

The Monthly Update

February 2008

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.

From January 2 - 5 Concerned Methodists had an exhibit at the Congress on Evangelism that was held in Savannah, Georgia. At the gathering I chanced to meet a Chinese national who lives in Singapore, which is located at the bottom of the Malay Peninsula. I had a friend with whom I’d lost touch who also lived in the same city. I asked if he knew Noel Goh (also a Chinese). He did. I gave him one of my cards and asked that he pass it on to him. That, also, he did. This past week, Noel sent me an e-mail and we have reestablished contact. Isn’t God’s providence wonderful?

One reason I was anxious to contact Noel again is because of our mutual passion to evangelize the Chinese people. I believe that there are similarities with what has happened in that country and with the Roman Empire during the days of Christ. Whereas, 2000 years ago, Rome - a pagan government – had united that country by force, and ensured a cohesive society by its road system and common language, this served to facilitate the spread of the Good News of Jesus Christ. In a similar way, Mao Tse Tung united mainland China under a communistic system – which is atheistic – and strove to make the people literate through the introduction of a simplified form of common Chinese characters; this is also serving to facilitate the spread of the Good News of Jesus Christ in that country. Couple that with the fact that the Chinese are spread all over the world – they are global merchants – this can serve as a channel to communicate the message of Christ all over the world as never before!

The Chinese that I have met are very passionate about their faith in our Lord. When the communists took over that country in 1949 and effectively shut the door to Western missionaries, it was feared that the church would die. On the contrary, the best estimates put the true “underground” church at between 78 million and 120 million people today. Praise be to God! What better way, then, to take the most populous country with its citizens spread all over the world, and engage in world-wide evangelism. Let us pray that this atheistic society will be permeated with Christian churches and witnesses, and become a Christian nation!

I thank the Lord for the opportunities that he presents to us!

We appreciate so much the support you provide - 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

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February 2008 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

“He that is warm for truth, and fearless in its defense, performs one of the duties of a good man; he strengthens his own conviction, and guards others from delusion; but steadiness of belief, and boldness of profession, are yet only part of the form of godliness.”
- Samuel Johnson

The Good Stuff

+ *Workshop teaches churches to be servants, not suckers*

[Editorial note: We as Christians are often caught between the dilemma of caring for the sick, homeless, and hungry - yet at the same time, not being used by those who are dishonest. This is included because it has good advice for all of us in balancing our sense of compassion with that of being good stewards in doing God's work. - AOM]

The woman looks lost and helpless. Tears run down her face.

There she stands as you look up from your desk in the church's front office. She asks for money to buy food for her children.

Or, a man approaches as you return to your car at the mall loaded with Christmas packages. "I lost my job, my car broke down. I need some money to get home," he says. "Any little bit you can spare would help."

What do you do? Hand over a few dollars? If so, do you walk away feeling like you have just been "taken"?

You are not alone, according to Beth Templeton, who has spent 25 years working with homeless and poor people. She offers a plan to help you be a servant instead of a sucker.

Templeton works with United Ministries in Greenville, S.C., a faith-based organization of about 100 congregations that aids local people who are homeless, experiencing financial crisis or lacking education or employment skills. The ministry began in 1970 by the South Carolina United Methodist Annual (regional) Conference and today involves many faith groups.

"I'm very fortunate in that I get to work both with people who have needs as well as with people who want to help address those needs," Templeton said. She teaches a workshop called "Servant or Sucker" that grew out of questions from ministers and church staff asking, "What do we do when people just show up? We feel like we are being taken, but we have no idea what to do."

She also started and directs "Our Eyes Were Opened," an outreach program of United Ministries targeting people with resources who want to reach out to those without resources. "So many times through the years I've seen some people really want to help, but they end up making a bad situation worse. Or they get angry at the very people they want to help," she said.

It's OK to say 'no'

"It's harder to say 'no' in a compassionate way and then help find other resources for somebody," Templeton said. "But sometimes when you're giving money, you're helping people to get drugs or to buy alcohol or to do things that are not healthy at all, that could actually end up in death."

In her Servant or Sucker workshop, Templeton offers these mantras:

- " Never do something for somebody that the person can and should do for themselves;
- " Poor planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on mine;
- " Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. (Matthew 10)

She gives practical advice on the dos and don'ts of helping someone directly:

- " Give money to vendors instead of the person;
- " Verify the story before you pay a bill or help with a financial problem;
- " Use a voucher system for food or gas.

