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# RENEWAL



***The Journal of the Evangelical Renewal Fellowship in New England***

***Walter Ciesluk, Editor***

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Evangelical Renewal Fellowship is the New England Association of The Confessing Movement within the United Methodist Church

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## **THE OTHER SLEEPING GIANT**

**Rev. Dr. Thomas Bentum**

Growing up in the United Methodist Church I soon recognized at an early age where the power of the church lay. It was with the women--the United Methodist Women to be more specific. I watched my mother as she attended meetings, baked for various events, and helped make sure at least financially her local church was a viable mission in her community and in the world. My dad was an active leader of our church but he and the men in general were but a shadow compared to what the UMW was able to achieve in a year of ministry.

Sadly the UMW is one of the biggest casualties in our declining church. According to the church's statistics in 1974 the membership in the United Methodist Church was 9.91 million in 2007 is was 7.85 million. The membership in the United Methodist women was 1.36 million in 1974 and was 645,000 in 2007. If you do the math the church declined 21% in that 33 year period whereas the UMW declined 53%. If the major movers and shakers of our church is declining over twice as fast as the rest of the church what does it say for our future?

I have heard a number of responses to the decline of the UMW; one is good riddance, we need to start something new! The UMW leadership nationally has helped lead the way in the church as a whole with its very Progressive leadership. One of the characteristics of active UMW chapters is their commitment to the structure and leadership. Money raised is given without much question up to the top to be dispersed. If many of our women understood where that money went and to what causes they would be appalled. But more insidious are the programs produced by the UMW leadership which again many active UMWs faithfully use. These programs reflect narrow Progressive theology and the particular causes of the leadership, often neglecting the core Wesleyan doctrines of personal repentance and holiness.

But what if the women of the UMW where to recapture the powerful orthodox faith that was once at their core? Less than 15% of the women in our church are members of the UMW but what a powerful force for renewal they would be if they experienced a spiritual awakening in their midst. From my experience in the four churches I have served in New England I can say that such a thing would have a powerful impact on the renewal of my congregations as a whole.

My guess is that the way to go is to not only to encourage spiritual renewal in the UMW but also encourage the establishment of other women's ministries in our congregations. Many of our women can not and should not have to wait until the UMW becomes more relevant to the spiritual needs of the vast majority of the women in the church. The UMW has enjoyed an almost exclusive role in many of our congregations for such a long time that the idea of starting alternative groups would no doubt seem threatening. But there is nothing in our Discipline that restricts our church to one women's ministry although the encouragement to establishment of a UMW in every congregation is done in the strongest of terms.

There are a number of ways women's ministries are developing in United Methodist congregations across our country both within, in partnership or even supplanting the UMW. Some of them are even conference sponsored. ERF has

invited Lizza Kittle of Renew: A Women's Ministry Network for United Methodists to join us for our annual board meeting on Saturday, March 27 in Exeter, NH. She will be able to share with us what is happening across the country and what we can do to renew women's ministry in our church. She will also be able to explain some of the things that are happening in the leadership of the UMW nationally because Renew also acts as a watchdog for their activities. The UMW is currently separating from the Board of Global Ministries which will have a major impact on both the UMW and mission work of our church.

As a pastor I have always found it difficult to influence the way a UMW does its ministry. I have learned to tread lightly in terms of any criticism I might have of their activities and programs. The reason I believe is that it is a very emotional issue with deep roots in particular people who have long passed from the scene. The forces to maintain the status quo are strong.

The United Methodist Church has been called the sleeping giant. Perhaps the UMW is the sleeping giant within the sleeping giant.

*Rev. Dr. Thomas W. Bentum is the Executive Coordinator of the Evangelical Renewal Fellowship (ERF). He is an Elder in the New England Annual Conference, and pastor of Gray Memorial United Methodist Church, Caribou, ME.*

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## RECENT BOOK

Walter J. Ciesluk

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### **Life After Death: The Evidence, Dinesh D'Souza, Regnery Publishing, Copyright 2009**

Is death the end? Or, as bestselling author Dinesh D'Souza argues, do the latest discoveries in physics and neuroscience, the most convincing philosophical deductions, and the most likely conclusions from anthropology and biology lend increasing credibility to the prospect of life after death? This book presents a reasoned, scientifically based case that life after death is more than possible, it is highly probable. Indeed it has far more evidence on its side than atheistic arguments about death marking our complete and utter extinction. In a very fascinating book, the author reveals:

- How modern science lays the groundwork for a science-based belief in life after death
- The distinctions between mind and brain—and why it is perfectly reasonable to assume that your immaterial consciousness can survive the dissolution of your material body
- The great atheist philosopher who provided one of the most ingenious proofs for the likelihood of an afterlife
- How the theory of evolution, far from undercutting the idea of life after death, supports it
- The evidence of Near Death Experiences—what it tells us, what it doesn't
- Why the Christian view of the afterlife is the most compelling and best suits the evidence
- What the probability of life after death means for our lives before death

I recently completed reading, "Life After Death, The Evidence", in one sitting. I couldn't put it down. I also have read with great interest Dinesh D'Souza's previous book, "What's So Great About Christianity".

