



# Cornerstone United Methodist Church

1411 Rim Road Fayetteville North Carolina 28311 868-5686

*July 2003*

## An Overview of the 2003 NC Annual Conference

When the North Carolina Conference met June 2-5 in Fayetteville, rocks from local churches were used in the worship area as a remembrance of pain and suffering inflicted by racism and cultural differences. The stage design highlighted the conference theme, "Come to the Water...for Repentance and Reconciliation," with water flowing through a stream surrounded by a display of rocks from churches.

Many churches had used the rocks in local church worship before the conference and returned home with new rocks proclaiming the new life built in Jesus Christ. Guest preacher Dr. Zan Holmes called on conference participants during the Service of Repentance and Reconciliation not to only rely on their own strength to perpetuate change but to seek God's strength to do what may seem impossible.

The Rev. Cynthia Wilson-Hollins was the conference music director. An offering of pledges and gifts for the Joseph and Shirley Bethea Welcome Center at Lake Junaluska brought the total raised to date to \$162,000. Worship services and prayer breaks were interwoven among business sessions.

Following a late afternoon Lay Rally, an evening mission celebration highlighted a "No Hungry Neighbors" emphasis to raise funds for food banks and the Society of St. Andrew. Through local church pledges and a Walk/Run during conference, almost \$135,000 has been raised. During third evening, the conference celebrated Congregational Development and the 50th anniversary of the \$10 Club for church extension.

In other matters, the conference

- Adopted a \$17.2 million budget, 4.18 percent over last year;
- Selected Blue Cross & Blue Shield as the administrator of a health care plan;
- Adopted a Comprehensive Plan of Inclusiveness;
- Called for the withdrawal of the church from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice;
- Called for changes in paragraph 161J on abortion, including opposition to partial-birth abortion except when the life of the mother was in danger;
- Defeated a resolution on amending the Preamble to the Social Principles;
- Adopted a resolution supporting chaplains in the State Department of Correction and studying how to assist with volunteer chaplains;
- Defeated a resolution which called for changes in the disciplinary language on homosexuality;
- Supported the ministry of the NC Christian Advocate and required all churches to have an Advocate representative;
- Overwhelmingly endorsed the continuance and expansion of Igniting Ministry;
- Defeated a motion to remove the budget line item for the NC Council of Churches;

## North Carolina Bishop Defends the Faith

Marion Edwards, United Methodist Bishop of North Carolina, has joined the Bishop of Florida in publicly criticizing the theology of Chicago-area Bishop C. Joseph Sprague, who has publicly denied Jesus Christ's eternal deity, virgin birth, physical resurrection, and atonement for the sins of the world.

Bishop Edwards, speaking in Raleigh on October 28, said Sprague's comments "strike at the heart of our ecumenical and United Methodist Church doctrine." Edwards quoted theologian and anti-Nazi martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "False doctrine corrupts the life of the church at its source, and that is why doctrinal sin is more serious than moral sin."

Earlier, Bishop Timothy Whitaker of Florida had issued a public critique of Sprague's denial of key Christian beliefs. (See [www.irdrenew.org](http://www.irdrenew.org)) for complete texts of speech or statement by Sprague, Whitaker, and Edwards.)

It is exceptional for United Methodist Bishops publicly to criticize each other's theology. Like Whitaker, Edwards was cordial toward Sprague but said he "profoundly disagrees" with Sprague's beliefs. "In his zeal to make the faith understandable to modern ears, the Bishop (Sprague) seems to have accommodated too much to the culture,"

Edwards declared.

Edwards cited a Pastor's obligation, in the *UM Book of Discipline*, to ensure "faithful transmission of the Christian faith." Sprague, in an October 18 column, declared he stood by his com-

