

It's All About the Mission

"Vital Congregations"

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James Carville may be best known for the mantra he articulated for the 1992 Presidential campaign. "It's about the economy, stupid." I recently noticed a similar phrase posted prominently in a colleague's office. "It's about the mission, stupid." My colleague wanted that phrase before his eyes every day.

In these days of General Conference meetings and changes happening all around us, it would behoove us all to keep before us constantly that it *is* about the Mission. Our ministries are not about ourselves but rather about the overriding claim that God has on our lives and the Mission to which he sends us out. And make no mistake about it: it is not *our* mission. It is God's mission. We are invited to join God in the work God is undertaking in the world.

The future of our church is inextricably linked to whether or not we seek to join God on God's mission in the world. How would our thinking change in our local churches were we to think of our communities as our congregation and not only those who attend our worship services? Where might we see God already at work? How could we build bridges of love between our worshipping community and the community at large?

One way to build such bridges is by intentionally creating new communities of faith with people who are not yet a part of our existing fellowship. Throughout this quadrennium the United Methodist Church has made real progress in creating new places for new people through new church starts, but we've only just begun. Starting new faith communities is essential to reach more people, more diverse people and more young people. Listen to what a young participant said of one of these new churches:

*"I had given up on church. I was hurt and tired of the judgment, the condescending looks from others, and the image of a God who was waiting to cast me out at the slightest thing. I was done. And hurt. And then I stumbled upon these people called RISE. They are different. I feel hopeful. I have met a different God than the one I used to know, and I now believe that God truly loves me. – from a participant in a new UM faith community started this quadrennium. Average age of participants? 24.*

This young person's testimony underscores what is at stake by keeping the Mission before our eyes. There are many people out there who yearn to know Jesus and seek to be part of an authentic, caring community of faith where they can grow, learn more about what it means to follow Christ and can join forces with others to join God's mission.

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