As a convicted Christian, who came to faith after at least a decade of studying Christian apologetics books and materials, I can appreciate the importance of these two books to seekers, skeptics, and even professing Christians".

In my role as chair of the Adult Education committee at my church, I am thinking seriously of proposing a small group study opportunity based on "Life After Death the Evidence". Toward this purpose, an audio version of the book is also available and a study guide will be published early in the new year.

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## PRAYER DURING THE ADVENT SEASON

Robbin R. Grill

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As we entered into the Advent season, we lit the candle of Hope in our churches. We prepare for the celebration of Jesus' birth. During this time we want to be renewed; to remember that Jesus came to save US from sin and death. We want to experience his coming to us now, in our everyday lives, to help us live our lives with meaning and purpose. And we want to prepare for the time when Jesus comes to meet us at the end of our lives on this earth.

When we wake up each day during this special time, we could light a candle just by taking a few moments to focus. We could pause for a moment as we get up and light an *inner* candle. Who doesn't have time to pause for a moment?

We could each find a way to pray something like this:

Lord, the light I choose to let into my life today is based on my trust in you. It is a weak flame, but I so much desire that it dispel some darkness today. I just want to taste the longing I have for you as I go attend to my daily duties and as I carry out my responsibilities. Let this candle be my reminder today of my hope in your coming.

Each day our prayer can get more specific as it prepares us for the day ahead. As we go about each task, we can pray that Jesus will be in our lives.

During the second week of Advent, we light the candle of love. As we continue to pray as we get out of bed in the morning and light two inner candles, let us add "Lord, I place my trust in you." Each day as we encounter times that are rushed we can take a deep breath, and make that profound prayer. We want to hear God's promise and invite Him into those real places in our lives.

On the third Sunday of Advent we light the candle of Joy. We prepare this week by feeling joy. We move through the week feeling a part of the waiting world that rejoices because our longing has prepared us to believe the reign of God is close at hand. So we ask: "Prepare our hearts and remove the sadness that hinders us from feeling the joy and hope which His presence will bestow."

Each morning this week we want to light a third inner candle, representing the transition from hope to longing to joy. And we can add: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior."

On the fourth Sunday of Advent we light the candle of Peace. Throughout Advent we have been finding intimacy with God in the midst of our everyday lives. Perhaps we can use the five days before Christmas to heighten our personal awareness of *whatever* is going on in our lives and how that can bring us to Christmas. The story behind these days can draw us in, and invite us to bring our lives to the mystery of how Jesus came into this world and why. He came in the midst of scandal and conflict. He came in poverty. He was laid in a feed trough after his birth. And he grew up in obscurity.

Jesus did not shun our world and its poverty and conflict. He embraced it. And He desires to embrace us today, in this day. Right where we are. Right where we are feeling most distant. Right where we are feeling the least "ready." If we let Him come into our hearts to be our Savior we will find ourselves entering the sacred night and morning of Christmas "joyful and triumphant" as never before!

Come, Lord Jesus. Come and visit your people.  
We await your coming. Come, O Lord.

*Robbin Grill is the coordinator of the Evangelical Renewal Fellowship (ERF) prayer ministry.*

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## A NEW WAY TO TELL THE OLD, OLD STORY

Walter J. Ciesluk

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In the past at my church, we periodically offered and encouraged everyone to take the “Contagious Christian” course developed by Willow Creek Association for personal evangelism training. This course was widely considered to be one of the most effective evangelism courses in the country. The Contagious Christian course stressed that we need to go beyond explaining what Christ has done in our life to what He has done for all people; we need to learn to communicate the Gospel message simply and more effectively to our friends and others.

Toward this end, we learned how to present the Gospel in a simple way analogous to the four spiritual laws developed by Campus Crusade of Christ for their evangelistic endeavors [Reference 1]. Simply (1) God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life. (2) Man is sinful and separated from God. Therefore, he cannot know and experience God’s love and plan for his life. (3) Jesus Christ is God’s only provision for man’s sin. Through Him you can know and experience God’s love and plan for your life. And (4), we must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know and experience God’s love and plan for our lives. The four spiritual laws emphasized personal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and de-emphasized Jesus’ command to follow Him and participate in ushering in the Kingdom of God in our time.

