

## Northern Illinois Conference Evangelical Association (NICEA)



### What Would a United Methodist Jesus Do?

It has become a tradition in the Northern Illinois Annual Conference that each year at conference time, NICEA sponsors either a dinner or luncheon for members of the group and their guests. Each of these events features a well known speaker, working with a topic we believe will be of particular interest to the group.

This year a luncheon was held on Friday June 6, 2008. Ninety five were in attendance to hear Rev. Dr. Royal Speidel answer the fascinating question "What Would A United Methodist Jesus Do? The text of Dr. Speidel's address appears below. We believe it's a message all United Methodists should hear.

Royal Speidel was raised in North Dakota, and committed his life to Jesus Christ as a youth. He earned the following degrees: a Bachelor of Arts from Westmar College in LeMars, IA; a Master

of Divinity from Evangelical Theological Seminary in Naperville, IL; a Master of Sacred Theology from Biblical Theological Seminary in New York City; and a Doctor of Ministry from Bethany Theological Seminary in Oak Brook, IL.

Dr. Speidel began his pastoral ministry in the Evangelical United Brethren Church in 1963 in North Dakota, and then moved to Lindenhurst, Illinois in 1968 to serve Trinity United Methodist Church. He was appointed to the Chicago Temple in 1974, and then began serving Friendship UM Church in Bolingbrook, IL in 1987. He retired from Friendship Church in 2001. Royal and Evelyn Speidel have four children and ten grandchildren.

Upon retirement, the Foundation for Evangelism (affiliated with the General Board of Discipleship of the United Methodist Church) headquartered in Lake Junaluska, NC, hired Royal as its Staff

Minister for Illinois and Wisconsin. In January 2004 he accepted the position of Distinguished Evangelist in Residence with the General Board of Discipleship in Nashville. His work has taken him to twelve annual conferences with multiple workshops in many of them. He is the author of *Evangelism in the Small Membership Church* and *100 Days of Hope*.

---

### What Would a United Methodist Jesus Do? by Rev. Dr. Royal Speidel

Thank you for the privilege of being part of this gathering. I am honored to speak with you today.

United Methodists come from two great traditions. Our Methodist history is an amazing story of how John and Charles Wesley spawned a Christian movement that today includes about 75 million Christians around the world. England was a more Christian nation because of the Methodists, and the movement came across the Atlantic so in the early 1900s one out of five Americans belonged to the Methodist Church. The Evangelical United Brethren Church had far less impressive numbers, but was also used by God to bring significant spiritual change to various regions of the country. Today as a united church instead of making up 20% of the adult population over 14 years of age we have dropped to 2.68 %.

This bothers all of us. Walter Kimbrough said in River Forest in January, he wants to be part of a championship church. None of us wants to belong to a losing enterprise.

But, what do we do? Jesus Christ loves the United Methodist Church. He created this great church, and no doubt is frustrated because of where we are today. **So, what would the United Methodist Jesus do?**

## **What does Jesus Christ want us to do to become a vital, growing church again?**

I want to suggest 6 things that I believe the United Methodist Jesus would do.

First, he would say take responsibility for what you alone can do. Change what you can touch. Bryan McClaren was asked a while back what United Methodists can do to turn us into a growing church again. He said each one can only do what is in our sphere of influence.

The local church is what every one of us touches, and by which each of us is touched. That is our basic arena, which we can change.

Having said that, conference and general church decisions are very important. The bigger systems in which our churches operate are very significant. For example, I believe it is very good that our conference is emphasizing new church starts and reaching out to new people. We are giving God an opportunity to work in our conference by investing large resources in church development and redevelopment. Our training people in small group ministries is crucial. Healthy churches have 60% of their people involved in small groups.

Jesus says rekindle your passion to bring others to God. For whose salvation are you praying? This is the stack of prayers Evie and I have the joy and privilege of praying for Monday through Friday mornings. It includes a slip that says the salvation of America, another says the salvation of our neighbors, and another says siblings. We pray for the salvation of our brothers and sisters. How many of you have family members not walking with Jesus Christ? Are you praying for them?

Every one of us belongs to a local church. Some of us have influence in our districts, others in the conference and yet others in the general church. The United Methodist Jesus says touch and change what ever you can.

Secondly, the United Methodist Jesus would have us remember our amazing God. The God of 100 billion galaxies each with 100 billion stars is wonderfully able to transform lives. God is powerful to enable laity, clergy and churches to bring major change in the lives of people and communities. The United Methodist Jesus reminds us of God's power that was seen in our past.