Her ABCs of helping are to:

- " Acknowledge the person has a problem;
- " Don't believe everything you hear;
- " Remember that Christianity is not judged by giving people exactly what they want.

She wants people to L.E.A.R.N.:

- " Learn available resources in your area;
- " Explain the reason behind your answer, and do not apologize;
- " Acknowledge the problem;
- " Referrals, make good ones;
- " Never explain what other agencies' policies are unless you are absolutely sure. For example, don't send someone to an agency with the promise of a job, housing, food, etc., unless you know for sure they can provide those things.

Levels of involvement

When working in the midst of poverty, churches must decide how much they can do. There are levels of involvement, according to Templeton. Most churches are level-one churches. They deal with the symptoms of poverty by providing soup kitchens, clothing closets, night shelters, etc. Level two is helping families overcome issues and barriers that prevent them from thriving. These could include assisting them with pursuing employment and education. Level three is reviewing systems that are barriers to escaping poverty. Is there adequate, safe, affordable housing? Is there adequate transportation to places of work? Why can't people who work long, hard hours still not afford housing? Is there adequate health care?

"I honestly believe that the justice that the Bible talks about is systems work," Templeton said. For instance, working to change the system might mean campaigning to raise the minimum wage. A person earning the minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour cannot afford a fair-market apartment anywhere in the United States. In Greenville, a family needs to earn at least \$11.50 an hour to afford housing, according to Templeton. That means two people working full-time and earning minimum wage cannot find an affordable place to live.

How churches can help

Churches have numerous options to respond. If they choose to help anyone who walks in the door, church policy needs to address staff safety, designate someone to work with the homeless and allocate money in the budget. A church may decide to use all of their benevolence money for direct aid and do it through an organization such as United Ministries. They can establish a specific day to take requests for assistance and make appointments throughout the week for that day.

Churches can choose to help by agency referral only. Churches also can staff a crisis ministry such as that of Buncombe Street United Methodist Church in Greenville.

Debbie Gordon, a longtime member of Buncombe, is on the board of United Ministries. She also was part of one of Templeton's poverty simulation workshops, which give participants an experience of what poverty looks and feels like. "We are people who work everyday, pay taxes, and don't know anything about poverty," said Gordon. In the workshop, participants are assigned roles and resources and must simulate four weeks in that person's life. "You go to work, pick up your paycheck, pick up your children, pay bills, everything," said Gordon. "It is a small taste of what people have to go through everyday." Gordon assumed the role of a 14-year-old boy in a family with a 7-year-old sister with ADHD and asthma and a baby brother. Their father had to balance getting them to and from school, going to work, and paying bills on a limited income. "We came close to getting evicted because the mortgage on our house was not through a bank," she said. "When 'Dad' went to pay the note at the mortgage company, he forgot to get a receipt. When told the mortgage was past due, he had to pay again because he had no receipt." At the end of the day, all participants come together to discuss their experiences. It is an intense, eye-opening experience, said Gordon.

'God put me here'

Templeton said she believes that sometimes people placed in our paths are messengers of God--angels in disguise. When confronted with her own limitations or encountering someone who needs help beyond her resources, she says a prayer:

"God, this is your child and I care and so if there is something I can do, then help open that door for me. But at this point I am entrusting this person to your care. Bring the right person into this man's life so that hopefully he can have a different kind of life if that is what you want."

- By Kathy L. Gilbert, United Methodist News Service (UMNS); Nashville {625}; Dec. 18, 2007.

+ ***Congress on Evangelism Draws More than 700 in Savannah*** With the Charles Wesley hymn "Spirit of Faith Come Down" providing the theme, the 2008 Congress on Evangelism brought together more than 700 United Methodists to share their passion and strategies for spreading the gospel. The congress is a place where "we can come and use the 'E' word without being ashamed or looking over our shoulders," said Bishop James Swanson, resident bishop of the Holston Annual Conference, during the opening worship service.

The January 2-5 event was held on Hutchinson Island in honor of the 300th anniversary of Wesley's birth. Both Charles Wesley and his brother, Methodism founder John Wesley, came from England to southeast Georgia and landed February 6, 1736, on Cockspur Island, just downriver from Hutchinson Island. "We United Methodists are here at the birthplace of the Wesleys' work in the new land ... the Colony of Georgia," wrote the Rev. David Kerr, president of the Congress, in a message to those attending.

