



LAITY VOICE

Newsletter of *Methodist Laity Reform Movement*

May 2002

Vol. 2, No. 1

Bishop Palmer's Vision for Iowa

Bishop Gregory Palmer presented his vision for the Iowa United Methodist Church on April 7 in Story City.

The Board of Directors of *Methodist Laity Reform Movement* adopted this statement on April 27 and sent it to Bishop Palmer and the Cabinet:

***Methodist Laity Reform Movement* strongly supports** Bishop Gregory Palmer's vision for the Iowa United Methodist Church, which he presented on April 7. We look forward to working with Bishop Palmer to help his vision become a reality. We are praying for God's continuing guidance and help for our Bishop.

We support Bishop Palmer's priorities for our Church, including Christian spiritual growth, prayer, evangelism, membership growth in every congregation, four new congregations each year, reaching out to Spanish-speaking people and all people, a new hands-on service ministry in every congregation each year, leadership development, expanding the Iowa School for Lay Ministry, and financial stewardship.

We share Bishop Palmer's alarm and sadness in the disastrous decline of our Iowa United Methodist Church, from 309,205 members in 1970 to 199,534 members in 2001. We equally share his determination to reverse this decline and help every congregation grow in members and in service, with God's guidance.

Bishop Palmer is wisely affirming the Mission of The United Methodist Church: "to make disciples of Jesus Christ." He calls all United Methodists to focus on Jesus.

We gladly support Bishop Palmer's vision, in the spirit of *Methodist Laity Reform Movement's* goal "to reform our Church, get the Church out of partisan politics, and help it return to its Wesleyan roots as an alive, growing, evangelical Church that strongly

upholds the traditional Christian faith and joyfully offers Christ to all people."

We offer three suggestions to help achieve Bishop Palmer's vision:

1. Include the laity more fully in Church leadership, decision-making, and service.
2. As we increase financial stewardship, use most of the money in our Local Churches. We support wise use of money for state-level priorities such as Bishop Palmer's plan for a full-time Director of New Congregational Development and Church Revitalization. However, we need a lean Iowa Annual Conference structure that will allow more of our members' giving to be used for Local Church ministries and service.
3. To help Iowa United Methodists unite in support of Bishop Palmer's vision, the Iowa Annual Conference must eliminate the paid lobbyist position that divides and politicizes our Church. The Church must choose to be a Christian Church or a political party; it cannot be both. We call on the June Annual Conference to make this decision.

We thank Bishop Palmer for his kind invitation to *Methodist Laity Reform Movement* to participate in his vision event on April 7. It was a positive and moving experience for our many leaders and members who were present.

ACTION: Study Bishop Palmer's vision for our church. His vision summary is on our Website: www.mreform.org. For full text: www.iaumc.org.

Pray for God's guidance for our Bishop. Send us your ideas to strengthen and implement his vision. Share your ideas with your Pastor and your Local Church's Lay Member of the Iowa Annual Conference. Bishop Palmer said it will take all of us to work out a plan.

Christian Citizen Participation? YES Paid Lobbyist? NO

Methodist Laity Reform Movement respectfully asks the Iowa Annual Conference (IAC) to abolish our Church's paid lobbyist position (Legislative Advocate). We are loyal lay members of The United Methodist Church (UMC). We work within the IAC, but we do not speak for it or any of its agencies.

Why should the paid lobbyist position be abolished?

1. Having a paid lobbyist divides and weakens our Church. Many United Methodists resent having part of their contributions used for a lobbyist who works against their own beliefs.

2. It is ineffective. See Legislators' comments on pages 3 and 4.

3. It is unnecessary. Individual United Methodists contacting their own Legislators are far more effective.

4. The lobbyist often takes positions in our Church's name that have never been adopted by the Iowa Annual Conference.

5. The money spent on this lobbying operation is more needed for Bishop Palmer's vision for our Iowa Church – spiritual growth, prayer, evangelism, membership growth, outreach, new service ministries, etc. (We do not speak for Bishop Palmer. We do strongly support his vision.)

6. It appears that **no** other Annual Conference in the entire UMC has a full-time paid lobbyist – including the many Annual Conferences that are growing, in contrast to Iowa's huge member loss.

Methodist Laity Reform Movement believes our Church should **not** have a paid lobbyist and should never allow any political faction—left-wing, right-wing, Republican, Democrat, Socialist, or any other—to promote its agenda through the Church. We would equally oppose having a Church lobbyist for a conservative agenda. **We oppose the paid lobbyist position, not the person.**

We believe the UMC must get out of partisan politics and stay out. The UMC should take a stand on an important public policy issue if there is a clear Christian position supported by a large majority of UMC members. The UMC's social witness should reflect the informed conscience of the UMC members, and it should rise up from the Local Churches rather than being imposed from the top down.

