

The Monthly Update

November 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This edition of our “Monthly Update” continues with information on the issues affecting our United Methodist Church and our world as a whole. One thing that is different, however, is that a few of the articles that were summarized in this edition of the “Monthly Update” are available for reading in their entirety at the CM website: <http://cmpage.org>. There was so much information we had wanted to provide that we did not have room in the body of the Update itself, but we did want you to be apprised of these happenings.

November is the month we associate with Thanksgiving Day – a joyous time celebrated in the United States, Canada and several other countries. Thanksgiving Day commemorates the feast originally held by the Pilgrim colonists and members of the Wampanoag people at Plymouth in 1621. On this day people express gratitude to God for His blessings and give thanks to family and friends for their love and support. Various Thanksgiving Day traditions have come into our lives through the years.

It is the time of the year set aside in which we especially have a sense of gratitude for all the good things in life – or at least we should have. We celebrate with a meal complete with the traditional stuffed turkey complete with dressing, gravy, pie, cranberry sauce, corn, greens, and whatever else your imagination (or your chef’s) might dream up. Along with the other traditions that have devolved is the Thanksgiving Day parade which probably started during the Civil War. The full-dress parade is a way to display our country’s military strength and discipline. During modern times with the advent of television, Thanksgiving has come to mean football games as well. Growing up as a boy in Texas, this meant the annual grudge match between arch-rivals Texas A & M University and the University of Texas. Of course, the teams are highly dependent on where you live.

Regardless of the customs and traditions celebrated, Thanksgiving symbolizes what should be for us an attitude for every day of the year – gratitude for all of the good things we have been provided by an unbelievably kind and loving God.

On a more sober note, please pray that our troops will be safe from harm. Also, in the midst of our joy at this time of the season, please join me and thousands of others in praying (and fasting) for what may be the most important presidential elections in our country’s history. May God bless America and continue to keep her strong and free.

Finally, speaking of thanksgiving, we are so thankful for you who, with your prayers and financial support, stand with us in our ministry of “contending for the faith.” Without you we would not be able to do what God has called us to.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

November 2008 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

People get the government they deserve.

– Thomas Jefferson's

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Correction In the last issue of the "Update" we had printed an article about The Reverend Billy Graham leading a group of crusaders into the "Old French Quarter" of New Orleans in an evangelistic parade that started a revival on Bourbon Street. This aspect of the article is not true. There was an event in New Orleans in March 2006 that was conducted to try to help the area recover "physically and spiritually from Hurricane Katrina" but this did not translate into the aforementioned event. We sincerely regret this error and wish to correct it. We also extend our heartfelt thanks to the Christian brother in Georgia who brought this to our attention. – Allen O. Morris

The Good Stuff

+ ***"We Would Rather Do Business with 1000 Al-Qaida Terrorists than with One Single American Soldier!"***

Sign in a Philadelphia Store Window

This sign was prominently displayed in the window of a business in Philadelphia. You are probably outraged at the thought of such an inflammatory statement. However, we are a society which holds Freedom of Speech as perhaps our greatest liberty. And after all, it is just a sign.

You may ask what kind of business would dare post such a sign.

The Answer: A Funeral Home

+ ***Your new Christmas button: "It's OK to say Merry Christmas"***

Help preserve our tradition of saying "Merry Christmas" by sponsoring Project Merry Christmas in your church.

It's hard to believe that there are companies and individuals who want to ban "Merry Christmas" and replace it with "Holiday Greetings" because, they say, they don't want to offend anyone. Christians can take a stand and proclaim to our communities that Christmas is not just a winter holiday focused on materialism, but a "holy day" when we celebrate the birth of our Savior. We can do it in a gentle and effective way by wearing the "It's OK to say Merry Christmas" button.

You can help preserve our tradition of greeting others with a "Merry Christmas" by taking a vital leadership role in the American Family Association's (AFA's) "Project Merry Christmas." Here's how. AFA is making available an attractive button and Glossy Sticker that carry on our tradition of saying "It's OK to say Merry Christmas." Purchase enough buttons for each member of your church and enough Glossy Stickers for each family to have one to go on their automobile. Urge your fellow members to wear their buttons and display the Glossy Stickers during the entire Christmas season. If you are unable to sponsor your church yourself, ask your Sunday School class to make it a class project. You can even order buttons and Glossy Stickers to share with co-workers, children in Christian schools, customers, etc.

Some might think simply wearing a button or displaying a Glossy Sticker is a small thing, but God can use small things to make a big point, and to create opportunities to share the Good News. And what a great time to do that at Christmas! AFA is asking individuals like you in thousands of communities across the nation to head up this project in their local churches. Your willingness to underwrite the cost for your church and enthusiastically promote this project is the key to making an impact in your area.

Contact information is: The American Family Association, P. O. Drawer 2440, Tupelo, MS 38803. Tel.: 1-662-844-5036

– Donald E. Wildmon, Chairman, American Family Association

Of Interest

+ ***U.S. Religious Leaders Invite Iranian Dictator to Dinner***

Washington, DC—Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has been invited to a dinner put on by American religious leaders during his visit to the United Nations, scheduled for September 25. The event is touted as a dialogue by the Mennonite Central Committee, World Council of Churches, and the Quaker group American Friends Service Committee. Representatives of the Episcopal Church and other mainline denominations plan to attend the dinner. Representatives of the churches previously visited Iran in February of 2007 and hosted a similar event for Ahmadinejad with the National Council of Churches in September of 2007 at the United Methodist Womens' Building in New York.

UM Action Executive Director Mark Tooley commented, "These confused prelates will undoubtedly minimize, if not ignore, the evils of the Iranian police state theocracy that brutalizes all who do not share its particular brand of Shiite

Islam. They are more worried about what the U.S. might do to Iran than what Iran's deranged president, filled with apocalyptic dreams of destroying the U.S. and Israel, might do to the world. "The problem is not only the personality of one man, rather than the consistent policies of a 28 year old repressively theocratic regime. Iran has been censured by almost the entire international community through the United Nations. It will be interesting to see if the religious leaders confront Ahmadinejad on his Holocaust denials and nuclear ambitions, or merely 'engage' him with pleasantries and anti-American rhetoric.

"Hopefully the dinner organizers will confront Iran's threats to wipe out Israel. In the past, these church leaders have said nothing about the religious freedom of Christians and other religious minorities in Iran. Indeed, there has been no professed concern about human rights in Iran. The Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD) challenges the leaders to speak up for religious freedom of Iranian Christians and for all people in Iran, since the Iranians themselves are not free to speak plainly."

– Press release by Jeff Walton, The Institute on Religion and Democracy; September 18, 2008; jwalton@TheIRD.org.

+ *Divided Methodists*

[Note: This reflects what we had observed and our perspective. This is a well-thought-out analysis. – AOM]

At its major conference in May, a major American organization voted to approve resolutions that: call convicted Puerto Rican terrorists "political prisoners" and demand their release from prison; support activist efforts to offer "sanctuary" to illegal immigrants; accuse the U.S. of "pursu[ing] a global economic agenda that is of, by, and for transnational corporations"; "support progressive income taxes"; demand an end to U.S. military aid to Israel. This was not a gathering of MoveOn.org or the Young Democratic Socialists of America. Rather, these were just some of the political resolutions adopted at the United Methodist Church's April 23-May 2 General Conference, the denomination's top governing body.

As America's second-largest Protestant denomination, United Methodism is no liberal church at the grassroots level. The wide range of its membership includes President George W. Bush, Senator Hillary Clinton, Vice President Dick Cheney, and former Senator John Edwards. In fact, if anything, United Methodists lean somewhat to the right. According to a study by one of the denomination's own agencies, three-fourths of United Methodist congregations in this country are located in "red" counties whose voters that supported President Bush's re-election.

According to a study by the Pew Research Center, white mainline Protestants (whose largest sub-category by far is the overwhelmingly white membership of the United Methodist Church) who attend church weekly favored Republicans in the 2006 Congressional elections by a 59-38 percent margin. Other surveys have shown large portions of United Methodists and other mainline Protestants strongly opposing their churches weighing in on political matters at all (regardless of whether the positions taken were liberal or conservative).

So why this great disconnect between the denomination's governing leadership and its grassroots membership?

FIRST OF ALL, the elected clergy and lay General Conference delegates are not a very representative sample of the people in local United Methodist congregations. The very nature of the General Conference, with the fourteen-hour days over the course of nearly two weeks and the library's worth of materials delegates are expected to read beforehand, tends to particularly attract the minority of members who want the church's primary function to be offering a "prophetic voice for social justice." At the same time, with some notable exceptions, most United Methodists with successful careers in government, business, or the military—who would bring a greater appreciation for political realism, free markets, and Christian "just war" teachings—simply do not have the available time needed to serve as delegates.

