

# The Christian Methodist Newsletter

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## General Conference 2008 (GC2008) - Summary

### GC2008 Concerns

Prior to General Conference, we were especially concerned about four different initiatives that might be used by the “liberal side” at the General Conference held in Ft. Worth. As do some others, I believed that they might view this as being a prime chance to pass a liberal agenda and were “pulling out all the stops” to try to make it happen. I believed that they might try multiple paths to accomplish their objective. Four were:

1. Ending “Elder tenure” – giving bishops authority to dismiss an elder.
2. Legislation – the passing of petitions normalizing same-sex marriages, ordination, etc. Along with this would be any legislation that would mandate “open membership” regardless of lifestyle or sin.
3. Elections to the Judicial Council – putting enough of theologically liberal members on the Judicial Council to rule in their favor.
4. Designating the United States as a “central conference” and separating it from the overseas churches.

First of all, regarding ending elder tenure and “giving the bishops the authority to dismiss an elder” – there was no need for the bishops to have this power at this time; this initiative was premature. We are currently in a denomination-wide program to have effective leaders in growing churches. The purpose is to identify ineffective clergy and rehabilitate them if possible and, as I understand the process, remove them if that is not possible – even to the point of providing an “exit strategy” for them. A corollary to this argument is the implication that the bishops do not possess enough power at this time to supervise and train their clergy. In my work with Concerned Methodists, I have long been aware that rank-and-file clergy tend to be deferential to their bishop. In just one instance, on a visit to Chicago (Northern Illinois Conference) where I was to speak to people as to what they could do in their conference, one evangelical clergyman very much wanted to meet with me – but would not because he was literally afraid that his bishop would find out.

While we saw strategies 1 and 2 defeated (thankfully), 3 and 4 were not. The commentary to the right expresses thanks to those who took a stand for Biblical morality. Action #4 (designating the United States as a “central conference” and separating it from the overseas churches) is presently in a study group that will report its results to the 2012 general conference in Tampa, Florida. This causes us extreme concern and will be a focus of prayer and activism during this next quadrennium.

What was especially disappointing were “working behind the scenes” and often an absence of truth in the debates. One voice wondered if our church was going to lose its hold on truth. Since Jesus Christ is the embodiment of Truth, this is central to us as a church. Let us pray this will not happen. – Allen O. Morris

### THANK YOU!

May 1--...our beloved United Methodist Church voted not to follow the path of the fracturing Episcopal Church or the shriveling United Church of Christ. Unlike those declining denominations that are increasingly captive to our surrounding American culture, United Methodists voted to affirm the teachings of Jesus Christ about marriage and sexual ethics.

Thank you, delegates of General Conference 2008! Thank you for standing up to the surrounding pressures and intimidation. Thank you for your faithfulness to Scripture. Thank you for recognizing that the Gospel’s purpose is not to affirm but to save and transform. Thank you for keeping faith with the one holy, catholic and apostolic church that transcends the centuries and all cultures with the timeless and ever fresh Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Special thanks go to our brothers and sisters in Africa. Thank you, Congolese, Nigerians, Sierre Leoneans, Liberians, Angolans, Mozambicans, Zimbabweans, Ivorians [people from the Ivory Coast] and others who journeyed thousands of miles, at a great price, for standing with us. You, our African friends, have stood between us and potential schism in our church. God is using your spiritual vitality and your zeal for the Word to preserve and renew our church. Some will revile you. But God will honor your fidelity to Him.

The church in America still has far to go. Over 3 million members lost in 40 years! And those areas of our church most preoccupied with liberalizing our sexual ethical standards, for all the talk about “open doors,” are the fastest declining. We

American United Methodists must learn from our African brothers and sisters and remember our own illustrious history. Methodist circuit riders of centuries past took much of America for Jesus through their audacity for the Gospel. The Lord has powerfully used Methodism in America in the past. If we will only return to Him, He may graciously revive us once again!

At the same time, we on the evangelical side of the church should be wary of blaming the liberal side exclusively for the decline of United Methodism in America. We all share sad responsibility, through our hesitation, our negativity, our passivity, our self-contentment, our too frequent unwillingness to risk discomfort for the Gospel. We are one church, and when any part of the church fails, we all fail.

We pray that the Holy Spirit will restore all of us who are United Methodists to a closer fellowship with Him, to greater unity in Him, and to greater service in Him. And we give thanks to our Heavenly Father, who despite our many failures, remarkably sustains us still.

