

COMMUNITY MINISTRY: FAITH AND LOVE IN ACTION

*Wisconsin Annual Conference Presentation by Deborah Bass
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Grace and peace to you in the name of our Savior Jesus Christ!

To Bishop Radar, the Cabinet and members of the Wisconsin Annual Conference, I bring you greetings from the directors, officers, and staff of the General Board of Global Ministries, our United Methodist agency serving God and the Church in more than 125 countries.

I am very happy to be with you here at the Wisconsin Annual Conference, especially since I was unable to attend my home conference meeting in southern California (Cal-Pac) this year.

I firmly believe it is good for the United Methodist soul to come to conference. Conference inspires and instructs us in the faith; conference can also deepen our endurance! Annual conference sessions help me to identify myself as a United Methodist, and at conference I always know I am among sisters and brothers.

Actually, though, when Bishop Rader invited me to speak, I tried to offer as substitute a number of preachers on the staff of the General Board of Global Ministries. She declined my generosity with my colleagues' time. "No," she said. "I want you to come." Bishop, let me say how grateful I am that you insisted because I was just being nice in offering you a preacher. I really wanted to do it myself. Nothing fills me with more joy than talking with my United Methodist brothers and sisters about Community Ministry.

Let me take this opportunity to thank the Wisconsin Conference for your consistent support of the global mission and ministry through the General Board of Global Ministries, including and especially missionary support. Your support for mission personnel through the Advance registered a large increase between 2001 and 2002 and held fairly steady for 2003. The board and the missionary community are profoundly grateful. I began my career in mission service here in the United States and I am proud when people call me a missionary.

Today my remarks are about a major arena of mission service, by which I mean the places where we live: Our Communities.

I have entitled my talk, "Community Ministry: Faith and Love in Action," and I want to explore this topic within the framework of your annual conference theme: "Who is My Neighbor: Seeking to Live in Love with One Another."

Community

The word "community" is not common in Scripture; in fact, a data base of terms in the English Bible maintained at the University of Virginia does not list it as appearing a single time in either the Old or New Testaments of the New Revised Standard Version. A synonym, such as "neighborhood," appears more often but still not frequently.

That finding perplexed me at first. Maybe I was looking for some proof-text for underscoring a field of mission dear to me. Then the Lord led me to see that the Bible does not usually deal with geographical abstractions. Both the Old and New Testaments name the places, and/or the communities, being described or considered. Think about it: From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is filled with the names of cities, towns, oasis in the desert regions, vicinities, large and small countries, and, yes, communities. Just a few examples: In the Old Testament, the historical books of Joshua, Judges, Kings, and Chronicles tells us more than we sometimes think we want to know

about the geography and towns of Palestine and surrounding areas.

The prophetic literature not only tells us where the prophets were from, but also where they made their pronouncements.

The Gospels abound with the names of the places visited by Jesus and his disciples. The Book of Acts follows the early evangelists from named place to place.

St. Paul's letters were written for specific communities of believers in actual localities. Finally, the Book of Revelation is addressed to churches in seven cities whose sites we can identify today.

The Bible does not talk about "community" as an abstraction; it takes us to communities, to real places where real people live, and move, and have their being: Places where, like Jesus and Paul, we make our witness to the Good News of God's love and forgiveness.

"Neighbor" was a term I found in great abundance in my computer search of the English Bible. Everywhere you turn, the Scripture speaks of neighbor, most often in terms of one's ethical and moral responsibility to those who live in an immediate vicinity. There are notable exceptions to geographical parameters in defining "neighbor;" primarily Jesus' Parable of the Good Samaritan, where a non-geographical depiction of "neighbor" defied common assumptions about ethnic relationships.

That parable paved the way for the international, interethnic, and interracial community of the Church.

I want here to recognize the universal and the global, implications of "neighbor" as reflected in the parable of the Good Samaritan, and within that context to put an emphasis on particular places—specifically the neighborhood, or community, around the church building where you and your congregation worship, teach, and join in Christian fellowship.

Our Places

Clear your mind if you can of other conference business and think about the community, the place, where your sanctuary is situated? Is it:

○ On a downtown thoroughfare, where your immediate neighbors are office workers and young people serving coffee at Starbucks?

○ In an older residential neighborhood of single and two-family houses, where the population may be shifting from white to black or from black to Hispanic

○ On a spacious suburban campus with acres of parking and few houses nearby?

○ At a country crossroads, next to a cemetery and the spot where a local school once stood?

○ A new church in a wooded grove or beside a lake, miles from the city, but surrounded by near-hidden subdivisions of urban-commuters?

And there are many other possible options. Picture your church building in its place? Is yours a "commuter church," one where few members live nearby but drive in each Sunday? Can most of your members walk to worship?

Do we know our church neighbors? Do they know us? A new pastor in a congregation in my conference, a church in Long Beach, was out visiting in her new neighborhood. She introduced herself to one of the local merchants as the pastor of the "XYZ United Methodist Church on the corner." "I never knew that building was a church, I never see it open," the merchant replied.

How are we, pastor or layperson, engaged in that community in the name of Christ? Do people know we are there? Really there?

The California pastor I mentioned—(and I hope you will allow me to use an illustration from my

home conference. While I now live in New York, my parents and other family members are still in California, and I stay in close touch with my home conference.) The pastor I mentioned was deeply disturbed by the comment of the merchant.

That particular congregation, which had a declining membership, had fallen into the habit of only using the back door, which faced on a small parking lot. The neighborhood had changed from Middle Class to poor; most of the church members lived at a distance and drove to worship.

The front door on the street side was rarely opened. I suppose it just did not seem necessary. That new pastor changed that. The door was opened EVERY DAY.

She started a weekly coffee hour for street people—and there were many in that area—that coincided with a Bible study held just off the narthex where the coffee pot stood.

Gradually, some of the coffee drinkers, especially on cool or rainy days, would stand or sit near the Bible study group. Some repeaters moved a little closer each week until finally a few were even inside the circle!

That pastor opened the church doors. She invited strangers in. She started computer literacy classes for welfare mothers. She and some of the laity did a community survey to find out who was there and what unmet spiritual and social needs the people might have. Based on what was learned, the church organized an interethnic summer enrichment program for children and youth.

The congregation began Friday night community dinners that provided after dinner tutoring for children, and parenting classes for young mothers and fathers. The dinners were not catch-as-catch-can events, but carefully planned, served dinners, using china and metal cutlery. “These children of this neighborhood deserve the best we can provide,” the pastor explained. Recipients of weekly food rations (distributed at the church) began to volunteer to help with the dinners.

