

DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

John Chapman died one cold winter's night, March 1845, in Fort Wayne. As was his custom, that evening John ate a simple meal, read portions of the Sermon on the Mount to his host family, and then went to sleep by the door before slipping into eternity. A few years earlier, when he purchased property in Allen County, he had simply signed his name: "I, John Chapman (by occupation a gatherer and planter of apple seeds)...."

Most of us know John Chapman better by his nickname, "Johnny Appleseed." Each year, Fort Wayne holds a celebration in his honor in September, around the time of his September 26 birthday. Yes, he was eccentric and, on rare occasions, he was sighted wearing his tin cook pot as a hat, but this industrious pioneer left a remarkable legacy.

Did you know that John Chapman was an entrepreneur? In the course of his life, he speculated on and developed more than 100,000 acres of real estate. He wisely invested in properties along rivers and key trade routes in Ohio and Indiana a few years before the settlers arrived. He gathered seeds for free from cider mills, carefully tended seedlings in his strategically located orchards until they were saplings of 3-5 years, and then sold them to the settlers at 6 pence per tree (about \$40 today). The new arrivals planted trees on their claims to prove to the land agents that they were intending to stay and farm the property. John Chapman had a positive return on his investment. When he died he had \$400 in cash on hand (about \$13,000 in today's currency) and the deeds to more than 1000 acres of orchards.

Did you know that John Chapman was also a sincere man of faith? He was always seen carrying the Bible, his favorite book, and the Sermon on the Mount was his favorite passage from which to quote. John was sincere but misguided after he came under the influence of the Swedenborgians. Fortunately, John's life was better than his theology. He lived simply, practiced radical generosity, and exercised care for God's creation as a faithful steward. John Chapman was a self-supporting, lay missionary. One historian concluded that he planted as many as 12 new congregations. Chapman preached his faith while practicing his trade. You can find a monument to John's life in Dexter City, Ohio, bearing this inscription:

*"Without a hope of recompense, without a thought of pride,
John Chapman planted apple trees, preached, and lived, and died."*

In honor of John Chapman's vision and industry (not his theology), my father-in-law and I planted a young apple tree in our yard this week. John left a legacy of multiplication.

Our theme word this year is "MULTIPLY" and our theme verse is John 15:8, "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear **much fruit**, showing yourselves to be my disciples." (John 15:8). As a reminder, all of our ministers have that verse imprinted on their pocket credentials this year.

One of the quotes that I recalled while preparing this report says it well:

*"Anyone can count the seeds in an apple,
but only God can count the apples in a seed."*

Apples average 5 seeds. Each seed becomes a tree. By the time it matures, in about 5 years, one tree can produce up to 300 apples per growing season. Those three hundred apples produce 1500 seeds with the potential for another 1500 trees. In five more years, an orchard of fifteen hundred trees could yield 450,000 apples with 2.25 million seeds. In five more years, those 2.25 million seeds have the potential become trees that produce 300 apples each. That fourth generation orchard of trees has a potential harvest of 675 million apples with over 3 billion seeds.

To be clear, there are some key factors that would be necessary for that multiplication to happen. Every tree would need to be healthy and protected from disaster or disease. And, every seed would need good soil, sunshine and water to grow, but God's clear design is that apple seeds can become orchards.

What if God's vision for your church was more than just adding a few more to your statistical report next year? What if God's vision for your church is not just gathering apples but what if He is inviting you to join Him in planting orchards?

God's first command to Adam and Eve was: "Be fruitful and multiply..." (Genesis 1:28). Jesus' last command to His followers was: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations..." (Matthew 28:19). Our Creator has designed multiplication into every living thing, including the church.

Throughout the book of Acts, we see examples of the multiplication that can happen when the Holy Spirit is unleashed to work through the Church. Acts 2:41-47, Acts 6:1-7, Acts 11:20-24 are just three of those examples.

Jesus declared "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you abide in me and I in you, you will bear **much fruit**. Apart from me you can do nothing... This is to my Father's glory, that you bear **much fruit**, showing yourselves to be my disciples." (John 15:5,8)

"Much fruit" sounds like the five seeds of one apple multiplying to become orchards with millions of trees. But here's the catch: seeds only multiply when they are buried in the soil and surrender to germination.

We can say we want to be part of a multiplication movement, but multiplication only comes through dying to self and abiding in the Vine. Jesus taught this: "...unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears **much fruit**. (John 12:24 ESV)

There may be debate about whether plants are sensitive to pain, but there is no debate that pastors feel pain. The reality is that there is no such thing as painless church multiplication. A church can grow through addition without much pain, but there is no real multiplication without death to self, security and the status quo. John Maxwell said, "churches stop growing when the price gets too high or the pain becomes too great."