- Reprinted from UMAAction: <http://www.theird.org/>

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### **General Conference Wrap Up**

The 2008 United Methodist General Conference opened its legislative session on April 23 with a Communion service celebrated at a wooden table fashioned from trees destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. Under the theme "A Future with Hope—Making Disciples for Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World," the conference began on the 40th anniversary to the day when the Evangelical United Brethren Church united with the Methodist Church to form The United Methodist Church.

The assembly approved a \$642 million denominational budget for the next four years and created a hymnal revision committee. It generally retained the church's stances on homosexuality, including the declaration in the church's Social Principles that homosexual practice is "incompatible with Christian teaching." Delegates opened the door to significant structural changes as the church works to address its increasingly global nature. And it tweaked the denomination's mission statement to read: "The mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."

#### **The worldwide church**

The assembly reflected changing demographics, as membership has shrunk in the United States while growing in Africa and the Philippines and parts of Europe. This gathering was less centered on issues confined to the United States than at previous assemblies. That was partially because 278 of the 992 delegates came from outside of the United States—100 more than attended the 2004 session. It also was the result of proposals from a task force studying the global nature of the church. Delegates approved 23 constitutional amendments that would make it possible to change the church's U.S.-centric structure to a more uniform global structure. The amendments must be ratified by a two-thirds vote of the aggregate total of annual conferences. A 20-member committee will bring recommendations to the 2012 assembly.

In separate action, The United Methodist Church in Côte d'Ivoire, the largest regional conference of the worldwide denomination with almost 700,000 members, received its full rights and responsibilities. As a result, United Methodists in the West African country, which has only two delegates at this General Conference, will receive significantly greater representation at future assemblies.

Delegates approved \$20 million for Africa University in Zimbabwe; \$10 million was already budgeted in apportioned funds, and \$10 million will be raised through World Service Special Gifts. Delegates also approved \$2 million to help United Methodist theological schools in Africa train additional pastors [for instance in Congo, where there are many more Methodists than Zimbabwe].

### Budget

The delegates approved a \$642 million denominational spending plan for the next four years built around four areas of focus for the immediate future:

- Developing principled Christian leaders.
- Creating new places for new people by starting new congregations and renewing existing ones.
- Engaging in ministries with the poor.
- Improving global health, especially attacking the killer diseases of poverty.

It was the first time the church has developed a budget on an outcome-based model, and church leaders celebrated the collaborative process used to reach a consensus among general agencies and other interests. The budget is 4.8 percent higher than the spending plan for the 2005-2008 period.

### Presentations

U.S. President George W. Bush, a United Methodist, and first lady Laura Bush sent greetings. Another United Methodist head of state—Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf—delivered an address that was an assembly highlight. "This is a special honor for me," she said. "I am the first African leader and the first female president to address the General Conference of The United Methodist Church." Her message included that "Liberia is on the way back" after years of civil war.

William H. Gates, Sr., co-chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, thanked the denomination for being a partner in the Nothing But Nets campaign to eliminate malaria in Africa. More than \$20 million has been raised since the campaign began in 2006. The church recently learned it will receive a \$5 million grant from the United Nations Foundation with help from the Gates Foundation on other health initiatives.

Bishop Sharon Brown Christopher delivered the Episcopal Address on behalf of the Council of Bishops. She attributed some of the U.S. membership decline to "ruptures in our United Methodist relationships. Left or right, conservative or liberal, we treat our baptized brothers and sisters as if they are our enemies" and seek to destroy those who have a different viewpoint or perspective, she said.

The first-ever Young People's Address was delivered by six young people of different ages and backgrounds.

Lyn Powell, lay leader of the North Georgia Conference, delivered the Laity Address. She challenged lay members to assume responsibility for reaching the unchurched and said it is unreasonable for clergy, with their myriad responsibilities, to spend large quantities of time engaging the unchurched.

### Legislative process

The assembly received 1,564 proposals, 540 fewer than the number processed by the 2004 session, but the body had one less day to work. Former General Conference sessions lasted 12 days but took a day of rest at the midpoint on Sunday. This year, as a cost-saving measure, the assembly met 10 days, including Sunday as a work day. The loss of the day of rest took its toll on the conference, however, and delegates voted to reinstate that day for the next assembly in 2012.

Delegates created a 24-member standing committee on faith and order to help bishops and the church reflect on matters of faith, doctrinal teaching, order and discipline. The group also will provide study materials upon the request of the bishops, the Connectional Table or General Conference.

