

# Laity News

Oklahoma Conference of The United Methodist Church

## LAITY SUNDAY

**L**aity Sunday 2008 is on October, 19. Now's the time to plan what your local church will do. Later in this brief article, I'll suggest a place for resources that you can access online.

It isn't often that a resolution from a legislative committee creates much of a stir—in me, anyway!

I was perusing some resources from the General Board of Discipleship about Laity Sunday and found the following blockbuster at the end of the Association of Annual Conference lay leaders directory.

### The Legislative Committee brings a recommendation of a resolution:

**Whereas**, The United Methodist Church has steadily lost membership for many years in its country of origin; and

**Whereas**, in the most recent year's totals The United Methodist Church lost 70,000 members, thus exceeding the previous year's losses of 60,000 members; and

**Whereas**, the historic strength of The United Methodist Church lay in well-equipped laity who were passionate in their beliefs; and

**Whereas**, the clergy of The United Methodist Church continues to equip the laity for the task of winning communities for Christ through witness, service and transforming ministry; and

**Whereas**, too many of our laity no longer claim that core responsibility of every Christian to find those who are lost, and to lead them into a church home now;

**Therefore**, BE IT RESOLVED that we, the laity, accept primary responsibility for the growth and vitality of The United Methodist Church.

Carried unanimously.

Recommendation from the Legislative Committee to add a new paragraph in the *Book of Discipline* ¶ 126: The Ministry of the Laity — The laity of The United Methodist Church are, by history and calling, active advocates of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, accepting the responsibility to carry out the Great Commission in everyday living. Every layperson is an evangelist; every layperson is a missionary. The primary agent of the salvation of the lost and the sustained growth of the church is the evangelistic ministry of its laity.

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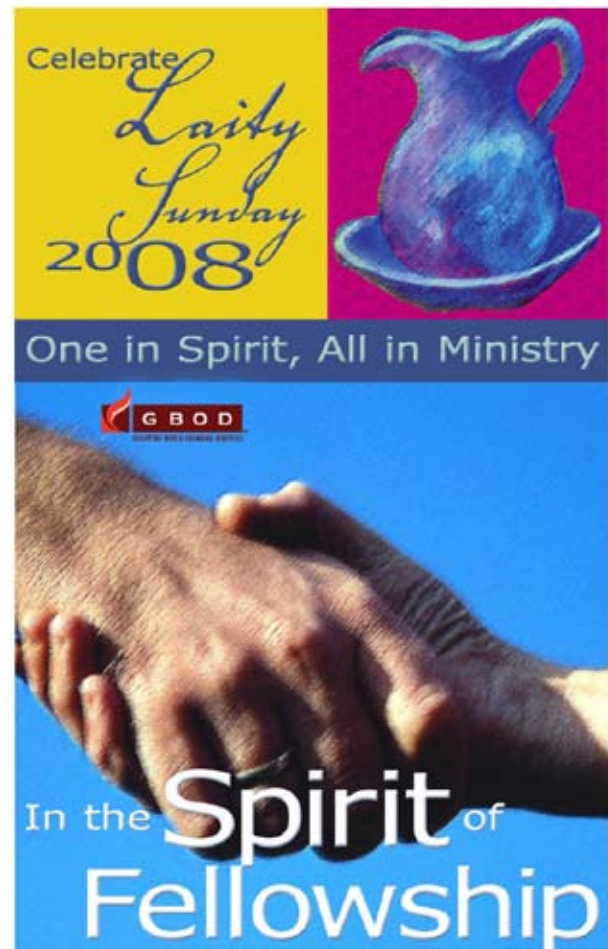
## Strategic Plan

### What's that?

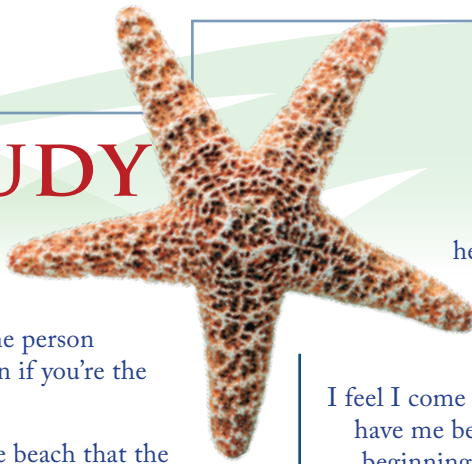
**T**he Conference strategic plan is a movement—not a program—that was affirmed by your pastor and lay delegate at Annual Conference 2008 and is:

