



“From Where I Sit ...”

In Defense of the Earthen Vessel (And the Treasure Within)!

By the time this article is published, we will be within a couple of months of the meeting of the General Conference in Baltimore, MD and our work will be cut out for us. With a seven day schedule much will be done in what will seem like a whirlwind. One aspect of the Conference that will face those persons who will be new in the delegations and who must wrestle with the recommendations and proposals that may become new laws for the Church is the understanding, per the discipline, that the departmental work of the Church has been divided into two arenas consisting of Connectional (programmatic) Ministries and Connectional Operations. The Connectional Ministries include the Departments of (1) Evangelism and Missions, (2) Christian Education, (3) Women’s Missionary Council, (4) Lay Ministry, and (5) Ministry to Men. On the other hand, Connectional Operations include the Departments of (1) Finance, (2) Publications, (3) The Christian Index, and (4) Personnel Services. The Office of the Executive Secretary is not formally included in Connectional Operations but because the Executive Secretary’s Quadrennial report is referred to the same committee for action (the Committee on Connectional Administration) as the majority of the other departments in Connectional Operations, one could readily infer that it, too, is a part of Connectional Operations.

I wanted to make this distinction to provide a context for the point of this article and its applicability to my work with Personnel Services. And the additional point of the context is that most members of the CME Church readily acknowledge the importance of the work of the programmatic ministries of Evangelism and Missions, Christian Education, Lay Ministry, Missionary Work and the work of Ministry to Men. But the case is not as easily made for the operational ministries of Finance, the Christian Index, Publications, Executive Secretary, and Personnel Services. The linear thought is that the programmatic ministries lead directly to the growth (numerical or otherwise) of the Church with a particular intent to see this result at the local or congregational level. But I would argue that the operational ministries, when properly understood and supported, work hand-in-hand with the programmatic ministries to accomplish the same result. Now I won’t try to speak specifically for the other four operational ministries because my space in this article is too limited, but I can say that my department carries the mandate to provide the Plan for the Retirement of the employees of the CME Church (especially the ministers), the Plan for the Property (Fire) and Liability (Casualty) Insurance for the CME Church owned properties, and the continuing benefit of those aged servants whose tenure of service predated the full blown implementation of the CME Retirement Plan. In addition to these major benefits for the CME employees of the Church, we have this year added available Plans for Health Insurance for those over and under the age of 65 along with medical, dental, and vision benefits in consort with additional disability and life insurance.

As an operational ministry, “Why is this important?” It is important because if the Church is to grow at the local or congregational level, it will only be able to do so if its leaders are able to concentrate and focus on the work of the ministry. As one who has also found himself in the past as a bi-vocational employee of the Church, I know the importance of having health insurance and life insurance for both me and my family, the importance of knowing that after 40 or 50 or even 60 years of service that there will be something available to provide for my years as a retired minister. When the rest of the world can consider retiring at 50 or 60, will I necessarily have to serve in ministry full-time until mandatory retirement at age 74, just to have enough, or more than a little, available for retirement? These a few of the questions that are increasingly being asked by those who are looking deeply at the Church and waiting for “acceptable” answers.

And it is because of these difficult questions that I find comfort in the work that I do. I may not be able to help the local church to raise the money to pay the 12% of salary contribution for their Pastor's retirement, but I can make sure that the Plan continues to exist with qualified benefits that include not only an accumulated retirement benefit, but life insurance for both the Pastor and his/her spouse along with short-term disability insurance. I may not be able to help a local congregation to pay the insurance on their church building or other owned properties, but I can make sure that the church understands how they can reduce their insurance premium and that a Plan exists that will insure their acceptable risks at the appropriate levels. I may not have been around when the recipients of our Gift Fund Plan were leading and serving and sacrificing 60, 70 and 80 years ago when our Church was growing by leaps and bounds, but I can continue to advocate for the Gift Fund Plan and insure that it is properly disbursed according to governmental guidelines so that these aged servants of the Church will continue to know that their labors have not been in vain and that they are remembered.

These are just a few of the points that I would make about the work of my "one" operational ministry department and how our efforts support the ministry of the Church at the local congregational level; and I am sure that given the opportunity, each of my operational ministry colleagues could equally enumerate the significant points of how their work supports the work of the programmatic ministries of the Church. But perhaps I can say it a different way. In 2 Corinthians 4:7(a), the writer says, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels ..." and even though the passage is specially referencing the Word of God in our hearts as human beings, I would paraphrase the application and suggest that if the work of the ministry is considered a kind of "treasure" by the Church, then those who perform this ministry are most certainly "earthen vessels." Let me push this point a little further, if the work of the ministry that is performed by our leaders is considered a kind of "treasure" by the Church, then those leaders who perform this ministry are most certainly "earthen vessels" and accordingly, those of us who work daily in the operational ministries do in fact "defend" these earthen vessels and the great treasure that is found within. Or at least that's the way it looks to me ...



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Personnel Services Webpage of the CME Website at www.thecmechurch.org)