



“From Where I Sit ...”

“We did ‘good’ ... But we can do better!”

In September 2012 the CME Church inaugurated the long awaited CME Unity Summit at the Sheraton New Orleans Hotel, 25 years after the very first meeting of the CME Convocation in 1987, coincidentally in the same city and at the same hotel. And what an inauguration it was! CME's came from every section of the country to accomplish in one meeting all of the work that would have been accomplished in three or more separate meetings.

Authorized by the General Conference of 2010, the financial intent of the meeting of the Unity Summit was to deliver, in a depressed economic climate, an innovative means by which both the denomination and the attendees would experience savings. Specifically, the denomination took the proactive step of combining the scheduled annual meetings of the General Connectional Board, the Executive Board of the Women's Missionary Council, the Annual CME Convocation and the Connectional Young Adult Retreat (the Connectional Lay Institute, a quadrennial meeting, had previously been combined with the CME Convocation). The savings for the denomination is reaped from the shared meeting costs in a central venue where the duration of the total meeting days has been trimmed from 10 to 5 days. The intended savings for attendees arises from the premise that a large number of meeting attendees attend most if not all of the same meetings. Therefore a person who formerly attended two or three meetings would save the expense of the additional travel of the second or third meeting by attending the one Unity Summit with the extra cost of paying for just one extra night beyond what was required for the CME Convocation.

Many of the attendees joined in to report that that first Unity Summit was a tremendous success! The spirit of the worship services, the preaching, the teaching, the quality of invited talent, the meals and the fellowship was second to none. Almost everyone present had a wonderful time. And the registration exceeded the largest ever reported in recent years for one of our annual meetings. Yes, we did “good” ... but we can do better!

“How could we do better?” I'm glad you asked. We could do better if the conference leaders are given the opportunity to better plan for the number who will eventually be in attendance. Sponsoring a conference is very much like a farmer planting a crop. To achieve a meaningful harvest certain growing prerequisites are necessary. But no matter how many prerequisites are accommodated, the harvest is minimized if the seed is planted too late. The seed of the conference is the presence of the attendee and for the conference to be successful and to fully achieve its goal on every level, it is important for attendees to register their intended presence, or plant the seed of their presence, in a timely fashion.

With a conference, many tasks occur behind the scene. The average attendee is not aware that a contract exists between the sponsoring organization and the hotel that generally is executed two years earlier. The contract commits the availability of a certain number of sleeping rooms and meeting rooms for the group until a certain date. If the group's sleeping room registrations are below the number projected by that certain date, then the hotel either releases the remainder of the rooms so they may be rented by others or the group assumes the responsibility for the unreserved rooms on the hope (or faith) that the group's attendees will eventually register and book the remaining rooms held by the group. However, if hope is futile



and faith is in vain and the attendees do not book these remaining rooms, then the sponsoring group must pay the hotel the full rental value of the rooms held but unused by the group. This can be a considerable sum. On the other hand, if attendees had registered earlier and confirmed their planned attendance, the potential of a situation such as this one could more easily be avoided. It would certainly make planning and preparing the conference easier.

There are other aspects of a conference that are impacted by attendees registering late, such as:

- When attendees register late, the conference may not have enough registration materials and conference distributions available, since these items must be prepared and printed well in advance of the conference.
- When attendees register late, it has an impact on the room setup and may require rearranging assigned breakout rooms or adjusting the seating of assembly areas.
- When attendees register late, it can affect the arrangements for meals and/or ticketed events.
- When attendees register late, it can affect attendance at planned events, if the attendee must secure lodging at another hotel because the conference hotel block is filled.
- When attendees register late, it can affect the accommodation of logistics when groups break at the same time intersecting in limited hallways.
- When attendees register late, it allows other groups to secure space in the conference hotel and therefore limit available sleeping rooms and meeting rooms.
- When attendees register late, it greatly impairs the plans and work of the host episcopal district.

Why am I raising this point? Again, I'm glad you asked. Our first CME Unity Summit had a registration of just over 2,000 attendees for a conference that began on September 25th. However as late as August 21st, slightly a month before the conference, the preregistration number was only 1,337, approximately 2/3 of the final number registered. It appears only 1/3 had registered two months prior to the conference.

I am raising this point and I am writing this article because I believe that many of our attendees are not aware of these facts. Many are not aware that waiting for the last few weeks to register and secure a room puts the financial success of the conference at risk. If a goal of the combined meetings of the Unity Summit was to relieve the attendees of some of the expense they had paid in the past, then why not make the process simpler and easier for all by registering as early as possible. This year's Summit started with one conference hotel, but as late registrations began to come in, sleeping rooms were no longer available because the room block had expired. Therefore an overflow hotel was engaged and then a second overflow hotel. This would likely have been unnecessary if attendees had registered earlier.

I'm told our next Unity Summit will be in Houston in September of 2013 and I hope that every person planning to attend will complete their registration and book their room by June. We know that we are going to the Summit. We know because we are members of the General Connectional Board and the Executive Board of the Women's Missionary Council. We know because we look forward to the training classes and Bible Study of the Convocation and the activities of the Young Adult retreat. And if we know, then why not prepare to go during the green season so the seed of our intended presence will be planted in a timely fashion. It seems like a smart thing. At least that is the way it looks to me ...

"From Where I Sit"

Tyrone T. Davis, D.Min, is the General Secretary of the Board of Personnel Services

(Copies of earlier articles may be found on the
Personnel Services Webpage of the CME Website at www.c-m-e.org)