

# The Monthly Update

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## March 2007

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This edition of the “Monthly Update” continues with information on some of the past actions that a lack of space precluded our printing until now. We believe that you will find them informative and helpful in knowing the myriad of things happening in our United Methodist Church.

I frequently have to answer the questions from supporters and others with whom I speak, “Why don’t more people see what is going on? Why do they keep putting money into the system when there is so much corruption?” I had often wondered about that myself. After I had thought through the problem, I arrived at the answer that I use to explain to them. I remind them of what Jesus said in the book of John about people being like sheep. He wasn’t being denigrating toward the human race; He was just being realistic. Sheep are stubborn and often follow instincts to do things that are not good for them. But when they are conditioned in the right way, they obey their shepherd blindly with a seeming inability to think for themselves.

In our United Methodist Church we have all too many preachers posing as pastors who are in reality “company men” (in the interest of equality, this applies to female preachers as well). Their prime loyalty is to the institutional hierarchy. Their chief purposes in their local churches are to get the apportionment paid and to keep the people in the pews pacified. Unfortunately, early casualties of these priorities are “truth” and following the Lord’s priorities. I have even heard one preacher tell some of his people, “Let’s face it – the church is a business.” That really is so sad.

What the church is – or should be – is an instrument to take the Good News of Jesus Christ to people everywhere. It should be a ministry of evangelism. If this were seen as our core purpose, our denomination would experience true revival and many of our problems would vanish.

I am reminded of another truth, that this is in reality a spiritual battle for the heart and soul of our United Methodist Church. A Presbyterian elder Susan Cyr stated a fundamental truth when she wrote, “This is not a battle which is distracting the church from its *real* ministry. *The battle over truth and falsehood is the real ministry of the church.*” (The emphasis is hers) We are “contending for the faith” of God’s truth over and against Satan’s lies couched in attractive terms.

I thank the Lord for the opportunities that He presents us! We also thank the Lord that the work that needs to be done is too great for the human effort alone; this forces us to our knees to seek His guidance as to His priorities.

We appreciate so much your support - both prayerfully and financially. Please continue to partner with us as we “contend for the faith” that the Lord has entrusted to our care.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,  
Executive Director

## March 2007 Update

### Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

*We are as close to God as we choose to be, not as we want to be. – J. Oswald Sanders*

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#### The Good Stuff.

+ *The God of Tony Dungy and Lovie Smith isn't just for Sunday.*

Super Bowl coaches' Baptist, Methodist roots remain with them on game day. While much has been made about NFL head coaches Tony Dungy's and Lovie Smith's skin color, they've got a stronger bond than being the first African-American head coaches to lead their teams to the Super Bowl.

For many people, football is religion. Superstar players are deified, weekly games are strictly observed, and everyone—devoted fan or not—watches the Super Bowl. But for Tony Dungy and Lovie Smith, football has not taken God's place. The head coaches of the AFC champion Indianapolis Colts and the NFC champion Chicago Bears, who will lead their teams in Super Bowl XLI on Sunday, have a lot in common. As has been well documented, they share the distinction of being the first black head coaches in the Super Bowl.

They are close friends, having coached together with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers for five years. They are also Christians. "God is the center of my life," Smith told the media during a Super Bowl press conference earlier this week. "It controls all that I do. I hope I don't have to spend my time telling my players I'm a Christian. I hope they see it in my life every day."

Smith and Dungy are not just Christians when the spotlight shines on them. Their day-to-day coaching styles and set of priorities stand out among a league of coaches obsessed with winning at all costs. The coaches in the headlines this regular season have been highlighted because of their animosity (Bill Belichick), duplicity (Nick Saban), and postgame electricity (Dennis Green). With only two coaches left to write about, the tenor of the articles has clearly changed.

"He does things the right way," Dungy said of Smith after the Colts and Bears each won their conference championship games. "No profanity, no intimidation, just helping his guys the best he can—and that's the way I try to do it. I think it's great that we're able to show the world not only that African-American coaches can do it, but Christian coaches can do it in a way that we can still win."

The trait that makes Dungy and Smith excellent coaches is their ability to put things in perspective. During even the most stressful situations, neither wavers from his steady approach to the ups and downs that are inherent in a volatile game. Although their mild-mannered styles do not make great headlines, they have proved endearing to players who look to Dungy and Smith for leadership. The best coaches have players who are willing to do anything—within moral and legal boundaries—for them. Dungy and Smith have commanded that respect because they love and discipline their players as a father would his son or God his children. And while a players' coach (e.g., Dick Vermeil) and a disciplinarian (e.g., Bill Parcells) can win Super Bowls, it takes a certain type of coach to lose Super Bowls well.

