



# LAITY VOICE

Newsletter of Methodist Laity Reform Movement

June 2003

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## Shatter the Silence!

By Mavis E. Diment, Grace UMC, Marcus

Following September 11, 2001, we were made aware of situations in our country when Muslim Americans were mistreated because they happened to share a religion or country of origin with the terrorists. This treatment was wrong; however, Christians are the most persecuted group in the world and the media and mainline churches, including the United Methodist Church, have largely ignored and remained silent about this tragedy.

It is estimated that more Christians lost their lives through persecution in the 20th century than in the previous 1900 years combined. In over 60 countries Christians face the realities of massacre, rape, torture, mutilation, family division, harassment, imprisonment, slavery, discrimination in education and employment—and even death. Paul Marshall, author of *Their Blood Cries Out*, states, "This plague affects 200 million people, with an additional 400 million suffering from discrimination and legal impediment.

At an annual meeting of the Methodist Laity Reform Movement, Diane Knippers of the Institute of Religion and Democracy, stated that the current situation for Christians in the Sudan should elicit the same response world-wide that apartheid did in South Africa just a few years ago. Yet the genocide of Christians continues in the Sudan.

On Sunday, November 9th, churches and individuals all over the globe will take part in the eighth annual International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. The IDOP is a global day of intercession for persecuted Christians worldwide. The focus of the day is on intercessory prayer and citizen action on behalf of persecuted Christians.

When Christians who live daily with persecution are asked what they need, they plead for prayer to help them endure. They know that prayer changes things. For us in our free society—the most we can do is the least we can do: PRAY!

For information about IDOP resources, go to [www.persecuted-church.org](http://www.persecuted-church.org) on the Internet or contact

Voice of the Martyrs, P.O. Box 443, Bartleville, OK 74003.

If you and your church are not currently praying for our persecuted sisters and brothers across the world, make Sunday, November 9th, 2003 the day you start. BUT don't stop there. Consider including them in your congregational prayers at least once a month. At Grace UMC in Marcus, we remember these special people on the first Sunday of each month when we have Communion. Here's a humbling thought, when we take communion there are millions of our fellow Christians who are unable to openly participate in the Lord's Supper.

The first year my church participated in the IDOP, we colored in red all the countries where persecution is rampant and were overwhelmed at the extent of this tragedy. We have also purchased bulletin inserts from Voice of the Martyrs to increase our awareness.

You will find that once you start praying about persecution, you will be moved to do more—prayer has that effect on us.

### ***Important Events for your calendar:***

- ✠ **UMORE Fall Retreat** — Nov. 21-22, 2003, Camp Wesley Woods ([www.umore.org](http://www.umore.org))
- ✠ **MLRM Members' Meeting** — June 7, 2003 Ames ([www.mreform.org](http://www.mreform.org))
- ✠ **Iowa Annual Conference** — June 12-15, 2003, Iowa State University
- ✠ **Bishop's Pilgrimage** — Nov. 2003. Phone 515-262-3691 or e-mail [ronruthanne1507@msn.com](mailto:ronruthanne1507@msn.com)
- ✠ **Good News National Summer Celebration** — July 24-26, 2003 Columbus, Ohio

## Flight 93 — Todd Beamer's Actions on September 11<sup>th</sup>

"I don't think we're going to get out of this thing. I'm going to have to go out on faith."

It was the voice of Todd Beamer, the passenger—and Wheaton College graduate—who said, "Let's roll," as he led the charge against the terrorists who had hijacked United Flight 93, the one, you will remember, that crashed in the Pennsylvania countryside. The whole world knows how brave Beamer and his fellow passengers were on September 11<sup>th</sup>. But then we learned more fully what buttressed that bravery: Faith in Jesus Christ. Todd died as he lived—a faithful evangelical believer. In an article titled "The Real Story of Flight 93," *Newsweek* reveals gripping new details from the actual transcripts of the now-recovered cockpit voice recorder. "Todd had been afraid," *Newsweek* relates. "More than once, he cried out for his Savior."

