

State of the District

One year ago at this event I was elected to serve as your District Superintendent. In the months that have ensued I have been privileged to visit churches, outreach centers, feeding programs, and minister's homes.

I have heard of & witnessed some incredible things. I have been encouraged by the heart and dedication of ministers in Northern California and Nevada.

- Number of churches that grew this last year
- Number of creative outreaches
- Creative partnerships

- Joey Steelman in Stockton – Outreach Center

- Evan Prosser in San Francisco – Every corner in San Francisco

- Greg Fairrington in Rocklin – Community Center, 400 event on local public schools last year

- Randy Greer in Las Vegas – Creative outreaches into his community. Outreaches to inner city children, medical clinic for people with no insurance, food bank, 11 low income senior units, just approved last week to build 66 units.

- Willie Bowers in Eureka – Is growing a powerful church that is marked by generosity to other churches both A/G and Non A/G.

- Steve Reyes in Sonoma – Drove the community and heard multiple stories. At the church was a vehicle that was obviously showing sign of a lack of repair. It seemed out of place – yet Pastor Steve was excited about the fact that his parking lot allowed a safe place to sleep at night.

I've seen the best in us come out of the worst of circumstances.

- Angelo Austria – love offering for money given to help with a family medical issue

The flooding of February. Several of our pastors were forced to evacuate, other pastors like Bruce Glines were in a position to welcome hundreds of people to the churches property for safe harbor. Bruce cared for people and personally walked the property as security in the evenings. In our conversation he spoke of the opportunity to minister.

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Following the flooding came giving. Generosity and caring across the district. Standing with fellow ministers in times of challenge.

In my first year

I have witnessed creativity and compassion for those in the church and those outside the church.

I have witnessed commitment to preaching God's word, and to making the salvation plan available to people both inside and outside the church. I have sat in churches and been privileged to listen to heartfelt altar calls.

I have witnessed sacrifice, risk and true concern for people in our communities – and true brotherly love for one another as Assembly of God ministers.

I have returned to the District Resource Center many times humbled by the acts of service, levels of commitment, acts of risk and true sacrifice I witnessed in my travels that day. I have said to Dr. Jay and to Dr. Sam – our churches are very good at what they do.

Concerns:

1. Comparison over worship styles and charismatic expression.

Read the account of Acts 2 for the first time. Something happened to unify a very diverse group. The crowd was from all points of the world. They noted we each heard in our own language. One of the enabling aspects of the Holy Spirit is to unify people.

In our district we have diversity.

Diverse geography – Redwoods, mountains, desert, beaches and the ocean.

Different challenges

Different ethnicities

Different cultures

Different languages

Different backgrounds

Different roads that led us to Christ

Diverse ways of doing ministry.

Diverse approaches.

Diverse focuses and emphases.

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Yet knowing all of that Jesus said this

I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one--as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. John 17:21 Living Bible

Our unity holds high kingdom value. Our unity is what Jesus prayed for us – so that the world would know him. Our unity and our connection to God is a precursor to evangelism – that the world will know.

Jealousy, comparison and suspicion are not the way we are going to build churches or the Kingdom of God.

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul spends a lot of time and energy under the direction of the Holy Spirit to point out something we all know and most of us have taught. We are one body. Comparison, suspicion and jealousy will not work for us in our physical body or this body of fellowship called the Assemblies of God.

Individuals are hurt and ministries are hampered when the body compares and criticizes.

As a Youth Pastor Concord Ca

I was given the opportunity to preach on a Sunday PM

I chose to speak of the power of the blood of Jesus

Following my message – a young man who represented our district in the national level of fine arts festival – performed a human video.

That night a man in the church called the Bible answer man – Hank Hanegraaff

And questioned my approach and the value of the human video in my sermon

Mr. Hanegraaff – who I have never met proceeded to belittle me saying I had more imagination than biblical understanding. I remember the hurt and frustration I felt when I listened to the tape recording of the program we obtained from the radio station.

I was accused without him knowing me

My ministry belittled without any evidence

I was reduced to a single sentence – because I was a youth pastor

The players are different – the positions vary – as do the points of conversation – but the effect the same – hurt and frustration.

