

**SPECIAL ISSUE**

## General Conference 2012: the Arkansas connections

BY AMY FORBUS  
Editor

Every four years, the United Methodist Church brings together up to 1,000 delegates from around the world for General Conference. Working in legislative committees and plenary sessions, delegates revise the denomination's *Book of Discipline* and *Book of Resolutions*, as well as approve plans and budgets for church-wide programs.

What does this process have to do with United Methodists in Arkansas?

For starters, the Arkansas Conference delegation holds a dozen of the 988 total delegate seats at the 2012 General Conference, set for April 24-May 4 in Tampa, Fla. Six clergy and six laypersons and their alternates, elected at the 2011 Arkansas Annual Conference session, have been reviewing proposed changes.

"Twelve delegates and four reserve delegates will be traveling to Tampa well equipped to deal with the issues ahead," said Asa Whitaker, the first-elected layperson and chair of the delegation.

### Structural changes

Proposals for changing the structure of the denomination's boards and agencies have commanded delegates' attention in the months leading up to General Conference. Within the Arkansas Conference, the Imagine Ministry process is addressing the need for change. Similar needs at the general church level have led to proposals that could restructure the entire

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denomination.

"Some have said General Conference 2012 is one of the most important General Conferences ever to be held," Whitaker said. "I cannot offer personal witness to that summary. However, I do believe the set of decisions to be reached may very well determine the future of the United Methodist Church."

Whitaker noted that proposed legislation points to several possible changes, including the restructuring of general agencies; realignment of apportionments; increasing clergy effectiveness; increasing accountability for bishops, clergy and laity; and eliminating job guarantees for elders in good standing (commonly called "guaranteed appointment").

Most proposals for restructuring come from the Connectional Table, a group that was informed by the Call to Action report issued in 2010. Several Arkansas Conference delegates, including Whitaker and three clergy delegates, the Revs. Rodney Steele, Rebekah Miles and Mackey Yokem, have been part of an advisory group to members of the Connectional Table during recent months.

For details on the recommendations, see stories in the special supplement inside this issue of the *Arkansas United Methodist*.

One factor to keep in mind about the recommendations: adjustments will happen. Before any legislation reaches the floor of General Conference, it goes through a process of review and [See ARKANSAS, page 6A]

## AN OCCASIONAL WORD from the Bishop



BY CHARLES CRUTCHFIELD

Dear Friends:

This edition of the *Arkansas United Methodist* is devoted almost wholly to the General and Jurisdictional Conferences that will be occurring later this spring and next summer. I trust you will read the paper well. If you have questions about the potential actions of the conferences, you should ask one of the delegates or your pastor to answer your inquiries.

There is one thing that you can do. You can pray. You can pray that in the midst of heated debates on the great (and sometimes small) issues that face the church, the delegates will not lose perspective, common sense, and civility. While we may disagree, we are not required to act like the two major political parties in this nation. Pray we will be the church filled with grace, forgiveness and compassion.

You can pray that when decisions are made, they are made with the mission of the church foremost in the delegates' minds, to wit: the church's mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

You can pray that when the delegates meet at the jurisdictional conferences they will put aside regional, racial, gender and secular political

bias to elect new bishops who will lead the church with integrity, accountability, humility, creativity and deep faith.

You can pray that the newly elected bishops will be persons willing to embrace the change that must occur if our church is to be the movement God is calling us to be in the 21st century.

And you can pray that the bishop assigned to the Arkansas Annual Conference next September will find the joy and grace in Arkansas that Karen and I have experienced for the past seven and a half years.

Faithfully,

Charles Crutchfield

P.S. And while you are in a praying mood, please remember the cabinet in your prayers as we work to make mission field appointments across the annual conference.

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# Change in the air

BY RODNEY STEELE  
Special Contributor

Sometimes what happens *before* General Conference has a profound effect on what happens *at* General Conference.

For the last three General Conferences, that was particularly true regarding how General Conference dealt with the issue of homosexuality. Before the General Conferences of 2000 and 2004, there were church trials dealing with annual conferences' reluctance to uphold the *Book of Discipline's* ban on self-proclaimed and practicing homosexual pastors. The General Conference responded by tightening the language in the *Book of Discipline* regarding the ban.