ACTION: Before June 6 (first day of the IAC June 6-9 session), please talk with your Pastor and your Local Church's Lay Member of the Iowa Annual Conference – and any other IAC Member you know. Ask them to **vote to abolish the paid lobbyist position and transfer this money to ministries that support the UMC's Mission: "to make disciples of Jesus Christ."**

Does the Paid Lobbyist Represent Our Iowa Church?

We believe the Legislative Advocate and the Legislative Advocacy Committee are totally sincere in all they do, and they think the positions they take are right and just.

But the lobbyist speaks for one political viewpoint on many issues, even though the Iowa Annual Conference of the UMC has not adopted any position on the issue.

For example, during the 2001-02 Iowa Legislative sessions, the Legislative Advocate registered as a lobbyist for our Church on these bills (and many others) **on which the Iowa Annual Conference has not adopted any position:**

AGAINST House File 4 and HF 537, a bill to limit the increase of city and county property taxes and to pay for some state mandates on local governments.

AGAINST HF 73, a bill to allow recognized veterans' organizations to provide honor guard services on public school property.

AGAINST HF 116 and SF 145, a bill to add to the state vital statistics law a requirement for additional information when a health care provider reports a termination of pregnancy.

FOR Senate File 95, a bill to restore automatically the right to vote of all persons convicted of a felony, when they are released from prison or discharged from probation or parole.

FOR SF 414, a bill to reduce criminal penalties for burglary and forgery.

AGAINST SF 494, a bill to expand the category of farm disputes for which mediation by the state's farm mediation service is required as a first step to resolve the dispute.

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The IAC *Book of Resolutions* **does not state any position on any of these 6 issues.** We believe these are among the many issues on which there is no clear Christian position; sincere Christians can and do disagree; and the Church should not take sides.

What Does the Lobbying Operation Cost?

The Board of Church and Society's proposed Advocacy Ministry budget for 2003 (pre-Conference manual, # 301) is:

Apportionment (on Local Churches)	\$ 51,315
Other Funds (gifts, not identified)	<u>98,145</u>
Total	\$149,460

This includes the Legislative Advocate, a staff assistant, and related activities and expenses.

A Tangled Web

Do you wonder why our Iowa Church is so deeply divided and damaged by having a paid Legislative Advocate (lobbyist)? Go to the Legislative Advocacy Website: www.gbqm-umc.org/ialeadvocate. It proclaims that the "Iowa United Methodist Church Legislative Advocacy Program" includes positions on a long list of issues. However, many of these positions are **not** Iowa Annual Conference positions. For example:

"Oppose Anti-Choice Legislation in Women's Reproductive Matters." This absolute pro-choice position conflicts with IAC Resolution 7201, which contains both pro-choice and pro-life language, including: "There is legitimate difference of opinion regarding the sensitive issue of abortion ... we oppose abortion for convenience, as a means of birth control and as a means of gender selection."

"Lobby for changes in civil rights statutes to include sexual orientation as a category for which there is protection against discrimination." The IAC has **no** resolution on this issue. The former resolution expired in 2001 and was not renewed.

"Support elimination of federal deductibility on state income tax" and "Oppose any tax cuts until human needs programs are adequately funded." The Website claims these positions on taxes are supported by 5 IAC resolutions. However, **none** of these 5 resolutions

stated any position on either of these 2 issues. Indeed, 4 of the 5 resolutions did not even mention taxes! Two of these 5 resolutions expired in 2001 and were not renewed, but they are still listed on the Website.

Why this mess on the Legislative Advocacy Website? There are two big problems: (1) using our Iowa Church to promote political opinions that the IAC has not adopted, and (2) failure to maintain the website, so it is full of obsolete and incorrect "information". Much of it was posted in 2000 but was still on the Website, not corrected and not updated, when this *Laity Voice* went to the printer (May 16, 2002).

Laity Can Have a Voice!

Visit the Website—www.ird-renew.org—of the Institute on Religion and Democracy, and click on **UM Action**. Read and sign a letter to President Bush. This letter informs the President that **Church officials who make statements undermining our nation's war on terrorism do not speak for all of us.**

What Do Iowa Legislators Say about the Paid Lobbyist?

Methodist Laity Reform Movement received these comments from Iowa Legislators this year:

State Representative (United Methodist): "I respect both advocates I dealt with as people. I think they are sincere people trying to do what they think is right.

"On a professional level, I would have to question the effectiveness of the position. I cannot point to one piece of legislation that was passed, defeated or changed because of a Methodist legislative liaison. I don't know of any legislator who changed a position because of the lobbying position. I can't suggest where our Church has received a benefit from having someone in that position. I can't see where other mainstream Churches that lack a liaison have been harmed from not having one. Maybe at one time it was a good idea. But, it would seem to me the money spent on this position could be spent better elsewhere.