After passengers were herded to the back of the jet, Beamer called the GTE Customer Center in Oakbrook, Illinois. He told supervisor Lisa Jefferson about the hijacking. The passengers were planning to jump the terrorists, he said. And then he asked her to pray with him.

As *Newsweek* related, "Beamer kept a Lord's Prayer bookmark in his Tom Clancy novel, but he didn't need any prompting. He began to recite the ancient litany, and Jefferson joined him: "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name..."

As they finished, Beamer added, "Jesus, help me." And then, Beamer and his fellow passengers prayed a prayer that has comforted millions down through the centuries - the prayer that David wrote in a time of great anguish: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil."

And then the famous last words: "Are you guys ready? Let's roll."

We now know from the cockpit voice recorder that Beamer and other passengers wrestled with the hijackers and forced the plane to crash into the ground, killing themselves, but foiling what was believed to have been the hijackers' plan to fly Flight 93 into the Capitol or the White House.

As Christians, we know that God can bring good out of evil. In Todd Beamer, the world witnesses a faith that held up in the extremity of fear: A faith that is even now comforting his widow and two young sons.

Lisa Beamer told NBC's Dateline, "You know, in the Lord's Prayer, it asks us to forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." "As Todd prayed this prayer in the last moments of his life, in a way," Lisa said, "He was forgiving those people for what they were doing, the most horrible thing you could ever do to someone."

It wasn't Todd Beamer's job to fight terrorists. He was just a passenger, who along with several others, did what he didn't have to do but foiled a terrible evil that might have been done to his country.

As Flight 93 hurtled towards destruction, Todd Beamer could not have known that his quiet prayers would ultimately be heard by millions—that the story of his last acts on earth would be a witness to the Lord he loved and served and a lasting example of true heroism.

[Note: Todd was also a member of the Christian organization Promise Keepers. Assuredly, he kept the faith with his fellow Americans.]

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### UMORE 2003 Fall Retreat

UMORE's Annual Fall Retreat is scheduled for Friday evening through Saturday afternoon, November 21-22, 2003, at Camp Wesley Woods, Indianola, Iowa. A registration of \$45 includes lodging, 2 meals and snacks.

Retreat leader will be Richard Speight, pastor of Marion United Methodist Church in Cedar Rapids. The Retreat theme will be "Come, Rest in Your First Love: First Steps toward Revival in the Local Church."

Visit UMORE's website at [www.umore.org](http://www.umore.org) for more information and registration procedures or contact Pastor Rick Dee, UMORE Executive Director, 308 Lakeshore Dr., Emmetsburg, IA 50536.

You may also contact Pastor Dee by phone, 712-852-9079, or request information by e-mail at [terrydee@ncn.net](mailto:terrydee@ncn.net).

## Bishop Sprague Rejects Key Christian Beliefs But Is Not Held Accountable

United Methodist Bishop Joseph C. Sprague of Chicago has publicly rejected Jesus Christ's eternal deity, virgin birth, bodily resurrection, and atonement for the sins of the world. He denied that Jesus is the only way to salvation, and said the Gospel of John is not true.

Sprague made his attack on the Christian faith in a January 28, 2002 speech at United Methodist Iliff School of Theology in Denver and again in a book, both entitled "Affirmations of a Dissenter." The full text of his speech is at [www.ird-renew.org/umaction](http://www.ird-renew.org/umaction).

Sprague is still drawing a salary as a United Methodist Bishop. A complaint filed by 28 United Methodists charged him with violating the *Book of Discipline* by disseminating doctrines contrary to established United Methodist doctrine and by disobedience to the order and discipline of the church. The complaint was dismissed.

*Methodist Laity Reform Movement* defends Sprague's constitutional right to believe and advocate whatever he chooses. But it is dishonest to hold the office and receive the pay of a United Methodist Bishop while attacking the traditional Christian faith of John Wesley and his church. Decency and integrity require Sprague's resignation or removal.