I have used a rather long story deliberately because in it we can find many of the ingredients of what I mean when I speak of community ministry, by which I mean the witness and work of Jesus Christ in a specific place—your place, my place: our churches.

Components of Community Ministry

Effective, sustainable community ministry that puts our faith and love into action consists of at least four components, or qualities:

①First, Openness. The Long Beach pastor was shocked into doing a very simple thing: She opened the church doors! She and some members swept the dust and cobwebs out of the corners and from along the facing. They polished the literature rack inside the door and put some flowers on the table. The church door is an important symbol.

Through no lack of malice, although perhaps with some degree of fear of strangers, that congregation had barred its front door, and was using the back entrance into its Holy Space. I doubt that they realized what this said to the neighbors.

Once the door was opened from the inside, it was easier for the pastor and church members to go out into the community, to find out about their neighbors and their concerns. Good doors allow easy passage in two directions! Doors are real objects and they are also attitudes.

Is it any accident that the motto of Igniting Ministries, the media campaign of The United Methodist Church, is “Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors.”

The seeds of community ministry are in Bible study, worship, fellowship, and education within the church, the body of Christ; but the impact goes beyond the church walls, through the doors of God’s grace into the world of neighbors known and unknown.

②Second, community ministry is transformation—transformation of both church and community. In describing the Community and Institutional Ministries Program Area of the General Board of

Global Ministries, *The Discipline* defines the unit's objective, in part, as that of forging "strategies for church and community development." That program area of the Board is quite deliberately yoked in our structure with the Evangelization and Church Growth Program Area.

Community ministry and evangelism stand together as common tasks and common joys in Christian discipleship. Community ministry looks at a specific place and lays plans, with God's guidance, to transform both the church and the neighborhood.

The Long Beach church that is serving as my example needed a revived and transformed spirit. It was in a rut. It needed to hear that its neighbors did not even know a church was there!

Can you think of a worse indictment of a Christian congregation? Its neighbors did not know it was there! That congregation did experience a transformation. It did not double its membership overnight but it was transformed in its attitude toward its immediate place of ministry and in its understanding of itself.

Transformation of church and community can take many forms. We have a church in Peralta, New Mexico, that has engaged in recent months in a remarkable community ministry that is transforming church and community. Now, the Peralta UMC does not have unlimited growth potential but it has added members in recent years. The village has only 4,000 people. Last Fall, when a confirmation class was being planned, some adults, already church members, asked if they could take part, to review what it meant to be a Christian and a United Methodist. "Sure," the pastor said.

So then, some members of the local Roman Catholic Church asked if they could sit in—not necessarily to become United Methodists but because they, too, wanted to revisit the basics of faith. "Why not," the pastor agreed.

The confirmation class, which continued over many months, had 77 members!

It became a community Christian education experience, ecumenical in spirit and content; Anglo and Hispanic, with field trips to a synagogue in Albuquerque. On Pentecost, about half of the members of the class joined the Peralta United Methodist Church. The congregation is progressively transformed; the community is increasingly transformed, especially when the church backs up its community education with teen sports programs, Scout troops, 4-H programs, a food pantry, and an Alzheimer's Support Group and other ministries to persons in crises. Transformation!

One of my colleagues at the General Board gives me reports on a large metropolitan congregation that is undergoing transformation in part because it has embraced the homeless population in its community---and it has a large homeless population.

The homeless men and women have in turned embraced the church, which not only has a shelter but also has fought—in court—for the right of the homeless to use the church steps when the building is not open. The church won its case. It told the city, in effect, "our steps are part of our ministry, the steps go into the community; the steps bring the community to us." It is not surprising to see homeless people in worship at that Fifth Avenue church.

A few years back, the congregation sponsored a New Year's Day Lunch for the homeless.

"We need to start the New Year together because we are neighbors," the pastor said.

Third, meeting human needs. Social, economic, and health programs are perhaps the most common images we have of community ministry, and, indeed, they are important while not exhaustive of the field. The United Methodist Church has a strong and illustrious record in this area and we continue to develop new forms as new opportunities and challenges arise. Our church-related hospital, child-care and senior citizen facilities, and community centers are all expressions of this heritage. In our connectional system, we have often joined together regionally to provide a vast range of services that respond to human needs.

United Methodists have taken very seriously the profound comment by the Prophet Jeremiah: “Everyone helps his neighbor” (Jeremiah 41:6).

The General Board of Global Ministries continues to relate to some 70 Community Centers across the country, including Northcott Neighborhood House in Milwaukee. These centers do wonderful work. Many, like Northcott, have strong programs for children and young people. Carlene Triplet, who is the liaison between the Board and Northcott, speaks with such enthusiasm about the after school programs that are conducted at the school sites.

Many congregations today find themselves called upon to respond to very local, very immediate human needs, especially as federal and state government welfare and job training programs have created gaps between needs and public services. We are seeing some new and some renewed patterns of response, some of which are cooperative and ecumenical.

I am familiar with several ecumenical or interfaith organizations in Milwaukee that engage in community organizing and community economic development. And, I am sure that United Methodists are part of the groups I know or others similar to them.

Our congregations and community centers across the country, rural and urban, are increasingly called upon to engage in ministries that build and operate low-income housing, provide job training, offer education for young parents, extend services for the disabled, and provide social opportunities for the elderly.

The Long Beach congregation to which I keep referring found new and important roles to play in meeting the needs of its community. In addition to the food, job training, and youth ministries it launched, that congregation became very active with other organizations in providing counseling to abused women.

Down in the North Alabama Conference, numerous congregations and United Methodist individuals have banded together to provide group homes and other services to mentally challenged adults.

They currently serve 30 adults in their residences and also provide summer camping experiences for a larger group of similarly handicapped adults who are recommended by congregations. I became aware of this program because United Methodist Residential Alternatives has for two years now sent volunteer teams to help at UMCOR’s Sager Brown material depot in Baldwin, Louisiana. The team has named itself “All God’s Children in Mission” and is one of the most productive and popular of the teams that come to Sager Brown.

Fourth and my final major point, community ministry represents comprehensive care for a place and its people. This quality unites openness, transformation, and creative response to human needs. If I had a biblical text for this point alone I would choose St. Paul’s comment in Romans 13:10: “Love does no wrong to a neighbor.” I treasure that verse of Scripture. I am convinced, that is where John Wesley got his admonition that Christians should do all the good they can and refrain from doing harm.

