

Let's be more open to God's surprises

By JANICE LOVE

Heresy is a strong, provocative word. It often brings to mind some shameful episodes in church history, events when the religious establishments sought to crush dissent, creativity, spiritual exploration and theological diversity.

Some of the most vivid images of heresy are: Joan of Arc burning at the stake; the Spanish Inquisition; the prosecution of Galileo; John Calvin's reign in Geneva; and unfortunately, much more.

One's faith, another's heresy

The negative, even deadly, experiences of debate over particular heresies overwhelm the few positive, life-affirming ones. In work for Christian unity, we regularly discover that too often a fundamental matter of faith for one group is a heresy for another. Some denominations' official doctrines, for example, consider Methodism a heresy.

At my own expense, for a personal retreat, I attended the now-famous conference on Re-Imagining: The Ecumenical Decade, Churches in Solidarity with Women. There I believe I experienced the Holy Spirit. Others

Here I Stand



Janice Love is a member of Wesley United Methodist Church in Columbia, S.C. (South Carolina Annual Conference).

believe I experienced a series of heresies.

Participants in the conference stand accused of daring to imagine and reconstruct the feminine face of God. We stand accused of daring to offer hospitality to lesbians.

We stand accused, as did some slaves in previous centuries, of daring to question whether traditional concepts and symbols in the church are more harmful than helpful when they urge people, particularly abused women, to endure suffering and crucifixion, to sacrifice themselves further, to forgive without genuine repentance from the offenders, and to settle for reconciliation without justice.

We stand accused of not invoking Jesus Christ into our midst. But I could feel, touch and see Christ in many encounters that weekend.

Jesus was with us

Jesus was present in shared experiences of faith journeys. Jesus was there when Rita Nakishima Brock told us stories of incarnation, immanuel and ecclesia. Jesus witnessed our songs of praise and thanksgiving, "Great is our God, ever adored."

Jesus was with us when we embraced the outcasts, the lesbians, and created community with them. Jesus was present in the elderly woman at my table whose wounds were as evident as her joy. Jesus was present in the men also deeply moved by the outpouring of love, acceptance and challenge.

Jesus was displayed in the artists' portraits of the women murdered by those who claimed to love them. Jesus was present in the meal where we committed ourselves to seek personal and institutional transformation.

Defining a heresy can be a legitimate exercise when Christians challenge each other to live more faithfully. Most of us, however, try to use the term to

Why give such notice to a closed church meeting?

Having been to many meetings of far more than 60 United Methodists which did not rate a full column of Review reportage, I can only conclude that the difference between meetings of United Methodists is that a few of them have publicists!

Your story headlined "Ad Hoc group sets closed meeting on church's future" (see Review, Feb. 11) is a case in point. Someone had to go to some lengths to get information to the Review that a group of self-appointed United Methodists were going to have a closed door meeting to which neither the press, nor other interested United Methodists, would be invited. Otherwise, why would such a notice even make it into the pages of the Review?

Our meetings are open to all, unless we are dealing with matters of personnel or litigation. In a true community, we don't have anything to hide. Given that tradition, "closed meetings," (even announced in advance "closed meetings") should be considered as non-events—even when information about the "closed meeting" is apparently shared by a publicist of some sort.

Thomas H. Griffith

West Hollywood, California

A bishop's correction

Please allow me to correct a mistaken impression.

In one of my lectures at the Congress on Evangelism in early January, I included a paragraph about the Sophia issue. What I said was correctly quoted by the religious press.

However, I made no mention whatsoever of the "Re-Imagining Conference" which was held in Minneapolis.

The particular lecture in which I dealt with the Sophia matter was written before I was even aware that the conference had occurred. Had I known about it, I still would not have commented upon it in the lecture, because I

Letters to the Editor

myself did not attend its sessions, and to make a public statement about a meeting of whose program I had no firsthand knowledge would have been contrary to my sense of accuracy and fairness.

Earl G. Hunt Jr.

Lake Junaluska, North Carolina

I didn't agree, but...

I was one of the United Methodists who attended the "Re-Imagining Conference" in Minneapolis. I paid my own way.

