

The Monthly Update

April 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

As we look forward to the 2008 General Conference things have been busy with all there is to do. It seems that there are so many things to do and time is so short. That is great! It is in those situations that we are forced to say, "Lord, there is no way we can do it all. Show us what You want us to do. Where are Your priorities."

This "April Update" contains ongoing news of issues affecting our United Methodist Church, especially as we lead up to General Conference, along with items of interest in this country and around the world. These are truly interesting times. We shall continue to include information on Islam, Iraq, and other strategic challenges to our safety as this becomes available.

May I take this opportunity to thank you for the support you have offered to this ministry – both in terms of prayer and finances? It looks as if we shall meet the financial obligations to get us through all the preparations needed for this General Conference – thanks to your generosity.

The second problem that we had communicated to you last month involved the expected publication of our book *Stewardship Perspectives – 2007*. We have resolved the delays and are back on track for production of the book – which we expect to go out to those who have ordered or requested it. However, I must tell you that right up to the final (internal) deadline, we did not receive some information we needed from two of the General Boards of the UMC and two of the ecumenical groups. As a result, the book that you receive will be about 99.99% complete – lacking only that little bit of data. We shall have that information by the time we send out the 2008 study. As it stands now, we plan to get the book to you the third week of April. I apologize for this delay but it could not be helped. I do think you will be pleased with the book when you get it.

May I take this opportunity to thank you for the support you have offered to this ministry - both in terms of prayer and finances?

Please be in prayer for us as we continue to do what the Lord has called us and prepare for the General Conference – that our time will be used wisely and effectively.

Your prayers and support are such a blessing to all of us here at Concerned Methodists.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

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April 2008 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

It is good to seek the "golden hours," the golden moments of our lives.

They can slip away all too easily and become "if-only's."

So capture them as they come by. They are worthy of being seized.

And, once seized, these frozen moments are worthy of our repeated visits.

They stay there, soft in line and bathed in a gentle glow, engraved in their twilight time.

- Dee Appel, in A Heart Awake to Beauty

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The Good Stuff. Hallelujah! Christ Arose

[Note: As you read this, think about this past Easter and the significance this has for all of us as Christians.]

Several years ago, Mel Gibson's movie *Passion of the Christ* touched off a firestorm of controversy. Some commentators, even the thoughtful Charles Krauthammer, charged that it was anti-Semitic. But millions of Christians flocked to movie theaters to watch this stunning dramatic portrayal of the events of Holy Week. A quote attributed to the late Pope John Paul II circulated widely at the time: "It is as it was."

We are led to contemplate again this year the events of that long ago week in the Holy Land. Jesus enters the city of Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Tens of thousands throng the streets shouting "Hosanna" and "Hail to the Son of David!" They place their cloaks and palm branches at His feet. By midweek, however, the mood changes. On a day known to history as Spy Wednesday, Judas Iscariot secretly betrays Jesus to the leaders of the Sanhedrin, the legislative assembly. The next day, Jesus has His Last Supper with His disciples. He knows that He will be betrayed. He knows all our hearts. When Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane, He prays that we His followers will be one. That must be our prayer.

Taken captive, Jesus is passed back and forth between Pontius Pilate and King Herod. Herod is the man the Romans use to keep the Jewish people in subjection. Pilate and Herod had been antagonists before this time, but they find a common interest in condemning Jesus. Their unholy alliance is sealed in innocent blood. Jesus is led away to be crucified. He endures beating, spitting, and the cruel taunts of the crowd. He does this not just to atone for the sins of the guilty people before Him. They have flocked to see the spectacle of the King of the Jews being slain like a sacrificial lamb. He does this for us, for our sins. While we were yet sinners, Jesus came and died for us.

Indescribable love and unbearable suffering converged in the person of Jesus Christ on that Cross. And when Jesus completed the time of His suffering and anguish - His mission to set us free from our slavery to sin and its hellish consequences - He cried out from the Cross: "It is finished!" Three days later, God showed His resounding approval by raising His Son back to life, and His resurrection gave us an invincible hope.

