

April 2, 2007

Dear Friend of RENEW,

I am writing this month's letter to you the week prior to Easter. By the time you receive this letter, we will have passed through another Passion Week and celebrated Christ's resurrection from the dead. We will be among those on the road to Emmaus, affirming the truth of His resurrection in our own lives.

Let me share a personal note with you. This season is especially sacred to me for it was just before Easter, over forty-five years ago, that I, as a young teen, accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Savior. Mine was a powerful conversion experience that changed my life completely, and impacted my family so they too eventually came to Christ. The witness of the Spirit, which John Wesley so fully affirmed, was a reality to me then—and continues to be so now. I share this with you—knowing you have a similar story to tell—anticipating my sharing will cause you to rejoice anew in your own salvation.

At present I am working on a major project in preparation for General Conference 2008. This project requires research into our Methodist history and theology. Part of my study has taken me to three volumes of John Wesley's Standard Sermons in Modern English by Dr. Kenneth Cain Kinghorn, Professor of Church History and Historical Theology and Vice President at Large, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky. These sermons give powerful testimony to Wesley's sound, evangelical theology with its roots in Scriptural Christianity going back to early church leaders including John Hus, John Wyclif, Martin Luther and other Anglican and Catholic witnesses. It is the Apostolic faith of the New Testament Church.

If this is so, why do we hear some say that we are a denomination with an uncertain theology—that we are “open” to many theological options? Methodism, like other “mainlines” was hard hit by the Social Gospel, Darwinism and German higher criticism during the last of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Unfortunately, the Social Gospel never abated, but rather continued to manifest itself through new “isms”—including socialism, universalism, feminism, multiculturalism and sexism.

While the Social Gospel and its advocates helped awaken the Protestant consciousness to the urgent needs of the poor and, in the case of Methodism, to challenge the church to reclaim its emphasis upon both a personal and a social holiness—the Social Gospel soon pre-empted the foundational teachings of Methodism and its founder John Wesley. Wesley kept first things first. In his sermon, *Justification by Faith*, he wrote, “Whatever

so-called ‘virtues and good works’ one may have, they are of no advantage as means of salvation. Until we trust in Jesus, we are still children of wrath and under the curse.” Yet, he made it clear in another sermon, *The Almost Christian*, “It is crucial to keep in mind that the kind of faith which fails to produce repentance, love and good works is not genuine living faith.”

Although the Social Gospel never gained popular support from those in the pew or from many evangelical leaders who recognized the corruption of biblical teaching, it did take hold in our colleges and seminaries—and, through these influenced our clergy and institutional leaders. Consequently, we spend a lot of time and money at our church’s highest legislative body, General Conference, endeavoring to hold the line on the basic biblical teachings upon which the Methodist Church was founded and which remain the legacy of The United Methodist Church.

This month, I want to encourage you to reacquaint yourself with the foundational teachings of Methodism. Our publisher, Bristol House, is a repository of good Wesleyan resources. Visit their website at [www.bristolhouseltd.com](http://www.bristolhouseltd.com), or call 1/800-451-7323 to talk with a representative about Bristol’s United Methodist resources. *The Standard Sermons in Modern English* translated by Kinghorn were published by Abingdon Press.

RENEW is partnering with Bristol House to offer you two excellent resources.

- For your donation in any amount, we will send you a pamphlet by John Wesley on *The Character of a Methodist*. This modern-language version of one of Wesley’s well-loved expositions provides an explanation of character as it relates to faith and life. It is routinely used in membership classes and for visitors.
- For your donation of \$25 or more, we will send you *Basic United Methodist Beliefs*, a fresh readable introduction to basic United Methodist beliefs. This book is faithful both to Scripture and Methodist tradition. The 13 chapters include questions for discussion.

Your continued prayers and financial support, as you are able, help us continue our preparation for General Conference 2008 and our daily network support services.

As we walk our individual roads to Emmaus, we are thankful that the risen Christ walks with us and makes Himself known to us—and challenges us to go into the world and “offer them Christ.”

In Jesus our Savior,

L. Faye Short  
President