

Welcome Lay and Clergy of the NC Conference of The United Methodist Church

*"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!
In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade..."*
(I Peter 3-4)

These are times of fearful hearts, conflicts, and consuming passions. Many are bound in despair and doubts. People are looking for something to trust and hold on to in turbulent waters. Some feel as if we are in time of 'exile' and 'bondage.'

To these times, God indeed speaks a word of hope – *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord... "plans to give you hope and a future"* (Jeremiah 29:10).

This week United Methodists from across eastern North Carolina come together as a people of faith to declare hope. We come to be reminded and to remind the world that "our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness." Programs and budgets don't create hope. Slogans and workshops don't create hope. God provides the living hope that sustains us and summons us to faithful living and service in these present days.

We also come to learn the ways of faithful and fruitful ministry. The psalmist writes: *"Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long"* (Psalm 25:4-5). United Methodists have always been learners! May these days together bind us in God's truth and stir in us a passion for reaching the lost and offering the hope of Christ.

The laity and clergy of the Wilmington District are honored to host this 2009 Annual Conference of the North Carolina Conference. Please call on any of the designated ushers if you have questions or needs. All the disciples and co-laborers in Christ of the Wilmington District pray that this time becomes for you a holy time with God and the Body of Christ. May we sing and live together:

*Hope of the world, thou Christ of great compassion,
speak to our fearful hearts by conflict rent.
Save us, thy people from consuming passion,
who by our own false hopes and aims are spent.
Hope of the world, O Christ o'er death victorious,
who by this sign didst conquer grief and pain,
We would be faithful to thy gospel glorious;
thou art our Lord! Thou dost forever reign.*
(Georgia Harkness, 1954, UM Hymnal #178)

We are God's people, and by his grace, we have... "A Future with Hope!"

E. Powell Osteen, Jr., District Superintendent
Clergy and Laity, Wilmington District