- An effort to take the church outside its doors,
- A way to become a more fruitful congregation,
- A way to look at our ministries and see how we can be more effective,
- An opportunity to create our own way to plan, carry-out and measure our effectiveness in the community,
- A call to hold ourselves accountable to being God's people in mission in the world making disciples for Jesus Christ.

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# A NOTE FROM JUDY



## DOES ONE PERSON REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

They do, if you're the person receiving and often if you're the one giving.

It's like the starfish on the beach that the young man was throwing back in the water.

Time after time he repeated the effort, but he just couldn't throw them all in the ocean.

A cynic said to him, "Doesn't look like you're making much of a difference."

The young man replied as he tossed another in the ocean, "It does to that starfish!"

### **You make a difference.**

You've been chosen to lead in your congregation and your efforts make a difference.

Do you ever think, "What difference would it make to this church and this community if I wasn't

here? What difference would it make to our community if our church wasn't here?"

I don't know about you, but often I feel I come up pretty short of where God would have me be. But praise God, we have a God of new beginnings!

What we did yesterday is not nearly as important as what we can do today and tomorrow. Whatever and however our church is in ministry now, God can take us to new heights if we are willing to answer that call with a thankful, willing, servant heart.

As leaders, we have the opportunity to help our churches in the new challenge of laying plans to be more fruitful congregations. Your church needs you. God needs you. God is calling you, for such a time as this. Thank you for being God's person. Don't hesitate to call if I can be of assistance.

**Judy Benson, Conference Lay Leader**  
580-335-3508; [bensonjj@pldi.net](mailto:bensonjj@pldi.net)

## STRATEGIC PLAN CONTINUED

All of these describe the "Strategic Plan," which is really a call for each of us to create our own plan for how we can be more effective as a church and as individuals in our communities in reaching others for Jesus Christ.

### **As we each create our plan there are four questions we want to ask.**

- 1) How do we help people relate to God?
- 2) How do we help people serve God's mission?
- 3) How do we relate to one another?
- 4) How do we relate to our community?

Prior to our usual charge conference, we will have church conferences where every member has a voice and vote.

Church conferences are to be preceded by "40-days of Prayer and Preparation." Daily devotions and prayer guides are available online or printed copies are available at (405)530-2019.

Great things happen when United Methodist pray. Ask your pastor and lay delegate for details because everyone is needed.

## SOME THOUGHTS ON LAITY SUNDAY CONTINUED

Carried unanimously.

Wow! I'm not sure whether it made it into the *Discipline* or not, but isn't that about as succinct as it gets? Our job —the Laity, that is— has the primary responsibility for growth and vitality of The United Methodist Church. I guess we'd better get busy. In our Conference, Bishop Hayes has pressed us to build a strategic plan. What better place to create the actions necessary for us to carry out this responsibility. A focus of Laity Sunday this year ought to be how we, the laity, do our part in facilitating this plan during the coming year.

While not Oklahoma Conference focused, the General Board of Discipleship Web site has some excellent resources available that you can print or download in preparing for your Laity Sunday activities. They were prepared by Sandy Zeigler, our director of lay leadership development for the General Board of Discipleship. You can find the resources at <http://www.gbod/laity/articles>.

**Bruce W. Ewing,**  
District Lay Leader, North Oklahoma City District

## Book Review

# Not just another pretty book



# OKLAHOMA LAITY NEWS

John Wesley knew people. As complex as his mind was, he knew the message of how to live our faith needed to be kept simple and as a result, he formed the three rules of the Methodist church. Wesley stated—lightly paraphrased—to avoid evil of every kind; to do good of every possible sort, as far as possible to all; and attend upon all the ordinances of God.

United Methodist Bishop Rueben P. Job has published a revised version that is worthy of our attention.

