**HAPPENINGS IN THE CHURCH**

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**KEEPING UP WITH THE RENEWAL GROUPS (PART 5)**

This Happenings article continues a series on evangelical renewal groups in the church.

**ALDERSGATE RENEWAL MINISTRIES (ARM)**

In the 1960s and 1970s God raised up a new thing in the church: the charismatic renewal. At the time Christian faith was under attack, first of all from the secular world, and secondly, from the religious world. In the larger world there was the Viet Nam war, student unrest, Woodstock, political revolution, and rebellion against tradition and authority. In the religious world there was the Death of God ideology, Harvey Cox’s *Secular City*, situation ethics, liberation theology and the progressive cry that “the world should set the agenda.” Within United Methodism there was the implosion of the seminaries, restructuring with new independent super-boards, fascination with socialist movements, and the introduction of “diversity” as a new god.

In 1972 the idea of “theological pluralism” was approved by the General Conference as a sort of official Methodist theology. As in the days of Wesley there was a lack of teaching and belief and experience of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. At that point The United Methodist Church began its own crisis of faith that would result in the loss of over three and a half million members in the U.S. in forty years.

But God has a sense of humor. As the apostle stated it (I Cor. 1:27): “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.” The modern charismatic movement did not come from out of the Pentecostal denominations but out of the mainline denominations. One of the powerful, effective ministries in those days was the Lay Witness Movement, and it was within the Lay Witness Movement that numbers of persons and churches were spiritually energized by the experience of the Holy Spirit. In 1977 over 2,400 Lay Witness Missions were held in the United States.

Charismatics were present at Good News convocations in the 1970s but a number of persons felt that Good News was too involved in church politics and not enough involved in the work of the Holy Spirit. A Good News board member, Dr. Bill Wilson, along with persons like Bob Tuttle and Russ Whetstone of the United Methodist Board of Discipleship were among the founding members of what is known today as Aldersgate Renewal Ministries. In 1977 50,000 mostly mainline charismatics rallied in Kansas City. Out of that meeting came Aldersgate Renewal Ministries.

The purpose of ARM is to equip the local church to minister to the world in the power of the Holy Spirit. ARM has been different from other evangelical renewals groups in that it has committed itself not to get involved in church politics and to work within, or at least alongside of, official UM structures. From its beginning until the end of December of 2012 it was an affiliate ministry of the General Board of Discipleship.

One of the major ministries of Aldersgate Renewal Ministries has been the annual Aldersgate conferences which have been held every year since 1979. These conferences have drawn anywhere from 1,000 to 2,000 participants and feature worship, major speakers and workshops.

In recent years ARM has sponsored Schools for Supernatural Ministry. ARM has presently entered into partnership with United Theological Seminary to resource a new D. Min. program in Supernatural Ministries.

Dr. Frank Billman, current head of ARM will soon have a book published: *The Supernatural Thread in Methodism: Signs and Wonders Among Methodists Then and Now.*

**RENEW MINISTRIES**

In 1977 two women associated with Good News, Diane Knippers of the staff and Helen Rhea Coppedge of the board gathered together interested women and formed the Task Force on Women in the Church (WTF). They published a newsletter, *Candle*, which by 1982 had reached a circulation of 22,000. The purpose was to review United Methodist Women (UMW) resources, share faith stories, and sometimes to offer supplemental materials that could be used in UMW settings.

The task force grew out of the frustration many women had with UMW. UMW, at least in its pre-merger Methodist version, had grown out of the Women’s Foreign Missionary Society, formed as an unofficial church sending agency in 1869. In 1884 the group was given official status and served for years as a missionary sending agency with special interest in women and children.

The May, 1968 issue of Together Magazine reported that the EUB-Methodist merger would result in a UMW membership of 1.7 million members in 38,000 units. But things did not go well with the merger. Former EUB women were not used to their women’s organization being involved in radical causes. The UMW study on China in 1978 appeared to be an apology for Maoism and quoted favorably an opinion that “China is the only truly Christian country in the world in the present day, in spite of its absolute rejection of all religion.” UMW began its radical decline. At present is has lost 2/3 of its membership and half of its units since the merger. It has gone from 1.7 million members to 567,000 members and from 38,000 units to under 18,000 units..

The Women’s Task Force offered encouragement to women who wanted women’s work to be more spiritually based and gospel oriented. The WTF reorganized under the name Evangelical Coalition for United Methodist Women (ECUMW) as a joint effort of Good News, Institute of Religion and Democracy and the Mission Society. By 1991 1,100 individuals or units had registered with ECUMW. At that time Renew became known as the Renew Network for United Methodist Woman a program arm of Good News. Faye Short served as president of Renew from 1989 to 2008. The present president is Liza Kittle of Augusta, Georgia.

Its webpage is: [www.renewnetwork.org](http://www.renewnetwork.org).

**TRANSFORMING CONGREGATIONS**

Transforming Congregations grew out of the Evangelical Renewal Fellowship of the California-Nevada Conference in 1988, which felt that the church’s message of healing and hope for practicing homosexuals was lost in the loud voices advocating for or against homosexual practice in the church.

Persons who have been a part of Transforming Congregations are not the homophobic, unloving types sometimes associated with ultra-conservative Christians, but have been persons who have left or are still struggling with the homosexual life-style, as well as other forms of sexual brokenness. They know rejection because they have experienced it. But they have chosen to follow Biblical mandates on human sexuality and believe God can bring healing even in the most difficult of circumstances.

While some agencies and groups in the church have sought and continue to seek to undermine the church’s stance on human sexuality, Transforming Congregation affirms the church’s stance. Yet, curiously Transforming Congregations has seldom been called upon by official United Methodism in the attempts to promote dialogue and understanding.

The present director of Transforming Congregations, Rev. Karen Booth, in her excellent study, *Forgetting How To Blush*, has traced the history of Christian and United Methodist teaching on human sexuality. Part of this history includes the tremendous amount of funding, much of it non-church connected, now being poured into the effort to compromise the historic stand of Methodism on marriage, the family, celibacy and faithfulness. Groups like Soulforce, The Religious Institute, Faith in America, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Foundation, the Human Rights Campaign, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, Believe Out Loud, the Arcus Foundation, the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, have poured millions of dollars into the effort to change the definition of marriage and to undermine traditional Biblical teaching on sexuality.

Transforming Congregations in 2013 has become structurally linked with Good News and will be a program arm of the Good News movement. The web page for Transforming Congregations is [www.transcong.org](http://www.transcong.org)