



General Conference 2004: Signs of Hope

By Dave and Jeanie Stanley

These are our personal observations—speaking only for ourselves—of the United Methodist General Conference in Pittsburgh, April 27-May 7, 2004. We were there to assist the reform and renewal movement. We thank all of you who prayed for General Conference.

Summary: God continues to lead His United Methodist Church in a return to traditional, Scriptural Christianity. The positive turn-around in the 2000 General Conference continued in 2004. The UMC strengthened its support for marriage and sexual morality. Faithfulness is gaining; moral relativism is losing. Hope is rising. Much remains to be done, with God's direction and help.

Good (a few key points):

A resolution reaffirmed **UMC commitment to the basic doctrines of the Christian faith** and emphasized that upholding this faith is critical to peace and unity within the Church.

The UMC's **commitment to Scriptural sexual morality** was maintained and strengthened in the *Book of Discipline*: (1) In the Social Principles, the Church's opposition to homosexual behavior was slightly strengthened. (2) The requirement that "self-avowed practicing homosexuals" cannot be ordained or serve as UMC clergy was slightly strengthened. (3) The prohibition of same-sex unions in UMC churches or by UMC clergy was maintained. (4) The list of chargeable offenses by UM clergy was strengthened by adding: not being celibate in

singleness, not being faithful in a heterosexual marriage, being a self-avowed practicing homosexual, and conducting or performing same-sex union or "wedding" ceremonies. (5) The prohibition against using Church funds to promote acceptance of homosexuality was expanded to **include Annual Conferences** and their funds.

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Important Events for your calendar:

- ◆ Thursday-Sunday, June 10-13, **2004**: Iowa Annual Conference, Ames
- ◆ Wednesday-Saturday, July 14-17: North Central Jurisdictional Conference, River Center, Davenport
- ◆ Friday-Saturday, September 17-18: Promise Keepers, Des Moines
- ◆ Friday-Sunday, October 22-24: United Methodist Men 4-state meeting, Salem United Methodist Church, Council Bluffs
- ◆ Saturday, November 6: Thanksgiving Ingathering at 5 sites. See page 4.
- ◆ Friday-Saturday, November 19-20: Retreat sponsored by UMORE (United Methodists Organized for Renewal and Evangelism), Camp Wesley Woods, Indianola
- ◆ Saturday, May 21, **2005**: *Methodist Laity Reform Movement* Annual Meeting, Ames

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Important new language was added to the Social Principles: (1) **“We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.”** The UMC is now the first “mainline” denomination taking this stand. (2) **“We affirm the importance of both fathers and mothers for all children.”**

The General Conference rejected all efforts to condemn or pressure the **Boy Scouts** because of their moral stand and refusal to allow known homosexuals as Scout leaders.

The **Judicial Council** (UMC supreme court) has become the one top-level UMC body actively and faithfully working to enforce our *Book of Discipline*. Judicial Council declaratory decisions during the General Conference are helpful. Elections of Judicial Council members are encouraging. **We believe the Judicial Council will now take even stronger action.**

Representation on General Church **Boards** was changed greatly. Growing areas (which tend to be faithful and evangelical) will have far more Board members. Declining areas (which tend to be revisionist) will have fewer Board seats. This change will help reform Boards which often lead the Church in the wrong direction.

Overseas delegates, especially those from our alive and growing **African Churches**, were more influential. They strongly support the traditional Christian faith and sexual morality. Their growing membership will give them even more votes in future General Conferences. The **Ivory Coast Methodist Church**, with 1 million members, was welcomed into the UMC.

Bad (a few key points):

The UMC continues to be **distracted and diverted from its Mission — “to make disciples of Jesus Christ — by the onslaught of the homosexual lobby.** The pressure and false accusations were intense. A pro-homosexual demonstration took over the General Conference for 30 minutes; some Bishops stood in support; and most of the Iowa delegation stood in support.

The General Conference **did not adopt any major new enforcement action** to stop the

defiance of our *Book of Discipline*. However, **we believe the Judicial Council will find a way to stop this anarchy.**

No effective action was taken to **protect faithful churches and clergy in rebellious areas**, including most of the Western Jurisdiction (which now has only 4% of UM members, because so many of the faithful have departed in sadness). Many are suffering oppression.

