Monthly Update

December 2010

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Each December, we make our annual request for contributions. We ask that each of you pray and seek the Lord's leading as to how you might support the ministry of Concerned Methodists. Since we have no paid employees, we are able to translate the maximum amount of donations into our ministry of informing people about what is happening within our United Methodist Church.

During this past year, the circulation of *The Christian Methodist Newsletter* has increased to over 17,000 people, groups, and churches in all of the 50 states and in 24 foreign countries. In addition we have published *Misguided Shepherds*, a book that recaps what United Methodist personnel have done in public political advocacy and their continued support for the homosexual/abortion agenda. In addition it contains added information on the nature of the Islamic threat to our country. We had delayed releasing it until the Values Voter Coalition conference in Washington, DC held this past summer, where we were able to broaden our contacts across a wider spectrum of the American public. We believe that it had a positive effect on educating average Americans in the reality that those UM employees who are public in supporting a radical left-wing agenda do not speak for the average person sitting in the pews of our churches. Additionally, we believe that this will serve us well in the future in further expanding our base of influence.

We still face challenging times, not only in our country and the world, but also in our ministry of renewal in the United Methodist Church. It is especially important for us this year since, although we send *The Christian Methodist Newsletter* out only as finances allow to our expanded mailing list. This is a two-edged blessing – although we do reach more people with our information the expense is greater and we often experience a shortfall in our income versus costs. At present we are \$15,302 behind on our budget for the year.

We ask you to pray as to whether or not you can help us ease this financial burden so that we can more fully utilize our resources in the cause of renewal in the United Methodist Church. May we ask for your continued help through your gifts and your prayers?

In the spirit of the Christmas season we would ask that – if you have not already made it a part of your family tradition – you read Luke, chapter 2, verses 1-20 in your Bible. This speaks most eloquently as to what this holiday season is all about. Finally, from your brothers and sisters here in Concerned Methodists, we wish the very best to you during this Christmas and throughout the coming year.

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

Believing in the ministry of Concerned Methodists, I will:

______ Make a "Faith-Promise" of \$_____ per month.

Send a one-time contribution of \$_____.

Promise to pray for the work of Concerned Methodists.

December 2010 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

"There are times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time we fail to protest."

– Elie Wiesel, Holocaust survivor and Nobel Laureate.

The Good Stuff

+ Naughty or Nice?

The American Family Association's (AFA's) 2010 listing of top retailers and how they recognize Christmas Based on current advertising, below is a list of companies that avoid, ban, or use the term "Christmas" in their advertising. We will continually update the list, so check back often. Criteria - AFA reviewed up to four areas to determine if a company was "Christmas-friendly" in their advertising: print media (newspaper inserts), broadcast media (radio/television), website and/or personal visits to the store. If a company's ad has references to items associated with Christmas (trees, wreaths, lights, etc.), it was considered as an attempt to reach "Christmas" shoppers. If a company has items associated with Christmas, but did not use the word "Christmas," then the company is considered as censoring "Christmas."

[The criteria used] was by color code (updated 11-17-10):

GREEN: Company uses the term "Christmas" on a regular basis, we consider that company Christmas-friendly.

YELLOW: Company refers to Christmas infrequently, or in a single advertising medium, but not in others.

RED: Company may use "Christmas" sparingly in a single or unique product description, but as a company, does not recognize it.

Companies FOR "Christmas": Amazon.com, Bass Pro Shops, Bed Bath & Beyond, Belk, Best Buy, Big Lots, Books-A-Million, Cabella's, Collective Brands, Costco, Dick's Sporting Goods, Dollar Tree, Family Dollar, Dollar General, H.E.B. Stores, Hallmark, Harris Teeter Stores, Hobby Lobby, JC Penney, JoAnn Fabrics & Crafts Stores, Kmart, Kohl's, Kroger, Lowe's, Macy's, Meijer, Menard's, Michael's Stores, Neiman Marcus, Nordstrom, Petsmart, Pier One Imports, Publix, QVC, Rite Aid, Sears, Super D Drug Stores, Target, Walgreens, and Wal-Mart/Sam's Club.

Companies marginalizing "Christmas": Banana Republic, Bath & Body Works, Gap Stores, Hancock Fabrics, Hy-Vee Stores, Old Navy, Limited Brands, Safeway, Starbucks, Toys R Us, and Whole Foods

Companies against "Christmas": Barnes & Noble, CVS Pharmacy, Office Depot, Radio Shack, Staples, SUPERVALU, and Victoria's Secret.

SPECIAL ALERT! Legal group offers valuable resources If you hear of instances of hostility toward Christmas expression, please let us know. AFA is working with the Alliance Defense Fund (ADF) to provide resources for government and public school authorities laboring under the misimpression they must censor Christmas. You can contact ADF at (1-800-TELL-ADF) for a copy of their legal analysis and memo on rights of seasonal expression at Christmas. We want to inform public officials about the law, and then encourage them to take a stand for Christmas.