The Glory of Easter lives on. The tomb where they laid His body is empty. The stone has been rolled away. The Son of Man has ascended and is seated at the right hand of God the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. This we know. This we believe. It is to this great truth that we bear witness.

This truth is the most important of all truths. Our mission will not be completed until Jesus Himself returns and reigns in righteousness and justice. Yet we undertake this mission with a sense of that same invincible hope that inspired those who peered with amazement into an empty tomb, saw the risen Savior face to face, and then proceeded to turn their world upright. We pray that you and your family will be especially blessed this resurrection Sunday. We thank you for your prayers for us. And we say: He is Risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah!

- The Family Research Council , Washington, DC; March 21, 2008.

Of Interest.

+ *GBOD Aims to 'Create New Places for New People'*

[Note: This is applying an organizational solution to what is a spiritual problem. Unless we have something of substance to offer, these efforts are misguided. If we preached an evangelistic message from Spirit-filled Christian clergy, we would offer the life-changing message of Jesus Christ. That would bring people for whom we would need new churches.]

If the General Board of Discipleship (GBOD) gets the green light, by 2012 the UMC could see exponential growth in the number of new churches started in the U.S. According to the Rev. Karen Greenwaldt, top executive for GBOD, the agency will oversee a collaborative effort of recruiting and training "1000 church leaders who will plant 650 new congregations over the next 4 years." While responsibility for actually starting churches rests with annual conferences, GBOD is committed to training and equipping the new church planters. The Rev. Thomas Butcher leads the denomination's collaborative effort to train 1000 new church planters who will start 650 new churches by 2012. "We can reach thousands and millions of new people for Jesus Christ, if we decide to do so. It's not about church buildings; it's about creating new places for new people and renewing existing congregations to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout their lifetime," said Greenwaldt. The number of churches in the U.S. is not keeping up with current population growth. In looking at the top 500 growing cities, church leaders found that too few UM churches existed in most of these areas. "Long-established congregations (alone) can't keep up with population growth and reach the new generations of people moving into new areas. There are not enough planters available to start the number of churches needed. We will have to raise a whole generation of church planters," Greenwaldt said. While current research shows that starting new churches is more effective in leading people to Christ, the UMC is also starting new initiatives to help renew existing congregations.

- *GBOD, as reported in UMNewscope, February 22, 2008.*

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+ *Conferences will bid farewell to 16 bishops*

Some United Methodist annual (regional) conferences meeting this spring and summer will say goodbye to retiring bishops and become better acquainted with the candidates they have endorsed to succeed them. The 2008 meetings will be the last for 11 retiring U.S. bishops. In July, their successors will be chosen by jurisdictional conferences, and the new bishops will begin serving effective Sept. 1. In addition, five bishops from the central conferences - regions in Africa, Asia and Europe - will retire this year or next.

The church's 63 annual conferences in the United States will meet after the 2008 General Conference in Fort Worth, Texas. Afterwards, the church's five U.S. jurisdictions will also convene once every four years, in July.

Bishops hold the top clergy positions in The United Methodist Church and are elected in the United States for life. Bishops in Africa, Europe and Asia are elected for a specific term, and if they are not re-elected, they return to the pastorate and are no longer considered a bishop. Bishops outside the United States who retire while serving their term are considered bishops for life. Church law requires U.S. bishops to retire after jurisdictional conference if turning 66 on or before July 1 of the jurisdictional year. Outside of the United States, different disciplinary requirements dictate the mandatory retirement age for bishops. A Task Force to Study the Episcopacy is asking the 2008 General Conference to increase the mandatory retirement age by two years to 68.

Four bishops in the central conferences also are retiring this year: Joseph Humper of Sierra Leone; Benjamin Justo and Solito Toquero of the Philippines; and João Somane Machado of Mozambique. The retirement of Bishop Øystein Olsen of the Nordic and Baltic Area of Europe is effective in 2009. Their successors will be chosen at their respective central conference gatherings, which are held at various times throughout the year.