A far-left political faction still controls the General Board of Church and Society and **uses the Church as its political party.** Many political resolutions were adopted — mostly on issues where there is no clear Scriptural position, and Christians honestly disagree.

Schizophrenic voting by General Conference delegates was puzzling. (1) They strengthened the UMC sexual morality stand, but adopted a “sexual orientation non-discrimination” resolution calling for laws to prohibit any discrimination by any employer or property owner based on “sexual orientation.” This would compel a church to hire as a youth leader a person openly involved in adulterous, promiscuous, homosexual, or other harmful sexual behavior. It is hypocrisy for our Church, which wisely refuses to employ practicing homosexuals as clergy, to advocate laws compelling their employment in all other positions. (2) They failed to adopt a resolution to provide a loving, Christian, transformation ministry for persons struggling with homosexuality (but even without official support, the great work of the Transforming Congregations ministry continues — see www.transformingcong.org).

Big spending increase. A \$612,500,000 apportionments budget was adopted for the 4 years 2005-2008, for General Church funds apportioned through Annual Conferences to the Local Churches. This budget is **12% higher** than for the current period (2001-2004). It is **35% higher than apportionments paid** during the last 4 years (2000-2003). Our UMC General Church suffers from the same unrealistic apportioning that afflicts our Iowa Annual Conference.

Challenges and opportunities:

Gracious exit for those who reject basic Christian beliefs. Open discussion is

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beginning on how to allow the dissidents to depart in a fair and peaceful way, taking with them their church property and pension rights.

Some within the UMC reject basic Christian and United Methodist beliefs, including the authority of Scripture, Jesus Christ as the only Savior, Jesus' resurrection, and the Christian sexual morality established by Jesus and the Bible. They believe the Christian faith must be conformed to current culture. Their beliefs are sincere and deeply held. They have a Constitutional right to believe and worship as they choose, but they do not have the right to divide a Christian church by undermining its basic beliefs.

These deep differences on essential Christian beliefs are irreconcilable — two different faiths. They are not among the many differences on “nonessentials” that we all need to live with.

Nearly all delegates voted for this good resolution: “As United Methodists we remain in covenant with one another, even in the midst of disagreement, and affirm our commitment to work together for our common mission of making disciples throughout the world.” But some had already broken covenant by rejecting basic Christian doctrine.

When this “unity” resolution was adopted, the presiding officer was Bishop Joseph Sprague, who has made public statements rejecting the eternal deity and bodily resurrection of Christ, denying that Christ is the only Savior, and rejecting the entire Gospel of John. Sprague has a right to advocate those beliefs, but not as a Bishop of a Christian church.

The UMC should be freed from the constant, divisive, internal battle to defend basic Christian beliefs, Scriptural authority, and sexual morality. Let us seek a fair way to allow those who reject the faith on which the UMC is founded to leave peaceably, so our Church can **focus on its Mission “to make disciples of Jesus Christ.”**

Election of Bishops. The five Jurisdictional Conferences in July will elect many new Bishops. If enough reform-minded Bishops can be elected, they (together with some current Bishops who

are increasingly alarmed) could become a critical mass for action by the Council of Bishops to stop the open violation of the UMC *Book of Discipline*. Pray for these conferences, especially the North Central Jurisdictional Conference in Davenport, Iowa, July 14-17, 2004.

Conclusion: We believe God used the 2004 General Conference to move His UMC further in His direction. We need continuing prayer and discernment for next steps in reform and renewal. Our Church belongs to our Lord and is in His hand.

For more General Conference information and recent news, go to:

www.confessingumc.org Confessing Movement Within The United Methodist Church
www.goodnewsmag.org Good News
www.ird-renew.org/About/AboutMain.cfm
 United Methodist Action

Questions from a Lay Person

- ◆ Why, at the Iowa Annual Conference 2003, was just one viewpoint presented by the Conference artist? Why was one artist allowed to decide for all of us what reality might be?
- ◆ Didn't Jesus weep when Saddam Hussein murdered people and buried them in mass graves, and when armed services men and women were and are being killed?
- ◆ Why were the posters so one-sided that a Lay Member resorted to taking posters so that another view could be recognized?
- ◆ Is this a pattern in our Conference that views contrary to what some in positions of authority believe are labeled as hateful and wrong?
- ◆ Is it fair that many resolutions were “railroaded” through without discussion?
- ◆ Why were so many denied the opportunity to express themselves?
- ◆ Why are there **FAR TOO MANY** resolutions?