In 2008, a Virginia Conference pastor was charged with not allowing a homosexual man to join his congregation. The General Conference responded by loosening the language regarding homosexuality and passing the most constitutional changes in recent history. Annual Conferences, though, did not ratify most of them, so the *Book of Discipline* did not undergo sweeping revisions.

This time, though, the focus seems to center on legislation from the Connectional Table and Interim Operations Team regarding the proposed restructuring of our Council of Bishops, as well as our general



Rodney Steele

boards and agencies. (To learn more, read the story "Proposals for major change at GC 2012" on the cover of the special supplement in this issue.)

There seem to be two areas of pushback regarding the legislation for dramatically changing the structure of the UMC, both of which have some history behind them. One comes from delegates from the Southeastern Jurisdiction. As the only Jurisdiction in the U.S. that has grown in membership and worship attendance, it has the most delegates of any geographical area.

I have visited with a limited number of delegates from the Southeast. It appears that they don't see the need for radical change, as do folks from areas of decline. In addition, there seems to be more distrust of bishops and, therefore, a reluctance to give them more power. One experience that feeds this distrust

is the aforementioned Virginia Conference incident, in which the presiding bishop violated due process as outlined in the *Discipline*. To be honest, the delegates from that jurisdiction with whom I have visited seem to fear that giving bishops more power will lead to more abuse.

The other pushback comes from groups who feel underrepresented in the proposed restructuring. Having worked hard to gain the involvement and representation they currently have, they are not eager to give it up. I believe there is a lot of support for their position and I predict that for that part of the plan to pass, it will need to increase the number of people at the steering table and ensure diverse representation.

Some folks ask what impact the restructuring legislation will have on the local church. At the outset, I don't think it will change much for local congregations. The impact would be more evident in the long term, as part of a larger whole: It could be the beginning of a renewed focus upon the ministry at the local level. Rather than looking higher up the hierarchy for "where the action is," we recognize that the action is where we are—working in our own communities to make and grow disciples.

Another part of the impact would be harder to measure: the efficiency factor. Like the utility bill that you'll never see because you've made your house more energy efficient, it wouldn't be as obvious, but it would make a difference.

By reducing the size of the general boards and agencies and increasing their efficiency, we would reduce the cost of running them, saving money for the local church. However, it will take some time before the local churches feel that ripple effect. Even so, in my opinion, it needs to be done to free up funds to expand ministry at the local level, where disciples of Jesus Christ are made.

If you have been following the Imagine Ministry process here in the Arkansas Conference, some of these themes may sound familiar. It's a crucial time in the life of the United Methodist Church, both here and around the world. Please join me in lifting our church up in prayer as we face big decisions and seek to remain faithful to Christ.

*The Rev. Steele, Arkansas' first-elected clergy delegate to the 2012 General Conference, serves as senior pastor of First UMC Mountain Home.*



BY AMY FORBUS

## EDITOR'S CORNER

# Special issue for a special season

Thanks for having a look at this special issue of the *Arkansas United Methodist*. In this General Conference year, I believe it's important for all of us to consider the work the Arkansas delegation will face when they participate in both General and Jurisdictional Conferences.

In addition to the paper's usual two sections, the staff of the *United Methodist Reporter* has compiled special supplement sections on General Conference. If you have any interest in the big-picture workings of our denomination, you'll find the information intriguing. And even if you don't think it interests you, give it a read anyway. You never know where helpful information or ideas will surface.

As I prepare to cover General Conference, some out-of-context quotations from my years majoring in English have popped into my head.

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..." —Charles Dickens, "A Tale of Two Cities"

General Conference will include some of the best opportunities to meet United Methodists from around the world, share in amazing worship experiences and witness decisions that will affect the life of the UMC for years to come.

General Conference also promises to include negative experiences, hurt feelings, disappointments and misunderstandings. Our church's highest governing body will make decisions that some people

will see as right and good, and that other people will declare to be grave errors. Controversy will brew. The Church is full of fallible humans, and you'll likely find as many opinions on the floor of General Conference as there are delegates.

