

Gifts of Hope

As I write these remarks, I am filled with a sense of possibility for congregations—indeed, for *your* congregation. Our congregational places are intended as gifts of hope for God's world. This gift is for the persons who come to them and for those in the many communities whose lives God's people are invited to touch with the welcome and hope that have already been found there.

Each article in this issue of *Circuit Rider* is, in its own way, about such hope. Each describes "a way of seeing" God's human creatures, whether children or

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what appear to be "difficult teens," whether of those experiencing miscarriage or those whose presence is to be seen as a gift instead of a problem. The cancer survivor and the severely disabled one is, before anything else, a gift to the gathered community and a sign of hope to an otherwise suffering and hopeless world.

After the same fashion, each article invites imaginative response from brother and sister Christians, not alone or even primarily from the ordained or otherwise professionally certified. And probably no one of us can respond to every article, but certainly to one—perhaps with an aging person or, indeed, to see ourselves as aging through hopeful eyes. We can be present in caring ways with those experiencing broken family lives, or experiencing themselves as "outsiders" in places that celebrate inclusivity. For it is intended that we are to learn how to suffer and to find joy together in our everyday communities.

If not in our congregations, where else in our culture is the Christian vision of the Resurrection (hope *no matter what*) to find its promised embodiments? Where else does our expectation of justice find its risky beginning—and at least partial fulfillment? Are we not to be God's mission in our own places, and aren't there United Methodist congregations in all places throughout God's created world?

Please read with eyes of Easter hope—not abstractly, but as you trust its promised embodiment in your own places.

Peggy Way
Guest Editor