

*A bi-monthly e-mail letter from agency officers and staff
of the General Commission on UM Men
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Faith and fractures

By Bishop Gary Mueller

What a world! Terrorism rears its ugly head on a daily basis around the globe. Politics in the United States has devolved into a partisan shouting match that seems to be heating up on a monthly basis. And closer to home, there seems to be an increasing decline in men's interest in faith.

So what do we do?

You need to begin by acknowledging that Christians address these issues from very different – and often diametrically opposed – perspectives. In fact, that person next to you in the pew this past Sunday could well hold very different opinions from you on these and many other matters.

It's easy, and therefore very tempting, to believe there's a single Christian answer to every issue, and that it can be easily discovered. Unfortunately, it's just not that simple. That's because Christians come at these issues from different cultural perspectives, life experiences, political leanings and personalities, in addition to their Christian faith.

That's why it's essential to understand that where you begin often determines where you end up. If you've had a particularly painful life experience, you may end up in one place. If you've been a staunch member of a political party for a number of years, you may end up in another. And if you've grown up in just one region of the country, you may end up at still another.

It's time to do the obvious – begin with Jesus. This does not mean simply quoting those parts of Scripture about the Jesus you like. It's much more about trusting Jesus to lead you by truly trying to see through Jesus' eyes, listen with Jesus' ears, think with Jesus' mind, feel with Jesus' heart and touch with Jesus' hands as that is revealed in Scripture.

But beware. Beginning with Jesus will be a challenge. A big challenge. You're going to need a good dose of humility. You'll be dealing with difficult, even painful, issues. And you may end up with very different answers than you ever imagined possible.

Does this mean that anyone can predict where this will lead? No way. Does it mean that everyone will agree about everything? That's ridiculous. Does it mean all Christians will come together to solve all our problems? Not in your lifetime.

But I trust Jesus. I trust you. And I think you're ready to follow where Jesus leads.

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What is our job?

By Gil Hanke

When you have time, Larry Coppock and I have a lot of wonderful stories to tell you about the July 17-28 National BSA Jamboree.

Our United Methodist Scouting booth was well received and helpful to hundreds of folks every day.

Larry put together a wonderful team. All of us have special moments we will always remember.

On a rainy Sunday, we sat or stood on the side of a wet grassy hill for the 8 a.m. Protestant Worship Service. Dr. Bruce Reed, director of state family programs for the National Guard, offered a memorable illustration about our task to bring others into relationships with Christ.

We know we are to be fishers of others. We are commissioned to go into the world to tell the Good News; that is our job.

But the question Dr. Reed raised next still bothers me; it challenges me, and it inspires me.

He asked, “Are we the fishers, or are we only taking care of the aquarium?”

You see, keepers of the aquarium make sure each fish in the tanks is well fed and happy. That is an important task.

But a “fisher” is focused on those who have yet to be caught.

It is time to redefine our task in the local church.

Perhaps the pastor and some of the staff (if you go to a big church) should take care of the aquarium and all the church members should engage in a systematic effort to fish for those who are not in anyone’s tank.

We know that an invitation from the pastor will bring a number of people to begin a new relationship with Christ.

We also know that number is small compared to the possible numbers that might be reached if laity made the same invitation.

But many of us never invite folks. We never invite a friend or co-worker to join us in worship. We don't invite them to participate in a new small group or attend a special event. We don't suggest they join us in a local mission project.

Looking at the current state of the church, it's safe to say, "We are not very good fishers."

But, that is our job.

This week, I am going to find a way to invite at least one person to take one step on that path to Jesus.

That is my job.

Will you join me?

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Wooden shoes make indelible impression on World War II veteran

By Larry Coppock

I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread. They are always generous and lend freely; their children will be a blessing.

—Psalms 37:25-26

Almost two years ago a prominent businessman sponsored 30,000 *Strength for Service to God and Country* devotional books. That was the good news. The bad news: we had no place to store them.

Enter Morris Dennis.

Mr. Dennis is a 91 year-old Navy veteran of WWII and CEO of Dennis Paper Co. in Nashville. Working through his president son, Ronnie, the books found a temporary home in the company's warehouse while waiting for distribution to chaplains of the armed services.