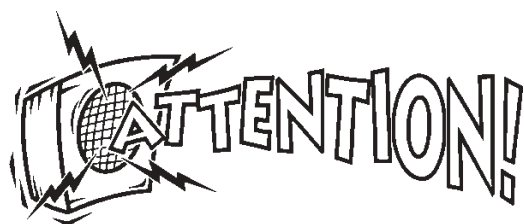


**Happy Independence Day!**

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- Defeated a motion which would have asked General Conference to remove the pastor as chair of the local church nominating committee;
- Called on the North Carolina and United States governments to develop a system of health care insurance;
- Endorsed participation of the US in the United Nations, support of the UN, and exhaustion of diplomatic efforts through the UN in future conflicts;
- Approved the establishment of a Pastoral Safety Net Foundation to develop and distribute funds to assist pastors with special needs;
- Celebrated the bequest of lake front property, valued as much as \$1 million, and authorized conference trustees to take any appropriate action concerning the property;
- Learned that Cokesbury would open a store in Greensboro, the fifth in North Carolina, and that \$14,457.66 had been contributed to the pension fund by the United Methodist Publishing House;
- Recognized Faith Harbor UMC in Surf City as the latest chartered congregation;
- Authorized the purchase of over 30 acres of land in three tracts for use in providing low-cost housing under the Rural Affordable Housing Initiative, funded in large part by the Duke Endowment;
- Learned that 100 volunteers participated in bagging 44,000 pounds of sweet potatoes at the conference for distribution by food banks;
- Celebrated the presentation of Lay Ministry of the Year Awards to Cape Hatteras UMM Assistance Program and Food Pantry, a ministry of Buxton UMC, and the Transitional-Aftercare Network/Prison Ministry, a ministry of St. James UMC in Greenville;
- Learned that \$4,716.34 had been received in offerings for Project AGAPE and the Peru Covenant;
- Learned that the Rev. Timothy Reaves, Bladen Charge, had won the Harry Denman Award for Outstanding Evangelism and that one church on the charge, Windsor, was the Key Taylor Award recipient for outstanding commitment to mission by a rural church;
- Learned that First Elon UMC was the recipient of the Saints of God Stewardship Award from the UM Foundation;
- Members decided to meet for Annual Conference in Fayetteville next year. Bishop Edwards said the dates would be June 9-12, 2004. General Conference delegates were elected. Membership stands at 232,700, up 2,154. Average attendance at principal weekly worship service(s) is 89,988, up 2,044.



## Cornerstone Small Groups

Mon. Women's Bible Study .....	Joy Semrad .....	867-6786
Wed. Night Bible Study .....	Richard Upchurch .....	424-4164
CBS (Corner. Bible Study) .....	Ben Sharpe .....	868-5686
Friday Night Fellowship .....	John & Antonia Ban .....	860-3470
United Methodist Men .....	Steve Kublank .....	424-1757
Senior High Youth .....	Brian & Christyn Hahn .....	480-0603
Junior High Youth .....	Mike & Sue Todd .....	425-6443
Kids Ministry .....	Melinda Alleyne .....	764-9083

## Good Stewards

Let's all help to care for this church we have been blessed with. Please observe the signs in the restroom stalls. Also, please pick up after yourself and your children so we have a neat, clean environment to worship and fellowship.

Scouting, as well as others, teaches us to "leave it better than you found it." What a great idea!



## Vacation Bible School

Vacation Bible School was a huge success! The kids had a wonderful time while learning about God's love. This year's theme was SCUBA (Super Cool Underwater Bible Adventure) and it was great!

Thanks to all of our leaders and helpers and especially Teresa Tisher for overseeing it all. These kinds of programs cannot be done without everyone's help. Thank you all for your servants' hearts.

## Children's Church

Calling all three, four, and five year olds for summer children's church, where we will meet Abraham, Joseph, and Moses. Theo, the Faith Retriever (our friendly puppet mascot) will join us for stories, crafts, songs, and games during the second service.

Parents and willing volunteers, please sign up on the board in our fellowship hall for your summer Sunday of service to the preschoolers of Cornerstone. You will be blessed.

If you have any questions, please call me, Laurie Harro at 860-9735. Thanks.

# 10 Objections to Christianity and How to Respond

by Frank Harber

Recently someone approached me with the following problem: “Nobody can talk me out of being a Christian, but I can’t talk anyone else into it. Can you help me?”

Perhaps she thought she was the only one struggling with this, but I’ve been asked this question hundreds of times. You see, I was once an atheist who set out to prove Christianity was untrue. But during my investigation, I discovered overwhelming evidence that demonstrates the validity of Christianity. And because of a dedicated Christian who was prepared to answer my questions, my heart was reached.

Are you prepared to answer the spiritual seekers in your world? Are you wondering if Christianity’s really true? Here’s a look at 10 objections skeptics pose toward Christianity—and how to respond.

*Christians are hypocrites.* A hypocrite is an actor, a person who pretends to be something she isn’t. Jesus’ harshest words were reserved for hypocrites. The reality is, there always have been and always will be some hypocrites in the Church. But Jesus doesn’t ask us to follow others; he asks us to follow him. Although Christians can represent Jesus either poorly or well, the real question isn’t whether there are hypocrites in the Church, but whether Jesus is a hypocrite. If someone can prove that Jesus was a hypocrite, then the whole structure of Christianity falls into ruin. The Bible, God’s Word, presents Jesus as nothing less than perfect. Jesus’ disciples testified that Jesus was without sin (1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5). Even Jesus himself challenged others to prove that he’d ever sinned (John 8:46).