Will the 2004 General Conference take action to restore faithfulness and accountability in The United Methodist Church? The future of this great church is in grave danger. (See related story on page 6.)

### Good News, 2003 National Summer Celebration July 24-26, 2003 — Columbus, Ohio

Featured speakers will include Dr. Scott Field, Rev. Joy J. Moore, Dr. George G. Hunter III, and others. Sixteen enriching *Breakout* sessions will cover many areas of church growth and ministry.

Additional information, including costs, youth activities, and hotel/motel accommodations can be found at [www.goodnewsmag.org](http://www.goodnewsmag.org)

You may also write to: Susan Mihal, *Summer Celebration*, 645 Dueber Ave. S.W., Canton, OH 44706.

## Laity Sunday

by Bob Morrison

We depend on our clergy and staff to run many things in our churches. They cannot and should not do it all. Laity Sunday is a time to celebrate and encourage involvement and support of our lay members!

*The Book of Discipline* asks us to celebrate and recognize laity on or about the third Sunday of October. This year most churches are declaring Sunday, October 19, as the day. Laity Sunday can be a turning point for laity in your church. It can be a starting point for demonstrating the Spiritual Gifts your congregation can provide, if given a chance. A helpful resource for planning can be found at [www.gbod.org/laity/articles/laity\\_sunday2002.html](http://www.gbod.org/laity/articles/laity_sunday2002.html)

What is your church doing about Laity involvement in your service on Laity Sunday October 19, 2003? What does your laity do and how do they do it? Do they serve as liturgists, ushers, present the sermon, testimonials, story time, refreshments, and other ways? Your real life stories could be just the example another church needs.

I would appreciate a reply with your experience or suggestion for others. An e-mail, note, or call will help us put together ideas to pass on.

Bob Morrison  
Secretary MLRM  
866-483-8889 ext. 3593

## Studies of Paul's Life and Teachings

Bishop and Mrs. Palmer are planning an 11 day educational tour to Greece and Turkey. In the brochure Bishop Palmer writes: "If there is anything that the Apostle Paul knew about, it was the value of travel for the sake of the Gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Cynthia and I invite you to join us in November of 2003 as we retrace Paul's steps in spreading the Gospel and encountering culture. You will treasure for a lifetime your journey by cruise ship to Istanbul, Athens, Philippi, Corinth, Ephesus and much more. Your faith will be deepened as large portions of the New Testament come to life for you in the company of friends old and new."

## Reminder: Create Ministries that Nurture Strong Marriages and Families

What is your church doing in response to the Bishops' resolution to strengthen pro-marriage and pro-family ministries within our denomination? At their November 2001 meeting, the United Methodist Council of Bishops noted that the "disastrous effects of family breakdown on individuals and society have been well-documented." The resolution originated with Bishop Clifton Ives of West Virginia.

The resolution asked the United Methodist Board of Discipleship, local churches, and annual conferences to "develop, identify, and promote resources and materials for local church ministries to married couples and families."

It quoted from the United Methodist Social Principles: "We believe the family to be the basic human community through which persons are nurtured and sustained in mutual love, responsibility, respect, and fidelity."

The resolution called for emphasis on "preparing engaged couples for marriage, enriching existing marriages, and for assisting couples and families in transition and/or crisis."

Have you responded to the Bishop's resolution? Let us know so we may share your ideas with other churches.

### United Methodist Men Active

United Methodist Men local church units have purchased 200 bicycles for pastors in Liberia; given 80,000 pounds of ostrich meat to Illinois food banks; supported "Hope for Hearing," a project that has placed more than 400 hearing aids and assisted children in six different schools for the deaf in Haiti; sponsored "Brother-to-Brother" gatherings, in which men develop friendships across ethnic and racial lines.

United Methodist Men have also participated in efforts to build or rebuild churches and homes damaged by hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, or fire; salvaged 3.9 million pounds of food by gleaning fields; and the 7,500 local UMM units have raised \$252,000 for hunger relief through the Society of St. Andrew, a partner with the Commission on United Methodist Men.

