



OPEN FORUM

C*ircuit Rider* is too often the “same-old, same-old” of a denomination in trouble, but in the Nov/Dec/Jan issue I found a real nugget of gold among the pyrite. Its articles on hospitality have been shared with our lay leadership as we seek to follow our God-given vision and fulfill our mission to make and form disciples in a transformational manner. Several of those articles were inspiring, encouraging, and affirming of some of the changes we have implemented.

Imagine my dismay when I turned to the Open Forum in the Feb/Mar/April issue and saw in the letters there much of why our denomination has trouble moving forward; everybody has their agenda...everybody has their “cause.” One writer laments the lack of attention to Baby Boomers. Another points out a lack of emphasis on young adults. Still another muses as to why gays and lesbians weren’t highlighted. Come on, folks! Can’t we look for the good, without picking everything apart all the time as we push our favorite agendas? Yes, baby boomers, young adults, and gays and lesbians are important—vitaly important—and the *Circuit Rider* has devoted much attention to each of these, as well as dozens of others over the years. Diversity is a gift from God; let’s not let diversity—and our desires to hear our own voices—turn diversity into divisiveness. Too much is at stake.

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I just finished reading the Book Excerpt “The Crisis of Younger Clergy: Deployment Dilemmas” in the Feb./Mar./Apr. 2009 issue of the *Circuit Rider*. I certainly understand this dilemma! Since I entered the United Methodist clergy on active appointments in 1971, I was in the group of clergy who in 1973 were a fairly large percentage of the ministerial ranks, according to this article. Over the years of my ministry, particularly my younger years, the Cabinet usually wanted me to be appointed to the very eldest and least promising congregations. I was able to turn a few of those churches into slightly growing congregations while I was there, but at least two of those very churches have, since I left, almost gone out of existence.

I was appointed to one of the supposedly young and promising young adult churches over 10 years ago, at the age of 52. That was almost the first appointment which could be described in that fashion in my ministry. I suppose it had taken me that long to be available to a young adult congregation. Since the ultimate goal of United Methodist clergy and cabinets these days is salary rankings, and since it is natural enough for persons as they get older to believe that their salaries should increase, it is almost inevitable that the United Methodist appointment system is having serious problems with obtaining younger clergy and with retaining them.

Wayne A. Beatty

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I’m writing in response to the anonymous letter about welcoming sex offenders (Open Forum, Feb./Mar./Apr. issue). While not an expert on the subject of offering ministry to sex offenders, I helped to do that as part of a treatment and recovery program once housed in (but not run by) a Presbyterian church in Dayton, Ohio. This particular treatment center had strict criteria for accepting sexual offenders into the program. Offenders who had used overt physical battery, or who had preyed randomly or serially on victims unknown to them were not accepted for treatment. The staff considered such offenders to be less likely to complete the program successfully and too great a risk to have in proximity with clients who were survivors of sexual abuse in various stages of recovery. Great care had to be taken to assure that survivors of abuse were helped to feel safe and secure in a facility that also accepted for treatment perpetrators of abuse. The term “safe sanctuary” does not necessarily reassure those who were violated while supposedly being protected in a “safe sanctuary.”

It’s possible that a local church could successfully undertake an intentional ministry to those convicted of criminal sexual abuse, but it would be very difficult to do this safely and successfully, and should not be undertaken by congregations lacking staff properly trained to do it. To welcome identified abusers openly into the congregation would surely have some impact on former (or present!) victims, and most pastors are unprepared to provide adequate emotional and spiritual support to these wounded individuals. Sexual offenders are unquestionably people who need the church’s healing ministry. Just remember that the quality and depth of specialized ministry they need is not one for which clergy and congregations are easily or automatically prepared.

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