An excellent example of comprehensive Christian care for a community was featured in “Many Faces of Mission,” a late February GBGM insert in *The United Methodist Reporter*. Perhaps you saw it. I am referring to a story on the Tyro United Methodist Church, a large rural congregation in the Western North Carolina Conference.

A former pastor, now a district superintendent, is one of our primary consultants on town and country ministry at the General Board of Global Ministries.

The Tyro church was led by God a decade or so ago to see itself as responsible “before Jesus Christ” for the welfare of the entire community in its sector of Davidson County, North Carolina. And it meant the whole spectrum of community issues: spiritual welfare, yes, but also the economic, educational, and health needs of the people. Now that is quite a mandate to receive from

the Lord! The Tyro church took upon itself the concerns of United Methodists and non-United Methodists, of old-timers and new-comers, and people of all colors.

A few of the results at Tyro: An aggressive local television ministry....a community-based economic development corporation....a never-before available day care facility....a community library...a health clinic, that for a time operated in the Sunday school wing of the church....a new community center....a sewer system....and plans for a new rural supermarket when the completed sewer system will permit, and a butcher's shop. The church-organized "West Davidson Day" brings together people from the whole area to build a sense of community and introduce neighbors to one another.

The Tyro congregation holds firmly to the belief that to make disciples, persons must be disciples," and that means comprehensive care for the entire community.

Let me share one other example, and this is my final point, of comprehensive care for the community. It comes from then Minnesota Annual Conference, the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, and I like to think of it as comprehensive care in the making. The goal is very broad but the program so far focuses on a food collaborative. Five local churches have made a covenant to work together in local urban ministry. The five are Mounds Park and Hmong Asbury in St. Paul, and Christ, Epworth, and Woodbury in Minneapolis. Their food program is itself remarkable, reaching some 300 people.

Painted on the side of the delivery truck are these words, "Food Given in the Name of Jesus Christ." Area residents and recipients of the food are invited to get involve in the ministry, and that is happening.

What touches me to the heart is the covenant statement that will take the collaborative into many others forms of ministry. It is short: "We are United Methodist partners, commissioned by God to act in justice, peace, and love. Through the Spirit of Christ, we strengthen our faith by risking mission together to bring the hope of the Gospel for community transformation with open hearts and hands."

I pray that God through the Spirit will strengthen us all to risk together the mission of hope that transforms our churches, our communities, and ourselves.

Amen.

Thank you.

Deborah E. Bass

THE GREATEST CHALLENGE: LIVING IN COMMUNITY IN A CULTURE OF INDIVIDUALISM

By Dan R. Dick

Community is a word that holds a prominent place in the Christian faith. We speak of faith communities, of building community, of reaching out to the community, and from the “common” root word – *commūnis* (*commūnis* means “common”) – comes the word communion. Intellectually, Christians hold community in high esteem, but the practicality of true community is eclipsed in our North American culture by a hearty and irresistible individuality. The rights and privileges of the individual rank among our highest lived values. “Standing up on our own two feet, looking out for number one, God helps those who help themselves,” and other gems pepper not only our speech, but our thinking and faith as well. The language of individualism permeates all aspects of life in the United States, including the church. The historic confessions so carefully crafted to begin “We believe...” have fallen from favor in mainline churches – congregational worship includes a credal confession only about 15% of the time – down from well over 90% prior to 1970. Instead, the language of confession is framed in “I” and “my” language – “I believe,” “I know Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior...” The language of our hymnody reflects the change – the vast majority of hymns from the 19th century were cast in communal terms – “we,” “our,” while the majority of 20th century hymns favored the singulars “I,” “me,” “mine,” and the current trend in praise music is deeply individualistic. “Now Thank We All Our God,” shifted to “Blessed Assurance, Jesus Is Mine,” and “A Mighty Fortress is Our God,” lost ground to “I walk through the garden alone.” While the individual relationship to God is important, maintaining a balance is important, but growing more difficult all the time.

Within Methodism, even the fundamentals of Wesley’s instruction – the practice of the means of grace -- changed from the practices of corporate piety employed whenever people of faith gathered, to practices of personal piety and private devotion. The majority of people in our denomination, when asked if they pray or read the Bible, respond from an individualistic perspective. Barna research indicates that while over 95% of self-professing Christians say that they pray, only 27% of those say that they pray with others. 87% read the Bible regularly, but only 16% read the Bible and discuss it with at least one other person. Christian faith and spiritual development in the United States is primarily viewed as a private act.

What then, does this mean for Christian community and our understanding of Christian discipleship? While community is still central to our language, is it truly central to our practice of discipleship?

The 1990’s saw a significant rise in Christian believers and seekers who claim to be, “spiritual, but not religious.” A frequent corollary to this line of thinking is that religion somehow impedes authentic spiritual growth, therefore it is better to avoid institutions that want to define the spiritual life. Every spiritual person should have unlimited freedom to seek and discover what works for them. This commitment to a customized “pick and choose” spiritual journey honors the individual’s needs, hopes, and experiences over any form of tradition, doctrine, or denominational identity.

Is this really a problem? Perhaps, perhaps not, but it deserves some serious exploration. Our religious heritage is the heritage first of a people – the Hebrew people – who identified themselves as a dynamic and integrated collective – the sin of any one person was the sin of all. From this sense of identity emerged community codes grounded in relationship to God and neighbor. Prophetic calls to repentance were extended to communities, tribes, villages, and towns, not just to individuals.

With the coming of the Christ, this sense of shared identity was reinforced. The majority of Jesus’ teachings – including the famous “you” sayings (you are the light of the world, the salt of the

earth, a city on a hill) – are in the plural, not the singular. The gospel, at its heart, is a deeply relational Good News – meant to be shared in an ever-widening circle of community.

Paul builds his theology on this interrelated foundation. Perhaps one of the most compelling of all of Paul’s metaphors from scripture is that of the *corpus Christi* – the body of Christ. In this image, both the individuality of the members and the integration into a larger whole are beautifully blended. As individual’s, we can only go so far, but together synergy occurs – we become greater than the sum of our parts.

Let me change direction for a moment and ask you a question? Following a long list of instructions on Christian conduct in the sermon on the mount in Matthew 5, Jesus closes with this stunning admonition: “Be perfect, therefore, as God in heaven is perfect.” How many of you gathered here are perfect? Show me your hands... How many of us, no matter how hard we try, how diligently we attempt to improve, can ever hope to achieve “perfection?” Is this some kind of joke? Would Jesus actually ask something of us that is impossible to accomplish? There’s got to be something else at work here...

