

UMC group announces conference

MADISON -- Kairos CoMotion has scheduled a conference Thursday through Saturday, Feb. 21-23, to celebrate the gifts of what has been previously called liberal or social gospel Christianity.

The group is made up of progressive United Methodist laity and clergy that takes its name from the Greek word "kairos" signifying the right time and the right moment.

It is committed to a vision of transformation in the overall church and embraces the opportunities and possibilities for change at hand in the new millennium. Participants will address issues concerning Christian reformation and reconciliation which they believe will aid individuals and faith communities in giving active voices to people at society's fringes.

Activities will be at the Marriott Conference Center in Middleton.

John Shelby Spong, retired Episcopal bishop of Newark, N.J., and current visiting lecturer at Harvard University, will give two presentations. Singer and social activist Holly Near will be in concert at 7:30 p.m. Feb. 22.

Conference attendees may choose from 10 workshop offerings, including economic justice in an affluent society, finding voice in silencing cultures, welcoming "sexual givenness" and the cost of transition.

Bishop Sharon Zimmerman Rader of the Wisconsin United Methodist Conference will close the conference with a worship service.

The Rev. Wesley White of La Crosse is a member of the planning team. He spent six years as pastor at First UMC in Milton and at Richmond UMC before leaving in June 1996. "There are a number of issues in which the church has closed its door, two of them being sexuality and women's liberation theologies," White said in a phone interview. "What we're about is expressed in a phrase that the UMC's national board has used, 'Open hearts, open minds, open doors.' None of these issues stands out because this group has a lot of concerns."

Spong has authored numerous books challenging conventional viewpoints on the Bible and Jesus, morality and the church's traditional role as the "Christian voice." Among them are: "Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism," "Why Christianity Must Change or die," his autobiography "Here I Stand" and "A New Christianity for a New World."

Spong challenges Christians to examine and debate the very nature of their faith.

Tickets for the Near concert are available at Madison Church Supply and A Room of One's Own, or by calling Lynn Church at (608) 732-4332.

For information about Kairos CoMotion or the Conference, e-mail wwhite@wesleyspace.net. Another option is the group's Web site at www.KairosCoMotion.org.

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