As I learned to do as a United Methodist woman, I went with an open mind expecting to be inspired, instructed and challenged. I took with me the knowledge and strength I have gained from intense study of the Book of Discipline's section on "Our Theological Task."

I wasn't disappointed in the conference. As I had anticipated, I wasn't in total agreement with everything said. However, I'm not always in total agreement with everything said in The United Methodist Church.

Clearly, our Book of Discipline calls us to reflect on God's action in our lives and to use this study to prepare us to participate in God's work in the world.

Sally Graham Ernst

Bethel Park, Pennsylvania

Editor's Note: Ms. Ernst is immediate past president of the Women's Division of the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries.

Words on Wisdom

Several of your recent issues have dealt with the issue of "Sophia worship." One important perspective has been left unspoken, and that is the fact that

there is a Biblical and traditional sense in which Christians do worship Sophia.

Consider: the United Methodist congregation of which I am a member recently sang the words of Anglican priest (later bishop) William W. How:

O Word of God

incarnate,

O Wisdom from on

high.

Of course, if "Wisdom" were transferred from the Greek, we would be justly

accused of worshipping "Sophia." Moreover, Wesley Theological Seminary, on whose faculty I serve, has as its inscription this verse:

Christos theou dunamis

kai theou sophia

"Christ, the power of God and the wisdom [sophia] of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24).

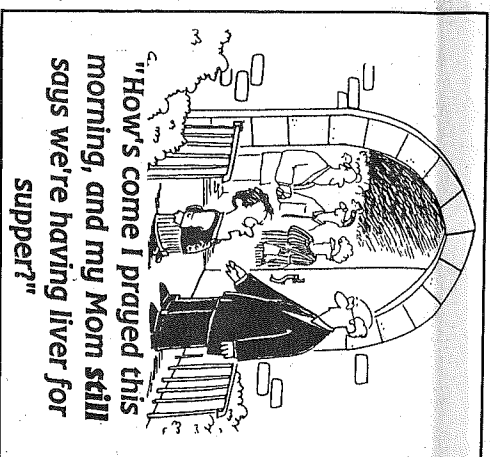
I realize of course that this may not resolve all of the current issues surrounding the worship of Sophia. Some feminists may worship a "goddess" Sophia, but for other feminists, "Sophia" is a scriptural and historic term for the Christ whom we worship.

Ted A. Campbell
Washington, D.C.

The central issue

In any controversy, it's important to identify the central issue and ignore distracting tangents. Despite the self-serving rhetoric of some, the issue on the Re-Imagining Conference isn't the agenda of the Good News movement.

Neither is it a question of whether people's faith is strong enough to endure blasphemy (a test most Christians endure every day). It isn't even whether Christians can express their faith in sexu-



"How's come I prayed this morning, and my Mom still says we're having liver for supper?"

C. 1994 Illustrations

The United Methodist Church betray both God and our church by supporting this conference?

I believe the answer to these questions is affirmative. The whole premise of "re-imagining" carries an implication that the triune God of Christian worship is the product of imagination in the first place. So why not re-imagine, if that is the case? This of course amounts to a practical pantheism—not a strong foundation for a church to ask people to sacrifice for, or involve themselves in.

David Stains

South Fork, Pennsylvania

Not of God

As a Christian and a member of United Methodist Women, I must respond to recent letters (see Review, Feb. 25). In my heart and after prayer, I have discerned that the involvement of the Women's Division in the Re-Imagining Conference was not of God. And I believe that other United Methodists who are guided by the Holy Spirit discerned the same thing—that "Sophia worship" is not of God.

Barbara Olm
Neehan, Wisconsin



Haitian Methodist says his government is slowly killing his fellow countrymen

By DIANE HUIE BALAY
 Associate Editor

MIAMI, Fla.—The poor of Haiti are pleading, crying for justice," says a Haitian Methodist leader.

Wishing to remain anonymous for security reasons, the leader recently told directors of the United Methodist Committee on Relief at their Winter meeting in Miami that the present system of government in Haiti is a failure.

"We are talking about heartless rulers," he said. "They have attempted to kill the hopes and dreams of the people."