Often things get lost in translation, and in fact “perfect” may not be the most accurate translation of the Greek term, or the earlier Aramaic root. (Greek was the written language of our gospels, translating and interpreting the colloquial Aramaic spoken in Jesus’ day.) In Aramaic, the concept of “perfection” was closer to our words “integrity” or “balance” – the ability to maintain complete consistency in thought, word, and deed. The concept further indicates an unwavering nature and the ability to stay focused. To be perfect, then, is to live a life of pure and total integrity. Not much help...

In the Greek, what we translate “perfect” is the word “*teleios*.” A purer translation of the word *teleios* would be “true,” rather than “perfect,” however, the word “true” still requires some definition. *Teleios* – truth – means the highest, purest form – the ideal. To be perfect in this way means to embody and model our full potential – physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Once more, it implies a complete alignment toward our deepest values.

It seems that Jesus might actually mean what he says – there is an expectation that we will be perfect as God is perfect, and therein lies the clue – we will be perfect, together. Jesus uses the plural when he offers this instruction – what is truly impossible for any one of us alone becomes the defining vision for Christian community.

Each of us is individually gifted, but as Paul so eloquently teaches in I Corinthians each is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the “common good,” and reinforces in Ephesians, that we are gifted, “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” Together we are reformed as “a holy temple in the Lord, built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.” In Paul’s view, church is not a location to which individuals travel, but the church is the living body of Christ from which each of us extends into the world. We are not the church by ourselves – we are only the church in communion.

The implications of this are staggering. We live in a highly individualistic culture. To be the church – to make a commitment to be a fully integrated member of a faith community – is to take a counter-cultural stand. It means that we reevaluate our very sense of identity – asking not, “who am I,” but “who am I in relationship with?”... and more importantly, “who are we?”

Developmental psychology offers a simple, yet significant, progression for the human lifespan. When we are born, we are immersed in a condition of complete and utter dependence – we cannot survive unless cared for by another. From birth, we begin a process of individuation – a breaking from dependency to independence, where we can care for ourselves, make our own decisions, and create the kind of life we choose. Parents know how difficult this evolutionary process can be from the “terrible twos” through later childhood pushing the limits to early adolescence and times of outright rebellion. While normal and healthy, this process is almost always painful and frustrating as well. Throughout childhood, independence is our “promised land” – the goal around

which we organize our lives. We gain validation and a new sense of self as we are able to care for ourselves, make our own decisions, and – at least appear to – control our won destiny.

Yet another normal progression is from independence to interdependence – an acknowledgment that – while we are able to fend for ourselves – there are great benefits to living in relationship with others. At a personal level, we join our life to the life of another to form the most basic unit of community – friendship. Friendship from the base of interdependence is very different from an independence base. In our independence, there are always walls clearly defining the “I” from the “thou.” In interdependence, those barriers soften – “I and thou” become truly “Us,” reflecting the profound truth espoused by Martin Buber, “I am in that thou art.” In more recent times, Desmond Tutu teaches a philosophy of “ubuntu” – identity is not formed by individuals, but in community. Ubuntu teaches that I cannot be fully me until I am in healthy relationship with you. No one can come to wholeness in isolation from community. Buber and Tutu remind us of the earlier teachings of Jesus and Paul. We can only go so far on our own. Authentic Christian discipleship requires us to travel our journey of faith *together*. When we combine our knowledge, skills, resources, and needs with others and we are all better off for the effort. When the good of the whole is kept in sight we can even achieve God’s intended synergy – greater together than any can hope to be alone.

This takes me to a side road, but a significant detour, nonetheless. Interdependence is central to the vision of the United Methodist Church, and has been since its inception. The model of a “connectional church” is unique, and we should have an advantage in offering a countercultural witness. It is significant that so many people challenge the efficacy of the connectional model. What once was viewed as our greatest strength is frequently called into question as one of our most serious liabilities. A commitment to interdependence would call us to a deeper connectionalism.

The movement from independence to interdependence creates a constant tension – balancing the needs and desires of the individual with the good of the community. Where individual needs are considered more important than the needs of the community, competition ensues. If the needs of the community supercede the needs of the individual, accommodation occurs and individuals find themselves less motivated to be creative, productive, or to learn and grow. Compromise balances some of the needs of the individual with the larger needs of the community, but settles for less than either side ideally desires.

Our gospels call us to another alternative. We do not have to settle for compromise. In Christian community we have the opportunity to collaborate to achieve the highest possible potential of the community by empowering and equipping individuals to live as the body of Christ in the world.

What is required to move us to this higher standard, this commitment to collaboration and a radical interdependence? I believe that we will only reclaim community, only offer a truly countercultural witness through covenant. Covenant is much more than a contract, than an agreement for mutual benefit. Covenant is a spiritual act. Covenant is centered in God. Covenant is a radical reorientation whereby we are transformed. My definition of covenant is “relationship grounded in significant promise.” Relationship grounded in significant promise means we connect, we unite, we care as much about each other as we care for ourselves. Our relationship is characterized by the highest expectations that we will achieve our greatest God-given potential. And we invest the very best we have to offer, willingly accepting the best that others offer as well.

The body of Christ encompasses unity and great diversity. As a society and as a church, we struggle with both. Few people claim to be fundamentally different from others. Studies show that commitment to safety, basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing, and placing a high value on relationships are universal to almost all people. Looking no further than these few values – we should be able to find much in common to support and defend. Yet, our tendency is to focus on our differences rather than our similarities, and our differences tear us apart. We profess a deep appreciation for diversity, then do everything in our power to disenfranchise those who are differ-

ent. We embrace diversity as an abstract ideal, not as a lived reality. What stands in our way of truly embracing diversity?

First of all, we do. Each of us lives in what Mortimer J. Adler labels, “the normative perspective.” The normative perspective reflects our personal point of view. I am standing here, looking at all of you. This view is valid, accurate, informative, and true – but it is not the only view. While it is normative for me – it is normative for no one else in this room. The same goes for our beliefs. No person intentionally decides to believe in something that is not true – it makes sense to us, it explains the world, it has meaning – otherwise we wouldn’t believe it. The problem comes when we believe that our normative perspective should be shared by all – if it makes sense to us, shouldn’t it make sense to everyone? The problem is that we confuse opinion with truth – our personal point of view with knowledge. Diversity is an affront to the very worldview that provides stability and balance. Different worldviews call my own into question, and that can be a very uncomfortable place. It is one thing for me to be me and for you to be you, but quite another when in order for you to be you, I can no longer comfortably be me. Think of almost any conflict occurring within our church today, and see if this doesn’t explain a lot. (Illustrate with examples from church/connection) To accept another worldview may mean I have to abandon my own.

