

## Jim's Tool Box

### What is the World Coming To?

At the recently concluded North Central Jurisdictional Conference, Bishop John Hopkins of the East Ohio Area offered the Episcopal Address. At the beginning of this remarks he noted that the address would be neither a sermon nor a report on the state of the church. Instead Bishop Hopkins spoke to the delegates at the conference about events that are shaping and changing the world about us – more specifically the Midwest in which we live.

Hopkins used as source material for his address a book by Richard C. Longworth *Caught in the Middle America's Heartland in the Age of Globalism* (available at [www.cokesbury.com](http://www.cokesbury.com) or at the Cokesbury Store).

Longworth is now a fellow at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. Previously, he was a senior writer at the *Chicago Tribune*. Coincidentally, the heartland of which Longworth writes in his book comprises most of the North Central Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church including the area encompassed by the Capitol Area South District.



Bishop Hopkins

Bishop Hopkins said that radical change is the future of the Midwest and the church in the Midwest. The challenge is already here in the globalization that is taking place across our region and around the world. As Longworth describes it in his book, “Then, about a decade ago, globalization arrived and changed the Midwest forever.

Traditional family farms vanished. Steel mills closed and auto factories shrunk.

‘Downsizing’ and ‘outsourcing’ enriched our vocabularies and frightened our workforce.”

Hopkins went on to use Longworth’s narrative to talk not only about the industrial Midwest shrinking drastically. Long worth describes how family farms have been replaced by factory farms. He writes about how small towns and county seat towns once filled with vibrant small businesses have seen those stores vanish as populations have shifted and the big box retailers led by Wal-Mart moved in out by the highway. Immigration has become a reality in many communities in ways that would not have been dreamed of in a generation earlier.

The communities of the Capitol Area South District have not been immune from the effects of globalization. Residents in communities from London to Lancaster and Circleville to Newark could cite the effects of globalization on their communities. Columbus has not been immune especially in its manufacturing segment. For example a report in *The Columbus Dispatch* earlier this year reported that in 1965 the largest employers in Columbus were General Motors (4,244 workers) Timken Roller Bearing (4,053 employees), and Jeffrey Manufacturing (2,775 workers). In 2006 the largest employers (with number of

employees) were: the State of Ohio (26,613), the Ohio State University (19,519) and J P Morgan Chase (14,276).

Of course the congregations of the West Ohio Conference have not been immune from all of these changes either. For 1971, the conference journal reported a membership in the West Ohio Conference of 411,295 members and an average worship attendance of 155,162. For 2007, the conference journal records a membership in the churches of the West Ohio Conference of 224,342 members and an average worship attendance of 122,739.

So what are we to do? What is the world as most of us have known it coming to? Bishop Hopkins reminded us that in the midst of all the change that communities in the Midwest have been facing, the church is the only stable institution in many of these communities. Hopkins says that the church cannot stay the same and we must lead the change. Bishop

Hopkins talked about all the changes that have taken place since the United Methodist Church was formed forty years ago. He

asked, “Have we been spending 40 years in the promise land or in the wilderness?” He said the children of Israel were ready to go, but then the people began to complain about the leadership and the food. Numbers 13 says the spies came back from Canaan with an unfavorable report.

Bishop Hopkins continued, “Currently we are in crisis in the Midwest, a crisis that affects small towns and cities. That crisis is globalization. If we don’t change, we will fall behind and continue to lose members and our influence in society.”

In talking about what we as the church have to offer to the challenge of globalization, Hopkins stressed the importance of United Methodist Christians advocating for the public education system across the region. Among the other things that Longworth notes in his book is that it will take an educated workforce (beyond high school education) for the Midwest to compete in the global economy.

In thinking about the church and its mission, the Bishop concluded by talking about the *one* mission statement of our church, “To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” He cited the three simple rules of John Wesley “Do no harm. Do good. Stay in love with God.” He mentioned the Four Areas of Focus that the 2008 General Conference adopted:

1. Developing principled Christian leaders for the church and the world.
2. Creating new places for new people by starting new congregations and renewing existing ones.
3. Engaging in ministry with the poor.
4. Stamping out killer diseases of poverty (malaria, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis) by improving health globally.

***“If we don’t change, we will fall behind and continue to lose members and our influence in society.”***

The bishop challenged those of us at the conference that it would be easy for us to sit in our churches and to ignore all of these changes and to conduct “business as usual.” But God is calling us to do great things through Christ who strengthens us. The Bishop concluded by saying that we can do it by the grace of God because we are the people of the United Methodist Church.

So rather than saying, “Look what our world has come to.” We have the opportunity to declare to the world/the communities around our congregations, “Look what has come to the world!” as we declare the hope that is ours in the person of Jesus Christ.

How are you/how is your congregation seeking to be faithful to your calling in this day? Share with me ways that your congregation is seeking to transform the world/to transform your community for the sake of Jesus Christ in these days. Just e-mail me at [jwaugh@wocumc.org](mailto:jwaugh@wocumc.org), and I’ll be glad to share some of your responses in a future Tool Box article.

Editor’s note: You can watch or listen to Bishop Hopkin’s Episcopal Address by going to this site: <http://www.ncj2008.org> and clicking on “Conference Resources and Video Links.”