

METHODIST LAITY REFORM MOVEMENT

Iowa United Methodists Working for Christian Faithfulness
and Reform Within The United Methodist Church

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Issues 2008 Report

5-28-08

Iowa Annual Conference (IAC), June 5-8, 2008

To: Our Members and Iowa Annual Conference Members

**From: Board of Directors of
METHODIST LAITY REFORM MOVEMENT**

We are sharing with you some concerns and recommendations on issues facing our 2008 Iowa Annual Conference.

If you are an Annual Conference Member (lay or clergy), we invite you to review this report and take it with you.

You are invited to **visit our MLRM information table in Hilton Coliseum and attend our brief information meetings on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights, immediately when the IAC adjourns, in the **Scheman Building, Room 250.****

To **all others** receiving this report: We invite you to review it and **express your own opinions** to your Annual Conference Members (lay and clergy) from your Local Church — if possible, before they go to Ames for the IAC session that begins Thursday, June 5. We encourage you to **ask them**, after the Annual Conference, what happened on issues that concern you.

This report was prepared at our Board's request by our *MLRM* 2008 Legislation Team (many of our Board and Advisory Council members) after review of the Pre-Conference Manual.

We support Bishop Palmer's Vision for our Church and his strong emphasis on offering Jesus Christ to all people. We seek to help our Iowa Annual Conference to focus on its Mission "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world" and to support and strengthen our Local Churches in meeting people's spiritual and physical needs in Jesus' name.

We offer this report in the hope that it will be helpful to you and will aid thoughtful, prayerful decision-making. We respect everyone's right to make his or her own decisions. **THANK YOU** for your consideration of our concerns and recommendations.

Please register now to be inspired by Bill Bouknight at our Annual Renewal Dinner, Saturday, June 7. See p. 7.

MAKE TIME FOR OUR FUTURE?

The 2008 Iowa Annual Conference appears to have a lighter workload than usual – no resolutions (sigh of relief) and no major task force proposal.

Shall we **set aside part of our time** for serious, prayerful discussion on the future of United Methodism in Iowa? Shall we consider **questions such as:**

- Does our Iowa UMC that has lost 40% of its members in 40 years need something more than business as usual? What “something” do we need?
- Why are some Iowa UM Local Churches growing, reaching out, bringing in new members by profession of faith – but most are still losing members? What can we learn from our growing churches?
- How could we devote more time, energy, and money to our UM Mission “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world”?
- How should IAC priorities change in response to our Council of Bishops’ Four Areas of Focus – develop clergy and lay leadership, start new churches and renew existing ones, combat poverty, fight killer diseases?
- If John Wesley were preaching to the 2008 IAC, what might he say? How would he guide us to apply his General Rules (do no harm; do good; stay in love with God)? Might he repeat, “Offer them Christ”? Would he again warn us, “But I am afraid lest (the people called Methodist) 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 discipline with which they first set out.”?

SPECIFIC ISSUES FACING OUR IOWA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

This is a **partial list** of issues. There are many other important items in the Pre-Conference Manual. We encourage you to study the entire Manual and each item, ask questions, and make your own decisions, carefully and prayerfully.

Recommendations on Items in Pre-Conference Manual. The Action Item numbers and page numbers are from the Pre-Conference Manual. Please read the full text in the Manual. Some **Questions** are suggested. You have the right to ask questions in the Legislative Committees and in IAC sessions.

2009 Budget and Apportionments

See the Conference Treasurer’s budget report and proposed 2009 budget (pages v-xi) in the Pre-Conference Manual, in front of Legislative Section 1. See also the budget and apportionments process in the Council on Finance and Administration (CFA) portion of Legislative Section 10 (#1007, pp. 202-205).

Apportionments: 4% increase for 2009. The Apportionment Analysis (page xi) shows a **4.00% increase (up \$627,066)** in total apportionments, to **\$16,303,779**. \$355,000 of this increase is for 100% payment by the IAC of its General Church apportionments, as voted by the IAC last year; see p. 196. However, this 4% **may go higher**; it does not yet reflect the increased General Church Apportionments adopted by the recent UM General Conference.

