40 YEARS of VISION for
United Methodist renewal and reformation

By James V. Heidinger II

The first issue of GOOD NEWS magazine was published in 1967. With this issue, Good News celebrates 40 years of renewal ministry.

Charles W. Keysor, a Methodist pastor in Elgin, Illinois, published the first issue of the digest-size magazine for Methodist evangelicals out of the basement of his parsonage. At the suggestion of his wife, Marge, he called it GOOD NEWS.

It had all begun a year earlier when James Wall, then editor of the Methodist minister’s magazine New Christian Advocate, asked Chuck, “Why don’t you write an article for us describing the central beliefs and convictions of this part [evangelical wing] of our church?”

Chuck’s article, “Methodism’s Silent Minority” was published in the July 14, 1966 issue of the New Christian Advocate, where he identified the major evangelical convictions (see original article on p. 14).

To his amazement Keysor received over 200 letters and phone calls in response to his article, most of them coming from Methodist pastors. Two themes surfaced in the responses: first, “I thought I was the only one left in the church who believes these things,” and second, “I feel so alone—so cut off from the leadership of my church.”

As he prayed about the letters and phone calls, Chuck felt he must do something. Having been a journalist prior to entering the ministry, he decided to launch a magazine which affirmed the evangelical message of the Wesleys and Francis Asbury. GOOD NEWS magazine was born.

Responses to the first issue were much like today. One disgruntled Methodist in Alabama wrote, “Your magazine is JUNK!” But Carl F. H. Henry, then editor of the new evangelical journal Christianity Today, wrote, “A mighty
fine beginning—congratulations!"

Rallying renewal groups: Seeing the immediate surge of interest in his magazine, Keysor chose 12 Methodists to serve as board members, and the Good News effort became incorporated as “A Forum for Scriptural Christianity.” The board’s first meeting was in May of 1967, only two months after the appearance of the first issue of the magazine.

Good News was a breath of fresh air for Methodists seeking spiritual renewal, quickly becoming their rallying point. Pastors and laity began organizing clusters of like-minded Methodists who came out of a felt need for fellowship, support, encouragement, and prayer. Soon, they began to map strategies for increasing evangelicalism within their annual conferences.

Today renewal groups exist in more than 40 of our United Methodist annual conferences, forming an extensive grassroots network for evangelical advocacy, fellowship, and prayer support. In my annual conference, the East Ohio Evangelical Fellowship—just one of such renewal groups—began in 1969 and has made an invaluable contribution in strengthening the evangelical witness in the conference, especially in youth camping programs and ministries.

Convo fellowship: The Good News board soon felt a need to sponsor some kind of national gathering to help unify Methodist evangelicals. Texas pastor Mike Walker, the youngest member of the fledgling board, headed up plans for the first national convocation held in Dallas in August of 1970. To everyone’s amazement, a whopping 1,600 United Methodists registered, coming from coast to coast! The Holy Spirit drew people together in a remarkable way.

Emotion and excitement filled the air as participants discovered other like-minded Methodists. Tears streamed down the faces of worshippers as they saw the evening crowds swell to nearly 3,000 persons jammed into the Adolphus Hotel ballroom. Folks heard luminaries such as missionary statesman E. Stanley Jones, Bishop Gerald Kennedy, Frank B. Stanger, Dennis F. Kinlaw, K. Morgan Edwards, Claude Thompson, evangelist Tom Skinner, Howard Ball, Billy Graham Association evangelist Akbar Abdul-Haq, Ira Gallaway, C. Philip Hinerman, and Les Woodson.

In bringing greetings to the assembly, a message from evangelist Billy Graham stated: “Wish I could be with you for this momentous and historic conference. Methodism was born and it grew through revival and evangelism. It is my prayer that the United Methodist Church will have a spiritual renewal and help lead our nation in the spiritual revival that we do desperately need. May God bless you all.”

