

## EPISCOPAL ADDRESS

Dakotas Annual Conference  
The United Methodist Church  
June 6, 2013

### INTRODUCTION

The Lord be with you! (And also with you.)

May grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge and love of God and Jesus our Lord. (II Peter 1:2, *The Message*)

Char and I are delighted that God and the 2012 North Central Jurisdictional Conference assigned us to the new Dakotas-Minnesota Area. It is good to be home!

In the weeks leading up to Jurisdictional Conference, and throughout the conference, my prayer was: “Gracious God, prepare my heart and soul to receive and embrace your direction for my life and ministry and fill me with holy anticipation.” God is good and answered my prayer. I believe with all of my heart, mind and soul that God has called me to join you here in the Dakotas Conference so that together we can advance our common mission of making disciples of Jesus for the transformation of the world.

Char and I are filled with holy anticipation and gratitude for the years ahead as we journey together, minister together, lead together. We request your prayers, even as we pledge to hold each of you and your congregations in our hearts and prayers. (Have Char stand or join me on stage.)

One of the great blessings I have already discovered in my first nine months with you is the many wonderful, gifted clergy and lay leadership of the Dakotas Conference. As I look across this auditorium and marvel in the diversity, creativity and faithfulness of the gathered leadership of the Dakotas Conference, I am reminded of Paul’s greeting in his first letter to the Thessalonians. I quote from Paul, but speak from my heart.

“Every time I think of you, I thank God for you. Day and night you are in my prayers as I call to mind your work of faith, your labor of love, and your steadfastness of hope in following our Master, Jesus Christ., before God our Father. It is clear to me, friends, that God not only loves you very much, but also has put God’s hand on you for something special.”

For something special! For something special! God has placed God’s hand on each of you – on each of us – for something special God has placed God’s hand on each of our congregations for something special. God has placed God’s hand on the Dakotas Conference for something special!

- That something special is to be a powerful, fruitful mission movement proclaiming the healing, saving, reconciling, transforming love of God revealed in Christ Jesus.
- That something special is to embrace our Wesleyan Movement's passion to "reform the continent and spread scriptural holiness throughout the land."
- That something special is to develop vital congregations that are engaging and impacting their communities and changing lives.
- That something special is to reach the next generations of children and youth.
- That something special is to seize the mission opportunity afforded by the Bakken Oil Rush.
- That something special is to make the redemptive, joyful, hope-filled, life-giving Kingdom of God visible, attractive, accessible, tangible, incarnate, real – all across the Dakotas!

Are you ready? Are you ready for something special? Can you feel God's hand upon you for something special? Are you ready to join with me and become unleashed, bold, spirit-leaders? Are you ready for something special? Are you ready?

### **SO, NOW WHAT DO WE DO? SHIFT HAPPENS**

We gather here in Bismarck during the very heart of the Pentecost season. We gather, hoping and praying that the mighty, Holy Spirit wind will rush in and fill this entire auditorium. We gather, hoping and praying that the mighty, Holy Spirit wildfire will spread through our ranks. We gather, eager to hear – truly hear – one another speak about God's powerful deeds. We are eager to hear one another across all that divides us. We long to hear one another beyond all that separates us.

For the next three days, I invite you to imagine this Dakotas Annual Conference session as that first Pentecost crowd. Imagine us unified by the active, empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. Imagine us acting as if we are drunk. Drunk with the joy of being one in Christ Jesus. Drunk with enthusiasm for God's purposes. Drunk with a desire to repent and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Imagine us – all 600 hundred of us – cut to the quick by Peter's preaching and responding with one voice, **"So, now what do we do?"** So, now what do we do? I invite you, with one voice, to ask God this critical question, this transformational question, this Pentecost question – So, now what do we do? Together we beseech God, **"So, now what do we do?"**

Pentecost changed the world. Pentecost shifted the world. Pentecost shifted the world from being exclusive and exclusionary – everyone speaking in their own tongue – to inclusive. Suddenly, without warning, everyone could understand everyone else. Suddenly, without warning, people of every language and culture, people from every corner of the known world,

were caught up by the Holy Spirit and included in the God movement. Suddenly, without warning, God's Spirit was poured out on all people That just give me chills!