Ingathering Alive for 25

Saturday, November 6 is the 25th anniversary of the Thanksgiving Ingathering.

**By Darrell and Carol Needham
25th Anniversary Committee Co-chairpersons**

Twenty-five years ago, about 300 people gathered at Westmar College in LeMars out of commitment, curiosity, and casual interest to see what all the fuss was about. Corn, cattle, kits, and Church World Service blankets were delivered that day to assist, as Jesus stated, "...some of the least of these my brethren."

From that first Ingathering (which raised \$44,882), the Thanksgiving Ingathering has grown to include five sites: Cedar Falls, Cherokee, Fort Dodge, Greenfield, and Mt. Pleasant. It is held the first Saturday of November each year.

Continual growth in attendance and giving has made the Ingathering one of the major mission outreaches of our United Methodist Church. The goal for 2004 is one million dollars in cash and in-kind contributions!

A central committee guides policies, selects projects, and coordinates activities; but each site operates with considerable autonomy.

Three of the original projects continue to be supported: Heifer Project International, Self Help, and United Methodist Committee on Relief. Church World Service was an early addition. Iowa Nigeria Partnership has become a vital part of the Thanksgiving Ingathering.

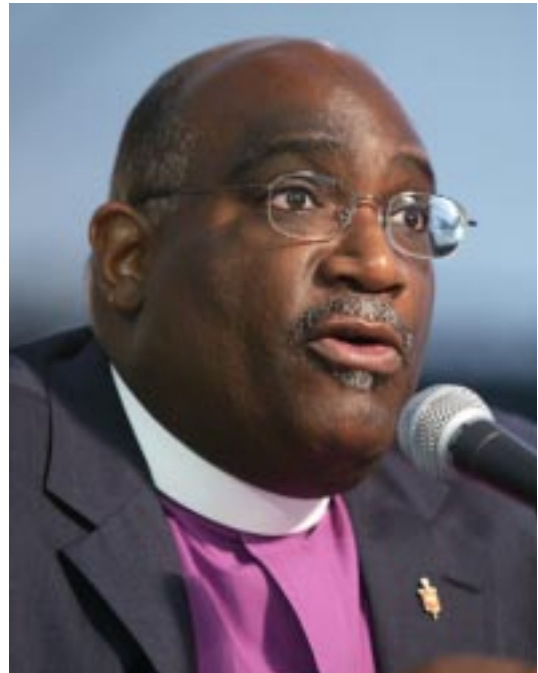
Quilts and wood-working items have been auctioned, adding to the excitement and income of the mission presentations, bake sales, crafts, comforters, and food.

Youth are involved through lock-ins the night before and helping on the day of the Ingathering. In-kind giving includes the outpouring of school, health, and sewing kits to Church World Service, layettes, dorm, and uniform kits, and books for pastors' libraries.

Thanksgiving Ingathering booklets with full information are available from your church pastor, secretary, or Mission chairperson.

A theme song has been composed and is ready for use. Bible School material is being developed. A new video with a message from Bishop Palmer is now available.

We encourage your support of this year's Ingathering.



United Methodist Bishop Gregory V. Palmer, Iowa, presides over a May 6 session of the denomination's 2004 General Conference in Pittsburgh. A UMNS photo by Mike DuBose.

You Can Help!

- ◆ **Visit our website:** www.mreform.org
- ◆ **Send us names** and addresses of Iowa United Methodists, in the enclosed envelope. Laity Voice reaches more than 20,000. Help us reach the other 179,000 Iowa UMs!
- ◆ **Send a contribution** in the enclosed envelope. Each issue of *LAITY VOICE* costs **\$5,096** — and will cost **\$10,192** when we double the number we reach.

Thank you!

Resolutions: What Do You Think?

