

Connected observer offers viewpoint on Imagine Indiana

By Taylor Burton-Edwards

I'm not part of the design team for Imagine Indiana, but I was involved in the feedback team leading up to the 2007 Annual Conference and, while continuing to participate in that group, also served on the Conference Design subcommittee leading up to the final plan now before us. I do not presume to speak for the Imagine Indiana Team as such, but rather as someone connected and committed to its work over these past two years.

I agree entirely that questions (of all sorts) and even challenges (of any sort) are good for us to be hearing together and talking about at this point. Asking questions and even offering challenges is a sign that people really care about what is at stake in making the kinds of structural changes being contemplated in the proposal for a unified Indiana conference. And all signs of caring are, in my book at least, good things.

As a participant in the process, I've come to believe that the proposal that has been developed will be good for both conferences to adopt, with whatever additional changes each may believe needs to be made to make it better this year and going forward.

I just want to be clear about what a conference structure can and cannot do. The conference does not make disciples of Jesus Christ. God does that and Christians living out their faith in community with God, each other, and those with whom they are in mission is the usual way that happens. What a conference structure can do is facilitate processes that support and encourage

"Asking questions ... offering challenges is a sign that people really care..."

more people in and alongside more congregations to be about living as disciples themselves, engaging actively in God's mission where they are, and supporting others in doing this beyond their local contexts. Conferences can do this better if they are structured and supported in ways that make such outcomes more likely at the local level.

So, as I look at it, there's no good way to separate issues like health insurance, pensions, property, indebtedness and costs of offices and staffing from the question of whether a change in conference structures ends up producing better outcomes. We have to talk about those things, because these are integral parts of what conference structures have to have in place to have the fiscal and human capacity to support this other work well. For me, then, it's not a matter of whether we should talk about EITHER the fiscal/business "side" OR the outcomes side. It's not about EITHER the "movement" OR "the institution." It's always both. Our hope all along, I think, has been to address both in ways we hope will make both maximally effective for United Methodists in Indiana.

I think we'd all admit that what we've produced isn't perfect yet. That's another reason questions that can lead to some further refinements on either "side" ("business" or "mission") are good to have and good to hear. We can't

answer every question or concern now – and never will of course. But there can always be room for some improvement. Questions now and at our conference sessions in June can help that happen.

Let's also be clear that what is being proposed is very different in lots of ways than what we have in place now. That means that another way to frame the "transition" into which we are entering might reasonably be to call it a "disruption." For a while, even though the existing structures will run side by side with the one we may vote to bring online, things just won't work the way they used to, and it will take a while for the new structures, once they are in place, to be fully up and functioning to maximum potential. A key question we all have to ask ourselves is whether the cost of the disruption is worth the positive changes we hope will be brought by the new structure.

Some may ask, "Couldn't we just take some of the ideas we've generated from the new conference proposal, and implement them in our current conferences, and thereby reduce disruption?" That's a good question. My sense is that just adding these new pieces (such as clergy accountability groups and clustering of congregations) to two sets of structures that are not designed to support those activities now could be more likely to mean that these helpful "new ideas" end up with less than

stellar implementation, because they wouldn't have structures behind them that are built to support them. While just adding these ideas into the mix might be less disruptive, then, the impact of these new ideas would, I think, more than likely end up being diluted, if not sidelined, by the structures that currently exist. That wouldn't have happened by anyone's malice. It's just that structures do what they're designed to do, and they don't do or support well what they're not designed to

do or support.

It's a big change we're being asked to consider and decide. Actually, it's lots of changes. And lots of disruptions.

At the end of the day – or in this case, at the end of our transitions – I do believe these changes and the disruptions they are bound to bring will have been worth it.

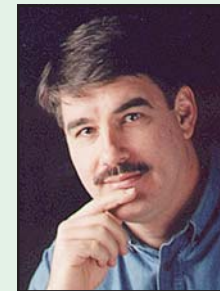
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BODY, MIND & SPIRIT

Going green

By Todd Outcalt
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Years ago, other colors had more notoriety. There was my blue heaven and yellow submarine and red sails in the sunset. Green was the color of envy or illness. But today, when someone asks, "Have you gone green?" they are asking an entirely different question. Green is in. And not just with the young.