Another quote that comes to mind—again, completely out of context:

"April is the cruelest month..." —T.S. Eliot, "The Waste Land"

Technically, in terms of General Conference's schedule, May is probably a crueller month than April. By the time the delegates enter May, they're up against greater quantities of physical, spiritual and emotional fatigue.

When I served as a lay delegate from the North Texas Conference in 2008, I blogged about the experience for the *United Methodist Reporter*. Looking back through those blog entries, I can see the highs and lows I weathered. I also see the support I received in so many forms: a blog comment, a text message, a visit with a friend who came to observe.

I've stated it before in two previous columns: the delegates need your prayers before and during General Conference. What I haven't said is that after eleven days away from their normal lives, they will need your prayers when they return home, too. Please remember to lift them and their work up to God.

If you choose to follow General Conference action as it unfolds (see page 7A for some ways to do that), I

invite you to keep a few things in mind:

- 1) Prayer really does help.
- 2) If a vote doesn't go the way you would like, don't pick up your ball and go home. We must continue to be the church together.
- 3) Amid the legislative minutiae, watch for the goodness—it's there. Just one example from 2008: Even while sitting on the floor of General Conference, delegates and bishops raised more than \$400,000 to fight malaria.

At the end of General Conference, some things about our beloved UMC will have changed. We will probably notice a few of those changes in our local churches. (For example, the 2008 General Conference added "witness" to the "prayers, presence, gifts and service" of our membership vows.) Others may take longer to play out in our structure.

Regardless of the changes to the UMC, a human creation, each of us will still belong to God, still have a calling that Christ has placed on our lives. And the question will remain: How do we answer that call, each and every day?

It doesn't take a General Conference to change the world. It simply takes each of us listening to God, then doing something about it.

To reach me, send an email to [aforbus@arumc.org](mailto:aforbus@arumc.org).

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# Sibling Arkansas delegates share hopes for holy conferencing

Distributed by United Methodist News Service

Two General Conference delegates from the Arkansas Conference—the Rev. John P. Miles II and the Rev. Rebekah “Beka” Miles—are siblings with sometimes widely divergent views.

But they and other delegates are being encouraged to use holy conferencing, or holy conversation, to set “a tone for respectful dialogue and relationship building.” The goal, explained Minnesota Area Bishop Sally Dyck during the pre-General Conference news briefing, is to have dialogue instead of debate, and to find consensus around important matters rather than have “winners” and “losers.”

**Barbara Dunlap Berg** of United Methodist Communications asked John, pastor of First United Methodist Church Jonesboro, and Beka, associate professor of ethics and practical theology at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, to share their thoughts about holy conversation and the role it might play at General Conference.

**Your father, John Miles, was a several-times General Conference delegate. What did you learn about holy conferencing/conversation from him? Growing up, did you debate/discuss United Methodist issues around the dinner table? How did that influence you?**

**John:** Dad has always been a very passionate person. He is deeply identified with the United Methodist Church. I learned that beliefs matter. I learned that principles were worth defending. I am not sure how holy our conferencing was, but Dad never demonized other people, even though he was often arguing with others. Both at annual conference and at General Conference, there were obvious allies and opponents. Dad always considered his opponents his brothers and sisters. I also learned from him that church politics were secondary to local ministry. Both Mom and Dad were our tutors in United Methodist politics.

**Beka:** Our mother founded and led the women’s leadership team in our jurisdiction, which was pivotal in the election of several bishops, including Janice Riggle Huie and Ann Sherer-Simpson. We learned from our parents that this is a highly political process, that compromise is central and that compromise doesn’t happen by itself. You have to work for it. You have to be willing to talk to people, to listen, and to give and take.

We were encouraged to debate issues around the dinner table and to disagree with each other. A lively disagreement was as important to a good family dinner as the food itself.

**Looking toward the 2012 General Conference and the many issues to be discussed, how is holy conferencing/conversation important? How would you define “holy conferencing/conversation”?**

**John:** I think most of us are deeply concerned about the polarization within our nation’s culture and politics. We as the church should try to give a better witness in our own struggles. Holy conferencing is not the surrender of basic beliefs for the sake of comity. Holy conferencing is holding fast to what you believe is true while listening to other people’s truths. It means not demonizing others. It means attempting to try to understand why others think differently about issues.