Will the losing coach of Super Bowl XLI be upset knowing how hard he worked and how far he came, only to lose the biggest game of his career? Most certainly. Will the losing coach be distraught and go into a three-day funk before beginning to scout college seniors? Most definitely not. Both Dungy and Smith will be back at work, rededicated to another season, in due time. But they are perhaps most different in that regard. While the NFL has turned into a 24-7 affair where coaches like to brag about how late they fall asleep and how early they wake up (with bonus points for sleeping in their office or filmroom) Dungy and Smith have always made sure that their priorities are in order—God comes first, family comes second, and football is a distant third.

This hierarchy was most recently apparent shortly before last Christmas, when Dungy's 18-year-old son, James, committed suicide. After taking a few weeks away from football to grieve, Dungy returned to the field with a professionalism that served as a witness to his deeply held faith.

Dungy and Smith are respected coaches not only because of their football knowledge (the duo collaborated to create the Tampa 2 defense, which both the Colts and Bears will use in the Super Bowl), but also because of the way that they conduct business both on and off the field. After the Super Bowl, Dungy and Smith will continue to be the same people they were before the big game. There will be no finger pointing, neither outward nor upward, for the unpretentious duo.

The two coaches live out their faith. While they do not proclaim it in response to every question asked at a press conference, they do not come close to hiding their true devotion. "The Lord set this up in a way that no one would

believe it," Dungy said after the Colts and Bears advanced to the Super Bowl. "The Lord tested us a lot this year, but he set this up to get all the glory."

- Jason Bailey, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/februaryweb-only/105-52.0.html> "This article first appeared in the February 2, 2007 issue of *Christianity Today*. Used by permission of Christianity Today International, Carol Stream, IL 60188.

#### + **Chaplains offer ideas, resources for churches**

- Military chaplains bring "holy vision" to the battlefield and are the church's best resources for helping congregations understand, welcome and support returning warriors. That was one message that came out of a Feb. 12-13 task force meeting of active and retired United Methodist military chaplains brainstorming on ways for the church to be in ministry with U.S. military personnel serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Each chaplain has a unique story of ministry, pain and joy to share with congregations. "It is the voice of the chaplain that brings holy vision," said the Rev. Dale White, who served 14 months as chaplain for a Marine unit in Fallujah, Iraq.

The meeting was sponsored by the United Methodist Endorsing Agency of the Board of Higher Education and Ministry and Board of Church and Society. The endorsing agency approves pastors to serve as chaplains and pastoral counselors. Currently, there are 359 United Methodist chaplains serving in the Air Force, Army and Navy, both in active duty and in the National Guard and Reserve.

During its first meeting, task force members suggested ways that local churches can care for soldiers, including to:

- Adopt a soldier or an entire military unit
- Provide a safe place in the church for military families to meet together
- Be good listeners & invite returning service members to share their experiences without talking about the politics of war
- Hold special worship services for military personnel when they deploy, return and on occasions such as Veterans Day and Memorial Day
- Learn about what chaplains do during wartime

The group also talked about using chaplains as resources to educate churches, annual conferences, seminaries and other groups about what chaplains do and what military personnel face when returning from war.

- By Kathy L. Gilbert, *United Methodist News Service (UMNS)*; #084; Nashville; Feb. 20, 2007.

#### + **Chaplains: Church must support returning soldiers**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. - Standing before a gathering of military chaplains, the Rev. Tom Carter offered the same "simple, kind words" that chaplains have said to thousands of warriors on the battlefield. "In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!" "I offered the life-giving service of communion while serving in Vietnam to many I knew would not return from war," said Carter, a former military chaplain and director of endorsement with the United Methodist Endorsing Agency, Board of Higher Education and Ministry. Chaplains in any war have offered the same, he added.

The Feb. 12-13 gathering of active and retired military chaplains marked the formation of a United Methodist task force working to teach the church to support and welcome service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. They were invited by the endorsing agency and the United Methodist Board of Church and Society. Twenty-one people participated. The United Methodist Endorsing Agency approves pastors to serve as chaplains in the military, hospitals, pastoral counseling and other extension ministries. Currently, 359 United Methodist pastors serve as military chaplains.