The congress, held each January, is sponsored by the Council on Evangelism and the United Methodist Board of Discipleship with the support of the Foundation for Evangelism. This year's three-day event was filled with preaching, workshops and, of course, the hymns of Charles Wesley Bishop Swanson said the 40-year decline in membership in the

United Methodist Church has “happened on our watch,” and that reversing that trend will require the power of the Holy Spirit. “We cannot do this on our own power or with our own strength. We forgot it is not about what we possess; it’s about what possesses us,” he said. The bishop also did a well-attended workshop on “Preaching for Conversion.”

The National Association of United Methodist Evangelists presented the “Philip Award,” named in honor of the evangelist Philip in Acts, to the Rev. William Bouknight and the Rev. Bob Nelson for their outstanding leadership in evangelism.

For the full UMNS article by the Rev. Jim Nelson, editor of the Wesleyan Christian Advocate, go to:

<http://www.umc.org/site/apps/nl/content3.asp?c=IwL4KnN1LtH&b=2433457&ct=4918849&printmode=1>

- *Good News Perspective* – No. 11, January 14, 2008; e-mail newsletter.

Of Interest

+ *Southeastern Jurisdiction tackles diversity issues*

[Note: One wonders where there is the clear message of winning people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. If this were a central focus and we concentrated on serving Him, many of these other problems would disappear. - AOM]

Lake Junaluska, N.C. Leaders of the United Methodist Southeastern Jurisdiction addressed the challenge of churches that struggle with inclusiveness during a conference aimed at bringing varied ethnic groups from diversity into community. A sense of urgency marked the "Embracing God's Diversity" convocation Dec. 13-15 at the United Methodist retreat center in Lake Junaluska. Organizers hoped to turn years of talk into action, and for the Southeast to take on a leadership role throughout the denomination. "Across the SEJ, we're tired of talking about a more diverse and inclusive church," said the Rev. Carl Arrington, the region's director of African-American Ministries and a conference organizer. "We want people of all backgrounds to know they are welcome in The United Methodist Church as equal children of God."

Strong showing

About 350 people participated, including almost every bishop in the region and cabinet members from each conference. Some attributed the high attendance to the bishops' strong support. "SEJ bishops want to lead this struggle to become a community, and some of us have done some arm-twisting to get many people here who would not normally come to this kind of event," said Bishop James Swanson of the Holston Annual (regional) Conference. "We're concerned that diversity hasn't come, and where it has come, community hasn't come."

Suanne Ware-Diaz, an associate executive of the United Methodist Commission on Religion and Race, spoke directly to whites in attendance. "We know that we're 92 percent white in The United Methodist Church, so we can't go forward in a ministry of reconciliation without your support," she said. Woodie White, bishop in residence at Candler School of Theology in Atlanta and former bishop of the Indianapolis Area, said he believed there had "never been a gathering as racially or ethnically inclusive" at Lake Junaluska.

Attendees broke into small groups that were racially and geographically diverse. Listening skills were strongly emphasized as the groups grappled with questions related to inclusiveness and welcoming. "People will change when we get to a place when we open ourselves up to understanding who (our neighbors) are," said Herb Walters of Rural Southern Voice for Peace, a Burnsville, N.C.-based conflict resolution organization. As an example, Walters said his group has connected with conservative evangelical church members in the area who share a "love for these mountains and want to take better care of God's creation." Walters encouraged participants to conduct similar listening sessions in their local churches and communities. "We need some rednecks in these groups," Walters joked. "We want them all. But the people we need to reach don't come. Words like 'multiculturalism' and 'diversity' scare those people away."

Breaking down barriers

In a sermon, White reminded participants that the church came into being in diversity. "How did we miss it (in Acts 2)?," White asked. "The context is utterly diverse, multilingual, multicultural, multiethnic. ... God said 'this is the setting. ... This is how I want it to be.' In the midst of that diversity something happened. The Holy Spirit came among them and broke down the barriers. "Heaven will be integrated," White continued. "I know hell will be integrated. This (earthly life) is a trial run. ... If you can't get it together here, you'll be miserable in eternity--whichever way you go." Representatives of several ministries spoke of their experiences. The Rev. Sylvia Collins, a Native American pastor in the Rockingham district of the North Carolina Conference, said she realized early she could answer a call to ministry in The United Methodist Church. "The Lord brought me out of the tobacco fields and planted me in a place that is rich with love," she said. "At Sunday morning worship I see every pew filled and every pew diverse because of what we believe," said the Rev. Laura Early in celebrating her congregation. All God's Children United Methodist Church, a new start near Ahoskie, N.C., has an equal black and white membership.