The conference called for a continuation of a study authorized by the 2004 assembly on the church's ordering of ministry. The 28-member study group is to address the ordering of ministry, the separation of ordination and conference membership, and the streamlining of the ordained ministry candidacy process.

Delegates approved the creation of a hymnal revision committee and authorized it to bring a proposed hymnal to the 2012 General Conference. An additional group will investigate the possibility of an Africana hymnal that incorporates music and liturgy from Africa—as well as Caribbean, African-American and other traditions with African roots.

### Homosexuality

General Conference essentially upheld the status quo on sexuality issues. In retaining its stance declaring homosexual practice "incompatible with Christian teaching," the assembly rejected a majority report from a legislative committee that recommended new language that faithful people disagree on the topic but that "all seek a faithful witness." A 516-416 vote replaced the majority report with a minority report calling for retention of the incompatibility clause. A subsequent final vote of 501-417 made it official. The assembly affirmed that all people are "individuals of sacred worth created in the image of God." Delegates also retained statements asking "families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends."

On the day after emotional debate and votes on many of the issues, approximately 250 advocates for full inclusion were allowed to walk silently through the aisles of the legislative gathering as an act of protest. Participants covered the Communion table with a black shroud to mourn the church's position in its Social Principles and the conference's actions that deny gays and lesbians the right to serve as clergy. Palmer expressed a "deep sense of gratitude" for both how the demonstration was handled and how delegates and bishops responded.

In other actions related to sexuality, the conference:

- + Asked the United Methodist Board of Church and Society to develop educational resources and materials on the effects of homophobia and heterosexism, the discrimination or prejudice against lesbians or gay men by heterosexual people. [Note: This is considered a step backward.]
- + Continued the policy of not funding groups that promote the acceptance of homosexuality, but noted that funds also should not go to groups that violate church principles against rejecting or condemning lesbians, gays and friends.
- + Retained language defining marriage as a relationship between one man and one woman.
- + Let stand language in the Book of Discipline regarding pastoral authority over church membership.
- + The church did not take action to remove transgender pastors from ministry, leaving the Rev. Drew Phoenix to lead his Baltimore congregation. Phoenix transitioned from female to male about two years ago.

### Constitutional amendments

General Conference passed a number of amendments to the church's constitution, which now await action from annual (regional) conferences. All constitutional amendments approved by a two-thirds vote of General Conference must be ratified by a two-thirds affirmative vote of the aggregate number of voting annual members.

Delegates passed a constitutional amendment that reduces from two to one the number of years a person must be a professing member of a local church before he or she can be a member of an annual conference.

Annual conferences also will vote on proposals that provide for newly created conferences to be represented at general, jurisdictional or regional conferences on a non-proportional basis. The issue arose after the Côte d'Ivoire Conference was assigned two delegates for the 2008 General Conference.

One amendment would enable local pastors, associate members and provisional members to join ordained ministerial members in full connection in voting for delegates to General and jurisdictional conferences. To vote, local pastors must have completed the Course of Study or master of divinity degree and have served under appointment for two consecutive years immediately preceding an election. Only ordained members in full connection with an annual conference may be delegates.

If annual conferences ratify another amendment, then local churches, jurisdictional and General Conference, "organizations, groups, committees, councils, boards and agencies" will have to adopt ethics and conflict-of-

interest policies. These policies will apply to both members and employees to help them “embody and live out our Christian values.”

Another constitutional amendment would make it clear all persons shall be eligible to attend worship services and, upon taking vows, become church members.

### Judicial Council

The Rev. Susan Henry-Crowe is the new president of the Judicial Council, becoming the first woman to lead the denomination's nine-member "supreme court." The other new leaders are Jon R. Gray, vice president, and the Rev. Belton Joyner, secretary.

Henry-Crowe is dean of Cannon Chapel and religious life at Emory University. Gray returned to private law practice in Kansas City, Mo., last fall after 20 years as a family court judge. Joyner, a retired member of the North Carolina Conference, is serving as an interim district superintendent. Angela Brown of California-Nevada, Ruben Reyes of the Philippines, the Rev. Kathi Austin-Mahle of Minnesota and the Rev. Bill Lawrence of North Texas also were elected as new members. Beth Capen, New York Conference, and the Rev. Dennis Blackwell, Greater New Jersey, will complete their eight-year terms in 2012.