Some seen as 'not human'

The Methodist leader said Haiti's problems are rooted in classism in which the elite see the majority as "not human."

"They fight education [for the poor] because they know it is a tool for social transformation," he continued.

Haiti, some 60 miles off the southeast coast of Cuba, is considered the most impoverished country in the Western Hemisphere.

"We have been living too long with leadership which drains the people without providing services," the Haitian Methodist leader said.

Since 1986, he said, eight Haitian

**"We are talking about heartless rulers. They have attempted to kill the hopes and dreams of the people."
 —Haitian Methodist**

heads of state have been assassinated or left office under suspicion of corruption, waste, mismanagement and misappropriation of funds.

\$360 million stolen

The speaker, who was introduced to the committee by name but requested that neither his name nor his picture be published, said dictator Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier absconded in 1986 with some \$360 million from the Haitian treasury.

A great deal of that money is widely believed to have come from misappropriated U.S. aid. Mr. Duvalier was later deposited in a massive uprising.

U.S. policies regarding Haiti have not made matters easier, the speaker continued. He claimed that in spite of President Clinton's verbal support of ousted Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the American Central Intelligence Agency is backing elite

pro-Duvalier factions who prospered under the dictatorship and who use the military to suppress the poor.

"Every day (pro-Aristide) people are being killed and are disappearing," he said.

The controversial U.S.-backed embargo against Haiti is severely hurting the poorest people, he said, but it is finally also hurting businesses of the elite.

"Food is scarce and very expensive," he said. "Adults and children are feeding themselves with clay and water."

"If there is only one bag of rice or one gallon of gas," he continued, "the army will get it."

"Had it not been for the churches, I don't know what the situation would be. Churches—the Methodist church in particular—are providing beyond their resources, and the younger generation is at the forefront," the Methodist leader said.

"Haitians are good people," he said. "I cannot understand why they have suffered so much."

The United Methodist Committee on Relief is helping Haitians on two fronts, said the Rev. Ken Lutgen, head of the organization: In Haiti through reforestation projects and churchwide through Church World Service refugee advocacy and relocation services.

