

# Response to Good News “Strategy” Report

The author, Tom Lambrecht, is a member of the Good News Board and a pastor in the Wisconsin Annual Conference. News from the Good News Board is sometimes first found on the UnOfficial Confessing Movement Page which is where we found it.

## Accusation

### [Progressive Christianity Strategy Report](#)

From Kairos CoMotion Conference  
February 2002 – Madison, Wisconsin  
by Tom Lambrecht, Good News

This report is based on information from two observers who attended the Kairos CoMotion event in Madison, Wisconsin, February 21-23, 2002. The purpose of the event was to rally the troops on the "liberal" side to work toward General Conference 2004. The main speakers were Bishop John Shelby Spong, Bishop Judith Craig, and Bishop Sharon Rader.

### NEW DESIGNATION

This group now wants to be known as "Progressive Christians" rather than "liberals." I guess they feel this circumvents the political connotations of "liberal" and enables them to define their movement in a new way.

The movement is based on an entire worldview that is different from traditional Christianity. They took pains to clarify that they are not just organizing around the inclusion of homosexuals, but more basically a view of ongoing revelation that can supersede Scripture. This is in keeping with the findings of the liberal-conservative dialogue sponsored by the CCUIC several years ago.

### NEW ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The new organizational umbrella for the Progressive Christianity movement is "The Church Within a Church Movement." They see themselves creating a new church based on this Progressive Christianity worldview that can grow within the mainline denominations before separating from them. They intend to model their movement on the Good News movement, which they see as the paradigm for developing a cohesive alternative structure within an existing denomination. The multiple other groups would then fall within the umbrella of The Church Within a Church. These other groups include the Reconciling Network, the Clergy Alliance,

## Affirmation

We find it problematic to write a strategic report based on not being present at a celebrative event. This basic difficulty shows up throughout Lambrecht's report.

If Lambrecht had been present or viewed our website we would hope that he would not miss our purpose by so wide a mark. We invite you to see our purpose in our [opening](#) and [welcoming](#) statements. Kairos CoMotion was and is a celebration of the open-heartedness of GOD.

It is always important to listen to people's understanding of themselves rather than to try to define them to themselves or guess about them. In the context of Wisconsin history, where we find ourselves, the term Progressive has a long and valued tradition of moving into the future rather than repeating the past.

We affirm the traditions of Jesus and the early church with their impetus toward inclusion and interpreting scripture for their time (this is quite different than the accusation of "superseding"). As Jesus often said, "You have heard it said, but I say to you ...." So the Spirit of Jesus continues this tradition by teaching/revealing things too difficult for our ancestors (John 16:12-15) and will continue to teach to our descendants that which is still too difficult for us.

We find this whole section is another misdefinition that fails in its attempt to understand second-hand information about one of our workshops led by Greg Dell and Susan Laurie. We simply state that Kairos CoMotion was planned by Wisconsin United Methodists (8 laity and 6 clergy) with no connections, before or after, with any larger movement. To find out the rest of the story trying to be told here, go to the [Reconciling Ministries Network](#), and follow the links to the *Clergy Alliance* and *Church Within A Church*

Affirmation, and the ethnic minority group pushing acceptance for homosexuality.

They intend to use the Open Hands magazine as their flagship publication, modeled on Good News magazine.

The Church Within a Church will have four focuses: 1) General Conference legislation, 2) formation of the shadow church, 3) Radical Obedience (using that new name instead of ecclesiastical disobedience), and 4) theological reflection and writing. Some will work within the system for change, while others will try to break the system. They are trying to develop mutual support for people working toward the same goal with different means. Right now, there is some animosity between those who are trying to break the system and those who are trying to work within the system for change.

### **2004 STRATEGY**

They look at 2004 as the watershed year in their movement. They plan to again pull out all the stops in attempting to legislate change at the 2004 General Conference. They actually expect to lose, however, and plan to come to General Conference with a plan for division in hand. There is still quite a bit of anger from people who left the UMC after the 2000 General Conference toward those progressives who stayed. Some thought everybody should leave after 2000.

In addition to the organization work outlined above, they plan to hold rallies around the country similar to the Kairos CoMotion event. They plan some rather aggressive publicity events, as well as some rather dramatic disobedience of church law. They hope to provoke the church into making martyrs of them. Their goal is to gain public support for homosexuals and make the institutional church and evangelicals look bad. They want to portray evangelicals as all being in the mold of Fred Phelps. They want to make 2000 General Conference protests look like a Sunday School picnic in comparison with what they do in 2004.

They are linking with progressives in other mainline denominations, believing (as we do) that there is more in common across denominational lines. They are working with Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Roman Catholics. They see a Progressive Christian denomination emerging that would cross traditional denominational lines. I believe this means they see their progressive theological approach as more important than denominational distinctives. They also expect the black Methodist denominations (AME, AMEZ, and CME) to join with them in the new progressive denomination. (I see this as unrealistic, but they are trying to cultivate top leaders within all of those

Every General Conference is important and has its watershed moments.

