

IGNITING EVANGELISTIC MINISTRY

ON THE ROAD

JAIME POTTER-MILLER

In March of 2001, I invested in an organization so secret that I didn't know that I was being received as a member until after I'd been practicing the rites of initiation for months. There are no officers, no dues, and no publications in this organization, but it exists nonetheless.

Watch for it on the road. It's subtle, but obvious once you know it exists. Many will never have the privilege of being a part of this select group; others may discover themselves involved when taking a ride in a friend's new car. Others may purchase a new automobile, and find themselves participating in the rituals.

What is this secret society? It's the unspoken, uncontrollable urge that drivers of PT Cruisers have to communicate with one another!

I see a Cruiser coming toward me. If my sunroof is open, I salute the other driver through the roof. If not, I flash my lights. He or she might sound a horn in response. Sometimes we wave wildly with silly smiles on our faces from the car that has made us so goofy. There are still precious few of us, so the membership feels elite . . . at least for now. But that won't matter in the long run. We share a common excitement and attachment to our transportation. We are family.

Watching the conception, gestation and birth of the Igniting Ministry initiative feels like driving a PT Cruiser. As I traveled the country last summer and autumn, visiting the places in 42 states where Igniting Ministry matching grants had been received, I discovered another sort of camaraderie that expresses itself in this same sort of non-specific fashion.

The Good News as expressed by the Igniting Ministry initiative is not evangelism-as-usual any more than a Cruiser looks like your average automobile. There is an air of freshness, and a sense that God is doing a new thing that accompany this surge of energy. My delight in observing the various manifestations of the Ministry as I saw it communicated in the churches I visited arose frequently because of the uniquenesses of each place. Even so, common thoughts articulated them-

selves in a variety of voices.

First, a commitment exists to make sure that what is advertised is actually on the shelves. Against the voices that proclaim that we do not have open hearts, minds and doors rise the whispers of a wisdom repeated centuries ago to "preach faith until you have it . . ." Igniting Ministry preaches the receptivity of "whosoever . . ." and will continue to do



so until we get it right. And then, when we “get it,” we’ll practice it all the more fully.

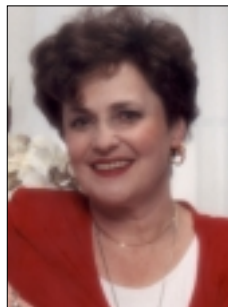
Second, no one I met believes that the investment in Igniting Ministry substitutes for outreach. There is no sense that we will raise the consciousness of the nation about the United Methodist Church to the detriment of missional dollars to fulfill the Matthew 25 mandate. This is not a choice between two ventures; it is a decision to embrace our entire responsibility as believers.

Third, I discovered a shared understanding that strengthening the church in the USA will only increase the potential for international evangelism. If North American dollars dwindle, the possibility of outreach also decreases. If stewardship, a natural outgrowth of being disciplined, is nurtured then the possibilities for increased mission escalate.

Taking advantage of all that the Igniting Ministry initiative offers is much akin to driving my PT Cruiser. There’s an excitement, a camaraderie, a risky attitude that accompanies the basic vehicle of transportation. The Gospel doesn’t change; the way in which we express it must adapt to the needs of the people whom God so loves. The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Igniting Ministry is one way to expand the visibility of the possibilities.

Is Igniting Ministry the only way we will reach out? Of course not. Is it the answer to all the questions being raised about the way the Church engages culture? Not by any means. Will it be the salvation of the UMC? No! We already have a Savior, and Igniting Ministry can only proclaim that truth. But is it an effective means to the same end that the Apostles knew? Yes!

Like the funny-looking car that you see with the driver who appears a little smitten, Igniting Ministry is tooling around drawing attention to itself and to the God it salutes. I’d like to invite you to hop in. □



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