Conservative and moderate United Methodists would generally rather spend their annual vacation time relaxing with their families, or perhaps even serving on a short-term missions trip, than going to an exhausting two-week church conference to argue at length about complex and divisive political issues on which fellow delegates have little expertise.

There are also problems with the process of the denomination's General Conference. The vast majority of the hundreds of political resolutions (as well as proposed statements and structural changes more directly related to church work) are not individually considered by the full body of about 1,000 delegates.

Rather, all petitions (the rough equivalent of proposed bills in Congress) are first considered by smaller committees and sub-committees of delegates, with the most liberal delegates disproportionately represented in the bodies dealing only with political statements.

As an observer at this General Conference as well as the previous one (in 2004), I saw how in the majority of cases, the recommendations of these small groups (sometimes with as few as four people) on proposed political statements more or less automatically become the position of the General Conference and thus of the entire denomination.

ALL OF THE ABOVE factors work to the advantage of the denomination's liberal-dominated official agencies, which submit most of the political-themed resolutions adopted and quite openly lobby delegates before and during the conference to rubber-stamp the preferred party line. One of the clearest demonstrations of the fact that the overwhelmed delegates have often not even read many of the petitions was this General Conference's overwhelming endorsement of a statement-at the behest of the denomination's powerful Women's Division-that at one point calls for participation in a conference in the year 2001!

Of course, this devotion to stridently left-wing politics is nothing new for the hierarchy of United Methodism. Under such influences as the Social Gospel movement and theological liberalism, many leaders in American Methodism and other "mainline" Protestant denominations in the early 20th century, rejected-or at least questioned the importance of-traditional Christian doctrine on such key religious matters as the authority of the Bible and the divinity of Christ, while seeking to redefine the church's primary mission into promoting political transformation of society. The radicalization of mainline Protestant institutions was further accelerated by the social upheavals of the '60s and '70s. (One United Methodist pastor friend of that generation recently told me about receiving academic credit in seminary for participation in protest marches.)

But while many conservative United Methodists have left for greener denominational pastures, many others are staying in and working to take their church back from its decades of liberal dominance. Powerful demographic factors appear to bode well for the prospects of a successful turnaround of United Methodism. The denomination has much stronger historical ties and a much stronger modern presence than other mainline Protestant denominations in culturally conservative Southern and rural parts of the country. Generally speaking, the denomination's more liberal-dominated areas are losing members (and thus influence within the denomination) more rapidly than other portions of the denomination.

It is not terribly surprising that liberal churches would have trouble growing when they downplay the importance of evangelism, or that they would struggle to even maintain their membership when they offer no greater answer to people's deepest spiritual longings than opportunities to sign eco-feminism manifestos or listen to stale platitudes about "peace and justice" (invariably defined as reflexive endorsement of the secular Left's political priorities of the day).

Perhaps most significantly, while the U.S.-based denomination continues to shrink in this country, it is growing rapidly in Africa. Now constituting one-third of the denomination's membership, African members are passionate about evangelism and excited about the church working to directly provide for pressing human needs. The Africans tend to have little patience for the theological and biblical revisionism of much of the U.S. United Methodist establishment and little use for barely read, hastily adopted, and quickly forgotten pronouncements by leftist church officials on domestic U.S. political concerns.

AT THIS GENERAL CONFERENCE, the church's liberal activist wing failed to demonstrate the firm control one would expect from decades of dominance. One of their top priorities, for the church to pursue "divestment" against Israel, was overwhelmingly rejected.

While the denomination's official position on abortion has been pro-choice since 1972, it has been inching in a more pro-life direction since. This General Conference overwhelmingly adopted statements (over opposition from liberal leaders) that describe abortion as "violent," oppose abortions chosen for "trivial reasons," and that "affirm and encourage the Church to assist the ministry of crisis pregnancy centers and pregnancy resource centers that compassionately help women find feasible alternatives to abortion."

And on the most prominent point of conservative-liberal struggle, the General Conference decisively voted to maintain its statement that homosexual practice is "inconsistent with Christian teaching" and the related prohibitions on same-sex union ceremonies and the ordination of "self-avowed, practicing homosexuals."

While few within or without the United Methodist Church would be aware of them, the radical political resolutions adopted at this General Conference are not particularly new phenomena. The concerted efforts by conservative and moderate U.S. members with the denomination's growing African constituency *are* relatively new and only likely to intensify in the future.

– Article by John Lomperis published in *The American Spectator*, June 2, 2008. John Lomperis is a research associate for the [Institute on Religion and Democracy](#).

+ *United Methodists plan campaign to 'rethink church'*

[Note: If this were to work, it would be good – but it is applying an organizational and activity “fix” to what is fundamentally a spiritual problem that is at the core of our denomination. – AOM]

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (UMNS)-What if church wasn't just a place where people spend an hour on Sundays? What if there wasn't just one door into the church but 10,000? And what if we began thinking about "church" as a verb instead of a noun? The United Methodist Church is going to pose those questions and others when it rolls out a new media campaign in 2009 aimed at getting people to "Rethink Church." The awareness campaign's launch will coincide with World Malaria Day, April 25. "In the next few years, we will seek to encourage a global spiritual dialogue," said the Rev. Larry Hollon, top staff executive of United Methodist Communications. "It will ask us to rethink church. We will ask, 'What if church were a verb and not a noun?'" Hollon and his staff presented the "Rethink Church" awareness campaign to the agency's commission during a Sept. 25-27 meeting in Nashville. The Commission on Communication oversees United Methodist Communications, which is directing the campaign. "What we're going to try and get across is the idea that 'church' doesn't just happen on Sundays, and 'church' isn't just a building," said Kerry Graham, president of Nashville-based Bohan Advertising/Marketing, which developed the "Rethink Church" campaign.

Attracting more people

The campaign is designed to redefine church as a 365-days-a-year experience where people seeking a church community can become involved at various levels - many of them non-traditional - such as volunteering with groups outside the church building and even through making online connections. Graham suggests that the church population, institution and hierarchy will need to understand and embrace the idea that it is OK for "church" to start out as day care, a youth-group ski trip, a men's basketball league or something that solves a secular need, such as Habitat for Humanity. "Whatever entry point is comfortable for someone who may find the idea of entering church daunting, an act of courage or a moment of high vulnerability - that's what church needs to be," he said.

United Methodists are working to bring three generations into the life of the church: baby boomers, post-moderns (also known as Gen X) and millennials (Mosaic or Gen Y). The target audience for the new focus will be 18- to 34-year-olds. With issues related to church relevance, negative impressions of Christians and opportunities for involving young people, these generations have been difficult to engage in mainline church involvement. Church officials expect the campaign to have a positive impact with other age groups as well. Hollon told commissioners that the church's mission statement, to "make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world," is the foundation for United Methodist Communications' work. He also noted that the new campaign will use language that resonates with the life concerns of people who aren't familiar with the church.

Competing for 'mind space'

Rethinking church and denominational marketing calls for an ability to tell the church's stories in "many, many different ways, through many media and with different audiences," Hollon told commission members. Although traditional marketing expressions such as television commercials, magazine advertisements and billboards will anchor the campaign, the "Rethink Church" message also will be delivered in other ways. Cutting-edge communication tools will include everything from United Methodist iTunes and text messaging to YouTube Methodist channels and bumper stickers. The question for campaign architects becomes, "How do we communicate faith in a complex, media-saturated world?"

"We face a multiplicity of media and competition for 'mind space,'" Hollon said. "We are living through changes in lifestyle and values in post-modern, post-Christian culture - changes that are continuous and require adaptation and the ability to turn on a dime."

"Rethink Church" will serve as a creative addendum to the campaign "Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors." The church has carried out the campaign on television, radio, billboards and other media for the past eight years.

General Conference, the legislative assembly of The United Methodist Church, approved approximately \$20 million in funding for United Methodist Communications for advertising and media campaign work for the next four years. The "Rethink Church" campaign's cost is not yet known, and some funding for it may come from other United Methodist Communications funds.

Challenging the church

The Commission on Communication was "very enthusiastic" about the general concept for "Rethink Church," said Bishop Sally Dyck, commission president, in a telephone interview after the meeting. The bishop, who leads The United Methodist Church's Minnesota Area, has supported since its inception the campaign for "Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors." She likes the fact that it offers churches training in radical hospitality, which is important to revitalizing congregations and starting new ones, she said. The campaign needs to continue, she said. "Rethink Church, I think, really bumps it up to another level, and it's actually a level that I have wanted our denomination to work on," Dyck said. "...Rethink Church is going to challenge every local church to think about what the meaning and purpose of church is." A

lot of churches define their meaning and purpose in terms of fellowship and have "sacrificed evangelism on the altar of fellowship," she said.

"Rethink Church" will also challenge members to think about how they live out church every day, in all aspects of life. "It really goes from just receiving the gospel in kind of a passive way to ...living that gospel out in the world," the bishop said. "It's a challenge to not only believe but to act and to live." The campaign will have a "wonderful challenge and opportunity for the existing church," but it will also invite people who have been disappointed with the church or even hurt by it to rethink and reconsider what church is really about, she said.