*What about the atrocities Christians have committed?* Some blame Christianity for religious wars, the Crusades, burning witches, the Inquisition, slavery, even the Holocaust.

The issue of atrocities is simply an extension of the question of hypocrites. So-called believers who didn’t practice

true Christianity have perpetrated evil. In reality, these people were Christian in name only.

Focusing on their atrocities is a smoke screen to avoid the real issue. Christianity has far more positive achievements than negative influences. It’s been instrumental in the formation of countless hospitals, schools, colleges, orphanages, relief agencies, and charity agencies. No other religion in history can compare.

*Christianity is a crutch.* Karl Marx, author of *The Communist Manifesto*, said, “Religion is the opiate of the masses.” Critics such as Marx have charged that religion is an invention designed for people incapable of coping with life’s pressures. Some critics respond that they don’t need this type of emotional comfort, as though that fact falsifies Christianity. Such individuals often claim to be “stronger” because they’re brave enough to face life without a “crutch.” To imply non-religious people don’t need a crutch is misleading.

Dependence on drugs, alcohol, tobacco, sex, money, power, other people, and material possessions demonstrates some people’s need for a crutch. Atheism—the belief that there is no God—can become a crutch for those addicted to a lifestyle contrary to God’s standards of morality.

Rather than being weak, Christians are strong—not because they depend on themselves, but because they depend on Jesus.

Everyone needs assistance. The question is, what will you lean on? Christianity provides what atheism or other religions never can: spiritual fulfillment, peace, and forgiveness.

*It’s narrow-minded to think Jesus is the only way to God.* Jesus claimed he was the only way to God (John 14:6). Such a claim is either totally true or totally false. Some people claim to be Christians, yet ignore Jesus’ claim to be the only Savior. Critics argue this view



is exclusory.

But if Christianity is true, then we must accept Jesus’ own teachings. If one believes Jesus’ assertions to be true, then the issue is settled.

*Being a good person is all that really matters.* Some argue that even if a person’s religion is false, what really matters is that she’s sincere about being a good person. This notion is based on the mistaken belief that God is pleased by “religion.”

Sincerity doesn’t determine truth, however. One can be sincerely convinced of the truth—and be sincerely wrong. For example, many evil men such as Hitler were very sincere in their beliefs. God judges people based on truth, not opinions—and that truth is Jesus Christ.

What about those who’ve never heard about Jesus? Such a question implies that God lacks compassion because he’s imposed his plan of salvation on us. Often such inquirers seem to imply that they’re more compassionate than God!

An important biblical principle to understand is that no one has ever remained lost who wanted to be found. Just as God sent the apostle Philip to the seeking Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-39), Jesus promises all who seek will find (Matthew 7:7-8).

*The Bible is filled with errors.* Because the Bible is God’s Word and God cannot lie (Isaiah 55:10-11; John 17:17; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 4:12), it’s totally trustworthy, free from any error. God’s Word is described as “the word

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of truth” (2 Corinthians 6:7; Colossians 1:5; 2 Timothy 2:15; James 1:18). Inerrancy isn’t a theory about the Bible; it’s the teaching of the Bible itself.

What most people claim as errors in the Bible aren’t errors but difficulties. People think they’ve stumbled upon apparent inconsistencies when they haven’t taken the time to find out all the facts, or made an in-depth study of the passage. Many Bible questions have been answered as new discoveries have been made in fields such as language, history, archeology, and other sciences.

Regardless of the kind of difficulty found, not a single irreconcilable error can be found in the Bible’s pages.

*If God is so good, why is there evil?* The thrust of this charge is that evil’s presence disproves God’s power. But is the presence of evil consistent with the God of the Bible? Consider: God didn’t create evil. Sin entered the world through Adam’s disobedience (Genesis 3).

Evil is necessary for a free world. Freedom, or free will, gives humans the opportunity to make wrong choices.

God hesitates to stop evil for an important reason. Just as parents often allow their children to make mistakes and suffer the consequences, God acts in a parental fashion with his creation.

God has the solution for evil. Jesus accomplished the ultimate defeat of evil on the cross. But just as we don’t yet have eternal bodies, evil has yet to be removed from the world.

*Why is there suffering?* Many hold that pain is evidence against God’s concern for humankind. However, pain can be used for good and bad purposes. Not all pain is bad. Pain is an essential mechanism for survival. Without pain, the body is stripped of vital protection. Pain is an important signal to warn of even greater danger.

