

UMVIM CONNECT 2007

“LEARN”

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Thank you for the invitation to be here – Wonderful music and great to be here with those who are committed to God’s mission in our world. You all are folks who understand that **mission is not simply a project of the church, mission is the purpose of the church!**

Refer to “Poverty” video: We have much to LEARN don’t we?

PRAY:

I took my first mission trip outside my own state when I was a freshman in college. Drove across country with 2 guys from my college to the Grand Canyon – Never really been out of NC – never been on a road trip with 2 guys. I was just a little bitty naive thing back then. Hostel – bathhouse several yards away – no walls – no doors – hitch hikers smoking pot – I was the only girl. Mama said, “Sounds good to me.”

Not exactly what I was expecting – but many of you could attest to the same thing couldn’t you. Went to Nigeria teach NT – no OT “in the same book. Following Jesus, being a part of God’s mission often brings many surprises.

LEARN, GO, SERVE! Tonight our focus is on LEARN.

OK if we are going to learn let’s start with a little quiz – I knew you would like that. These are questions that all United Methodist should be able to answer and especially mission leaders like yourself – so I expect you all to make 100.

- (1) What is the name of our mission board?
- (2) How many missionaries do we currently have? 939

- (3) What is a PIM?
- (4) What is a Primetimer? **SHOW Brochure** (You all are not doing too bad)
- (5) As United Methodist we have 4 goals in mission – what are they?

Goal 1 make disciples.

Goal 2 Strengthen, develop and renew Christian congregations and communities

Goal 3 Alleviate human Suffering

Goal 4 Seek justice, Freedom and peace

My hunch is if you don't know these the rest of the folks in your church don't know them. **(SHOW BROCHURE!)**

These goals incorporate what Wesley called our Personal Holiness (piety) and Social Holiness. Being born again and justice for the poor; it's about the transformation of our souls and the transformation of unjust systems in our world. And we don't just choose one or two of these goals if you want to be a true follower of Jesus. They can't be separated. Jesus call to be a disciple was one that invited people to be a part of Kingdom living where the well being of folks spirit and the body was cared for, where salvation and systemic justice went hand in hand.

I want to start by sharing some of the things I learned about God's mission over the years.

- (1) For one thing: Mission is messy. It would be great to think that we could just come up with some great clear guidelines that we all could agree upon and follow the right steps and have everything turn out right. But it usually doesn't happen that way. Mission is messy business. For just when you think you've covered all the bases in this area something else pops up totally unexpected. One of the greatest difficulties anyone will have in mission is the unwillingness to be surprised.
- (2) Mission is often complicated. We would like to think that it is just a matter of going to help someone, of doing something good for the other -- and it may

certainly involve that but it is far more complicated than simply “Doing Good”.
(rutitans, Goodwill, Jr. League) Let me ask you a question, “Do good intentions
always result in good theologically sound practices?” No I am afraid that good
intentions do NOT always translate into good theologically sound practices.
Church groups: **Sending used clothes**.... Was that a good thing?... Well maybe
but in this situation.... VIM visits in West African country and comes back
wanting to **build a well**. Is that a good thing? Maybe but in this situation
....women were physically abused by their husbands.... **Me & shoes for
Hassan’s kids**.... Was that a good thing?..... Maybe but in this situation.....
Mission is complicated.

- (3) Mission will change US. When we really open ourselves to being a part of God’s
mission things start happening, lives are changed and priorities have to be shifted.
This is not always a very positive experience, and often it doesn’t feel very good.
Causes conflict in the church. So if a church’s experience of mission is going out
doing good projects here and there that gives everybody that warm fuzzy feeling
you make want to take a look at it to see if it is really theologically grounded.
Because our example for the scriptures and most especially from the life of Jesus
is that being a part of God’s mission is often hard work that doesn’t always leave
us with warm fuzzy feelings. It leaves us feeling uncomfortably and challenges
our very lifestyle and culture.

How do we move folks from that warm fuzzy mission something more substantial? We
LEARN, we study – we start when they are young.

SHOW

[MISSION POSSIBLE](#) for teaching children, [PARTNERSHIP IN MISSION](#) for
understanding our theology in mission, and books to use in bible study about mission
[Mutuality in Mission](#) and [Concepts in Mission](#)

Being a part of God’s mission is pretty demanding. Well I have really started us out on a
positive note haven’t I? So what’s the good news here? Well the best news is you are

not the Savior of the world. Jesus is. So we can give up that heavy burden that many of us carry around. Just chill out because it doesn't all depend on you.

