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“Relevance and Holy Spirit — What the Church Needs Now”

God is calling us to lead, be spiritual leaders, face the day and rock the boat when it needs to be rocked.

Life is always changing, and the church cannot remain the same. If we're not reaching men, women, boys and girls — and not inviting them into relationships with Christ — we're not meeting our call as United Methodists.

Now is a time of challenge and opportunity. Challenges always provide unique opportunities for ministry. New opportunities for ministry often require new approaches for ministry.

To meet the challenge, good United Methodists will need to modify our vocabulary. To reach new people for Christ, the words, "we've never done that before," will need to be followed by, "but let's try it and see what God does through it." We can ill afford to allow institutional stagnation to hinder the denomination and the churches within it.

While The United Methodist Church is showing growth in Africa and the Philippines, many of our congregations in the United States are struggling with dwindling church membership, professions of faith and baptisms. In some regards, we are not reaching the "least and lost" with the Good News and the love of Jesus Christ.

We have become a much more middle-class denomination, and we're not dealing with each other across socioeconomic levels. Numerous congregations are thriving. Praise God! But these congregations provide a glimpse of what God wants to do through all of our congregations.

As a denomination, we've lost some of the passion of the early Wesleyan movement. Those early Methodists were passionate for God and sharing the Gospel to all of God's people. John, Charles and the others in the "Holy Club" had a passion for the poor and imprisoned. That passion provided education for miners' children who would not have had access to education.

Our passion is not as strong as it has been or needs to be. The Wesleys' ministry was extremely relevant to their day and addressed the brokenness of their day.

Brokenness still exists in every family and socioeconomic level. You may not be able to see it, but our communities contain:

- people who are hungry, in poverty, struggling just to make it from day to day;
- persons who struggle with the oppression of addiction;
- children who — because of economics, substandard schools or below-level education — don't have the same chances in life;

- adults who don't have the skills they need for a job because they didn't finish high school;
- racism; and
- rising levels of violence.

Our congregations can provide for these people. The power of our Triune God can and will make a difference in their lives. Muhammed can't do it. Buddha is not the answer. Only Christ. Each United Methodist church can offer people Jesus.

If we really love God, we're called to love God's people. We're challenged to approach others with the heart, eyes and mind of Christ and to do for others as we do for ourselves.

Numerous congregations struggle because they are not reaching or connecting with the community that surrounds them. In too many instances, we try to do the work on our own strength, rather than under the power of the Holy Spirit.

Any church — urban, rural, suburban, small, medium, large — can make a difference with the power of the Holy Spirit. But we have to rely on that power. We have to spend more time "being" with God in prayer. Otherwise, we won't find healing for God's people or the church.

It's not about us! It's about the power of the Holy Spirit working through us to transform the world.