Jurisdictional conferences

–The North Central Jurisdiction Conference convenes July 15-19 in Grand Rapids, Mich. Delegates will elect a bishop to succeed retiring Bishop Sharon Brown Christopher.

–The Northeastern Jurisdiction Conference meets July 16-18 in Harrisburg, Pa., and will fill three openings left by the retirements of Bishops Violet Fisher, Jane Middleton and Susan Hassinger. Hassinger has served as an interim bishop to fulfill the unexpired term of Bishop Susan Morrison, who retired in 2006 for health reasons. When the delegates meet, they could decide to merge the episcopal areas of New York West and Albany, folding four conferences into one and reducing the number of bishops in the jurisdiction from 10 to nine. The proposed date for the change is 2010.

–The South Central Jurisdiction meets July 16-19 in Dallas, where the retirements of four bishops will be on the agenda. Retiring are Bishops Benjamin Chamness, William Hutchinson, Joel Martinez and Alfred Norris. Norris has been serving as interim bishop since 2006 following the death of Bishop Rhymes Moncure.

–The Southeastern Jurisdiction Conference convenes July 16-19 in Lake Junaluska, N.C., where delegates will elect a bishop to succeed retiring Bishop J. Lawrence McCleskey.

–The Western Jurisdiction Conference meets July 16-19 in Portland, Ore., and will fill two openings being left by the retirement of Bishop Beverly Shamana and the voluntary resignation of Bishop Edward Paup. Paup was elected March 11 to lead the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, the church's mission agency, effective Sept. 1.

Annual conferences

The annual conference is the "basic unit" of the church, according to the denomination's Book of Discipline. It may include an entire state, part of a state or even parts of two or more states. In addition, three U.S. missionary conferences rely on the denomination for funding. During the annual conference gatherings in the United States, Africa, Europe and the Philippines, one-year appointments of all conference clergy members are announced. New deacons and elders are ordained, candidates for ordination approved, and special projects and ministries recognized. A bishop presides over each annual session.

–The first session of 2008 conference gatherings was held in February when the Northwest Philippines Conference convened. The U.S. gatherings begin in May when the Red Bird Missionary Conference convenes May 9-10 in Coalgood, Ky., and will conclude June 22 with the adjournments of the California-Pacific Annual Conference in Redlands, Calif., and the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference in Moscow, Idaho.

U.S. ANNUAL CONFERENCES

North Central Jurisdiction

Dakotas, June 4-7, Fargo, N.D.

Detroit, May 16-18, Adrian, Mich.

East Ohio, June 16-19, Lakeside, Ohio

Illinois Great Rivers, June 4-7, Peoria, Ill.

Iowa, June 5-8, Ames, Iowa
Minnesota, May 27-30 Saint Cloud, Minn.
North Indiana, May 29-31, West Lafayette, Ind.
Northern Illinois, June 5-7, Saint Charles, Ill.
South Indiana, June 5-7, Bloomington, Ind.
West Michigan, June 15-18, Grand Rapids, Mich.
West Ohio, June 9-12, Lakeside, Ohio
Wisconsin, June 8-11, Madison, Wis.

Northeastern Jurisdiction

Baltimore-Washington, May 22-24, Nation Harbor, Md.
Central Pennsylvania, June 5-7, Grantham, Pa.
Eastern Pennsylvania, May 29-30, Philadelphia
Greater New Jersey, May 28-30, King of Prussia, Pa.
New England, June 13-15, Wenham, Mass.
New York, June 11-14, Hempstead, N.Y.
North Central New York, May 30-June 1, Liverpool, N.Y.
Peninsula-Delaware, June 13-15, Princess Anne, Md.
Troy, June 4-7, Saratoga Springs, N.Y.
West Virginia, June 5-8, Buckhannon, W.Va.
Western New York, June 13-15, Buffalo, N.Y.
Western Pennsylvania, June 12-15, Grove City, Pa.
Wyoming, May 28-31, Scranton, Pa.