Our theology of mission doesn't start with us and our wants or desires or our dreams --- as important as we are we are not the starting point for mission. Nor is our mission or outreach committee the starting point for mission.

Our theology of mission doesn't even begin with those who are suffering and are in great need. Indeed they are important and we need to always keep before us that we don't just go and 'do' mission TO the "least of these" but rather we are in mission WITH the least of these, in partnership with, not simply ministry to. Yet they are not the starting point for mission.

So where is it? As United Methodist our starting point in mission is God. It is God's mission that we are about. From Genesis to Revelation, the Scriptures bear witness to a mission which begins with God, belongs to God, and will be fulfilled by God at the end of time. Now that's good news. It's not your mission, it's not the mission of your congregation, or of the United Methodist Church. There is only one mission and it's God's mission. Now there are many ways that we live this out but only one mission

All day long God is working for good in the world and God invites us to be a part of God mission. God's prevenient grace is at work, God's prevenient mission, already there ahead of us. We are connected to a living God who will not stay put but who moves in mission to redeem, restore and reconcile the whole creation to God's self. That's the good news!

It's important to know our starting point. We are different from a civic group or an eagle project. We are about the divine, mystical work of God. And we need to do our homework to understand our theology of mission to and understand the people to whom we are going.

It's God's mission. If that's true then how in the world are we to know where and how God wants us to participate in that mission unless we spend time with God in prayer, unless we are committed to being with God. We need to (1) first understand it's God's mission and (2) then we need to be grounded in Jesus Christ.

Being grounded in Christ through our spiritual formation is absolutely fundamental to a theologically sound mission. Far too often we, our churches want to get in there and help somebody, we want to DO something. But unless we are grounded in Christ through a disciplined life of prayer, meditation, study, and worship we can end up doing more harm than good.

It's not uncommon for the chair of a local church's outreach/mission committee to call me and the conversation go something like this. "We would like to do something in mission we've been doing some things locally but thought we might like to branch out a little and wondered if you had any ideas about some other place, maybe another country that we could help." After some conversation together sharing with them the most current information I know I ask if the committee or group has spend any time in prayer and discernment about where God might be leading them in regards to their mission. And sadly the response is often, "No we have just mainly talked about what we wanted to do. But that's a good idea maybe we do need to pray about it." Somehow we have managed to separate our spiritual formation from our mission. We have forgotten that our DOING must be based on our BEING in Christ.

Story of Stephen in Nigeria with tools. "But sir we haven't blessed them yet!"

Wouldn't it be great we were people who saw prayer as such an essential part of our life and work. Wouldn't it be great that before we practiced the tools of our trade we made sure that work was under girded and with quality time spent with God.

At a recent college graduation Porter Taylor an Episcopal Bishop told two stories from his Dioceses.

Both stories involve Will, a 4 year old son of one of the priest.

Will and some young children were playing church with his bothers and sister. Will serving communion with pretzels, “this is the body of Christ, this is the body of Christ” He came to his sister and she crossed her arms refusing to take it and he started poking her with the pretzel saying, this is body of Christ and you WILL take it.

Compare that with:

Will and his family were coming home church Will was asked what they talked about in his SS class that morning and he said, “Blah, Blah, Blah.

Two extremes of often how the church, our mission work can be perceived ... meaningless Blah, Blah, Blah that is irrelevant to the daily life of ordinary people, but it makes us feel good whose up there teaching or being poked and judged, forcing our truths like the pointy pretzel and told TAKE IT, it is the body of Christ!

I remember how one of my seminary professors used to describe some of our mission work, he said we as Christians come riding in like shining knights on white horses spraying agape all over people’s face without first asking them if they like the smell.

Karen Greenwaldt of the General Board of Discipleship was at our AC just a few weeks ago and she asked if we had ever been given a cup of cold water, then she asked us if we had ever had a cup of cold water thrown in our face. Quite a different experience. It got me to thinking about how we do mission. Sometimes it our great zeal to DO something, to HELP somebody I wonder if we aren’t dashing them with the cold water of our good intentions.

After all we want to DO something. We are ready to go. When perhaps one of the most important jobs in mission is the **preparation** of our spiritual lives, the developing of a disciplined prayer life, the struggling with our theology, taking the time to learn and understand the issues of injustice and how our lives or country may be implicit in those systems.

If you don't have time for a focused disciplined prayer life --- you don't have time to be in mission. If your outreach/mission committee doesn't have time to focus on a discerning prayer life and study of scripture and learning --- then they really shouldn't be taking time to go do some mission project.