There are about 3200 counties in the United States, and United Methodist Churches are found in more counties than any other denomination. Why? Because the Circuit Riders 200 years ago were so in love with Jesus Christ, that they wanted others to know the joy of living in Christ. They literally gave their lives riding in rain, snow and sleet. Temperatures 100 above and 20 below.

Questions: is the Holy Spirit less dynamic today than 100 or 200 years ago? Is Jesus Christ less able to change life today than yesterday? Is the power of God who led Moses and the people of Israel across the Red Sea into freedom diminished today? We read in scripture that God desires all to be saved. Does God have less passion to save people today? If the God who helped early Methodists bring people to Christ in such large numbers that 20 out of 100 Americans were Methodist has not changed, what has changed?

Jesus Christ who died for us is still in the saving business transforming persons, churches, communities and nations. I led the Red Bird Missionary Conference spring retreat with about 125 persons. A 25 year old man was there, who was a slave of drugs and liquor until a couple of years ago. His Kentucky mother spent hard earned money to send him to clinics to be freed from his addiction. Red Bird mission is in one of the poorest counties of America. The young man had rejected the witness of many Christians. One night riding home on a four wheeler, he had an encounter with Christ while he was drunk. He committed his life to Christ, but when he walked in the house and told his wife, she said, "You are stupid." She had heard his talk before. This was for real. The next day he pulled up the marijuana plants behind the house, and emptied several six packs of beer on the ground. He is new creation in Jesus Christ. He spoke at chapel at the mission high school the week before I got there, and God used him to lead a teenage mountain girl to give her life to Jesus Christ.

Two years ago an evangelist from Uganda about 28 years old at that time got my name from the Internet. We communicate frequently. He and his evangelism team have led over a thousand persons to commit their lives to Christ since January.

The recent Pew Research study shows that 16 percent of Americans are unaffiliated with any religion. Sixteen percent without a church is about the same percent as mainline denominations. What is the fastest growing religious group in America? You got it. The unaffiliated. Jesus is telling us to reach out to these folks. All of them have that God shaped vacuum in their hearts.

The United Methodist Jesus is telling us that God is amazingly powerful to change lives today and to build churches.

Thirdly, the United Methodist Jesus reminds us to confess our sins. How long has it been since you have heard reference to the seven deadly sins: pride, gluttony, sloth, lust, greed, envy and anger? Pope Benedict said recently that "We are losing the notion of sin."

How many of you have read the book, *Reveal*? It tells the results of a self-study at Willow Creek. Six thousand Creekers were surveyed and 5000 in other churches.

Bill Hybels says their research tells them they were mistaken at Willow Creek. They had believed that getting people involved in church activities grew their spirituality. And it is true. Getting people involved on the finance committee, or Staff Parish Work Area brought small behavioral change. However, Willow Creek wanted the barometer for change to be based on the two biggies: the first and second commandments. What helps people love God with all their heart, mind and soul and their neighbor as themselves? In these two categories mowing the church lawn, ushering, serving as a liturgist or as a soloist or choir member brought not one iota of change. Just getting people involved in church activities does not change their love of God and neighbor. Their research showed that four activities brought spiritual maturity: They are personal prayer, confession of sin, reading and studying scripture and listening to God. These activities created Christians who love God with all their hearts, minds and strength and their neighbors as themselves.

Isn't it amazing that confession of sin changes human behavior? How can we get our people to confess their sin more? Two things. Talk about it more. Let us find ways to talk about sin that draws people to Christ instead of drives them out of the church. At my age, I confess my sin more than ever before. Not because my sins are greater, but the closer you get to the light of God the more you see your blemishes.

Fourthly, the United Methodist Jesus would tell us to be a fasting people. Early Christians fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays. John Wesley observed a fast on those two days as well, and he encouraged his clergy to fast on Fridays. Would we be meeting at this annual conference if early Methodist clergy had not fasted on Fridays?

God sanctifies people through fasting. Giving up solid foods disciplines us. Refusing to satisfy the body with solid food for a day enables us to focus more love toward God. Loving God more enables us to love people more. Sanctification is becoming the most loving people we can become.

I have fasted for about 30 years not eating solids on Tuesdays and Fridays, and whatever passion for Jesus God has in my heart is there partly because of Royal saying no to Royal's appetites.

In March I did four workshops for the Griffin District clergy spring retreat in the North Georgia conference. As we talked about fasting, I told them it would be exceedingly interesting to see would God would do for that district if every clergy fasted just on Friday for one year. I say the same thing about the Northern Illinois Conference. Wouldn't it be fascinating to see what Jesus Christ would do in our conference if every clergy gave up solid food on Fridays until dinner time?

