

OPEN FORUM

I read with interest the article “Retirement Repositioning” by Pastor Brian Bauknight (May/June/July). He spoke of “a growing sense of emptiness and restlessness” following his retirement from the responsibilities of senior minister in a large congregation. Knowing how to use the talent and experience of the growing number of retirees is a challenge facing our denomination. There are more retired bishops than active! When I was in Minnesota I discovered that the Conference was responsible for as many pension checks as we had pastors under appointment! This included both retirees and widowed spouses.

I am eighty-eight and have been retired twenty-two years. Following my retirement I was given the privilege for nine years of three different assignments that I found very satisfying and I could fulfill them at my own pace. Then for another nine years I was privileged to be a “Bishop in Residence” at a large church and found such duties as teaching a Sunday school class very fulfilling.

I’m of the opinion that most clergy, following official retirement, would welcome even a non-stipendiary assignment. There are small churches that cannot afford full-time clergy but would greatly benefit from the leadership of an expe-

rienced pastor who has much wisdom to share. There are many larger congregations whose ministry would be enriched if they were to add to their staff the gifts of a part-time, retired pastor. Perhaps every annual conference should have a “shadow” cabinet that would examine the ways in which the church could use the talents, experience, and gifts of each new class of retirees.

Retired Bishop Emerson S. Colaw
North Central Jurisdiction

The February/March/April issue was one of the best issues ever. It has a painful, yet hopeful message. The pain is facing the reality that perhaps most of our existing congregations will not be able to make the changes that are necessary to minister to Generation X and beyond. The hope is in seeing new ways of organizing local communities of faith that are creative, exciting, and herald a whole new day for what will be the descendants of today’s UMC.

One of the dilemmas will be in how to deal with congregations that require more of a maintenance pastor than a church growth pastor. There is a significant ministry that occurs even in congregations that are not growing in membership. People are born, people

get sick, people have life issues and spiritual struggles. These people need a caring and dynamic pastor who does not necessarily have to be an entrepreneur of church growth. But these congregations are made to feel second class because they do not jump on the church growth bandwagon. If pastors are made to feel less than adequate because they are not implementing their Annual Conference’s latest “whiz bang” program for church growth, they will not be able to serve to the best of their ability. We need to encourage older churches who are still looking beyond themselves. A good pastor matched with a traditional congregation that is truly interested in younger adults can be effective, but perhaps in a less dramatic way than a new church start-up.

We need more new congregations that are encouraged and allowed to develop ministries, missions, and operating rules that are “outside the box.” This requires bishops and district superintendents to not force patterns and rules that end up killing a new church. It means not expecting a new church to pay full apportionments in less than ten years or to place names on report forms for offices that do not relate to the community he/she serves. The church bureaucracy simply needs to issue the challenge and then get out of the way, approaching church growth as something that has to occur from the bottom up rather than the top down.

Roy White
Elder in the Virginia
Annual Conference

Thank you so much for your recent issue on global health. Tuberculosis, a cheaply preventable and treatable disease, is wreaking havoc in places of poverty and setting back progress in stemming the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Many families in the U.S. are one health emergency away from plunging into poverty. Children’s life expectancy and general quality of life are being compromised by our inability to rally the collective will to tackle both the “easy gets” and the complex issues surrounding basic health care here and abroad. We United Methodists have it in our theological DNA to care about and work on these problems with compassion and practicality. Let’s continue to keep rising to the occasion.

Lisa Marchal
Indiana Conference