest and most effective way to make disciples, grow leaders and establish groups. The Free Methodist Church in North America planted 944 new churches in its first forty years (1860-1900). We averaged less than two per year over the next eighty years (1900-1980). Can we regain the passion and sacrifice of our homesteading pioneers?

At no time in American history has the need for new churches been more urgent. Consider for a moment the following statistics.

The church to population ratio is declining:

In 1890, there were 27 churches for every 10,000 Americans.

In 1950, there were 17 churches for every 10,000 Americans.

In 1996, there were 11 churches for every 10,000 Americans.

-- George Gallup, Church in the World Today

From 1986-1996, the combined membership of all Protestant denominations declined by 9.5%, while the national population has increased by 11%.

In the average year, half of all churches do not add one new member through conversion growth.

Each year, 3,500 to 4,000 churches close their doors for the last time. Only 1,100 to 1,500 are started each year. In other words, we lose 10 churches per day while gaining only 3 per day.

— ASCO

Despite our strong Christian heritage, the church in America is declining. Many older churches are showing signs of aging and decline. They are struggling to make the gospel relevant to a new generation and are often failing to bridge that cultural gap.

According to Leith Anderson in **A Church for the 21st Century**, "New churches are the most effective means of evangelism. New churches are flexible, open to newcomers, entrepreneurial, outreaching, and not burdened with servicing old internal relationships and demands." Older

churches “tend to become so burdened with budgets, buildings, and pastor and people problems that they no longer have the energy for outreach.” (p. 60)

What is the State of the Work regarding multiplication?

- a) Together we have planted over 25 new churches in the United States this year.
- 2) The Board of Administration of the Free Methodist Church of North America has committed more money to church planting, and conferences are doing the same than at any time in our history.
- 3) Emphasis on and resourcing church planting is producing positive results:
The western area has started 29 new churches in the last 33 months (since January of 1999) – an average of approximately 1 church every 5 weeks.
The Eastern United States has planted a new church every month for the past two years.
- 4) Empowering leaders to strategize in ways that accomplish our expected outcomes is helping our Portuguese and Spanish ministries that are exploding with growth, primarily through the planting of new groups, equipping of leaders to plant, entering new territories, and establishing schools to train pastors and planters.
- 5) On Sunday, September 16, approximately 3,500 people drove to the Crossroads Community Church Annual Classic Car Show in Temperance, Michigan. 250 volunteers gave loving care and witness to the 300 show car owners and visitors in this outreach event. More than 2,100 people came inside to attend the worship services, and children and teens provided a variety show and singing on an outside stage. Pastor Glenn Teal reported that several committed their lives to Christ.
- 6) The Free Methodist Church in Southern California has partnered with Free Methodist World Missions to launch the Free Methodist Church in Ethiopia under the leadership of Badeg Bekele. In just four years, we now have five churches with approximately 1,500 adults in regular weekly attendance, a medical clinic, and an elementary school.
- 7) The Long Beach, California, Light & Life Christian Fellowship Church, under the leadership of Pastor Larry Walkemeyer, in the last eleven years has gone from a congregation of 50 to approximately 800. In addition, they have birthed four daughter churches (Long Beach-Belmont, Long Beach-Bixby, Long Beach Hispanic, and the Storehouse Free Methodist Church in Philadelphia, PA), with a combined weekly attendance of approximately 1,250.
- 8) Pastor and district leader, Doug Anderson, has been applying the purpose and vision of the Free Methodist Church in the local church and in the district. The Willow Creek Association notes that at present the fastest growing church in America is the Endicott Free Methodist Church pastored by Doug, growing from 180 to 800 over the past eighteen months. They have, during the same period, mothered their first congregation.
- 9) The Seattle, Washington, Rainier Avenue Free Methodist Church, pastored by Dr. Paul Olver, has partnered in 2000 with Free Methodist World Missions to launch the Free

Methodist Church in Thailand. This ministry led by Rev. Arthur Chutong now has two churches (approximately 70 people), two affiliated churches (approximately 55 people), and a pastor from Malaysia in the process of transferring into the Free Methodist Church with plans to plant a church in the city of Ipoh, Malaysia. PNW pastor Kevin Austin and family arrived in Rayong on a 2-year VISA assignment.

10) Statistics reveal that we are winning many to the Lord, seeing increases in worship attendance, but not keeping pace with assimilation of members (see charts). We must find ways to encourage membership, believing that membership is one of the key components of multiplying disciples. In the coming year, your Board of Bishops will be preparing teachings on this subject, including a video to be used in our churches.

We believe that the path toward the fulfillment of this God-shaped vision is that every church be a healthy church with Spirit-filled leaders who are working a plan to fulfill our expected outcomes.

This means that we must pray, knowing that the Holy Spirit is given to those who ask – who call upon God. We also know that the only plans worth pursuing are God's plans. So we like to remind ourselves as a church that we have no plans but God's plans. Of course, this is only true to the extent that we pray, seeking the mind and heart of God, then obey, responding to His leadership as the Head of the Church.

Bottom line: we want to be a Holy Spirit anointed and Holy Spirit led organism that focuses on being a **Healthy Biblical Community of Holy People multiplying disciples, leaders, groups and churches.**

*Board of Bishops of the
Free Methodist Church of North America*

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