Question: Is this **4% (or higher) increase** in total apportionments **necessary and realistic**? If some increases are necessary, what lower-priority expenses could be trimmed to prevent this big increase in total apportionments?

Question: Which way will we do more for our Church's Mission ("to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world") – by increasing total IAC spending, or by allowing our Local Churches to use more of this money for their ministries and outreach?

Question: While Iowa UM membership is declining, shouldn't the IAC **reduce** its total burden on our Local Churches, to limit the soaring per-member cost?

Recommendation: Reduce total apportionments; don't increase them.

Budget assumes 83.4% of apportionments will be collected. The 2009 budget assumes **only 83.4%** of the total \$16,303,779 apportionments will be **collected** and \$2,712,227 (**16.6%**) will **not** be collected.

Recommendation: Continue the current budget method used by the CFA and Conference Treasurer: the budgets are based on estimated **actual** receipts, including apportionments **collected**. The budgets throughout the Pre-Conference Manual include an "Apportionment received" amount (Total apportioned, less amounts not collected). The CFA further prioritizes and trims budgets each fall, to reflect the shortfall in apportionments collected. (Rules of Order, par. M.2, page 441 of 2007 IAC Journal; same provision is at p. 45 of the PCM; part of it is stated in #1007, par. 11, p. 205).

However, remember this caution: The Apportionment Analysis (page xi) and all **Apportionment Requests** in the Pre-Conference Manual are **inflated** and **artificial**: total apportionments, with no reduction for unpaid amounts.

Recommendation: The high percentage of uncollected apportionments should be seen as a **warning** that many Local Churches want to pay their apportionments but cannot – and the IAC should **freeze or reduce** the total amount of apportionments, especially in this time of economic uncertainty.

Question: How accurate are the amounts of apportionments collected and not collected, in the budget documents (page viii)? For example, page viii shows \$2,341,419 actual amount of apportionments not collected for year 2006. However, Note 12 to the IAC's audited 2006 financial statements states that "approximately \$2,500,000" of apportionments for 2006 "was not received and is netted against apportionment revenue." (This Note 12 is at page 28 of the audited statements, which follow page 292 of 2007 IAC Journal.) We assume there is a satisfactory explanation of this difference, but it should be provided.

Legislative Section 1

#101-111, pp. 1-50: Major revision of the Conference Rules of Order.

Many changes appear necessary because of restructuring, but the revision goes further. **Recommendation:** Review carefully. What is changed? How? Why?

#104, pp. 2-4. Legislation. Nearly all of the current Rules of Order for the IAC legislative process, legislative committees, consent calendar, etc., are

deleted. Instead, each year the IAC Session Planning Committee “shall determine the process by which all legislation shall be considered by the Annual Conference.” The process will be announced in the Pre-Conference Manual.

Recommendation: Defeat all of #104. Keep the current rules in #104.

We believe these basic procedural rules are important and should be changed only by the IAC, not by any committee. IAC members deserve to know the rules in advance, rather than wondering what this year’s rules will be until they are received in the Pre-Conference Manual. Let’s keep these important rules in our Rules of Order in the IAC Journal, so they can be found easily at all times.

#111, p. 46: Procedures for voting and speaking at IAC are **deleted.** Same concerns as stated above re #104. **Recommendation: In #111, remove the deletions** on pages 46 and 47 (pars. D and H); **keep the current rules.**

Errors noted: p. 29, near top of page: refers to 12 districts; should be 8 districts. pp. 37 & 40: Two Action Items, both numbered #109.

Legislative Section 2

#203-204, pp. 56-61: Board of Church and Society. Please read all of this material. We are still dividing our church by maintaining a paid IAC lobbyist, who is advised by a committee of this Board. The lobbyist is now part-time instead of full-time, and the title has been changed again, to Leadership Development Minister for Social Justice and Mission. See #603-604 below.