Raising awareness

As the campaign is developed, United Methodist Communications will be seeking comments on the concept from other leaders around the church, including bishops, general agency executives, pastors and theologians. "Rethink Church" is envisioned as more than just a media campaign or awareness campaign, developers say. The goal is for it to become a movement, with results measured in terms of lives touched and transformed, according to United Methodist Communications staff. Those measures are being developed, but traffic on a future Web site for the campaign will be one indicator.

"When we started 'Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors,' The United Methodist Church was indistinguishable from most other mainline denominations," Hollon told the commissioners. "In fact, someone called us a 'generic' denomination." The original campaign, launched in September 2001, raised U.S. awareness of the church from 14 percent to 30 percent, according to Hollon. He said 96 percent of those surveyed by Gallup last March now have a positive or neutral view of The United Methodist Church.

The national search for a new advertising agency of record began in late 2007. United Methodist Communications received about a dozen proposals from agencies across the United States and narrowed the contenders to four. "The Bohan Agency was far away better prepared and better versed in what we are trying to accomplish than any of the others," Hollon said. "They took what we had and built on the last eight years to take us to a whole different place."

– By Susan Passi-Klaus, United Methodist News Service (UMNS); {#405}; Oct. 2, 2008.

Passi-Klaus is the marketing associate with United Methodist Communications.

+ Got a Methodist question? Go to Archives and History

What is a circuit-rider? If you don't know, you can find the answer at www.gcah.org. Just click on the "UMC History" link.

MADISON, N.J. The United Methodist Commission on Archives and History is beefing up its Web site-not only to help answer random queries, but also to provide quicker access of the denomination's historical information to scholars, church bodies and the person in the pew. "We claim that it's probably the richest collection for research on global Methodism in the world," said the Rev. Robert Williams, who became the commission's chief executive in 2006.

Located for 26 years on the bucolic campus of Drew University in New Jersey, the Commission on Archives and History oversees denominational treasures in its 16,000-square-foot space. Upstairs, a reading room with wireless Internet access offers materials for scholars and other interested readers to peruse. Downstairs, on two underground stories, are roughly two miles' worth of records, most of which can be accessed within 10 or 15 minutes through the database.

The collection is not all paper and celluloid. Numerous ceramic busts of Methodism founder John Wesley-the type of which used to adorn mantelpieces in British Methodist homes-can be found, along with Wesley's death mask and reproductions of a teapot made for him by the Wedgewoods.

To Williams and the staff at Archives and History, it's all about reclaiming the denomination's past to point it toward the future. "We just don't do history for nostalgia's sake," he said, going on to quote Albert Outler, the 20th-century United Methodist theologian: "Nostalgia is mortgaging the future for the sake of the past."

Research requests

During the past year, the commission received more than 1,000 research requests and hosted 64 registered users of the archives, including 34 "long-term" researchers who stayed for three or more days or traveled a long distance to be there. Information seekers range from high school students to senior scholars, according to L. Dale Patterson, the archivist-records administrator. While the number of e-mail inquiries is increasing rapidly, "we still get a lot of phone calls," he said.

- Want to know how to preserve old photos and documents? Archives has some tips that Patterson calls "nonprofit affordable." Church members also can learn how to preserve fragile items, record oral histories and build a homemade humidifier through the archival leaflet series.
- Taking a vacation? Must-see places are listed in "A Traveler's Guide to the Heritage Landmarks of the United Methodist Church."
- Interested in listening to history in the making? Archives now has digitized versions of 80 one-hour shows from a 1960s radio program called "Night Call"-one of the first talk radio programs. More than 600 programs can be found in the United Methodist audio archives at <http://audio.umc.org>.
- Looking for a photo? An extensive collection includes a quarter million images of mission work dating from 1890 to 1925.

How to preserve

Queries from local congregations often fall into two broad categories, according to Patterson. "For the local church, one of our most frequently asked questions is what type of records does a local church need to keep," he noted. The other category deals with what materials are available "to help churches celebrate their history." The commission does provide a set of guidelines online, in conjunction with the annual conferences, about keeping church records. Locating such records must be done elsewhere. "When a church closes, those church records are sent to the annual conference archives," he explained.

Congregations planning to mark an anniversary can access a series of small booklets "that walks them through the planning," Patterson said. The Web site also has short biographies of famous United Methodists, bulletin inserts and history notes "which just answer simple, basic questions."

Minutes and journals of church agencies and commissions, as well as all the newspapers of annual conferences, are collected at Archives and History. "Several of our conferences have gone to all digital media," he said. "We are developing, essentially, an online newspaper depository."

The commission recognizes serious research through a series of grants and awards. To expand its focus beyond the United States, a new grant called "The World is My Parish" will provide \$1,000 to \$3,000 for researching the history of global Methodism.

International commission

The new commission includes members from the Philippines, Brazil, Zambia, Norway and Mozambique. Simão Jaime, the returning member from Maputo, Mozambique, is an assistant archivist in that country's national archives and stopped by Madison recently to do research himself. The commission has approved a \$10,000 grant for a training program of archivists in Mozambique.

The commission relates to the historic black Methodist denominations, according to Williams, and has a significant partnership with the African American Methodist Heritage Center.

Archives and History staff members also want to ensure that the denomination's Evangelical United Brethren heritage, as well as the history of other predecessor groups, is not lost. Williams sits on the advisory council for the Center for EUB Heritage at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, where the commission had its organizing meeting in September.

As The United Methodist Church concentrates on four areas of ministry focus around leadership, church growth, poverty and global health over the next four years, Archives and History will look at ways to give historical perspectives of the denomination's previous successes in those areas.

With a healthy financial picture-which Williams attributes to careful management by former long-time leader Charles Yrigoyen Jr. and a previous reduction in staff-the commission is well-positioned to provide such assistance.

"The decision was made that our primary worth had to be in the archival end," he said. "We believe that our reserves are critical to being the custodians of the record of the church. We have to care for what's been entrusted to us."

- By Linda Bloom, UMNS, New York; Oct. 17, 2008. Bloom is a UMNS news writer based in New York.

+ *With globalization, church must offer different view*

Making a difference as a church in an age of increasing globalization requires a new level of engagement with biblical resources and the resources of the Christian tradition. Such was the challenge presented to higher education leaders in The United Methodist Church by the Rev. Joerg Rieger, professor of systematic theology at United Methodist-related Perkins School of Theology in Dallas. Rieger has written extensively about the intersection of Christian theology with economics, globalization and poverty. He delivered the Willson Lecture Oct. 10 to the governing members of the United Methodist

Board of Higher Education and Ministry. Globalization today is about the aggressive expansion of the free-market economy, driven by a philosophy that firmly "believes in the trickling down of its benefits and in its God-given freedom," Rieger said. But critics warn of increased suffering and disorder for the world's poorest people under the new paradigm.

The process of globalization doesn't end with economics and politics. Rieger warns that the powers of globalization seek to extend their rule into culture and religion and will not stop until they reach "our innermost selves." A big part of meeting the global challenge, he said, is to investigate the Bible in a "historical self-critical mode" to see what messages it offers and what responses it calls for from the church in a changing world. The interpretation needs more "bite" and can no longer be approached as "if we were living in isolation, in the ivory towers of the academy or the ivory towers of the church."

There also is no turning back, and the changes must be faced honestly, according to Rieger. Challenging globalization may be like "trying to push a camel through the eye of the needle," he said, adding that "unless we address these real issues that make it impossible for us to enter the kingdom of God, the life of the church will be reduced to playing sandbox games. "Even our most pious and spiritual moments are located in the context of the global expansion of power," Rieger said. Global power, he notes, moves from the top down-from people who have it to those who do not. Religion, meanwhile, plays a role. "Religion is never an uninvolved bystander," he said.

The church's calling is to promote a bottom-up philosophy related to power. After all, the philosophy is among the guiding principles of Methodism founder John Wesley, who said religion must not go from the greatest to the least, lest power would appear to be of men. Wesley realized that religion could "go the other way around," starting from the bottom with "the least of these." The Methodist movement depended on the common man to multiply Wesley's message.

Globalization today shapes culture, religion and the ways people think and feel as individuals, families and communities. Unless the flow of power and how it affects all aspects of life are analyzed, "we are bound to become part of the problem rather than the solution," Rieger said of the church's role.

The Apostle Paul rejected the greatest-to-the-least concept of leadership within the Roman Empire and instead saw Jesus' model of leadership and power as an alternative-one that both challenges the empire and spreads the Gospel.

"Christ's power as Lord decidedly moves from the bottom up and generates a new way of being in the world," he said, noting that the United Methodist mission is a bottom-up approach to globalization by making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Rieger hopes that seminaries and theological schools will help the church impact globalization by developing new leadership models that are more accountable to the alternative kind of leadership that God demonstrated in Jesus Christ. Theological education is not just about the training of new ministers but about ongoing education needed by everyone at all levels of ministry in the church. "We are all in this together and we are all learning all the time," he said.

