

A Pastoral Letter to the Whole Church

LAKE JUNALUSKA, N.C. – During the closing hours of their weeklong meeting Nov. 5-9, the United Methodist Council of Bishops issued a pastoral letter offering words of “hope and peace” to people struggling with the consequences and fear of terrorism:

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Grace and peace be to you in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

The sad and terrible events in the United States of America, on Sept. 11, 2001, and beyond, compel us to speak words of hope and peace to United Methodist people in the 120 annual conferences in more than 50 countries of the world. Stunned and shattered by terrorist attacks in the United States and the threat of bioterrorism, we, your bishops, call upon the church to join us in seeking solidarity with victimized peoples throughout the world.

Our fervent and constant prayers are for those who grieve because they have lost companions and loved ones; for military chaplains and for those persons who are providing the ministry of presence, comfort, healing and hope; for public servants and countless volunteers who have demonstrated selfless generosity; for all who are redemptively reaching out to those persons who have been erroneously connected to terrorism; for the people who have been placed in harm's way and their loved ones; for President Bush and the leaders of all the nations that they may have wisdom and courage to lead people toward justice and peace. We pray for innocent victims who have experienced injuries, loss and death. We also pray for those who wish to do harm. We pray that violence, terrorism and war will cease. We ask you to join us in prayer.

We are extremely concerned for the thousands of people who live in fear and terror and those displaced by war and poverty. We sincerely believe that every conceivable effort must be used to protect those who are innocent and most vulnerable. We are persuaded that we must use the spiritual and human resources of The United Methodist Church to respond in a loving and caring way. We commend churches around the world for their contribution to the appeal, “Love in the Midst of Tragedy,” and all other humanitarian offerings.

We, your bishops, believe that violence in all of its forms and expressions is contrary to God's purpose for the world. Violence creates fear, desperation, hopelessness and instability. We call upon the church to be a community of peace with justice and to support individuals and agencies all over the world who are working for the common good for all of God's children. We also call upon the church to study and work toward alleviating the root causes of poverty and the other social conditions that are exploited by terrorists.

As people of the resurrection, we believe that peace has been achieved in Christ; however, this peace is yet to be fully realized in human relationships. The message of the resurrection is that love is stronger than all the forces of evil. Furthermore, it is only sacrificial love, not war, which can reconcile people to God and to each other. We call upon the church, leaders, nations and individuals around the world to make room for love so that the patterns of our common life might reveal God's justice.

We offer this letter with the wondrous promise of Advent ringing in our ears: “But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for see I am bringing to you good news of great joy for all the people.’” (Luke 2:10) ■

Peace
Bishops of The United Methodist Church

Say ‘NO’, continued from page 2

We need what author Don Joiner calls “Creating a Climate for Giving” (a book I highly recommend). An intentional, comprehensive, long-range, ongoing stewardship plan, Joiner declares, must be implemented in the local church to create the climate.

Basic is a theology of stewardship for funding ministry. For too long, stewardship has been equated with getting people's money. (If we only mention stewardship at annual fundraisers, should we expect anything less?) The theological focus should not be on the church's needs, but on the individual Christian's need to give. Former Holston Bishop Ellis Finger is fond of saying, “I wish St. Paul hadn't said ‘God loves a cheerful giver’ because God loves all people whether they're cheerful or not. But you can count on this: A cheerful giver loves God!” Creating a climate of cheerful giving – of giving because we want to and not because we have to – is essential.

People like to give when they feel it makes a difference, when they see giving as an investment in people's lives and in a better world. Note the recent outpouring for the victims of Sept. 11.

Creating a culture of giving is accomplished through the “5 M's of Being”: (1) Determining our market (who do we seek to minister to?); (2) Focusing

our mission (what is our vision and purpose for that market?); (3) Planning our ministries (what will we do to meet our mission?); (4) Supplying the means (what fiscal and human resources will we develop and how?); and (5) Offering the motivation (how shall we lend inspiration to encourage giving?).

Intentional planning should include a comprehensive strategy for funding ministry. Wayne Barrett's book, “Get Well! Stay Well! Prescriptions for a Financially Healthy Congregation,” is a recommended resource. Planning a three-year cycle of fundraisers can be incorporated in the church's program along with ongoing worship and education.

Pastoral and lay leadership are also key to creating such a climate. Like it or not, parishioners follow the examples of the pastor and laity leaders. We pastors cannot with integrity ask parishioners to grow in giving if we're not willing to ourselves.

The Church should not have to beg and resort to less-than-Christian motivation to receive the resources it needs to do God's work. The time has come when we must employ a new paradigm that provides way-of-life giving. ■

The Rev. George Odle is the conference's stewardship consultant.

C-mail:



Taking The Call in-house:

Readers speak out

► Just read the new in-house *Call*. It looks great! I can't wait for more.

Rev. Dennie D. Humphreys

District Superintendent

Big Stone Gap, VA

► We received our new issue of *The Call*. We thought it was tremendously better than the national version. I'm also excited about *The Sunday Call* that can be downloaded for our weekly leaflet. Please pass on a “job well done” to those who worked so hard on the new format.

Barbara J. Heins

Bradburn Hill UMC

Greeneville, TN

► The new version of *The Call* was the first one I have read from cover to cover in months. I enjoyed the story about Jerry Everly [‘Holston minister reaches out to suffering New Yorkers,’ 11/5/01] the most.

Rev. Brian Burch

Tyner UMC

Chattanooga, TN

► I have mixed feelings about the change in the conference newspaper. I had become accustomed to the other. When we decided to go with the United Methodist Reporter nearly 30 years ago, we took it before the Annual Conference for approval. We don't do things that way now. However, if given a chance to vote, I suppose the conference would approve the change. I suppose the new format will give the opportunity for more local church news.

Rev. Roy L. Howard

Chattanooga, TN

► My first impression of the new *The Call* is that I had a hard time getting interested in reading it. My main interest in getting *The Call* is for the denomination-wide issues. The new issue had very little of this. I vote for the old method of generating *The Call*. If not that way, then we should somehow get hold of national writings of issues affecting Methodism and the Church in general.

Dr. W. Kelly Dagenhart

First UMC

Oak Ridge, TN

■ Have an opinion?

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