The second chapter of Acts says, "All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?'" (Acts 2:12) Eugene Peterson in *The Message* puts it this way: "Their heads were spinning; they couldn't make head or tail of any of it. They talked back and forth, confused: 'What's going on here?'" The people gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost experienced the "Whoosh Factor." On Pentecost, "whoosh" happened. The Holy Spirit "whooshed in" and turned the world upside down and inside out, and everyone present knew that everything had changed, even though they could not comprehend all that had happened.

Dear friends, we live in such a time. We live in an age, a Pentecost-like season, when everyone knows that everything is changing at the speed of a violent wind, at the speed of wildfire, and we cannot comprehend it all. Like those present for the first Pentecost, our heads are spinning; we can't make heads or tails of any of it.

In 2006, Karl Fisch first wrote and published a video titled, "*Did You Know?*" for the higher education market. It became an instant UTube sensation. Perhaps, some of you have seen it. It has been updated each year. The video helps me understand why I so often have that "head-spinning" experience. It is about the paradigm shift that is constantly happening all around us. It is about the "whoosh" in which we live. Take a look at "*Did You Know?*"

(Show video: version 3.0, officially updated for 2012)

That is only a small slice of the shift – the whoosh – that is happening all around us. But, the point is stark – the point is clear – we are living in exponential times. Information technologies, populations, jobs, cultures, the church are all shifting at lightning speed. The church finds itself in the midst of a huge "whoosh." We certainly do not want to find ourselves flatfooted, unable or unwilling to be the transformational movement God intends. We certainly do not want to be the church Lyle Schaller quips about when he says that if the 1950's return, The United Methodist Church will be perfectly positioned to reach the world.

In her recent book, *Christianity After Religion*, Diana Butler Bass notes of the declining mainline churches, "The anxiety is such that some may well think it the end times." But she argues that what's really happening may just be "the end of a particular set of patterns organizing church, theology and religious life." She writes that what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called the "garment" of faith could be falling apart, leading to something more authentic.

The question Peter's Pentecost congregation asked is our question, "**So, now what do we do?**"

## **OUR JOURNEY TOWARD VITALITY THE ADAPTIVE CHALLENGE**

Three weeks into my new assignment to the Dakotas-Minnesota Area, I conducted personal interviews with each district superintendent and director-level conference staff person and participated in my first Dakotas Extended Cabinet meeting. Just days before, I attended my first meeting of the Dakotas Common Table. Each of those conversations and meetings was a great experience and a very helpful orientation for me. I remain grateful to the entire Extended Cabinet for the thoughtful and patient manner in which they responded to my endless questions.

But, I also discovered the Extended Cabinet asking their own profound question – the same question the Pentecost congregation asked Peter at the conclusion of the very first Pentecost sermon: **“So, now what do we do?”**

Over the past nine months, the Extended Cabinet and I, and several other conference leaders, have been wrestling with that very question. So, now what do we do to increase the number of vital, fruitful, missional congregations in the Dakotas Conference? So, now what do we do to equip local churches to fulfill the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world? So, now what do we do to call forth, train, support and “unleash” bold spirit-leaders?

“So, now what do we do?” is the adaptive question confronting all of us. Adaptive is the new “c” word. It is the substitute for the word “change”; because we all know that we do not like to change. There is a reason we all can recite the last seven words of the church – “We’ve never done it that way before” – as automatically as the Lord’s Prayer.

After the “whoosh;” after shift happens (if you quote me, please say that phrase slowly); after the winds of Pentecost blow through, we are left to answer the adaptive question. In every age, the church is confronted with the challenge to adapt or atrophy; to renew or regress; to re-invent or die; to revive or become slave to endless technical fads and fixes.

As the Extended Cabinet and I have wrestled with the issue of the primary adaptive challenge confronting the congregations (and the annual conference as a whole) I have concluded that our real adaptive challenge is to:

**passionately and respectfully offer Christ in a Wesleyan Way that speaks to our cultural context.**

To do so, we will need to ensure that offering Christ is our very heartbeat, permeating and shaping everything we are and do. We will need to become more nimble, innovative, experimental. We will need to be open to inversions and transformation. We will need to become more movemental and less institutional. We will need to be unleashed! (Anyone nervous yet? Or expectant and hopeful?) We will need to learn together. We cannot go it

alone; we will need to learn from each other and together as a whole community. There will be no technical fixes, easy solutions or silver bullets. Making the necessary and continuous adaptations will lead to a cultural shift within Dakota United Methodism. We will look different; be different. As the prophet Isaiah reminds us, we will “Sing to the Lord a new song!” (Isaiah 42:10)

Are you still ready for something special? Are you still ready to be unleashed as bold spirit-leaders? Are you ready to engage the adaptive challenge?