**MILESTONES**

A warm and wonderful congratulations to Good News and especially Dr. Jim Heidinger for the crystal clear message of church renewal and evangelism which has been unwavering and faithful to the Word for all these 40 years. Only eternity will know all the hope and courage you have given to hundreds of churches and pastors. We look forward to Good News and read it cover to cover. We marvel at the inspiration it always offers. Thanks for the two cover stories you did about our Trilby UM Church renewal. The response was overwhelming and a sure sign that you are fulfilling your purpose in reviving the United Methodist Church.

Thanks for your dedicated interest in getting my book New Life for Dying Churches, It Can Happen Anywhere! out to hundreds of churches. You truly make a difference in every endeavor put before you for 40 years. From the bottom of our hearts we pray you may have another brilliant 40 years.

Rose Sims
United Methodist evangelist
Twentieth century United Methodism was marked for renewal. Discouraged United Methodists received hope that they weren’t alone in their evangelical concerns. And most importantly, they began to dream of a new day of revival and renewal in their church.

For 30 years following the Dallas Convocation, Good News sponsored a national convocation nearly every summer. United Methodists came for fellowship, inspiration, and instruction. One couple remarked at our Washington, D.C. convos in the early 1990s, “Jim, when we came here we were so discouraged, we were considering leaving the church. But our hearts have been renewed, and we’re going back to our home church with new hope.” And return they have, by the hundreds, with programs and ideas for their local churches like Marriage Enrichment, Trinity Bible Studies, Faith Promise missions giving, Disciple Bible Study, Discover God’s Call, and Walk to Emmaus.

Improving Sunday school literature: One of the earliest concerns of the fledgling Good News movement was the need to improve dismal denominational Sunday school literature. Evangelicals were frustrated, but hardly knew where to begin to bring about change.

In 1968 Good News carried a stinging evaluation of Methodism’s new adult curriculum. One reviewer wrote, “What is missing here...is a particular and sustained biblical theology.” This reviewer looked in vain for any word about “salvation, any good news about the atonement of Jesus Christ, or any hint about the possibility of spiritual

new birth....”

The next year a Good News team met for the first of many dialogues with the church’s curriculum editors and officials. The denominational leaders responded with obvious impatience and condescension toward evangelical concerns. One bishop informed the Good News delegation that they must realize that all contemporary scholars supported the Bultmannian notion that much of the Bible is myth. That was indicative of the gulf that existed between grassroot members and many in positions of national leadership.

Nevertheless, dialogue had begun. The United Methodist Publishing House gradually became more aware of its responsibilities to serve the whole church, including the evangelicals. In 1975, Good News published its first edition of We Believe, a confirmation series for junior high youth. Pastors dissatisfied with United Methodist materials received it enthusiastically. It remains a widely-used confirmation curriculum yet today.

A 1985 evaluation of denominational curriculum revealed improvement in our church school literature. In addition, the Disciple Bible Study program has found a warm welcome in the church, as has more recently Christian Believer, a similarly-packaged in-depth study of Christian doctrine, a resource from the United Methodist Publishing House (UMPH) which is doctrinally sound.

The problem evangelicals have now with church school curriculum is its lack of consistency. For adults especially, one quarter’s materials might be sound while the next are disappointingly weak, which is the problem with materials that are published for a broad sweep of theological positions. This inconsistency, among other things, was the impetus that led Good News to begin publishing its Wesleyan and evangelical Bristol Bible Curriculum.

Both the We Believe confirmation materials and the Bristol Bible Curriculum are published today by the independent, for-profit publisher, Bristol House, Ltd., headquartered in Anderson, Indiana. (Good News had begun publishing books and study materials in 1989, but sold its publishing ministry in 1991 to a small group of Good News supporters who formed Bristol House, Ltd.)

In what was viewed as a sign of increasing openness to the evangelical constituency in the denomination, a few years ago the United Methodist Publishing House (UMPH) and Bristol House, Ltd. joined in a cooperative project to produce Sunday school and small group curriculum for children and adults. This joint venture was welcomed by evangelicals as a new sign of openness on the part of the UMPH.