Suffering is a signal. It also can be a spiritual signal that reminds us of the fragile balance of life and our mortality. In *The Problem of Pain*, Christian apologist C.S. Lewis writes, “God whispers to us in our pleasure, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts to us in our pain; it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf

world.”

Some suffering actually helps to bring greater good. This is best seen in Jesus’ own suffering. Jesus traveled down the road of pain, loneliness, and death—a road that led to the cross. Jesus isn’t just a Savior, he’s our suffering Savior. The cross is the ultimate example of innocent suffering.

At the heart of this issue is the underlying challenge that God isn’t fair. The problem is, society holds pleasure as its chief goal in life. This philosophy is known as hedonism, and those who live by this philosophy find any form of suffering offensive. To say God isn’t fair is an extremely dangerous charge.

If God gave us what we deserve, we’d be in trouble. It would be foolish to ask God for justice; what we need is mercy. God’s mercy and grace are so taken for granted that suffering and pain shock us.

*If there’s a hell, why would a loving God send people there?* God hates evil, and one day, evil will cease. While evil and suffering and pain are very real, they are also very temporary.

The day God deals with evil, he will deal with all evil. In the meantime, God strives for as many people as possible to accept Jesus’ death and resurrection as payment for their sins, so they can live eternally with him. The sad fact is, many will make the decision not to be a part of God’s heaven. God won’t send them to hell; they’ll send themselves.

For God to force people to go to heaven against their wishes wouldn’t be heaven—it would be hell. Atheist author Jean-Paul Sarte noted that the gates of hell are locked from the inside by the free choice of men and women.

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*Frank Harber, evangelist-in-residence and professor of evangelism at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, is author of Reasons for Believing (New Leaf Press).*

### ***Digging Deeper***

Need more help with faith-related

questions? Check out the following books and Web sites:

*Answering the Tough Ones*, David Dewitt

*Answers to Tough Questions*, Josh McDowell and Don Stewart

*The Case for Christ*, Lee Strobel

*Defending Your Faith*, Dan Story

*Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, Josh McDowell

*Give Me an Answer*, Cliffe Knechtle

*Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli

*I’m Glad You Asked*, Kenneth Boa and Larry Moody

*In Defense of the Faith*, Dave Hunt

*Know What You Believe*, Paul Little

*Know Why You Believe*, Paul Little

*Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis

*Reason to Believe*, R. C. Sproul

*Reasons for Believing*, Frank Harber

*Tough Questions* series, Garry Poole and Judson Poling

Christian Research Institute: equip.org (includes Bible Answer Man broadcasts)

Stand to Reason: str.org

Ravi Zacharias International Ministries: gospelcom.net/rzim

Answers in Action: answers.org

Eden Communications: ChristianAnswers.net

Christian Apologetics and Research Ministries: carm.org (includes links to several other apologetics sites, including those listed above)

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[Editor’s Note: Check the public library as well as the church library for some of these titles. If you can’t find them there, ask around at church. Someone in our church family may have the one you’re looking for and I’m sure they’ll be happy to share.]

ments “without equivocation.” He accused his critics in United Methodist renewal groups, including IRD, of using him as a “poster child” for “fund-raising efforts.” He implied that his critics might be “narrow-minded,” “theologically bankrupt,” and “ethically complacent.” And he warned he “will not sit quietly and idly as the well-heeled religious right seeks to take over our beloved Church.” In his column Sprague did not mention his fellow Bishops who have questioned his theology. “For me, the most serious lapse in Bishop Sprague’s address... was to diminish the reality of the Holy Trinity,” Edwards said. Sprague asserted that Jesus was not eternally divine but became a god through “radical obedience” to God the Father. Edwards said he feared that Sprague’s Son of God was merely a “great hero” and not the “eternal fullness of the second person of the Trinity.”

Edwards warned that Sprague was potentially “diluting the Trinity by making the Son of God a kind of ‘johnny-come-lately’ to the godhead.” He accused Sprague of teaching the second-century theory of adoptionism, which taught that Jesus became divine through adoption, and which orthodox Christianity rejected.

Sprague has “omitted” from his conversation the “authority of the canon of Scripture,” Edwards noted. According to Methodism’s founder John Wesley, the “biblical canon is the authority of the church,” Edwards said. Sprague’s problems with the virgin birth, resurrection of the body, and the atonement “may spring from not always letting all of Scripture speak to the rest of Scripture,” Edwards observed.

