

# On Methodism

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September 2010

## *BISHOP G'S EPISTLE*

Dear sisters and brothers,

I want to express once again my profound gratitude for those lay and clergy members who made their way to Lake Junaluska for the Special Session of our Annual Conference this past Saturday. When the registration cards were counted, 1,399 of you were present and for that we are all most thankful. I do not take any of that lightly and in this message put in writing what I said several times on Saturday: thank you very much! Our need to call this special session was to finalize work and approve the 2011 WNC Conference Budget. All of the information and the final actions concerning that budget are posted on-line for all to see.

As I shared with the members who were at Lake Junaluska on Saturday, I have had some very productive and hopeful conversations with the Presidents of our five colleges and with the Executive Directors of our Homes and Health Institutions over the last two months. There had been many questions raised about our relationships and our funding of these historic conference-related institutions. You will find that all of them remain in the 2011 budget.

In summary, the results of those conversations have confirmed that our colleges will be setting aside the financial gifts we send their way for scholarships for students who need that assistance to attend one of our fine schools. For our part, as lay and clergy leaders across this conference, we must be more intentional about inviting and encouraging the young people in our churches to attend one of our five colleges. Enrollment figures tell us that less than 20% of the students at our five schools are United Methodist and that, to me, is unacceptable and embarrassing.

We have a long-standing commitment to our retirement homes and villages. As I have visited in each one of them, I have witnessed first-hand the kind of quality care and concern that make for a safe and healthy environment after a life-time of work. There are many residents who, because of financial constraints, are unable to pay the full price. Both the Special Sunday offering on Mother's Day and our conference apportioned budget item provide assistance to these persons. The Children's Home in Winston-Salem and our UMAR homes across several cities provide much needed assurance and hope for those in special circumstances. We have a Biblical mandate to care for the children.

Unfortunately, in order to provide continued support for these historic institutions, the amount of funds available to start new churches was drastically reduced. The Conference acted to provide some funding guarantees for those churches we have already started, but that will not be sufficient going forward. As I travel around the conference, I hear a great desire on the part of almost everyone to grow and to reach more people, especially younger people, for Jesus. We know that the most effective way to reach out to new generations and new populations of

people is through the planting of new churches. Our "Power of 3" goal of "30 in 3" is still within reach. However, we will need to find new funding streams to make that possible. The Fund for New Faith Communities will be one of those avenues, and I will be inviting everyone to participate and support this vision of extending and expanding the Kingdom.

In the current "new normal" of the economy, these are challenging and difficult days. But as I said in my opening message on Saturday (now posted on our conference web site), I believe our commitment to Jesus and our desire to witness and serve Christ will be matched by faithful Biblical stewardship practices. If we are going to make a difference for Christ and transform our communities and neighborhoods, as well as our world, we all must become faithful and generous disciples of Jesus. We can do no other! ---Bishop Goodpaster