**OUR JOURNEY TOWARD VITALITY**  
**VISION: GOD’S PREFERRED FUTURE**

If we are to ensure that offering Christ is our very heartbeat, permeating and shaping everything we are and do, then we will need to give full-blown expression to Jesus’ imperatives to:

- cultivate spiritual vitality,
- reach new people, and
- heal a broken world.

I believe this is God’s vision – God’s preferred future – for each of the 250 United Methodist congregations in the Dakotas Conference.

Jesus’ Great Commandment (Luke 10:27) to love God and neighbor is the scriptural imperative to cultivate spiritual vitality. Within our Wesleyan tradition, we practice this great commandment through the practical and formational disciplines of three simple rules – do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God. Wesley claimed the mark of a vital, mature “Methodist” Christian was loving God with all of your heart, soul, strength and mind and your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus’ Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) to go and make disciples of all nations is the imperative to reach new people. Within our Wesleyan tradition, we practice this great commission through summoning people to experience the prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace of God and encouraging people to embrace a life of personal and social holiness. The thrust of the Wesleyan movement was to “reform the nation ... and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.” It is in our DNA to offer people Christ.

Jesus’ Great Call (Luke 4:18-21) to preach good news to the poor and to liberate the oppressed is the imperative to heal a broken world. Within our Wesleyan tradition, we practice this great call to mission through our historic commitment to make visible and incarnate the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. We are a people of compassion and mercy, advocacy and justice.

## OUR JOURNEY TOWARD VITALITY VISION PATHWAYS

The unique purpose of an annual conference is to equip, resource, support and encourage churches in fulfilling these scripture imperatives – this vision – in their respective geographical, cultural and demographic contexts. To achieve this purpose and to be truly collaborative partners with the local congregations, annual conference leaders and structures will also need to become more adaptive.

- We will become less regulatory and more permission-giving. Dr. Len Sweet recently said, “There can be no role for a denomination that tries to regulate its pastors and churches. No one wants to pay to be regulated; they will pay for resources.” (*United Methodist Reporter*, December 7, 2012, page 7B) **And, I would add leadership.**
- We will become less concerned about “one size fits all” and more focused and targeted in our resourcing and training.
- We will give less time to maintenance ministry and more time to fostering innovation.
- We will be less concerned about everything being in good order and more tolerant of chaos and “failed successes.” (Bishop Robert Schnase)
- We will spend less time managing church fights and fires and more time celebrating Holy Spirit interruptions and breakthroughs.
- We will be less tolerant of mediocrity and fruitfulness and more insistent on accountability to what Jesus has called us to be and what you said you will do.
- We will spend less time teaching people to run the church and more time teaching people how to be the church.
- We will not live in the past, but anticipate and imagine the future. I recently heard one of our pastors say: “If our memories are stronger than our dreams, then we are a dying church.”
- We will spend less time on piddling problems and more time nurturing God-sized dreams.
- We will spend less time and energy being experts and more time becoming an adaptive, learning community.
- We will spend less energy waiting for committees to act and more energy celebrating where individuals, congregations and networks are birthing new initiatives.
- Above all else, we will re-direct the conference’s financial and personnel resources toward building the missional capacity of our congregations.

Missional means to focus on God's purposes for Christ's mission, not our personal or institutional preferences. It means to embrace and align our work around Jesus' imperatives to cultivate spiritual vitality, reach new people and heal a broken world. It means to turn outward and engage the world with a burning desire to offer Christ and have a transforming impact on individuals, our communities and global systems.

