



LIZA KITTLE

OUR CAUSE, OUR CALLING, AND OUR COMMITMENT

Preparing for a new year of ministry at RENEW, I have been pondering “big picture” things. One of the challenges of leading RENEW is striking a balance between engaging the spiritual battles of the United Methodist Church and promoting the formation of alternative women’s ministries. Both are important. Although God has clearly shown RENEW that building transforming women’s ministries is our primary focus, we must continue to be involved in reform and renewal of the church. We persevere, knowing that our cause is just, our calling secure, and our commitment steadfast.

Our cause is just. It involves upholding scriptural Christianity and bringing spiritual vitality to our troubled denomination. It means upholding our *Book of Discipline* and insisting our appointed leaders enforce it. It means standing for biblical truth in the Christian faith and against pressures to abandon or alter it. It means allowing the Holy Spirit to do a “new thing” in our midst.

One doesn’t have to look far to see where the church is growing—in Africa, where the Word of God is preached, scriptural Christianity is upheld, and lives are being transformed. Growing and healthy churches in the United States are also Christ-centered, committed to scriptural integrity, and focused on evangelistic mission outreach. These churches advocate a proper balance between personal and social holiness, key tenets of Wesleyan theology.

Most of our growing, vital churches also have alternative women’s programs. RENEW remains committed to encouraging our pastors, bishops, and the General Conference to recognize and support other women’s ministries within the church. Less than 15 percent of the women in the UM Church participate in United Methodist Women, the only officially sanctioned women’s ministry in the church. The time is now for our church to embrace variety in women’s ministry programs—especially in a denomination that celebrates diversity and open-mindedness.

Our calling is secure in the hands of God. Renewal and reform within the UM Church is not an easy task. Those called to this task are deeply passionate about the future of our denomination. God has given encouraging signs of affirmation to this calling over the past year. Constitutional changes that would have separated the U.S. and Central conferences were soundly defeated in annual conferences. Changes that would have removed pastoral authority regarding readiness for membership were also defeated.

Many in the church believe these amendments were initiated by liberal groups who continue to promote the acceptance of homosexuality practice. By removing any barrier to church membership and silencing the voice of African delegates, who tend to be theologically orthodox, these groups would have greater success in changing our stance on this issue. By 2012, it is predicted that 30 percent of the delegates at General Conference will be from Africa. (In 2004, the African delegation made up 10 percent of total delegates in 2004 and 20 percent in 2008.) The votes of our African brothers and sisters are critical for maintaining the historic doctrines of Methodism.

Our commitment is steadfast. I have seen firsthand the devotion of clergy and laity called to this noble endeavor of reform and renewal in the UM Church. RENEW was privileged to participate in a dialogue between renewal leaders and the Council of Bishops’ Unity Task Force in November 2009 at Lake Junaluska, N.C. (see page 7). I witnessed servants of the Lord speaking up for biblical truth and denominational integrity with humility and grace.

As a church, I encourage you to participate in this movement through several means. One is through prayer—for our church, bishops, and leaders. Another is through knowledge and participation. Stay informed about the issues facing the church, engage in dialogue with church leaders, and be able to clearly articulate your Christian beliefs.

And, very importantly, support renewal groups through generous regular giving. It takes tremendous financial resources to engage our brothers and sisters in Africa, send a renewal coalition to General Conference, communicate with constituents, speak to congregations and groups, and provide resources for the church. There is no greater cause than helping maintain the scriptural integrity and future growth of the United Methodist Church.

For the ministry of RENEW—holding workshops, producing Christ-centered materials, planning leadership conferences, expanding our organization, communicating with our network, and participating in renewal efforts—your giving is also essential.

I pray that everyone will join this just cause, seek God’s guidance about your own calling, and be steadfastly committed to reform and renewal. Your participation will bring honor and glory to God. Won’t you partner with us in this just and noble cause? I pray that you will.

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