**Beka:** Honestly, true holy conferencing is difficult, perhaps impossible, to achieve on any large scale at General Conference. I have a more modest hope, which you can call holy conferencing if you want: that we will be civil, generous and try not to make complete jackasses of ourselves and that when we do make

jackasses of ourselves, we will apologize and then try to amend our ways.

**John is a first-time delegate, though he has attended three General Conferences, including one as an alternate. This is Beka’s third time as a delegate. What is it like to serve on the same delegation as your sibling whose votes, quite likely in some instances, will be opposite yours?**

**John:** It is an honor to serve on the delegation. When my sister was elected as the second clergy delegate, I was very proud of her. She is a wonderful person. I do not always agree with her, but she is the kind of delegate and clergy person we desperately need at General Conference. She is willing to think outside the box while being deeply committed to basic Christian theology and ethical behavior. I am not naive enough to think things will always go the way I want them to go. At General Conference, you

**‘We know we have to take the other seriously. We know our love for each other and shared commitments to God trump any argument. That’s true for arguments with my brother, John, and with all our brothers and sisters in Christ.’**



Rebekah Miles

**‘Holy conferencing is holding fast to what you believe is true while listening to other people’s truths. It means not demonizing others. It means attempting to try to understand why others think differently about issues.’**



John Miles II

are always guaranteed to lose some of the votes. You do the best you can and accept the outcome and go back to your home and be grateful for your local church.

**Beka:** I love serving with my brother. What I want to see in delegates—whatever their political leaning on any particular issue—is a capacity to listen to others with whom they disagree, a willingness to compromise and a pragmatic spirit that seeks to work out agreements between the various parties. My brother has that in spades, as do many other people of diverse opinions. Not only do I love serving with my brother at General Conference; I am even going to room with him! OK, I have to admit I am a little uneasy about that one! But there is no question that our love for each other can weather ANY disagreements and ANY living arrangements, including spending 10 days in the same hotel room!

**Do you expect to debate issues one-on-one with each other before and/or during General Conference? If so, please**

**elaborate.**

**John:** Beka and I share a passion for the United Methodist Church and the holy catholic church. It is a tie that binds us. We love talking about theological and ethical issues confronting our church. I think, sometimes, we enjoy debating our differences more than our similarities. In our family, it is a prized hobby.

**Beka:** That’s exactly right. We love arguing about the issues. It’s the favorite sport in our family, but as with any sport or game, there are rules. We know that we can’t be mean and nasty to each other. We know we have to take the other seriously. We know our love for each other and shared commitments to God trump any argument. That’s true for arguments with my brother, John, and with all our brothers and sisters in Christ.

**Which issues, in your opinion, will call for the greatest amount of holy conferencing/conversation, and how will you encourage that?**

**John:** The issue of homosexuality, of course, has polarized the mainline churches for decades now. With the continued growth of our more conservative regions in the United States and around the world, I think there will be a bit less tension around that issue. I also think the work of the Connectional Table will be a flash point. Surely, no one at the conference believes the status quo is acceptable. I have some hope we can rethink our structures and our way of doing ministry together.

**Beka:** We should approach every issue with the minimalist expectations I described above—being civil, listening generously to the other and trying not to be a jackass. We like to think we are divided by left and right, but the truth is that the ideologues on the left and right are extremely difficult to tell apart; they are cut from the same cloth.

**Do you agree with the Rev. Mike Slaughter, lead pastor of Ginghamburg United Methodist Church, Tipp City, Ohio, who said, “We do more political conferencing than holy conferencing”? Why or why not?**

**John:** It would be naïve to think that holy conferencing will be the guiding principle of something like General Conference. Most of the delegates were elected through an openly political process, and we are often political enthusiasts ourselves. If we can be gracious in our political differences, that is realistically about as close to holy conferencing as we can get in something as political as General Conference. Actually, I have found the people who decry church politics the most are the ones in charge.