Over the past several months, we have been laying the foundation for focusing our time, energy, prayers and resources on four key vision pathways we believe will help congregations and the conference increase our missional capacity. The four vision pathways are:

- Developing Missional Leaders
- Equipping Missional Congregations
- Extending our Missional Impact
- Generating Missional Resources

Developing Missional Leaders builds capacity by focusing on creating a culture of call, identifying, preparing and deploying clergy and lay leaders who are gifted and skilled in leading congregations to become more vital. Equipping Missional Congregations builds capacity by creating new places for new people in strategic missional settings and providing resources/training for exiting congregations seeking to re-invent or re-vision their mission and ministry. Extending our Missional Impact builds capacity by providing avenues for congregations to more effectively utilize our "connection" to have a greater impact on transforming their communities and the world. Generating Missional Resources builds capacity by generating the financial resources necessary to create and sustain our leadership development, congregational vitality and missional impact initiatives.

Currently, the Extended Cabinet and a number of the conference Links and leaders are developing the strategic initiatives and tactical plans to put wheels under each of these pathways toward our vision of every congregation bearing kingdom fruit reflective of Jesus' imperatives:

- love God and neighbor,
- go and make disciples of all nations, and
- liberate the oppressed.

### **OUR JOURNEY TOWARD VITALITY FRUITFULNESS**

Missional congregations that are cultivating spiritual vitality, reaching new people, and healing a broken world bear much kingdom fruit. They experience the "signs and wonders" of God's Spirit breaking through and raising people to new life in Jesus Christ. They reflect the fruitfulness of the early church recorded in Acts 2. They witness God working in and through

them to bring forth this fruit. Vital, missional congregations prayerfully establish and assess their fruitfulness in alignment with Jesus' imperatives:

#### Reach New People

- Worship attendance
- New professions of faith

#### Cultivate Spiritual Vitality

- Number of small groups
- Number of people in small groups

#### Heal a Broken World

- Number of people sent into mission
- Number of people impacted by the church's service
- Total mission giving

Missional congregations create new places and new room for new people. They call forth and equip bold, spirit-leaders. They feed the hungry, stand with the poor, visit the prisoners, welcome the strangers and immigrants, advocate for the oppressed and persecuted and those on the margins. They help eradicate the killer diseases of poverty. They go to the oil fields and the wheat fields. They keep a grip on hope and offer people hope. Missional churches are not afraid or insulted or embarrassed to be accountable for kingdom fruit because they are not so arrogant to think their fruitfulness is the result of what they alone are doing. Missional churches know their fruitfulness is the result of what God is accomplishing in and through their obedience to Jesus' missional imperatives.

### **SO, NOW WHAT DO WE DO? REPENT AND PRAY FOR THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

When Peter's compelling sermon caused the Pentecost crowd to ask, "So, now what do we do?," he did not hesitate in responding. "Repent! Repent, so that your sins may be forgiven. Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Peter's first response to the question, "So, now what do we do?," was to tell those gathered to change their lives before they went out to change the world. Peter's first response to the question was, turn to God before you go out to turn others to God. Peter's first response to the question was to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit so that you do not go out into the world powerless. Peter understood that transformation begins with the individual.

Our United Methodist movement will never fully realize its potential to transform the world until those of us gathered in this room -- the spiritual leaders of the Methodist movement in the Dakotas -- and all those we represent back home, are actively being formed in the image of Christ for the sake of the world. The Dakotas Conference cannot fully participate in the grand story and mystery of resurrection unless each of us is on the journey of dying to self and being



raised to new, transformed life in Christ Jesus. Any recovery of the United Methodist way, any recovery of John Wesley's "experimental religion" must include the individual and personal experience of an awakened soul, God's pardoning and infilling grace, and a lifelong journey in God's perfecting grace. Wesley had it right – a movement to transform the world must begin with the movement of God within the heart and soul of the individual. This is the continuous first step in being unleashed as bold, spirit-leaders!

Some time ago, I received a letter from a pastor writing to share an update on the congregation's growth in ministry and mission. One sentence, in particular, caught my attention. The pastor wrote: "One of the big lessons we are all learning is to focus on heart transformation as the goal and other measurables as the results of transformation."

So, now what do we do? Dear friends, is it time for a season of repentance in the Dakotas Conference? Is it time to turn back to God? Is it time to focus on heart transformation? Is it time to pray, fervently pray, for the gift of the Holy Spirit to break through and renew and revive us? Is it time to confess that we cannot become a conference in which each of our 250 congregations is vital, healthy and growing until we are a Holy Spirit-filled, Pentecost People fully available to pursue God's purposes.

