

## State of the District Address

### I. Unity awards

Two years ago, in this address, I stated:

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, lakes 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.

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

## Unity Awards

### → **Mel Roebeck**

An ordained minister with the Assemblies of God, Dr. Roebeck has also worked on ecumenical issues for 35 years.

He has worked with the Vatican since 1985 and has served as the cochair of the International Catholic–Pentecostal Dialogue since 1992.

He cochairs the International World Communion of Reformed Churches–Pentecostal Dialogue and works with the Lutheran World Federation and many other groups.

Dr Roebeck regularly meets with the Pope and has met with the Arch Bishop of Canterbury.

Recently received National honor for ecumenical work at the National Workshop on Christian Unity at its annual meeting in St. Louis.

### **"Jeffrey Gros Excellence in Ecumenism Award" for 2019**

*Mel too is both a teacher and a practitioner of the search for Christian unity. He is Senior Professor of Church History and Ecumenics and Special Assistant to the President for Ecumenical Relations in the School of Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary and an ordained minister in the Assemblies of God. His historical work, reaching back to the first centuries of the church, is indispensable to understanding the changes to the shape of the Christian world, which have come since—well, since the Azusa Street revival, of which he is also an important interpreter.*

*But Mel is above all about the work of enlarging the tables of ecumenical conversations so that Pentecostals are not talked always about by others but rather bring their own experiences and theological wisdom into the Church's quest faithfully to be its whole self.*

He is regularly in settings where he represents us and our Pentecostal Beliefs. We are honored to have Dr Roebeck as a credential holder in Northern California and Nevada

### → **Kevin Townsend**

Sectional Presbyter in Coast Counties Section. Although involved in a demanding building program in his church, Sunny Slope Christian Center, he made time to assist churches in both Los Lomas and Pacific Grove with great leadership. In both situations, the churches are experiencing success due to Pastor Kevin's efforts

### → **Connie Pack**

Executive Presbyter since 2008. Only Female XP we have had in this district. She has also served many years at The House in Modesto – where she recently retired. Connie has expended incredible energy as resource to females who need counseling or assistance through the restoration programs. Her efforts are both noted and honored as a unifying effort in our District.

### → **Samuel Gordon**

He has served as an administrator with the Chicago Public School System, a Principal in the Sacramento area, Pastoral Care and Missions Pastor at Capital Christian Center, and Executive Vice President of Capital Bible College. He currently serves as Superintendent of Capital Christian School

He is also the President of the Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration Committee, a faith-based organization established to educate the region, motivate the community, and advocate positive social change within the greater Sacramento area.

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.

## **II. Honor**

Last year I discussed with you an area as a district we are embracing that is and will alter the life of this district. I believe we have an obligation to excel in this area.

Honor. Honor is the bedrock of relationship  
Ministry moves at the pace of relationship

Therefore, our ministries are all impacted by how we handle to opportunities to honor another.

Last year we discussed areas where we, according to scripture, are called to strive in this area of Honor.

1. Honor God
2. Honor those in political offices
3. Honor those who lead the church
4. Honor your spouse
5. Honor your parents
6. Honor all men. **All men defined:**
  - Age – 26, 56, 86 – Gene Lawrence
  - Race / All ethnicities
  - We must honor the women of this district
  - Honor the unsaved world around us.
  - Those who are seeking restoration in our fellowship

#### Honor Awards

- **David Royer** – Daniel Matsunaga
- **Arney Corbin** – Jim Davis
- **Kyle Bethke** – Cliff Traub

This last point on the topic of honor I made was – *honoring those who are seeking restoration in our fellowship* –

This is where I would like to draw my comments in this year's address.

### III. Restoration

One of the acts of the Assemblies of God that should set us apart in the religious world is our commitment to restoration of a fallen brother. In a day and age where we see actions that can only be seen as punitive, and at the same time we watch fallen ministers dealt with in a fashion that is permissive and does not allow any hope of healing and well-being.

*Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.* Galatians 6:1

This scripture is vital in understanding the process of restoration for a fallen brother.

According to this passage the goal of catching your brother in sin does not include the caught you - finger pointing type of accusation. Catching your brother in sin is never about proving guilt or innocence. It is not ours to judge. The act of being caught in is an interesting one.