Doctrinal doldrums: From the start, Good News’ primary concern has been theological. Born in an era when church radicals were demanding “Let the world set the agenda for the church,” we were convinced that the biblical
admonished him, saying, “Ed, you must remember that you are in a church that embraces theological pluralism.” For that superintendent, theological pluralism meant that some may affirm the bodily resurrection of Christ and some may not.

In 1974, Good News authorized a “Theology and Doctrine Task Force,” headed by Paul Mickey, associate professor of pastoral theology at Duke University’s Divinity School. The task force was charged with preparing a fresh, new statement of “Scriptural Christianity” which would remain faithful to both the Methodist and Evangelical United Brethren traditions. In addition to Mickey, the committee included Charles Keysor, Frank B. Stanger, Dennis F. Kinlaw, Robert Stamps, Lawrence Souder, and this writer.

In 1975, the Task Force presented its statement to the Good News board and it was adopted at its summer meeting at Lake Junaluska. It thus became known as “The Junaluska Affirmation.” Albert Outler praised Good News at the time for being perhaps the only group within the church to respond to his challenge for United Methodists to “do theology.”

Theological issues were always top drawer for Good News. Our questions and frequent criticism of theological pluralism played a major role in the 1984 General Conference decision to develop a new doctrinal statement for the church. The theological commission, authorized by that General Conference and chaired by Bishop Earl G. Hunt Jr., brought a new and much improved theological statement which was adopted overwhelmingly by the 1988 General Conference. It cited “the primacy of Scripture” as the new guiding principle for doing theology. The term “theological pluralism” was purposefully and conspicuously omitted from the new statement.
Some today still try to resuscitate “theological pluralism” under the guise of diversity. However, United Methodism has its clearly articulated doctrinal standards which are protected by Restrictive Rule in the Book of Discipline (Par. 17 Article I).

The seminary challenge: Good News has long been troubled over the liberal domination of theological education. Across the years, evangelicals at our United Methodist seminaries have consistently reported unfair caricaturing, ridicule, and intolerance toward their orthodoxy, biblical beliefs. They also have cited a troubling dearth of evangelical faculty at our seminaries.

In 1975, United Methodist evangelist Ed Robb Jr., in a fiery address at Good News’ summer convocation, called upon the church to restore Wesleyan doctrine to our United Methodist seminaries. Institutional leaders fumed and seminary professors fussed about his challenge. One could hear the murmurs echoing from their hallowed halls: “How dare he be so critical!”

However, Robb’s hard-hitting address led to a new friendship with Albert C. Outler, United Methodism’s eminent Wesleyan scholar, who taught at Perkins School of Theology in Dallas. Together, with help from others, they formed A Foundation for Theological Education (AFTE). To date, more than 110 evangelical scholars, called John Wesley Fellows, have participated in the scholarship program, receiving grants to seek their PhDs with plans to return to teach at our United Methodist colleges and seminaries.

In 1976, Good News also began publishing Catalyst, the newsletter sent free to all United Methodist seminarians, with the goal of making them aware of evangelical scholarly resources which they did not always have in their liberal seminary setting. The Rev. Mike Walker, the board member who organized the first Good News convocation, has coordinated the editing and mailing of Catalyst from its inception. (It continues today under the auspices of AFTE, which is now chaired by Dr. Ed Robb III, senior minister at The Woodlands UMC Church in Texas.)

In 1977, Good News sent teams to nearly all United Methodist-related seminaries, engaging them in dialogue and urging them toward greater openness to evangelical faculty, course materials, and library resources.

Missions derailed: In 1974, United Methodist evangelicals from 23 states gathered in Dallas to discuss their concerns with the church’s world missions program. Those gathered criticized the declining number of overseas missionaries the mission board’s preoccupation with social and political matters, and its lack of concern for matters of faith—including conversion and the planting of new churches.