The annual Willson Lectures are designed, in part, to contribute to the spiritual and intellectual enrichment of people associated with boards and agencies of The United Methodist Church

– By Linda Green; UMNS, Nashville, Tenn. {#432}; Oct. 15, 2008.

+ ***Path 1 focuses on 'biggest mission field': the U.S.***

[Note: We agree that the spiritual crisis within The United Methodist Church is one that is expanded in our society. The solution, however, is not organizational "fixes" but spiritually finding our roots starting with that of repentance. – AOM]

The United Methodist Church in the United States loses 1,500 members each week, a decline that steadily adds to the country's designation as "the biggest mission field." The denominational decline is contributing to the estimated 195 million "unchurched" people in the country, now considered the third-largest mission field in the English-speaking world and the fifth largest globally, according to the United Methodist Board of Discipleship in Nashville. "Not one county in the United States has a greater church population than it did 10 years ago," said the Rev. Tom Butcher, coordinator of Path 1, the denomination's new church growth emphasis for creating faith communities. "The biggest mission field is in the United States."

The United Methodist Church wants to stop that decrease and reconnect with its past by planting churches that reach more people, younger people and diverse people. "We want to regain our Methodist DNA of starting a church a day," Butcher said. That daily church planting has not occurred for 40 to 50 years, he added. "John Wesley was a church planter. He followed the people."

Unlike Wesley, the founder of Methodism, the church seems to follow money and not people, according to the Rev. Vance Ross of the United Methodist Board of Discipleship. "Wesley followed people and the money seemed to come with it," he said. "How can we get to where people need the church?" Butcher pointed out that Path 1 "is not about saving the church but about saving lives" and avoids being a one-size-fits-all solution.

Start 650 congregations

By 2012, the denomination wants to equip 1,000 church planters to start 650 new congregations, which would then commit within their first 10 years to beginning new churches, eventually increasing denominational numbers by millions within 30 years. The United Methodist Board of Global Ministries will begin 400 new churches in other countries. Currently, about 70 to 80 percent of the 34,398 United Methodist churches in the United States are not in the right location when it comes to population groups, statistics suggest. The population has moved to places where United Methodist churches do not exist, Butcher said. "There is an urgent need for new churches," he added.

In 2005, total United Methodist membership in 500 of the country's fastest-growing counties shrank by 2,265 people. Across the country, 17.5 percent of people are in worship on Sundays and 82.5 percent are "somewhere else on any given Sunday morning," he said.

The church's effort to re-evangelize America focuses on building leaders, investing in people and relationships, going where the "unchurched and dechurched" people are and collaborating with healthy existing churches to create new places for new people, according to Path 1.

Congregational growth is one of the denomination's four areas of emphasis - the others are leadership development, global health and ministry with people in poverty - designed to help United Methodists commit their energy in ways in which they can live out their faith.

In a few years, the denomination will record a significant number of retiring clergy, and the current number of clergy under 35 years old is less than 5 percent, according to church data.

Nearly 50 percent of the trained church planters for new church starts will be laity. Traditionally, ordained clergy and local pastors start new churches, Butcher noted.

Training church planters

The board's Office of New Church Starts will work with the Foundation for Evangelism and the National Plan for Hispanic and Latino Ministries to train laity to become church planters. "The pool of laity is larger than the pool of ordained elders and local pastors," Butcher said. "In a lot of our churches, there are people in the pews who could do new church starts. Finding the right leaders are essential, and we have gifted and passionate people in our churches. Wesley did not have ordained people to train; he trained laity." He described the ideal United Methodist church planter as a person who has the ability to draw crowds, is courageous, and is a self-starter, good preacher, risk-taker and entrepreneur. The successful planter thinks outside of the box, possesses a winning personality and can build relationships, has been successful in starting new things, and is committed to Christ and solid in Wesleyan theology.

The plan also will need individuals who have success in creating ministries but do not enjoy membership on boards or committees, who are from other faith traditions that have similar theology, or are young people already exhibiting potential for ministry.

The Office of New Church Starts is working with annual conferences and the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry on the steps lay people would need to become "certified lay pastors" to be able to serve the sacraments and perform weddings and funerals.

The emerging church movement, which strives to make church relevant, authentic and connected to daily life, could generate new church starts and draw younger generations, Butcher said.

Bishop Gregory Palmer, president of the United Methodist Council of Bishops and leader of the denomination's Illinois Area, considers Path 1 "a gift to the church." The plan gives significant focus to the disciple-making mission of the church, he said, and research suggests that one of the ways to engage people is to make new congregations and faith communities. "Path 1 helps put the focus on the focus," he added.

Racial/ethnic communities

The U.S. church currently begins 90 new churches annually, some successful and some not. The plan is consulting with the denomination's racial/ethnic caucuses on the best practices in order to raise the bar for successful church planting for those populations. Half of the new places for new people will focus on racial ethnic and multicultural communities. "We have to expect that not every new church start is going to succeed," said the Rev. Junius Dotson, chairperson of the new church starts committee for the Board of Discipleship.

Detractors have lamented the denomination's beginning 650 new churches while it closes churches and others remain more than half-filled in worship. "We are concerned about every church, but churches have a life cycle," Butcher said, explaining that resources have to be re-allocated for new church starts. "Revitalization alone is not going to make us a stronger denomination or save our churches, but starting new ones will." Responding to the fears that Path 1 would hurt existing churches, Butcher said the plan does not aim to start new churches at the expense of existing congregations.

For more than a year, the Path 1 team has been building an infrastructure for the \$8.5 million General Conference-approved program. While most of its \$5 million budget is within the Board of Discipleship, the ministry is in collaboration with the Council of Bishops, congregational developers and other church agencies and caucuses.

The ministry will raise \$2.5 million for staff development and operating expenses. The Board of Discipleship will also contribute up to \$1 million in staffing and new ministry funds. Church agencies are donating time and resources around best practices and strategies for new church development.

None of the allocated money is for the new churches themselves but for locating and training church planters and developing best practices in a variety of contexts. The hope is to raise funds and realign existing resources to enable annual conferences to plant the new churches, Butcher said.

– By Linda Green; UMNS, Nashville, Tenn. {#420}; Oct. 7, 2008.

+ *Hoosier United Methodists establish new conference*

[Note: This is a reflection of the problem stated above. Until we have revival, we shall continue to decline. – AOM]

Clusters and cooperation are the touchstones for a new streamlined Indiana Annual (regional) Conference approved by more than 2,000 United Methodist Hoosiers in a special session on Oct. 4. The uniting of the South and North Indiana conferences comes at the conclusion of more than two years of work by task forces and a team made of clergy and lay members from both conferences to streamline the administrative structure and place resources closer to local churches. The last structural change of this magnitude in Indiana came in 1968 when the former Methodist Church and former Evangelical United Brethren Church voted nationally to become The United Methodist Church. The Imagine Indiana Design Team recommended the merger after membership in both conferences dropped to half of what it was in 1968. The team said a single conference would be more efficient and would allow more financial resources to go to ministries and programs rather than administration. The new conference will make extended use of electronic communication for meetings and the distribution of news and information.

– By Matthew Oates and Daniel R. Gangler; UMNS, Indianapolis {#417}; Oct. 6, 2008. Oates is a correspondent for Indiana United Methodist Communication and is a member of Trinity United Methodist Church in Lafayette, Ind. Gangler is director of communication of the Indiana Conference.

+ *Human trafficking becomes ecumenical target*

When Rani Hong was 7 years old, she was sold to a child broker in India, subjected to beatings and starvation, and eventually sold again to an illegal international adoption network. Her story has a happy ending: her adoptive American mother, unaware of what had happened to her, showered her with love. But she has no kind words for the abductors who kept her from her family and her country. "They changed my name, my birthdate, my age ... all in the name of profit," she said. Hong was among the speakers offering perspectives on the complex issue of human trafficking during a Sept. 29-Oct. 1 ecumenical conference at the United Methodist-owned Church Center for the United Nations.

The conference was sponsored by the Justice for Women Working Group of the National Council of Churches and the Women's Division, United Methodist Board of Global Ministries. The event drew 70 registered participants, including young women, representing 15 denominations, according to the Rev. Ann Tiemeyer, the NCC's program director for women's ministry. "I believe the ripple effect of networking that happened at the conference will create countless results," Tiemeyer told United Methodist News Service, "from the simplest action of one participant on Sunday morning sharing information with a friend sitting next to them in the pew, to a more coordinated ecumenical advocacy partnerships to challenge, change and create local, state and national laws that will support victims/survivors."