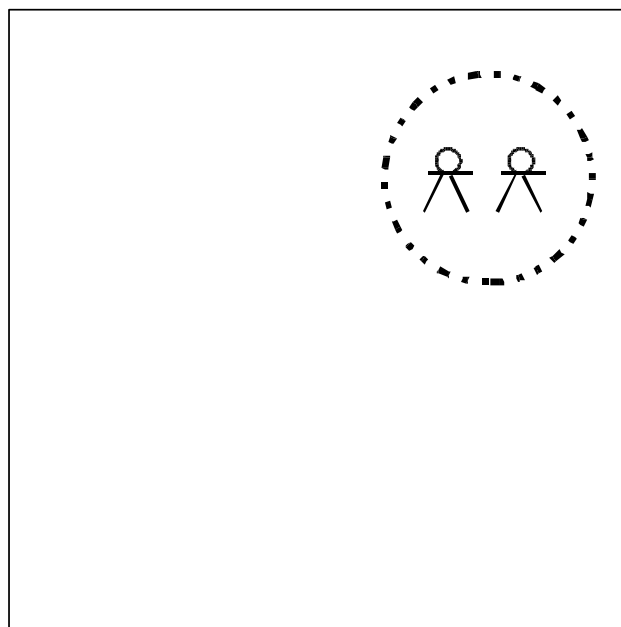
These popular Gospel summaries based on the four spiritual laws were effective in the past, but they often communicate only a small part of Jesus’ central message. In more recent times, it has been easy to convince seekers and nominal Christians that the world is fallen just by pointing to the newspapers and TV news. At the same time, most people get real personal satisfaction and well-being doing something to help people in need and to work toward social justice, i.e., participating in bring the Kingdom of God on earth. On the other hand, it has been harder to convince people that they are themselves bad (sinful) and in need of personal salvation.

To deal with this new reality, James Choung, when at InterVarsity Fellowship, developed a new Gospel presentation for personal evangelism, which emphasized transformation and not just decision. It’s a visual way to show a more holistic picture of the Christian faith’s central message, and hopefully change the way Christians think about the Gospel itself as well. This gospel presentation was featured in a July 2008, Christianity Today article [Reference 2] and described in James Choung’s new book, True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing In [Reference 3].

This new Gospel presentation can be useful to all Christians, particularly evangelicals as they pursue their personal evangelism efforts. In addition, InterVarsity Fellowship has published a booklet by James Choung describing the approach [Reference 4]. The presentation has an introduction, four explanatory parts, includes 5 diagrams, and then asks for a response. As a preview, I thought it would be instructive and helpful to summarize the presentation in the rest of this article.

### Introduction:

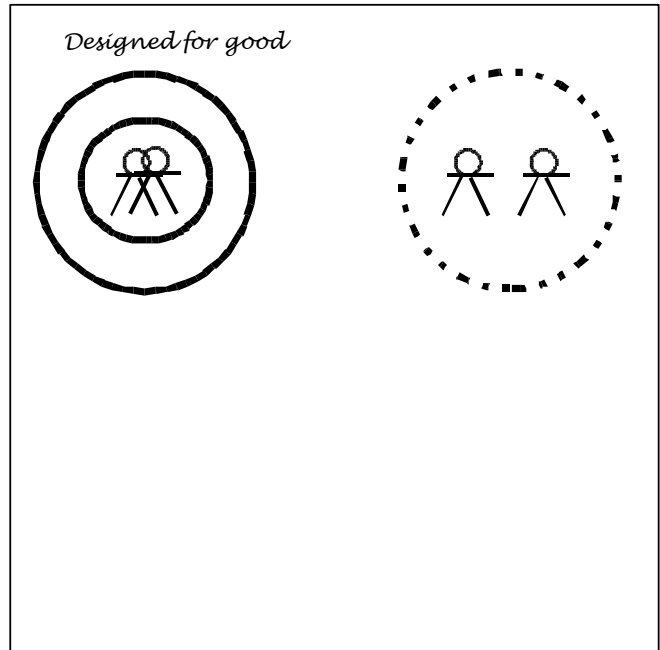
Would you like to hear the core message of Jesus or the basic storyline of the Bible? What’s our world like? What do you see on the news? The world is in bad shape; that’s obvious. (Draw the world with a squiggly or dotted circle with the people within slightly apart.) But what’s more interesting is the human response: how do you feel about this kind of world? No normal person thinks that suffering, violence and oppression are good things. No one is happy about the bombs in Iraq or the bloodbath in Darfur. There’s nothing but tragedy when the levees broke in New Orleans or when the Towers fell in New York. There’s nothing but sadness and despair when a child is infected with AIDS. So what does this mean? Most people want a better world. But our universal longing speaks of something more. Just like hunger points to food and thirst points to water,



so our universal longing for a better world suggests that such a world either once existed or will one day exist.