This is evidence that we are mired in the cultural quagmire of independence. Independence is about drawing lines and setting limits. Individually, it is how I define myself apart from the rest of the world. For a congregation, it is the way we differentiate “us” from “them.” At the denominational level, it causes us to resent the general church, and behave congregationally rather than connectionally.

The call to true Christian community through authentic discipleship invites us to leave independence for interdependence, and the path is simple. Simple, but not easy. Interdependence requires one thing – that we expand the circle that defines “us,” and eliminates any barrier that defines “them.” “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal 3:28) Christ has broken down the dividing wall, the hostilities between us. We are encouraged to have the same mind that is in Christ Jesus, to regard others as better than ourselves. Jesus prays that his disciples may enter into the oneness with each other that Jesus himself knows with God, and that indeed that oneness might unite them all. Our act of holy communion – that word again, communion – pleads that we might become one with Christ, one with each other, and one in service to all the world. We must be careful what we ask for – for we are claiming less of ourselves individually in order to become the body of Christ. We are accepting a radical non-duality as the body of Christ. No longer is there an us and a them, an inside and an outside, a who belongs and who doesn’t. We are choosing another course – a course of acceptance rather than judgment. A course of tolerance rather than blaming. A course of service rather than entitlement. We become the model for a “more excellent way,” – a way of love and kindness, mercy and grace. We say to the world, we are one – one in the spirit, one in Christ Jesus, one with the creation of God that God calls “good.” Not one of us here can do this alone. If God will prevail, if the love of Christ will be known, if the power of the Spirit will transform and save lives, it will be through the community – the people called to be a people, the body of Christ. Amen.

1. How do we define community in our church? Who is “us?” Who is “them?” What are we doing/can we do to expand our definition of “us?”
2. In what ways do we offer a message of interdependence to counter the cultural commitment to individuality?
3. In what ways might our connectional structure encourage and empower greater interdependence? How does it do so now?

MESSAGE OF THE CONFERENCE LAY LEADER

Sheri Graeber

WE are the church. WE are in ministry together in the world. WE share one faith and one hope: Jesus Christ. WE are on a journey together in Wisconsin. Do these words sound familiar? These are words we have all heard from our Bishop!

Our Bishop not only spoke these words; she modeled them as well. She is genuinely and sincerely interested in empowering laity to do ministry. I'd like to share a few examples. When the Lay Ministry Academy was emerging as a vision, our Bishop was an integral part of the planning team. She helped us open doors, find leaders, and access resources. Most importantly, she offered her *presence* among us as a leader in our opening sessions. And such leadership she offered us: she shared words of inspiration and encouragement; she shared HER story with us; AND she sat among us and listened! As our vision grew, we began another path on our journey with Faith Alive! Our Bishop was once again among us, listening to our deepest yearnings and worked with us to help them take shape. She helped us find leaders who would guide us, challenge us, and inspire us. And once again, she shared her commitment to us by serving as one of our retreat leaders. When the Culture of the Call event was envisioned, our Bishop included laity in all facets of planning and participation. As our Annual Conference has grown and changed, our Bishop has insured lay and clergy partnership in conference leadership such as reorganization, transformation, personnel committee, leadership council, and circuit leader training just to name a few.

Laity experience vital leadership preparation in partnership with clergy to be in ministry not within the church building but in the community. Because of your leadership, we can join hands together around tables and say **WE ARE THE CHURCH**.

Bishop, we celebrate your ministry among us. We celebrate your servant leadership. We thank you for sharing this journey with us. You have walked with us as Jesus walked with disciples and seekers long ago. You have nurtured us and helped us grow. We are truly blessed by your presence among us. And we know that **WE ARE THE CHURCH TOGETHER**.

“HAVE THE MIND OF JESUS CHRIST”

Bishop Oh-Suh Kwon
Text: Philippians 2:1-11

Introduction

It is a great joy for me to visit Wisconsin Annual Conference for the second time following my first visit last year. I am especially happy to meet you and worship with you, brothers and sisters in Christ, on this blessed Lord's day.

As the resident Bishop of the Eastern Annual Conference of the Korean Methodist Church, representing 600 churches, 750 pastors, 110,000 members, I greet you in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. May the peace of our Lord be with you all!

During the Eastern Annual Conference held from April 12th to 14th, the sister relationship between the Wisconsin Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church and the Eastern Annual Conference of the Korean Methodist Church was made official.

The Eastern Annual Conference had the honor of having Bishop Rader, her Cabinet and the Director of Outreach Ministry, Rev. Jane Folmer Zikoff. I would like to express my deep appreciation of their making special effort to visit the Eastern Annual of Conference of South Korea. We had a meaningful time together.

I hope and pray that our sister relationship will benefit both Annual Conferences greatly in the future.

Main Body

I have three dreams for us to achieve in the future through our sister relationship between the Wisconsin Annual Conference and the Eastern Annual Conference.

My first dream is “Growth through mutual learning.”

In Philippians 2:1-4, St. Paul tells us that there are certain principles in Christian fellowship. In verse 2, he says, “be of the same mind.” In verse 3, he says, “count others better than yourselves.” In verse 4, he says, “let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

There is a reason for his requesting all these. In verse 2, St. Paul says, “to make my joy complete.” What does it mean? It means that St. Paul wants the Christians in Philippi to give him joy by being in such a good Christian fellowship. It was St. Paul's desire that Christians in Philippi would be in good Christian fellowship. I believe that it is also our Lord, Jesus Christ's desire for us to be in good Christian relationship.

Jesus wants Christians to give him joy by cultivating a beautiful relationship. As in the Korean hymn “I want to be Christ's joy,” Jesus wants us to be his joy by our being in a good relationship between the two Annual Conferences.

What attitude would we need in order for us to become Christ's joy? As verse 4 says, we need the attitude of looking not only to “our own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

Our being in sister relationship means that we can learn from each other. Sister relationship doesn't mean that either party gives or receives one-sidedly. We can learn and be influenced from each other. Therefore, we ought to aim to grow through mutual learning in our sister relationship.

When I visited Wisconsin Annual Conference last year, I learned a lot from observing how you run your Annual Conference. It was an eye opening experience for me to learn that Annual Conference can be a fun and celebratory event, not just a dry parliamentary procedure.

After I returned to Korea, I applied what I had learned in Wisconsin Annual Conference to the Eastern Annual Conference. The result was a great success! I have received many positive responses from the Conference delegates on the change they perceived in our Conference culture. They all said to me, "Bishop Kwon, we really enjoyed the new way of conferencing in our Annual Conference."