“I believe that the stronger and clearer teaching of the New Testament is the Christian hope for the resurrection of the body,” Edwards said.

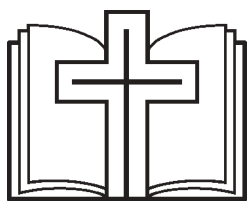
Edwards challenged Sprague’s criticism of Christ’s atonement as a blood appeasement of an angry deity. “The death [of Christ on the Cross] is not to make God happy; the death is the sad pay for sin,” Edwards explained.

Reacting to Sprague’s assertion that the virgin birth is “not historical fact,” Edwards said, “Its truth (the Virgin Birth) is clear: God was active in the birth of Jesus, not simply in the miracle of conception, but in the incarnation of what God had to say to us: the Word became flesh.”

“I truly believe the Church has been given the faith of the apostles,” Edwards concluded. “This faith I have received. This faith, and no other, I truly believe.”

Thank Bishop Marion Edwards for his defense of the Christian faith. Box 10955, Raleigh NC 27605. Fax 919-832-4721. E-mail: bishopmme@nccumc.org.

*UMAction, April 2003*



## Summer Schedules

The CBS (Cornerstone Bible Study) is taking a break for the summer. Watch next month’s newsletter or your Sunday bulletin for information on when they will be starting back up.

The Wednesday Night group will start up again on July 9th. There is childcare for all ages but all are asked to help split the cost. It is an open, thought-provoking study and they have a lot of fun too.

Live your life in such a way that you wouldn’t be embarrassed to sell your pet parrot to the town gossip.  
— Will Rogers



## CAN YOU BE USED BY GOD?

The next time you feel like God can’t use you, just remember....

NOAH was a drunk,  
ABRAHAM was too old,  
ISAAC was a daydreamer,  
JACOB was a liar,  
LEAH was ugly,  
JOSEPH was abused,  
MOSES couldn’t talk,  
GIDEON was afraid,  
SAMSON had long hair and was a womanizer!

RAHAB was a prostitute,  
JEREMIAH and TIMOTHY were too young,

DAVID had an affair and was a murderer,

ELIJAH was suicidal,  
ISAIAH preached naked,  
JONAH ran from God,  
NAOMI was a widow,  
JOB went bankrupt,  
JOHN the Baptist ate bugs,  
PETER denied Christ,

The DISCIPLES fell asleep while praying,

MARTHA worried about everything,

MARY MAGDALENE was demon possessed,

The SAMARITAN WOMAN was divorced..more than once!

ZACCHEUS was too small,  
PAUL was too religious,

TIMOTHY had an ulcer ..... AND LAZARUS WAS DEAD!

No more excuses now. God is waiting to use you to your full potential.

**Mexican Fiesta Night!**  
**July 23, 2003**  
**7:00**

Cortazar Methodist Church Praise &  
Worship Team  
of Cortazar, Mexico



This 26-member group, ranging in age from 17 to 23, will share their musical talents and lead us in a time of praise and worship with their singing and dancing, miming and guitar-playing. Please contact the church if you are able to host a member of this group overnight on July 23. There will be a pot luck supper before the service. Plan to join us and bring a dish to share.

# July 2003 August

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2 Noon Prayer Group	3	4 Friday Night Fellowship 7:00	5
6 Cornerstone Pizza Sunday @ Two Brothers!	7 Pastor's Day Off Women's Bible Study	8	9 Noon Prayer Group	10	11 Friday Night Fellowship 7:00	12
13 Council Mtg 7:00	14 Pastor's Day Off Women's Bible Study	15	16 Noon Prayer Group	17	18 Friday Night Fellowship 7:00	19
20	21 Pastor's Day Off Women's Bible Study	22	23 Noon Prayer Group <i>Mexican Fiesta</i>	24	25 Friday Night Fellowship 7:00	26
27	28 Pastor's Day Off Women's Bible Study	29	30 Noon Prayer Group	31	1 <i>Independence Day</i> Friday Night Fellowship 7:00	2
3 Cornerstone Pizza Sunday	4 Women's Bible Study	5	6 Noon Prayer Group	7	8 Friday Night Fellowship 7:00	9
10 Church Council Meeting 7:00	11 Pastor's Day Off Women's Bible Study	12	13 Noon Prayer Group	14	15 Friday Night Fellowship 7:00	16

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*Mark your calendar for Mexican Fiesta Night Wednesday, July 23 at 7:00!*

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*There's always something happening at Cornerstone!*

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You are... God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief Cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. *Ephesians 2:19-22*