During the June 2003 session of the Iowa Annual Conference (IAC):

84 resolutions were adopted by the IAC.

Only 13 of these resolutions were adopted one at a time, with opportunity for discussion and amendment.

The other **71 resolutions were adopted in big batches**, nearly all with no discussion.

15 of these were adopted on the Consent Calendar; most were noncontroversial.

Many of the other **56 resolutions** were controversial. IAC members who wanted to discuss them or offer amendments were silenced. *2003 IAC Journal*, pp. 126-139.

The IAC adopted **36 resolutions in one batch** — by a **nondebatable** motion to suspend the rules. **No discussion or amendment** was allowed. That was done at **6:05 PM, Sunday, June 15, 2003 — 2 hours and 5 minutes after the scheduled adjournment time**; many voting members had gone home. *Journal*, p. 139.

25 adopted resolutions were **not in the Pre-Conference Manual**. The IAC members did not know they would be voting on these resolutions until after they arrived at the IAC.

Many resolutions hastily batch-adopted on nondebatable motions are divisive. For example:

- Call for an Iowa “sexual orientation” law that would force schools, camps, and churches to hire (including work with children) persons engaged in adultery, promiscuity, homosexuality, and other harmful sexual behaviors. (*IAC 2003 Book of Resolutions, #7207*)
- Support for churches to offer “sanctuary” for some illegal immigrants. (#7506)
- Opposition to any anti-missile defense (Strategic Defense Initiative). (#8616)
- “Lifting economic sanctions against Iraq.” (#8613) This resolution is written as if the Saddam Hussein regime were still in power. The sanctions against Iraq had been lifted before the June 2003 IAC began. Allowing no discussion, the IAC voted to lift nonexistent sanctions against a vanished regime!

Was all this done lawfully? Yes. Almost anything can be done by “suspending the rules.”

Was it fair and democratic?

Did it unite our Church? Divide our church?

United Methodists in other Annual Conferences that are gaining members tell us they usually adopt only a few resolutions. The Iowa Annual Conference has been losing more members while adopting more resolutions.

What do you think?

Methodist Laity Reform Movement welcomes and supports the report of the Bishop’s Task Force on Resolutions. It will improve the resolutions process. It will not solve the 3 big problems: too many resolutions, political misuse of the IAC, and unfair silencing of discussion.

Are We Good Stewards?

Questions while reading the Iowa Annual Conference (IAC) budget requests in the 2004 Pre-Conference Manual:

1. The Apportionment Revenue Analysis shows total apportionments on Iowa Local Churches increasing **0.74%** for 2005 and **3.67%** for 2006. Will sending these increases to Des Moines do more for our Church’s mission — and for Bishop Palmer’s excellent Vision for the Church — than using this money in our Local Churches for their ministries?
2. 2005 figures: total apportionments \$14,932,380, less \$2,178,311 not collected (**15%** of the total) = \$12,754,069 apportionments received. Is it realistic and good stewardship to ask our Local Churches to send in nearly \$15 million when we expect **only 85%** of that amount will be collected?
3. The percentage of apportionments **not collected rose sharply, from 10%** (\$1,364,090) in 2002 **to 15%** (\$2,128,358) in 2003. What does this tell us about our Local Churches’ reaction to rising apportionments? Are the 2005 and 2006 budgets realistic in assuming the “not collected” percentage will remain at 15%?
4. For 2005 budget, **Board of Church and Society is up 83%**, Board of Discipleship **down 61%**, and Board of Global Ministries **down 62%** (or down **28%** after adjustment for funds moved from BGM to District Ministries). Are these priority shifts wise for a Church whose Mission is “to make disciples of Jesus Christ”? Why make the huge shift to the most divisive IAC activity: the Advocate-lobbyist operation (**up 88%**)?

General Conference 2004: What Do Others Say?

Comments on the United Methodist General Conference held in Pittsburgh, April 27-May 7, 2004:

Diane L. Knippers, President, Institute on Religion and Democracy (May 28, 2004):

"The recently concluded 2004 General Conference of the United Methodist Church offers great encouragement to those seeking reform not only in the Methodist Church, but to any number of churches dealing with issues of Scriptural authority and the church's understanding of marriage.

