"Living The United Methodist Way:
Offer Them Christ Through our Holston Conference Churches"
Annual Conference 2008

All that we are doing – the 40 Days of Preparation leading up to Annual Conference and the workshops during our sessions this week – is designed to help you go back home, Offer Christ to all, and make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world – which is our mission statement, as we were reminded this morning by Randy Frye. How can you take all of this and make something of it outside of Stuart Auditorium – back at Auburn UMC in Riner, Virginia, or Rising Fawn UMC in Rising Fawn, Georgia, or Fincastle UMC in LaFollette, Tennessee, or wherever you worship each week?

How many of you actually used the 40 Days of Preparation for Annual Conference this year? Did you like it? Do you realize it would make a great teaching tool in your local church and does not have to be tied to Annual Conference preparation? It can be used as a 40-day devotional guide on what it means to each of us to live in the Wesleyan tradition in our United Methodist Church and offer Christ to all. If you used the guide, you also know –as Kim Goddard reminded us yesterday – that some specific suggestions were made on how we can "Offer Them Christ," including a year of preaching and studying and learning in our local churches using the Gospels.

Paragraph 120 of the 2004 *Book of Discipline* says that our mission is "to make disciples of Jesus Christ." The recent General Conference revised our mission slightly, and our new mission (effective January 1, 2009) is "to make disciples of Jesus Christ *for the transformation of the world*." The second sentence of that paragraph, often overlooked, states that **the most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs is the local church**. How can your local church transform your world where you live and work and worship each day and be a significant arena for disciple-making?

A little further on in Paragraph 122, the Discipline gives us guidance on how we are to carry out our mission to "make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." We make disciples in four ways:

1. Proclaim the Gospel and invite, welcome, and gather persons into the faith.
2. Lead persons to commit their lives to God through baptism and profession of faith in Jesus Christ.
3. Nurture persons to Christian living through worship, the sacraments, spiritual disciplines, and other means of grace, such as Wesley's Christian conferencing (which we have heard about from Randy Frye earlier today). And
4. Send persons forth into the world.

If we do these steps right, then the persons we send forth into the world will create an ever-widening circle as they proclaim the Gospel and invite, welcome, and gather; lead others to baptism and profession of faith; nurture those persons; and then send them forth into the world.

On Day 26 of the 40 Days of Preparation (Tuesday, May 13), we began to consider what it means to Offer Christ at the local church level. Now, we have a few moments to consider what that will look like at home. For the next few minutes, we will spend some time in dialogue with each other. So, get comfortable, make sure you are seated with other person or persons from your local church, and consider these questions:

- When you hear the phrase "Offer Them Christ," what does that phrase mean to you? Who are the "them's" in your *church* who need to be offered Christ? Who are the "them's" in your *community* who need to be offered Christ?

- In the Board of Lay Ministry video, did you see or hear any stories of local church ministries and think to yourself, "Hey, we could do that in our local church"? If so, which ministry do you want to remember and take home, perhaps with some slight changes or adaptations?

- What are some ways you believe your church could be Offering Christ that you are not already doing? Think creatively! Instead of "get outside the box," think about how you can "get outside the building!"

- Finally, if you could do anything – *anything* – for the Kingdom of God without fear of failure, what would you do?

This exercise concludes for this Annual Conference session our consideration of our theme of what it means to Live in The United Methodist Way and to Offer Them Christ through our Holston churches. But we all know that our work has just begun.