The rest of the story

Mr. Dennis began sharing his WW II experiences with me when I would drop by to pick up some books. I invited both him and Ronnie to an SFS board meeting last year to share some of his war-time memories and so that we could properly thank them for their generosity.

He served on the LST 58 where he piloted an LVCP (landing boat) in the second wave at Normandy, June 6, 1944. No LVCP's came back from the first wave, Dennis noted.

During the first few days of the invasion he met a little girl on the sands of Saint Marsal Beach. She was desperate for food for her starving grandparents. A compassionate Dennis asked her to wait and he would go and secure food from the ship and bring it back to her. He did just that. The little girl insisted on paying Morris but had no money. She offered a pair of wooden shoes she was wearing. Morris reluctantly took them as she insisted.

This is one of the highlights of Morris Dennis' war time experiences, not because of efforts to win a medal or make the news. Quite the contrary, he holds on to the shoes today as a keepsake, and as a remembrance of a poignant moment of human kindness in the midst of chaos and desperation.

Possible reunion

Just recently I wrote to a friend of mine who lives in Luxembourg. He and my father served together in a rifle company, 89th Inf. Div. at the same time that Dennis was steering ships across the English Channel to France. He enthusiastically offered to write his contacts, including the granddaughter of General George Patton, to see if they can help locate the 'little girl' in the story. While she would be almost as old as Mr. Dennis, if indeed alive, finding her would serve as a small but meaningful recompense to a member of the Greatest Generation who made altruistic contributions that are seldom depicted in highlight reels.

Please be in prayer that something good happens, perhaps even locating a little girl, now grown up, and that she and Mr. Dennis are once again able to walk the Normandy beaches and share their memory. What a peaceful and Godly thought.

The Tennessean newspaper carried an [article](#) about Mr. Dennis.

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Seasons of our journey

By Rick Vance

A few weeks ago, I attended a worship service, and the guest preacher was a member of the church staff. He began his sermon by describing his faith struggle before becoming deeply involved in his small group.

“Welcome to church. The place where hypocrites gather together to further their belief that they have it right and everyone else has it wrong. Here we look to the sky and speak presumptuously of an invisible construct known as God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, which name we use just depends on the day. We are people that believe that ‘God sent himself in the form of his son to sacrifice himself to himself so he could save humanity from himself.’ We hear music and stir ourselves into a frenzy, praying for God to show up... this was me ... a little less than a year ago. I began to doubt everything.”

He continued to speak about how he felt “suffocated” because he knew if the church knew of his struggles they might reject him and his ministry. He described this cold, lonely and bitter time as his “December.” This story, though, had a positive ending. The church leader continued his sermon by talking about his small group that “through it all” accepted and loved him. The love and support he received helped him move to a new season he calls his “July,” a place where he met Jesus anew.

He stated that the seasons are not the opposites of each other, but rather the times are similar with some of the same struggles and challenges. The difference between his “December” and his “July” was that he now has a small group of fellow travelers who help him through times of doubt and help him see Jesus.

Research tells us that the vast majority of men in our church do not have another man to whom they can go when they are in their “December.”

Do our United Methodist Men’s groups offer a place where men can risk being vulnerable about their struggles and find support from another man or group of men?

Are our men’s ministry groups a place where, as a friend’s nine-year-old grandchild stated, “God changed me in a way I never knew that He could change me. I thought God was a myth then, through church and all the prayers, I know that now God is the best thing that anyone could ever have in their life!”

Do our men have other men who will be willing to risk saying as this same friend’s 13-year-old grandchild said, “God changed me because I used to lie and say ugly things and I prayed that [God] would help me stop doing that and he helped me with that.”

Men’s ministry is about transformation. When our men come together, do they leave transformed and renewed having experienced hope and joy?

If not, I encourage you to embrace the theme of the 12 National Gathering of UMM and “Make discipleship building a contact sport!” Use resources available at the web site of

the commission to develop ministry and accountability groups that will meet all men where they are and help them experience Jesus' love and acceptance during all of the seasons of their life.

The staff member I spoke of earlier was in his 20's. Many times, people ask me; "How do we reach younger men?" Do it as Jesus did! Meet them where they are; accept that they may have struggles and let them share in ministry. Love them like Jesus loved and loves.