"By strengthening its support for marriage and re-emphasizing its commitment to an orthodox understanding of human sexuality, the Methodist Church has proven that it is possible to resist the tide of relativism within our churches."

Dr. Ira Gallaway, retired UM Pastor, Associate Director of The Confessing Movement Within The United Methodist Church (May 5):

"The General Conference Stays the Course.

"In the 1972 General Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, the United Methodist Church went on record with regard to the practice of homosexuality. For eight successive General Conferences, reflecting the will of the vast majority of United Methodists, the Church has been steadfast in supporting the Biblical witness, the apostolic faith and tradition, and the *Discipline* and doctrine of The United Methodist Church.

"In successive votes on Tuesday, May 4, the 2004 General Conference continued to maintain the stance held by over 97% of World Christendom. One wonders, though, whether the radical pro-homosexual lobby will ever give up the fight and will continue to severely damage the witness of the Church.

"The Judicial Council ... rendered a decision that is crystal clear about the appointment of a self-avowed practicing homosexual pastor. ... While the court ruled that it could not overturn the Dammann verdict, it was unambiguous in ruling that any appointment of a self-avowed practicing homosexual would violate church law. ...

"Why shouldn't the church work at finding a way to allow those churches or conferences who are determined to defy the doctrine and *Discipline* of the church to leave the denomination with pension vested for pastors and property for the church? ...

"We would plead that all of our confessing supporters would stay the course. If you leave our church, we are weakened. If you stay and live out a vigorous apostolic faith and support The Confessing Movement, we are stronger and we are convinced that God will bless our witness. Thanks be to God for His gift of salvation in Jesus Christ."

Good News Board of Directors (May 21):

The Board of Good News affirms this statement of the unity of The United Methodist Church, adopted by the General Conference, based on our common covenant and common mission. Unity within the church is a goal we share with the 2004 General Conference. Unity, however, can only be attained when we share common commitments to our United Methodist doctrinal standards, as historically and ecumenically interpreted. These foundational beliefs provide the bedrock and motivation for our solemn covenant with Jesus Christ and with each other for common mission.

"Therefore, we call upon the Annual and Jurisdictional Conferences of the church to act in accordance with church law and doctrine. ... Failure to uphold our doctrines and *Discipline* is what could further threaten the already fragile unity of our beloved church.

"Finally, we call upon the Council of Bishops to work to ensure that the *Discipline* is upheld in all regions of the church. It is this faithfulness to church doctrine and polity, not the words of a resolution no matter how heartfelt its approval, that will signal whether The United Methodist Church will move ahead in unity."

Mark Tooley, Executive Director, United Methodist Action (May 27):

"One of the most effective arguments made by pro-homosexuality advocates is the claim that their cause is historically inevitable. They speak as if society and the church were everywhere

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headed in a single direction: toward individual autonomy, moral relativism, and the affirmation of every kind of sexual activity among consenting adults. ...

“But history does not support this kind of crude determinism. The long-term record does not show a continuous descent into sexual license, but rather a movement back and forth between stricter and laxer sexual standards. Nor does the church necessarily follow the trends in society. Both the early Church and the early Methodist movement stood strongly for the sanctity of marriage, during periods of great sexual license. ...

“The United Methodist Church, America’s second-largest Protestant denomination, strengthened its stance against homosexuality at its recent General Conference in Pittsburgh. Comparing multiple votes in 2004 and 2000, the margins against any acceptance of homosexual practice were slightly larger this year than in 2000. ...

“The 2004 General Conference also voted to reinforce The United Methodist Church’s disapproval of homosexual practice in several other areas. By 77 percent, it endorsed laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman. ...

“With future General Conferences filled with increasing numbers of delegates from more conservative regions, including the overseas conferences, there is little reason to expect any diminution in the margins upholding traditional Christian teachings on sexuality. Perhaps the pro-homosexuality advocates, and others, need to reconsider their claims of historical inevitability.

Federal Marriage Amendment: URGENT!

Methodist Laity Reform Movement strongly supports marriage as a union of one man and one woman. We stand with Jesus (Matthew 19:4-6). We support our Church’s stand for marriage and against homosexual unions (*Book of Discipline*, par. 332.6 and par. 2702 with 2004 addition).

