

## EASTERN SHORE DISTRICT MISSION PLAN

### *Vision*

We envision the Eastern Shore as a place where clergy, congregations, and communities are freed for edge-walking action on behalf of the gospel of Jesus. As people called into a life of holiness, we walk to the edge where our only trust is in the Christ who walks before us. As people called into beloved community, we meet brothers and sisters who live on the edge of security and acceptance.

“Those who dwell on the far edges stand in awe of your acts. You make the gateways of morning and evening sing for joy.” - Psalm 65:8, CEB

### *A Description of the Eastern Shore*

The Eastern Shore District of the United Methodist Church is comprised of 52 local churches in Accomack and Northampton Counties. The counties are connected geographically, and face some shared challenges in the area of poverty and economic security. Accomack is experiencing growth in some industries while Northampton is facing the loss of a major employer, Riverside Shore Memorial Hospital.

The United Methodist churches of the Eastern Shore are mostly small congregations with long histories. Among these are 9 predominantly African-American churches. Many of these congregations are experiencing declines in attendance and financial giving in an environment where church attenders make up a minority of the population.

### *Conference Vision*

Bishop Young Jin Cho has led the Virginia Conference with four very clear areas of emphasis:

- **All Things New-Equipping Vital Congregations (ATN-EVC)**, the conference initiatives related to beginning new faith communities, renewing existing congregations, and developing fruitful practices of ministry.
- **Strengthening our spiritual foundations** through the cultivation of the practice of prayer and spiritual disciplines. The Covenant of Spiritual Disciplines that congregations have been invited to adopt is one means for deepening the foundations.
- **Developing new faith communities**
- **Nurturing the culture of cooperation and coordination** among conference structures

Each of these has implications for our work on the Eastern Shore. In the renewal of our existing congregations in their ministry and mission, encouraging the development of authentic spiritual vitality, envisioning new expressions of church even in a region with the most UMC churches per capita, and building unity between district churches and with the larger conference mission.

### *Opportunities in the Mission Field*

As a response to these challenges, the district mission strategy team has identified these areas of opportunity:

1. Developing a Discipleship Model of Congregational Health focused on spiritual growth, lay leadership development, and moving from members to disciples
2. Work with Children, responding to one of the most vulnerable populations in our community and the under-resourced families and schools that serve them.
3. Poverty, engaging in new relationships with the poor and the marginalized, those of whom Jesus said "when you did it for the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it for me."
4. Increasing District Unity around responding to the above opportunities

### *Where are we ready*

In identifying these areas of opportunity we are aware that there are green shoots already that we want to nurture. Among these are:

- Programs related to congregational fruitfulness and vitality like the 5 Talent Academy, How to Reach New People Workshops, and Checking Vital Signs processes for assessing congregational health and district training opportunities
- Ministries with children at local churches and through our district missions - Una Familia, Camp Occohannock on the the Bay & the Agape Christian Children's Community Center
- The new Ministry with the Poor Work Group, which is enlisting churches in reorienting their outreach around ministry with those living on the edge.

### *Desired Outcomes*

Over the next four years we feel called to work towards these outcomes:

1. At least 10 churches per year engaged in intentional, intensive processes of disciple formation and mission re-orientation.
2. Increasing the number of small groups engaged in spiritual growth and witness.
3. Annually increasing the percentage of active members engaged in transformative ministry with those living on the margins, including children.
4. Aligning district programs and activities so that they are focused on these mission emphases.

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