



WE CONFESS



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2008 RENEWAL & REFORM COALITION

A HOPE AND A FUTURE THROUGH OUR WESLEYAN HERITAGE

Christ United Methodist Church in Memphis, Tennessee had an international flavor on October 26 and 27. Approximately 200 United Methodists from all over the world gathered there for worship and preparation for the 2008 General Conference. The conference was entitled “A Hope and a Future Through our Wesleyan Heritage,” and was sponsored by the 2008 Renewal and Reform Coalition. That coalition includes the Confessing Movement, Good News/Renew, LifeWatch, Transforming Congregations, and UMAction. Almost half of the attendees will be delegates at the 2008 General Conference in Fort Worth, TX. The Rev. John Holt, Memphis district superintendent, and the current senior minister of Christ Church, Dr. Steve Dodson, welcomed the attendees.

The opening worship service featured magnificent singing, led by the music ministry team of Christ Church. Dr. Bill Bouknight, recently retired Senior Minister of Christ Church, preached on the subject-- “Speaking the Truth in Love,” based on Ephesians 4:14-16. Dr. Bouknight declared that the United Methodist Church is still in denial about its decline. The reason for that decline, in his view, is that the denomination is no longer sure what its “good news” is. He said, “When a denomination does not have clarity about its central message, it cannot declare it with confidence or conviction. Our bugle sounds more like retreat than reveille.”

Dr. Bouknight asserted that in order to speak the truth, United Methodists must:

- Reduce our hypocrisy;
- Resist making majors out of minors; and,
- Rediscover our cross-centered gospel.

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Dr. Bouknight claimed that the cross-centered gospel is the only message that can save souls, change lives, and transform us into a mighty movement for God. But getting the message right is not enough. We must also distribute it with grace. We must demonstrate to the world that we can disagree without demonizing or despising one another. Dr. Bouknight asserted that because of the diverse world views and attitudes toward Scripture within the denomination, he doubted that United Methodists could compromise on the really important issues. However, he said, “We must be able to treat each other with respect, honesty, and kindness. To do otherwise would invite scorn on our church and on our Christ. We must speak the truth in love.”



Dr. Bill Bouknight

The bulk of the conference was devoted to six primary issues that are likely to dominate the agenda of the 2008 General Conference. The six issues, and the speakers who addressed them, are as follows:

- GENERAL CONFERENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF A GLOBAL CHURCH
Eddie Fox and Rob Renfroe
- ADVOCACY FOR WOMEN’S AND CHILDREN’S ISSUES *Marget Sykes and Dixie Brewster*
- THE CRITICAL ROLE OF THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL *Ron Enns*

(Continued on page 2)

- DOCTRINE, ACCOUNTABILITY, LEADERSHIP AND THE COUNCIL OF BISHOPS
Maxie Dunnam
- EMPOWERING THE CENTRAL CONFERENCES
Jerry Kulah

Following the presentations regarding these six issues, time was allotted for discussion and reaction.

For the evening meal on October 26, the delegates were divided according to jurisdiction. In the various jurisdictional meetings, introductions were made of those persons who have been endorsed as candidates for the episcopacy.

The Rev. Tom Lambrecht presented an orientation session about General Conference, including pictures of Fort Worth's downtown area and convention center.



Bishop William Morris

Retired Bishop William Morris's Bible study led off the second day of the conference. He also presided over Holy Communion in the closing worship service. The Rev. Gloria Brooks preached in that service.

One of the highlights of the conference was the

"MESSAGE FROM AFRICA" presented by District Superintendent Jerry Kulah of Liberia. This message had been approved by 22 African district superintendents and several bishops. Rev. Kulah raised questions about the spiritual strength of the UMC. He said, "We of the Central Conferences of Africa are deeply concerned that the UMC is



beginning to speak with different languages, and not with the common speech that presents Jesus Christ as the Good News of salvation, as our only Lord and only Savior." He asserted that many Africans are saddened over the reality that "some United Methodist churches of the Euro-Western world have prioritized the issues of homosexuality, abortion, and

questions about the authenticity of the Scripture over its commitment to making disciples for Christ." Rev. Kulah then gave an African perspective on the essential beliefs and missional priorities that should guide the denomination.