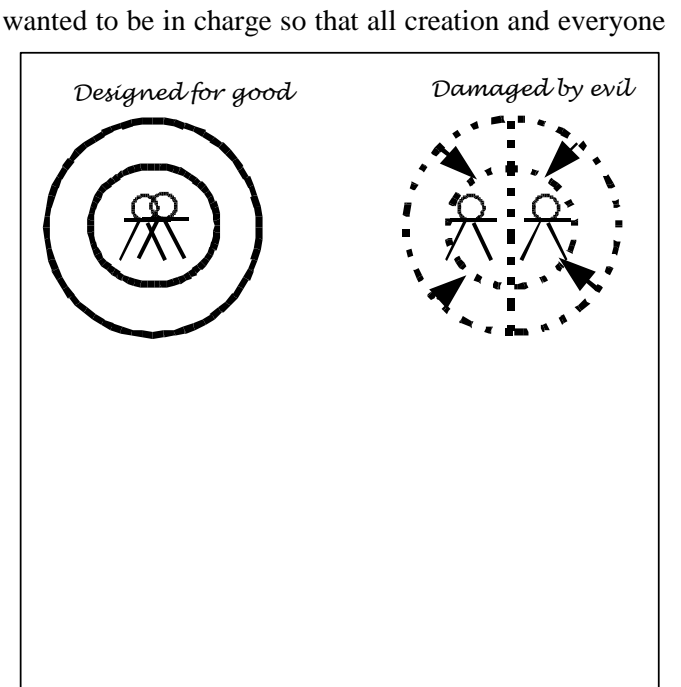
**Part 1: Designed for good**

In the Christian worldview, God created a good, wonderful world. In the beginning, everything was right with each other. (Draw a new solid circle in the top left corner representing the world. Draw people close together to represent intimacy and community.) Creation was designed for the care of us and we were designed to take care of creation. We were made to be interdependent on each other. On a relational level, people were designed to take care of each other. They were made to be in true community, with the freedom to love and be loved, to serve and be served, to be themselves without shame in front of each other. On a personal level, we were each designed to be in a relationship with God, one full of love and intimacy. God was with us, and we enjoyed being with him. We were meant to love and serve each other as well. (Draw the inner circle to represent God’s presence with us. The world and all that’s in it was designed for good. Write the words “Designed for good” at the top.) But what happened to this good world? How did we get to where we are today?



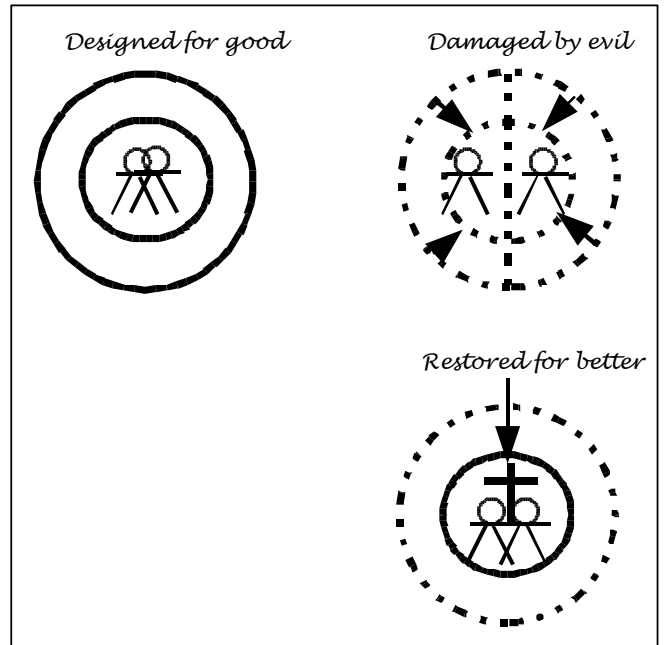
**Part 2: Damaged by evil**

When God was in charge, we had a wonderful world. But we wanted to be in charge so that all creation and everyone in it could be used for our own benefit instead of its intended design and purpose to serve each other. It became all about us. (Draw the arrows that point inward to the people that represent self centeredness.) We damaged creation. We drain her for her oil, and fill the air with pollutants so we can have comfortable lifestyles. But there are also other larger issues, such as racism, sexism, slavery, corruption, injustice and oppression that damages us and our world. On a relational level, we damage each other and others hurt us whether we mean to or not. When we live for only ourselves, then it’s easy to take and gain without regard for other people. (Draw a squiggly or broken line right down the middle, splitting the people from each other.) On a personal level, we damage our soul and its relationship with God. We are afraid of God now, and in our fear, we try to ignore him and live for ourselves. But we are only hurting ourselves, and we will never be the kinds of people that we want and dream to be. (Draw an inner circle, and then a dotted or squiggly line around the inner circle to represent shock and damage to our relationship with God. We and the world are damaged by evil. We’re all contributing to the mess. (Write the words “Damaged by evil” in the top right.) Where have you seen damage in your own life or the lives around you?