Silvia Peterson, director of Centre Latino in Mitchell County in western North Carolina, said Hispanics will continue to come to the United States despite immigration crackdowns because "we all have a dream when we come to this country that this is a land of endless possibilities." She added that she wishes "we will all listen to the words we say in church and try harder to live out what they mean."

Swanson said he probably won't see racial equality achieved in his lifetime. "But because I'm a person of hope, even if I won't get there, it's no excuse (not) to try and make it happen. We are a people who believe in transformation. ... When people say that we're fighting a losing battle, tell them they have no choice because we are children of Christ."

- By Neill Caldwell, *UMNS*; Nashville, Tenn. {627}; Dec. 19, 2007. Caldwell is editor of *The Virginia UM Advocate*.

+ ***By the Numbers***

In the 75th edition of the Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches, published in March by the National Council of Churches and Abingdon Press, the UMC ranked third in total U.S. membership, following the Roman Catholic Church and the Southern Baptist Convention.

In the April report, "This Is Our Story," by the General Council on Finance and Administration, U.S. membership in the UMC had dropped more than 19% from 1974 to 2005, with 41% of U.S. churches reporting no new members by profession of faith or restoration. The report indicated that in 2005 giving adjusted for inflation increased for the fifteenth consecutive year.

The General Commission on Status and Role of Women (GCSRW) reported that women make up 58% of the membership of the UMC. Also noted was that women make up two thirds of the staff of the general agencies, around half of the executives. Active clergywomen with ten years of service generally have a lower salary (\$45,930) than active clergymen (\$52,338) with the same amount of service.

- *UMNewscope*, January 11, 2008.

+ ***UMs Consider New Northeastern Boundaries***

When delegates to the Northeastern Jurisdiction of the UMC meet next July, they could decide to merge two episcopal areas, folding four conferences into one. The new episcopal area and its one conference essentially would replace two current episcopal areas—New York West and Albany—and reduce the number of bishops in the jurisdiction from ten to nine. The proposed date for the change is in 2010. The jurisdictional boundaries committee is expected to consider the proposal when it meets in February.

[This comes as no surprise. Since the people in the Northeastern Jurisdiction tend to espouse a theologically liberal outlook, they don't tend to win many people to Christ. Hence, they decline. This will continue until we as a church are fully focused on the Lord Jesus Christ and serving Him with our whole hearts. - AOM]

- *UMNewscope*, November 23, 2007.

(UM) 2008 General Conference.

+ ***SoulForce Plans "Direct Action" at 2008 General Conference***

The Soulforce United Methodist Planning Team released a statement announcing a planned direct action at the 2008 United Methodist General Conference in Fort Worth, Texas, on April 26-27. Signers of the statement include co-chairs Steven Webster and Dotti Berry, as well as Reverends Gil Caldwell and Phil Lawson. Soulforce was launched nearly ten years ago by Mel White and Gary Nixon. The two believed they were laying the groundwork for a new social movement. Drawing upon the teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi, they began to organize lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) activists to study the principles of nonviolent direct action.

In the statement released January 11, the planning team said, "For almost forty years, the United Methodist Church has struggled with fundamental issues of fairness and inclusion, including same-sex unions, LGBT clergy, and the status of LGBT lay members. In 2006, the Judicial Council of the United Methodist Church—led by Surgeon General nominee James Holsinger—issued Decision 1032, which granted sole authority to local pastors to deny church membership to gay men and lesbians and made a mockery of the official slogan of the United Methodist Church: 'Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors.'"

For eight General Conferences now, United Methodists have engaged in prayerful and respectful Christian conferencing. It is the position of Soulforce and its United Methodist constituents that our denomination's position reflects "bigotry" and misinformation about LGBT people. With our bishops all talking about and hoping that Christian conferencing will be the norm for the upcoming General Conference, one wonders how they will lead the church in light of Soulforce's planned "direct event." One 30-minute demonstration before 1,000 delegates on the floor of General Conference costs the church 500 delegate-hours of work.