The group formed the Evangelical Missions Council (EMC) which several years later would become an arm of Good News. David A. Seamands, Good News board member and former missionary to India, was named EMC’s first chairman. Conversations with the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) continued. However, after no less than 22 “dialogues” over an 11-year period between Good News and GBGM, Seamands and others learned that “the unfortunate gulf separating us from the GBGM policymakers was wide and deep.”

For eight years, the Rev. Virgil Maybray, a highly-respected clergy member of the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference, served as full-time executive secretary of Good News’ EMC effort, spending most of his time speaking in and consulting with local churches about expanding their missions programs. During that time, Virgil ministered in more than 350 UM churches in 35 states, raising mil-

Virgil Maybray was the executive secretary of Good News’ Evangelical Missions Council and became the Vice-President when the Mission Society was formed.
lions of dollars for missions, with more than $1 million channeled directly through GBGM’s Advance Special Programs.

In 1983, when evangelical discontent peaked upon learning about the proposed new leadership of the World Division of GBGM, 39 large-church pastors and 4 missions professors (all United Methodist) met in St. Louis to form a “supplemental” missions sending agency. It was to be called The Mission Society for United Methodists. It opened its doors for ministry in February of 1984 and began helping United Methodists get to the mission field. Today, with headquarters in Norcross, Georgia, and now known as simply The Mission Society, the young sending agency now has 224 persons in ministry (full-time, standard support) in 31 countries. (This compares, interestingly, with recent numbers from GBGM which report just 247 full-time, standard support missionaries.)

Legislative landmarks: United Methodist evangelicals and traditionalists have struggled with how to respond to the church’s liberal theologies and programs. They could ignore them, find another church, or use their influence for positive change. Good News opted for the latter.

At the 1972 General Conference in Atlanta, Good News launched its first involvement in the legislative process. Board members Bob Sprinkle and Helen Rhea Stumbo prepared and distributed ten petitions and four resolutions. They also cranked out occasional newsletters. Although the 1972 conference was a disaster, approving abortion and adopting the statement on theological pluralism, Good News had thrown its hat in the ring.

The 1976 General Conference brought a stronger Good News showing with the additional help of Robert Snyder and John Grenfell. By 1980, Good News had launched its first full-bodied effort, led by Don and Virginia Shell. They continued leading Good News’ legislative strategy program until 1992, when they turned the leadership over to Lynda and Scott Field, a former Good News board chair and senior pastor of the Wheatland-Salem United Methodist Church in Naperville, Illinois. They gave extraordinary leadership to the Good News General Conference effort from 1996 through 2004.

Whether Indianapolis in 1980, St. Louis in 1988, or Pittsburgh in 2004, the Good News effort has worked behind the scenes in annual conferences to get evangelical and traditional delegates elected, well-crafted petitions channeled properly, and a series of position papers published which articulate our stand on major issues.

The nearly two weeks we spend on site at General Conference with our 40-person team is the culmination of more than two years of careful preparation. As a result of Good News’ field work and legislative training efforts, more United Methodist evangelicals have decided to get involved in the legislative process. Good News, along with other members of the 2008 Evangelical Renewal and Reform Coalition, will once again have a team on site at the 2008 General Conference in Ft. Worth, Texas.

MILESTONES

Congratulations, Good News, on 40 years of service to the church. The powers that be have not always seen your work as a service, but the record now is clear. Your steady attention to the tasks of renewal has borne fruit. Both the Good News movement and the church have matured as mutual correction, Christian Conferencing, and a spirited debate, now and then, have shaped us. My personal respect for Good News and its leaders has grown steadily. I remember my skepticism at the 2000 General Conference about the “Breakfast Briefing.” I thought it could only be more politics. But I was wrong. What a great service to the whole church! May God continue to bless your work.

