

# THANK YOU!

**M**ay 1--Yesterday, our beloved United Methodist Church voted not to follow the path of the fracturing Episcopal Church or the shriveling United Church of Christ. Unlike those declining denominations that are increasingly captive to our surrounding American culture, United Methodists voted to affirm the teachings of Jesus Christ about marriage and sexual ethics.

Thank you, delegates of General Conference 2008! Thank you for standing up to the surrounding pressures and intimidation. Thank you for your faithfulness to Scripture. Thank you for recognizing that the Gospel's purpose is not to affirm but to save and transform. Thank you for keeping faith with the one holy, catholic and apostolic church that transcends the centuries and all cultures with the timeless and ever fresh Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Special thanks go to our brothers and sisters in Africa. Thank you, Congolese, Nigerians, Sierre Leoneans, Liberians, Angolans, Mozambicans, Zimbabweans, Ivorians and others who journeyed thousands of miles, at a great price, for standing with us. You, our African friends, have stood between us and potential schism in our church. God is using your spiritual vitality and your zeal for the Word to preserve and renew our church. Some will revile you. But God will honor your fidelity to Him.



A UMNS photo by Mike DuBose.

The church in America still has far to go. Over 3 million members lost in 40 years! And those areas of our church most preoccupied with liberalizing our sexual ethical standards, for all the talk about "open doors," are the fastest declining. We American United Methodists must learn from our African brothers and sisters and remember our own illustrious history. Methodist circuit riders of centuries past took much of America for Jesus through their audacity for the Gospel. The Lord has powerfully used Methodism in America in the past. If we will only return to Him, He may graciously revive us once again!

At the same time, we on the evangelical side of the church should be wary of blaming the liberal side exclusively for the decline of United Methodism in America. We all share sad responsibility, through our hesitation, our negativity, our passivity, our self-contentment, our too frequent unwillingness to risk discomfort for the Gospel. We are one church, and when any part of the church fails, we all fail.

We pray that the Holy Spirit will restore all of us who are United Methodists to a closer fellowship with Him, to greater unity in Him, and to greater service in Him. And we give thanks to our Heavenly Father, who despite our many failures, remarkably sustains us still.

## Rep. Cleaver Characterizes Life in U.S. as “Terrible”

In a luncheon at which the General Board of Church and Society highlighted its “commitment to the progressive and life-giving issues,” Democratic Congressman Emanuel Cleaver expressed frustration with present-day America. Likening the need for change to turning a car around, he stated that, “As terrible as things are in the United States... our job as people of faith is to turn things around. U-turns are permitted.”

Cleaver declared, “For the United States to be saved it means that we have to have some respect for the peoples of the world.” Objecting to the Iraq war, he predicted, “Your children and your children’s children are going to be adversely affected” by the “\$9 trillion debt,” most of which, he said, originated from the costs of the war.

Cleaver suggested that many Americans justify the war with religious arguments, and contended, “If you listen to some of my colleagues, we’re doing it [fighting the present wars] for Jesus.” He added, “Many people in the church are looking for a military messiah” but said that Christ is not the “pistol-packing prophet” that they desire. Using the parable of the Prodigal Son to describe America’s war on terror, Cleaver lamented, “Having wasted our substance in a far away land, we are beginning to smell the stench of the pig pen” and long for home.

The Missouri representative also objected that “poor populations have disproportionately been affected by the war,” in part because “many of them are joining [the armed forces] for economic reasons.” Those who are “poor enough... end up on the sands of Iraq.”

Recalling the passage in I Samuel 31 where the Philistines descend a mountain to strip the dead following a battle, Cleaver said, “In 2008 we are still stripping the dead... [The poor in] our nation [are] dead to our compassion and dead to our sensibilities.”

To see an example of this figurative “stripping the dead...we need only look down the road at New Orleans,” where much of the devastation of hurricane Katrina remains. “Only 23.4% of the people in the 9th Ward [of New Orleans] have a high school diploma... 30% did not own a car [at the time of the hurricane], and that’s why I became outraged” when people would question why they did not simply evacuate the city. “These were poor people being blamed for being poor... They were economically, educationally, and environmentally dead and they were stripped of their dignity and pride.” Cleaver seemed to assign responsibility for post-Katrina suffering to an uncompassionate American public rather than the storm.

In light of economic woes such as “24,000 foreclosures a week” and “gasoline prices [that] are already high and... not going to go down,” Cleaver warned, “Society is going to have to change, we won’t be able to” continue our current consumption patterns. In light of that reality, he claimed, “We don’t need a church that is not prophetic.”

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