

# Town Hall Meeting, April 17, 2007

## *Remarks by Mr. Jim Winkler, General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society*

**JIM WINKLER:**

When I was a boy, I remember my father preaching regularly that the church exists for mission. We United Methodists believe the mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. When people join the church we ask them if they will resist evil and injustice in all its forms. Ours is an active faith, one that strengthens the heart and the soul of the believer and prepares each of us to respond to the needs of the world.

John Wesley reminded us there is no holiness that is not social holiness. At a time when God's very Creation is in peril, we cannot afford to focus solely on individual salvation. Neither can the United Methodist Church carry out its mission effectively if our infrastructure is weak.

For more than 20 years, thanks to the commitment of our church to develop ethnic young adult leaders, the Board of Church & Society has operated a summer intern program. One of the 2005 interns, Erik Velez, has completed his degree. He has joined a new United Methodist Hispanic congregation in Nashville where he's helping to start an English as a Second Language Program. Erik works at the Fair Housing Council, an organization devoted to fighting racial discrimination in the housing industry. He's also been elected to the board of directors of Amnesty International.

Erik's exactly the type of leader our church needs: a committed Christian in a new congregation working for justice and peace because of his faith in Jesus Christ. The United States is a rapidly diversifying nation, but in this country the United Methodist Church remains 93% white. The general agencies can and do develop leaders like Erik.

In Arkansas, one of the poorest states in the U.S., there's been a long struggle to raise the minimum wage. This now successful effort was led by Rev. Steve Copley, pastor of First United Methodist of North Little Rock. Steve says, "The religious community was key. When leaders from local churches, both lay and clergy, as well as bishops and other leaders from a wide spectrum of the state's faith community united behind the effort, it created a powerful voice for change." That's an example of faith being put into action.

At the general church level, the Board of Church & Society has been involved in "Let Justice Roll," an ecumenical movement devoted to increasing the minimum wage. Our Social Principles call on all employers to "pay their employees a wage that does not require them to depend upon government subsidies such as food stamps or welfare for their livelihood."

Our ministry with the poor goes beyond feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, and clothing the naked. It requires challenging the principalities and powers that profit from the misery of so many. We have to join justice and mercy together.

Another example: the Philippines is a poor country where a tiny percentage of elites control most of the wealth at the expense of the vast majority of the population. Shortly after the terrible events of 9/11, the Philippines was identified as the second front in the war on terror. A tragic consequence of this has been the assassinations and murders of more than 800 church leaders and human rights activists.

Last month, Bishop Solito Toquero accompanied a group of church leaders to Washington for an international conference on the Philippines crisis organized with the assistance of the General Boards of Global Ministries and

Church & Society. Additionally, the boards helped arrange for the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee to hold a hearing on the killings. Afterwards, our staff accompanied the delegation to Geneva, Switzerland as they testified before the UN Human Rights Commission.

This is the kind of ministry with the poor that must be part of our mission. We must question the growing gap between the rich and poor and advocate for fair trade and government priorities that care for the last, the least, and the lost.

A year ago, the general secretaries made a presentation to the Connectional Table about our work on the 2009-12 church budget. In the course of that presentation, we listed a few examples of how the agencies carry out ministry together on a daily basis. Afterwards, a district superintendent said to me,

“Jim, I’m embarrassed to admit I had no idea the agencies worked together. I always assumed there was no cooperation. In fact, I’ve always had the impression you compete against one another.”

Well, even though it is often unrecognized, collaboration is occurring and has been occurring in a variety of ways. Some current collaborative partnerships that are notable include:

Agencies working together to create model pension systems for Central Conferences; to create curricula and provide content for educational materials relevant to mission interpretation; to prevent drug and alcohol abuse; to provide seminars on national and international affairs for United Methodist youth and adults.

Friends, The United Methodist Church is a worldwide movement dedicated to spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ. The general agencies help to provide resources and direction to the movement. The General Conference created the agencies to provide glue to connect and hold the movement together.