Leicester R. Longden
Assoc. Prof. of Evangelism & Discipleship
University of Dubuque Theological Seminary

United Methodist evangelicals were encouraged by the efforts of concerned denominational leaders to formulate pre-General Conference activity such as the 1988 “Houston Declaration” and the 1992 “Memphis Declaration.” Both of these initiatives were spearheaded by the leadership of what is now known as the Confessing Movement within the United Methodist Church—which includes prominent leaders such as James B. Buskirk, Maxie D. Dunnam, Ira Gallaway, John Ed Mathison, William Bouknight, and the late William H. Hinson. The grassroots efforts noted above reflected the growing conviction that evangelicals must engage in the legislative process to make their voices heard if the church is ever to experience renewal and reform.

Proliferation of evangelical voices: I am still amazed to think that at one time there were no groups or publications that spoke on behalf of United Methodism’s evangelical or conservative constituency. That, no doubt, helps explain the immediate flood of responses to Chuck Keyser’s inaugural article, “Methodism’s Silent Minority.”

It’s a different world today and the United Methodist Church is not the same church. Think of the organizations that didn’t exist 40 years ago: Good News, The Institute on Religion and Democracy, United Methodist Action, A Foundation for Theological Education, The Mission Society, Transforming Congregations, Lifewatch (the Taskforce of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality), the
MILESTONES

Happy 40th Birthday! If Good News had not come to birth 40 years ago, someone or some group would have to give it birth today. You have served the United Methodist Church well, contending for the faith once and for all delivered to the saints. You have shown the Christian way of generosity and graciousness in response to what sometimes has been unfounded vehement criticism. Your groundedness in Scripture and the Wesleyan way has inspired those of us who seek the renewal of our beloved United Methodism. My prayers are with you as you continue your vital ministry of encouragement and challenge. My special thanks to Jim Hiebinger who has provided a model of Christian statesmanship as he has navigated the often turbulent waters of dialogue and controversy.

Maxie D. Dunnam 
Chancellor 
Asbury Theological Seminary

RENEW Network, Concerned Methodists, the American Family Association, and the Confessing Movement Within the United Methodist Church.

We should also note the important contribution of several groups affiliated with the General Board of Discipleship, including the Council on Evangelism, the Foundation for Evangelism, the National Association of United Methodist Evangelists, and Aldersgate Renewal Ministries. The above groups have been faithful voices on behalf of our Wesleyan theological heritage.

All of these groups, of course, have their own histories and purposes. They do not walk in lockstep, to be sure. But let's not miss the significance of their existence. The voices of United Methodists evangelicals and traditionalists are finally being heard. Channels now exist to guarantee this will happen. Thousands of United Methodists have found avenues for evangelical ministry as well as ways to address effectively the spiritual, moral, theological, and social issues that exist in our church.

Emerging new spirit: The various evangelical groups noted above are a part of something new that is emerging within the United Methodist Church. I would call this new surge a growing expectation that the church be faithful to its historic message. I was visiting an annual conference last June and a clergy member, noting the large number of evangelicals elected to his General Conference delegation, said to me almost matter-of-factly, “We expect our delegates in this conference to affirm the evangelical faith.” I was encouraged to hear that. It was another sign that more and more United Methodists have grown weary of theological revisionism and doctrinal fads; weary of those who would use the church in order to advance an ideological agenda. It is time for all of our United Methodist leaders to embrace, believe, and teach the historic doctrines of our Wesleyan tradition.

Many of us have been encouraged by Tom Oden's The Rebirth of Orthodoxy, published in 2003. After observing the evangelical gains at the 2000 General Conference in Cleveland, Oden says those gains are an indication that the United Methodist Church is re-centering itself around the Apostolic Faith. He wrote, “These gains came largely as a result of a preceding and continuing network of prayer, a coalition of numerous renewing and confessing movements working closely together, and widespread demoralization among the old-guard liberals.”