- http://action.afa.net/Detail.aspx?id=2147486887

+ The Miners

This part of the story did not make it to the major news shows – a week ago, all the world was mesmerized by the ongoing "miracle" rescue of 33 miners trapped deep underground in a mine in Chile for 69 days, a process that took an agonizing 22 hours. More than a billion people around the world sat glued to their TV sets to watch the amazing rescue attempt. Fox News Channel had its highest viewer ship in ten years, drawing more viewers than even NBC. While the facts of the rescue have been covered in great detail by the mainstream media, here are some things you might not have heard on the news.

When the miners were rescued – when they came up one-at-a-time in that rescue capsule – most (perhaps all) of the miners were wearing special yellow T-shirts. These had been created by the Chilean branch of Campus Crusade for Christ. Emblazoned boldly across the front of the T-shirts were the words, in Spanish, "Thank you, Lord." The miners, in fact, had requested these words. The shirts were made and sent down to them while they waited for rescue.

But that's not all. A quotation on the back of the shirts which began "porque en su mano estan..." was actually Scripture. It was Psalm 95:4: "In His hands are the depths of the earth, the heights of the mountains are His also." Campus Crusade

had also provided the trapped miners – while still deep underground – with MP3 players with the audio version of the "Jesus" film. They also received the Bible in audio format.

Now here's the good news. Rev. Aldredo Cooper, the chaplain to the President of Chile, said of the rescued miners, "They're all wanting to testify to the Lord Jesus Christ. All 33 of them are saying that they found God in the mine. Five or six were already Christians and held services down in the mine. Many went down with no faith at all but they all say this: 'We were not 33; we were 34 because Jesus Christ was with us down there." One miner, Mario Sepulveda, told reporters, "We never lost faith. We knew we would be rescued. I have been with God and I've been with the devil. I seized the hand of God. I always knew God would get us out of there." One interesting point that I had missed was that a medic actually was sent down the rescue hole before the other miners could be brought up. Isn't that a picture of what God did? He sent His Son down to us before we could be rescued. We all, like the miners, were in darkness. But, as Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12). And, "I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness" (John 12:46).

I can only imagine the reaction, if those miners, trapped deep underground, came across Psalm 88 on their audio Bibles, when these words rang in their ears:

I am counted with those who go down to the pit; I am like a man who has no strength, Adrift among the dead, Like the slain who lie in the grave, You have laid me in the lowest pit, In darkness, in the depths.

You have put away my acquaintances far from me; I am shut up, and I cannot get out; My eye wastes away... LORD, I have called daily upon You; I have stretched out my hands to You. Will You work wonders for the dead? (Psalm 88: 4-10, selected portions)

– Sent by e-mail from Martin Rasmussen

Of Interest

+ RECLAIMING LAY LEADERSHIP KEY TO REVIVAL

The UMC can experience revival by returning to the spiritual practices of Methodism's early years, say two scholars leading an effort to develop passionate lay leaders. In joining the mainline establishment, the church jettisoned many of the activities that made John Wesley's movement so vibrant, said Scott Kisker, associate professor of church history at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. "Mainline means we are an establishment religion that basically doesn't see much difference between creating good citizens and creating Christians," Kisker said._"In the 18th century, Methodist preachers took to the road to share the gospel, and Methodist laypeople gathered each week for class meetings to discuss the state of their souls. Often the class leaders—rather than ordained clergy—performed pastoral duties for their communities. It was all a bit countercultural. The early Methodists were the Jesus freaks of their day.

Kisker and the Rev. Steve Manskar, director of Wesleyan leadership for the General Board of Discipleship, would like to see the church recapture some of that 18th-century spirit. To help with this revival, Manskar and Kisker will lead the Wesleyan Leadership Conference on Oct. 14–16 at West End UMC in Nashville. The conference comes on the heels of a recently released Congregational Vitality study that identified small groups as one of the main "drivers" of church growth, attendance and giving.

Manskar is working to get UM congregations across the country to establish Covenant Discipleship groups, based on the model of lay-led class meetings. "Lay leadership is essential," Manskar said. "That's where the revival is going to come from. We need to have laity taking the lead in the visiting, the caring and the mission of the church."

Such a finding would not have surprised John Wesley. Kisker said small groups were a key part of Methodism from the beginning. However, as the church grew in size and its members grew in prosperity, Methodists started to want to be more like their neighbors, Manskar said. They stopped wanting to attend class meetings each week, and they wanted pastors who no longer traveled but served one congregation. In the process, many laity lost their passion for discipleship. The church still attracted new members. But as a percentage of the U.S. population, it stopped growing sometime after the Civil War, Kisker said.

The practice of class meetings still works, Kisker and Manskar said. Manskar hopes Covenant Discipleship groups will lead people across the connection to have profound experiences, similar to those experienced in the early band meetings and class meetings. Further information on the conference is available at www.gbod.org/wesleyanleadership — Heather Hahn, UMNS, as reported in Newscope, August 11, 2010

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+ Report Examines Salaries for United Methodist Clergy in the U.S.