**Beka:** “Politics” is not a dirty word. We have a highly democratic, political polity. The founders of American Methodism set things up that way. An open political system is a gift. We just have to be willing to engage in the process with civility, generosity and a willingness to see and monitor our own faults. If the promotion of holy conferencing encourages us to be civil to each other, that’s wonderful. If it slows things down and gives less time to the actual political process, it will give significant advantage to the packages of legislation proposed by boards, agencies, commissions and bishops. In other words, depending on how it is done, even the call for holy conferencing itself can be a political act with political advantages for particular players in our legislative process.

Each cycle, as I prepare for General Conference and as I engage in the process at General Conference, I call to mind a quotation from the economist John Kenneth Galbraith found in a letter he wrote to John F. Kennedy as he began his presidency. “Politics is not the art of the possible. It consists in choosing between the disastrous and the unpalatable.”

# How do we get bishops, anyway?

## A primer on Jurisdictional Conference

Every four years, General Conference commands much attention among United Methodist leaders worldwide. But not all of the action happens there.

In July of General Conference years, the five U.S. jurisdictions hold concurrent Jurisdictional Conferences. Each of these gatherings has a shared goal: to elect new bishops in their respective jurisdictions.

The Arkansas Conference is part of the South Central Jurisdiction (SCJ), which also includes the annual conferences in New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, Missouri and Louisiana. The 2012 South Central Jurisdictional Conference will be held in Oklahoma City's Cox Convention Center, July 18-21—the same dates as similar conferences in the Southeastern, Northeastern, North Central and Western Jurisdictions.

Jurisdictional Conference delegates' primary task is to choose our newest bishops. In addition, the delegates receive reports, make decisions and cast votes on items such as the SCJ budget. They also handle some matters relating to the SCJ's affiliated organizations: Mount Sequoyah Conference and Retreat Center, Southern Methodist University and Lydia Patterson Institute.

### Candidates and voting

Though every ordained Elder in the United Methodist connection is eligible to be elected to the episcopacy (the office of bishop), in the SCJ, delegates typically choose from among endorsed candidates.

Persons willing to stand for election typically receive the endorsement of at least one annual conference delegation, an entire annual conference or an organized group that shares a common goal. For example, caucus groups who have endorsed candidates this year include Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR) and the Women's Leadership Team (WLT).

In the SCJ, endorsed candidates submit profile information and answer a series of questions in writing. With the answers in hand, General and Jurisdictional Conference delegates receive opportunities to interview the endorsed candidates. This year, the bulk of the candidates' interviews with the Arkansas delegation took place Jan. 27-28.

The *Book of Discipline*, our denomination's law book, recommends that the votes of at least 60 percent of Jurisdictional Conference delegates who are present and voting be required to elect a new bishop. The SCJ Conference rules abide by this recommendation.

The first ballot of the 2012 SCJ Conference is scheduled to be cast on Thursday morning, July 19. That ballot will likely be the first of many; at the 2008 SCJ Conference, delegates went through the balloting process 23 times to elect three new bishops.

### Assignment to episcopal areas

When the delegates finish electing all three new bishops, the work then falls to a smaller group: the Jurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy. This group includes one clergy person and one layperson from each of the annual conferences in the jurisdiction.

While other delegates wait, the Jurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy goes through the hours-long process of assigning bishops to episcopal areas. Some bishops will stay in their current areas; others will move to another area; and, in 2012, three episcopal areas will receive first-time bishops.

### Consecration

Saturday morning of the SCJ Conference is reserved for a special service of consecration for the new bishops. This year's consecration service is July 21 at St. Luke's United Methodist Church Oklahoma City at 10:30 a.m.

The service is open to the public—at least those members of the public who get there early. Most consecration services have a full house of worshipers.

### Then what?

Bishops are expected to report for work in their new areas Sept. 1. For new bishops and retiring bishops, as well as for those moving from one episcopal area to another, the time between the adjournment of Jurisdictional Conference and September is filled with adjusting to new plans and handling logistical issues. Please keep each of these leaders and their families in your prayers.

### How many years can a bishop serve?

In the U.S., bishops normally serve in one area for up to two four-year terms, but they can continue for a third term with approval of the jurisdictional conference. Bishops are elected for life and serve in their assignment until retirement (required by the *Book of Discipline* to be the jurisdictional conference following their 68th birthday).\*

This time around, four bishops in the SCJ are retiring: Arkansas Area Bishop Charles Crutchfield, Louisiana Area Bishop Bill Hutchinson, Nebraska Area Bishop Ann Sherer-Simpson and Northwest Texas-New Mexico Area Bishop Max Whitfield. But, because the conferences in Nebraska and Kansas are joining together to form a single episcopal area, we will elect only three new bishops for the SCJ.