In Nashville, the chaplains called it a privilege to bring the word of Jesus Christ to young men and women serving the military during wartime. They said The United Methodist Church needs to honor the sacrifice of those serving. "We all long for the day of peace and none more than the person who has to pull the trigger," said the Rev. Dale White, who was chaplain for a Marine unit in Fallujah, Iraq, for 14 months. The Rev. Laura Bender, chaplain and a training manager at the Naval Chaplains School in Newport, R.I., said no soldier should have to go to war alone. "Who cares for those who (fight) on behalf of all of us?"

"How will the church respond to troops returning from war?" asked the Rev. Neal Christie, assistant general secretary of the Board of Church and Society, the denomination's social advocacy agency. "Troops and their

leadership inevitably are expected to return to extended families-and especially children, congregations, places of work, neighbors and other significant relationships-bearing the trauma of war in Iraq and Afghanistan," said Christie. "What will be the church's pragmatic, pastoral response to their homecoming when a return to life as normal is impossible?"

The task force discussed how the church can welcome, support and use the experiences of chaplains to educate congregations. It will develop an action plan to be implemented under the oversight of the Board of Church and Society and Endorsing Agency.

### Back but not home

White described military chaplains as missionaries who bring the church's perspective and assurances of God's grace to military personnel. "We have a unique way of presenting God to an audience of 18-to-22-year-olds," he said. "We bring them God, many of them for the first time."

The chaplains told agency staff that returning from war is a journey-and being back doesn't mean being home. Bender and others began working on a liturgy for "returning warriors" that acknowledges the pain of the "trigger puller," cares for families and makes a place for soldiers when they return. "Being acknowledged in worship means a lot," said the Rev. Jim Fogle-Miller, National Guard chaplain.

*- By Kathy L. Gilbert, UMNS; #083; Nashville; Feb. 20, 2007.*

### The Bishops.

#### **+ *Three bishops urge new U.S. budget priorities***

[Note: This is seen as continuing political activism by our church leadership. It would seem that they would get their own denominational house in order first before attempting to help the president and the Congress run the country. This reflects much of the same tired old rhetoric offered by the anti-U.S./socialistic movement of the 1960s. – AOM]

Three United Methodist bishops are asking President Bush and the U.S. Congress to place the needs of children and the poor at the heart of the budget debate. "The debate among elected leaders over the federal budget is at its core a debate over how the nation's abundance is shared," the bishops say in a Feb. 15 letter to the president and members of Congress.

"We are alarmed by recent trends in the federal budget that have squeezed investments in education, child care, food nutrition programs and other anti-poverty measures to accommodate dramatic tax cuts for the wealthiest citizens in the United States and to fuel military conflicts abroad. These policies turn the teachings of Christ on their head."

The letter was signed by Bishops Janice Riggle Huie, president of the Council of Bishops; Gregory Vaughn Palmer, the council's president-designate; and Beverly Shamana, president of the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, which is the social advocacy agency for The United Methodist Church.

The Council of Bishops has focused for years on lifting up the well-being of children and combating poverty, the letter noted. "We will not remain silent as the most vulnerable populations in the United States and around the world are sacrificed at the altars of greed and war."

Saying the United States is enjoying "unparalleled abundance," the bishops said the budget "is as much a moral as a financial document." They called for a "reordering of our nation's budget priorities" and urged development of "a budget that reflects our shared commitment to justice and compassion for all God's children."

Bush, who is a United Methodist, sent his \$2.9 trillion spending plan to Congress on Feb. 5. In his written message to Congress, the president said his blueprint "reflects the priorities of our country at this moment in its history," including keeping the economy strong, protecting the homeland and combating terrorism. Bush said his plan would reduce the U.S. deficit annually and balance the government's books by 2012.

The Coalition on Human Needs, a coalition partner with the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, said the Bush budget cuts vital services for the poor, near-poor and middle class and increases funding for the military.

The budget will put \$739 billion in tax cuts into the hands of millionaires alone between 2008 and 2017, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, an organization that researches and analyzes how proposed budget and tax policies impact budget choices for low-income Americans. "Spending for education, housing, the environment and other programs requiring annual appropriations will total nearly \$392 billion in the Bush budget, \$13 billion below the cost of keeping up with inflation," according to the Coalition on Human Needs. The squeeze would be felt by children losing health insurance, low-income seniors losing food aid and others.