Nashville, Tenn. – A new report that examines how salaries varied for United Methodist pastors in the U.S. found that average pastor salaries grew faster than the inflation rate over the decade ending in 2008. Average salaries increased steadily by approximately 2 percent per year, for a 21 percent over a decade. The average salary of a fulltime pastor not living in a parsonage was \$55,000 in 2008, compared to \$45,300 in 1998.

The study, which focused particularly on how salaries differ with respect to gender and race, found substantial salary differences between male and female pastors (13 percent), and white and non-white pastors (9-15 percent). Those differences were largely attributed to differences in seniority between male and female pastors, and the assignment of non-white pastors to congregations that pay lower salaries. "Most of the gender/race gap disappears once congregational, personal, and position attributes are taken into account," the report states. "The report concluded that the gender gap can be expected to decrease over time as more female pastors gain seniority, and in fact diminished somewhat from the beginning of the study period to the end," said the Rev. HiRho Park, Director of Continuing Formation for Ministry.

The percentage of female pastors in The United Methodist church increased by about 50 percent over the study period, and seniority of female pastors increased an average of about 30 percent. The number of churches in a charge had a negative impact on salaries, even accounting for the size and resources of charges. Moving from one to two churches in a charge was associated with a 7 percent reduction in salary. Associate pastors and part-time/other local pastors earned about 30 percent less than elders who are the lead or sole pastor (even after accounting for congregational attributes and differences in seniority), but there was only a moderate gap between full-time local pastors and elders.

Substantial differences were also found between conferences. Excluding Rio Grande (which was an outlier), more than \$14,000 separated the conference with highest average salary (California-Nevada) from the lowest (West Virginia), even after adjustments were made for variations due to congregational, appointment, and personal characteristics (though not for the cost of living in various locations).

The study was conducted by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry in collaboration with the General Commission on Status and Role of Women, the General Council on Finance and Administration, the Anna Howard Shaw Center at Boston University, United Methodist Communications, the Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries, the General Commission on Religion and Race, the General Board of Discipleship, and the General Board of Pensions.

- Diane Degnan, ddegnan@umcom.org, UM Communications, Office of Public Information, November 17, 2010.

+ Call to Action Steering Team Releases Final Report

Nashville, Tenn.: The first priority of The United Methodist Church must be a commitment to fostering and sustaining congregational vitality if the denomination is to be effective in its mission, states the final report of the Call to Action steering team, released today. "While there are many examples of effective disciple-making, prophetic witness, and ministries of justice and mercy across the Connection, these efforts do not obviate the effects in the United States and Europe of our increasingly older membership and aging leaders; declines in the numbers of professions of faith, worship attendance, and baptisms; and growing financial burdens accompanied by decreasing revenues," the report states. "Thus, the adaptive challenge for The United Methodist Church is to redirect the flow of attention, energy, and resources to an intense concentration on fostering and sustaining an increase in the number of vital congregations effective in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."

The steering team proposed the following five recommendations, which would be mutually interdependent:

- Beginning in January 2011 and continuing for at least ten years, concentrate on using the drivers of congregational vitality to build effective practices in local churches.
- Dramatically reform the clergy leadership development, deployment, evaluation, and accountability systems.
- Measure progress in key performance areas using statistical information to learn and adjust approaches to leadership, policies, and use of human and financial resources.
- Reform the Council of Bishops, with active bishops assuming responsibility/accountability for improving results in attendance, professions of faith, baptisms, participation in servant/mission ministries, benevolent giving, and lowering the average age of church participants, as well as for establishing a new culture of accountability throughout the church.
- Consolidate program and administrative agencies, and align their work and resources with church priorities and the commitment to build vital congregations, and reconstitute them with much smaller competency-based boards of directors.

The Call to Action Project was launched by assignment from the Council of Bishops with endorsement and funding from

that recommendations would be fact-based and not opinion-based, the steering team commissioned research based on extensive data-mining and objective methods for identifying relevant trends, behaviors, and issues. An independent system-wide operational assessment of the connectional church was conducted by Apex that looked at how the denomination is currently using people, money, and processes at the district, annual conference, and general church levels. In addition, comprehensive research on data from various sources was carried out by the international firm Towers Watson to gain information about the factors that lead to congregations being more vital as evidenced by attendance, growth and engagement. Reliable statistical findings based on massive amounts of data from over 32,000 congregations show that high-vitality churches consistently share common factors that work together to influence congregational vitality and are characterized by the prevalence of:

- Effective pastoral leadership including inspirational preaching, mentoring laity, and effective management
- Multiple small groups and programs for children and youth
- A mix of traditional and contemporary worship services
- A high percentage of spiritually engaged laity who assume leadership roles

The Call to Action steering team...pesent[ed] their recommendations to the Council of Bishops at their meeting in Panama City, Panama in two parts on November 3-4, and to the Connectional Table at their meeting in Franklin, Tennessee on November 15. The report proposes the next step to guide change management be the establishment of a five-member interim operations team to work with the Council of Bishops, the Connectional Table and the general agencies to develop and implement work plans in stages leading up to and beyond the 2012 General Conference. The steering team's final report, the operational assessment report and the congregational vitality report are all available in their entirety at umc.org/calltoaction.

