

On Methodism

August 2009

An Open Article to the People of the UMC

Greetings, Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

We wonder at times—particularly at financially difficult times like these—how did we get in this situation? We are all aware that giving within the church has decreased, which diminishes the amount of monies available for mission and ministry. We've been worried and anxious about where we've been, where we are and where we're going. We've been concerned with protecting what we have; worrying that life as a UM as we know it—being in ministry and doing mission work to the world—just can't go on as it is.

It's okay to be concerned. Healthy concern allows us to open our hearts and minds to the existing situation. It is the nature of the community to be concerned about our collective futures. And this is not a time to chastise or criticize each other for expressing these concerns. This is a time for the faithful to take action to curb the effects of the economic challenges we face today. Out of our concerns can grow constructive actions.

In many arenas, bold and deliberate actions are being taken to curb the downturn and look to the future. Annual conferences across the connection have prayerfully given consideration to their expenses by rethinking finances and focusing on ministry. They are redirecting their efforts to enhance current and developing new ministries. Praise God for this creative thinking on the part of so many UMs across the connection.

The UMC is in the forefront of compassionate giving. A few examples of the way groups within the connection are living into the reality of a strained economy are exemplified in the reports from annual conferences and agency board meetings. Among them: reduction or no increase in salaries for conference staff in 2010; decreases or a freeze in current missional budgets among several annual conferences; the Council of Bishops voted to return bishop salaries to the 2008 level beginning in 2010; and general agencies of the church adjusted spending plans for 2009 and are re-evaluating 2010 spending plans. These are just a few.

Experts tell us the economy will begin a turnaround near the end of the year. When? No one knows the exact day, or time, or event, or even by how much. We should be encouraged by some of the early signs of economic recovery. At the same time, our optimism should be tempered with patience. Many in our communities will continue to bear the burdens of this economic crisis, and they will need our prayers and support in these difficult times. Although the likely slow pace of recovery will continue to challenge our churches, conferences, and agencies, UMs are still a generous people.

The economic Advisory Committee of the General Council on Finance and Administration (GFCA)

continues to monitor the situation and provide their insights to our leaders. Their models indicate that giving to apportionments in 2009 and 2010 will be below the levels of previous years but similar to the lowered levels experienced during previous recessions. As Methodists committed to the lessons of John Wesley, we remain faithful to the word of God as the director of our faith. As faithful followers of Jesus Christ, we know that during these times, God continues to show us a new thing: mission work around the world is still continuing, leaders are developing in their effectiveness to shepherd congregations into a new path of growth, donations are being made to purchase life-sustaining supplies that will help stamp out killer diseases associated with poverty. God has, is currently, and will continue to supply all that we need to carry out our ministries, as stated in Philippians 4:19.

Thank you for your continued support of the mission and ministry of The UMC.

--Bishop Lindsey Davis A., president, Board of Directors

Moses Rathan Kumar, general secretary and treasurer, GCFA