- *Good News Perspective* – No. 11, January 14, 2008; e-mail newsletter.

+ **Global Gathering Discusses Increased General Conference Costs**

General Conference is becoming costlier to hold and falling more in the red, partially due to the growing number of international delegates. The event's 2008 gathering next spring in Fort Worth is projected to cost \$6.6 million, up from the \$5.3 million price tag of the 2004 Pittsburgh assembly, even though its length has dropped from 12 to ten days. A business report on the gathering was presented during the Nov. 12-13 meeting of the Commission on the General Conference, the convention's planning commission.

Part of the increase is attributed to the growing number of international delegates as the U.S.-headquartered denomination swells its membership rolls in Africa and the Philippines. Since 1996, the number of international delegates has risen from 14% to 29% for the Fort Worth convention and is projected to hit 40% in 2012, said the Rev. Alan J. Morrison, the commission's business manager from the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA).

In addition, cities are not giving convention planners the competitive rates offered just after the Sept. 11 terrorists' attacks of 2001, when convention business decreased. Morrison said denominational leaders did not authorize enough money to cover the entire cost of the 2008 gathering, with potential losses reaching \$1.3 million. The 2008 General Conference may include a \$750,000 loss, but the proposed budget for the Tampa convention includes \$870,000 to pay down the shortfall.

Meanwhile, commissioners are considering ways to cut General Conference costs. One petition submitted to the 2008 assembly would limit the number of delegates to between 500 and 600, rather than the current 1,000, at a savings of about \$1.5 million. The commission saved \$250,000 by cutting the length of the 2008 General Conference by almost two days, said Wilson, superintendent in the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Annual Conference in Oklahoma City. The commission also has considered holding General Conference every six years rather than the current four, and meeting during the summers on college campuses where delegates would stay in dormitories rather than hotels. - Steve Smith (UMNS)

- *UMNewscope*, November 23, 2007.

(UM) General Council on Finance and Administration. United Methodist finance leader plans to retire early

The chief executive of the finance agency for The United Methodist Church will retire Dec. 31 instead of next June as earlier planned. Sandra K. Lackore, who is on leave to care for her husband as he battles leukemia, has headed the General Council on Finance and Administration since 1996. "In the months that Cecil has been ill, it has become abundantly clear to me that I must give my full attention to him," Lackore said.

The council coordinates and administers finances for the 13.5 million-member worldwide church and also safeguards the legal interests and rights of the denomination. Lackore, 63, announced in September she would retire next June 30 and close out a tenure that includes consolidating the agency from three geographically separate offices to one central location, establishing a foundation to endow churchwide ministries and establishing a denominational insurance company.

- Marta Aldrich, *UMNS; Nashville, Tenn. {622}; Dec. 17, 2007*

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"A man always has two reasons for doing anything: a good reason and the real reason. Let us be like the man of the frontier and always reveal with utmost honesty our real reasons for all that we do." - J.P. Morgan

Global Outlook

"In reality there is perhaps no one of our natural Passions so hard to subdue as Pride. Disguise it, struggle with it, beat it down, stifle it, mortify it as much as one pleases, it is still alive, and will now and then peek out and show itself."

- Benjamin Franklin

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Africa. African bishops focus on poverty at historic meeting

MUTARE, Zimbabwe - United Methodist bishops in Africa ended their first continental meeting with a renewed resolve to work together strategically to fight poverty in Africa. The three-day African Bishops Roundtable brought together 12 active and retired bishops to the campus of Africa University in Mutare. The bishops, representing congregations from west, east, central and southern Africa, developed strategies against poverty and committed to make United Methodist-related Africa University a partner in their efforts. The Sept. 10-13 roundtable was the first gathering of its kind for the denomination's African bishops, who lead 3.2 million United Methodists and 1 million preparatory church members. The bishops had wanted to meet as a group similar to the way their U.S. counterparts meet as a college of bishops within each of the five U.S. jurisdictions. Previously, the only times the African bishops have met has been at the spring and fall meetings of the denomination-wide Council of Bishops.