- Diane Degnan, ddegnan@umcom.org, UM Communications, Office of Public Information, October 25, 2010.

(UM) 2012 General Conference

No Change in Number of Delegates for 2012 General Conference The secretary of the General Conference, Rev. L. Fitzgerald Reist, announced today that the number of delegates for the 2012 General Conference will be near the 1,000-delegate limit. – UMNS

(UM) Bishops Goodpaster Urges Bishops to Shift Focus to the Future

The Council of Bishops President challenges the bishops to "focus" on what is about to happen rather than what has always been. More than 87 United Methodist bishops from Africa, Europe, Asia and the U.S met in Panama City, Panama Nov. 2-6 for the semi-annual, followed by a meeting of the Conference of Methodist Bishops and Presidents on Nov. 7-9 and CIEMAL on Nov. 10.

In the presidential address to the Council of Bishops in Panama City, Panama today, Bishop Larry M. Goodpaster challenged the bishops of The United Methodist Church to "lean into God's future" by turning the focus of attention to what is about to happen rather than what has always been. "We have the opportunity to lead the church toward greater vitality, impact and influence in the world," said Bishop Goodpaster. "By our decisions and actions this week in Panama, we will either lean into the future or be content with more of the same."

Goodpaster said that the first steps toward the future were taken when the Four Areas of Focus (leadership development, church growth, global health, and ministry with the poor) emerged during the 2008 General Conference. The Call to Action report presented to the council on November 3-4 invites the church into an adaptive challenge that will "redirect the flow of attention, energy, and resources to an intense concentration on fostering and sustaining an increase in the number of vital congregations effective in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."

"Leaning into God's future must move us toward accomplishing the mission by empowering and equipping women and men in thousands of local churches scattered in countries around the globe to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world," he said. The bishops of the church, he said, must act decisively and with a sense of urgency to cast the vision, exercise influence, persuade, lead, and begin leaning into a relevant future. In order to begin laying the groundwork for the 2012 General Conference, Bishop Goodpaster challenged his colleagues in the Council of Bishops to commit to do four things:

- 1. To covenant to weekly prayer and fasting for the 18 months leading up to General Conference
- 2. To convene and host holy conversations on a monthly basis with varied groups of people
- 3. To promote and encourage participation in the Leadership Summit on April 6, 2011

4. To use the covenant group meetings in Panama to focus on supporting, encouraging, and holding each other accountable for these commitments

"With great hope and anticipation of what God will do with us and among us, I believe it is time for us to lean into God's future, fish from a different side of the boat, and prepare to be astounded by the results," said Goodpaster.

- Diane Degnan, ddegnan@umcom.org, UM Communications, Office of Public Information, October 25, 2010.

(UM) General Board of Church and Society (GBCS)

UM General Board of Church and Society withdraws endorsement of One Nation Working Together rally

{Note: This gives a less-than-objective perspective of this situation. I had attended this "controversial" Aug. 28 event on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial led by Fox News TV and radio personality Glenn Beck and can attest to the reality that it was a visible witness against the extreme direction to the left that some are trying to take our country – to include some of the leaders of our United Methodist Church. The reactions against our leaders who have taken it on themselves to steer our once-great denomination onto a course supportive of far-left political objectives is seen as being "divisive" by those who espouse values contrary to those held by our country's founding fathers. What is in reality divisive is the direction in which our leaders have been trying to take our church which is at variance with values espoused by our founder John Wesley. This would apparently be a case of "removing the log" out of their eyes to see the situation clearly. – AOM}

Washington, DC: The General Board of Church & Society (GBCS) of The United Methodist Church is rescinding its endorsement of the "One Nation Working Together" rally in Washington, D.C., on Oct. 2. The board is disturbed by some of the overtly political and partisan statements issued by organizers of the march. GBCS agreed to be an endorser because the aims of the rally to "build a more united country with good jobs, equal justice and quality public education for all." These goals are non-controversial and consistent with scripture and the United Methodist Social Principles. Further, the rally was initiated by respected civil rights organizations such as the NAACP and the Leadership Conference for Civil & Human Rights. The list of endorsers, however, grew to include a variety of organizations that created enormous, unnecessary controversy. The inclusion of such groups on the list of endorsers has detracted greatly from the professed aims of the rally and the board is very disappointed this has occurred.

GBCS signed on as an endorser of "one Nation Working Together" prior to the "controversial" Aug. 28 event on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial led by Fox News TV and radio personality Glenn Beck. Subsequently, the "One Nation Working Together" rally has been portrayed by opponents as a counter-demonstration to Mr. Beck's event.

