

## **Five Talent Academy**

For the last several years, the Virginia Annual Conference has been working on efforts toward renewal. Many of these efforts have gathered around our recent “All Things New” task force. This work began with a simple resolution from the Conference floor that we establish 250 new faith communities in the next thirty years.

As those task forces began their work, they recognized that this effort should not only be directed toward establishing new congregations, but also in resourcing the renewal of existing churches. The result is The Five Talent Academy. The Academy has been created to offer resources and opportunities for any existing church which desires to take the next step in mission and ministry.

The Academy is based upon the parable in Matthew 25. Our risen Lord has given talents, or churches, into our hands as congregational leaders. His expectation is that we will invest our congregations and not return them as we received them. As such, he encourages us to not bury our churches in the sand, keeping them as they are for fear of what could happen. Instead, he lovingly invites every faith community to aggressively multiply the church, expanding them numerically and spiritually in mission and ministry.

To accomplish this purpose, the Academy is organized around three key values. Wesley understood how to facilitate revival in the church and how to recruit leadership. His expectation was that his preachers should demonstrate “fire, faith, and fruit.” In the same way, the Five Talent Academy embraces what we have called “the partnership of the willing” (Fire). This is not a Conference mandated program. Churches sign up for the covenant and curriculum because they believe that the Lord has called them to another level and they earnestly desire it. In addition, the Academy embraces the message of the parable; that our Lord is present and available to any congregation, in any circumstance, and any size, and that he earnestly desires each congregation to multiply and is more than able to provide the resources to achieve that end (Faith). Finally, the Academy believes that each congregation should demonstrate numerical and spiritual evidence of this multiplication. Churches are supposed to grow (Fruit).

To enable and encourage these Biblical and Wesleyan values, each participating congregation will be required to adopt (through Church Council) a series of numerical goals around the five key areas of ministry. The purpose of these goals is not to simply pursue greater numbers, but to

reach more people and take them deeper in their discipleship. In addition, each participating congregation will prayerfully pursue a plan to plant or partner in planting a new faith community within five years. Models for this will be available for any size congregation.

The Academy will also accomplish these goals by offering a three year curriculum comprised of six semesters. Each six month semester will focus upon one of the key areas, including planting a new faith community. The lead pastor and at least one key lay person will participate in two small group meetings each year (one per semester) and will also join (with other church leadership if desired) in two large seminars which will be focused upon the topic of that semester. Key speakers who have demonstrated effectiveness (fruit) in their area of ministry will be recruited as speakers for these events.

The Academy is also a work in progress. As we begin this process, we hope to refine and enhance the way in which we seek congregational renewal. Please join us in praying that the Five Talent Academy will be a new vehicle for our existing congregations to multiply our talents and aggressively invest them so that our Lord will say to each of us; “Well done good and faithful servant...”