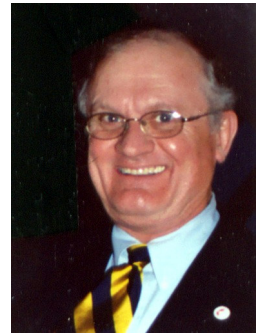


Dear Colleagues and Delegates of the
North-Central Jurisdictional Conference,



Rev. William G. Owen

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I am asking to be considered for the episcopacy and I know many of you don't know me. Let me tell you a little about myself.

I was called from the business world into ministry and began seminary at the age of 50. From seminary I went to graduate school to work on my Ph.D. in Historical Theology planning to continue in pastoral ministry with a part time teaching position in church history. I have been under appointment since October 1993 and was ordained an elder in 2001. Theologically, I am a Wesleyan Evangelical with an orthodox and Trinitarian understanding of our faith. I believe in the full humanity and full divinity of Jesus Christ and His physical resurrection. I am a strong supporter of John Wesley's synergy between evangelism, mission and social justice. They cannot be separated, and each has to be based on a theology well grounded in scripture. I am a shepherd leader and an agent of constructive change.

Though I never aspired to or prepared for candidacy for the episcopacy, Bishop Sprague broached the subject of my potential candidacy last August. This spring when NICEA, the Northern Illinois Conference Evangelical Association, approached me about submitting my name as a candidate for the episcopacy I decided, after prayer, to wait until General Conference ended to make this important decision. When our delegates returned from General Conference I heard stories of pain over our many differences in the church. It reminded me of our church history, tragically rife with schisms. From the 1054 AD split between the Greek East and the Latin West, our church history is a litany of righteous separation. God has *never* called for the church to split, for when the church splits it simply re-polarizes and both sides continue to battle. I am opposed to any church split for Biblical, historical and sociological reasons even though our differences are significant.

We as a denomination have reached a crisis point in the life of our church. We see our culture dramatically changing into something entirely different, though we cannot tell what. We can see the beginning, but we cannot see the end. We can only know that we are going through one of the most important changes our church has ever experienced.

Symptomatic of these dramatic changes is our loss of parishioners across the denomination in the United States. For the last 35 years these losses have

demoralized both our lay people and pastors who have worked so hard in faithful obedience to the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ.

The new culture we are entering requires a new paradigm of understanding and behavior. It requires change. In changing we must be intentional and willing to take risk. To take risk, we must feel safe. To feel safe we must act out of love. We must experiment with more flexible organizations that are able to act quickly. We know that if we continue to do the same things in the same way we will get the same results. We need to rethink our organizations around functions instead of geography. We should make them more flexible while cutting structures that no longer meet our needs. We must spend more time and funds on training our leaders. We must train change agents as we move forward.

What our denomination needs now is sophisticated conflict resolution and healing to lower our pain and increase our trust without sweeping our very real differences under the carpet. Then we can move forward positively. We want our beloved United Methodist connection to bloom in the 21st century, not to return to its old glory, but to grow into a new glory while still telling the age old story. Schism has never been God's will and never will be. We are called to ministry in the 21st century *together*.

With all of this, I am optimistic! We can overcome obstacles we have erected and the attitudes we have developed – if we place our trust in God. He loved us so much He gave His only begotten Son. We must give up clinging to past structures, attitudes and behaviors. We stand before a world that needs us, though it may not say so. We stand before our God who has called us and He has said so. At this point in time United Methodism needs to take a giant step forward and we can do it. Rejoice, for God is with us and loves us and will protect the church. It is then, with humility and awe, and thanks to NICEA for their endorsement that I offer myself as a candidate.

Your brother in Christ,

Rev. William G. Owen
Northern Illinois Conference