GBCS does not support a statement reported in the Sept. 30 issue of The Washington Post made by a key organizer of the event. He said, "We aren't the alternative to the tea party; we are the antidote." This statement heightens the sense of the "One Nation Working Together" rally as a gathering organized in opposition to Mr. Beck's demonstration.

Unfortunately, discourse within the United States has grown increasingly divisive. Perhaps more troubling, discourse within The United Methodist Church has taken on a very un-Christ-like tone. E-mails and phone calls made to the board by clergy and laity have been shocking in their vitriol.

The "One Nation Working Together" rally began with a clean, clear message consistent with the social teachings of The United Methodist Church. The controversial circumstances fomented by both opponents and proponents of the rally do in no way detract from our support for efforts to "build a more united country with good jobs, equal justice, and quality public education for all." We realize that many United Methodists who share these goals will attend the event. We pray that the rally will overcome the misguided controversies surrounding it and deliver hope for the change their presence does endorse.

Jim Winkler, General Secretary, General Board of Church & Society, The United Methodist Church

- Wayne Rhodes, Dir. of Communications, UM Communications, Office of Public Information, wrhodes@umc-gbcs.org; October 1, 2010

(UM) General Board of Discipleship (GBOD).

At its board meeting, held Aug. 4–7 in Nashville, the General Board of Discipleship (GBOD) affirmed the new format of an eight-page document for Foundations: Shaping the Ministry of Christian Education in Your Congregation. GBOD is charged in The Book of Discipline to provide for the church a clear statement of the biblical and theological foundations of Christian education. Previously published as a book in 1992, this leaflet takes the primary content and makes it accessible both on the Web and in print. Board member Hugh MacKintosh presented the report of the Committee on Older Adult Ministries of The UMC, which included action taken by the committee for financial grants to be awarded in 2010. All

grants were for projects that promote intergenerational ministries. Of the 63 grants received, 38 were approved and funded for a total of \$75,000. Distribution was as follows: eight in the North Central Jurisdiction, one in the Northeastern Jurisdiction, four in the South Central Jurisdiction, 12 in the Southeastern Jurisdiction, two in the Western Jurisdiction and 11 to Central Conferences. The funding process for Caregiving Ministry grants is from Aug. 1, 2010 to Jan. 15, 2011.

In preparation for General Conference 2012, GBOD has begun its review of potential legislation. Among the pieces recommended at this meeting of GBOD's directors are the renewal of two documents on sacraments, "By Water and the Spirit" and "This Holy Mystery." In other business, directors heard a report from the Global Young People's Convocation and Legislative Assembly meeting held last month in Berlin. Bishop Charlene Kammerer (Virginia Area), president of GBOD, held up this meeting as an example for The UMC as it seeks to be a more global denomination.

- GBOD; as reported in UMNewscope, August 25, 2010.

(UM) Judicial Council.

New Orleans - Regional United Methodist officials, questioning how much authority a key church executive should have in setting the number of delegates to the denomination's lawmaking body, may have to wait and see. The Judicial Council at its fall meeting ruled it had "no jurisdiction" to act on a request from the South Carolina Annual (regional) Conference inquiring about the General Conference secretary's authority to adjust the number of delegates participating in the legislative gathering. The General Conference, which gathers every four years, will next meet in 2012.

Among other actions at its Oct. 27-30 meeting, the denomination's top court ruled that the Baltimore-Washington Conference violated the fair process rights of one of its clergy members and deferred to its April 2011 meeting a request from the New York Conference related to same-sex marriage.

In oral hearings on the case involving the General Conference secretary, the Rev. Tim Rogers of South Carolina asked the council whether the secretary could ultimately determine the exact number of delegates to be elected by each annual conference and possibly "become the single most powerful person in the denomination." Rogers is the South Carolina Conference secretary. General Conference has set a range of 600 to 1,000 delegates and a ratio for representation, with each annual conference allowed to send at least two delegates. The concern, Rogers said, is if the language in church law is interpreted to allow the secretary the latitude to fix any number of delegates, even within the range.

The Rev. L. Fitzgerald Reist II, the current General Conference secretary, told the Judicial Council he understood the concerns, but said that legislation from the legislative body itself would be needed to correct any problems. He added that the secretary does need "a wide enough margin to allow for adjustments" as annual conferences select delegates. Reist said he consults with the conferences regarding representation because the final delegate count has financial implications. If General Conference has 750 delegates instead of 1,000, for example, "we can save a million dollars," he explained.

The Judicial Council ruled that it has no jurisdiction in the matter because the South Carolina Conference had taken no action that affects the authority granted to the secretary of the General Conference. "In the absence of a specific action of the annual conference, a request for a declaratory decision is nothing more than an invitation to answer a moot and hypothetical question," the ruling said.