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Iowa Legislators Say (Continued from page 3)

"I think the ineffectiveness of the position is due mainly to forces outside the control of the liaison. I think the liaisons are good people who could fulfill more vital roles in other Church positions. I think it is important for Iowa Methodists to engage in good citizenship and to participate in their government. But, I think that could happen with or without a paid advocate."

State Representative (United Methodist): "The Iowa UMC Lobbyist has never said a word to me, never been introduced. Strange, since I am a Methodist. I don't even know what she looks like. How can a lobbyist be effective if they don't work with the Legislators?"

State Senator (United Methodist): "I believe there are far more pressing needs for our Conference to be spending funds. I do not believe that the position has been effective from a lobbying standpoint. (The lobbyist) has taken many positions which I know to be contrary to the position of most Iowa United Methodists. As a Methodist Legislator, it is almost enough to cause me to want to change churches, although I won't because I believe change is best made from within."

State Senator (United Methodist): "I do not recall having ever been approached by the current lobbyist on any issue. I find this particularly unusual because I have been a lifelong Methodist and have served on numerous committees over the years. One would think that a fellow Methodist would be one of the first to be lobbied. Without doubt, the opinions of United Methodists from my district are far more important to me than those of a paid lobbyist who has never lobbied me."

State Representative: "I would rather hear directly from my constituents. When I get a note from the Iowa Methodist lobbyist, I usually don't even read it. Your money could be much better spent on evangelism rather than a lobbyist."

State Senator: "I have never seen the lobbyist influence any piece of legislation. This is because an effective lobbyist must have the ability to garner the support of his or her membership in each legislator's

district in order to have a voice in legislation. When a legislator feels pressure from home, due to the ability of a lobbyist to generate support back in the legislator's district, then legislation is impacted. Legislators do not believe that the UMC lobbyist has this ability.

"Generally, the UMC lobbyist simply serves to offer passing commentary on legislation moving through the body. Since the lobbyist's position is always liberal, and the majority of the legislature is moderate or conservative, there simply is no impact."

State Representative: "As a legislator, I try to represent my constituents as much as possible. That means listening to those constituents that are Methodists, more than the church's lobbyist."

State Senator: "I do not believe the lobbyist speaks for the majority of Methodists. I am troubled by a church paying a lobbyist. I have had no contact with the current lobbyist, which surprises me. A lobbyist should provide information. This one has not, at least for me."

Confessing the Faith Conference

The first-ever gathering of Evangelical, Confessing, and Renewing Christians in the Mainline Churches of North America will be held in Indianapolis, Indiana, October 24-26, 2002 (Thursday-Saturday).

It is sponsored by the Association for Church Renewal and 15 mainline Church renewal groups.

This is an exciting opportunity to:

1. Unify and encourage mainline Christians in reaffirming classic, orthodox Christianity.
2. Celebrate our oneness in Jesus Christ, share strategies and build networks for mainline renewal, and discern what the Holy Spirit is doing in our Churches and world.

For more information and registration procedure, please visit our Website:

www.mreform.org

Iowa United Methodists Say: Paid Lobbyist? NO Change Church Priorities? YES

A total of 1,458 Iowa United Methodists signed and returned *Methodist Laity Reform Movement's* widely-distributed Opinion Survey by May 14, 2002. Their opinions on two questions are especially important as the Iowa Annual Conference prepares to vote on these issues in its June 6-9 session:

QUESTION: The Iowa Annual Conference of the UMC now has a full-time paid lobbyist. Should our Iowa Church terminate this paid lobbyist position and instead encourage all members to express their own opinions to Legislators?

ANSWERS: **87% Yes**, 10% No, 3% undecided

QUESTION: Should the UMC—at Iowa, national, and world levels—change its priorities by reducing its spending for political activity, central offices, and top-level staff, and redirecting this money for Christian evangelism, discipleship, and helping people in need?

ANSWERS: **94% Yes**, 5% No, 1% undecided

Complete Opinion Survey results will be reported in *LAITY VOICE* and on our Website: www.mreform.org

United Methodist Servant Honored

Bill Appelgate of Story City, Iowa, was recently honored for his many years of commitment to Heifer Project International (HPI).

Bill was presented the first annual Dan West Fellow Award for being a promoter and supporter of HPI since the late 1960s. Bill and his wife, Dorothy, helped move cattle by boat to Indian villages in Peru, accompanied hogs to Bolivia, and helped HPI projects in Honduras, Guatemala, and Africa.

Bill was the founding father of the Bishop's Ingathering. He has been Lay Delegate to six General Conferences of The United Methodist Church, and has spoken to over 300 Churches across the country.

