

March 2008

Dear Friend of Transforming Congregations (TC),

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I hope that during this Lenten and Easter season you have felt the presence of the Lord, gaining a deeper appreciation for both the sacrifice He made on the cross and His resurrection power in our lives and world.

This past winter has been a “slow” time at TC without a lot of travel, giving me the opportunity to catch up on office responsibilities and to do some much needed writing – the continuing book project with Bristol House and several legislative petitions for United Methodism’s upcoming General Conference the end of April.

But ministry activity has definitely picked up, and it started with a wonderful local youth event the beginning of March. Almost 100 people attended our day-long, basic sexual purity workshop at New Dimensions Family Worship Center in Salisbury, Maryland, a predominantly African-American congregation. Other local churches had also been invited, and the attendees ranged in age from older elementary kids to those well into their senior years.



But the majority were teens 13 and up, and they were both enthusiastic and brutally honest as we discussed the world’s message and God’s message about sex. Over the last several months, I worked hard to revise the workshop, making it more interactive and more relevant to a younger, “hipper” crowd. (This is the first time I’ve worked with this age group, and believe me, it was a challenge!) PowerPoint images displayed the overriding cultural worldview of magazines, movies, TV and music – the false impression that two consenting adults are free to do anything they want sexually. Hearing passages from Genesis, Song of Solomon and 1 Corinthians, several young people were surprised to learn that the Bible has such a positive and passionate view of sex within marriage. But some kids were still cynical enough to doubt that God’s way was the best.

I think that’s partly because today’s Christian teens haven’t seen good examples of the blessings of married life, not even among church leaders. Divorce and single parenting have left them with low expectations, and they wonder if there’s really a “special someone” with whom they can build a life-long relationship.

Eric and Leslie Ludy address these concerns in a series of books they have written –*God's Gift to Women, Authentic Beauty* and *When God Writes Your Love Story* for older teens and young adults and *Teaching True Love to a Sex at 13 Generation* for parents and church leaders. (One or all of these books would make excellent additions to your family or church library!) Instead of focusing on Biblical “thou shalt nots” or warnings about unwanted pregnancy, disrupted personal plans, and sexually transmitted diseases, the Ludys highlight the breathtaking love story God writes when we give Him control of our sexual lives.



A portion of the recent TC youth workshop was based on some of the Ludys' suggestions. Volunteers held foam core outlines that represented their future spouse and children, as well as the future spouse of the person they were currently dating. Participants were asked to consider how their current ideas and choices about sex would affect these various people some day. And they also took time to write notes of hope and promise to their future mate and family. Two of the younger boys liked the activity so much, they asked if they could keep their foam core “people.” They carried them like mascots for most of the rest of the day!

It isn't enough for Christians to criticize the sexual immorality all around us in the culture and church; we have to be willing to “go the extra mile” to promote and strengthen marriage so that young people have something to look forward to and strive towards.

That's why I'm so excited about another ministry opportunity the end of March. My husband Randy and I will once again help lead the Aldersgate Renewal Ministries (ARM) Minister and Spouse Retreat in Goodlettsville, TN. Held each year the week after Easter, it's a Spirit-filled, life-changing event which aims to rekindle pastors' love for their mates, their Master, and their flock.

Please think about encouraging your own pastor to attend this year or to mark his/her calendar for the 2009 retreat. (You can find registration and other information at <http://www.aldersgaterenewal.org/events/arc/MSR08.html> or call ARM at 615 851-9192.)

And of course, we also hope you will think about financially and prayerfully supporting TC. While our year end giving was good, we're still running almost \$10,000 behind where we were this time last year. Your contribution would not only help us “catch up,” but you can have the assurance it will be put to good use – helping church leaders “model and minister sanctified sexuality” so that God's love story will be heard loud and clear!

Blessings,

Rev. Karen Booth
Executive Director