Other business

In other business, Judicial Council ruled that the Baltimore-Washington Conference violated the rights of a suspended pastor. The court ordered that compensation and benefits be restored to the Rev. Helen Steiner Smith, retroactive from Feb. 11, 2010, "until she receives another appointment or is declared ineligible for appointment." Smith had been suspended from her position as pastor of Benevola United Methodist Church in Boonsboro, Md., in May 2009 after allegedly failing to carry out pastoral duties by not fully disclosing her husband's status as a registered child sex offender. According to news reports at the time, David Alvin Smith pleaded guilty the previous year to a sex offense charge after his adult daughter told authorities he had sexually abused her as a child.

Smith was placed on a voluntary leave of absence by the conference, an action "reversed and vacated" by the court, which found the case to have been mishandled by the bishop, superintendent and conference board of ordained ministry and "replete with errors, omissions, flaws and disciplinary violations."

Judicial Council also deferred to its April 2011 meeting a request from the New York Conference on a policy it adopted this

year, effective in 2011, allowing any of its clergy members to be "legally married at their own discretion, as permitted by Paragraph 103 of the Articles of Religion." The conference asked the council for a declaratory decision about the validity of the policy, which is based on the premise that Paragraph 103 takes precedence over Paragraph 2702 prohibiting same-sex marriage for clergy.

Requests to reconsider two decisions from the Judicial Council's meeting last April – upholding the trial court verdict against Jimmy J. Montgomery, a former South Carolina clergyman, and allowing United Methodist bishops in the Philippines to handle a complaint against one of their own – were denied.

The full decisions from the Judicial Council's October 2010 meeting are posted in the full text of the December Update on the Concerned Methodists' website: cmpage.org:

A further clarification on Decision No. 1179 from the website of the Judicial Council is offered:

Decision No. 1179

In Re: Request from the Northern Illinois Annual Conference for a Declaratory Decision as to the Meaning, Effect, and Application of ¶ 4 of the Constitution as it Relates to an Annual Conference Rule that All Clergy Shall, Without Discretion, Admit to Membership Any Baptized Member Desiring to Join the United Methodist Church and Avowing the Faith

DIGEST OF CASE

Under the Constitution, the General Conference has full legislative power over all matters distinctively connectional including the power to fix the conditions, privileges, and duties of Church membership which shall in every case be without reference to race or status. An annual conference is not permitted to devise and define its own policies or rules relating to the conditions, privileges and duties of Church membership. Such efforts violate the Discipline and are unlawful.

STATEMENT OF FACTS

The 2010 session of the Northern Illinois Annual Conference adopted the following request for a declaratory decision from the Judicial Council:

- 1. The Northern Illinois Annual Conference adopt a rule stating that, in accord with Par. 4 of the Constitution, all clergy shall, without discretion, admit to membership any baptized member desiring to join The United Methodist Church and avowing the faith;
- 2. The Northern Illinois Annual Conference shall ensure that all clergy are aware of this rule. Accordingly, the Annual Conference Board of Ordained Ministry shall as soon as possible establish and implement concrete ways to effectuate this rule and awareness of it with all Conference clergy.
- 3. The Northern Illinois Annual Conference requests from the Judicial Council of The United Methodist Church a Declaratory decision that the rule, above, and its implementation are consistent with the Constitution and Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church.

Jurisdiction

The Judicial Council has jurisdiction pursuant to ¶ 2610 of the 2008 Discipline.

Analysis and Rationale

The Northern Illinois Annual Conference request for declaratory decision asks the Judicial Council to affirm that its direction to the Board of Ordained Ministry is correct. We are unable to do so. In reviewing action of an Annual Conference, our inquiry considers whether the action is consistent with or in conflict with the Constitution and the Discipline. Any conference action that conflicts with the Constitution and the Discipline cannot be affirmed.

The Discipline is a book of law governing every aspect of the life and work of the Church, including regulations relating to its temporal economy, the use and disposition of Church property, and the conditions privileges, and duties of Church membership. Under ¶ 604, an Annual Conference is authorized to adopt for its own government, rules and regulations that are not in conflict with the Discipline. The proposed direction to the Board of Ordained Ministry conflicts with the Discipline and is, therefore, impermissible. An Annual Conference may not legally ignore, negate, or violate provisions of the Discipline even when they are based upon conscientious disagreements with its provisions.

Under ¶ 16 Article IV of the Constitution, the General Conference has full legislative power over all matters distinctively connectional including the power to fix the conditions, privileges, and duties of Church membership, which shall in every case shall be without reference to race or status. The issue of Church membership is a matter distinctively connectional. The General Conference has determined the meaning of Church membership in ¶¶ 214-221 and the method of admission into the Church in ¶¶ 222-225. Because membership is a matter distinctively connectional, an Annual Conference has no authority to create standards of membership that conflict with the Discipline. Efforts of an annual conference to devise and define its own policies relating to the conditions, privileges and duties of Church membership are contrary to the Discipline.