### Social action

Delegates urged U.S. lawmakers to ensure that immigration laws don't tear families apart, and they advocated for "full protection of all workers."

Stating that Israel continues to violate international law by building a wall on Palestinian land, the conference called upon Israelis and Palestinians to uphold U.N. resolutions and International Court of Justice rulings.

Delegates called on United Methodists to divest funds from companies that support the government of Sudan in order to end the genocide in that area.

The body encouraged the implementation of the universal school lunch program and also called for equal rights of men with regard to parental leave and child custody. [Note: The “universal school lunch program” is seen as a significant step toward socialism.]

On the 100th anniversary of the Social Creed, delegates decided that a proposed new creed would serve the church better as a "companion litany." It has been set to music.

### Life Issues:

General Conference voted 416-384 for the United Methodist Board of Church and Society and the Women's Division of the Board of Global Ministries to continue as members in the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice.

The assembly added a statement on abortion to the Social Principles offering "ministries to reduce unintended pregnancies" and to assist the ministry of crisis pregnancy and support centers that help women "find feasible alternatives to abortion."

The conference asked the Board of Church and Society to identify and publish on its Web site educational resources on stem-cell research. The resolution encourages pastors to use the resources to become informed about the use of embryonic stem cells for medical research and to offer these resources for study in local churches.

Noting that more than 400 people have been put to death in Texas since 1982, the assembly asked the Texas legislature to end executions.

### Other items

General Conference approved a full communion agreement with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, in which each church recognizes the other's ministry and mission, the authenticity of the other's baptism and Eucharist, and the interchangeability of ordained ministers. The ELCA's assembly will act on the agreement in 2009.

Several health and wellness petitions sponsored by the pension board were adopted.

The assembly increased the retirement age of bishops from 66 to 68 and the retirement age of other ordained clergy from 70 to 72.

Concerned about finances, delegates approved a plan that will result in one less bishop in four of the five U.S. jurisdictions, beginning in 2012. The savings will be used to fund new episcopal areas elsewhere. The action will not affect the Southeastern Jurisdiction, which already elects one less bishop than the present formula allows.

The 40th anniversary of the founding of the denomination also marked the 40th anniversary of the dissolution of the Central Jurisdiction, a racially based structure, and the formation of the Commission on Religion and Race. The assembly also celebrated the 60th anniversary of the Advance and the 100th anniversary of ministry to Methodist men, the Social Creed and the Board of Pension and Health Benefits.

Pastors or district superintendents may now ask the bishop to give sacramental authority to a deacon if an elder is not present. That right is confined to the location of a deacon's primary appointment. In areas where it would take a great deal of time to deliver the sacraments to people, a layperson is given the right to deliver the Communion elements.

People who join United Methodist churches henceforth will promise to be faithful in "their witness" as well as in their "prayers, their presence, their gifts and their service."

Final session

The final gavel came down May 2 at 11:15 p.m., followed by worship, which ended shortly before midnight.

The next General Conference will be in 2012 in Tampa, Fla.

This report is summarized with minimal editorial comments from a UMNS report filed by J. Richard Peck; May 6, 2008.

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Delegates learned that church members raised \$3 million to restore churches damaged by Hurricane Katrina. More than \$60 million was given through the United Methodist Committee on Relief for humanitarian aid in the Gulf Coast.

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By J. Richard Peck, UMNS; May 6, 2008; Fort Worth, Texas. Peck, a four-time editor of the Daily Christian Advocate, served as an editor for United Methodist News Service during the 2008 General Conference—his 11th assembly.

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**Following are other supplemental news reports of interest:**

**Theological education in Africa gets boost**

Theological education in Africa is set to get a \$2 million boost thanks to the 2008 General Conference of The United Methodist Church.

The assembly's 992 clergy and lay delegates from across the globe voted April 28 to expand and strengthen theological facilities beyond Africa University, as well as library development, scholarships, publications and

logistical support of theological education during the next four years. The funding would become final with the approval of a churchwide budget later in the week.

According to the petition, approved 565-353 by delegates, there is a significant need for the church to support theological education across the continent because Africa represents nearly 26 percent of all United Methodists worldwide, or 3 million people. Leading these millions are 3,616 ordained elders in full connection, who represent 9.4 percent of all fully ordained United Methodist elders around the globe.

"Many times we are not aware of the realities in Africa," said Ilunga Kandolo of the North Katanga Annual (regional) Conference, in the Democratic Republic of Congo. "When you look at the incredible growth of the church in Africa, we forget that the church growth is the result of the gifted clergy we have."

