

## What is going on in Five Talent Academy?

For the last several years, the Virginia Annual Conference has been trying to reverse the trend of losing its member by working toward renewal of its churches. "All Things New" task force has been born with a simple resolution from the Conference floor that we establish 250 new faith communities in the next thirty years. The Academy within the new task force was also established and theologically founded upon Jesus' Parable of the Talents in Matthew 24: 12-30. It offers the necessary training, resources, and tools not only for establishing new congregations, but also for any existing church which desires to take the next step in ministry and mission. The Academy encourages not to close its doors because of declining in worshipers and finances.

The Five Talent Academy embraces John Wesley's three key values: **Fire, faith, and fruit**. The fire is demonstrated in "the partnership of the willing." Having faith in the Lord, not only who is present and available to any congregation of any size or any circumstance, but also who provides and blesses to multiply. Churches are to grow numerically and spiritually and bear fruit. All these are possible because the Lord has bestowed upon us multiple talents. It is only up to us how we as communities of believers will expand and utilize them for the kingdom of God on earth.

This is not a Conference mandated program. Churches are to sign up for the covenant and curriculum because we believe that the Lord has called us to another level and we earnestly desire it.

As a pastor of Warren Charge I am grateful that each of three churches has become one of 108 churches which signed up for the covenant and its membership in Five Talent Academy. My prayer is within 3-5 years we will reach our objective of **becoming three station churches** by growing spiritually and numerically. The real ultimate objective is that our Lord will say to each of us, "**Well done good and faithful servant.**" There are five goals to work on annually:

1. **Ministry with the poor:** 10% of annual giving (Planned & actual ministry with the poor).
2. **Worship:** 5% increase in average worship attendance.
3. **Faith Development:** Small group (ongoing active group of professing members, adult Sunday school) participation represents 50% of average worship attendance.
4. **Stewardship:** 10% annual increase in giving.
5. **Evangelism:** Professions of faith represent 10% of average worship attendance.

The Academy offers three year curriculum of six semesters. Each six month semester will focus upon one of the key areas. We have to attend two small peer group meetings each year (one per semester) sharing on the key area for each semester. On October 1, our key note speakers were Tony and Bart Campolo who were exceptionally motivational and inspirational speakers who inspired all of us and demonstrated their experiences in the Ministry with the Poor. Ten of us from the Charge attended the seminar and brought back inspiration. It is imperative that we now need to structure what we have heard, seen, and been inspired so that we can apply to practices of our church before it evaporates from us. **In each church, we need to brainstorm what we have brought from the seminar into the life of the church in next several weeks. Our next move is to participate in the small peer group of churches by meeting on Nov. 21 in Charlottesville and share our negative and positive experiences and learn from each other.**

Yosung and I have also attended "Leadership Transformation" seminar offering teaching sessions by the author, Robert Schnase, of "Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations in your church" in September. I will give sermons based on the seminar in November and Bible study. Bishop Schnase offers the

ministry of the church, practicing **Radical Hospitality, Passionate Worship, Intentional Faith Development, Risk-Taking Mission & Service and Extravagant Generosity**. According to the author, there is nothing new in these practices except that he added new adjectives that draw more of people's attention and give new meaning to the old United Methodist church's practices. This conference also offered dynamic preaching from Rudy Rasmus who inspired to be in ministry with the poor. Rev. Rasmus started with 19 members at St. John's UMC in Huston, Texas in 1992 and has now grown to have 9000 members ( 3000 of whom either are or were homeless). "The Bread of Life" has been co-founded with his wife Juanita in 1992 today and serves 7000 hot meals and various services to the homeless each month. The key phrase in practicing his ministry is "I love you, and there is nothing you can do about it!"

It has been a special privilege serving Warren Charge as your pastor in our faith journey **together** in attaining our goals to reach our ultimate objective of establishing three station churches of United Methodist and of hearing from the Lord individually saying to us, "Well done good and faithful servant." The Lord has sent me here to love you and to partner with each other in our faith journey. I truly love you all! Thank the Lord everyday for you!

Faithfully submitted by Sarah Cho