Hong and her husband, Trong Hong, have established the Tronie Foundation to promote education about human trafficking, lobby for policy changes and assist survivors. Trong Hong witnessed acts of murder and torture as a child among the Vietnamese "boat people." Both of their stories have been featured on television on "The Oprah Winfrey Show."

Rani Hong did not learn the full circumstances of her abduction until she found her birth mother when she was 28 years old. She spoke about how child brokers trick mothers or fathers into giving up their children. "They don't see the good in a person. All they can see is a commodity-something that can be sold over and over and over again," she said.

According to the Polaris Project, "an estimated 17,500 foreign nationals are trafficked annually in the United States alone. The number of U.S. citizens trafficked within the country is even higher. An estimated 200,000 American children are at high risk for trafficking into the sex industry each year."

Interviewed 65 women

Helene Hayes, a Roman Catholic Sister of the Good Shepherd, has done extensive research of how women are sold again and again in the sex trafficking trade. The social policy analyst has traveled to Southeast Asia, Europe, Saipan and parts of the United States to interview 65 trafficked women for an upcoming book. Her direct quotes from some of those women are sobering:

"Being obligated to have forced sex, you are nothing. You are only merchandise."

"I complied because I did not want to die."

"One of the girls jumped from a building and died and I envied her."

The women spoke to her, Hayes told conference participants, because "they know in a very deep, incisive way that silence will seal the fate of other trafficked women from around the world." Calling trafficking a modern form of slavery, she believes that showing trafficked women as "full human beings" through her book is a first step in solving the problem.

A less recognized form of human trafficking exists among agricultural workers, according to Virginia Nesmith, executive director of the National Farm Worker Ministry and a member of the United Church of Christ. Noting that the United States has 2 to 3 million farm workers, she said "the great majority (of workers) are immigrants and so they are among the vulnerable populations for enslavement." In September, five residents of Immokalee, Fla., pleaded guilty to enslaving more than a dozen Mexican and Guatemalan workers by holding them on family property, beating and chaining them and forcing them to work in farm fields in Florida, North Carolina and South Carolina. In another recent case, a family was picking up homeless men in Florida, providing them with drugs, and then forcing them to work in farm fields. Farm workers are often hidden down isolated dirt roads, out of view to the general public. "The first time I saw a slave camp, I didn't realize until later what it was," Nesmith said.

Face of trafficking

United Methodist Women has addressed the issue of human trafficking, including child labor, for the past few years, according to Glory Dharmaraj, a Women's Division executive. "Increasingly, we feel the face of global migration is female, the face of poverty is female ... and now I sense the face of human trafficking is female," she said.

The U.S. State Department estimates that 80 percent of trafficking victims are female and about half are under 18 years old.

Dharmaraj will explore the possibility of future UMW trainings to create awareness of trafficking and work with law enforcement agencies as the organization continues its mission "to stand in solidarity with the least of these who do not have an advocate."

The true scope of the human trafficking problem is difficult to assess because statistical information has not been compiled over the years, according to Laura Lederer, senior director for Global Projects on Trafficking in Persons at the State Department.

Although an estimated 1.1 million people are trafficked across international borders each year, including more than 14,000 across U.S. borders, "that doesn't take into account the internal trafficking," she said, noting that as many as 20 to 25 million could be enslaved worldwide. "Ending this contemporary form of slavery is a priority for the United States," Lederer said. "We had to have a law that reached the whole pipeline of activity."

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, also called TVPA, takes a victim-centered approach, she said. The congressional legislation increased penalties to traffickers from 5 years to 20 years to life and mandated the creation of an interagency government task force that meets annually and a policy group that meets quarterly. "It created the political will at the very top levels," she explained. The State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons assesses and rates 194 countries annually "to tell the world" whether problems of trafficking are being addressed. Those who lag on the issue risk losing funding from the United States. Task forces coordinated by the Department of Justice link federal and local law enforcement officers to pursue traffickers.

Rescue & Restore

"Rescue & Restore," a program of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, helps identify and assist victims of human trafficking, and the Department of Labor will issue a list of products made with child or forced labor. Survivors of trafficking "have a great deal to offer" in tackling the problem, Lederer pointed out. One survivor returned to India with law enforcement officers and led them to a brothel where she had been hidden behind a wall, at the age of 11, during police raids. "They opened that wall and found a dozen more children that day," Lederer said. "They were able to rescue them."

Carol Smolenski, a longtime advocate of trafficking survivors, said she is optimistic about the new laws, programs and support services now available. As one of the founders of ECPAT-USA in 1991, which now stands for "End Child

Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes," she believes the legislation passed in 2003-which makes it possible to prosecute American sex tourists when they return to the United States-is a helpful deterrent. ECPAT-USA also promotes a code of conduct for the travel industry. Problems remain at the state level, Smolenski said, where child prostitutes under age 18 are simply labeled as "bad kids" and arrested and prosecuted rather than helped. "They're not seen as victims of trafficking," she explained. "They're not seen as children in need of assistance."

At its Sept. 22 governing board meeting, the NCC approved a resolution on human trafficking endorsing the conference and encouraging member communions to further educate congregations about the issue and to advocate for policies and practices to end human trafficking.

The 2008 United Methodist General Conference, the denomination's top legislative body, approved a resolution calling for the abolition of trafficking.

– By Linda Bloom; UMNS, New York {#413}; Oct. 3, 2008.

+ *Church members can address trafficking locally*

Mary Streufert has a blunt assessment of human trafficking. She calls it "a form of human retail." A theologian and member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, she often addresses congregations "to connect them in their heart and their head" on the evils of trafficking and what they can do to make a difference. During a Sept. 29-Oct. 1 ecumenical conference on human trafficking at the United Methodist-owned Church Center for the United Nations, Streufert shared with participants her presentation for congregations.

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 defines sex trafficking as "the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act ... induced by force, fraud or coercion or in which the person forced to perform such an act is under the age of 18 years." Labor trafficking is considered to be the same type of actions "for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery."

Church members tend to become involved after they realize that trafficking is a local issue, according to Clare Chapman, a United Methodist and executive with the National Council of Churches, which co-sponsored the conference with the Women's Division, United Methodist Board of Global Ministries. She advocates an ecumenical approach. "We (churches) are going to have a much greater impact if we do this together than if we do it individually," she told United Methodist News Service. Linda Bales, who fights trafficking as an advocate with the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, agreed. "We do need to educate churches on the issue," she said. "They could be very pivotal in identifying people who are being trafficked."

Rescue & Restore

The Board of Church and Society works with the Department of Health and Human Services and its "Rescue & Restore" program (<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking>), which helps identify and assist victims of human trafficking in the United States. Often, it's just a matter of getting organized. Barbara Anderson, an American Baptist from Arlington, Mass., spoke of how church members decided last year to raise \$250,000 for "Break the Chains: Slavery in the 21st Century" (<http://www.abwmbreakthechains.org/>), a two-year national mission project of the American Baptist Women's Ministries. "To date, we still have 9 months to grow our project," she said. "We have raised over \$206,000." Project participants, who use resources from Rescue & Restore, have had requests from across New England to give presentations on human trafficking. "I think telling the story is what it's all about," Anderson said.

Through Trinity Baptist Church, where she attends, Anderson and a friend set up a church booth about human trafficking at Arlington's "town day" last year; staged an educational event the first Sunday in Advent; and led the congregation to agree to sponsor a community awareness program, which took place in late September. Now Anderson is involved with a group working to establish a permanent safe house for trafficked women in Boston and is planning a breakfast for women of faith in her community to begin building a network of anti-trafficking advocates.

Carol Smolenski, executive director of ECPAT-USA, which fights against the commercial sexual exploitation of women, suggested talking "to the men in your lives about the sex industry in general" and making sure that churches provide "a child protective environment" and mentoring to every child. Churches can participate in ECPAT's campaign to protect children in tourism by supporting the "Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism" (www.thecode.org) and encouraging U.S. companies to sign on.

– By Linda Bloom; UMNS, New York {#414}; Oct. 3, 2008.

(UM) General Board of Church and Society

+ *United Methodists call for stewardship over greed*

[Note: This uses rhetoric typified in those who espouse a socialist worldview. It is simplistic and predicated on class warfare and the mantra "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer" typical of those with a far-left worldview. – AOM]

Declaring that "the financial bubble has burst," United Methodist leaders are calling for a biblical mandate of stewardship over corporate greed as the U.S. government scrambles to revise a failed \$700 billion bailout of Wall Street [in a statement issued by the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, the denomination's social action agency and led by General Secretary Jim Winkler]. The financial crisis is being blamed on risky home mortgages and other high-risk loans held by U.S.-based financial institutions including Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers, as well as mortgage lenders Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, Countrywide Financial, Indymac Bank and American International Group.