### Part 3: Restored for better

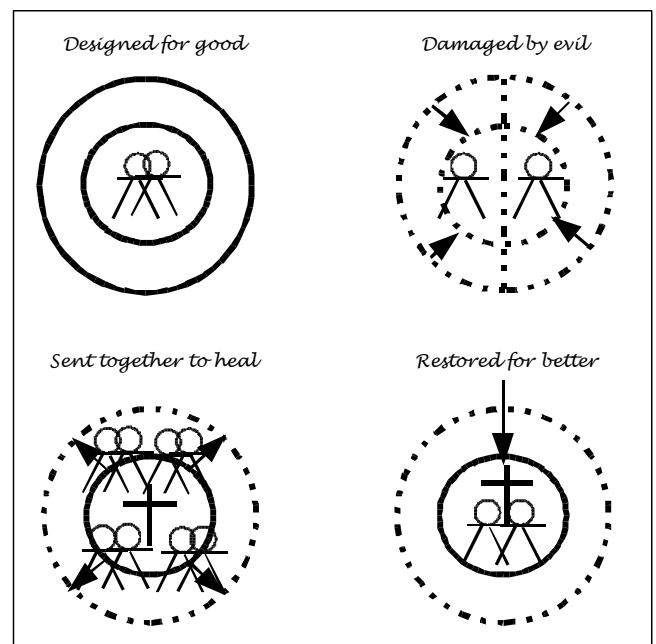
But God loved the world too much to leave it this way. (Draw the world again with the dotted or squiggly lines. Draw an arrow coming down from above into the world's mess, and a cross in the center of the circle.) God came to the planet as Jesus 2,000 years ago and started a new thing. He started a resistance movement against evil, though not with military revolution or communal withdrawal. Instead, he taught us a better way to live, and wants to give us the power to overcome evil in us and around us. Ultimately, Jesus comes into the center of our damage, our hurt. He takes it all upon himself and dies on the cross. But he comes back to life, overcoming the evil in the world. He then offers his protection to us. In Jesus, we can overcome the selfishness and damage in us and in our world. He has given us the way. In so doing, we're all restored for better. He restored creation so that all of it could be used in their good ways. All of the world's systems, the environment, corporations, governments, schools, can now be used to usher in God's values of love, peace and justice. Oppression & injustice can be alleviated. He also restored our relationships, so that we can love and forgive each other. Damaged relationships can be healed. (Draw people at the foot of the cross, learning to be like Jesus.) Lastly, God restored our relationships with himself. People don't have to live self-centered lives or be afraid of God anymore. But we can have a relationship with God full of love and intimacy as well. (Draw an inner-circle representing God's presence, and write "Restored for better" at the top of this circle.) The good news: the revolution has begun, and we're all invited. Jesus came to restore the world and everything in it for better.



### Part 4: Sent together to heal

Jesus wants us to join this movement against evil, to go out and heal the planet. (Draw the outer circle again, again with the dotted or squiggly lines because the fullness of the Kingdom of God has not yet arrived. Draw the cross in the center again.) On a personal level, we're called to submit to Jesus' leadership and become more like him. We need to become the kind of good we want to see in the world. So we admit our contribution to the damage, and let Jesus take charge of our lives instead. (Draw the inner circle representing God's presence.) As we're becoming more like Jesus, we're also called to heal relationships, our own and others. We ask for forgiveness, and forgive others. Then we're freed to love each other. (Draw the four pairs of people near the inner circle.) Lastly, we're called to heal systems. We're called to protect and heal the environment. We're called to fight injustice and oppression. It's overwhelming, but we're called to do it together. (Draw the arrows leading outward, which represent God's Spirit.)

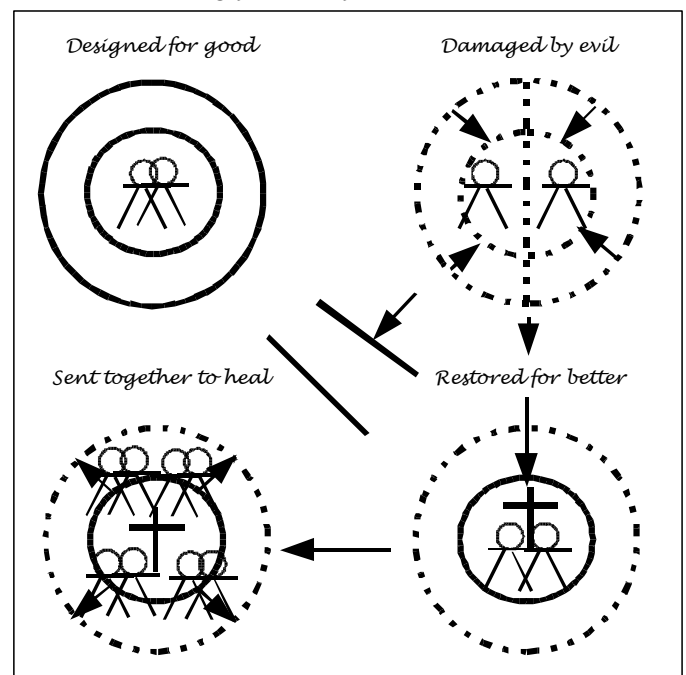
Many Christians around us have gotten stuck in the third circle, not helping to heal the planet. But Jesus wanted his followers to be in this fourth circle, by being sent together to heal. (Write "Sent together to heal" at the top of this circle.) We don't go alone, but with the power of God's Spirit and the community of God's people with us. He'll be with us. With these resources, Jesus is asking us to be sent together to heal the planet.