Africa University proposed the roundtable event, which was organized with the support of the Council of Bishops, the General Council on Finance and Administration and the denominational Episcopal Fund. The bishops said such periodic gatherings allow them to share experiences, reflect on the challenges and joys of their ministries, and plan together approaches to a myriad of issues confronting church and society in Africa. "As we go through our struggles, God is sharpening our tools so that we can be instruments of change," said East Africa Bishop Daniel Wandabula. "Sharing and listening to my fellow bishops, I believe that the kingdom can come. We cannot separate the spiritual and the physical ... to be the church; we should not shy away from the problems we face."

Education and quality of life

The bishops explored how issues of health, food security, governance and education intersect with poverty to negatively impact the quality of life of people in their congregations and communities. They agreed that a poor quality of life leads many Africans to migrate to Europe, North America and elsewhere, which hurts development efforts in Africa. "(People) aren't able to live in their own communities and localities and so they move away to other countries in an effort to find a better place and life," said Nigeria's Bishop Kefas Kane Mavula. "We have to convince people that moving away is not the solution. ... We have to make sacrifices, remain in our situations and try as much as possible to do what we can to improve those situations."

Saying education is a key to fighting poverty, the bishops committed to partner with Africa University in efforts to increase skills, nurture responsible leadership and help to change unconstructive mindsets. They need the university to train professionals, but limited resources make it difficult for young people to receive higher education.

Role of Africa University

The bishops view Africa University as a primary source of educators, managers and administrators to implement training programs and nurture new development projects in various countries.

Because the bishops want country-specific programs, they are taking a more active role in finding resources to pay for scholarships for students going to Africa University from their countries and conferences. They agreed to take a proposal for scholarship support for the university to the Nov. 4-8 meeting of the Council of Bishops. The proposal, dubbed "Hope for African Students," seeks support to enroll four students a year at Africa University from each episcopal area in Africa.

The United Methodist-related school has 1,300 students from 26 African countries and more than 2,000 alumni - pastors, teachers, agriculturalists, public health workers, business professionals and others - at work across sub-Saharan Africa. It offers undergraduate and graduate programs in six faculties and an institute.

The African bishops hope the Council of Bishops will help make the African Bishops Roundtable an annual gathering on the Africa University campus. "Let us not wait for heroes; let us be the heroes. Let us not wait for disciples; let us be the disciples and let us transform our reality," said West Angolan Bishop Gaspar Domingos.

- *By Andra Stevens, UMNS; Nashville, Tenn.; {492}; Oct. 5, 2007.*

Zimbabwe. United Methodists increase support in South Africa

[Note: It is no wonder that there is food shortage in Zimbabwe, the former Rhodesia. When the native people were fighting for their independence and were granted it by international pressure on the White-ruled government, there were two candidates for President: Robert Mugabe, a known Marxist, and Methodist Bishop Abel Muzorewa, who is a Christian. Our denomination and both the National & World Council of Churches supported Mugabe, who won. Since then, our outside sources have informed us of the poverty and Mugabe's campaign to drive out or kill the White farmers, who raise the food in that country. While this hunger is a problem, we need to accept our church leader's misguided decision-making in their choice of whom they supported. We need to ask why they made the choice they did - AOM]

STAMFORD, Conn. - The United Methodist Church is increasing support for a ministry that assists Zimbabweans who flee into South Africa to escape food shortages and economic chaos at home. Directors of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, meeting in Stamford, launched an appeal for funds by contributing \$2,388 at the conclusion of a "poverty banquet." Those contributions and a new grant by the denomination's relief unit will assist the Ray of Hope program at Central Methodist Church and Mission in Johannesburg. The United Methodist Committee on Relief announced an allocation of \$50,000 to Central Church. It earlier sent \$25,000 to the ministry.

The new grant will help the mission increase services to the homeless, pay utility bills and improve sanitation facilities. Hundreds of homeless people crowd the church building every night. Come evening, the church literally overflows with people sleeping on every available space. "I can think of no group of people today who are poorer, hungrier or more in

need of help than the refugees finding their way from Zimbabwe to Central Church," said the Rev. Sam Dixon, UMCOR's chief executive. "We cannot sit back and do nothing as this situation continues to grow worse."

- By Elliott Wright, UMNS, New York; #502; Oct. 11, 2007.

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"When a citizen gives his vote to a man of known immorality, he abuses his civic responsibility; he sacrifices not only his interest, but that of his neighbor; he betrays the interest of his country."

- Noah Webster, 1823 (*Wrote Webster's Dictionary*)