South Central Jurisdiction

Arkansas, June 8-11, Hot Springs, Ark.
Central Texas, May 31-June 4, Fort Worth, Texas
Kansas East, June 4-7, Baldwin City, Kan.
Kansas West, May 28-30, Salina, Kan.
Louisiana, June 1-4, Shreveport, La.
Missouri, June 6-9, Springfield, Mo.
Nebraska, June 11-14, Lincoln, Neb.
New Mexico, June 3-6, Glorieta, N.M. (In joint session with Northwest Texas)
North Texas, June 8-11, Plano, Texas
Northwest Texas, June 3-6, Glorieta, N.M. (In joint session with New Mexico)
Oklahoma, May 25-29, Tulsa, Okla.
Oklahoma Indian Missionary, June 5-8, Antlers, Okla.
Rio Grande, June 12-14, Corpus Christi, Texas
Southwest Texas, June 4-7, Corpus Christi, Texas
Texas, May 25-28, The Woodlands, Texas

Southeastern Jurisdiction

Alabama-West Florida, June 1-4, Montgomery, Ala.
Florida, May 29-31, Lakeland, Fla.
Holston, June 8-11, Lake Junaluska, N.C. (Called session June 1 for clergy session and ordination at Central United Methodist Church, Knoxville, Tenn.)
Kentucky, June 1-4, Louisville, Ky.
Memphis, June 3-6, Jackson, Tenn.
Mississippi, June 8-10, Jackson, Miss.
North Alabama, June 5-7, Trussville, Ala.
North Carolina, June 11-14, Greenville, N.C.
North Georgia, June 17-20, Athens, Ga.
Red Bird Missionary, May 9-10, Coalgood, Ky.
South Carolina, June 1-4, Florence, S.C.

South Georgia, June 8-11, Columbus, Ga.
Tennessee, June 8-10, Murfreesboro, Tenn.
Virginia, June 15-17, Roanoke, Va.
Western North Carolina, June 5-8, Lake Junaluska, N.C.

Western Jurisdiction

Alaska Missionary, May 30-June 1, Anchorage, Alaska
California-Nevada, June 18-21, Sacramento, Calif.
California-Pacific, June 18-22, Redlands, Calif.
Desert Southwest, June 12-15, Scottsdale, Ariz.
Oregon-Idaho, June 18-22, Salem, Ore.
Pacific Northwest, June 17-20, Moscow, Idaho
Rocky Mountain, June 18-21, Denver
Yellowstone, June 11-15, Billings, Mont.

CENTRAL CONFERENCES

(Complete information on some conferences is unavailable.)

Austria Provisional, May 15-18, Salzburg, Austria
Bulgaria Provisional, Sept. 4-7, Sofia, Bulgaria
Central Luzon Philippines, May 23-25, Baguio City, Philippines
Czech & Slovak Republics, May 22-25, Slovak Republic
Estonia, June 12-15, Tallinn, Estonia
Finland-Finnish-speaking Provisional, June 25-29
Finland-Swedish-speaking Provisional, June 14-17, Vasa, Finland
Germany East, Schwarzenberg, Germany
Germany North, Hamburg, Germany
Germany South, Deutschland, Germany
Hungary, April 9-12, Szolnok, Hungary
Liberia, Harper City, Maryland County, Liberia
North Central Philippines, Feb. 21-24, Tumanuini, Isabela, Philippines
Northeast Luzon Philippines, March 27-30, Baguio City, Philippines
Northeast Philippines, April 3-6, Rizal. Santiago City, Isabela, Philippines
Northern Philippines, June 5-8, Buguey, Cagayan, Philippines
Northwest Philippines, Feb. 7-10, Baguio City, Philippines
Norway, June 19-22, Stavanger, Norway
Pangasinan Philippines, May 15-18, Bani, Pangasinan, Philippines
Poland, June 13-15, Kielce, Poland
Serbia-Macedonia Provisional, Oct. 9-12, Strumica, Macedonia
Switzerland-France, June 26-29, Basel, Switzerland
Tarlac Philippines, Feb. 28-March 2, Matatalaib, Tarlac City, Philippines

By Linda Green, Nashville, Tenn. {UMNS #114}; Mar. 17, 2008.