Rev. Kulah's conclusion was unforgettable. He reminded the assembly that when the baby Jesus was threatened by a vengeful King Herod, the holy family fled to Africa for sanctuary (Matthew 2:14-15). Then he declared, "Today the churches of Africa again offer themselves as a sanctuary for God's Word, hoping that the Lord may use the African churches as his means of renewing the church around the world." ■

Audio recordings of the various presentations can be listened to and/or downloaded from the Christ UMC website at www.cumcmemphis.org (Click on Media). If you have any question, contact The Confessing Movement office by phoning 317-356-9729 or by emailing confessingumc@iquest.net.

LITERATURE AND PAMPHLETS may be requested by completing an order form found on The Confessing Movement website at http://confessingumc.org/v2/pdf/ORDER_FORM.pdf or by calling the office at 317-356-9729.



HAPPENINGS AROUND THE CHURCH

HOLY CONFERENCING AND CIVIL DISCOURSE

By Dr. Riley Case

Bishops and others working with General Conference are to be commended for urging a new tone of civility in the debates leading up to and during next year's General Conference at Fort Worth. In a nation in which secular political discourse is becoming increasingly uglier, could the United Methodist Church serve as an example of respectful dialogue and debate?

If so, a good place to start is the way in which we speak of each other. Evangelicals and those who call themselves conservative would do well to refrain from language which accuses others, or even ideas, as "apostate," "unregenerate," or "heretical."

Those who call themselves progressives would do well to refrain from labels such as "homophobic," "racist," "fundamentalist," and "sexist." When a well-known speaker accused the evangelical renewal groups at a General Conference banquet (to great applause), saying: "They are not voices of God but voices of white privilege, greed, capitalism, racism,...and American domination of the rest of the world," he was not helping in the cause of holy conferencing.

Those involved in discussion and debate should avoid speaking of "the radical left" or "the religious right." Accusations that one side or the other is only interested in power and control, or taking over the church, should be avoided.

It is hoped that bishops also would heed the call for a new tone. In 2004 bishops allowed a demonstration in which placards brought onto the floor of the conference spoke of the church as "hateful," "exclusive," and "intolerant." Some stood in solidarity as one of the demonstration leaders came to the altar and smashed the chalice to be used for Holy Communion (the person who smashed the chalice was then lifted up as "prophetic" and in 2007 was elected the head of his delegation). In 2000 several bishops were arrested by the city of Cleveland for civil disobedience as they demonstrated against their own church (and in the process cost the church several thousands of dollars to pay for additional police protection). Bishops have also violated the separation of powers by interfering in the legislative process and more recently by challenging the judicial council ruling 1032.

It is hoped that bishops might hold each other accountable. It is hoped that the rest of us might hold each other accountable. We need to be reminded when we have been judgmental of others, or questioned the motives of others, or used inflammatory language. ■

What is at Stake at General Conference 2008?

By Mickey Ellis



Mickey Ellis

I love my church – a church set in a diverse community on the west side of Houston. The needs of the community are many, and we, the people who make up the body of our local church, are determined to address those needs and do whatever we can to meet them –

providing housing for the homeless, Spirit-led prayer and healing for the ailing, and a Christian Academy with the mission of sending out Christ-like students – just to name a few.

But, are we aware of the controversy that threatens to tear our denomination apart? Do we realize that should that happen, our little church will have to shift its focus from its missions and ministries (the work God has called us to) to asking ourselves the question, “How do we respond?” How do we respond to our members who can no longer be a part of a church who condones practices contrary to the Word of God – to a community filled with lost people who are seeking the Truth – to the children who ask the tough questions because what they are being taught and what they see happening in their church are two different things? Are we aware of exactly what is at stake?

