

United Methodists Join Forces to "Turn Worlds Upside Down"

Area Three: Eliminating Poverty and Ministry with the Poor

How do we propose to "do" ministry with the poor? That was the focus of the third plenary, addressed by the Rev. Ed Paup, general secretary of the General Board of Global Ministry. "As we begin this new quadrennium, it cannot be business as usual if we intend to make ministry to and with the poor a priority," he said.

Reminding participants of our Methodist roots among the poor of 18th century England, Paup said that, today, by and large we are not poor.

"More than 80 percent of humanity lives on less than \$10 a day," he said. "The poorest 40 percent of population accounts for only five percent of income."

How do we, as United Methodists, seriously go about ministry with the poor today, Paup asked. The answer is by looking it in the face.

"There are 26,000 children who die each day in poverty. They are invisible," he said. "There are more than 72 million children of primary age who are not in school due to poverty; 350 to 500 million persons living with malaria; the billions who have no ready source of drinkable water."

Poverty is a highly complex reality, Paup said, and requires new ways of interaction.

"We need to do three things," he said: Hear the poor -- listen to the poor themselves, not just to the stats; accept the poor -- which implies seeing them and acknowledging that they exist; and serve the poor -- responding to needs, spiritual and physical.

Both Jesus and John Wesley, Paup said, placed the poor at the center of their ministry. "The value of souls and the depth of faith are determined neither by economic status or breadth of taste," Paup said, quoting Wesley.

Noting that the United Methodist Church has hundreds of effective ministries with the poor in place, Paup sounded a hope-filled note that the church today is "neither without model or practitioner." But in order to really make a difference, United Methodists, who make up about .002 percent of the world's population, Paul said, must partner in new and sometimes strange ways.

"If we do this in a way that I believe God calls us, we will see a renewal in The United Methodist Church and a new sense of relevancy in the world," Paup said. "The transformation will take place individually, then in our congregations, and then in our conferences.

An offering taken at the beginning of this session raised more than \$8,000 for the North East District Outreach Ministries of the Florida Conference. Participants placed money and checks on a table at the front of the stage as the praise band from New Life United Methodist Church offered music.