Many times I think we, as Christians want to get out there and shine for Jesus before we have spent time with the Light of the world. We rush head long into mission projects without first spending time with God, and before long we end up frustrated and disillusioned with it all, and find that in the end we have done more harm than good.

Before we GO, before we SERVE we need to spend some time learning (1) it's God's mission we are about, (2) learning what it mean's to be grounded in Christ (3) understanding that mission is about RELATIONSHIPS.

This transformational mission, this relational mission is pretty radical stuff --Mission as relationship moves us far from that old model of white missionaries going out with all the answers to conquer and save the heathens. Mission as relationship means that when we reach out in mission we know that we have something to learn from those to whom we go. It's not just about what we have to offer them but what is it that God wants to offer us through that relationship. We often think of mission as the helper/helpee, the giver/receiver, the host/the guest. With this limited notion it is easy for mission to remain simply a hand out, a charity, which makes us feel good and which never asks the hard questions of justice, where we ourselves are changed and are willing to challenge oppressive systems and practices. Mission just remains a travel tours with a helping component built in.

A father would often bring his young son down to help with the feeding program in his community. One day the father was overhead to say, "I sure hope this feeding program is around when my son is grown so that he can bring his children here to help." Now I understand the good intention that he had when he said that. But shouldn't we hope and

be working for that a day when that feeding program won't in the first place? Kingdom raisers not heaven gazers.

Mission is more than just us helping somebody. Throughout the scriptures the model of mission is reciprocal, in which the roles between the giver/receiver flows back and forth. Mission is not just from here to there – mission is from everywhere to everywhere. Mission is not = but --- --- in which we all are in need of the other. It is a mission of mutuality.

But that's hard work. For many of us and our churches we would rather just be the ones to go out and help somebody and come home and feel good about it and that be the end of it. Because to get involved in a relationship is messy business.

But God gave us the model of mission as relationship through the incarnation of Jesus. Becoming one of us. Entering into a relationship with us. Not simply sending down help from on high but getting in there and pitching God's tent with us and becoming one of us. Involving God's self in a relationship, in which Christ the host becomes our guest.

Mission is about developing a loving caring relationship with those around us and in the world in which we are willing to be changed and transformed.

- Putero Rica Team – must finish the roof even though the folks want to visit with us.
- Bishop Machado in Mozambique – “please don't make our children become beggars”
- Soccer Field in Kenya – trust the relationship and 3 yrs later built the clinic

We sit in our church meetings to discuss how we can best help someone in our community and guess who is missing from the discussion – those we are seeking to “help”, why because we don't know them, we haven't become friends, we haven't done the risky business of developing a relationship.

- Story of the church who took Turkey to new Hispanics neighbors – didn't have a stove. Didn't know them, hadn't become friends, didn't have a relationship.

One of Wesley's greatest worries about the people called Methodists was they would one day becoming middle class loose touch with the poor, the marginalized. Where is our church's priority for the poor? Do you personally have any relationship with those on the margins in your community?

When mission moves from simply "helping people" – to building relationship it becomes a lifestyle. We discover that the everydayness of life can become opportunity for mission, for relationship building in which we are open to God's action in our own life. We can be in mission when we go to the grocery store as well as when we reach out to a Katrina survivor or a child in Africa. "If you can't see the face of Christ in next person you meet you might as well not look any further." I close with this story.

Several years ago I was on a mission trip to Guatemala. After a busy day of hard work we gathered for worship. As the Guatemalan pastor preached on in Spanish, little 5 year old Lousia who was sitting next to me signaled for me to bend down to her and she whispered in my ear. And then giggled. I whispered back to her that I did not speak Spanish, and apparently she didn't speak English because she kept whispering to me --- Finally, I turned to my friend sitting next to me and ask her to explain to Lousia in Spanish that I was sorry but that I didn't speak Spanish. So she did. And Lousia responded back to me in Spanish, "That's OK, tell her to talk to me anyway."

So for the rest of the service I would lean down and whisper something to Lousia in English and she would giggle and giggle and then she would whisper something in my ear and would giggle and giggle. Neither of us understanding what the other way saying. As the service went on little Lousia crawled up into my lap and went to sleep.

"It's OK, tell her to talk to me anyway." We have a world right outside our church walls who need someone to talk to them, who needs someone to listen to them, who need to

hear the good news of Jesus Christ. We need to be Kingdom living, mission people. I pray you all will be the leaders who do the hard work of preparation and learning so that you will be ready to Go and Serve in relationship in God's mission.