## Response

We can't go straight to the last circle. We need to become the kind of good we want to see in the world. In everything we do, we bring all that we are to it, our motivations, our instincts, our methods. We are all damaged too, and we need healing before we can do true healing around us. Jesus does that the best. By giving him leadership over our lives, we can become the kind of good we want to see around us. (Draw two parallel lines that block the path between the 2nd and 4<sup>th</sup> circle. Then draw three arrows: the first arrow is unable to reach to other side. The other two show a path to the 4th circle that is only through Jesus.) So, which one of these worlds do you relate to? In the first world, everything's fine, but ceased to exist because of the sinfulness of humans. In the second world, you're overwhelmed by the world's or personal problems. In the third world, you've made some commitment to Jesus but are holding back. In the fourth world, you're in the movement of God with his people. Where are you?

- If you think you are in the first circle, we already said that this world no longer exists and the world needs help. What's your role in helping to heal the planet?
- If you think that you are in the second circle, tell me about it. Jesus is offering you a way to overcome it.
- If you think you are in the third circle, that's a great start. But it's clear that Jesus is asking you for more. What's keeping you from joining his movement to heal the planet?
- If you are in the fourth circle, that's great. What you're doing is in line with the values of the Kingdom of God, but you could be doing so much more with God's presence and with his people. You could be a part of something that will last. Would you like to let Jesus be the leader of your life and join his movement to heal the planet? Will you trust him with your life?
- Would you like to make a decision toward Jesus? If so, that's great! Jesus also wants to give you resources for this mission. Have you ever asked to receive the Holy Spirit? Can I pray that you receive the Holy Spirit? Would you like to learn more about Jesus in a Bible study with some friends? Can I pray for you?



Why don't you give this new Gospel presentation a try in your personal evangelism efforts. I recommend going to the James Choung's web site, [www.jameschoung.net](http://www.jameschoung.net), select the link to "The Big Story", and see how it is done. Then practice the presentation yourself. You do not have to memorize the words. Instead, give it your own personal touch, but be sure to stress the systematic, relational and personal themes. Reference 4 also includes Bible verses to support the Gospel presentation as well as short answers to questions frequently asked by seekers and nominal Christians alike. In the end, remember that presentations don't save people. The Holy Spirit does.

### References:

1. Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws, Campus Crusade for Christ Pamphlet, Copyright 1968
2. James Choung Has Found a Way to Tell The Old, Old Story to a New Generation, From Four Laws to Four Circles, Interview by Andy Crouch, Christianity Today Article, July 2008
3. True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing In, James Choung, Inter-varsity Press, Copyright 2008
4. The Big Story, A Gospel Presentation, James Choung, Intervarsity Booklet, Copyright 2007

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**GOING WORLDWIDE,  
FOR 25 YEARS THE MISSION SOCIETY HAS HELPED THE CHURCH DISCOVER ITS MISSION  
Dick McClain**

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In June 1975, I attended the West Michigan Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church for the first time. In two months, I would complete my final classes in seminary and take my first appointment as a deacon and a probationary member of the conference. Sometime during that week I met with Dr. Bob Smith, who was to become my district superintendent. After a few pleasantries, Bob got down to business. “Dick, I have a fine appointment for you,” he began. “You are going to serve at Ganges and Saugatuck....”

I don’t recall what he said after that. Not hailing from Michigan, I’d never heard of Saugatuck. But since I had spent the first few years of my life as a missionary kid in India, Ganges was a name I knew. I was secretly gratified that Bob obviously had gone to the trouble to find out about my childhood, and thought it was rather clever that he was playing a joke on me by telling me he was sending me back to India.

But Bob knew nothing about my early years in Asia as a missionary kid, and he wasn’t kidding. Two months later, my wife Pam and I—with a toddler and a newborn in tow—began what became 11 years of sometimes challenging, frequently thrilling, but always fulfilling ministry in southwest Michigan. Our first stop was the Saugatuck-Ganges Parish.

It really was quite natural that I’d think “India” rather than “Allegan County, Michigan” when I heard “Ganges.” Seeing life, ministry, church, and just about everything through international lenses is just what you do when you grow up overseas. Perhaps, too, it was my being the son and grandson of missionaries that especially sensitized me to what I saw happening (or not happening) in the missions program of the United Methodist Church during those years.

By the mid-1980s, what had begun as a gnawing concern among evangelicals in the denomination had grown to alarm and had finally resulted in dramatic action. That came in the form of the launch of The Mission Society for United Methodists, an “alternative” mission agency, as some called it. It was established by an ad-hoc group of pastors and former missionaries who met in St. Louis on November 28, 1983. Within days they tapped the Rev. Dr. H. T. Maclin, a 31-year veteran of the General Board of Global Ministries, to become the founding president. The new agency was incorporated on January 6, 1984.