*- By Kathy L. Gilbert, UMNS; #075; Nashville; Feb. 15, 2007.*

#### **+ *Pan-Methodist bishops to reflect on work together***

Three decades ago, The United Methodist Church's highest legislative assembly directed the denomination's bishops to work with other Methodist Episcopal leaders on developing a more cooperative spirit in fulfilling the mission and ministry of Methodism. That conversation in 1976 helped launch quadrennial "consultations" of the bishops of four American branches of the family of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, and in 1978 led to the formation of what is known today as the Commission on Pan-Methodist Cooperation and Union to plan those gatherings. The commission is the result of the 2000 merger of the Commission on Pan-Methodist Cooperation and the Commission on Pan-Methodist Union and was organized to address mutual concerns of the African-American Methodist and United Methodist families. Among the concerns: cooperative church expansion, training of local church leadership, coordinated prison ministries, the family and its cultural identity, the impact of societal factors, coordinated church administration services and shared facilities.

The Ninth Consultation on Methodist Bishops will convene March 11-13 in Atlanta, where bishops of the United Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion and Christian Methodist Episcopal churches will reflect on their past, work together in the present and plan for the future. Together, the 94 active bishops in the pan-Methodist family lead more than 14 million congregants across the globe.

In the United States, the Methodist Episcopal Church organized in 1784. In the nine decades that followed, American Methodism experienced division and separation, as black Methodists created their own denominations in response to racism and other injustices that existed in the main Methodist bodies.

Seven years have passed since The United Methodist Church apologized to the African-American Methodist churches for the racism and injustices that caused them to divide from the main Methodist church. During the 2000 General Conference, the delegates engaged in a service of repentance and reconciliation. The African-American Methodist churches announced they would be "fruit inspectors" because it not enough to apologize without a commitment to change.

"The consultation will give our bishops an opportunity to share some current commitments that each have made both as to the structure and mission of the larger church."

*Nashville; Feb. 15, 2007.*

- *By Linda Green, UMNS; #079;*

**The General Board of Church & Society.** The Board of Church and Society and other church organizations have been outspoken against the war in Iraq. But Rev. Neal Christie said the church must demand public policies that support soldiers who exit Iraq and Afghanistan and need access to health care, a living wage, housing and other needs brought about by the violence of war. "So to be in focused conversation with United Methodist chaplains deployed as soldiers, who advocate on the front line for their troops, who embody the social justice commitments including peace with justice, and are just back home, is both meaningful and necessary," he said. Rev. Christie is the assistant general secretary of the Board of Church and Society, the denomination's social advocacy agency

The gathering split into three groups to discuss difficult questions such as: How do we support our military while also opposing war? How can churches, districts and conferences provide opportunities for chaplains to share their experiences? What is the role of church leaders in lobbying state legislatures to adequately fund veteran assistance?

- *By Kathy L. Gilbert, UMNS; #083; Nashville; Feb. 20, 2007.*

#### **The (UM) Judicial Council. *Judicial Council denies reconsideration of two decisions***

OVERLAND PARK, Kan. (UMNS) - The United Methodist Judicial Council has rejected appeals to reconsider two decisions that have created much debate within the church. The council voted not to revisit Decisions 1031 and 1032, issued last October and related to the case of the Rev. Ed Johnson of South Hill (Va.) United Methodist Church, who blocked a practicing homosexual man from taking membership in the church.

Johnson was placed on involuntary leave last June by his clergy peers in the Virginia Annual Conference, and Bishop Charlene P. Kammerer upheld the action. But in Decision 1031, the Judicial Council ruled that Johnson's due process rights were violated when the conference transformed an administrative complaint against him into a judicial complaint. And in Decision 1032, the council made a much more far-reaching ruling, saying that the senior pastor of a local church does have the right to determine a person's readiness for membership. Following the rulings, Kammerer returned Johnson to the South Hill pulpit. [Note: Reverend Johnson was later re-appointed to another charge in the eastern part of the state - much against the wishes of the congregation. These were seen as

good rulings from the Judicial Council which not only upheld the integrity of Christian morality in the denomination but also the integrity of local pastoral leadership. –AOM]

The Judicial Council issued short memos (1040 and 1041) declaring it would not reconsider the two rulings. Four of the Judicial Council members joined in writing dissenting opinions, and three members signed a concurring opinion. The court has nine members.

The two rulings created much protest across the denomination from those who said the decisions stood in contrast to the spirit of the church's theme of "Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors." The decisions also triggered official appeals from Kammerer and the Virginia Conference Board of Ordained Ministry, as well as briefs from the principals in the case and numerous friends of the court.