## New Publication of the Iowa Annual Conference

*Grace Upon Grace* is the new quarterly publication of the Iowa Annual Conference. In the inaugural issue, Bishop Palmer says that each time we receive an issue we will be reminded that the church is servant to the God whose glory has been seen in the face of Jesus Christ, whose very nature and way of acting is grace. "From his fullness (full store) we have received grace upon grace." John 1:16

## Random Thoughts

by Juanita O'Tool

Today the big tree in front of our home came down. Some people are like a hollow tree—still having limbs and growing leaves on the outside, but hollow on the inside. A big storm of life comes along, and they have nothing to cling to—so they topple.

We have had two huge trees taken down on our property since we moved here in December 1996. Each of these trees provided shade for us and shelter for the birds and squirrels that we loved to watch. Today, the third one hit the ground—taken down by the city. Each year there were more dead branches and less shade and protection. Now, they're gone, and we miss them very much; they were like good friends. However, because of their being hollow and empty on the inside, they were also a threat. They would sway in a big wind and, if they had fallen, they could not only have destroyed the sanctuary for the birds and squirrels, but would have destroyed homes; either ours or the neighbors.

We need to invite Jesus into our lives and let the Holy Spirit abide in us, so we do not become hollow or dead inside and maybe destroy someone or something else; as well as ourselves.

Readers are invited to send articles and/or letters to Noreen Miller, editor, 204 Eagle Drive, McGregor, IA 52157

Visit our website at  
[www.mreform.org](http://www.mreform.org)

## Our Church in Wonderland? Or in Orwell's 1984?

**Do words still have meaning in The United Methodist Church? Consider:**

**Book of Discipline**, par. 404.1: "As followers of Jesus Christ called to servant leadership, bishops are authorized to guard the faith, order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline of the church."

**Jesus Christ:** "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6, NIV)

**Bishop C. Joseph Sprague:** "I must dissent from Christocentric exclusives which hold that Jesus is the only way to God's gift of salvation." (Speech at Iliff Seminary 1-28-02)

**Articles of Religion** of the UMC: "Christ did truly rise again from the dead, and took again his body...." (Article III)

**Sprague:** "I believe in the resurrection of Jesus, but I cannot believe that his resurrection involved the resuscitation of his physical body." (Speech 1-28-02)

**Articles of Religion** of the UMC: "The Son, who is the Word of the Father, the very and eternal God, of one substance with the Father, took man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin; ..." (Article II)

**Sprague:** "The myth of the virgin birth was not intended as historical fact...." (Speech 1-28-02)

**Book of Discipline**, Doctrinal Standards, par. 101: "We share with many Christian communions a recognition of the authority of Scripture in matters of faith ..."

**Sprague:** "I have chosen here not to deal with John's account of the gospel ... Jesus simply did not preach, teach, or describe himself as John suggests... if Jesus did not possess trans-human, supernatural powers (as I do not believe he did) what sense can we make of the miraculous stories about him in the gospel accounts?" (Speech 1-28-02)

**Sprague:** "I can affirm my faith through the symbolic language, the theological poetic utterances of the ancient creeds, but it is incumbent upon me as believer and evangelist to unpack this ancient, obtuse language about Jesus in order to make a semblance of finite sense out of infinite mystery on behalf of those who find the ancient creedal language confusing or implausible." (Speech 1-28-02)

**What does all this mean? In The United Methodist Church, a Bishop can and does reject**

**basic Christian and UM beliefs — and is NOT held accountable.**

**The great words remain, but they mean anything or nothing — whatever meaning is chosen by anyone who "unpacks" or "makes sense out of" the faith given to us by the Bible and the apostles.**

### What Do You Think?

Did the following actions by our church's paid lobbyist ("Advocate") help us or divide us?