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+ UMC, ELCA conclude dialogue, look toward votes

[Note: This is not necessarily a good idea. When two denominations come together in an "accord" it is usually at the "lowest common denominator" of their doctrine. When two declining denominations come together, you have a larger denomination that continues to decline. We need to do more than tinker with the organizational machinery.]

Over the next two years, both The United Methodist Church and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America will ask its members to approve "full communion" between the two bodies. That step follows an interim agreement and the conclusion, in December, of the last round of dialogue between the two denominations. The vote will take place this spring for United Methodists and in 2009 for Lutherans. According to the Rev. W. Douglas Mills, an executive with the United Methodist Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, full communion essentially means "acknowledging one another's ministries as valid," as well as wanting to be involved in mutual decision-making.

Being in full communion is a visible step toward full unity, he said, but added, "We don't know what full unity is or can look like." Over the last three decades, ELCA-UMC dialogue teams have explored the sacrament of baptism (1977-

79) and issues of episcopacy (1985-87). The third round of dialogue, from 2001 to 2007, explored the two churches' understandings of Eucharist and resulted in the 2004 recommendation for an interim agreement.

By Linda Bloom, United Methodist News Service {#015}; Jan. 15, 2008.

+ 2010 congress to explore faith communication issues

NEW YORK. Changes in perceptions about religion, its influence in the public arena and how technology delivers the message are among the issues communicators will consider at Religion Communication Congress 2010. The congress, with the theme "Embracing Change: Communicating Faith in Today's World," is scheduled for April 7-10, 2010, at the Marriott Downtown Hotel in Chicago. Participants will represent a broad spectrum of communications specialties, faith traditions and theological perspectives.

Shirley Whipple Struchen, a United Methodist and coordinator of RCCongress 2010, said the use of "instantaneous communication" is probably the biggest change since the last congress in 2000. That could mean networking through Web sites such as MySpace and FaceBook, offering different perspectives through blogging or providing downloadable podcasts for MP-3 players and cell phones. Jeffrey Cole, University of Southern California Annenberg School for Communication, is among speakers who will address that issue during the 2010 event.

In addition to the plenary sessions on timely issues, RCCongress 2010 will feature more than 50 skills-building workshops and time for participants to interact and learn from each other. Interfaith interaction has become increasingly important, and Struchen said it was recognized in 2000 that because worship does not mean the same thing to everyone, it was more appropriate to add "faith expressions" to the agenda.

Inviting such a broad range of participants, including international representation, to the congress "is more than networking," she added. "It's really (about) understanding each other."

A diverse group of North American communications professionals are planning the event. Among United Methodists involved are the Rev. Dan Gangler of Indianapolis; Lesley Crosson, New York; the Rev. Ken Sloan, Nashville; the Rev. Erik Alsgaard, Lakeland, Fla., and Cam Howard, Trotwood, Ohio.

The 2010 event follows a 40-year tradition. The first congress was in 1970 in Chicago, followed by congresses in 1980, 1990 and 2000. In 2000, more than 80 cooperating organizations participated as partners and 1,300 attended. For the upcoming congress, 64 cooperating organizations have signed up thus far and include United Methodist Communications, United Methodist Association of Communicators and UMR Communications.

Struchen said more cooperating organizations are being sought **for RCCongress 2010 and** financial assistance, particularly for international scholarships, is welcome. More information about the gathering is at www.rccongress2010.net

By Linda Bloom, United Methodist News Service {#035}; Jan. 31, 2008.

