

OPEN FORUM

In the March/April issue of *Circuit Rider*, Philip Blackwell's allusion that the UCC's TV ad with bouncers as "crazy congregationalists" is right on the mark. This ad is a step back in the journey for peaceful ecumenism. It is an affront to the supposed equalizing of those who do not affirm homosexuals as being racial bigoted and insensitive to the disabled. Finally, it airs out the universal church's "dirty laundry" before the world and throws down the "glove" to the confessing church to reciprocate in kind. May God have mercy on us all.

Doug Lynn,
Thornville, Ohio

Although I was surprised to see Ray Rhoads's article on page 16 of your March/April 2005 edition, I was not surprised by the hope he sees in the probationary members of the Northern Illinois Conference (NIC). There is, however, another element of hope that Ray did not mention.

There is great hope in leaders like Ray who selflessly give of their lives and time. Ray mentioned that probationary members in the NIC attend fifteen overnight retreats that assist them in unpacking their practice of ministry. What Ray did not mention is that he and a small team of elders and deacons plan and participate in those retreats and other activities.

Like Ray, some of these leaders are at times in their careers when it would be easy to step back and let someone else facilitate the next generation of ordained clergy. Ray and his team are not facilitators. They are dedicated mentors who have a passion for nurturing future generations.

Ray's Probationary Leadership

Development Group (a.k.a. PLEDGE) is not designed to move probationary members through a process. It is designed to love and nurture them, assisting them in becoming more effective in their practice of ministry. Praise God for the vision of hope the NIC Board of Ordained Ministry sees in Ray Rhoads and for their continued efforts to improve the ministry process.

Steve Ziegler
Hampshire, Illinois

A few years ago I had the privilege of attending a training for *Alpha* with six people from my congregation. We were richly blessed and truly inspired. We presented the program to the entire congregation, and it was readily accepted and utilized. The blessings and fruit from the *Alpha* course have been numerous. We are very thankful for this wonderful gift from our brothers and sisters in Christ from England. However, I was surprised to see in the March/April *Circuit Rider* an ad for an alternative program. It is described as "an unapologetically liberal alternative to the *Alpha* course."

The course is called, "livingthequestions.com." How interesting. I didn't know that evidently "the wheel is broken." It must be, because there are those who feel the need to fix it. What a sad statement, as once again divisiveness raises its head. I am troubled by this obvious reactionary response. The *Alpha* course is a refreshingly proactive effort to offer an apologia that is in step with the classic, ecumenical consensus within the church at large and our historic Wesleyan theology. But I keep forgetting about that rather illusive form of "tolerance" that is quite popular today, which seems to be more

important than historic, orthodox Christianity.

Deane Wyllys
Commerce, Michigan

I am responding to Merlin Ackerson's concern about applause to "special music" in our churches. (Open Forum, March/April *Circuit Rider*) While I share with him some of that concern, particularly indiscriminate applause, let us be open to it being more than a response to a "performance" but "participation in the Spirit" during worship beyond reading responses, singing hymns, etc.

Based on passages such as Psalms 47:1, 98:8, and Isaiah 55:12, I learned from charismatic colleagues that applause can be redirected from clapping for the special music to a "clap-offering to the Lord."

Worship is meant to be a joyful experience in the Spirit; why "quench the Holy Spirit"? And alongside of applause, a pastor could encourage more "Amens" when appropriate, even to preaching: 1 Cor 14:16; and what shall we do when we sing verse 4 of Hymn 139?

Alex Borsos Jr.
Southampton, New Jersey

Sermon Starters

What happened to July 10?

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Sermon Starter with the
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in this issue at

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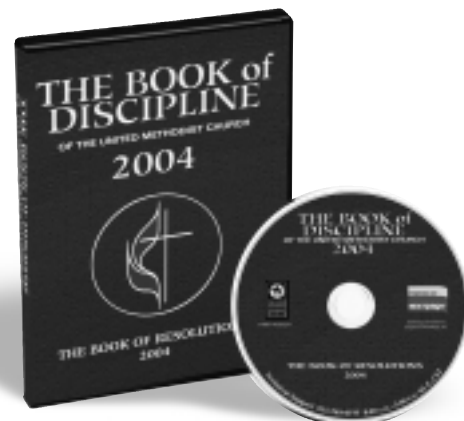
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