

April 27, 2008

## **E-lumination – April 27, 2008**

Dear Colleagues in Ministry,

Peace and grace to you in Jesus Christ!

As I write this, I am in attendance at the General Conference of The United Methodist Church in Ft. Worth, Texas. I am writing to share some information with you related to a recent news story carried by some local media.

On Wednesday, April 23, 2008, I was surprised to learn that a media release from an attorney's office in Portland detailed the filing of a lawsuit against "the First United Methodist Church, as well as related United Methodist entities." Upon investigating, I found that on April 22, 2008, a multi-million dollar lawsuit was filed against the First United Methodist Church, Portland; the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference; and the Metro District Church Extension Society on behalf of a man for money damages for sexual abuse in the 1960s and related psychological and emotional damage by Chester Earls, at the time a United Methodist pastor.

Upon learning of the lawsuit, I immediately began to consult with some of the leaders of the Annual Conference. Our Conference chancellor, Paul Cosgrove; our Communications Officer, Linda Sullivan; and members of the Ministry Cabinet have been involved in this response.

I am deeply saddened by this news. Our Annual Conference has taken seriously this and all allegations of clergy sexual misconduct. Our actions in response to the misconduct has been timely and in accordance with the process outlined in the *2004 Book of Discipline*. We quickly responded to the victim in a thorough and compassionate way.

Details of this legal response must be kept confidential since we are now involved in a legal proceeding. I hope you understand why I cannot share more specific details with you at this moment. It is difficult to know what exactly will transpire as we engage in this legal process. And I know that there is some uncertainty and concern, even fear about what may happen. I assure you that we are working diligently in this difficult situation with the assistance and support of many competent persons.

I want to invite you into prayer with me for all of us who are and will be working on this complex legal matter. I also ask that you pray for the victim of the clergy sexual misconduct as well as all others involved in any way.

I have asked the Rev. Steven Sprecher to serve as spokesperson on my behalf. If you have questions about this matter, please contact Rev. Steven Sprecher at 503-636-8423.

In Christ's shalom,

*Robert T. Hoshibata*

*Gracious God, we praise you for your sustaining grace in our lives. When we rejoice, you are with us. When we are perplexed and worried, you assure us of your presence and your*

*love. We ask for your guidance for those who are involved in the complexities of the legal process being faced by our annual conference. We ask for your presence as we respond with patient love and understanding. Reassure us of your love and grace that we might be persons who, though journeying in the valley of the shadow, are nonetheless bearers of the light of Jesus Christ. We pray for reassurance of your love in his strong name, Amen.*