The 2004 General Conference in Pittsburgh saw further gains that would indicate that the evangelical presence at United Methodist General Conferences continues to grow with each quadrennial gathering. On some 15 votes on issues of human sexuality, delegates affirmed more strongly than ever the church's long-standing, scriptural position. A motion to allow homosexual unions or marriages was defeated by an 83 percent vote. Surprisingly, delegates by
a 77 percent vote went on record to “support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.” We are the first and only mainline denomination to be on record on this issue.

As we move toward the 2008 General Conference in Fort Worth, Good News will enthusiastically support the four emphases coming from the Council of Bishops. We are especially excited about the proposal for starting new congregations all across the country. Evangelism has always been a passion for the Good News constituency. For seven years, we have been a promotional partner with The Alpha Course through GOOD NEWS magazine. By their account, this has been a major factor in the Alpha Course being used in more United Methodist churches than any other denomination in America.

The story of the past decade of Good News’ ministry cannot be told without mentioning the unusual advocacy ministry of the Rev. John Grenfell, a retired member of the Detroit Annual Conference. A former district superintendent, John was tutored well by the late Bishop Dwight Loder that the administration of the church should be done justly and with integrity. John has participated in more than 50 supervisory response sessions, helping pastors who are in need of good and godly counsel, and who often need the help of an advocate. John brings to these sessions a profound understanding of the Book of Discipline and our administrative processes, always urging pastors and laity to be sure they understand due process and the rights provided them in the Discipline.

Even though Good News has sold Bristol House, we continue to publish books for our constituency on themes such as prayer, evangelism, and renewal. One of our newest is Beyond the Badge, by our board member, the Rev. Dr. Chuck Ferrara, a clergy member of the New York Annual Conference. This outstanding book, aimed at bringing police officers to faith in Christ, is already in its 6th printing, even though it has been out less than two years. Churches have been buying the book in quantities to give as a ministry outreach to local law enforcement personnel. The book has great credibility because Chuck, himself, served for 16 years as a member of the New York Police Department (NYPD). Now a pastor, he also ministers as a police chaplain in New Fairfield, Connecticut.

Cry for leadership: When United Methodists feel compelled to form alternative groups within the church and gather at their own expense to issue declarations to the church, as they did at Houston and Memphis, what you have is a plea for godly leadership. We look hopefully to our bishops who are charged with the teaching and overseeing function in the church. Our bishops, according to Paul, “must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught,” so they can “encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it” (Titus 1:9).

It is easy for evangelicals to grow weary in the struggle for renewal. Some who do will often say, “Jim, the struggle is a distraction from the real ministry of the church.” But Presbyterian clergywoman, the Rev. Sue Cyre, editor of the journal Theology Matters, has written an apt reply to that sentiment, saying that this is not a distraction from real ministry. She writes, “The battle over truth and falsehood is the real ministry of the church. Everywhere the church goes, it is to proclaim the truth of the Gospel, but it is always against a backdrop of some false beliefs.” What a timely word. And those who hold false beliefs do not let go of them easily—Scripture attests to that. So, “Let us not grow weary in well-doing, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest, if we don’t give up” (Galatians 6:9).

**New day for United Methodism?** So perhaps a new atmosphere is emerging within the church. Granted, we still face serious problems, but there is much reason for hope.

At an earlier anniversary observance, I wrote words that I believe are still relevant today. I will close with them. “Evangelicals today believe the church has been entrusted with a divinely-revealed plan of redemption. This message is set forth clearly in the Word of God. This fact automatically establishes the relevance of the Christian message. We must resist attempts to impose other standards of relevance upon it. And even the slightest mishandling of that biblical message must be ruled out of order. The biblical message, proclaimed in the power of the Holy Spirit, will still bear fruit today. This trustworthy message will revitalize and renew United Methodism and enable us to share in the evangelical awakening that already is moving across our land and world. When our pulpits are alive again with the faithful proclamation of the Word of God, we can be sure the Lord will once again add daily to the United Methodist Church ‘those who are being saved.’”

**James V. Heidinger II** is the president and publisher of Good News.