**“Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living,”** published by the United Methodist Publishing House, is a book that needs to be digested slowly. The truths are simple. The application or actual living of these truths, however, is radical. Truly lived the before and after difference in our lives is as different as merely walking on a sidewalk and doing what the Olympic gymnasts do on the balance beam.

### First rule: do no harm.

He focuses on relationships with people. Do no harm to those with whom we disagree. When I am bound to do you no harm, I lose my fear of you and I am able to see you and hear you more clearly. When we agree not to harm those with whom we disagree, conversation, dialogue, and discovery of new insights are possible.

This view demands a radical trust in God’s presence. Most often it is a step not taken because it demands so much self-discipline and a very deep faith that God will empower and lead the faithful. Often our fears speak so much louder than our faith. I pray for faith that speaks loudly.

### Second rule: to do good of every possible sort.

Job speaks of “every act and every word passing through the love and will of God and there be measured to discover if its purpose does indeed bring good and goodness to all it touches.” In the words of an elder friend, it says easy, does hard.

Job’s stating of the third rule sells the book by itself. Stay in love with God. Wesley intended this to instruct us to give minutes each day to praying, reading the Bible, meditating, worshipping, and taking communion. All the ways we build our relationship with our heavenly Father. Stay in love with God touches a nerve nearly everyone has stroked. Relationships with spouses that began years ago with a spark, absorbed our attention, and made us want to do anything and everything we could to be with, get to know,

and please this person who had come into our lives. This is discipleship brought home to where we live.

The cover of the book is dark brown with words imprinted in gold. It is worth five dollars just to adorn a coffee table. The truths found inside the book call us to new heights of living Christ’s message.

Another book that is not as pretty to look at but is worth reading is **“Touch: The Power of Touch in Transforming Lives (Baxter Press/Spirit rising),”** by Pastor Rudy Rasmus. Rasmus is a licensed local pastor at St. John’s United Methodist Church in Houston.

His church ministers to very marginalized people, the homeless, addicted, and AIDS-infected. Their congregation is largely made up of the people Christ’s walked the streets to find. We may not have the concentration of these folks in our midst that Rudy has, but they are in our midst. Rudy’s book gives radical definition to loving the people Christ loved the most.

**Frank Denney, Associate Conference Lay Leader  
Lay Life and Works**

## Ministry Sunday

# A new idea!

Celebrate Ministry Sunday (moving Sunday for clergy or the first Sunday for a new pastor) is the date that the Oklahoma Annual Conference encourages your church to celebrate your ministries and outreach.

This new special Sunday was voted on by Annual Conference this last May and it is to become effective after annual conference in 2009.

The idea is to assist your incoming pastor in getting to know your church. As various ministries are celebrated the entire congregation becomes more aware and ministries are strengthened. The Sunday morning worship is to be organized by the lay leader, Lay members to annual conference and others, and possibly utilizing a lay speaker to bring the message.

After a trial Celebrate Ministry Sunday this year, because of the benefits, church members affirmed the suggestion that it might occur every year with the pastor having the option to deliver the message.

Look online next spring at <http://www.okumc.org/Laity> for “Celebrate Ministry Sunday” resources created by the Board of Laity which will help you in your planning.

# OPPORTUNITIES RESOURCES

## Stewardship

### Member's vows mean more than "Show me the money"

**T**he 2008 General Conference voted to add the term "witness" to the vows taken and repeated when new members join a congregation.

Now we vow to support the church with our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness.

Often when we hear the word stewardship we expect someone to ask about money. But we have responsibility for much more than our money. Think about being a good steward of the five valuable assets now listed in our vows. Recently I asked a friend who has been facilitating Financial Peace University sessions, "what is the opposite of stewardship?" His response was one word – "mismanagement."

As I consider my stewardship of the five vows, the first being prayer, I realize that I sometimes mismanage my opportunities to support the church with my prayers.