### Concurring opinion

Council members James W. Holsinger Jr., Mary A. Daffin and Keith D. Boyette signed a concurring opinion, saying they "join with our colleagues who have voted to deny the petition for reconsideration in this matter because the petitioners for reconsideration have not shown Decision 1032 clearly to be in error, nor have they shown that reconsideration of the decision is necessary to prevent a manifest injustice resulting from the interpretation of the decision. "We recognize that the issues presented in Decision 1032 are controversial in nature and the subject of heated debate long before they reached the Judicial Council ...," the concurring opinion continues. "Twenty-two briefs were filed with the Judicial Council prior to Decision 1032, representing the diversity of positions on the substance of the questions before the council. The issues were thoroughly briefed and ably argued. The council conducted oral hearings in the matter because of the diversity of positions taken on the questions presented. The issues were fully debated within the council, and the council rendered its decision.

"The 12 briefs and the more than 2,000 communications filed with the Judicial Council on the petitions for reconsideration, again reflecting the diversity of positions on the issues before the council, have not persuaded us that the council erred in Decision 1032," said Holsinger, Daffin and Boyette. They added that "it is time for the issues addressed in Decision 1032 to now be debated by the United Methodist Church, as is occurring."

"The presiding bishop fulfilled her disciplinary responsibilities when she responded to the questions of law," they wrote. "The Judicial Council has fulfilled its disciplinary responsibilities in reviewing the decisions of law rendered. "We disagree with those in the minority who cavalierly assert that the Judicial Council has somehow exceeded its role in precisely fulfilling that role," they said. "The role of the Judicial Council is to interpret the Discipline and to apply its provisions to the scenarios that are presented. In Decision 1032, the council has interpreted relevant provisions of the Discipline and applied them to the scenario posed to it.

"We disagree with those in the minority who assert that further debate before the Judicial Council will be healing for the United Methodist Church. Rather, we believe that reopening this matter, especially where no grounds have been demonstrated to do so, will further polarize the various parts of the church," Holsinger, Daffin and Boyette wrote. "We have arrived at this view with great respect and admiration for those who disagree with us in the minority."

### Dissenting opinion

In their joint dissent to the decision not to reconsider Decision 1032, the Rev. Susan Henry-Crowe and the Rev. Paul Shamwange, joined by Beth Capen and Jon R. Gray, wrote that "theologically, and as well as disciplinarily, the pastor has no discretion to exclude anyone from membership or the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist because it is not his/her invitation. It is Christ's. Therefore, all who present themselves for baptism, Eucharist and reception into the church are joyfully welcomed. ... "For the pastor to deny membership is to present obstacles to the work of the Holy Spirit," they said. "This denial is dangerous and does not serve the work of evangelism."

Gray, joined by Capen, Henry-Crowe and Shamwange, filed a separate dissent on the denial of reconsideration of Decision 1032 around the idea that the Judicial Council "created new law heretofore unknown and in my judgment un contemplated by any previous General Conference."

"The role of the Judicial Council is to interpret disciplinary provisions from a legal standpoint," Gray wrote. "The pronouncements contained in Decision 1032 concerning 'discretion' and 'responsible pastoral judgment' have abandoned all traditional notions of interpretive restraint. ... Separation of powers is a time-honored doctrine that has served our connection well. The General Conference would be unwise to attempt to execute episcopal functions. Bishops do not participate in the legislative process as they are not eligible to vote at the General Conference.

"It follows that the Judicial Council should not, under our system of governance, attempt to create law by legislating from the bench," he wrote. "Judicial activism, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. Decision 1032 is an example of judicial activism of the rankest order." The dissent used a Latin term, "Jus dicere, non-dare," which means, "To declare law, not make it." It went on to call Decision 1032 "clearly in error."

"The Book of Discipline is silent on the issue of 'responsible pastoral judgment,'" Gray continued. "Our task would have been complete had we merely said so. It would have been better for the Judicial Council to provide no guidance on the question than to provide the poor guidance of Decision 1032."

The dissent stated that "at times in the church there is a tendency to see the Discipline as superseding Scripture. The Constitution as contained in the Book of Discipline has to be the measure by which we apply the Bible. The Constitution should not be in conflict with the Bible. If the Discipline violates the Bible, then the church is no longer Christ's church, but rather a mere association of men and women."