"The rich have grown richer and the poor poorer. There is little appetite among the people to rescue the rich from their excesses," the statement said, noting that "the prophetic voices of the Bible repeatedly warn against a society that favors the rich over the widows, aliens, orphans and the poor." The church supports measures that would reduce the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, including revising tax structures and eliminating government support programs that benefit the wealthy at the expense of others. "A just response to the financial crisis must include limiting the compensation of failed corporate executives," the statement added. The agency called for a single-payer health-care program, bankruptcy law reform, caps on credit-card interest rates, aid to homeowners and stricter oversight of Wall Street. "The financial bubble has burst. Corporate greed must be replaced by the biblical mandate of stewardship," the statement said.

Last week, the top staff leader of United Methodist Women urged U.S. legislators to represent families and children as they address the global financial crisis. In a Sept. 19 letter, Harriett Jane Olson called on congressional leaders "to keep before you the faces of families and children whose future will be determined by the decisions you make." Olson is the top executive of the Women's Division, United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, based in New York. "We pray that you will look out for the future of families and children even if it requires action that is not in the interest of the powerful corporations," she said. Olson also called for bipartisan, short-term and long-term action to help families facing foreclosure and bankruptcy to retain ownership of their homes.

– By Kathy L. Gilbert; UMNS, Nashville {#408}; Sep. 30, 2008.

+ *Commentary: The Bible vs. the gravy train of greed*

[Commentary of our own: Note the strident politically partisan rhetoric here using class warfare arguments. What about denominational bureaucrats who feed off the laity, the people in the pews who so faithfully give their hard-earned money to support church executives who travel around the country and lobby against our government for radical far-left causes. If the people in these local United Methodist churches balk at paying their apportionment, how tolerant or sympathetic are the church leaders for the people in the pews who struggle to pay ever-increasing demands for their money? We see a parallel here. Unfortunately, Jim Winkler confuses politically-partisan views with the Bible. – AOM]

There have been more limousines than usual on Capitol Hill over the past couple of weeks. No one wants to be left out of the big bailout for banks and financial institutions. A gravy train this long doesn't roll down the tracks very often, and everyone wants their share of the \$700-plus billion that is expected to be doled out of the U.S. treasury in coming years.

The White House-organized initiative for homeowners facing foreclosure, Hope Now, routes callers to call centers in Phoenix and Spokane, Wash. Four percent of callers actually speak to housing counselors who negotiate with lenders to reduce a borrower's mortgage. Other callers receive advice on how to manage debt better. Hope Now is dominated by mortgage industry representatives unwilling to restructure loans for homeowners.

The U.S. secretary of the treasury and the chair of the Federal Reserve Board belatedly requested an immediate meeting with congressional leaders on Thursday night, Sept. 18, to describe the huge financial crisis facing the United States and the world. They proposed to spend hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars to bail out Wall Street and financial institutions that have been feeding greedily off the American people for years.

Thrown to the wolves

The rescue of the rich is taking place right now. The rest of us are being thrown to the wolves. And you can forget about the poor people outside the United States. The highest number of Americans ever - 28 million - are receiving food stamps. The wealthy have already benefited dramatically, to the tune of hundreds of billions of dollars, in tax cuts voted for them by other rich people. The Bush administration and Congress are filled with millionaires who profit personally from tax cuts.

Thankfully, several years ago the scheme to derail the Social Security program and place the funds of taxpayers in the hands of Wall Street investment firms was defeated. Imagine the plight today if the retirement accounts of hundreds of thousands of U.S. citizens were in similar peril.

Untrammled greed

Hundreds of billions of dollars have already been wasted on a war of aggression against the people of Iraq. The Taliban has regrouped in Afghanistan because the people of that country do not want a foreign military occupation of their land, and the current field commander is asking for more troops.

The scriptures repeatedly warn against the consequences of untrammled greed and of nations determined to conquer and dominate other nations and peoples. The psalmist in Psalm 72 promises that God "delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. God has pity on the weak and the needy and saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence God redeems their life; and precious is their blood in God's sight."

– A UMNS Commentary by Jim Winkler; UMNS, Nashville {#419}; Oct. 7, 2008.

(UM) General Commission on Interreligious Concerns/Ecumenical Issues

+ *United Methodists organize for new ecumenical efforts*

DAYTON, Ohio -The United Methodist Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns is not quite re-inventing itself. But with new leadership at its helm, 26 new members on its 43-person board and an expanded agenda of both a global and interfaith nature, the church's ecumenical agency is moving forward in a new way. "We realize it is a season of fresh beginnings," said Bishop Mary Ann Swenson of the Los Angeles area, the new commission president. During its Sept. 17-21 organizational meeting at United Theological Seminary in suburban Dayton, the commission officially elected its new chief executive, the Rev. Stephen Sidorak Jr., and heard from the new ecumenical officer of the United Methodist Council of Bishops, Bishop Sharon Rader. Swenson noted that the meeting's theme-"Making All Things New" from John 1:5-is fitting for the new leadership, new members and the new quadrennium. She said she hopes the commission can focus on teambuilding and promoting unity with wholeness, both within the denomination and on the outside, with Methodist, ecumenical and interfaith partners.

The Rev. Michael Kinnamon, a Disciples of Christ minister who leads the National Council of Churches and is a longtime friend of Sidorak's, delivered the sermon for his installation.

– By Linda Bloom; UMNS, New York {393}; Sep. 22, 2008.

+ *Pan-Methodists reassess roles on United Methodist boards*

LOUISVILLE, Ky. -The African Methodist Episcopal Church has withdrawn its support of a resolution affirming full communion with the other denominations in the Pan-Methodist Commission, and it is reconsidering having representatives on United Methodist agencies. Speaking at the March 6-8 meeting of the Pan-Methodist Commission, Bishop Earl McCloud, the ecumenical officer for the AME Church, said the withdrawal was based on a series of events, primarily those that led up to the dismissal of the Rev. Larry Pickens as leader of The United Methodist Church's ecumenical agency. Last November, the commission adopted a resolution affirming full communion and mutual support of the churches in the Pan-Methodist Commission. But since then, the bishop said, "I've changed my mind." "I do not agree presently with the resolution and will not take it to our General Conference" for adoption, he said. Other pan-Methodist denominations will consider the resolution at their General Conference gatherings in 2008 and 2010.

The 40-member body includes representatives of The United Methodist Church and five historically African-American Methodist churches: the African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian Methodist Episcopal, Union American Methodist Episcopal and African Union Methodist Protestant denominations. Established in 2000 by the top legislative bodies of the African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian Methodist and United Methodist churches, the commission works to foster cooperation among its member denominations in evangelism, missions, publications, social concerns and higher education.

Following the 2000 General Conference's Acts of Repentance, where The United Methodist Church apologized for actions that caused blacks to leave its predecessor churches in the 18th and 19th centuries, representatives of the historically black pan-Methodist churches were placed on the boards of directors of United Methodist agencies. Members who served on the Commission of Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns questioned the process that led to the dismissal of Pickens, who was the agency's first African-American chief executive. Last December, the three pan-Methodist representatives on that agency were unhappy enough with the process that they left the commission meeting after Pickens' dismissal.

AMEZ Bishop Nathaniel Jarrett, the Pan-Methodist Commission's chairman, said the Pickens situation had adversely impacted the commission. He asked if pan-Methodist participation on United Methodist boards and agencies should be revisited in the future. "The intent was good and it may still be, but at some point we need to talk about it again," he said.

– By Linda Green; UMNS, Nashville, Tenn. {105}; Mar. 12, 2008.

(UM) Men

+ *United Methodist Men slate new methods, officers*

In the same year that the ministry of United Methodist Men is celebrating its 100th anniversary, annual conference presidents of United Methodist Men learned of new methods to reach men in the next 100 years. "I'm more excited than I've ever been before about men's ministry," said the Rev. David Adams, top staff executive of United Methodist Men. While noting the long history of ministry through chartered groups of United Methodist Men, Adams said "we need to be invitational and provide many entry points for men."

To help churches launch new efforts in men's ministry, the commission has established a process whereby men can become "men's ministry specialists." The specialists will be certified by the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry following recommendation and mentoring by their pastors, training experiences in men's ministry, a course in United Methodist history and polity, and experience in leading a local or regional event. There also will be opportunity for people who have completed courses in lay speaking ministries to receive additional training to become men's ministry specialists.

Change of venue

The 10th national gathering will be held July 10-11, 2009, on the campus of Belmont University in Nashville. Held once every four years, the event next year will include speeches by Chicago Area Bishop Hee-Soo Jung and the Rev. Kevass Harding, pastor of Dellrose United Methodist Church in Wichita, Kan. A planning team is negotiating with other nationally known speakers and singers. An informal worship service will be held on Sunday, July 12, for those remaining in the Nashville area.

United Methodist Men is a ministry to and through all men of The United Methodist Church. Among other ministries, it supports the Upper Room Prayer Line, youth-serving agencies including scouting and Big Brothers/Big Sisters; and hunger relief efforts through the Society of St. Andrew. Men's ministry formally became part of the denominational structure in 1908 when the Methodist Episcopal Church authorized the creation of Methodist Brotherhoods. During 2008, United Methodist Men's groups have held a series of celebrations and special events across the United States in honor of the organization's centennial.

