



"From Where I Sit ..."

What if ...?

During the 1980 Presidential Election debates, then Governor Ronald Reagan often used the phrase, "There you go again." Well here I go again writing on a topic other than something directly related to my department. But as a faithful member of the CME Church, I can't help but lend my voice to a continuing concern of and about our Church. It is no secret that many of the churches in most denominations have declining memberships. No one seems to know the real reason why or, if they know, they are not saying. Many different methods and tactics are being offered as solutions for church growth, but only time will tell if any of them will really achieve increased growth.

Anyone who really knows me knows that I am a traditionalist which I guess makes me "old and foggy." But when I was converted in a CME Church in 1956 at the age of 7 I believed that the CME Way was a true way to the Kingdom. Over the years, I have learned our faith, our belief, our history, and our doctrine and throughout my ministry I have sought to apply what I have learned and experienced to the benefit of the congregations I have pastored and the positions I have held.

In the May issue I wrote about what I have "missed most" since becoming a General Officer and I was pleasantly surprised at the number of readers who reached out to me and sympathized out of what they, too, have begun to miss whether because they have either retired or because they have not received an appointment. We shared our griefs and we discussed how times have changed. However, a conversation with retired Presiding Elder Dr. James Russell of North Carolina really hit home. As we discussed declining memberships, we also acknowledged that we do not appear to be starting new churches (particularly in growing communities). I suggested that perhaps we have forgotten the Disciplinary requirement (§408 §6 page 79 – 2014) that Local Preachers (i.e., Deacons or Elders), among their other duties, are to start new churches. This is not a new requirement, but has always been in our Discipline since our founding.

If the number of our congregations are not growing by new churches being formed by local preachers (we went on to discuss); then "What if ..." our leadership considered using the talent of some of our "able" retired preachers and, perhaps coupled with some young deacons, allowed them to venture out and start or begin new congregations? "What if ..." these experienced retired pastors were not only able to seed and grow new congregations, but to also mentor some of these young preachers in the real and practical experiences of ministry? Of course these new ministries would necessarily require Episcopal approval and other supportive actions to insure success as indicated in the Discipline.



Between you and me, I don't know what we as a church would have to lose utilizing this so called "What if ..." scenario but I do believe that there is so much more that we could gain if such a win-win approach proved successful. The important thing is that we admit our present reality and engage a future strategy that fully utilizes all of our available resources believing that the God we serve will still give us the victory of a growing church. *Or at least that's the way it looks to me ..."*

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(Copies of earlier articles may be found on the
Personnel Services Webpage of the CME Website at www.thecmechurch.org)