The Greek word here is catching your brother in sin is *prolambano*. It carries with it the idea that the Christian brother stumbles into a transgression, and he is surprised by what has occurred. The act of restoration here is clearly outlined as what proves spiritual maturity. As a process of restoration is conducted, the spiritual maturity of those in oversight is proven more than the guilt or innocence of the fallen brother.

There is a difference between the ideas of punishment and restoration. When Jesus conversed with a sinful woman at a well in the middle of the day in Samaria, he asked her to get her husband. She answers Jesus with a half-truth. This is a pivotal moment in this account. Jesus had every right to condemn her for her answer. What he lacked was the desire – it simply did not serve his purpose. Too often in restoration we demonstrate the desire to condemn, even though, we lack the right.

Our inquiry, questioning, and discovery process must be for the purpose of selecting the best method of restoration, not the best method of punishing a fallen brother.

When a brother is caught in sin, and a restoration process begins, it must be done with the hopes of celebrating the successful conclusion of the restoration program.

The difference between restoration and punishment are enormous. The restoration is a process which demands ***preparation, relationship, accountability, and celebration.***

## Preparation:

In Luke 15 the story of the prodigal son, the calf, robe, shoes, ring, all prepared in advance for the sons return. Please notice the posture of the father - verse 20 - while he was still a long way off his father saw him and ran to him. This posture is one of anticipation. One of expectation.

Can we say that when a minister falls and enters a program of restoration, that we are watching a waiting for his return? Do we handle the months of the program with anticipation of restoration?

Furthermore, look at the commands in the story given by the father:

Verse 22 bring the best robe  
 Verse 22 put a ring on his finger  
 Verse 22 and sandals on his feet  
 Verse 23 bring the fatted calf and kill it.

Please notice that the commands were not given like this  
 Somebody hurry and make a robe, go buy a ring, fashion some sandals - get a calf fattened.

The preparation was in advance of the sons return. Everything was set and in place for the sons return. All of this points to expectation. All of this points to a readiness to celebrate restoration. It is my hope that we would never enter into a restorative program without also making a comment of anticipation of celebration when the program is completed.

John 21

We watch as Jesus practices the finer points of restoration.

Peter denied Christ

Ran from his calling Luke 5

Went back into what he was called from

Not only did he abandon his calling - He led others away

Lessons from Jesus on restoration.

Jesus went to him in person.

Preparation was made for the conversation as Jesus prepared a fire of coals, and had breakfast being cooked. The fish, the fire of coals, and the advice on the beach of casting the nets on the other side - every detail meant something to Peter. Every detail thought out in advance to prepare Peter for restoration.

Preparation in advance of restoration is demanded for restoration to succeed. It can never be as simple as placing a brother in a program. Programs don't restore people. Ministers who believe in the fallen brother are essential in restoration. We cannot simply trust another district, a single presbyter or even a monthly report to suffice in the restoration effort.

Jesus had coal fire and fish prepared before Peter even knew Jesus was present on the beach. Only twice in the New Testament is a coal fire mentioned.

John 21:9 and earlier in John 18:18.

The coal fire, the three question, all intended to recreate the scene of Peter's denial - not for the purpose of re-hashing it, but, for the purpose of completely restoring Peter. The fire of coal is another point that draws attention to this idea of preparation.

The coal fire here is not the mineral of coal, since there is no coal found in Palestine. The coal here is a wood, charcoal fire, the wood is burned to the point that a bed of coals remains. From personal experience, this type of coal takes an hour to produce. A bed of coals points to the preparation of Jesus to make the restoration of Peter possible.

Jesus spoke about the future not the past

Jesus affirmed the call

Jesus entrusted Peter with something of great value.

Jesus used restoration as preparation

Jesus was willing to start again where Peter was. His love of Christ was **Phileo** when Jesus asked for **Agape**.



Peter's statement of Phileo was an honest self-assessment of where he was and what he felt able to give to the master.  
This is growth for Peter whose track record of over stating his commitment is well documented in scripture.

Jesus made a loud statement that being restored is not being perfect - it is being usable.

### **Relationship:**

We are people who believe in relationship  
We are people who preach relationship  
God's relationship with man  
Jesus coming to establish a relational bridge to God  
Jesus bringing freedom not thru religion but relationship.