New Officers

A new slate of officers was elected for the 2008-2011 term:

John Dowell, president of the Southeastern Jurisdiction of United Methodist Men, elected NACP president;

Dean Holloman, president of Oregon-Idaho Conference, elected president of the Western Jurisdiction;

Dan Ramsey, vice president of the South Central Jurisdiction, elected president;

L.W. Smith, chairman of the Strength for Service Committee, elected president of the Southeastern Jurisdiction;

Lee Donley, president of Detroit Conference, elected president of the North Central Jurisdiction.

Wayne Custer, president of the Northeastern Jurisdiction, reelected to that post;

Carl Young, an attorney in Edmond, Okla., elected president of the United Methodist Men Foundation. Robert Powell, Dotham, Ala., continues as executive manager.

– By J. Richard Peck; UMNS, Nashville, Tenn. {109}; Mar. 13, 2008. Peck is communications coordinator for the Commission on United Methodist Men.

(UM) Women/ Women's Issues

+ *Church center hosts hearing on U.N. goals to end poverty*

NEW YORK (UMNS)-Worried about land rights, the effects of disease and even getting enough food to eat, women, children and human rights advocates testified on efforts to end poverty in their countries in a hearing at the Church Center for the United Nations. A Call to Action Against Poverty-an international coalition of trade unions, faith groups and other non-governmental organizations-convened the Sept. 22-23 hearing for grassroots voices excluded from the U.N.'s Sept. 25 High Level Event on the Millennium Development Goals. A drummer's prelude set the tone for the opening interfaith worship service in the chapel that included dramatic readings on a child's view of the U.N. Millennium Development Goals and singing by a local children's choir.

Harriett Jane Olson, president of the Women's Division, United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, welcomed the standing-room-only gathering to the United Methodist Women-owned facility. "This is the place and now is the time for us to let the urgency of the Millennium Development Goals be known," Olson said. "Thank you for your commitment." The hearing began with the words of "witnesses"-indigenous peoples, children and grassroots women-and a panel of advocates that included former Ireland President Mary Robinson voicing concerns about education, poverty and hunger, and environmental sustainability in their nations.

In 2000, the United Nations adopted the Millennium Declaration calling for implementation of eight goals by 2015: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empowerment of women; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; and create global partnerships for development.

– By Yvette Moore; UMNS, New York {401}; Sep. 26, 2008. Moore is executive secretary for communications for the Women's Division.

+ Women's Division backs U.S. sex ed legislation

STAMFORD, Conn. (UMNS)-United Methodist Women are supporting proposed U.S. legislation to fund comprehensive sex education at the state level. Directors of the Women's Division, United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, endorsed REAL (the Responsible Education About Life Act) during the division's Oct. 10-13 annual meeting. The Women's Division is the administrative arm of United Methodist Women. Inelda González of Harlingen, Texas, is the division president for the next four years. "As people of faith, we believe it is a moral imperative to provide children and teens with all the information they need to make responsible and informed decisions about their health," said the adopted resolution on "Reproductive Freedom for All Women."

UMW members are urged to contact their congressional representatives and circulate petitions to voice support for the act, which is contained in Senate bill 972 and House bill 1653. The legislation would provide \$204 million in state funding for programs presenting "honest, medically accurate, complete, age-appropriate sex education," according to the Women's Division resolution.

The Women's Division resolution also calls for "access and availability of affordable birth control (including emergency contraception) and comprehensive family planning for every woman in consultation with her doctor, without interference from pharmacists or medical personnel." The question was raised whether to include emergency contraception, popularly known as the "morning-after pill," but directors declined to discuss the issue and voted overwhelmingly for the resolution as written.

The RENEW Network, an evangelical renewal group focused on women in The United Methodist Church, is criticizing the division's support for the REAL Act. In a statement issued Oct. 14, RENEW President Faye Short cited studies in favor of programs for sexual abstinence and expressed disappointment about the support of legislation "that emphasizes comprehensive sex education with little or no emphasis upon abstinence."

Julie Taylor, a Women's Division executive, told United Methodist News Service that while federal money already had been allocated to state abstinence-only programs over the past eight years, the comprehensive nature of the REAL Act is "part of a step toward prevention" of unwanted pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Liza Kittle of RENEW condemned such sexual education programs for giving little attention to messages of abstinence and focusing more on "topics parents find offensive," ranging from masturbation to the use of condoms.

Taylor particularly noted the importance of education about condoms as protection against HIV infection and said that not talking about condoms in school could be akin "to signing a death warrant" for some teens.

Kittle, who attended the Women's Division meeting, criticized the division for the lack of open discussion before the vote and for using a denominational focus on global health "to increase their activism with the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice." The denomination's membership in the coalition has aroused controversy, particularly in relation to the coalition's pro-choice position on abortion. But continued membership of both the Women's Division and United Methodist Board of Church and Society was reaffirmed last spring by the 2008 United Methodist General Conference, the denomination's top legislative body.

– By Linda Bloom; UMNS, New York {430}; Oct. 14, 2008.

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Have a heart that never hardens, a temper that never tires, a touch that never hurts.

--Charles Dickens

Global Outlook

Nobody trips over mountains. It is the small pebbles that cause you to stumble.

The Episcopal Church. *Anglican Communion Continues to Undergo a Seismic Shift with Pittsburgh Diocese Move*

Washington, DC—The Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh voted on Saturday to end its affiliation with the national denomination. The vote carried with support from 119 of the 191 lay delegates and 121 of the 160 clergy delegates. The diocese has aligned itself with another province in the Anglican Communion, the Argentina-based Province of the Southern Cone. The vote taken by the diocesan convention follows the removal of Pittsburgh Bishop Robert Duncan on September 18th by the Episcopal House of Bishops over the charge of “abandonment of the communion”. Pittsburgh follows the Fresno, California-based Diocese of San Joaquin, which voted to secede from the Episcopal Church in December 2007. Two other Dioceses, Fort Worth, Texas and Quincy, Illinois, are scheduled to vote in November on similar resolutions.

IRD Religious Liberty Director Faith J.H. McDonnell commented: “We at the IRD support the faithful Anglicans in the Diocese of Pittsburgh who have now left The Episcopal Church. Their decisions were made soberly and only after much prayer and agonizing deliberation. We also recognize that, in responding to God's call, some faithful Anglicans will remain within The Episcopal Church. Their call is no less one from God, and we support them in their mission of renewing the denomination. The real issue here is not parishes or dioceses departing, rather it is that the Episcopal Church was hemorrhaging membership well before the controversial ordination of Gene Robinson. Individuals are realigning with their feet. Many of the most vibrant and evangelistic parishioners are leaving, and the remaining revisionists appear unable to offer a compelling draw to potential new members.

“While Gene Robinson’s consecration heightened the issues within The Episcopal Church, it is in no way the main issue for the churches that are leaving. It provides one example of how The Episcopal Church has drifted away from its Scriptural foundations, but only one. Beyond wanting to be faithful to Scripture, the churches felt that their mission work was impaired by remaining within The Episcopal Church. Faithful orthodox Episcopalians owe a debt of gratitude to Global South Anglicans, where the church continues its vibrant growth and ministry. Orthodox Anglicans from many different groups have shown support to the Pittsburgh Diocese, demonstrating a solidarity that could only have been dreamed of a few years ago.

– IRD Press Release by The Institute on Religion and Democracy. POC: Jeff Walton, 202-682-4131, 202-413-5639 cell; jwalton@TheIRD.org; Monday, October 6, 2008

India. *Urgent Prayer Request India YWAM (Youth with a Mission)* “Please pray”

This is a request for prayer for YWAM missionaries and their churches in Orissa, India. The request came from her friend, Mable Hurst, an associate of HCJB Global. Please read and make this a matter of urgent prayer.

Dear beloved sponsors and friends of Good News India.

We have never seen anything like this. We knew that Orissa was the most resistant and hostile State in India as far as the Gospel is concerned. And we brushed off the continuous threats and harassment we faced as we went about His work. But none of our staff imagined that they would see this kind of carnage.... And it seems to be totally under the radar of the Western Media Let me explain.... A militant Hindu priest and 4 of his attendants, who were zealously going around the villages of Orissa and 'reconverting' people back to Hinduism, were gunned down by unknown assailants in Central Orissa last weekend. Immediately the Christians were blamed. The cry rose up... 'Kill the Christians!' And the horror began.... In the past 4 days, we have first hand witness to hundreds of churches being blown up or burned and many, many dozens of Christian tribals have been slaughtered.