Now let me venture to say that just as the Korean Methodist Church learned a lot from the Wisconsin Conference, Wisconsin Conference can learn from the Korean Methodist Church. For one thing, I think that the Wisconsin Annual Conference will benefit from learning the passion and zeal for the ministry in the Korean Methodist Church.

In Korea, church growth is impossible without pastors' leading special prayer meetings like Early Morning Prayer Service that meets at 5 am every morning and All Night Long Prayer Meeting on Friday nights. Pastors encourage their church members to attend these prayer meetings by leading the exemplary prayer life themselves. Korean pastors and lay people believe in the power of prayer and as a result, we are experiencing the miracles of prayer. I am convinced that the Korean Church can share these spiritual dynamics with American Church.

As our sister relationship evolves, many specific programs will be created and implemented. Programs like "Sabbatical Exchange Program", "Youth Exchange Program" will enhance our mutual learning experience.

The second dream I have through our Sister Relationship is "peace".

Verses 5-8 talks about "Jesus who came in the form of a servant" Jesus is the Son of God who created this universe. Jesus is the Lord and he is the master of your life and mine. Everything we own belongs to him. Yet, he came in the form of a servant. Not only that, but he humbled himself and became obedient unto death. Why did he come as a servant? To bring peace into the world. On the day Jesus arrived in this world, the Bible describes the moment of his coming to the world by saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!" (Luke 2:14)

Friends! Jesus came to the world in the form of a servant to bring peace into the world. Therefore, we, as the followers of Jesus, should strive to be peace-makers in the world.

Korea is the only divided country in the world. Despite her 5000 years of history, Korea suffered the division in the 20th century and still remains divided in 21st century with all the wounds unhealed.

Knowing the brokenness of Korea, Korean Church is eager to pray for and support of mission in North Korea. We are spreading gospel among Korean-Chinese immigrants in China and are training them to be future evangelists for North Koreans in the preparation of the reunification of the two Koreas.

I am convinced that not the political reunification but the gospel of Christ is the only way to heal the broken hearts and to reunify the divided minds of Korean people.

When the Bishop Rader and her Cabinet and Rev. Jane Zikoff came to Korea, we had the chance to visit the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) together. We saw that there was train rail that was stopped by numerous landmines, artilleries guns and soldiers. We saw that there was a road that we were not allowed to take. There we prayed for the peaceful reunification of two Koreas. I still remember vividly that Bishop Rader prayed in tears for the healing of brokenness of two Koreas.

Beloved members of Wisconsin Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church! I am asking you to pray for peace in the Korean Peninsula. We, Korean Methodists, will pray for the United States of America.

Even though the Unites States is still in the quagmire of war against Iraq, even though the United States is being criticized for the inhumane mistreatment of Iraqi POWs(Prisoners Of War), we,

Korean Christians, will pray for the United States so that the U.S will use its power for the justice and peace of the world.

When I return to Korea after my visit here, I am planning to visit Pyongyang, with other Bishops from ten Annual Conferences of the Korean Methodist Church. They say that there are churches in Pyongyang. But the churches in North Korea are just nominal churches.

During my visit to North Korea, I want to renew my vision to evangelize North Korea. I pray that the gospel of Jesus Christ will transform North Korea and help prevent her from becoming a threat to world peace. I would appreciate it if you pray for our peace-making effort in Korea. It is my hope and prayer that the Wisconsin Annual Conference and the Eastern Annual Conference continue to spread the seeds of world peace through the gospel of Jesus Christ! I want us to be faithful disciples of Jesus who worked for peace unto death.

My third dream is to build healthy church and healthy Annual Conference through our sister relationship. We say we are healthy when our body parts do their function well. Hands have the function of maneuvering. Feet have the function of walking around. Ears have the function of hearing. Mouth has the function of speaking. Likewise, our churches and our Annual Conferences should function well so that we may become healthy church and healthy Annual Conference.

What does it mean by “the function well of the church”? We can find the answer in verse 11 when it says, “to the glory of God, the Father.” “The glory of God” may sound somewhat vague to us. But verses 9 and 10 clarify the meaning of it. It is written, “God raised him up to the heights of heaven and gave him a name which is above every other name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth.”

In other words, the function of the church is to glorify God by witnessing Jesus Christ in the world. By witnessing the gospel of Jesus Christ, by making the power of the gospel of Jesus available in the non-believer world, we can glorify God. In a nutshell, we should glorify God by evangelism.

If the United States had not sent missionaries to Korea about one century ago, the church growth in Korea would not have been possible. Thanks to American Church, Korea has become one of the few countries that are sending missionaries in the world.

Unfortunately, the zeal for evangelism and mission seems to have dwindled in the U.S.A, especially in the U.M.C.. Although the U.M.C. still send many missionaries around the world, it seems that it has decreased, compared to the past.

It is my strong belief that we need to make special effort in evangelism and mission in order for us to be healthy church and healthy Annual Conference.

I pray that we will become healthy church and healthy Annual Conference by rekindling the enthusiasm and zeal for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

I hope and pray that three wonderful things will happen through our sister relationship between the Wisconsin Annual Conference and the Eastern Annual Conference. The three wonderful things are, “growth through mutual learning, peace in the every corner of the world, and healthy church and healthy Annual Conference through witnessing the gospel of Christ in the world.”

May God bless our sister relationship so that we may glorify God through our cooperation and fellowship in Christ.

May God bless you all! Amen!

MESSAGE OF THE CABINET

Bishop Sharon Rader and members and friends of the Wisconsin Annual Conference, it is an honor and privilege to share with you the common vision and directions of the Wisconsin Conference Cabinet.

We offer our gratitude and thanksgiving to God for the many ways that all of you, the clergy and laity, give faithful service and witness to Christ's Church and its mission. Because of your commitment and leadership, we, Wisconsin Annual Conference, makes a difference both in our own communities and the global world.

We understand the Cabinet's primary task as providing spiritual leadership that supports and encourages clergy and congregations in their ministries of witness and service to the world. Whenever we gather together as the Cabinet leadership we affirm effective, healthy leadership, which would not happen without spiritual transformation or formation. So we intentionally focus on worshipping community and spiritual formation and see that authentic transformation happens-to call the church to spiritual renewal and change.

In this Annual Conference we celebrate Bishop Rader's twelve years of ministry in Wisconsin and they have been marvelous years under her Episcopal leadership. We give our thanks and gratitude to our God because of her self-giving and creative leadership.