Steve McVey (Dirt Roads Network) talks about that turning point moment when they released their first campus, a congregation now larger than the mother church, to become an established church. Steve talked candidly about personal pain. He had to release key leaders. He had to give up control. He had to die out to his reputation,

being known as the senior pastor of a rapidly growing multi-site church of 400 to becoming, once more, the pastor of a rural church of 140.

Dying to self and abiding in Christ are essential to Kingdom multiplication.

God is writing some wonderful stories of multiplication in our Crossroads District team, but there is still much to be done in our own mission field with 3 million lost people. If we're honest, too often our churches have looked inward rather than focusing on the harvest. Some churches have scaled their vision down to simply surviving. Too many of our leadership teams have settled for addition when is God inviting us to multiply.

Dying to self and abiding in Christ are the only ways to experience the level of fruitfulness and multiplication that we see in the New Testament and in so many of our sister churches around the globe.

Last month, I had the privilege of representing the North American General Conference at the 2019 International Conference of The Wesleyan Church. I was humbled and convicted by the explosive growth of our churches in areas where poverty and persecution are both extreme. India, Cambodia, Nepal and Mongolia are just a few of the fields where The Wesleyan Church is rapidly multiplying.

I am glad that our Crossroads District partners with the dynamic, young Wesleyan churches in Bangladesh and Mozambique. Rev. Joshe Bose and the team in Bangladesh and Rev. Abel Nove and the leaders in the northern area of Mozambique have both more than doubled the number of Wesleyan churches in their areas in the past 5 years. Praise God for their multiplication even in the face of economic hardship and political opposition!

Yes, there are cultural and demographic variables to consider, but the Bible is clear that our God is not a respecter of persons. However, God does reward faith. Few things take more faith than for a pastor and a local church to move their focus and investment to the needs of the lost at the cost of our own preferences and convenience. The truth is that fruitfulness lies on the other side of surrender and obedience. Bearing much fruit proves our discipleship and brings God glory.

Jesus said, "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." (John 15:8)

Jesus says that the Father is glorified by our fruitfulness, not just maintaining. Is your church dreaming of "much fruit" in making disciples and multiplying new Kingdom communities?

Most of our churches have completed their LEVEL FIVE assessment. I'll be reviewing those results with our pastors in each annual coaching conversation. As a next step of faith, we are asking each Local Board of Administration to prayerfully envision what multiplication will look like in their context over the next 5 years. Many of our churches have already developed their own multiplication plan. We are challenging every church to complete this vision exercise by District Conference 2020.

I'm convinced that every church, large and small, can be part of the multiplication movement. For your congregation, it may be partnering with three or four other Wesleyan churches to plant a church in an unreached community or among an unreached people group. It may mean launching or hosting a Spanish-language congregation in your building. It may look like adding another campus of your ministry in a prison, in an apartment complex, or in a nearby community.

I do believe this: It takes all kinds of churches to reach all kinds of people. Who are the people in your region that you're not yet reaching? What new Kingdom community initiative might God bless to help you reach them?

When we came together to create the Crossroads District, our vision was to develop a stronger team to more effectively equip our leaders and churches for Kingdom impact. Together, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we committed to making disciples and multiplying congregations. We want to be accountable to one another for these key measures each year:

- 10 new Kingdom communities launched
- 100 new disciple-making leaders mobilized
- 1000 new believers baptized as disciples of Jesus

Last year, 603 new believers (60% of benchmark) were baptized (up from 562 in FY2018 and 531 in FY2017), 1397 people prayed to receive Christ as Lord (up from 1214 in FY2018 and 1153 in FY 2017), and 98 people (98% of benchmark) declared a call to ministry/missions (up from 74 in FY2018 and 80 in FY2017).

The current number (98) of new disciple-making leaders mobilized is drawn from the annual statistical report of people answering the call to mission or vocational ministry. However, that will not be our only metric because the majority of people making disciples in our district are serving in marketplace ministry. A key question I'll be asking our pastors in our coaching conversations this year will be, "Who are you now discipling that is actively discipling someone else?"

This year, the number of churches closing exceeded 5%.