The 2008 General Conference amended ¶ 225 in an effort to remove the discretion of the appointed pastor in charge and to mandate that a member is good standing in any Christian denomination who has been baptized and who desires to unite with The United Methodist Church shall be received as either a baptized or a professing member. The 2008 General Conference did not, however, amend ¶ 214 relating to Church membership or admission into the Church. The practical result is that the General Conference has created one path for admission into Church membership for persons in good standing transferring from other Christian denominations and another path for persons seeking Church membership who are not members of other Christian denominations, generally referred to as a profession of faith.

Our jurisdiction is limited to declare Church law as it exists. We are not empowered to determine which path to membership is the right path or to re-write the Discipline between sessions of the General Conference. We presume that the General Conference is aware of the provisions of the Discipline and that whenever it acts it does so with intention and purpose. It remains the prerogative and the obligation of the General Conference to determine the scope of the inclusiveness statement contained in ¶ 4 of the Constitution and in relevant portions of the Discipline in order to provide clear and unmistakable direction to clergy and laity alike. Efforts of Annual Conferences to devise and define their own policies and rules relating to the conditions, privileges and duties of Church membership are contrary to the Discipline. An Annual Conference may not legally negate, ignore, or violate provisions of the Discipline, even when the disagreements are based upon conscientious objections to those provisions.

The Northern Illinois Annual Conference direction to the Board of Ordained Ministry is hereby determined and declared null, void, and of no effect.

DECISION

Under the Constitution, the General Conference has full legislative power over all matters distinctively connectional including the power to fix the conditions, privileges and duties of Church membership which shall in every case be without reference to race or status. An annual conference is not permitted to devise and define its own policies or rules relating to the conditions, privileges and duties of Church membership. Such efforts violate the Discipline and are unlawful.

Concurring Opinion

My disagreement with the holding of Decision 1032 was made clear in my dissenting opinions in Decision 1032 and in Memorandum 1041. Simply stated, Decision 1032 was wrongly decided. It ignored our settled precedent relating to the assumption of jurisdiction and took liberties with the legislative prerogative of the General Conference. Although the 2008 General Conference made an effort to clarify the standard for Church membership and provide direction to clergy and laity alike, its effort was not comprehensive enough to be fully dispositive of the issue of inclusive membership. This has created a perverse anomaly. The Church now has differing paths to membership. There is one standard for Church membership for persons in good standing in other Christian denominations who wish to join The United Methodist Church (¶ 225). There is another standard for those who wish to join The United Methodist Church by profession of faith (¶ 214).

Partisans on both sides of the membership issue have urged the Judicial Council to act in place of the General Conference to declare one standard of membership. On the one hand, some urge the Judicial Council to declare that all persons are to be admitted into Church membership upon request and without pre-condition. On the other hand, there are those who wish for the Judicial Council to rule that the pastor in charge has unbridled discretion to determine who can and cannot join a local church. Though polar opposites, both positions are equally misguided. The Constitution assigns to the General Conference the power to fix and define the conditions, privileges and duties of Church membership. Annual conferences may not establish parochial rules, regulations, policies, directives, or operating procedures relating to the conditions, privileges, powers and duties of Church membership nor may annual conferences prescribe methods of admission into the Church that conflict with the Discipline. This constitutional restriction applies to the Judicial Council as well. The Judicial Council has no authority to create law that it thinks the General Conference should have enacted, but merely to declare the law of the

Church as it exists. As stated in my dissent in Memorandum 1041, this issue can only be resolved by the General Conference. Decision 1032 has caused the Church needless strife. However, the Judicial Council cannot act in excess of its jurisdiction. It would be a senseless repeat of the same mistake for the Judicial Council to assume legislative authority that is properly reserved to the General Conference.

Jon R. Gray October 30, 2010

CONCURRING OPINION

Judicial Council Decision 1032 determined that ¶ 214 and ¶ 225 of the 2004 Discipline "are permissive and do not mandate receipt into membership of all persons regardless of their willingness to affirm membership vows."

The General Conference in 2008 amended ¶ 225, changing the word "may" to "shall" in the paragraph that relates to persons who transfer their membership into The United Methodist Church from another denomination.

Whereas the controlling opinion in Decision 1032 noted that ¶ 214 in the 2004 Discipline said persons "may be received" into membership and decided that "disciplinary language of \P ¶ 214 and 225 is permissive," the action of the 2008 General Conference replaced the permissive term "may" with the mandatory term "shall" in ¶ 225 while leaving ¶ 214 unchanged.

In the 2008 Discipline, ¶ 604.1 specifies the authority of annual conferences to make their own rules.

The annual conference, for its own government, may adopt rules and regulations not in conflict with the Discipline of The United Methodist Church, provided that in exercise of its powers, each annual conference shall act in all respects in harmony with the policy of The United Methodist Church with respect to elimination of discrimination.

The Judicial Council has delivered numerous decisions, from 1947 to the present, on the limits as well as the liberties of annual conferences to make their own rules. Therefore, the facts in this case are within a long history of jurisprudence by the Judicial Council regarding the authority of an annual conference to establish its own rules. This case also sits within the Constitutional provision that the work of annual conferences includes adopting their own rules and regulations.