Any plan for division is in the mind and desire of the beholder. We have no such plans and no plans to make such plans. Division is the farthest thing from our hearts.

We recognize that different people make different decisions about the same issue. There are plenty of spousal/partner jokes about voting for different candidates, needing the windows open or closed, squeezing the toothpaste from the middle or the end. For better and for worse, we rejoice that we have been joined with all the various partners in United Methodism. We will grow together or we will fail as a witness to Jesus as a gate to God.

The "theological divide" is not between progressives and evangelicals. Progressives are evangelical in the very best sense of announcing good news that faith need not regress to some golden age in the 13th century, or any other century, but may today be born from above as a new creation in Christ (John 3:7-8; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20)

We believe the outline of conspiratorial strategy Lambrecht sees is actually the historical process used in the rise of the religious right and is now being projected by them on to Kairos CoMotion and others who celebrate God's inclusivity. For documentation of this belief we refer you to a study by the Presbyterian Church about the Institute for Democracy, [\*A Moment to Decide: The Crisis in Mainstream Presbyterianism\*](#). The processes documented are the same religious right activities in the United Methodist and Episcopal churches.

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We cannot speak to where in the world this 2004 delusion was devised. We can speak to questions of

denominations, and they are trying to portray the issue as a racial one.)

They see this as not just a theological divide between progressives and evangelicals, they also see it as a north-south split along regional lines. In that context, they are trying to portray the southern church as a good old white boys' network, made up of evangelical rednecks. They are working with all of the ethnic caucuses except for the Hispanic caucus. They see John Shelby Spong as the Martin Luther King of the Progressive Christian movement. Of the 300 people who attended the Kairos CoMotion event, about one-half were from Wisconsin (mostly clergy), one-third were from Northern Illinois (including large representation from Broadway UMC, Greg Dell's church), and the remaining 20% were from the Western Jurisdiction and from Madison academia (University of Wisconsin professors and students).

#### EVANGELICAL STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

I see several implications for our evangelical strategy, in light of this information.

1) We ought to continue keeping the pressure on the other side through accountability actions (publicizing disobedience, filing complaints, etc.). However, we should take care not to overreact and create martyrs when it is not necessary.

2) We need to prepare our constituency to expect the onslaught that will come, as the progressives attempt to stage media events. We shouldn't get flustered or intimidated by their tactics. If we can just stay strong for two more years, we may be able to bring closure to this conflict.

3) We should continue focusing on the theological issues of disagreement. We need to help the mainstream UMC find its theological identity as a point of unity. Otherwise, even if the progressives leave, we will not have anything more than institutional unity (with an even stronger tendency to minimize conflict and disagreement). We need something positive to hold us together and give us our identity as a denomination.

our participants. We can say the guess work on who the participants in Kairos CoMotion were is so far off the mark that it is ludicrous and is at best a set up for some other party to be able to quote these as reliable statistics. Even if the guess had been correct we fail to see what pertinence it has other than trying to tar whole categories of people - Wisconsin clergy, the Northern Illinois Conference, the Western Jurisdiction, and academics.

Note that the basis of the strategy for the Good News style of "evangelicalism" are based on misrepresentations. This style of responsive strategy is similar to computer programming where garbage in equals garbage out.

We recognize a warning, but continue to rejoice in and act out of GOD's love. (Matthew 5:11-12)

Kairos CoMotion was a celebration, not a media event (except as the IRD, Good News and others attempt to define it as such). We are intrigued that our celebration would be experienced as an "onslaught" and described as a "tactic." We pray those who find celebrations to be flustering or intimidating will soon find their joy - for celebrations will go on for an eternity, not just for two more years. We give thanks to the Holy Spirit for the gift of celebration.

We propose that the "something positive" to hold us together as United Methodists is already present, though not in any theological issue or creed. Our *Book of Discipline* begins us on that "something positive" as it describes our distinctive heritage as United Methodists: *The Wesleyan emphasis upon the Christian life - faith and love put into practice - has been the hallmark of those traditions now incorporated into The United Methodist Church.* [par. 60]

4) We could consider setting up behind-the-scenes contacts with leaders of the other side to work out a mutually agreeable plan for them to leave. Several years ago, we were saying that we wished there were a way for us to help them leave. Now we have the opportunity to do that. In working out the plan, we should not be vindictive or greedy. Instead, we should work out a reasonable plan that penalizes no one. After all, we might have been in the same situation ourselves. We should treat them as we would have wanted them to treat us.

The picture of a smoke-filled back-room to cut a church division deal is repugnant to us. We place our hope and joy in the light of Christ that keeps shining in the dark and has never been put out. (John 1:5)  
Any plan such as the one suggested by Lambrecht penalizes everyone as it breaks a community that attempts to nurture every level of spiritual maturity into deeper and more joyful living rather than aspire to only one expression of acceptable creedal orthodoxy.