I know this repentance needs to begin with me. I can't tell you what parts of your lives, work and witness need to turn back to God. For me, I repent of my tendency to be a planner more than a prayer. I confess that I have too often focused on growing disciples by osmosis and cognitive theological assent rather than by leading persons to new birth in Christ. I confess that I often depend on my own cleverness, methodologies and strategies rather than being fully dependent upon God's hope, imagination and call. I seek forgiveness for not being obedient to Christ's commands to bear much fruit and proclaim Good News to the poor. I confess that I have been silent in the face of injustice and oppression. I repent of my tendency to blame others, systems, and even our denominational structures for our decline.

And, so I pray, Lord God, gentle my desperation, soften my fears and soothe the knots of my anxiety. Forgive me for my contribution to our decline and loss of evangelical fervor. Lord, reshape me to be an agent of healing and hope. Startle me with your Holy Spirit presence to live my life as authentically and boldly as Jesus lived his. Unleash me to raise the dead to new life in Christ. Help me to always remember that transformation begins with me. I petition you in the precious and powerful name of Jesus. Amen.

### **SHEPHERDS AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART**

I love the prophet Jeremiah. He shows us a God who yearns for us; a God who has wonderful things in store for the people; a God who grieves when we turn away. In the midst of Jeremiah's scathing and sustained call for Judah to repent and return to God, the Lord utters a promise pregnant with grace and hope.

“I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.” (Jeremiah 3:15, *NRSV*)

In the midst of disobedience and imminent danger, God is promising the people leaders – bold, spirit-leaders:

- bold, spirit-leaders who love the Lord;
- bold, spirit-leaders who shepherd the people;
- bold spirit-leaders who feed the people;
- bold, spirit-leaders who marry knowledge and wisdom.

In every generation, and in all circumstances, God calls forth and promises bold, spirit-leaders for God’s people. I rejoice that this remains true in our current Dakotas context. The next generation of “shepherds after God’s heart” is being called, nurtured and formed through a variety of events and initiatives, including our camping program, middle and senior high rallies, campus ministries, confirmation and ministry exploration events.

God is calling forth bold, spirit-leaders – shepherds after God’s own heart – for the Bakken Oil rush ministry. As the vision was being cast for the Dakotas Conference to launch a comprehensive and strategic plan to be in mission to the oil fields, Rev. Roger Spahr, lead pastor at Watertown Cornerstone UMC, told us that he believed God was calling two members of the Cornerstone congregation to begin a United Methodist ministry in the burgeoning community of Watford City. Several interviews and conversations later, and following a visit to Watford City to explore ministry settings and options, it is clear God is, indeed, calling forth Jim and Kathie Konsor to offer bold, spiritual leadership to Watford City. Jim spent several months operating a payloader in the oil fields near Watford City. The human dislocation and unmet spiritual needs he witnessed broke his heart. God filled that broken place in his heart with a call to serve the people of the community. Together, Jim and Kathie are ready to be sent, on behalf of the Dakotas Conference, to launch a United Methodist mission in Watford City, a community where we have never had a United Methodist presence. A significant portion of the Bakken Oil Rush Miracle Offering we will receive this evening at our conference banquet will help support their ministry.

I’d like you to meet Jim and Kathie and hear their story of God’s call upon their lives. Please join me in greeting Jim and Kathie Konsor.

I was fortunate to enter ministry in the old North Dakota Conference that had a strong “culture of call.” Even as a teenager struggling to understand the stirring of the Spirit within me, my pastors and key lay leaders took an interest in me, encouraged and guided my explorations and provided me with wonderful opportunities, long before I was “ready” to test and develop my competencies. By the time I responded to God’s call and headed to seminary, I knew that a major portion of my ministry was to multiply myself as a leader. I have attempted to pay my leadership debt forward ever since.

At the 2012 General Conference of The United Methodist Church in Tampa Florida, I was approached by a young clergywoman delegate from the Iowa Conference. She began our conversation by asking if I remembered her. Regrettably, I did not. The passage of time and a name change due to her marriage left her unrecognizable to me. Katie immediately filled the awkward space by joyfully reminding me that I was her first pastor when she and her family joined St. Paul's UMC in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. She went on to tell me she became a disciple of Jesus under my pastorate and later responded to God's call on her life to become a pastor because I had once told her that I believed God was calling her to ministry. For me, this conversation was the highlight of the entire 11-day General Conference. If there is any legacy to my episcopacy in the Dakotas-Minnesota Area or to my ministry as a whole, I hope it will be that I used my influence and energy to call forth, encourage, equip and unleash the next generation of disciples of Jesus Christ and, in particular, the next generation of bold, spirit-leaders.