Tshibang Kasap Owan, president of Katanga Methodist University in Northwest Katanga, agreed, but added that because the continent is so vast, Zimbabwe-based Africa University is not enough. "All of our students do not have opportunity to go to Africa University, so we need to support other facilities in Africa," he said.

Before the delegates passed the measure, the Rev. Charles Boayue, a delegate from the Detroit Conference, expressed support of this initiative because Africa is a fast-growing part of the denomination. He encouraged the delegates to "not allow our budgetary constraints to be the only measure for how we treat this great need."

The \$2 million approved by the delegates is not final until the churchwide Council on Finance and Administration and the Connectional Table present a quadrennial budget to the 2008 General Conference for approval.

- By Linda Green, UMNS; April 28, 2008; Fort Worth, Texas.

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**University Senate members, trustees elected**

Delegates to the top legislative assembly of The United Methodist Church elected four people to the organization that determines the relationship of academic and theological institutions to the denomination.

They elected two chief executive officers of United Methodist-related educational institutions and two who hold positions relevant to academic or financial affairs to the University Senate.

The University Senate, established in 1882, is one of the oldest accrediting bodies in the country. Its mission was to ensure that schools, colleges and universities related to the church were worthy of carrying the denomination's name. In recent years, regional bodies have accredited academic institutions, and the senate has focused more on how institutions are related to The United Methodist Church.

The 25-member body of professionals in higher education has responsibility for supporting the development of institutions whose aims are to address significant educational, cultural, societal and human issues in a manner reflecting the values held in common by the institutions and The United Methodist Church.

Elected to a four-year term were:

Maxine Clark Beach, vice president and dean of Drew Theological School, Madison, N.J.

David L. Beckley, president of Rust College, Holly Springs, Miss.

Charlene Black, retired university president and academic vice president at Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, Ga.

The Rev. Maxie Dunnam, former president of Asbury Seminary, Wilmore, Ky.

The senators are from five electing bodies, including the National Association of Schools and Colleges and Universities of the denomination, United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry, General Conference, Council of Bishops and the University Senate.

- By Linda Bloom, UMNS; April 28, 2008; Fort Worth, Texas. Bloom is a United Methodist News Service writer based in New York

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### **Biblical Position on Homosexuality Retained**

Delegates to the 2008 General Conference on April 30 rejected changes to the United Methodist Social Principles that would have acknowledged that church members disagree on homosexuality.

Delegates instead adopted a minority report that retained language in the denomination's 2004 Book of Discipline describing homosexual practice as "incompatible with Christian teaching."

The adopted wording in Paragraph 161G also states that "all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God," and that United Methodists are to be "welcoming, forgiving and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us."

Delegates also approved a new resolution to oppose homophobia and heterosexism, saying the church opposes "all forms of violence or discrimination based on gender, gender identity, sexual practice or sexual orientation."

### Majority and minority reports

In its majority report, the legislative committee, chaired by Frederick Brewington, New York Conference, recommended that delegates delete the incompatibility sentence and adopt the statement, "Faithful, thoughtful people who have grappled with this issue deeply disagree with one another; yet all seek a faithful witness."

The revision also would have asked United Methodists and others "to refrain from judgment regarding homosexual persons and practices as the Spirit leads us to a new insight."

Brewington told delegates the petition would be "an exciting and mature way forward," calling it "an honest, yet humble approach to how we are to view one another."

"Moving forward means we have come to a point of telling the truth. And we do not agree," he said. "We can make the determination to move forward, and stop the hurt."

In presenting the minority report, however, the Rev. Eddie Fox said that any United Methodist statement on human sexuality needs to be "clear, concise and faithful to biblical teaching."

Leaving out the statement that homosexuality is "incompatible with Christian teaching" would be confusing, especially for members of the church outside the United States, Fox said.

I have seen and experienced the pain and the brokenness in parts of our global movement whenever our church has failed to hold fast to this essential teaching of the Holy Scripture," he said.

The delegates' action prompted a coalition of gay advocacy groups immediately to stage a silent vigil outside the Fort Worth Convention Center. Members of Soulforce, Affirmation, Reconciling Ministries Network and Methodist Federation for Social Action lined the entrance as delegates returned from a dinner break.



### Heated debate

Earlier in the day, the petition opposing homophobia generated some heated debate from the floor when a delegate from the Democratic Republic of Congo described homosexual practice as among the things “that come from the devil.”