John Wesley prophetically said the following:

“I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold fast both the

doctrine, spirit, and the discipline with which they first set out.”

I think for most, deep down we are indeed aware that we as United Methodists are facing trying times, now more than ever, and it is time to be united in our Wesleyan beliefs and make a stand for the church we love.

Philip K. Shiver wrote: *“If ever a silent majority should have made a noise, it was during the past twenty-five years in our own church. With our silence, we gave tacit approval to the direction our church was taking.”*

Much will be determined for the United Methodist Church at General Conference this coming year (April 22-May 2, 2008). So, what’s at stake? Just a few of the legislative priorities the Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA) has are as follows:

Remove all language within the UM Discipline that would in any way prohibit full participation in the ministries of the UMC based on gender identity and/or sexual orientation. (That includes ordination)

Call on the UMC to go on record at the 2008 General Conference in support of the work of, and membership in, the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice.

(For the entire list, go to www.mfsaweb.org, click on “General Conference” and then on “Legislative Priorities”)

There are so many decisions that are made by the UMC’s judicial process - from proposed

legislation such as that shown above to the actual people who make these decisions for the church who are voted into position - and it is critical for every church member to make their voices known if we are to retain our Wesleyan heritage.

I love my church and more than that, I love the true work of the church – loving all people, even those who oppose us, with the Truth as laid down by God in the Bible. To share anything less is a lie, it is not love and we will be held accountable. I will not stand idly by when I know that God is moving me to take action. I hope you will join me.

What can the average church member do?

PRAY – This is the most important thing you can do. Let the Spirit lead you, and rest assured that *“if you remain in Me (Jesus) and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”* (John 15:7) Encourage your congregations to pray. Can you imagine what would happen at General Conference if everyone in our denomination were praying as the Spirit leads? If you would like guidelines for a prayer service, please let me know. One of our pastors has written a wonderful service of prayer.

TALK WITH YOUR MINISTER – Tell him/her how you feel about our official affinity to liberation theology. Do you know that 75% of the Ministerial Education Benefit Fund is distributed to 13 “Official” theological schools which are liberal in

their teaching (see also legislative priority #10 on the MFSA website)? Do you know that some of them don’t even acknowledge the immaculate conception of Jesus! Conservative seminaries, who acknowledge the divinity of Jesus, receive absolutely no funding from the United Methodist Church. That is your apportionment dollars at work! Also, let your ministers know if you think the Bible is fine without rewriting it.

WRITE – To again quote Philip K. Shiver, *“Write to your District Superintendent, your Conference, your Bishop, and the Methodist publications. Write action items for your Annual Conference. Make your ideas and your presence felt. You are regularly asked by various church-affiliated groups to write letters to your congressional delegation and the President on political issues. How much more important is it to reclaim your church? The same strategies that moved the church to the left with a minority of members can return it with a majority membership more inclined to the middle of the road.”* ■



VOTING WITH OUR DOLLARS

All of us related to the Confessing Movement want to see renewal and reform in our beloved denomination. Our prayers and hard work are required, but that is not all. It takes money to run the Confessing Movement and to accomplish at least 100 tasks each week. When we make a financial contribution to the Confessing Movement, we are voting for reform and renewal. Have you made a personal contribution to the Confessing Movement this year? Has your local church made a contribution? 2007 is almost over. The time to step up and make a difference is now!

**The Confessing Movement
within The United Methodist Church**

7995 East 21st Street
Indianapolis, IN 46219
(317) 356-9729
Fax: (317) 356-9742

Web site: www.confessingumc.org
E-mail: confessingumc@iquest.net

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Purpose Statement

**Confessing Jesus Christ as Son, Savior, and Lord,
The Confessing Movement exists to enable the United
Methodist Church to retrieve its classical doctrinal
identity, and to live it out as disciples of Jesus Christ.**

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