Chief among the concerns that led to the formation of The Mission Society were: (1) the perceived movement of the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) away from programs that had the specific objective of bringing people to faith in Christ; and (2) the dramatic reduction in the number of missionaries being sent by the UM Church around the world.

To put the decline of the missionary force in perspective, at the time of the merger of the Methodists and Evangelical United Brethren churches in 1968, approximately 1,650 missionaries served around the world under those two denominations. But by the early 1980s, the GBGM—which by then had slashed its missionary ranks to slightly over 500—announced the goal of reducing that number even further to just 300, or fewer than one adult missionary for every 100 United Methodist congregations.

Against that backdrop, you can imagine my response to the formation of a new, evangelical, sending organization for United Methodists. In a word, I was thrilled! Finally, someone was actually doing something about renewing biblical missions in my denomination. I determined I would do all I could as a young pastor to support these efforts.

During the summer of 1985, I had the privilege of meeting H.T. Maclin when he spoke at the Michigan Area Pastors’ School. Blessed with a humble spirit, the grace of a true southern gentleman, and convictions of steel, H.T. represented The Mission Society in a way that was received well by many of my colleagues.

A month or two later, we were blessed to have the Rev. Virgil Maybray as the keynote speaker at our congregation's annual missions conference. Prior to the formation of The Mission Society, Virgil had led the Evangelical Missions Council, an arm of Good News devoted to promoting missions within the denomination. Although The Mission Society was not established by Good News, Virgil and many others who were connected with Good News had been part of its formation. Shortly after The Mission Society was launched, Virgil had become its first vice president.

In the providence of God, I had met Virgil 18 years earlier—the summer before my sophomore year of college. Now, he was preaching in my church, challenging the people of my congregation to commit their lives and their resources to God's mission, and thrilling us with reports about the new sending agency.

After the conference concluded, I made an offhand comment that would prove to change my life. "If there's ever anything I can do to help out The Mission Society," I said, "please let me know."

Now don't get me wrong, I wasn't looking for a job. I was having the time of my life with the wonderful people at the Leighton UM Church.

But Virgil proposed that I apply for the position of director of missionary personnel with the new agency. When I replied that I didn't know anything about doing such a job, he was quick to respond that since I was a missionary kid and a pastor, what more did I need to know? I didn't have a ready answer. (As they say, you don't know what you don't know.) By God's grace, nine months later in 1986, Pam and I moved to Stone Mountain, Georgia, and I became the eighth member of the staff of The Mission Society for United Methodists.

### **Going wide**

The Mission Society's original bylaws stated that it was to be a missionary sending agency "for United Methodists and others of Wesleyan persuasion" (*italics added*). In point of fact, however, for its first decade, "MSUM" (as it came to be known) only accepted candidates who were active members of the United Methodist Church.

However, being an independent "faith mission" while at the same time maintaining a visible identity with one particular denomination was something of an anomaly. As The Mission Society became better known, candidates from a variety of Christian communions began to apply for service. Sadly, for nearly 10 years, we turned down many splendid applicants for the simple reason that they were not active members of the United Methodist Church. (Interestingly enough, that litmus test was not required by the GBGM.)

Beginning in the mid '90s, however, we came to the growing conviction that The Mission Society could accomplish its desire to be leaven within a mainline denomination while at the same time serving the wider Christian community. The result was that we began to accept candidates who were Wesleyan in spirit and conviction though not United Methodist.

The transformation to an interdenominational agency of Wesleyan heritage became complete when the name of the organization was officially changed to The Mission Society in 2008. Today, although the majority of our missionaries and partners are still United Methodists, The Mission Society includes more than 200 cross-cultural workers who come from 12 denominations. (Since The Mission Society's founding 25 years ago, 465 missionaries have been approved.)

Internationally, The Mission Society collaborates not only with United Methodist central conferences and autonomous affiliated Methodist denominations, but also with a variety of other Christian communions in 32 countries to which its missionaries are assigned.

Unlike some missions whose work focuses on a specific area of ministry (such as Bible translation, disaster relief, or radio broadcasting), the ministries of The Mission Society are as varied as they are numerous. Nevertheless, our core mission is very simple: The Mission Society exists to lead the Church to the world, and to lead the world to Jesus.

## **Pointing the Church to the world**

If churches are measured by how “missions-minded” they are, mission agencies should be measured by how “church-minded” they are.

Speaking at a missions mobilization conference we had the privilege of leading in Ghana in January 2008, Robert Oboagye-Mensah, presiding bishop of The Methodist Church of Ghana (and a newly-elected member of The Mission Society’s board of directors) said, “God does not have a mission for God’s Church. God has a Church for God’s mission. Mission was not created for the Church; the Church was created for mission.”

