



Thoughts from the Bible and Books

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June 2006

6 Months Down, 54 To Go

One of my favorite definitions of discipleship comes from the title of a book by Eugene Peterson – “a long obedience in the same direction.” Following Jesus requires more than fits and spurts of passion. It means walking – sometimes quickly, often slowly – in the same direction day after day, year after year.

Part of our long obedience as a church is captured our “15 by 2010” statement. If you don’t have a copy, pick one up in the lobby. It’s the five year plan for URC. These 15 initiatives summarize what we aim to accomplish, relying on the Lord, by the close of 2010. And believe it or not, we are already nearly 1/10 of the way through our allotted time. So I thought it would be helpful to update you on what has transpired over the last 6 months.

Initiative #1: Prayer

The staff has begun taking their three mandated annual prayer days (1c). To ensure that we actually got away and prayed, I asked all our program staff to give me their prayer date for the spring semester. Next up is one for the summer and then at least one more in the fall. In addition, Lela Vandenberg and Steve Herwaldt have been

designated as our prayer leaders for this initiative. At present, this means simply that they are praying and leading others in prayer. Look for their announcements in the bulletin. You are welcome to join them for prayer any time.

Initiative #3: Missions

We adopted several new missionaries this year and increased our missions giving in terms of real dollars and as a percentage of the budget. Hopefully, the percentage will increase again for 2007. In the near future, the missions committee will be branching off into work groups to tackle the individual components of this initiative. And don’t forget to pray for the Urbana Missions Conference which comes at the end of December.

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Initiative #4: Evangelism

As most of you know, we gave the website a complete overhaul in the past few months. As you may not know, this was to accomplish 4c in our vision plan. Yet, more work needs to be done to make URC stronger in local evangelism. Two good starts: the Easter outreach where we gave away several hundred books and the possibility of evangelism training in the fall.

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Initiative #5: Growth Groups

We had a big push for growth groups last summer and fall. Several new groups were formed and new leaders trained. I think it's safe to say that more of our congregation is in a growth group now than at this time last year. But we still are not really a church of growth groups. It's not a part of our church DNA (as the saying goes). Yet, growth groups are essential for assimilation, building community, and caring for one another (the ABS's of growth groups). Allan Knapp continues to spearhead this initiative, but he needs some more help since Curtis and Annie Miller are heading to Turkey. If you have an interest in strengthening our growth group ministry talk to Allan.

Initiative #6: Elder Districts

Every in-town member and adherent should have received a letter explaining elder districts. This is still a bit of an experiment for us, but the elders are excited to pray for a specific group of people in our church and be available for questions or concerns. If you or someone you know didn't receive a letter and would like to be a part of a district, please contact the church office.

Initiative #9: Mercy-Ministry

Several weeks ago, Bob Sheehan and I met to talk about 9a: "Provide more opportunities for our congregation to show mercy to the poor and needy, and address the causes of poverty, in the Lansing area and around the world." I was excited about Bob's passion, good ideas, and commonsense. Bob is in the process of getting an initial gathering together to talk about how URC can best do mercy-ministry. Stay tuned for more information or contact Bob if you are interested.

Initiative #10: Adult Education

The URC Institute (10b) will be held October 6-8, 2006. Headlining the weekend will be D.A. Carson from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Mark Whalon has been leading a team of people who are working hard to prepare for this big event. The other half of initiative 10 is about adult Sunday School classes. Dave Hinkley is meeting with a small group of folks this coming week to talk about how our adult education can be more developed and more strategic (10a).

Initiative #11: Campus Ministry

Jon Saunders has started meeting with some students at Olivet College in hopes of starting a campus ministry there (11b). The response has been encouraging. Our international ministry has seen several new faces in the past couple months, including Qiang Xue who has joined Irene Unkefer, Tito DeLeon, and Delia Castaneda on the leadership team.

Initiative #12: Sunday Logistics

Jeff McAlvey is heading up a task force charged with examining parking and space problems at URC (12a). The task force will be collecting data about our congregation, noting trends, and exploring a lot of different options, big and small. They will be bringing a report and any recommendations to the consistory later this year or early 2007.

Initiative #13: Restructuring

The Administrative Committee was redeployed (13a), and then disbanded until further notice. The committee met several times, drew up a report, and made some recommendations, but then felt like there was no need for them to continue meeting at present. The consistory is experimenting with quarterly consistory meetings (13c). We last met in March which has freed the elders and diaconate to focus more on our particular areas of ministry. The consistory approved statements of qualification and responsibility for the elder board and diaconate (13d). A four week training course was offered in April for nominees and interested persons (13e).

Initiative #14: Staff Positions

Katie is, as was promised, now our full time, *and fully-funded*, Associate Campus Director. For the 2006-07 school year, Katie will be the team leader while Ben Falconer takes a year off to study at Trinity. Jon Saunders will be paid a regular salary from the remainder of Ben's salary. Not to leave anyone out, Vanessa will continue on the campus staff, being paid from the monies her and Jon have fundraised.

As you can see, there is a lot going on at URC. And lots more to do. So how are you going to be involved?