### **UNLEASHING BOLD, SPIRIT-LEADERS**

I have had hundreds of conversations with congregations, pastors, conference staff, laity and district superintendents about leadership. We somehow know, through experience and observation, that effective leadership, particularly effective clergy leadership, is essential to the vitality and growth of missional congregations. Personally, I have come to believe that cultivating clergy excellence and supporting bold, spirit-leaders is the primary lever in renewing and strengthening our Wesleyan Movement.

Many people ask me what I see as the essential characteristics of bold, spirit-leaders. The Dakotas Conference Board of Ministry, like all conference boards, has been directed by the General Conference to develop criteria and characteristics of effective clergy leadership. I invited Rev. Sue Nilson Kibbey to be our conference speaker because she is an exceptional teacher in the field of leadership excellence. I know she will also help us more fully understand the dynamics and characteristics of being a bold, spirit-leader.

I'd like to share, very briefly, with you eight traits of bold, spiritual leadership I learned from a most unexpected source – Dewitt Jones, a photographer for National Geographic. Some years ago, I was introduced to a DVD entitled, *Celebrate What's Right With the World*. Some of you have probably seen this video or used it with your congregations. I'd show it to you today if it wasn't 25 minutes long. The video features Dewitt reminding the viewers to celebrate what is right with the world, rather than what is wrong. He uses his incredible photographs to illustrate his narrative. As I watched the DVD, I suddenly realized it was a lesson in unleashing bold, spirit-leaders. He was teaching me how to be a bold, missional leader for such a time as this – for a time requiring a fearless adaptive attitude and skills. Here is what I learned and continue to affirm.

### **Believe It and You'll See It**

Bold, spirit-leaders see a world of possibilities, because they believe it. They see what God sees. They find ways around the obstacles, commit to the results they are looking for, and have high expectations. They believe with every fiber of their being that God is making all things new. They see resurrection and new creation wherever they look. Don't you want to be this kind of leader? (Yes!)

### **Recognize Abundance**

Bold, spirit-leaders recognize abundance and see assets everywhere. They recognize the abundance of God's economy. They build a vision of abundance, not scarcity. They broaden their definition of winning and look for ways to partner with others. Don't you want to be this kind of leader? (Yes!)

### **Look for Possibilities**

Bold, spirit-leaders look for possibilities to engage in Christ's mission. They are visionary; they build a vision of opportunities, not problems. They are always watching for and learning from what is working. They keep looking for the next possible answer. Don't you want to be this kind of leader? (Yes!)

### **Unleash Your Energy to Fix What's Wrong**

Bold, spirit-leaders unleash their energy to fix what's wrong. They fall in love with and connect with God's vision for creation. They celebrate what is good in the world and what is good in people. They believe that solutions exist. Like Michelangelo they see the angel in the stone and carve to set it free. They focus on what is right with the situation. Don't you want to be this kind of leader? (Yes!)

### **Ride the Changes**

Bold, spirit-leaders ride the changes; they even pray for change. They realize that change is possibility, and the times of most change always hold the most potential. They learn to live with uncertainty, yet act with confidence. They see change as an ally in the cause of Christ's mission. Don't you want to be this kind of leader? (Yes!)

### **Take Yourself to the Edge**

Bold, spirit-leaders are willing to take themselves to the edge. They move from the comfort of being adequate or good to the challenge of being significant – making a difference. They trust God's promises and vision enough to step out beyond their own comfort zone. They follow God's vision wherever it lead, especially to persons on the edge of society. Don't you want to be this kind of leader? (Yes!)

## **Be Your Best for the World**

Bold, spirit-leaders seek to be their best for the world. They maintain the balance between being the best *in* the world and being the best *for* the world. They act with humility, grace and discipline. They are servants and willing to sacrifice for others. Don't you want to be this kind of leader? (Yes!)

