

OPEN FORUM

I am writing to apologize to Mark Beeson, pastor of Granger Community Church and Gregg Parris, pastor of Union Chapel United Methodist Church for the article that appeared in the September/October 2007 issue of *Circuit Rider*. The issue included statements by various church leaders about what they expect from the future of The United Methodist Church, and the article by Riley Case contained this very unfortunate quote: "Two churches in the North Indiana Conference, Granger and Union Chapel, with a combined worship attendance of 7,500 (11 percent of the entire conference), are tolerated at best in the conference, and rarely called upon for resourcing."

I found it embarrassing to read a suggestion in a publication for all United Methodist clergy that somehow these two churches are undervalued in the North Indiana Conference. Nothing could be further from the truth. I appreciate the leadership both Mark and Gregg bring to the Conference. That is why we asked Gregg to lead what was a wonderful workshop a year ago at the Pastor's Convocation for Evangelism in the North Indiana Conference and have asked Mark to lead a workshop next April for "Our Life Together," our overnight retreat for all United Methodist clergy in Indiana.

I respect these pastors and hear praise and amazement expressed across the Conference about the wonderful ministries of their congregations. I will continue to suggest their names to lead workshops, leadership training events, and to find other ways their impact can be multiplied though out the Conference and the whole country. I am writing here to set the record straight that these two churches, and their pastors, are not "tolerated at best," but appreciated and admired for their effective ministries.

Michael J. Coyner

Resident Bishop
Indiana Area

The September/October issue of *Circuit Rider* raises good questions and offers many thoughtful suggestions as we look to the next General Conference.

No one, however, mentions that the Institute of Religion and Democracy is out to destroy The United Methodist Church and other similar denominations.

The leaders of the Good News and Confessing Movement caucuses would have more credibility if they publicly denounced and withdrew from the unholy alliance with the IRD.

Our Board of Global Ministries is not good enough for these caucuses. They seek to have separate women's work. They do not support our publishing house for literature. Our seminaries are not evangelical enough. Through the influence and influx of money from the I. R. D. the structure of our denomination is being dismantled any way possible.

The suggestion of amiable separation of those groups from The United Methodist Church sounds reasonable until you follow the money. These groups simply want control of the vast assets of The United Methodist Church.

Let these caucus groups withdraw if they choose. But they do not deserve any of the assets. A local church member can leave a church; there is no financial settlement no matter if the member did pay 50% of the building cost or buy the organ.

In the early 20th century the group that would become the Nazarene denomination left because the Methodists were not "Wesleyan" enough. Wesley was not orthodox. He was a radical!

Albert Askew

North Georgia Conference

Dr. Riley Case has taken it upon himself to be the critic of the so-called "liberal agenda" in United Methodist seminaries. The latest critique has come in the September/October 2007 issue of *Circuit Rider*. Dr. Case asserts—without data to support his statement—that "United Methodist seminaries appear to have little interest in hiring or involving evangelical

scholars" (17). If we construe the term "evangelical" as referring to people who (a) confess traditional, orthodox Christian faith, including the Trinity, Incarnation, and Resurrection; (b) hold Jesus Christ to be God's definitive revelation to humankind; (c) believe in the power and work of the Holy Spirit to lead us away from lives of sin and into lives of righteousness; and (d) believe that same Spirit to have inspired the Holy Scriptures to make us alive unto salvation, then Dr. Case is quite wrong in his blanket criticism of United Methodist seminaries.

At United Theological Seminary, there is a deep respect for Christian tradition, an abiding sense of the importance and work of the Holy Spirit, and a commitment to training ministers who will lead people to the fullness of life in Jesus Christ. We also offer a concentration in Church Renewal, grounded in the conviction that all renewal, whether of individuals, churches, or the Church Universal, begins with the work of the Holy Spirit.

Duke Divinity school has long been associated with the post-liberal movement, most notably through the work of Stanley Hauerwas. Scholars such as William J. Abraham and Rebekah Miles at Perkins School of Theology demonstrate a profound respect for the traditional faith of the Church. There are twenty John Wesley Fellows teaching in United Methodist seminaries in the U.S., including, Wendy Edwards, the dean at United. There are ten professors at United Methodist Seminaries in the U.S. who hold E. Stanley Jones chairs in Evangelism, funded by the Foundation for Evangelism.

Dr. Case's rhetoric is just that—rhetoric—but it does not hold up to scrutiny.

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