Congratulations to both Bill and Dorothy!

Prayer Event: April 5, 2003

Please mark your calendar now to reserve Saturday, April 5, 2003 for a great Prayer Event led by Terry Tekyl. Watch for more information.

Expect a Prayer

If you attend the Iowa Annual Conference, June 6-9, you can expect over 60 people to be praying for you.

Last year, Char Knutsen of Walcott, Iowa, recruited individuals from all parts of Iowa to pray for the Iowa Annual Conference. Each individual volunteered to pray for a specific time—usually an hour. This year Char expects even more to sign up for this essential privilege of prayer. Our Conference will be strengthened by this personal prayer support.

Something Good is Happening

Twenty-four laity at a *Methodist Laity Reform Movement* Board meeting told of their involvement in church work. Their ministries included:

Accountability prayer partner for a Pastor; teacher of high school class of 25 youth; Director of preschool; leader of Wednesday night church service; initiated a new women's circle; Team Couple for Marriage Encounter; youth leader on preschool Board; Missions Chairperson; Lay Delegate; District Stewardship Committee; UMW President; Iowa Conference UM Men leader; Lay Leader; Marriage Encounter expansion to Asia; leader of morning UM Men group; leader of Companions in Christ; Scoutmaster with 54 boys in troop; Chair of County Board of Supervisors; Lay Pastor; Conference Board of Church and Society; counsels drug addicts and invites them to Church; Chair of Ingathering; promoter of Heifer International Foundation; liturgist for worship service; mentor of Confirmation class; Iowa Coordinator for Lifewatch; card ministry; Administrative Council; Foundation for Evangelism Board; Drake Relays volunteer; UM Men President; Institute on Religion and Democracy Board; Prayer Advocate for UM Men.

Please send us *something good* that is happening in your Church and how you are reaching out to your community.

Send to: **Noreen Miller, Editor, 204 Eagle Drive, McGregor IA 52157.**

Iowa Lay Leaders to International Conference

Dennis Bell, Iowa Conference Lay Leader, and Norma Morrison, Iowa Board of Laity Vice Chair, attended the Association of Annual Conference Lay Leaders, an international UMC organization.

ACTION: Help Your Local Church Elect a Pro-reform Lay Member of the Iowa Annual Conference

Please act now. Key points:

1. This year your Local Church will elect its Lay Member(s) of the 2003 Iowa Annual Conference – which will elect Iowa's delegates to the vitally important 2004 UMC General Conference.
2. Pray and plan together with pro-reform friends in your Local Church.
3. Get information: How many Lay Members does your Local Church elect? What is the date of your Charge Conference this year? Who are the members of your Local Church's Committee on Lay Leadership? (This was the Nominations Committee; now renamed; see *The Book of Discipline*, par. 258.1.)
4. Prayerfully choose a strong pro-reform candidate for each Lay Member position and for each Alternate position. They must have been United Methodist members for at least 2 years and active participants for at least 4 years, except in a newly organized Church. (*The Book of Discipline*, par. 250.2.) Consider and pray: are YOU willing and able to serve as a Lay Member? Also consider recommending persons to serve on the Committee on Lay Leadership; usually the Charge Conference each year elects three, for three-year terms.
5. **This summer**, several pro-reform persons should talk with your Pastor and the Committee on Lay Leadership members, and recommend your candidates. **Do not delay.** The Committee usually discusses nominations in the summer or very early fall, before the Charge Conference.
6. If the Committee on Lay Leadership does not nominate your candidate(s), go to the Charge Conference, nominate your candidate(s), and request a written ballot. You have the right to make nominations from the floor (*The Book of Discipline*, par. 248). Don't let opposition or criticism stop you. Many more pro-reform Lay Members are needed.

YOU ARE INVITED:

Saturday, June 1

Annual Meeting & Issues Briefing

Methodist Laity Reform Movement invites you for lunch and helpful information: Saturday, June 1, Noon to 4:00 PM, Scheman Building, Iowa State Center, Ames.

How can we help Bishop Palmer's vision?

What big issues are facing our Iowa Annual Conference session (June 6-9)?

What's new in the UMC reform movement?

Diane Knippers, national reform leader, will speak on "Church and Society: Gospel Witness or Partisan Lobby?"

To make reservations, E-mail info@mreform.org, fax 563-264-3363, or call Bob Morrison at 1-800-334-8920, ext. 393.

Send Us Names!

__ *This LAITY VOICE* will reach more than 20,000 Iowa United Methodists. But our Iowa Church has 199,000 members. Help us reach more of them!

__ Please use the enclosed envelope to send us names and addresses of Iowa United Methodists. And send your church directory or membership list; mark everyone who might be interested. We will send information to every name and address you provide.

__ Will you also 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.



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