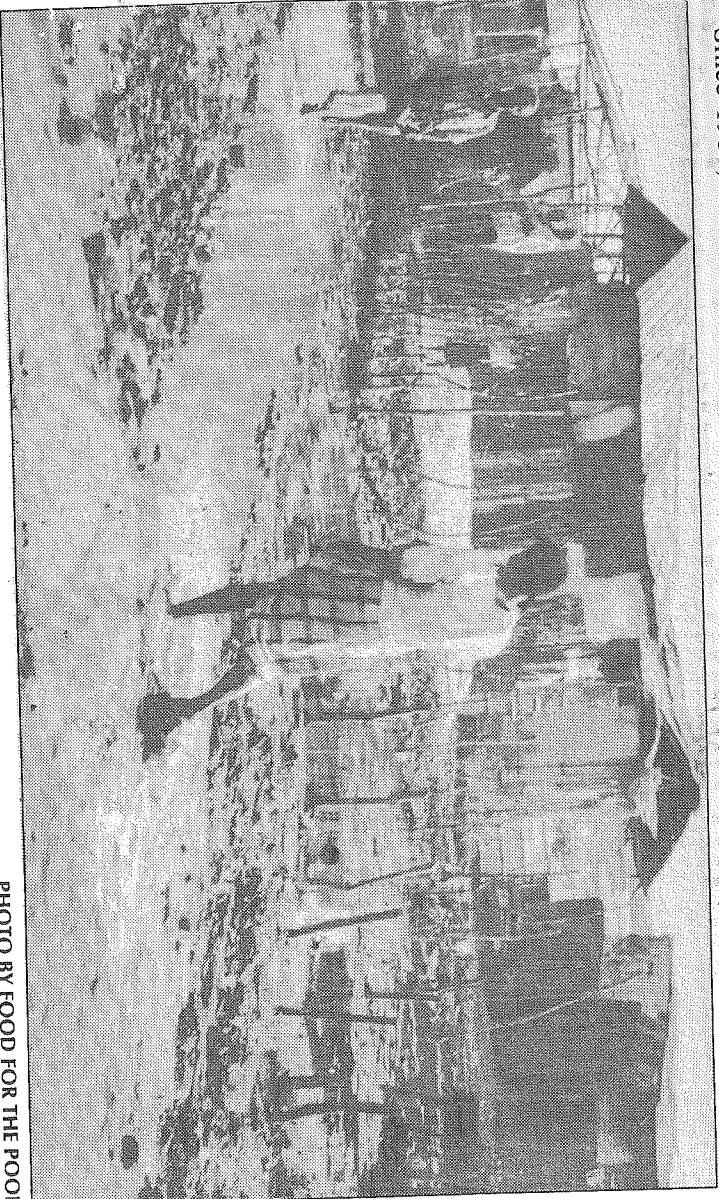


PHOTO BY FOOD FOR THE POOR

Living conditions are bad, but, of greater import, food is scarce and very expensive in his country, a Haitian Methodist reported recently to United Methodist relief officials. He said that adults and children are feeding themselves with clay and water in a desperate attempt to stay alive.

Bishop sends audio taped message to churches

By WILLIAM H. MOYER Jr.
 United Methodist News Service

ALBANY, N.Y.—How can a bishop talk at one time with members of all 670 congregations in a three-state episcopal area? United Methodist Bishop William Boyd Grove of Albany found an effective method in an audio studio in Vestal, N.Y., in December, recording a brief message inviting all parishioners to pray daily in 1994 for renewal of the church.

Bishop Grove taped two versions of the message, one for the denomination's Wyoming Annual Conference—covering northeastern Pennsylvania and southern New York—and one for the Troy Annual Conference—covering Vermont and northeastern New York.

With assistance from Wyoming Annual Conference

Communications, each message was duplicated onto audio cassettes, packaged, custom labeled and mailed by both conference offices to pastors.

The bishop previously had written each of the pastors, asking them to play the message the first Sunday of January. "I believe that prayer changes things," Bishop Grove said in his message. "In fact, our father John Wesley once said that God does nothing except in response to prayer."

Church members were asked to pray daily for a host of people, ranging from church workers to new Christians, as well as for needs in their communities.

The written response to Bishop Grove's invitation to respond has been overwhelming, according to the bishop. Many letters asked Bishop Grove himself to pray for specific family and church concerns.

UM delegation supporting Burundi bishop's return home

By DENISE JOHNSON STOVALL
 Associate Editor

A delegation of top-level United Methodists was visiting Burundi this month to show denominational support for Bishop J. Alfred Nduricimpa.

As head of the United Methodist Church of Burundi and president of the Burundi Christian Council, Bishop Nduricimpa had been in exile in this country since October, following the overthrow of the Burundi government.

United Methodist Bishops David J. Lawson (Illinois Area),



Alfred Nduricimpa

Klaiber (Germany Area) and Doreen Tighman, head of Africa, Europe and Middle East missions for the General Board of Global Ministries, met in Central Africa Feb. 27, then traveled together to Bujumbura, Burundi.

According to Ms. Tighman, the emergency trip was made at the request of the United Methodist Council of Bishops to provide protection for their African colleague.

"Members of the Council of Bishops had planned to travel with Bishop Nduricimpa when he left the country in February," said Ms. Tighman, "but the bishops decided that it showed a bigger statement of support if we came after he arrived back home. They wanted to show that they were checking to see that the bishop arrived safely and to show that the eyes of the world-wide United Methodist Church are on that country."

Ms. Tighman added that Global Ministries officials were worried about the safety of the African bishop when he returned to his home country. Open attacks by members of the minority Tutsi tribes were being made on members of the Hutu tribe, even in the capital city of Bujumbura.

Subsequently, Global Ministries staff contacted the U.S. State Department and advocacy groups such as Amnes International and Africa Watch to insure that the church leader would come to no harm.

Ms. Tighman told the Review that international peacekeeping force from the Organization of African Unity arrived in Burundi at the end of February to curb some violence. However, streets of the country were still reported as very dangerous.

She speculated that Bishop Nduricimpa would not be able to back safely to his hometown of Gitega for some time.