We preach it sometimes better than we practice it.  
One of the most significant areas to promote and stress the value of relationship is with a fallen brother while he is engaged in a restoration process.

Even dismissal does not mean we are done with a minister  
Bylaw Article 10 section 9 a 4

*Credential absolution. Should a district where a dismissal occurred determine, after careful investigation, that a dismissed minister has completed remedial restoration followed by faithful service for many years, it may request the General Council Credentials Committee to lift a dismissal and clear the minister's name by changing his or her credential status from dismissed to resigned.*

Also, our bylaws never demand banishment of a dismissed minister. Our bylaws call on us not to endorse the ministry of a dismissed minister – but the idea of banishment is clearly conspicuous in its absence.

Restoration is progressive.  
Good days and bad days. Some are ready instantly.  
Others must come to the point that they are ready for restoration. The process is not done – years may pass before restoration is seen in relationship.



We must be willing to visit and revisit circumstances to determine if a minister is able to be considered for the description of this bylaw. It is dangerous and counter gospel message to write off a fallen brother for all time.

### **Accountability:**

2 Corinthians 5:18 NIV

*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:*

2 Corinthians 13:11 ESV

*Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.*

You only hit what you aim at.

If you aim at nothing you will successfully hit it every time.

Aim for restoration.

Comfort one another.

Agree with one another.

This creates the peace of God to be with us.

### **Celebration:**

Back to Luke 15

*<sup>24</sup> For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.*

The word son is of great significance.

A restoration of fellowship and relationship.

Things are re-established.

There was a break

There was a wound

There was hurt and disappointment

There was a fracture

But now there is restoration – this son of mine – WOW! – What a tremendous statement

You are where you were – accepted and a part of the family.

In most occasions the beginning of a restoration program is disruptive and loud.

People in the church learn of a moral failure.

Ministers across the section also hear the news.

In some cases the failure of a minister can have district wide impact or even national effect.

In too many situations this is simply unavoidable.

What is far more under our control and our direction is the celebration which occurs at the end of a successfully completed programs.

A couple years ago during an Executive Presbytery meeting we met with a minister who had recently completed a very difficult and long period of restoration. At the close of the program the minister and spouse came to meet. Congratulations were spoken, tears were shed, and a credential packet in an envelop was slid across the desk to the minister. I remember thinking to myself – we can do better than this. How can this process start so loud an end so quietly? How can there be so much commotion at the origin and so little at the conclusion? How can we give so much attention to discovery and restoration programing and save none for celebrtion of completion?

*<sup>24</sup> For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.*

The completion of being restored is to be celebrated.

Not simply celebrating the process

Not only celebrating the restored credentials

Not only celebrating corrected behaviors

But, celebrating the person.

Celebrating their role as a son, a brother, a co-laborer in Christ.

*For this son of mine ----- So they began to celebrate.*

Great connection – the restoration of the person, the relationship is what is worthy of our celebration.

## **I believe that celebration is a Christian Discipline**

It is a discipline that we have tendency to overlook

1. Celebration requires gratitude
2. Celebration is something we choose

Celebration is a deliberate choice. Sometime our celebration means that others will be angered as seen in the character of the older brother in Luke 15. The older brother's potential for resistance and anger did not change the choice to do what was necessary – celebration. As a principle, we can never neglect doing what is right for fear that somebody might react badly.

James 4:17 (NIV)

*<sup>17</sup> If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.*

One last point here on choice, restoration is not connected to revisionist history. By restoring a brother, we are not attempting to rewrite what was, what has happened. Restoration is never the act of doctoring the details of the past – it is however moving past the details and choices of the past toward a restored future. Restoration is refusing to leave a brother locked in a mistake of the past – restoration is recognition of a new chapter and new season. One of the most wonderful points of restoration is that we are allowed to embrace a position of moving ahead – together.

### 3. Celebration requires an acknowledgement of Gods role and provision

There is a scriptural principle that demonstrates the role of God in restorative efforts. Restoration is an impossibility without somebody humbling themselves. The reason you and I are reconciled to God  
Restored in our broken relationship from the effects of sin  
Is because ....

Philippians 2:6-8 | NIV 84

*<sup>6</sup> Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,*

*<sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*

*<sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!*