Outcalt

A few weeks ago a dear woman in her eighties asked me if the congregation used "green coffee" during the fellowship hour on Sunday mornings. We don't, but we will.

Actually, I'm afraid I'm behind the curve when it comes to going green. Two of our family cars are behemoths. We grow none of our own food. We use too much electricity.

But this spring I decided to try my hand at saving the environment and simplifying my life. Our home in Brownsburg sits on the same White Lick Creek that flows south past Calvary church. And, since I had a kayak, I thought I would paddle to work instead of driving the 1½-mile trip.

The experiences I've had so far on the creek have been enlightening.

For example, paddling 400 hundred yards past our property, I discovered that the appearance of a town quickly gives way to the appearance of a wilderness. There are no buildings, no sprawling subdivisions and no exhaust fumes. Actually, the quiet rippling of water is very peaceful. And along the creek there is a surprising amount of woods – and wild life.

To date I have encountered ducks, geese, blue herons, squirrels, raccoons, foxes and

every creeping thing that creepeth on the earth. I also have discovered a 10-foot-square beaver lodge about a half-mile from our house – the source of the beavers who chewed down some 40 trees on our property this past winter.

Amazingly, these wild things live nearby – right in the heart of town – but I rarely notice them, or they are not visible. Likewise, I note that we

humans have created a disturbing amount of pollution and dumped it in their habitat. The creek is not only home to many wild things, but also a frightening amount of trash: old tires, dozens of rolls of barbed wire, bottles, cans, plastic jugs and a thin, oily film that clings to the water like skin.

During my mornings paddling to church, I also have become more aware of certain biblical affirmations. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. Consider the lilies of the field. The heavens are declaring the glory of God. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God.

I'm still growing – right now I'm just a mustard yellow bordering on chartreuse – but I might become green some day.

One step at a time, I guess. But as I can, I'm just going to enjoy my new ride to work. It may not be ministry in the traditional sense, but maybe those beavers will go easier on my timber next winter. I know my shade trees would be a lot greener if they did.

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Study shows support for Epworth

By Jean Brindel, Capital Fund Team
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The Feasibility Study for the Epworth Forest Project of the Impact 2818 North Indiana Conference outdoor ministry program has been completed. The study was very positive, showing strong support for both the proposed Epworth Forest project and the entire camping ministry of the North Indiana Conference.



Brindel

Like the any good study, it reports things we already know, things we need to know, identify growth and finally develop goals. To read the details of the project and the feasibility study, log onto www.rightfuture.org, then click on "news" and then "April 2008."

The study revealed some things we already knew: Great things happen at church camp, like "spiritual awakening and commitment to ecclesiastical leadership, and even first dates..." and "that Epworth Forest Camp and Conference Center at North Webster has been successful in spite of its facilities – that's how strong the quality of programming is perceived to be."

The study told us things we need to know, such

as to be successful in raising funds for the Epworth Forest Project, the story of the ministry will need to be shared in effective, creative ways with the help of the local church and strong leadership. It is important to stay connected to those who have attended ministry events at the Impact 2818 sites, such as Epworth Forest.

Growth was identified: The Outdoor Ministry Resource Team has created an executive committee for governance of expansion and upgrading of the facilities of outdoor ministries sites such as Epworth Forest.

Finally, the study presents three levels of fundraising goals for the Epworth Forest Project for the next 24 months: the base goal of \$10 million, a challenge goal of \$15 million and a breakthrough goal of \$22 million. This summer, the work will begin to share the story so that the \$10 million goal will become a reality in the next 24 months.

Log onto the Web site (www.rightfuture.org/news.html) click "News" and then "April 2008" and read the entire study. Begin to pray about how it is that you will be part of God's plan to continue the strong outdoor ministry that will touch the lives of future generations. Join in the commitment to "Doing everything it takes to reach the next generation for Jesus Christ."

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