"I've traveled to the Middle East Cambodia, all over the world," said Tighman. "But this is one time that really concerned about visiting a foreign country.

"Continue to pray for the bishop Burundi."



Leading pastor elected president of seminary

By CYNTHIA B. ASTLE
Associate Editor

One of United Methodism's best known international leaders, the Rev. Maxie D. Dunnam of Memphis, Tenn., has been elected president of Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Ky.

He will take office July 1, succeeding the Rev. David L. McKenna. Dr. McKenna retires June 30 from the presidency he has held for the past 12 years.

United Methodist Bishop Kenneth L. Carder (Nashville Area), in making the appointment, said, "Dr. Dunnam's experience as a pastor, writer, teacher and respected leader in Methodism throughout the world uniquely equips him to serve as president at Asbury Seminary.

"He exhibits the Wesleyan balance of knowledge and vital piety; personal salvation and social witness. His professional skills, experience and personal commitment to the Christian gospel

serve as a model for the leadership needed in the church."

Developing lay leadership

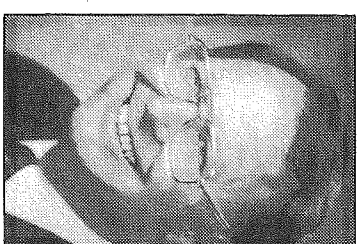
Dr. Dunnam, 59, has been senior pastor of the 5,800-member Christ United Methodist Church in Memphis since 1982.

His tenure there has been marked by emphases on developing lay leadership, on evangelism and on innovative inner-city ministries and ministries to the

unemployed.

His daily one-minute inspirational message, *Perceptions*, is broadcast on radio and television in the greater Memphis area.

Announcing the news to his congregation Feb. 20, Dr. Dunnam explained, "(1) all boils down to this: I have possibly 10 years left for active ministry. I believe God is giving me an opportunity to help renew a church which I believe desperately needs renewing; to shape the church of the 21st century by helping shape theological education. . . . Our hope for the future is in the places where clergy are trained."



Maxie Dunnam

Asbury is not one of the 13 seminaries officially related to The United Methodist Church, although its current enrollment of 910 students includes about 365 United Methodists, said Robert L. Bridges, the seminary's vice president.

The seminary is known for its evangelical theology and tradition and for ties of some of its faculty with the unofficial United Methodist caucus, Good News.

Dr. Dunnam received an honorary doctorate from Asbury in 1977, has been a trustee for the past 12 years and serves this year as chairman of the board.

He is a member of the executive committee of the World Methodist Council, serves as chair of the World Methodist Evangelism Committee and is a member of the Roman Catholic-Methodist International Dialogue Commission. In 1992 Dr. Dunnam was given the council's highest honor in recognition of his longtime service.

Helped lead 'declarations'

Dr. Dunnam also has been known as a leader of the more conservative political factions within The United Methodist Church.

Preceding both the 1988 and 1992 General Conferences, the church's highest legislative bodies, Dr. Dunnam was among leaders of groups which produced documents known as the Houston Declaration (1988) and the Memphis Declaration (1992).

Both documents opposed changing the church's stance barring homosexual people from ordained ministry. Additionally the Memphis Declaration also opposed God language other than the traditional Trinitarian formula of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Additionally, Dr. Dunnam is one of three leaders of a closed-door, invitation-only meeting, "Consultation on the Future of The United Methodist Church," to be held April 5-6 in Atlanta. He served as 1975-82 World Editor of the interdenominational, multilingual devotional guide, *The Upper Room*.

Cathy Farmer, editor of the Memphis Conference edition of the Review, a sister publication of the Review, and United Methodist News Service contributed to this story.

Congregation marches against gangs and violence in their inner city neighborhood

By CAROLYN STEPHENS

FORT WORTH, Texas—"Armed" with big sticks, protesters marched through a four-block residential area on a recent Sunday morning to oppose the encroachment of warring gangs in north

Pointing to the bullet holes that still bore the identifying numbers made by law officials, Mr. Harrington said, "In my mind these are the marks of the crucifixion..."

Fort Worth's (Texas) Diamond Hill neighborhood.