On September 23, 2002, a Legislative Network e-mail was sent asking Iowa United Methodists to collect multiple signatures on a letter "to oppose a war against Iraq." The letter called for "an end to preparations for an attack and war against Iraq," and asserted, "**A military attack against Iraq is immoral.**"

On January 2, 2003, another Legislative network e-mail was sent asking Iowa United Methodists to "join us in packing City Hall" for a Des Moines City Council meeting in support of an anti-war resolution. (The City Council rejected the resolution.) "You (Iowa United Methodists) are also strongly encouraged to consider presenting an anti-war resolution at your local city council meeting."

Christians want peace and freedom for all people, and have differing views on when war is justified. Many Christians opposed the Iraq war. Many other Christians reluctantly concluded that it was a just and necessary war.

National polls showed a large majority of Americans supported the decision by our nation and many others to end Saddam's tyranny. Surely that majority included many United Methodists.

**When our church and its paid staff are used to advocate one side of a political issue on which honest Christians can and do disagree, the church is weakened and divided.**

## New Devotional Guide for Armed Forces

Bishop Gregory V. Palmer recommends a special devotional guide that has been shipped to military chaplains for rapid distribution to deployed troops. This "Prayers for Courage" devotional was created by Upper Room Ministries. The 32-page booklet is a compilation of prayers and scripture that offer words of comfort, hope, and love. Over one million copies have been sent overseas.

Bishop Palmer represents the Council of Bishops in the UMC Division of Chaplains.

Bishop Palmer suggests you may order this devotional guide at a nominal cost from The Upper Room customer service department at 800-972-0433. The Upper Room would welcome your prayers and your contributions to support this ministry for our service personnel. You may send a contribution through the Conference Treasurer or send it to **Upper Room Ministries, Chaplains' Fellowship Ministry, PO Box 340004, Nashville, TN 37203-0004**

means" principle motivates them. Such thinking is often used to justify wrong behavior. They may become vehement against you voicing your opinion if it's contrary to theirs and spew forth hateful accusation saying, "You are motivated by hate". They are the persons being hateful—yet accusing you of hate.

Something gets turned around. But it's nothing new. The prophet, Isaiah, spoke about a time of such moral decline that people began to "call evil good and good evil." (Isaiah 5:20 NOAB). It's happening again.

*Hate accusation ploys* are especially apt to occur when persons realize their arguments are lacking fact and substance. They then use verbal attack and name-calling to try to take the focus off their faulty argument.

It is extremely sad when professing Christians allow such a spirit of unholy anger to control them. So much hurt could be avoided if they would ask the Lord to remove such a spirit from their hearts and bring his peace in its place.

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## You Hate Me!

by Dan Miller

"You hate me!"

Little children may use that line on parents who won't let them have their own way. It's usually as a last resort after tears of agony haven't worked. They hope to induce guilt and/or sympathy. One could say it's a variation of the old "Nobody loves me—Everybody hates me—Guess I'll go eat worms" wail. "You don't agree with me. You hate me!" You may even hear adults using this hate accusation idea as a way to promote an agenda they are pushing.

The fact is, other people do have opinions differing from yours and mine. SHOCK! There will be people disagreeing with you on one issue or another all through life—from the time before you have any teeth until the time you've lost most of them. If you decide to read those situations as being hate motivated, you're in for a long bumpy ride of your own making.

There are people who will stop at almost nothing to see that opposition to their opinion is squelched. They may work to develop laws to stop you from even voicing your opposing views. The old "end justifies the

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## YOU are invited!

**What's new** in The United Methodist Church reform movement? Find out at our **Annual Meeting and Issues Briefing**, Saturday June 7,

Noon to 4:00 PM at The Hotel at Gateway Center, US Highway 30 at Exit 146 on Elwood Drive in Ames

National reform leader **Rev. Tom Lambrecht** will give us facts and action opportunities on the "**Crisis of Identity and Accountability**" in the UMC.

**What big issues** are facing our Iowa Annual Conference (June 12-15) and the 2004 General Conference?

*American buffet lunch will be provided, with free-will offering.*

Reserve a seat toll-free **866-218-4123, ext. 3593** or e-mail [info@mreform.org](mailto:info@mreform.org),



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