Question: If the Iowa UMC has “great influence” in “opposition to gambling” as asserted on p. 58, why does the number of Iowa casinos continue to increase?

Question: This Board, through the Iowa Peace Network, supports “persons who refuse to pay that part of their taxes that goes to the military.” Can the IAC consistently take that position, while criticizing churches and members who withhold part of their apportionments because of conscientious objections to how some of the money is used?

#205-206, pp. 62-64: Board of Discipleship. This Board’s work includes Christian education, evangelism, spiritual formation, stewardship, and worship. All these are needed to help our Local Churches grow and make disciples.

Question: This Board’s 2009 apportionment request is \$33,000, much smaller than many other IAC boards and programs. We do not recommend increasing this amount; we believe total apportionments should be frozen or cut. However, should the IAC request this Board to plan for expansion of its work, especially its help provided to our Local Churches, and to work with CFA to find any needed additional money by reducing other spending that is less essential?

Legislative Section 3

#308, p. 77: Board of Global Ministries (see also pp. 66-76). The 2009 Apportionment Request is a **21.49% increase, to \$947,570.**

Questions: Is this big increase necessary and wise? It is mostly for Hispanic ministries, parish development, and community ministries; we believe these are

all high priorities. What increases in church-planting and new ministries can we reasonably expect from this increase? Where can other spending be cut to provide this added money without raising total apportionments?

Questions: Why is the apportionment request for the Mission Personnel Committee increased (by \$12,200, to \$58,200), when p. 76 says 2 of the 3 persons funded have retired or moved away? The one remaining person is a "Church and Community Worker" who is an attorney "working with immigration issues in Iowa and Nebraska." Is the IAC paying for legal assistance to illegal immigrants? Could this money be better used in other ways?

#312, pp. 94 & 92: Wesley Foundations. The Wesley Foundations received a big increase last year; the 2009 apportionment request is **\$764,664**, another increase. **Questions:** Why is the WF apportionment nearly equal to the Board of Global Ministries apportionment, and 22 times bigger than the Board of Discipleship apportionment? Do the 4 Wesley Foundations make enough disciples of Christ to justify this big expense? How many students are served? Are all WF activities fully consistent with the UMC *Book of Discipline*? Could this money be better used for other IAC or Local Church ministries for young people?

Recommendation: Don't increase the WF apportionment now. Instead, the IAC should require an **impartial costs-and-benefits study** of the Wesley Foundations and their effectiveness in comparison with other UM ministries.

Legislative Section 4

#405, p. 104: Commission on Christian Unity. Ministry Plan includes "dialogue ... around homosexuality and other justice and social concerns."

Question: Why is there no recognition that homosexual behavior is a Scriptural and moral issue and the UMC does not condone it? (*Discipline*, par. 161G.)

Legislative Section 5

#501, p. 114: Commission on Status and Role of Women. Ministry plan includes "developing materials on language inclusiveness." **Question:** Will those materials be consistent with the Bible and *Book of Discipline*?

Legislative Section 6

#603, p. 137: Accountability of Conference Connectional Ministries Council. This paragraph on accountability is less complete than the accountability paragraph adopted by the 2007 IAC (2007 IAC Journal, p. 326).

Recommendation: Amend this paragraph by substituting the exact language adopted by the 2007 IAC (updating the year of the *Discipline*): "All Iowa Annual Conference programs, activities, and expenditures shall be consistent with the mission of the church as stated in *The 2008 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*. The Conference Connectional Ministries Council shall administer this provision in cooperation with the Council on Finance and Administration."

#603-604, pp. 135-137: Connectional Ministries Staff. This apportionment includes the cost of the Leadership Development Minister for

Social Justice and Mission, who is a part-time lobbyist. See #203-204 above. This person has an Administrative Assistant; see IAC Website.

Questions: How much time of these 2 persons will be spent on the lobbying operation? What is the total cost of the lobbying operation?