Their sticks carried the message to "Pray for Peace" and "Stop the Shooting."

Led by the Rev. Brooks Harrington and Raul Gutierrez, co-pastors of Diamond Hill United Methodist Church, the group of about 30 began their march in opposition to recent gang-related shootings that had claimed the lives of several neighborhood youths and a mother whose sons had also been the target of a drive-by shooting Feb. 2.

"This is not what neighborhoods are about," Mr. Harrington told the assembled group.

"Neighborhoods are for raising families, for children to play in and for supporting one another."

Neighborhood children and their parents were drawn to the spectacle of support by the marchers.

They came out from behind barred doors to join the group which had tripled in size by the time they stopped at the home of Rosa Ocura who, at the time of her drive-by shooting death, had

begun a campaign to rid her neighborhood of gangs.

Her husband, Lupe, and three of their six children came out of their modest, bullet-riddled home to accept the group's prayers and condolences.

Nearby neighbors, previously fearing retribution, took this opportunity to embrace their friend. Noticeably missing were the two sons Mrs. Ocura had fought unsuccessfully to keep from gang involvement.

Pointing to the bullet holes that still bore the identifying numbers made by law officials, Mr. Harrington said, "In my mind these are the marks of the crucifixion, like the nails in the hands of Christ."

His words were repeated in Spanish by Mr. Gutierrez for the predominantly Hispanic neighborhood residents.

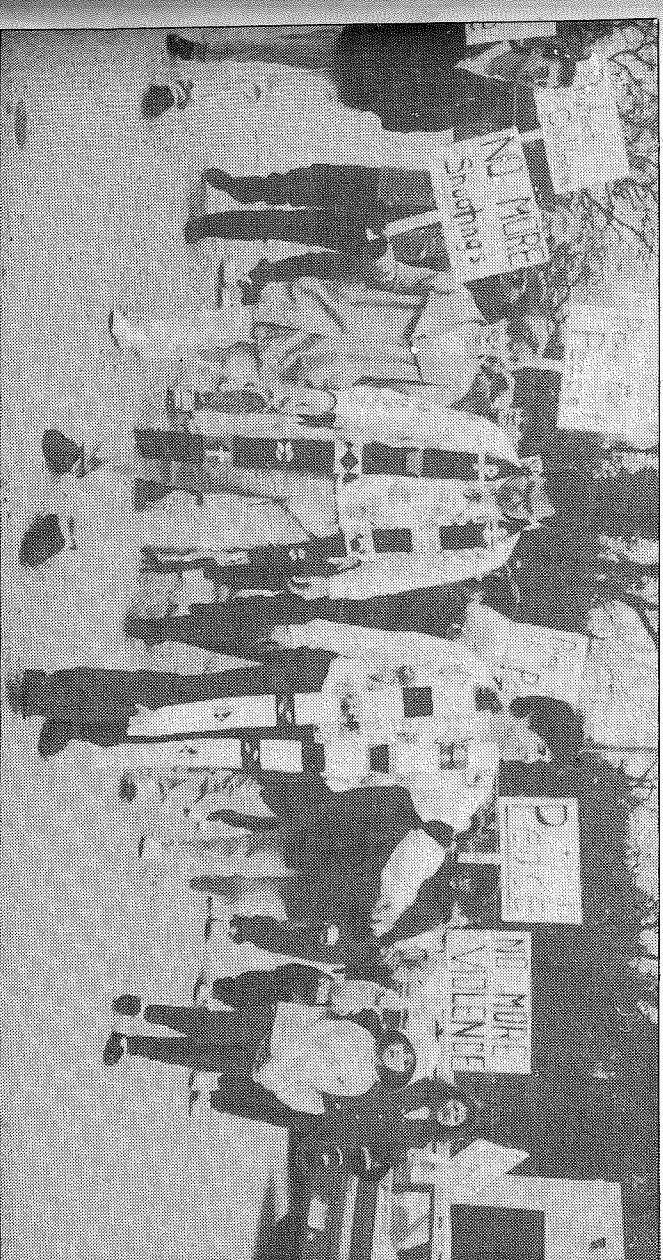
Among the marchers were teachers from Diamond Hill elementary school immediately across the street from the United Methodist church. They say they are sickened by seeing children with great potential inevitably facing the pressure of gang membership before their reach their teens.

