

## STRENGTHENING BRIDGES

In 1996 The United Methodist Church took a giant step forward in relations with the Jewish community by enacting Resolution 88, *Building New Bridges in Hope*, using as its foundation the 1972 resolution, *Bridge in Hope*, enacted in 1972. The General Conference of 2000 enacted Resolution 75, furthering United Methodist-Jewish relations in calling all United Methodist churches around the world to observe Yom HaShoah, the day of remembrance of those who died in the Holocaust of World War II.

*Building New Bridges in Hope* left to another time and further conversation the question of "...evangelization of persons of other faiths, and of Jews in particular" by saying, "These issues call for continuing, serious and respectful reflection and dialogue among Christians, and with Jews." The United Methodist Church holds that the time for action on this issue is now, and because of the long history of Christian hostility toward Jews, the initiative clearly lies with the Church.

That our lack of clarity on this point is a break in the bridge between United Methodism and the Jewish community is certain. In the 1997 joint commentary on *Building New Bridges in Hope*, Jewish scholar Leon Klenicki said,

The question considered by this principle is very crucial in the relationship of Christians and Jews. It reminds us of the word 'evangelism' which brings great uneasiness to Jewish hearts. Through the centuries, evangelism has been a way by which Christians tried to convert and persecute Jews in the Western world. As Jews, we need to understand the exact meaning of evangelism.

We cannot know the way in which God's Spirit will work, nor can we know in whom the Spirit will be made manifest. We have always proclaimed that God spoke through the prophets of Israel and Judah and that Jesus spoke and acted in the tradition of those prophets. "God's grace is active everywhere, at all times, carrying out this purpose as revealed in the Bible. It is expressed in God's covenant with Abraham and Sarah, in the Exodus of Israel from Egypt, and in the ministry of the prophets." (*Book of Discipline* ¶121)

In a significant way, the path toward Jewish--Christian reconciliation has been paved by the Catholic Church, and we United Methodists can be grateful for that work. (See *Nostra Aetate*, Sect. 4). In his reflection on this landmark declaration from Vatican II, Walter Cardinal Kasper, President of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, announced that, "...Because we have all this in common and because as Christians we know that God's covenant with Israel by God's faithfulness is not broken (Rom. 11:29 c.f. 3:4), mission as understood as conversion from idolatry to the living and true God (1 Thes 1:9) does not apply and cannot be applied to the Jews." Therefore, he concluded, "there is no organized Catholic missionary activity toward Jews."

With our Catholic sisters and brothers we believe that God has not abandoned God's covenant with the Jews. Jews who are faithful to their historic covenant are not outside God's saving and redemptive power and action. With deep gratitude for the courageous leadership of the Catholic Church, therefore we hereby formally disavow any United Methodist program of proselytism directed toward practicing Jewish persons aimed at bringing such persons into Christian church membership, even as we acknowledge it to be our obligation as Christians to continue to witness to the truth of the gospel and to proclaim for all that Jesus is Lord and for us is the way of salvation. Our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ "is fully *embodied* in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ." (*Book of Discipline* ¶121)