

Covenant groups, clusters concepts worth developing

The Imagine Indiana Design Team will soon bring to the North Indiana and South Indiana Conferences of The United Methodist Church a proposed plan for uniting the two conferences who voted unity this past spring.

Part of the Design Team's report proposes a clustering of churches and the formation of clergy covenant groups, as two important aspects of the new Indiana Conference, to meet the church's goal of "making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." Both of these proposals are designed for congregational support and accountability to meet the church's goal.

Conversations about clergy covenant groups and congregational clusters have been lively the past few months, receiving both strong praise and straightforward criticism during the 18 district discussions with Bishop Coyner and in other discussions with members of the Imagine Indiana Design Team.

Hospitality needs to be coupled with support and accountability of our congregations and their pastors.

Both are proven concepts used in other United Methodist conferences within the church, but for these ideas to be fruitful and strengthen the church in Indiana, they need to be introduced through gracious invitations for participation, not mandated with punitive actions if congregation or clergy decide not to participate out of fear or previous unpleasant experiences. Hospitality needs to be coupled with support and accountability of our congregations and their pastors.

Personally, I look forward to clergy covenant groups. As an ordained elder serving the church in an extension ministry, I have not been part of such a group of four or more clergy and have felt the

lack of such support in my own ministry. Yes, I have fear of betrayed trust from past experiences, but being accepted in a group of peers makes such a group inviting despite my fears. I need the spiritual discipline that such a group can offer and I feel my ministry will be better with participation.

I also have heard fears expressed for the clustering of several congregations to work together on community ministry as well. Pastors have expressed an overload anxiety with another meeting to attend in addition to covenant groups. If the clustering of churches is only seen as "another meeting to attend," then it may be nothing more than an anxiety producing event.

On the other hand, clustering to serve the greater community in which we are placed will be a sharing of ministry for the transformation of that community, county and state. Some clusters may very well be a bust, but those clusters of congregations that think with like minds and hearts will be more able to face an evermore secularized society giving witness to the world that God is love.

The genius of John Wesley, founder of The United Methodist Church and other Wesleyan denominations, was his insistence that the world was truly his parish, not the bounds of the parish, the church or its membership. All people are members of God's family. Clusters of congregations working together will give witness that United Methodists are organized and connected to trans-

form the world with God's love in Jesus Christ.

The Imagine Indiana Design Team proposal won't be the end-all plan for bringing the new Indiana Conference into a complete and whole being. If approved, the proposal will physically bring the two conferences into one, however it can only usher in a new conference whose mission, ministry, witness and outreach will be shaped into a reality



by those who are nominated to serve as the leaders of that new conference. In Wesleyan terminology, the new conference will continue to be made perfect or whole.

Even at its best, the Design Team proposal is only a plan on paper until it is lived out and reshaped in the lives of those who claim the plan as their own.

-- Daniel R. Gangler
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A two-day event in sharing faith through personal stories

Fox, Reisman to lead LEAP convocation Feb 29-March 1

To assist both United Methodist laity and clergy in sharing their faith stories with others, the lay leaders of both the Indiana North and Indiana South conferences are sponsoring an Indiana Area convocation to be held in Indianapolis.

Kayc Mykrantz, lay leader of the North Indiana Conference, and Ike Williams, lay leader of the South Indiana Conference of The United Methodist Church, invite both laity and clergy to a unique **LEAP Year Event – Let's Establish A Priority to Tell Our Story** – the weekend of **Feb. 29–March 1** at United Methodist-related University of Indianapolis.

They will be joined by Dr. Eddie Fox of The World Methodist Council and nationally known

North Indiana Conference Evangelist, the Rev. Kimberly Reisman in a two-day event leading participants to become confident in sharing their faith through personal stories.

LEAP will run from opening workshop at 7 p.m. Friday, Feb. 29, through closing worship at 3:30 p.m. on Saturday, March 1, at Ransburg Auditorium in Esch Hall. Registration will open at 5 p.m.

Indiana Bishop Mike Coyner will lead opening worship followed by a presentation by Fox.

The Christ United Methodist Church Choir of Franklin will provide special music for the evening.

Cost is \$50 per person including materials and Saturday lunch. A brochure including a registra-

tion form is available online at www.inareaumc.org. Printed brochures will be mailed to lay leadership across the state in January. A registration form also is provided with this story.

Leaders of the LEAP event Feb. 29-March 1

Kimberly Reisman

The Rev. Kimberly D. Reisman serves as the North Indiana Conference Evangelist of The United Methodist Church and execu-



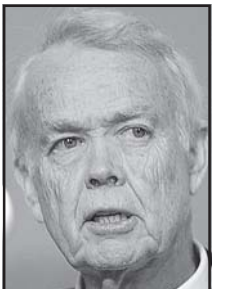
Reisman

tive director of Next Step Evangelism Ministries, where her focus is empowering others to take the next step of faith on their spiritual journey. Reisman provides her writing and in the context of retreats, seminars, workshops and revivals both nationally and internationally. She is a native of Gulfport, Miss., and had lived in California, Tennessee, Georgia and Connecticut before moving to Indiana in 1993 with her husband, John and three children.

Eddie Fox

The Rev. Dr. H. Eddie Fox is the World Director of Evangelism of The World Methodist Council. He is responsible for leading 16 Regional Secretaries of World Evangelism in developing indigenous evangelism on every conti-

nent. The World Methodist Council, an association of churches belonging to the Methodist-Wesleyan tradition and representing more than 76 million constituents in 138 countries, through its Division of World Evangelism is challenging member congregations to Offer Christ Today. As the World Director, Fox preaches World Evangelism missions, develops holistic models of evangelism ministry of word, deed and sign, teaches, and encourages lay and clergy to be about the ministry of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.



Fox



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Reflection on City Church

I was present at the service on Sunday, Oct. 7 (Nov.-Dec. 2007 *Together*) at the site of City Church in Gary. I remember when the congregation closed. I also remember when we closed both First UMC and Indiana Harbor in East Chicago, when we closed Ambridge, Glen Park, and Marshalltown in Gary, and when we closed Centenary and Christ UMC in Hammond.

We apologized to the community for failing to continue in vital

ministry at City Church. Are we also prepared to apologize to these other communities for failing in our ministry to them as well? It appears that we simply do not know how to be in ministry in the urban community. Obviously, other churches are carrying on effective ministry in these neighborhoods.

Is there not something we can learn from them? What is God calling the UMC to do in these communities? Probably not plant flowers.

– Rev. Bill Kaster
Plymouth, Ind.
Trinity UMC

LEAP Registration Form

To register for the LEAP to Tell Our Story event, please complete this registration form and send it with a check for \$50 per person to the Indiana Area of The United Methodist Church, attn. Lisa Timmerman, 1100 W. 42nd Street, Suite 210, Indianapolis, IN 46208. Thank you.

Deadline: February 14, 2008

Name/s _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Phone number (AC _____) _____

Cell phone (AC _____) _____

e-mail address _____

Local church _____ of _____ District _____