“Homosexuality is a practice that is incompatible with the love of God,” he said. “We love homosexual people, but we detest what they do.”

But the Rev. Judy Stevens, New York Conference, countered: “We are all aware of the violence used against homosexual people in the world today. ... It’s time to stand with people whose orientation may be different from us.”

The Rev. Debbie Fisher, from the Northern Illinois Conference, told delegates about a gay relative who was beaten to the point of being unable to function as an adult. “I ask you to think about Wesley’s three rules,” she said. “Great harm was done to this man who loved God.”

The Rev. Steve Wende of the Texas Conference said the debate was painful, but cautioned delegates against changing the Discipline’s language: “If we do this as a way of making some people happy, it won’t make anyone happy.”

Will Green of the New England Conference urged delegates to adopt the committee’s recommendation. “It allows for gay and lesbian people like myself to stay in the church in a safe way that doesn’t cause us to be sacrificed for the sake of church unity,” he said.

The Rev. Kent Millard, South Indiana Conference, said the petition reflects reality among United Methodists. “The truth is, we are divided,” he said. “Let’s just acknowledge that it doesn’t say one is right and one is wrong. It just says we disagree.”

After replacing the majority report with the minority report, delegates approved it 501-417.

### In other action on sexuality issues, delegates voted to:

Add the words “sexual orientation” to an existing resolution regarding a commitment to educational opportunity regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnic origin or economic or social background;

Retain language of Paragraph 341.6 in the Discipline that prohibits United Methodist ministers from conducting ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions;

Reject a proposal to add “civil unions” to a list of basic civil liberties in Paragraph 162.H because delegates felt the language was already inclusive;

Reject amending Paragraph 161.C to include “committed unions” in a section describing the sanctity of the marriage covenant.

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[The Rev. Muland Aying, a delegate from the South West Katanga Conference, speaks on the legislation. A UMNS photo by Maile Bradfield.]

- Robin Russell, UMNS; April 30, 2008; Fort Worth, Texas. Russell is the managing editor of the United Methodist Reporter.

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**Church supports people of Tibet, Sudan, Taiwan**

United Methodists have officially affirmed support for “the people of Tibet and their struggle for independence and autonomy.”

The action came May 1 as General Conference, the denomination’s top legislative body, met at the Fort Worth Convention Center. The petition on Tibet was among the consent calendar items approved that day.

Protests led by Buddhist monks have occurred in recent weeks in Tibet, sparked by grievances against Chinese rule and a desire for independence. A worldwide tour of the Olympic torch, which returned to China on April 30, was disrupted by pro-Tibet advocates. China is hosting the Olympics this summer.

The United Methodist Church affirms the Dalai Lama’s 1987 Five Point Peace Plan and supports the efforts of the United Nations to protect human rights of all Tibetans and preserve their heritage. The church’s agencies will “continue to monitor this situation and provide opportunities for the United Methodist Church members to advocate for justice for the people of Tibet.”

A call to compassion and caring

A new resolution on Sudan called “Sudan: A Call to Compassion and Caring” was part of the consent calendar approved on April 29. It advocates for justice for all Sudanese, calls upon United Methodists “in every country” to encourage their governments to aid development of a more just economic system in the Sudan and asks church members to “examine all methods of protest and solidarity before undertaking them” to ensure that none of their actions cause violence.

Church members are encouraged to take advantage of the 2009 mission study on the Sudan being prepared by the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries and to continue to support the work of the United Methodist Committee on Relief there.

A petition on “Divestment and Sudan,” submitted by the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, was not on the consent calendar and is awaiting action.

Also approved by consent was a petition reaffirming the denomination’s support “of the democratic aspirations and achievements of the people of Taiwan.” Church members are encouraged to become educated about contemporary issues related to Taiwan and the “One China” policy and promote the rights of Taiwanese “for stability, security and self-determination of its own status in the family of nations.”

- By Linda Bloom, UMNS; May 1, 2008; Fort Worth, Texas.

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Copies of the book *We’ve a Story to Tell...* are available at a cost of \$12.00 + \$2.00 shipping and handling. In addition, copies of the 295-page book *Stewardship Perspectives – 2007* (which contains data on church spending) are available at a cost of \$14.00 + \$2.00 shipping and handling. Send your orders to the address contained at the bottom of this page of *The Christian Methodist Newsletter*.

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