(UM) General Board of Church and Society Peace Conference... against Iraq war

Participants heard from multiple speakers at the 2008 Lake Junaluska Peace Conference held Jan. 31-Feb. 2 at a United Methodist retreat center in North Carolina. More than 400 people attended.

Jim Winkler, top executive of the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, the church's social action agency, addressed conference participants. "The war in Iraq is and has been an unmitigated disaster," said Winkler. "The sad fact is that conditions are so bad in Iraq due to our invasion that life was better under Saddam Hussein-and that was an era of fear and misery," he said. "You have to work hard to make this a reality. To accomplish such a terrible feat, you have to spend hundreds of billions, perhaps trillions of dollars. You have to kill a lot of people and force millions from their homes into refugee status. You have to lie and cheat and steal. "The war must end; that is why we are here this weekend," Winkler said. "The consent of the people is required for the war to continue. Let us withdraw our consent."

By Kathy L. Gilbert, UMNS {#047}; Feb. 6, 2008.

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How can there be too many children? That is like saying there are too many flowers.

- Mother Teresa.

Global Outlook

*Make your whole yea's plans in the spring and your day's plans early in the morning. – Chinese proverb **

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Iraq. Operation Iraqi Freedom

Today marks the fifth anniversary of the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom. On the evening of the invasion, President Bush told the men and women of the Armed Forces that "the peace of a troubled world and the hopes of an oppressed people now depend on you. That trust is well placed." While many things have not gone according to plan in Iraq, our service men and women have certainly earned that trust. In cities across our country, streets will be filled with anti-military zealots blocking traffic, disturbing the peace, and protesting our continued presence in Iraq. Whatever your views on the war, let's not lose sight of the men and women who are serving. By choosing to serve us, our all-volunteer force puts an enormous strain on their personal lives and families. While service members fight abroad they are missing the special moments many of us take for granted. They can't take the day off to celebrate holidays with loved ones. They miss anniversaries, birthdays and even the births of their own children. These are tremendous acts of selflessness. Please take time today to show your support for our troops. Pray for their continued strength, for their safety, and for their families while they sacrifice to establish peace in a troubled world.

- The Family Research Council, Washington, DC; March 21, 2008.

The World Council of Churches. UM Bishop Joins WCC Search Committee

UM Bishop Sally Dyck of Minneapolis has joined the World Council of Churches (WCC) committee that will search for a new leader to succeed the Rev. Samuel Kobia. Kobia-a Methodist from Kenya and the first African to lead the WCC-announced during the WCC Central Committee meeting Feb. 13-20 in Geneva that he would not seek an extension to his first term, which ends Dec. 31. The WCC executive committee will appoint an interim leader at its September meeting to serve from Jan. 1 until the new chief executive takes office, which is expected to happen by the end of 2009.

Other Methodists on the 18-member search committee are the Rev. Sanele Faasua Lavatai, Methodist Church of Samoa, and Itayi Ndudzo, Methodist Church in Zimbabwe. Two UMs, Lois Dauway and the Rev. Larry Pickens, serve on the council's executive committee and were present for long discussions regarding Kobia's request that he not be renominated. According to Pickens, Kobia has expressed an interest in getting back in touch with his Methodist roots and possibly enrolling in a doctoral program at a UM seminary. Pickens said he would work with Kobia to facilitate his interest. "I think he would be an asset to any of our seminaries," he added. The WCC, which celebrated its 60th anniversary in February 2008, is emphasizing a renewed call to "visible unity" in the church. "We live in a deeply changed world and with a profoundly changed religious setting today," said the Rev. Walter Altmann, the WCC moderator. "But there is no need to change this basic commitment which has gathered the churches in the WCC fellowship throughout these 60 years."

-Linda Bloom (UMNS). As quoted in *UMNewscope*, March 14, 2008.

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The best remedy for a short temper is a long walk. – Jacqueline Schiff