For no other reason than they bear the name of Christ. Night and day I have been in touch with our Good News India Directors spread across 14 Dream Centers in Orissa... they are right in the middle of all this chaos. In Tihidi, just after the police came to offer protection, a group of 70 blood-thirsty militants came to kill our staff and destroy the home. They were not allowed to get in, but they did a lot of damage to our Dream Center by throwing rocks and bricks and smashing our gate, etc. They have promised to come back and 'finish the job.'

Our kids and staff are locked inside and have stayed that way with doors and windows shut for the past 3 days. It has been a time of desperately calling on the Lord in prayer.

More police have come to offer protection. In Kalahandi, the police and some local sympathizers got to our dream center and gave our staff and kids about 3 minutes notice to vacate. No one had time to even grab a change of clothes or any personal belonging. As they fled, the blood thirsty mob came to kill everyone in the building. We would have had a mass funeral there, but for His grace. In Phulbani, the mob came looking for Christian homes and missions. The local Hindu people, our neighbors turned them away by saying that there were no Christians in this area. So they left. We had favor.

The same thing happened in Balasore. All our dream centers are under lock down with the kids and staff huddled inside and police outside. The fanatics are circling outside waiting for a chance to kill. Others were not so fortunate. In a nearby Catholic orphanage, the mob allowed the kids to leave and locked up a Priest and a computer teacher in [a] house and burned them to death. Many believers have been killed and hacked into pieces and left on the road.... even women and children. At another orphanage run by another organization, when this began, the Director and his wife jumped on their motorbike and simply fled, leaving all the children and staff behind. Every one of our GNI directors that I have spoken to said: 'We stay with our kids.... we live together or die together, but we will never abandon what God has called us to do.'

More than 5000 Christian families have had their homes burned or destroyed. They have fled into the jungles and are living in great fear waiting for the authorities to bring about peace. But so far, no peace is foreseen. This will continue for another 10 days.... supposedly the 14 day mourning period for the slain Hindu priest. Many more Christians will die and their houses destroyed. Many more churches will be smashed down.

The Federal government is trying to restore order and perhaps things will calm down. We ask for your prayers. Only the Hand of God can calm this storm. None of us know the meaning of persecution. But now our kids and staff know what that means. So many of our kids coming from Hindu backgrounds are confused and totally bewildered at what is happening around them. So many of their guardians have fled into the jungles and are unable to come and get them during these trying times.

Through all this, I am more determined than ever to continue with our goal: the transformation of a community by transforming its children. Orissa will be saved... that is our heart's cry. If we can take these thousands of throw-away children and help them to become disciples of Jesus, they will transform an entire region. It is a long term goal, but it is strategic thinking in terms of the Great Commission.

What can you do? Please uphold all this in fervent prayer. We must get the word out and increase our prayer base for this is spiritual warfare at its most basic meaning. We are literally fighting the devil in order to live for His Kingdom.... We pray for peace and calm to pervade across Orissa. Thank you for taking the time to read this. Please pass it on and help us to get as many people to partner with us on this cutting edge effort to fulfill His mandate: Go and make disciples of all nations....

Prayer works!

Blessings, Chip & Sandy Wanner Col 2:2 MBI Team Facilitators to YWAM frontlines

– E-mail received. Ann Zelter; Sent: Thursday, October 16, 2008 4:10 PM

Sexuality Issues. Secular Windfall to Boost Gay Influence over Churches

WASHINGTON – A windfall \$1.2 million will be flowing to homosexual advocacy caucuses within mainline denominations over the next two years. The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Foundation is injecting the cash to “support a strategic, collaborative effort to expand pro-LGBT faith-based organizing efforts,” according to an announcement by More Light Presbyterians (MLP), which operates within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

The funding comes from the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund through the umbrella National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, a lobbying group that has sought to enlist churches in its secular political advocacy. Partnering the secular and faith-based groups “holds the potential to transform the larger LGBT movement by greatly expanding its supporters and extending its reach,” explained Randall Miller, a program officer with the Haas Fund.

The gay caucuses within mainline denominations can now step up efforts to pressure churches to alter their belief and morality to accommodate homosexual practice. The funding will allow MLP “to build capacity and take our next steps as an organization and network by hiring additional staff,” enthused Michael Adey, MLP executive director. United Methodist, Evangelical Lutheran, Episcopalian, and United Church of Christ caucuses will similarly benefit.

Jim Berkley, director of IRD’s Presbyterian Action Committee, commented: “Homosexual advocates have long coveted the social capital of Christian churches. The core faith and mission of the denominations matter not. Churches evidently exist merely to be co-opted for politics. Activists want the churches’ clout for their society-changing purposes. “Now church gay caucuses seem overjoyed to be bought out by secular lobbying groups. In this collaboration, political activist want to use the church to promote causes alien to the churches’ life and faith, and the church gay caucuses enthusiastically collaborate. At a time when mainline denominations writhe in self-defeating conflict, this well-funded political pressure is poisonous.”

– IRD Press Release by The Institute on Religion and Democracy. POC: Lorelei Coyle 202-682-4131; 202-905-6852 cell; lcoyle@TheIRD.org; August 28, 2008.

Sudan. Sudan Project serves as model for denomination

Ginghamsburg Church did not seem to be a promising assignment when the Rev. Mike Slaughter was sent there 29 years ago. He was the first full-time pastor for the small United Methodist congregation in Tipp City, Ohio, since its founding in 1864. As part of the "rust belt," the Miami Valley area surrounding the church was losing both jobs and population. But Slaughter stayed and the church grew--so much so that it has attained "mega-church" status, with multiple buildings and ministries on two campuses serving about 4,500 people weekly. Membership stands at 1,300.

Ginghamsburg's ministries now extend far beyond Ohio. Through its Sudan Project, undertaken in partnership with the United Methodist Committee on Relief, "we are reaching or touching a quarter million people in Darfur," Slaughter said. Slaughter spoke about that project--which has raised \$3 million in three years--during the spring meeting of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, UMCOR's parent agency, March 10-13 in Stamford, Conn.

Christmas miracle offering

He sees the project as a model for The United Methodist Church. His Christmas fundraising message is a simple one: "It's Jesus' birthday, not your birthday." Since Christmas 2004, Slaughter has asked parishioners to make a monetary donation for Sudan mission work equal to what they spend on family Christmas presents. The effort has become known as the "miracle offering." The project has been particularly effective because it gives local church members a sense of ownership. "When we're focusing on one major mission initiative, it will have an incredible impact and ownership in our people's lives," Slaughter said. The \$317,000 raised during the 2004 Advent season helped start a sustainable agricultural project in South Darfur, an area with less conflict than West Darfur and home to many internally displaced persons. The investment in that project "is now feeding 65,000 people with no additional funds," he said.

The initial project-promoting small-scale farming and other agricultural work, along with the distribution of non-food items-focused on about 250 families in the Ed Al Fursan community south of Nyala, the capital of South Darfur. UMCOR also has assisted in managing the El Ferdous IDP camp.

During Advent 2005 and 2006, the miracle offerings raised more than \$1.5 million, about \$80,000 of which was donated by partner churches, schools and businesses. A five-year child development program was begun in 2005 and a four-year water project in 2006. The results include the construction of 90 schools and the training of 200 teachers serving 11,000 students, and the establishment of 10 water yards, providing 22,000 people and their livestock with water.

Each year, the miracle offering has expanded to include donations from other churches, many of them small congregations. Of the \$1,145,649 raised during the 2007 Advent season, more than \$200,000 came from other partners, including 17 United Methodist churches from nine states. For example, Urbana (Ohio) United Methodist Church, a congregation of around 200, has contributed \$56,000 over a 12-month period.

"People want to contribute to something that has significance," Slaughter told UMCOR's board of directors.

Sharing concern

Slaughter has addressed churches and schools across the United States about the situation in Darfur which, he noted, has been labeled by the United Nations as "the worst humanitarian crisis in the world today." Since 2003, more than 200,000 people in Sudan have been killed and 2.2 million displaced from their homes, according to U.N. statistics.

Despite a 2006 peace agreement, a rebel offensive occurred recently in West Darfur, with responding government and militia attacks. All sides have committed killings and human rights abuses, including destruction of property and forced displacement, according to a March 10 statement by Sima Samar, the Special Rapporteur of the U.N. Human Rights Council after a 13-day visit to Sudan.

During a March 11 briefing to the U.N. Security Council, the assistant secretary-general for peacekeeping operations said that a peacekeeping operation cannot by itself bring security to Darfur and that the parties in conflict must be pressured to negotiate a peace, according to a U.N. news release. UNAMID, a hybrid African Union-U.N. force, is patrolling Darfur.

Because the work of the Sudan Project is centered in South Darfur, much of the conflict has been avoided, but progress was impeded at the end of 2007. "We've had, this fall, some security frustrations that have held up some of our water project," Slaughter said. Since the beginning of 2008, work has resumed on the project, located in Adilla.

– By Linda Bloom; UMNS, New York {107}; Mar. 13, 2008.

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Life always gives you back what you give out