"We want gang members to know that the community does not support their killing ways," Mr. Gutierrez said in support of residents who are vowing to enlist other area churches to help Diamond Hill United Methodist Church in future marches.

Ms. Stephens is editor of the Central Texas Reporter, a sister edition of the Review.



FORT WORTH, Texas—The Rev. Brooks Harrington shows a spent bullet casing found near a home that was the target of a gang-related shooting spree.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CENTRAL TEXAS CONFERENCE

FORT WORTH, Texas—"We want gang members to know that the community does not support their killing ways," said members of Diamond Hill United Methodist Church in Fort Worth during a recent protest march through their neighborhood.

A holy season 'out of step' with 'usual' times

A time of self-examination, confession and repentance won't win many popularity contests. Life's too short, we say. Why use any of it in somber introspection?

Traditionally, of course, the Christian season of Lent is just such a period. That fact automatically distinguishes it as a season out of step with our times. It gets low marks in a microwave world that exalts action, speed, results and, most of all, "having fun."

For precisely that reason, though, Lent is the season that we as Christians need most to emphasize. If liturgical seasons could be personified as prophets, Lent would be a holy troublemaker, like say a Joel or an Amos, who disconcertingly challenges the modern "Gimme more, and now!" zeitgeist.

With its focus on "giving up" something—a thing, a habit, an attitude—Lent calls into question all of our worldly attachments. As such, it does not deny the goodness of Creation and the blessings, indeed the necessity, of the material world.

Editorial

But it does compel one to think potentially disturbing thoughts:

Exactly what is most important in my life? What actually does come first for me? Money? Pleasure? Power? The Self in its many guises? If impartial witnesses observed me for a day, what priorities would they see?

Few of us desire such honest encounters with ourselves, of course. It's far easier and less disruptive to conduct our lives' business "as usual." What we forget, though, is how "business as usual," practiced on a wide scale, imperils our world, not to mention our individual lives.

■ Business as usual—nearly 500 years of "usual," in fact—has led to the bloody tragedy being played out in Bosnia. While a ceasefire there has brought a breather in the war, the underlying causes—ethnic and religious

bigotry among them—remain unresolved.

■ Business as usual keeps illegal drug traffic flowing through the streets and into the homes of even good, upstanding families, who, not daring to look inward, fail to see its dangers.

■ Business as usual grinds too many congregations into ordinariness, extracting the "salt" that gives them flavor and staying power in a world seeking signs of hope and permanence.

■ Business as usual keeps countless families on a relational treadmill of taking each other for granted, their members rarely looking up to see the hurts and hopes of their kin.

To all of this, Lent, that holy troublemaker, says: "Be still and know God."

In short, slow down, give up, look inward, confront the truth of your life—and allow yourself to be confronted by the One who is life itself.

Such honoring of the holy season of Lent may be, in fact, the only hope we have in an "as usual" world amid "as usual" lives of truly staying in business.



RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE PHOTO
To the bustle of our "business as usual" lives, the contemplative season of Lent, that holy troublemaker, says: "Be still and know God" (see related editorial at left)

