



**California-Nevada Annual Conference
The United Methodist Church**

Ted Virts
Conference Superintendent

August 7, 2009

To: Conference Circuit Leaders

Dear Friends,

I hope this summer is a time of rest and renewal for you. I'm personally grateful for your willingness to serve as a circuit leader. By now I expect that you have had some contact from your Superintendent either individually or as part of a group. I know that there are more meetings scheduled.

I am writing to invite you to a special training time with Rev. Doug Anderson as part of the Gathering of Orders in November, and to offer some thoughts about your role as a circuit leader.

Training Time with Doug Anderson

Doug Anderson is the director of the Bishop Reuben Job Center for Leadership Development and will be leading the Gathering along with Bishop Brown. Doug has guided a number of conferences as they develop models for leadership similar to the Circuit model we are beginning. Doug will have dedicated time for the Circuit Leaders on Thursday after lunch. He has about 2 and ½ hours scheduled and we expect to end before 4:00PM. Please register early for this event. If you need to stay for an additional night, please indicate this on your registration. The Conference will pay for the extra night.

This Fall and Circuits

When the Cabinet gathered just after Annual Conference we were in agreement that the circuits will be well on their way if, by December, there is a sense of trust and collegiality among the members of the individual circuits. Your role as a Circuit Leader for this first phase will be to establish the tone and ground rules for sharing and for trust that are so essential to working together. Trust is demonstrated as folks worship together, report to each other, share stories, joys and worries about the work they are doing, and begin to find ways that they can collectively be in ministry with their congregations and communities. Every individual pastor has a unique history, a unique story and a unique set of gifts and graces. Together we are much stronger than we are separately.

One of the initial circuit activities will be to explore the nature, meaning and way of doing church conferences within your circuit. Your Superintendent will be providing you some guidance about how Church Conferences might work within that Superintendent's area of supervision. Some Superintendents will be asking Circuit Leaders to do direct work with the Church Conferences, and others will be asking Circuit Leaders to work with the circuit to develop a mechanism for having the church conferences take place.

I have enclosed the letter that will be going to your local churches about the framework for this year's church conferences. I have also included a set of guidelines for conducting a church conference. There are only a few specific activities that must take place. What *may* take place is limited only by your creativity.

The circuits are a place of permission and not so much a place of regulation. The way that we work together is as broad and varied as the diversity of communities and geographies we serve.

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The combinations of gifts, graces and personalities will lead each circuit to a unique means of accomplishing our common goal of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Reminders and boundaries

I do want to remind you of a few things. Circuits are a place of shared ministry development. They are a place where clergy assigned to the local church focus on shared spiritual grounding and common work of disciple making. They are the way that our conference is returning to living out the connection we share as followers of Jesus Christ and clergy in the United Methodist Church.

As a Circuit Leader you are also part of a circuit that your District Superintendent is convening. The Superintendents form their own circuit with the Bishop where we share the same kinds of concerns that you have. Our belief is that this means of doing our work together is based very deeply in scripture. We are called together as the people of God and Jesus says whenever we gather He is in our midst.

The role of the Circuit Leader is not that of being a superintendent. Superintendents remain responsible for personnel matters, evaluations, matters related to law and matters related to the *Discipline*. If any of those questions surface at your circuit, please know that it is not your task to resolve them. While your circuit may be involved in discussing strategies for improving relationships, and developing ministry goals, supervision rests with the District Superintendent. Circuit leaders don't meet with the Staff Parish Relations Committees of the circuit. They don't become a mediator between a pastor and a congregation. The District Superintendent is the one who will deal with those specific items.

The authority of the Circuit Leader rests within the circuit. The Circuit Leader creates the environment where the pastors within the circuit are listened to, cared for, challenged and collectively set direction for the circuit. The circuit shares information, strategy and resource needs within the circuit and with the Superintendent. Circuits can plan events together, share workshops or trainings within or across circuits. Pastors can share ideas as we have always done. Clergy in circuits help build ministry along with the Superintendents, but Superintendents remain as supervisors.

Shared Wisdom, Shared Need

Finally I want to invite you to be in contact with your superintendent, and with me if that would be helpful. Specifically let us know if there are areas of training or information that would be valuable for you to have. Our intention is to be as transparent as possible about information that is being shared and suggestions that are being made. The task of ministry within each given area and within each given circuit rests on the collective wisdom of your circuit.

I believe we are called to this time and this place. I have every confidence in your leadership and in God's grace to guide us in these days ahead. I'm honored to be on this journey with you.

Ted Virts
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