

## **Witness Team Bill Gates, Chair**

### Witness Team's Vision – 2005-06

*Your Conference Witness Ministry Team is committed to work with local churches and ministries to do just that... witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ in the midst of what surrounds us. We are an emerging group of lay and clergy leaders forming covenant relationships centered in a Christian spirituality of action and reflection that defies separation of spiritual formation, evangelization, and social justice. While we believe all churches and ministries are capable of addressing symptoms of injustice through acts of mercy, we are convinced that only by working together will we be able to move upstream toward changing the systems that create and perpetuate injustice.*

### Our goals for the Conference year 2005-06 include:

- 1) *Adding at least 5 additional lay leaders and 6 additional clergy leaders to our covenant group.*
- 2) *Identify 2 or 3 projects from local ministry settings as action/reflection models for us to test the waters of our collaborative Witness efforts.*
- 3) *Meet at least twice as a team and more often in local/district/regional groups.*

### Present Reality:

It's been two years since I accepted the nomination to chair the Conference Witness Ministry Team. Early in that time we set out to define our vision and set some goals that would move us toward the vision... We did it. And that's pretty much where we are today: Great Vision—No Plan.

What I have found is that all my expectations have come true—the fears and the hope. My biggest fear was about time. The vision we came up with is about pumping up the church's (local ministry setting's) ability to address issues that push on our parishes the most. I use the language of "congregation-based community organizing" to describe it. It's about building relationships to work for social justice. And it takes time. It is about finding people, lay and clergy alike, who have the courage and heart to stay in a conversation about suffering and injustice long enough to transcend the symptoms to the systems that perpetuate them. That takes time. It's about a Biblical discernment that resists easy answers and refuses to separate spiritual formation, social justice and evangelization. That takes time.

While those fears have been affirmed as a reality, I also am overwhelmed with hope. That hope is about people... with talent... with spirit. I see it everywhere I go in our Conference. How do we organize it? See last paragraph!

What I've found is that these principles of organizing, which we made our vision, pay great dividends. They work! They're beginning to work in my church just like they've worked in other churches throughout the country. I haven't yet figured out how to split my time (without it splitting me!) locally and around the Conference to make them a reality elsewhere.

2006-7

What's our plan for the next year?

- 1) **Add a co-chair.** We'll split the mission of the Witness Ministry Team into a) the vision that we've developed as I mention above, on one hand, and b) the practical work of responding to action requests, research projects, Denman Award, and other projects that might fit better into a traditional "program" slot. Adding a co-chair will help move item b) forward.
  
- 2) **Pilot Project.** Keep the vision – pray/work toward a plan. It could be that the Bishop's Initiative to Eliminate Hunger might bring some focus to the vision. I'm looking for a couple of ministry settings (local church, mission cluster, other... you define it), this next year from across the Conference to begin a multi-year pilot project. We have money. We can make it work.

If you can answer these questions with an affirmative, call me:

- "Do you want to see your congregation do more?"
- "Can you build long-term relationships with people and organizations that are different than you?"
- "Will you commit yourself to an action-reflection model of congregational life?"