If that is true, then it’s high time that mission agencies do a rapid 180° turn and begin to help the Church get about its mission rather than assuming that the Church somehow was established by God to support the agency’s mission.

It was precisely this conviction that led The Mission Society to establish in 2000, what is now one of the two branches of our Missions Operations division: the Church Ministry department. Over the past decade, through seminars, conferences, workshops, and coaching, we have provided training to help hundreds of congregations and thousands of pastors and leaders to more effectively mobilize themselves to reach their communities and the nations for Christ.

It’s not just American churches that we are mobilizing for missions, however. Beginning in 2003, The Mission Society has conducted missions mobilization conferences that have impacted several thousand pastors and leaders from scores of denominations in more than 20 countries, primarily in Latin America and Africa.

It is not the Church’s job to help groups like The Mission Society reach the world. It’s the mission agencies’ job to help the Church reach the world. What we are discovering is that when we work hand-in-hand with the Church, Christ is honored and his work is accelerated.

## **Pointing the world to Jesus**

Leading The Mission Society’s more than 200 missionaries whose ministries reflect tremendous diversity can feel a bit like herding cats at times. But the diversity is only on the surface. At their core, Mission Society missionaries share one common purpose, and that is to offer people Christ. There still is “no other name under heaven by which people can be saved.”

Two biblical themes increasingly shape our understanding and practice of mission. The first is the Incarnation. Dr. Darrell Whiteman, vice president for mission personnel and preparation and resident missiologist at The Mission Society, teaches our missionaries that Jesus’ incarnation is their model for cross-cultural ministry.

God in Christ Jesus went to incredible lengths to communicate his love to humanity. Jesus, says Whiteman, did not just become a generic human. He became a first-century Palestinian Jew who spoke Aramaic with a low-prestige Galilean accent! Philippians 2 reminds us that Jesus emptied himself of all the prestige of being God’s son in order to identify with human beings. If God so fully entered a particular human culture in order to connect with humankind, should today’s missionaries do any less?

Whether it means living in an apartment in the middle of a predominantly Muslim immigrant community in Atlanta or amidst an unreached tribal group in a village in northern Ghana, living with and learning from the people we seek to lead to Jesus is not only a core value, but also a key ministry strategy for The Mission Society’s missionaries.

But the Incarnation not only defines a missionary’s lifestyle, it also shapes the missionary’s message. Although the gospel never changes, the ways in which it relates to the diverse human family must be as varied as are human cultures themselves.

That leads to the second theme that continues to both challenge and instruct us, and that is what we refer to as “radical biblical contextualization.”

What does that mean? Well, throughout the New Testament, Jesus’ followers seemed to be discovering something foundational about missions (see Acts 15, Acts 17, I Corinthians 9). The manner in which the Good News of Christ is conveyed and the outward forms of expression which those who receive it exhibit must take on the look and feel of the local culture if the gospel has any hope of penetrating deeply or spreading broadly throughout a people group.

Our missionaries are trained and prepared to discover where God (whose prevenient grace reached them before they found him) is already at work among peoples who have yet to know Christ. I fully anticipate that as the least-reached peoples become followers of Jesus, their resulting worship and witness will proclaim that Jesus is Lord in ways that may look and sound very unfamiliar to our Western Christian eyes and ears. I’m confident, however, that the Shepherd will have no problem recognizing his sheep and calling them his own.

Both the call to the church to engage the world and the call to the world to embrace Jesus grow out of the *Missio Dei*—the Mission of God. It is as ancient as God’s call to Adam and Eve in the garden, and as abiding as the promise of the One who said he would be with us always, even to the end of the age.

As The Mission Society celebrates its 25th anniversary, it is with a renewed commitment to follow Jesus as he walks the streets of the city and the dusty pathways of the village. We celebrate the fact that mission in the 21st century is the enterprise of the worldwide Church. Even as the mantle of leadership in the global Church is being passed from the North to the South, we enthusiastically embrace the opportunity and the challenges of becoming servants to the global Church as it reaches out to the least-reached peoples of the world.

The Scripture not only gives us hope but spurs us on: “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb’” (Revelation 7:9-10).  
Maranatha!

*Dick McClain is the new president and CEO of The Mission Society.*

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## **Evangelical Renewal Fellowship**

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### **Purpose Statement**

*Confessing Jesus Christ as Son, Savior, and Lord, the Confessing Movement exists to enable the United Methodist Church to retrieve its classical doctrinal identity, and to live it out as disciples of Jesus Christ*

### **ERF Executive Team (1 July 2009-30 June 2011)**

Executive Coordinator: **Pastor Tom Bentum**

Communications Coordinator: **Walter Ciesluk**

Prayer Coordinator: **Robbin Grill**

Reform Coordinator: **Pastor Brian Wood**

RENEWAL Conference Director: **Pastor Tom Bentum**

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At Large Member: **Pastor Mike Pike**