If you are looking for resources, always check the resource pages of our [web site](#) or contact me. I am always available to be your brother on the journey.

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Motivation

By Steve Nailor

Motivation is literally the desire to do things.

It's the difference between waking up before dawn to pound the pavement and lazing around the house all day. It's the crucial element in setting and attaining goals.

I recently attended a session at Family Vacation Bible School and it was on the topic of "Motivation." I began thinking about what motivates you and me to do what we do or do not do? Why is it so hard for men to become motivated to be disciples and witnesses to others when we know Jesus calls us to share our faith with others?

What motivates us to be disciples of Jesus Christ?

Maybe you have asked one of these questions:

God, what's in it for me?

What do I get out of this? Why should I try to make changes in my life? What will I get for doing this? Is it worth it? For me, the thought of living an eternal life with God is enough of an answer to this question.

"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, and order that you may know that you have eternal life:

—1 John 5: 13

Lord, can I follow you later?

Can I put this off till tomorrow? Yes, you can, but how does that help you understand God's call for you today. In Mark 1:15-20 when Jesus invites Simon and Andrew, then James and John to be his disciples, they dropped what they were doing and followed him immediately. Do not put off what will help you live every day the rest of your life. Maybe you could find a friend and begin to read and study the Scriptures together.

Do I really have to put you first, Jesus?

Jesus is my personal savior, friend and confidante. Jesus knows everything about me and whatever my sins have been, are and continue to be, Jesus forgives them.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.

—Luke 10: 27

Currently I am in three Class Meeting sessions based on the book *The Class Meeting*, by Kevin Watson. I asked the participants to share with me what motivates them to do what they do? One wrote;

- “God’s Great Commission.”
- “The Bible (God’s Word) tells us to.”
- “Tell the people about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”
- “Let others know how awesome God is.”

Matt. 28: 16-28 talks about how we are to go into the world and make disciples. That leads me to ask, “How do we create situations that encourage men to share what is going on in their lives?” Watson writes, “The most important ingredient to a successful group is you!” You must be intentional about your faith. We must be willing to be vulnerable and share openly with other men.

I have been very fortunate over my lifetime to have had at least seven men who have been instrumental in my life. They supported me and encouraged me to get involved and in the Word. Because of their encouragement, I wound up in Africa on a mission trip to help families have clean water and a place to prepare their meals. I was scared, unsure that I should do this, but every step of the way those men, my wife and my family encouraged me. That trip has motivated me far beyond anything I ever expected.

Most likely, we become disciples because of a testimony, other’s deeds, our needs and the encouragement of someone we trust.

We look to others and say, “I would like to be like him.”

We may be shy, afraid we will say something we shouldn’t, feeling unprepared or like we are off base, or might be asked to pray out loud.

But, God will give us what we need, if we will only take a chance and accept his grace.

Jesus calls each one of us to be his disciple. If you need some support and guidance I would suggest “The Class Meeting” approach. Take a chance, find a friend or a small group and be motivated for the Lord!

If you would like to talk more about “The Class Meeting” structure, please feel free to email me.

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Witnessing success

By Mark Lubbock

“Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”
—Hebrews 10:25

I recently visited a church that was meeting to formalize the creation of a new UMM unit. Certified Men’s Ministry Specialist Joe Kelley (who is also the national prayer advocate) invited me to join him as he offered support and resources to this new group. They were diverse in age which suggests this group reflects a cross-section of the church, a healthy sign!

Steve Browning, Jr. from Zachary (La.) UMC led the meeting.

Steve was discussing the design of a Ministry Fair booth for the UMM. The church offered him a table display made from foam core material that kids use for science fair projects. But he wanted something the guys would connect with and demonstrated a connection with the men of the church. He suggested, “Hey, let’s take some police caution tape and use it to make a border on a plywood sign for our UMM booth. In fact, why not take some duct tape and use it to make the letters of UMM!”

Great idea Steve!

Steve was envisioning a display through the eyes of his target audience: MEN. He understands “the man code,” one of the core tenants of men’s ministry. Make the environment inviting to men.

The rest of the group contributed ideas for the event and for the future of the men’s group.

Dinner that night at the meeting was spaghetti cooked by a locally renowned chef. It was delicious and filling, and connected with the men in attendance.