Question: Since the lobbying operation is dividing our church – promoting one political viewpoint on issues where Christians honestly disagree and there is no clear Scriptural mandate – shouldn't those who favor this operation pay for it with voluntary giving instead of imposing this apportionment on all Iowa UMs?

Legislative Section 9

#901, pp. 162 & 166: Board of Pensions: High Deductible Plan.

Participation is "greater than expected" in the new optional high deductible health plan for active clergy and lay employees. **Question:** How can the IAC use this new health plan option to hold down long-term health insurance costs?

Legislative Section 10

#1007, par. 6, p. 203: Apportionment Formula. This formula for 2009 appears to be substantially the same as the 2008 formula adopted last year, except for this new addition:

Recommendation: Support new subpar. 4; it limits each congregation's 2009 apportionment increase or decrease to no more than 10%.

Recommendation: Earnestly seek a better way for apportionments. The IAC should make time to discuss alternatives and decide on next steps.

Large numbers of Iowa UMs believe the apportionments system is broken – a command-and-control dinosaur – and we need to create better bottom-up ways for partnership by our Local Churches in UM connectional ministry.

Two years ago, in 12 well-attended Listening Sessions a big majority said we need a new system. The Bishop's Task Force on Connectional Funding proposed a Tithes and Offerings plan; it needed more work to fit *Discipline* requirements. The IAC wanted to move ahead. But nothing happened.

Last year the CFA proposed a new system that would allow each Local Church to choose which programs it will support, and how much, **within** the Conference Missions apportionment (about \$3 million). Bishop Palmer ruled that this plan would be consistent with the *Discipline*. But nothing happened.

Our Church is in crisis – total apportionments rising but 17% unpaid, frustration after 2 years of inaction, and disillusionment in our Local Churches that want to be partners but are burdened by an obsolete, unresponsive, top-down system.

Can we restore hope for our future by agreeing on next steps toward a better way that includes more mission choices by our Local Churches?

#1007, par. 6, p. 203: Apportionment Incentive. CFA proposes to develop for 2010 a plan to allow Local Churches to apply for a reduced apportionment (up to 3 years) to help offset start-up costs of new local outreach ministries. This is a small but helpful step toward reform. **Recommendation: Support.**

Annual Renewal Dinner

COME BE INSPIRED!

Saturday, June 7, 2008 – 5:30 PM

Scheman Building, Room 167-179, ISU, Ames
during Iowa Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church

All clergy and laity are welcome!



Dr. William Bouknight

Outstanding UM Pastor and Evangelist

Do you want a Christ-centered, evangelical, growing United Methodist Church? Don't miss Bill Bouknight's uplifting message and practical experience!

- † Served 41 years as Pastor of UM churches in South Carolina and Tennessee
- † Over 4,000 new members joined Christ UMC in Memphis while Bill was Pastor
- † Leader in multi-racial ministry, working together with African-American church
- † Harry Denman Award and Philip Award for distinguished service in evangelism
- † United Methodist Congress on Evangelism, Executive Committee member
- † Leader of the Confessing Movement Within The United Methodist Church
- † Served as Chaplain in Army National Guard; retired as Brigadier General
- † Author of several books, including
 - The Authoritative Word; Preaching Trust in a Skeptical Age
 - Should Christians Always Oppose War, and 11 Other Questions Believers Ask
 - If Disciples Grew Like Kudzu

Sponsored by Methodist Laity Reform Movement

Buffet dinner – free-will offering

For reserved dinner and seat, **register by Friday, June 6**

If you don't have a dinner reservation, come and listen! Chairs provided.

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***For reservations, send this to:* MLRM, PO Box 763, Muscatine, IA 52761-0763**

OR e-mail info@mreform.org

OR call toll-free 1-866-218-4123

OR during Annual Conference, send this to Bob Morrison (lay member, Southeast District) or leave it at MLRM information table in Hilton Coliseum.

Name(s) (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Ms.) _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____ **Number for dinner** _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____