We are on the same team. We are on a team that is bigger than the Assemblies of God.

We are on a team that spans decades, generations, denominations, styles, approaches and even our personal preferences.

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The problem is:

That which was given to unify
That which was given to empower
That which was given to help
That which was given to enable

Has become a point of contention in our district.

We are divided along lines which are geographical – I'm ok with that
We are in two separate states – I'm fine with that
We have large churches and small church – that is a great thing
We have a variety of styles and approaches from our pulpit – That is as it should be

What makes no sense is that we have set up lines of disagreement over the Holy Spirit and His manifestation.

Our Unity matters to the world around us. John 17

Any point that divides us is wrong
Any division affects us all
Any dis-unity must be dealt with if we expect to be effective in reaching our world.

The Holy Spirit is not to be a point of contention – but the power to unify and enable us.

Our strength has been found in our ability to celebrate different approaches and different expressions while holding to fundamental truths and an understanding that God's word as infallible and inerrant.

There is room for many styles, expressions and approaches.

We are interested in unity not conformity.

San Francisco Giants – all wear the same uniform – but the talent and abilities are unique to the individual players. We are not all the same – not at all – but we should all be unified – wearing the same uniform.

Diversity with unity creates great strength. It wins championships

Disunity over diversity weakens the whole.

I am also concerned about the division that exists across our district over worship styles.

- division over worship
- We agree on worship but then we argue over style. The battle over style has its most detrimental effects on the thing we hold as valuable - the worship

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Personal preference has taken a place of priority that exceeds even the purpose or practice of worship.

True worship is encountering the presence of the living God.

The presence of God fills up, permeates, and overspreads every worshipping soul.

This is your promise as you walk through these doors.

This is how we move into the worship service.

Worship is an act of faith.

It's an act of obedience.

Faith is a major part of it.

Preference should be inconsequential in light of God's presence.

People who skip the first part of service because they dislike the style of music

People standing in the lobby of the church, arms crossed in protest until the worship is done – only then do they enter the sanctuary.

Here again we have taken something that is magnificent and designed to unify us not only with one another – but with the God we worship.

Allowing to become, in many cases, the most contentious part of the services.

Worship is a matter of the heart

Worship is an expression of love and commitment

Worship is not about us at all

Worship is about giving something to God that he is owed.

***The attitude you come in with determines the depth you go out with.
My Preference should never overshadow the desire for His Presence***

Worship style division is not owned by an age group

Unfortunately multiple generations have joined in the issue of complaint and disengagement.

The old

The middle age and they young all tout preferences over commitment to worship

Worship is one of the areas in church that we actually are allowed the privilege of proving what we claim – we are family.

We say we are family – to a congregation that is made up of people from broken homes, families and lives.

Welcome to the family – then we argue with one another over style.

Worship should be like Thanksgiving

Same menu

Different generations.

And appreciation for all the members of the family – grandpa always says the same type thing about when he was young

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As much as you hate it – you still hope he will ask – do you have a girlfriend yet?
The aunt who tells you the same story.
The goal – all of us at one table
You don't really like the orange jello with cottage cheese in it – but it's part of the experience – it's ok. All the generations – all together.

We never had a 20 something table, a 50 something table, or a 70 something table at thanksgiving.
Never did we separate those who wanted ham to another room from those who prefer turkey
Our desire is to find common purpose and common ground
We never majored on the differences – we celebrated commonality – we are family.

Close:

Division is a threat to us as a movement.
Division is a threat regardless of the issue at hand.
Division is a threat regardless of the opinion or preference you hold.
Unity is handled on a one on one basis
Unity is not a District Resource Center program
Unity is fostered in every city, between our ministers, the manner in which we respect one another, and the way we talk about each other when not present.
The prayers we pray or refuse to pray for one another.
Our ability or inability to celebrate another's success.

Let's face it friends – very few of us are even close to accomplishing the task we are called to.
Few of us are even living up to our capability.
The task is too important
The charge too compelling
The commission too incomplete
For us to stand in disunity with one another.

The world will know you and me by their love for one another

Eph. 2:14-15

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, NIV84