We must search for what God is calling us to do

By MICHAEL KROTH

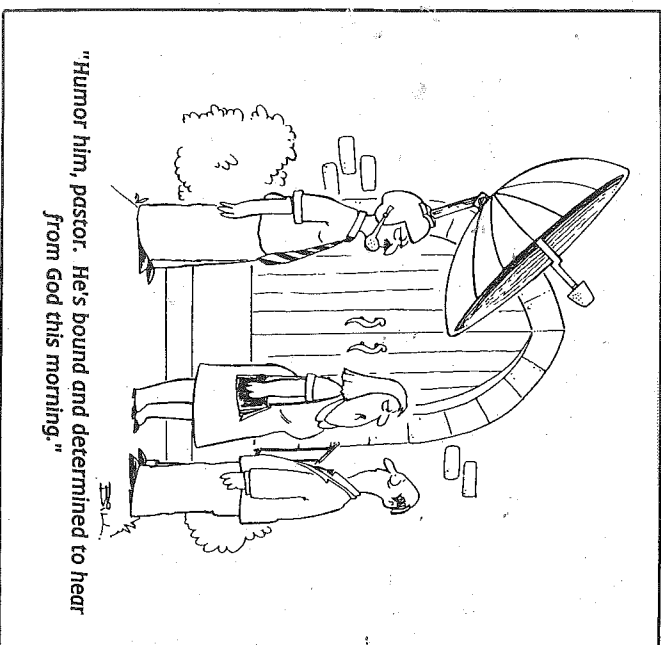
Everyone wants to lead a meaningful life. One of the hardest journeys to take is down the road into our heart to find that elusive meaning. When we find meaning we validate our existence.

United Methodists have underemphasized the need to discover a "calling" for our lives.

We are trained to serve others, to love our neighbors, and to be good stewards of what God has given us but we don't search long enough or hard enough to find that special task God asks of each of us. Therefore, we miss the powerful, personal relationship with our Creator which we have the potential to develop, and the intensely important life we strive for.

Unwavering quest

To live, as most of us do, a "good" life may be satisfactory. But to live a passionate one, as John Wesley



did, requires the same unwavering quest to find God's plan for us that Wesley relentlessly pursued for himself.

Who could doubt that Gandhi, Mother Theresa, Moses, and Martin Luther King had special callings from God? In the same way we are called to make a special contribution to the Kingdom.

How will we know when we've found our special vocation? We won't know, intellectually, but we will know in our hearts. How we perceive it will be different for each of us, but it will always give us that special, individual, spiritual feeling we have when we know what God is asking us personally to do.

In unexpected ways

God calls in unexpected ways and the best way to discover that call is to listen to ourselves. To trust that inner voice.

Start by asking what you care about and enjoy doing. What do you love to do?

Next, ask yourself what your special talents are. What are you good at? What could you be good at?

Third, what is the need? Is there a special need in the world you are drawn to, either by circumstance or your own interests?

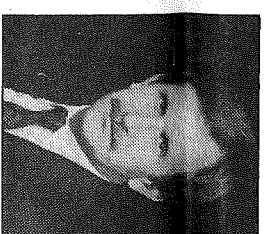
What others are saying

"As citizens we do not have the capacity or the authority to judge the president's personal life; that is the province of the Almighty. We do have a responsibility to evaluate as best we can how the president is conducting the public business. He is our public agent in charge of the public trust and committed by his public oath to guide the presidency according to the Constitution."

—Former U.S. Senator George McGovern, 1972 presidential candidate, writing in *Christian Century*.

"I've been wondering why some people invite others to church and why some people do not. Could it be

Last, in your innermost heart, in your deepest prayer, what do you feel God wants you to do with your life? Listen to yourself and listen to God. If we can answer the first three questions we are on our way to discovering the answer to the fourth—which is the real calling for our life. Live with meaning, passion, and purpose. Search for your special calling. Each one of God's children is extraordinary, and called to a unique mission here on earth. Discover it. Live it.



Michael Kroth is a member of First United Methodist Church in Albuquerque, N.M. (New Mexico Annual Conference).

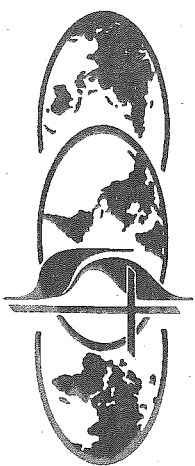
My Witness

that some of us are in churches that are so vital that we can't help telling people about our church? Perhaps others in less vital churches are secretly hoping that it one will ask them where they attend church."

—The Rev. Ezra Earl Jones, chief executive the General Board of Discipleship, Nashville.

"To sing and laugh in festival before the awesome threats of worldly power can never be tolerated. The world always solemnly attempts to silence those who laugh at its sinister self-centeredness. But the first sound on Easter morn is always the great laugh of God!"

—The Rev. Robert Layne, Topeka, Kan., quoted in the *The Joyful Noise Letter*.



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