As we gather together here, we can assure you that the state of our Church in Wisconsin is alive in Christ and growing with the help of the Holy Spirit. We are not perfect, but we are working at it. We are not in total agreement on some issues, but we are working on those.

We celebrate of the deep faith of all the people in our Church and move constantly toward friendly, open and welcoming Church in Wisconsin, yet schism talk may be a strong challenge to our Church today.

We celebrate how many people are eager to be involved in the leadership of the Church, clergy and laity, youth, women and men, young and old, poor and rich, and all diverse people in Wisconsin.

Bishop Sharon Rader has lived and worked among us with refreshing vision, courage and compassionate care;

Sacramental community and Kingdom table of inclusiveness: Bishop Rader has guided us and demanded that we build our Annual Conference as a sacramental community. She has called us to be a model community and for deepened communion with the living God.

Her invitation to the Cabinet table leadership was a strong intention to live and create a kingdom table of inclusiveness. Our Cabinet has been a blessed community and practiced profoundly prophetic vision.

As we initiate together for expanding cross-racial appointments, we believe that our commitment to the church be truly inclusive, with leaders who will provide what we need, without regard to the person's racial /cultural background. The highest ideals of inclusion are made manifest when we are doing cross-racial appointments. People see the ministry of the church being carried out without barriers of race or culture getting in the way.

Inclusiveness in our Conference is a gift, and collectively we long for God's kingdom table of inclusiveness as our future. Thanks to her intentional leadership we hope to continue our commitment to build a kingdom table for everybody who belongs and is woven into all of life and all of creation.

Connectional Church and the active mission outreach: Bishop Rader reaches out to clergy and laity and has been a faithful witness of United Methodism as a connectional Church. She called

Wisconsin United Methodist to serve not only locally, but also internationally, because we are a connectional Church. Our commitment to General Church connectional giving has been strong and 100% and we hope we will continue our Christian witness to the whole world. Common Thread is a district wide movement for increasing awareness of connectional giving. Congregations in the Chippewa District participated and they heard stories about how their apportionment giving has affected people's lives throughout the state, nation and the world. This movement will continue to the Coulee District in the fall and more to come.

We give thanks to our partnerships with many different Conferences, Bolivia Methodist Church, Rio Grande Conference, Cuba Methodist Church, and the Sister relationship with Dongbu Conference in Korean Methodist Church. Early April, our Cabinet joined traveled to Dongbu Annual Conference in Korea and we shared deeply in mutual support and dialogue. Their hospitality was delightful and renewed our Christian fellowship throughout the trip. We enjoyed God's activities in Korean Church that refreshed and renewed our spirits.

Culture of unity and mutual accountability: Bishop Rader has lived the unity in the Christian community. She accepts and embraces the differences of people and demonstrated her deep commitment to Christian unity. Wisconsin United Methodists are progressing continually living community of unity spirit and we hope to live without distractions in the living body of Christ. We invite all of our Wisconsin United Methodists to unit in diversity through accepting and embracing each other's differences.

We need to focus on Christ's mission and ministry in the context of ever-present grace of loving God. Even though schism talk may be a strong challenge to our church today, we will continue to be one Body in our vital relationship with Christ. As a Christian community, we need to outstretch our living space and include all God's children.

Since last Annual Conference, we are called to live and lead in the transformational process toward the Circuit Ministry. The vision of Circuit Ministry is clear and challenging, and we see this as the future of the ministry in Wisconsin. This fires up our life together and created a critical sense of urgency. Even though we are a very faithful people, yet far too many churches remain stuck in the past and the current challenge of the ministry calls us to an emerging way of God's kingdom and ministry in Wisconsin.

Bishop Rader named the transformational team and we moved together toward an effective organizational change through the Circuit Ministry formation. We believe the Circuit plan will facilitate creative partnership of our clergy colleagues and laity leadership, and cultivate necessary change for achievement of God's kingdom goals.

Wisconsin United Methodists are calling the urgently for change and we are witnessing the emergence of a new world. God is calling among us to cast the net toward the other side of the boat.

We believe the Circuit Ministry Plan values shared leadership and team ministry at the highest level.

At its core, the Circuit ministry is the effort of clergy and laity to conference together to fulfill the vision of Jesus Christ for the church by remembering who we are and where God is calling us to go. It is obeying commands of Jesus Christ, "casting the net to the other side," in today's mission field.

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

Celebrate our Wisconsin United Methodist Church where our active discipleship already grows.

Rich racial ethnic communities that grow in new faith communities in Green Bay: Hmong, Hispanic, Korean, Philipinos, Native Americans, Indian in South Asia, African and Afro-American traditions that flow from around the globe and flow into all of Wisconsin land through cross-racial appointments. Disciple Bible Study has become a significant outreach opportunity in the Winne-

bago area. What started as the self funded efforts of a few lay persons is now providing for deepening faith and understanding of Scripture for several groups of prisoners and lay leaders involved in Disciple 1 and Disciple 2 with plans for offering Disciple

In Metro region, we have enjoyed a deepening partnership with Ministry with the City. There has been exciting progress made on obtaining a house of rehab, Sidewalk Sunday School, Spanish language classes, and collaborative new faith community development between existing churches and the new ethnic population. CETA and Bayview, Principede paz and Racine: First. In the Capital area, Madison Asbury UMC is planning and working toward an extension site in the Verona area. New faith community development is steadily growing in many different areas in Wisconsin.

Share deeply in mutual support and dialogue:

We need to support our common vision as Wisconsin United Methodists. Circuit Ministry is not a new concept in Wesleyan tradition, yet it is a new calling and radical discipleship in our culture. We need the support of the community to do it. And as we share with one another our various ways of spending time with God, our Christian journey will grow both full and clear.

Examine our corporate life and live prophetically:

If we live God's grace, love and justice, then we must dare claim God's abundant blessings for all people, including the poor, including our selves. Wisconsin is a beautiful land and some even claim it is a center of the world.

We need to tend our environment as a treasure for the ages. To do such in our materially driven culture is to walk the way of the prophets.

Our financial stewardship needs to be examined again and bring the gratitude giving as a high value because God is abundant and surely we are blessed.

In post 911 and Iraq war we know how hard it is to claim love and justice as a common value. For our own particular age we seek a clearer vision.

What kind of living do we need to claim of our congregations? Districts? Conference? What forms of true spirituality do we need to live out?

Come again and again to the table where we are truly fed:

The table of God's kingdom is far simpler and it is for all. Its nourishment is deep. It is the table of the One who says, "Take. Eat. This is my body. This is my blood. This is for you." In coming regularly to the table of our Lord, in searching out the times of this and in living the discipline of it, we shall together enter the ever-widening mystery of grace that breathes through the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ in Wisconsin Annual Conference.