We thank the 2004 General Conference for adding these strong statements to the UMC Social Principles: **“We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.”** and “We affirm the importance of **both fathers and mothers** for all children.”

The **Federal Marriage Amendment** (SJR 30 & HJR 56) is urgently needed. It will add this statement to our U.S. Constitution: “Marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman. Neither this Constitution, nor the constitution of any State, shall be construed to require that marriage or the legal incidents thereof be conferred upon any union other than the union of a man and a woman.”

Why is a Constitutional Amendment necessary to defend and preserve marriage? Because only the Constitution can stop extremist judges from forcing homosexual “marriage” on the entire nation, as they have already done in Massachusetts. The Constitution is our fundamental law.

Either we the people will amend our Constitution to preserve traditional marriage, or activist judges will amend the Constitution by re-interpreting it to compel recognition of same-sex “marriage.” After the courts impose same-sex marriage as a Constitutional right, they will go on to compel recognition of polygamy, group marriage, and other “sexual orientations.”

Marriage is not just a private affair. Marriage is a public virtue; it brings man and woman together in the relationship ordained by God, aids responsible sexuality, and provides mothers and fathers for children.

The Federal Marriage Amendment is about justice for children. Homosexual “marriage” would harm children, because it deliberately denies a child either a mother or a father. Social science research proves children without a married mom and dad suffer severely.

The Amendment fully protects marriage as a union of one man and one woman, and also prevents any court from forcing any kind of recognition of same-sex unions.

This Amendment is sponsored by a bipartisan group of 15 U.S. Senators and 122 U.S.

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Representatives, including Iowa's Jim Nussle and Steve King. President Bush supports it. But adopting it will be a hard, uphill fight against powerful, name-calling opposition. A U.S. Constitutional Amendment needs a 2/3 vote of Congress and ratification by 38 states.

For more information, go to:

www.family.org/cforum Focus on the Family

www.allianceformarriage.org Alliance for Marriage

www.frc.org Family Research Council

MLRM is not a lobbying organization. **We encourage you and all Iowans to tell your own opinions to your lawmakers.** You may want to consider (1) asking them to make the Federal Marriage Amendment (SJR 30 & HJR 56) a top priority; (2) asking Senators Grassley and Harkin and Representatives Leach, Boswell, and Latham to sign on as co-sponsors; and (3) thanking Reps. Nussle and King for being co-sponsors.

Please write, phone, or fax now:

Senator Charles Grassley
135 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510
Phone: 202-224-3744
Fax: 202-224-6020

Senator Tom Harkin
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510
Phone: 202-224-3254
Fax: 202-224-9369

Representative Jim Nussle (1st District)
303 Cannon House Office Building
Washington DC 20515
Phone: 202-225-2911
Fax: 202-225-9129

Representative Jim Leach (2nd District)
2186 Rayburn House Office Building
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Fax: 202-226-1278

Representative Leonard Boswell (3rd District)
1427 Longworth House Office Building
Washington DC 20515
Phone: 202-225-3806
Fax: 202-225-5608

Representative Tom Latham (4th District)
440 Cannon House Office Building
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Phone: 202-225-5476
Fax: 202-225-3301

Representative Steve King (5th District)
1432 Longworth House Office Building
Washington DC 20515
Phone: 202-225-4426
Fax: 202-225-3193

Laity Address at 2003 Conference

The Vice-Chair of the Board of Laity of the Iowa Annual Conference, Norma Morrison of Muscatine, challenged clergy and laity to "...examine their hearts and answer God's call to ministry." Excerpts from her address:

"How would our world be different if every one of us and every person in our congregations at home served our Lord with a ministry? ... Each of you is unique with special talents and abilities God has given you. God has a special purpose for each of you. There is no other person exactly like you on this earth; only you can share what God has given you. If you don't share your unique love for Christ, it will be lost. No one else can give what you have to give. ...

"I believe it is possible to change the world — possible because of people like you — possible because of United Methodist Churches like those in Iowa — possible because our Lord Jesus commands us to 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.'"



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