

"Winds of Change"

My heart was overflowing with a presence of joy which had been blowing gently through my spirit as I knelt in prayer. Whispers of Jesus through the voices of happy children; the dancing heart of the Holy Spirit felt deeply in the soft giggles of an infant; ripples of movement as God embraced young children through the arms of earthly parents. It took a few moments to draw myself from such abundant grace...Finally I managed an Amen to the prayer. As I stood to face my congregation I paused for reflection and asked, "Do we fully grasp the amazing gift God has given us in children?" I continued by telling my people of how often I am invited to assist other congregations with a passionate request..."Help us to reach MORE children." Why do churches want MORE children? In my travels I have observed three motives hidden within this request.

- We want more children in our church so that my children will not be the only ones in Sunday School or UMYF;
- We want our children to return and be involved in our Christian Education program; and
- We want those children who are unchurched to come.

My Children
Our Children
Those Children

The reasons for seeking the presence of more children in a congregation is tempered by a variety of motivations. I will not speak of those here, but I will challenge all Christians to examine their hearts and to pray passionately for the desire to reach not: my children; our children; or those children, but...TO REACH ALL children so that we will make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

"The US alone has more than 180 million unchurched people, making it the third largest mission field in the English speaking world and fifth largest globally." The winds of change are creating the greatest opportunity for growth in the history of The United Methodist Church. May we pray mightily for MORE children and with the convicted hearts of lovers of Jesus...Please Lord, make us fling open wide the doors of our churches to ALL CHILDREN!

When we are open to receiving all children within our churches we will be challenged to respond creatively and to listen deeply.

- Where are children at risk in your community? Will you help?
- How might your church support parents and caregivers? Will you help?
- How can you offer Jesus in areas that children are attracted to:
Drama, Music, Sports, Dance, Media, Camping, Missions

There are endless possibilities to reach children in the swirling winds of change. May we all move faithfully into the future, responding in unconditional love to All Children.

"See what love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God."

1 John 3:1