On its docketed items in this spring session, the Judicial Council:

- Declined jurisdiction due to the "inadequacy of the record" in two requests from the California-Pacific Annual Conference to rule on the withdrawal of a recommendation for probationary membership by the conference's board of ordained ministry, and the continuance of a probationer beyond eight regular sessions of the annual conference.
- Ruled that Amendment VII to the United Methodist Constitution defines clergy membership in an annual conference and does not limit or change the voting rights of the various clergy categories that remain. The case came from a request by the Dakotas Annual Conference to examine how Amendment VII, adopted by the 2004 General Conference and ratified by annual conferences last year, would affect voting rights. "The Constitution now mandates a definition of clergy status that includes only those categories specified in Paragraph 32," the ruling says. "Amendment VII has no effect on the voting rights of lay members of the annual conference," the council added.
- Ruled that there was no authority to assume jurisdiction in the question of a pair of bishop's rulings during a West Michigan Annual Conference debate on parsonage standards and escrow funds, respectively, because the rulings were parliamentary in nature.
- Affirmed the decision of law by Bishop Warner H. Brown Jr. in the Rocky Mountain Annual Conference that a proposed amendment allowing clergy to waive base minimum compensation was in violation of the *Book of Discipline*. "Only deacons may choose to waive minimum base compensation" and can be appointed to a non-salaried position, the ruling stated. "Elders and local pastors are entitled to receive not less than the equitable compensation established by the annual conference."

- By Neill Caldwell, UMNS #254 [2006]; Nashville; May. 2, 2006

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*Time is life's nursery for love.*

**Global Outlook**

*Life is Hard  
Afterlife is Harder!*

- Seen on a church sign

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**Mozambique. Global nature task force proposes a U.S. central conference**

[Note: This is seen as a bad move. We believe the reason behind this is to dilute the gains made by the conservative orthodox movement in the United Methodist Church and to retain power in the far-left institutional hierarchy. – AOM]

MAPUTO, Mozambique-A group of United Methodists examining the global nature of the denomination is proposing that the United States become a Central Conference. The proposal introduced to the United Methodist Council of Bishops on Nov. 3 would end the current system that splits the United States from the central conferences that govern the church outside the United States and would revise the United Methodist Book of Discipline into a "truly general book of doctrine, mission and discipline, deleting all portions that apply only to the United States." The existing U.S. jurisdictional conferences would exist within a U.S. Central Conference. The proposal would group all five U.S. jurisdictions into one central conference, putting it on par with the central conferences already in existence. If approved, the changes would take effect in 2012. Nebraska Bishop Ann Sherer, a member of the task force studying the church's global nature, said that as conversations delved into the worldwide

connection of the church and how the church was expanding outside the United States, "we found that the U.S. church needs to get our act together," adding that the proposal is an attempt to clarify the church's desire to be a more worldwide denomination. The power of the General Conference will essentially remain the same, Kansas Bishop Scott Jones said. Churchwide agencies will remain as agencies for the whole church. The Judicial Council would remain as a general church body elected by the General Conference. The Council of Bishops remains as the council for the entire church. Central conferences, including the United States, would consider resolutions pertinent to their regions [emphasis added]. They could create and fund their own agencies, establish their own educational requirements for clergy and establish mission initiatives appropriate for their context. Jones added that the principle portion of the residential percentage (75-80 percent) of General Conference votes would be retained by the United States. "What we are doing is freeing up each section to deal with its own issues while strengthening the church," he explained.

### Study of Episcopacy

A task force studying the episcopacy is seeking to align changes in the episcopacy to a strong theology on the bishop's relationship to making disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The task force is seeking input from the bishops on a variety of issues, including limiting terms to eight to 12 years with an option for re-election, ending a bishop's term at retirement, returning the bishop's membership to the annual conference from which he or she was elected and reducing the number of bishops in the United States. [Note: These are seen as very positive changes.– AOM]

In other actions, the bishops received an update from the group that is rewriting "In Defense of Creation," a document first issued by the Council of Bishops in 1980 calling for eliminating nuclear weapons. It is proposed that the new document will address three interrelated items: the spread of nuclear weapons, global poverty and degradation of the environment, including global warming. In order to receive input from the public and inform the wider church community of what is happening, a public hearing is being planned for next October at Metropolitan United Methodist Church in Washington. [Note: This is a far-left "one world" document lacking in serious credibility. – AOM]

- By Linda Green, UMNS #671; Nashville; Nov. 13, 2006.

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*I have a duty to fulfill every second.*

- Richard Wurmbrand