At least twenty-five decisions of the Judicial Council have touched directly on some aspect of the authority given to annual conferences to adopt their own rules. Particularly relevant for this case is Decision 323, the last sentence of which reads, "A rule which substitutes discretionary for mandatory authority to that extent is in conflict with the Discipline and invalid."

The action of the 2008 General Conference to amend ¶ 225 by changing the word "may" to the word "shall" transformed a previously discretionary authority into a mandatory one. As it now reads, "A member in good standing in any Christian denomination who has been baptized and who desires to unite with The United Methodist Church >b>shall be received as either a baptized or a professing member." [Emphasis added.]

Left unchanged is ¶ 214, which addresses eligibility for church membership and says, "All people may attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments and become members in any local church in the connection (¶ 4)." [Emphasis added.]

Decision 1032 found that both \P 214 and \P 225 in the 2004 Discipline were "permissive" and did not mandate the receipt of persons into membership. The action of the 2008 General Conference removed any doubt about the nature of \P 225, which uses the word "shall" and is now clearly a mandatory statement. In keeping with Decision 323, therefore, any rule in an annual conference that would attempt to substitute discretionary authority for the mandatory authority in \P 225 is in conflict with the Discipline.

Not covered by Decision 323 is whether an annual conference may adopt a rule with the word "shall" when the Discipline uses the word "may" (\P 214). Moreover, although \P 214 still has discretionary language, \P 214 does not explicitly state with whom discretion resides. Decision 1032 found that discretion resides with the pastor in charge, even though no explicit statement appears in \P 214.

Decision 323 says "A rule which substitutes discretionary for mandatory authority...is invalid." It did not address what might appear to be a rule that substitutes mandatory for discretionary authority.

Decision 1032, which was based in part on an interpretive reading of \P 214 and \P 225, has at least in part been superseded by the 2008 General Conference in its amendment of \P 225.

William B. Lawrence

I join in this concurring opinion. Katherine Austin Mahle

I join in this concurring opinion. Susan T. Henry-Crowe

Saturday, October 30, 2010.

By Linda Bloom, United Methodist News Service, November 3, 2010.
 Bloom is a News Service multimedia reporter based in New York.

"A clear conscience makes a soft pillow."

Global Outlook

"The wages of sin is death. Repent before payday."

Ivory Coast. Bishop Boni calls families, church, to prayer

ABIDJAN, Côte d'Ivoire (UMNS)—When Bishop Benjamin Boni heard God telling him to rally the West African country to prayer after violence had convulsed the country, the leader of the country's United Methodists responded. "One day, a voice clearly said to me, 'Call on the churches, not only the Methodists, but other churches, to join in prayer, and we did that," Boni says. "And for (a while) ... we had peace." The bishop's ability to work with the other religious leaders of his country and mount a national call to prayer reflects the standing of the denomination, now part of The United Methodist Church, in the life of the country.

— The United Methodist News Service

The National Council of Churches. Council Revives Debate over God Language

Can Christians discuss the language of faith without it becoming a battle over political correctness or theological orthodoxy? The National Council of Churches hopes so. To begin the conversation, its Justice for Women Working Group brought 28 people to Chicago in August for a three-day symposium, "Language Matters." S. Kim Coffing, UM participant, did not know what to expect. "The issue of how we talk about God and faith stirs up pain for many people," said Coffing, an executive with the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (GCSRW). "From the minute I walked in, it was obvious what they wanted was to listen to us," she said. "I saw how hungry people are to have meaningful conversations that are descriptive of their faith," she said. "They want to connect with other people around these issues. If there was a common theme, it was our need to listen." America is more diverse than ever before, Coffing said. The church draws people from a wide spectrum of races, ethnicities, cultures and customs. "How does a mother explain the blond-haired, blue-eyed Jesus at church to her dark-skinned child?" she said. "Faith language can alienate some people, while rendering others invisible."

The NCC also says the issues are bigger than gender. It talks about using "expansive" language rather than merely gender-inclusive language. Efforts to raise sensitivity to language emerged on a large scale among mainline Protestants in the 1970s with the influx of female students and faculty and the development of feminist theologies. "Inclusive language" lectionaries and Bibles emerged. Theologians produced a range of books on the issues. Still, "Inclusive language never really took root in the mainstream," said M. Garlinda Burton, general secretary of GCSRW. "It's a volatile issue," Burton said. "Some in the church underestimated the value of having conversations with one another rather than having a policy

dictated."

"Part of the impetus to have a meeting on language is the impression of some observers that the use of gender – inclusive language throughout our NCC member communions has declined," the council said. The council's working group says the language used to talk about faith is a justice issue – a view Burton shares. "Like any other Christian social justice issue, you continue to look at the Holy Spirit for transformation," she said.

– Susan Hogan for UMNS; as reported in UMNewscope, September 1, 2010.

Never give the devil a ride. He will always want to drive.