A friend told me on Tuesday that his little church of 6 families needed \$100,000 for a building. They recently agreed to fast on a Saturday, and then come together to share their financial commitments. Six families came up with \$104,000. God blesses us in fasting. It is one of our central means of grace.

Fifthly, a United Methodist Jesus would tell us to encourage our people and America to practice sexual purity.

What would a United Methodist Jesus do about the sexual situation in America? Sexual freedom is a huge problem throughout the world, and unfortunately, much of it is being exported from the United States

through our movies, which are watched around the globe. Reportedly, even the dictator of North Korea is hooked on pornography from America. Most sexual discussion in Methodism deals with homosexuality. But in my opinion heterosexual sin is a major contributor to increased acceptance of homosexuality. Heterosexual sin is a great problem for two reasons: First from a statistical standpoint. A huge study of 120,000 adults in Canada reported that 1.6% identified themselves as homosexual.

A two million dollar study at the University of Chicago found that two percent of Americans identify themselves as homosexual. If 98% of Americans are heterosexual, by sheer numbers sexual immorality among heterosexuals is a far greater issue.

The second reason heterosexual sin is of great significance is because American Christians wink at it. Sexual sin is not considered offensive if it is heterosexual. Movies and TV dramas constantly show unmarried people jumping into bed, and Christians are so immune to that kind of sin there is little or no negative reaction. Two university students told me in a motel in Lexington, KY in March they were going to FL for a week's vacation. They had no wedding bands. A couple told me on the elevator of a motel in Orlando, FL on Mon. that he was from Connecticut and she from NJ. Unmarried people sleeping together at Disney World believing this is the American norm.

I had a conversation with one of our finest young clergy recently. He had a young unmarried couple living together. The man presented a problem to his young pastor. He told him that his live-in has an uncle, who is gay. He is bothered by this, but his lady is not. He asked his pastor how he could talk to his woman about this. This man thought fornication is less a sin than homosexuality. The United Methodist Jesus says stop the hypocrisy. God does not look lightly upon sexual sin period. Be honest and acknowledge sexual sin of every kind.

Pastors, teach your congregations two new words: fornication and adultery. How many of our people have ever heard the word fornication?

If the church does not speak about sexual behavior, Hollywood will gladly fill the void. If our youth do not have solid teaching about the words fornication and adultery in the church, where are they going to be taught?

The United Methodist Jesus is telling us there is wonderful freedom in sexual purity. Coaching our people to practice sexual purity will help them prevent personal heartache and serious sexually transmitted diseases. Plus sexual discipline will help them in every area of life.

Sixth, the United Methodist Jesus tells us to bring more young people into the clergy ranks and more young people into the church. If we are going to become a dynamic movement again, we need to fill our pulpits and our pews with young clergy and young church members. United Methodist members average 58 years of age. How likely is it that Gen Exers born from '65 to '82 or millennials born from '83 to 2001 will gravitate to a congregation of older people?

Or, if 95% of our clergy are over the age of 35, how likely will our clergy be to reach young adults? When I hit 60 years of age, I suddenly realized that reaching young adults was a whole lot harder simply because of my age, so I organized a young couple's club, and recruited young adults in their twenties and thirties to lead new small groups we were starting. If you are over 50, you don't naturally attract the twenties and thirties any more, so what are you doing to compensate? What extra steps are you taking to bring families with children into your church?

The Council of Bishops has Vision Pathways, which call for starting a new church every day. Check the United Methodist bishop's vision pathways on the internet, and you will see the goal to start one new church every day. That is terrific! It is laudable and exciting, but here is a problem. Research supposedly says that 25-35 year olds are the most effective group at starting new churches. The twenties and thirties people bring vision and energy into the church. With only 5% of our clergy under 35, who is going to successfully start the new churches?

Jesus says reorganize your efforts to fill your churches with twenty and thirty year olds. Build new church buildings that will attract the young. Also, support Chrysalis, youth church camps and evangelical campus

ministries, so young people called to full time service in the church are attracted to United Methodist ministry.

May God bless us as we give ourselves to the task of saving souls for the Kingdom of God.

---

*If you are interested in information about NICEA, please contact Jim Blue at [JamesBlue@aol.com](mailto:JamesBlue@aol.com).*

*Northern Illinois Conference Evangelical Association (NICEA)  
1771 Sherwood Road  
Des Plaines, IL 60016*