## **Expect God to Work Miracles**

Bold, spirit-leaders expect God to work miracles. They believe God, in Christ, is at work every day reconciling and redeeming the world. They pray for new life to be unleashed and confidently expect to see the miraculous each day. Don't you want to be this kind of leader? (Yes!)

## **UNLEASHING NEW LIFE PRAYER MOVEMENT**

In just a few minutes I will be inviting you to pray with me. I will be inviting you to get out of your seats and come forward to the front of the auditorium, flooding the aisles. I will be inviting you to come and pray for God to send the Holy Spirit to break through and renew, revive and re-energize our churches, unleashing new life. I will be inviting you to come and pray for God to give us courage to boldly, audaciously lead a Wesleyan revival across the Dakotas and around the world. I will be inviting you to come and join me in unleashing a New Life Prayer Movement in every church and community. So, get ready! This is first call for an altar call! I have asked members of the Extended Cabinet to be here in the front of the auditorium to pray with you. They will also distribute to you a personal Unleashing New Life Prayer card.

Dear and beloved friends in Christ, God is good, (All the time). All the time, (God is good). God has brought us so far. We see and celebrate the fruits of strengthened congregations – growing spiritual vitality, new people being reached, the world being healed. We see and celebrate new faith communities; transformed lives; congregations making eternal differences in their communities; bold, spirit-leaders being developed; growing generosity; increased worship attendance; and expanding missional impact.

“Whoosh” has happened. And, whoosh will continue to happen. That is the nature of living in this wonderful state of Pentecost. When Jesus promised his disciples God would send the Holy Spirit, he told them this companion “would be with you forever.” (John 14:16) Friends, “whoosh” will continue to happen. Jesus promised it. God fulfilled the promise on that first Pentecost. And, God is fulfilling the promise every day. Every day, the wind of the Spirit is blowing all around us. All we need to do is hoist our sails into God's mighty Spirit-wind.

So, now what do we do? Whoosh is all around us. So, now what do we do? Bold spirit-leaders pray. That's what we do! They hoist their prayer-sails into God's might, ever-present Spirit-wind.

Reverend Bill Quick, a former, long-term senior pastor at Metropolitan United Methodist Church in Detroit, told the story of a museum curator who noticed two cleaning women looking at a portrait of John Wesley at Aldersgate. Apparently, Methodists themselves, one of the women spontaneously prayed, “Do it again, Lord; do it again – soon.”

Yes, Lord. Do it again. Do it again soon – and every day – in the Dakotas and across our global Connection. We are ready, Lord – ready to be shaped into bold-spirit-leaders for the sake of your kingdom and your people.

There is much I do not know. Many of you have already discovered this to be true! But, here is what I do know with utmost assurance: God wants to use Dakotas United Methodism to do it again. God’s mighty Spirit wind is blowing.

- Are you ready to hoist your sails? (Yes.)
- Are you ready to repent and turn into the Spirit-wind? (Yes.)
- Are you ready to boldly lead the God movement in the Dakotas? (Yes.)
- Are you ready to make Jesus’ kingdom imperatives, your church’s imperatives? (Yes.)
- Are you ready to be unleashed? (Yes.)
- Are you ready to pray? (Yes.)

Then come, come now! Come to the front of this auditorium and pray with me. Come and hoist your sail into God’s mighty Spirit-wind. Come; come running or skipping or walking; but, come and join the New Life prayer Movement. Come, let us pray that God will do it again – soon. Come, let us pray for the Holy Spirit to break through and unleash new life.

The prayer is on the screen, if you have not yet received your personal prayer card.

Let us pray:

**Come, Holy Spirit and break through to renew and revive our churches, unleashing new life!**

**Come, Holy Spirit and empower our clergy and lay leadership to proclaim the Good News of Jesus’ resurrection power and promise.**

**Come, Holy Spirit to transform and boldly use us, without limits, delays or excuses, to reach and make new disciples of Jesus Christ to transform the world.**

**Come, Holy Spirit, and work through me to raise the dead to new life.**

**In the precious and holy name of Jesus. Amen.**

I encourage you to stay and pray as long as you like. Following a break, we will re-convene in our respective clergy and laity sessions.

Thank you for your attention. God bless you.

**Bishop Bruce R. Ough**  
**Dakotas-Minnesota Area**