The first part of my mismanagement is that I put off praying until I have time. I intend to pray during the 15-minute drive to work so I can multi-task and put this time to good use, but my mind wanders. As a tool to help me pray in the car, I am learning to pray with my mouth and sometimes actually moving my lips. In the past it seemed odd to see someone in their car talking to themselves, but today with people using cell phones while driving it doesn't look strange anymore. Praying out loud allows me to focus and put God first.

Also being a good steward of our prayers includes praying for our district, state and global church leaders. Since their decisions can affect us, we need to be praying regularly that they will have wisdom, knowledge and understanding. If not us then who is praying for these leaders? As we become good stewards we realize that church is much bigger than our local congregation.

Mark Springer, Assistant Lay Leader for Stewardship

## United Methodist Men 100 YEARS AND STILL SERVING

As United Methodist Men celebrate 100 years in ministry, they are organizing an opportunity to supply "Strength for Service to God and Country" a devotional book to heroes serving our country both at home and abroad.

Many service women and men have already received a copy of "Strength for Service" but a need for more devotionals remains.

"The soldiers really do love this devotional," commented Capt. Shannon Philio, who is chaplain at Forward Operating Base Kalsu, in Iskandariyah, Iraq. "The books were quite well received. I would like more copies if that is possible," said Major Mike Hoffman, chaplain at 412th, Fires BDE, Camp Delta, Iraq.

Your church can provide 10 of these valuable books for \$50. For information see [www.StrengthForService.org](http://www.StrengthForService.org).

## Circle of Care YOU CAN BE AN AMBASSADOR

- 11,400 Oklahoma children in Foster care
- 14,000 confirmed cases of child abuse
- 42 Oklahoma child deaths as a result of abuse

These are statistics that make us cry. But the ministry of Circle of Care (who has been standing in the gap for over 90 years and are enabled by you and ambassadors who lovingly serve) makes us smile.

Women like Susan McCue and Carolyn Houk, co-ambassadors and involved advocates, help the Fairview United Methodist Church make life better for "at-promise" children, especially at the Holsinger Home. For information as to how you can help, call 405-530-2080.

**Young Adults/Young Families (YA/YF)**  
WANTED: Young men, young women, and young families to take part in the wonderful world of United Methodism.  
WHERE: All over the state of Oklahoma

**WHEN:** Today, tomorrow, and forever more  
**HOW:** now that's a REALLY good question...a question that I will address this year.

As your chair of YA/YF, I hope to reignite the passion that younger people feel for their church. I hope to get simple - get down to basics, if you know what I mean.

My first idea centers around congregations joining together and creating activities that have momentum and excitement from the very beginning. Two small congregations can come together and take something with nominal success and turn it into something much more fulfilling. God can be glorified in any situation; just think how much glory can happen if the numbers are larger.

I have just scratched the surface of what we can do. I look forward to working with you as we brainstorm and launch these cooperative plans.

Please lift up YA/YF in your prayers - God likes it when we ask for ideas.  
Sharyl Pickens, Chair

## Lay speakers do what?

Lay speakers of Oklahoma continue to be busy doing what lay speakers do. You may ask “What are lay speakers doing?”

First just a reminder of what a lay speaker is:

- an active supportive member of a United Methodist Church;
- eager to serve through the church;
- well-informed on scripture, and on the doctrine, heritage, organization, and life of the United Methodist Church;
- committed to witnessing through church and community leadership, care giving ministries, and spoken communication; and
- willing to improve their skills for service.

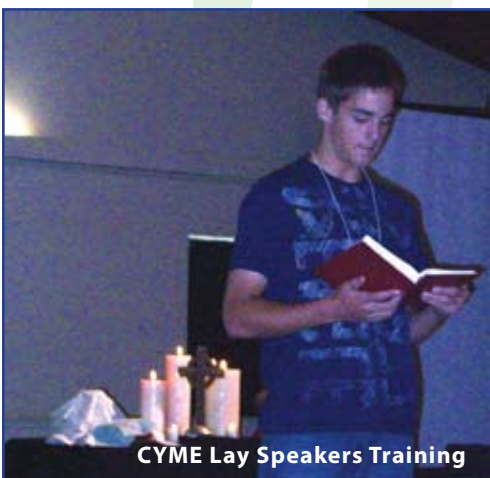
How this looks in Oklahoma: we teach Sunday School classes; we teach Bible Study; we visit members in the hospitals and nursing homes; we facilitate grief recovery groups; we give Bibles to young men and women heading off to boot camp; we lead music, play musical instruments, and sing in the choir; we are camp leaders; we lead in worship services, serve as lay leaders, serve on the Board of Laity, lead basic and advanced lay speaking courses; we go on mission trips; we volunteer for Vacation Bible School; we give children's sermons; we drive the bus; we paint and clean; we greet you at the door; we are servants of our congregations; and yes, sometimes, we'll preach a message.