- 8 congregations closed in FY2019 (total of 275 in attendance)
- 3 of those merged with other churches (total of 195 / average of 65)
- 5 of those closed (total of 80 in worship / average of 16 people)

Multiplying by at least 5% per year is imperative to just maintain the status quo, but we must move toward a multiplication rate of 10% to outpace the growth of the unreached in our state. Seven new Kingdom communities (congregations or campuses) were adopted/launched this year (70% of benchmark) with 6 projects in various stages of launching in the coming year including: Speedway Way City Church, Indianapolis Encounter Assembly, and SEND Church in southwest Fort Wayne. Just as we were making final preparations for conference, another church planting possibility has emerged in Union City.

New Kingdom communities will include micro-churches in homes and offices, multi-site campuses, and church plants in new neighborhoods, among new people groups, and in new zip codes to reach the 3 million people without Christ in the Crossroads District.

While we are passionate about planting new Kingdom communities, we are also committed to equipping our existing churches. We offer revitalization initiatives through Maximizing Impact and StratOp consultations. We have coaches who are willing to come alongside your team. We have tools and training to help but your church has to be dissatisfied with the status quo. Don't you ever get tired of doing the same things, year after year, with more effort but diminishing results? There is help available, if you want it. We believe that God wants every church to win and multiply!

I'm excited about a new seminar we'll be offering our churches this year with Dr. Bob Hallett, founder/CEO of TLC Stewardship Ministries. On Saturday, October 5, Bob will teach a seminar for pastors and lay leaders called "Resourcing God's Vision." Dr. Hallett will also be available for follow-up coaching and training in key churches committed to raising the level of stewardship to release significant funding for Great Commission ministry. Dr. Hallett, one of our own ministers, has helped hundreds of churches raise millions of dollars. He has graciously made his book on stewardship available as a free gift for delegates.

Overall, worship attendance in our churches increased by 1.5%. That's a slight turnaround after 4 years of decline but still down over 1000 from our combined high of 14,611 in 2014. I'm grateful for addition and celebrate all progress but **doesn't your heart long for multiplication?**

Our highest number of baptisms in recent history was 698 in 2014. Ten years ago we only baptized 354. This year, we baptized 603. Our goal is to baptize at least 1000 new disciples each year. With 100 churches, we only need each church to baptize 4 more than last year. Now for a church that had zero baptisms last year, that would be an incredible faith goal. For a church that baptized 20 or 30 last year, baptizing only 4 more would not be challenging or inspiring, so I'm going to ask you to allow me to raise the bar. What would "much fruit" look like for your church in baptisms next year?

I understand that we don't save people, but God does call us to baptize those who repent and are saved. Last year in our combined ministries, we had 749 more people pray to receive Christ than we disciplined into baptism as a next step of obedience.

In a few moments, you will be receiving a card from our tellers. The form simply asks you to write down a faith goal for baptisms. What can you believe God might do if we prayed and worked for multiplication, not just addition?

How many baptisms do you believe God could bless you with this year?

We'll be collecting those cards later today. Each church has already been allotted T-shirts for the number of baptisms you reported last year, plus one more. At the close of our conference today, we're going to have a time of commitment. We will ask one of your leaders to come forward to collect as many more shirts as you'll need for the new believers your church is going to be praying and working to baptize this year. I believe we may need more shirts!

In closing, I want to thank the incredible team with whom I am blessed to serve. Our three Assistant District Superintendents provide outstanding leadership. Chris Williams is full-time on our staff and, in addition to a host of other responsibilities, leads the pastors in Region 3. Matthew Trexler (Region 1) and Michael Colaw (Region 2) lead by example as they pastor multiplying churches and also invest in the pastors in their respective regions. Dr. David Smith is a gracious leader for our District Board of Ministerial Development. Rev. Carol Schenck, our wonderful District Secretary, and Mrs. Nancy Schoonmaker, our fearless District Treasurer, both do fantastic work with a great attitude. Pastor Seth Bye, Executive Ministry Partner, and Mrs. Roxene Lo, Office Manager, complete our district staff and we couldn't do all that we do without them!

Special thanks also to the many leaders of our district ministries. Their reports are included in your packet. Read the reports and celebrate the many ways that our team is working together under their leadership. I encourage you to let these leaders know how much you appreciate their efforts that are advancing the Kingdom.

On a personal note, I am blessed and grateful for Sherry, my dear wife and best friend, who has shared ministry and life with me for the past 35 years. We count it as a special joy and sacred trust to serve our team in the Crossroads District.

Our theme word for the year is: MULTIPLY

Our theme verse for the year is:

**“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit,
showing yourselves to be my disciples.” (John 15:8)**

May God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, equip and anoint us, the pastors, the lay leaders, and the churches of the Crossroads District, to multiply for His glory!

Respectfully submitted,

Mark Gorveatte
Crossroads District Superintendent