

OPEN FORUM

In Neil Alexander's opening editorial in the Nov/Dec 2004 issue, from "Dreaming with Our Hearts Open," he makes reference to the retirement benefits of UM pastors in Africa being two corrugated, aluminum panels for roofs on their homes.

I work with the Preachers Aid Society and Benefit Fund and the retirees in The Illinois Great Rivers Annual Conference and would like more information on this issue. Do you know the source and how I can learn more about UM pastors benefits on retirement from Africa?

Perhaps we could do something like a retiree-to-retiree partnership if we could get some more information.

Thank you much for your current issue on Africa: God's Blessing.

E Paul Unger
East Peoria, IL

Editor's Note:

For information, go to www.gbop.org and click on the link for the **Central Conference Pension Initiative**. This initiative began last quadrennium and led to a report at General Conference 2004 about urgent needs, with recommendations for ongoing action. Several projects are underway to collect necessary information, establish procedures governing eligibility and the management of pension distributions. One idea being explored is similar to Rev. Unger's suggestion for clergy-to-clergy partnering between pastors in North American and their African counterparts. There is some information at the website indicated above and more will be posted as it becomes avail-

able. Those interested may also contact Ms. Gale Whitson-Schmidt, Senior Advisor to the General Secretary of the General Board of Pensions and Health Benefits at: gwhitson-schmidt@gbophb.org

This issue of *Circuit Rider* may well be the most important and most informative issue ever published.

I have read *Circuit Rider* since it was created and this is the kind of literature we need.

Similar issues on other fields of Mission: for example Costa Rica, would be welcome.

And Thank you.

Gil Hoffman
Indiana, PA

In the Nov/Dec issue, (Open Forum) John Wunderlich advised me to look at Article XII of the Confession of Faith of the Evangelical United Brethren Church as proof that we are not much different than World Vision which believes in eternal damnation for the lost. I would like to respond by pointing out that Article XII (adopted by the General Conference of the Evangelical Association in 1809 after being recommended by George Miller) states that the "wicked" will experience endless condemnation after death. Because I believe that God's saving grace does not end at the grave, I do not believe in endless condemnation. Nevertheless, because I take this article of faith seriously (not literally), I do believe that people who commit evil deeds, like Adolf Hitler and those who run the

School of Americas, will be disciplined by God after death.

World Vision, in sharp contrast, believes in eternal damnation for the "lost." They apparently believe that all non-Christians and perhaps Christian heretics will be sent to hell after their deaths. This would include all of our Jewish, Muslim, and Baha'i neighbors.

John Wesley, contrary to the teachings of World Vision, had this to say regarding eternal damnation:

"...because I have no authority from the word of God 'to judge those that are without'; nor do I conceive that any man living has a right to sentence all the heathen and Mahometan world to damnation. It is far better to leave them to Him that made them, and who is 'the Father of the spirits of all flesh.'"

Bob Blackburn
Berlin, WI

Thanks for tackling a tough subject in the "Atonement" issue (Spet./Oct.). My comments: (1) Why two articles from Asbury Seminary authors which offer little new? (2) Where is Marcus Borg, who has good contemporary perspectives on the atonement in his books? (3) Graham McFarlane laid out the subject well but ran out of space to posit more explicit conclusions. (4) "The Wrath of God" article depicts the problems faced when dealing with a tough theology. New explanations require lots of teaching. That's what makes the "old" theology of the atonement so popular: it's digestible in 5 sentences! (5) J. Alfred Smith's article hits the nail on the head! The cross has to do with being a suffering servant, not "negotiations" between God and Jesus about eternal life. Good start on a complicated subject. Keep going!

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