Older men who had been part of a defunct UMM unit were in attendance. These sages were empowering and encouraging.

I witnessed energy, purpose and a level of anticipation as the evening went on. This was certainly not a dead, go-nowhere meeting.

The keys to success were simple:

Provide personal invitations

Do not rely on notices in bulletins or emails. These help support the personal invitation, but rarely deliver when used alone.

Have a purpose

Meeting just to eat and have fellowship will not draw younger men, and even older men will quickly drift away. Leaders should establish a purpose and a mission. The commission and men's ministry specialists are ready to help your unit with this task.

Provide food fit for men

Men appreciate quality and quantity when it comes to food.

Recruit, train and empower younger men

Personally invite young men and include them in the planning the event. Give them some responsibility and freedom to choose.

Today's church is too often an example of what happens when you desperately cling to But-this-is-the-way-we've-always-done-this mentality.

Each generation has their own identity, and fashions its own style, preferences and experiences. Few, if any, want to adopt their parent's style, let alone their grandparents'.

Tastes change.

Consider the example of Jesus. He recruited and trained young inexperienced men and turned them loose. If Jesus could entrust the future of the church with young men, we would be foolish to reject a similar strategy.

Men's groups thrive in healthy ways when they recruit, train, and empower younger men as a part of the leadership team.

Evaluate and update

Advertisers understand that you periodically have to change things up.

Create an annual review team made of a cross-section of your church men.

Do not limit this to men who attend your group's meetings. Non-participants can help you identify new opportunities and craft a plan that will reach more men.

Include them all

Think about the many ways men are touched by your church, but who do not participate. What would it take to meet them where they are?

Consider the activities that men enjoy. Offer challenges accompanied by rewards for jobs well done. Incorporate variety that allows for varying preferences.

Certified men's ministry specialists are here to help and the General Commission on UM Men provides a treasure house of knowledge, ideas, resources and assistance.

We all want to make you successful.

Please feel free to contact me with any ideas, questions or if you'd like me to come speak to your group.

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Discipleship —The Contact Sport

Don't leave it in Indy

By Jim Boesch

Those of you who participated in the awesome 2017 National Gathering of United Methodist Men are charged with living out what you experienced in Indianapolis and taking the momentum created there to empower others.

Those of you who did not come to Indianapolis, pray for God to put men in your life who did attend the gathering so they can influence you with what they bring back to their Christian communities.

Let's break down the theme of the gathering into its component parts so it may be better understood and utilized.

Discipleship

Discipleship is the transformational process of following and becoming like Jesus Christ through kingdom-building ministries.

“From childhood, you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

—2 Timothy 3: 15-17

Discipleship is about heart transformation.

The biggest challenge in discipling is to follow Jesus in creating lasting change and not just temporary emotional reactions:

- Short-term change is driven by the current environment and is only brief behavior modification.
- Permanent change must occur to drive the heart transformation, which is, at its core, the DNA of Christian discipling.

“Jesus called out to them, ‘Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!’ And they left their nets at once and followed him.”

—Matthew 4:19-20

“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.”

—Psalm 32:8

Contact

John Wesley said, “The Bible knows nothing of solitary religion.”

God created us to be in relationship with others, and Jesus founded His Church to be the vehicle that allows us to do life together as we seek to build His earthly kingdom.

Men want to be in contact with others:

1. In community with others to pursue common goals.
2. As part of a team with a common mission.
3. In relationship with a diverse group of like-minded seekers of common truths, dreams and legacies.

Jesus replied, “The most important commandment is this: ‘The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all your strength.’

The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandments are greater than these."

—Mark 12: 29-31

Sport

Most sports provide a shared challenge with clear values and beliefs in the pursuit of victory.

Sport has defined strategies and objectives.

Most men engage in sports in order to build a legacy that matters in the lives of others.

Jesus equips us and gives us the final assignment for the ultimate sporting event:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

—Matthew 28:18-20

In the end, our charge is to live wholly and totally into the lives of others in order to help others become followers and disciples of Jesus Christ.

The most effective way for us to enable others to become disciples is to help them discover who God created them to be.

It all comes back to living out the theme of our 12th National Gathering.

Discipleship is indeed a contact sport!

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What is your group?

By Mark Dehority

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