The Cabinet is committed to work for this special time of transition and will listen attentively from you, Wisconsin United Methodist family.

We wish to express again our deep appreciation for Bishop Sharon Rader. We are deeply grateful for her servant leadership, her love to the church, and her prophetic voices.

By Hee-Soo Jung, Dean of the Cabinet, Wisconsin

2004 STATE OF THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE CONFERENCE COUNCIL ON YOUTH MINISTRIES

Good Afternoon Annual Conference Delegates! Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share with you all the wonderful gifts that this Conference has been blessed with through the incredible youth of your local churches. I am the Graduating-President of the Conference Council on Youth Ministries Kaitlyn Aliota, and proud member of the First United Methodist Church in Downtown Madison. At this time I would like to thank the Bishop who has steadfastly and most-willingly served the Youth of Wisconsin wholeheartedly and with an ever-contagious spirit of God and faith. Your guidance and support have impacted so many and it is our hope that you keep in touch, and always allow God to bless your youthful heart.

I speak on behalf of the thousands of youth within our Conference who, unfortunately, could not be present with us this evening. May I provide a little insight attesting to the wonderful year that the Conference Council on Youth Ministries has had, and a little hope and prayer for the years to come.

“We want more than this world’s got to offer.” The youth of the Wisconsin Annual Conference pray by this simple statement that has carried us through the trials and tribulations of life in the crazy world which we live. “We want more than this world’s got to offer.” The youth of the Conference seek more than the familiarities of daily life and search for an existence of meaning and substance. “We want more than this world’s got to offer.” And that is how we thrive amongst a society that tells us we’re wrong, unworthy, and of no value. Through WildFire! Ministry Missions to the primer graduating Youth Ministry Institute Class of 2004, the Conference Council on Youth Ministries has had a busy yet successful year—one in which we have proved our value, purpose, and belonging in the Kingdom of our God.

The Wisconsin Conference Council on Youth Ministries seeks to provide opportunities for youth to “Spread God’s Love,” through the WildFire! Youth in Missions experiences. These missions are designed to give youth an opportunity to serve God through serving others within the state, nationally, and internationally. WildFire! Youth in missions targets mission ministries that are specifically sponsored by the United Methodist Church connectional ministry. Each participant may experience serving God through providing construction labor for families, Vacation Bible School Ministries for children, and smiling faces for people who just need a friend to make their day. This past summer, hundreds of youth and adults traveled together across the nation to provide ministries for people in need. One trip went to Pennsylvania to paint, install carpet, construct wheelchair ramps, porches, handrails, and shelving, and assist with the local Vacation Bible School program. Days filled with long work were concluded by powerful late night worship. The bonds of friendship that were formed during the course of the week enhanced the entire experience. One student volunteer was quoted to say, “It was an awesome experience. God’s presence was greatly felt in the people we helped and in the ways we all got along and worked as a team.” This year youth and adults across the state have the opportunity to serve around the world. Mission trips will include destinations from the Madison Transitional Housing, Christian Disciple Farm, and Native American communities, to Atlanta, Georgia, Central Mexico, and the Philippines. It is our hope that God’s Love may be spread through these missions’ opportunities, and we are blessed to have the ability to serve our family in Christ.

Every four years, the United Methodist Youth Organization gathers youth from around the world to celebrate our United Methodism and God. This past summer, the youth of Wisconsin were fortunate enough to partake in the festivities of the highly acclaimed Youth 2003 event held in Knoxville, Tennessee. Taking seventy-five youth from our great Conference, we were able to participate in wonderful workshops and worship that left the over ten thousand attendees with an overwhelming sense of love and compassion for all present-and not present-at the event. Truly an

awe-inspiring experience, Youth 2003 was also the site for the biannual United Methodist Youth Organization Convocation. Gathering youth representatives from across the country, we daily-discussed issues that are pertinent to youth today including the General Conference's Shared Mission Focus on Young People Proposal. Much like our own Annual Conference, the results have already begun to impact the youth of the conferences and provide a better means of networking within and across jurisdictional lines.

With the help of the new Conference Youth Event Manager, Kris Pepper, the major events of the Conference Council on Youth Ministries, including the Conference Confirmation Retreat and Senior and Junior High CONVOS, were great successes across the border. Proving that the youth of Wisconsin are meant to live for so much more, these three events combined reached over twenty-five hundred youth and provided great stepping-stones to add to the foundation of a powerfully spiritual event ministry in the Wisconsin Conference.

In keeping with the "wanting more than the world has to offer" mentality, the Conference Council on Youth Ministries disbanded our previous event Youth Annual Conference in attempt to establish a new, more effective means of reaching youth across the state. Kicking off the initial year of the annual Regional Youth Conferences, each of the four regions in the Conference hosted a smaller but equally important gathering of youth to conduct the annual business of the Council. Each regional conference, held elections for the upcoming Council, worship services of varying bands and speakers, as well as a Festival of Ministries, a sort of "Talent Show for God," and an Issues Forum, in which two United Methodist adults were asked to come in and share opposing sides on a presented issue in a compassionate, Christian environment so that the youth of the Conference hear both sides of an issue in order to make a more informed decision or stance on such topics. Reaching over one hundred youth, the Regional Youth Conferences were very successful on all levels: from providing new ways of networking local churches to allowing youth to discuss the issues that matter to them most.

In this wonderful Conference of God, youth ministry is no longer a ministry where adults do planning to entertain youth—it is truly a team effort of ministry between youth, adults, and God, in which all three voices are heard equally. Through the establishment of the Safe Sanctuaries and Boundaries Workshops and the Youth Ministry Institute, adults in youth ministry can now receive adequate training to serve with youth in Wisconsin. These workshops and classes have been designed with youth in mind, and have provided many with the knowledge and experience that without these programs would go unnoticed and unfortunately overlooked. With the help of these programs, however, youth and adults are working together to make youth ministry a safe and enjoyable ministry for all involved. Because of the tremendous successes that we have been so blessed with, we, the youth, feel that our only limitation is finding adults who can provide guidance and support for the ministries that we would like to see created and continued in the Conference. Together, youth and adults are learning about one another, and making this world a place that offers more than it ever could alone. "We ARE meant to live for so much more," and it is our prayer that with your continued support and love, God may reach and bless the lives of so many more—and even if we reach only one within the next year, we will rejoice, for even that one is special to God. "We want more than this world's got to offer," and through your encouragement we will make it the better place we dream it to be.