As you see, lay speaking is not all about pulpit supply. Whatever your gift is, you can use that gift and fulfill your calling to ministry through the lay speaking program. Anyone who has gone through a lay speakers training course will attest to the fact that the rewards outweigh the cost in time and effort because the course opens the way to further study and makes one more aware of ways to serve, teach and communicate.

This was the fourth summer at CYME camp that the basic lay speaking course was presented and the second summer to have an advanced course. There were 19 youth that completed the basic course, and five completed the advance course. This gives a total of 67 local youth lay speakers, and 17 of those have taken an advance course to become certified

lay speakers. I pray that all pastors will continue to use and encourage our youth as leaders in the church.

To the best of my knowledge and count, we have 956 lay speakers in



CYME Lay Speakers Training

# OKLAHOMA LAITY NEWS

the Oklahoma Conference. What a blessing. We have been called by God. We are ready to serve the church.

“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”  
—Philippians 1:6

**Patricia Parvin, Conference Director of Lay Speaking Ministries**

## UMW gathering

Enid First UMC will be the site of this year's 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Oklahoma United Methodist Women on Saturday, October 4.

Members from our Conference will make their way to First Church to *Publish Glad Tidings* as we come together to celebrate our mission in ministry with women, youth and children in our communities, conference and the world.

We promise a full and exciting day that will begin with singing, praising, worship and remembering. We are delighted to have E. Judith Siaba, Women's Division Director and Vice President on the Section of Social Action, as our speaker. Bishop Robert Hayes Jr., will lead us in afternoon worship and Holy Communion. See you in Enid.

**Donna Roberts, Conference UMW President**

## St. Paul School of Theology and Oklahoma City University

Clergy and laity can celebrate history in the making as we mark the inaugural academic year of the St. Paul School of Theology at OCU. The benefits promise to be many as persons called to the ordained ministry can study at our seminary without leaving the state.

Our brothers and sisters in the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference will benefit as courses will be both available and affordable. As laity we expect to partner with the seminary in offering leadership and enrichment opportunities.

## Local Church Leaders Workshops

Well, it seems way too early to be talking about Local Church Leaders Workshops but they will be here before we know it. If you were at Annual Conference this year you experienced the excitement surrounding the "Strategic Plan."

I really believe God has given us unlimited opportunities to help people relate to God, help people relate to one another, help people serve God's



**Bishop Hayes at a Local Church Leaders Workshop in 2006**

mission and help churches relate to their communities. The challenge is how will these opportunities bear fruit in your church setting?

The "Spiritual Servant Leadership Development Team" of the Conference Board of Laity has been busy developing the "Strategic Plan Play Book." An entire class at the LCLW will be dedicated to this unique training. This will be an opportunity for those lay and clergy that are a part of the church's visioning and planning team to come together and gather ideas for the coming year.

What is really unique about this class is the partnership between the Conference Board of Laity and the Leadership Development Ministry Team. There will be a specially trained group of lay and clergy leading this class at each LCLW. This class is for both laity and clergy.

It is really exciting that the conference is supporting such an effort to equip the local church. We believe this will strengthen the partnership between lay and clergy in hearing God's call to make and multiply disciples of Jesus Christ who transform the world and to reach more people, more diverse people, and younger people.

Also we will be offering the LAY LEADER 101 class for new and experienced local church lay leaders.

What an exciting time in Oklahoma United Methodism. Make plans now to attend a LCLW and be a part of the vision.

**Chuck Stewart, Associate Conference Lay Leader  
Spiritual Servant Leadership Development**