And, a word about words: While we are not Episcopalians, our denomination does use the word "episcopal"—not capitalized—to refer to the elements of our connectional system that pertain to bishops.

\*In the annual conferences outside the U.S., called Central Conferences, bishops are elected for a specific term. If not re-elected at the end of the term, the bishop returns to the pastorate and is no longer considered a bishop. Bishops who retire while serving their term are considered bishops for life. In the Africa Central Conference, bishops who are re-elected for a second term then become bishops for life. (from umc.org)



Newly elected Bishop Earl Bledsoe is escorted to the platform by Bishops Alfred Norris and Janice Riggle Huie at the 2008 South Central Jurisdictional Conference. The SCJ will elect three new bishops in 2012 to fill vacancies left by retiring bishops, including Arkansas Area Bishop Charles Crutchfield.

AUM FILE PHOTO BY JANE DENNIS



## About the theme and logo for the 2012 SCJ Conference



Gwen Lester, a member of Christ UMC in Claremore, Okla. (an Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference congregation), designed the logo for the 2012 Jurisdictional Conference.

Working from the chosen theme, "Woven Together for Transformation," Lester turned to the weaving of a Choctaw river cane basket. The interconnectedness of all parts represents the weaving together of the two host conferences, Oklahoma and Oklahoma Indian Missionary, the weaving together of all ethnicities of the conferences, and also the weaving together of all the conferences within the South Central Jurisdiction. The seeds represent us, the people of the church, being poured out "for the transformation of the world," in keeping with the UMC's stated mission. Like seeds, as we grow, we also are transformed.

## Endorsed candidates for the episcopacy in the South Central Jurisdiction



**Cheryl Jefferson Bell**

**Cheryl Jefferson Bell** currently serves as pastor of Trinity Heights UMC Newton, Kan. She has been endorsed by the Kansas West Conference delegation and the SCJ Women's Leadership Team.



**Bob Farr**

**Robert D. "Bob" Farr** currently serves as director of congregational excellence for the Missouri Conference. He has been endorsed by the Missouri Conference delegation.



**Cynthia Fierro Harvey**

**Cynthia Fierro Harvey** currently serves as Deputy General Secretary of the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). She has been endorsed by the SCJ Women's Leadership Team.



**Mike McKee**

**Mike McKee** currently serves as senior pastor of First UMC Hurst, Texas. He has received the endorsement of the Central Texas Conference delegation.



**Gary Mueller**

**Gary Mueller** currently serves as senior pastor of First UMC Plano, Texas. He has received the endorsement of the North Texas Conference delegation.



**Elijah Stansell**

**Elijah Stansell** currently serves as the treasurer of the Texas Conference. He has received the endorsement of Black Methodists for Church Renewal.



**Chappell Temple**

**C. Chappell "Chap" Temple** currently serves as senior pastor of Lakewood UMC Houston, Texas. He has received the endorsement of the Texas Conference delegation.



**Eradio Valverde**

**Eradio Valverde Jr.** currently serves as the superintendent of the Corpus Christi District in the Southwest Texas Conference. He has received the endorsement of the Rio Grande Conference delegation.



**Fred Wideman**

**Fred Wideman** currently serves as senior pastor of Broadmoor UMC Baton Rouge, La. He has received the endorsement of the Louisiana Conference delegation.



**David Wilson**

**David Wilson** currently serves as Conference superintendent of the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference. He has received the endorsement of the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference.

## Arkansas connections (continued from page 1A)

revision in a legislative committee. By the time General Conference delegates have the opportunity to cast votes, the proposals are all but guaranteed to read differently.

### Arkansas ties

Any United Methodist may submit a petition to General Conference. This time around, several pieces of legislation have roots in the Arkansas delegation.

The sibling pair on the delegation, the Revs. Rebekah Miles and John Miles II, submitted a piece

of legislation stemming from the late 2008 and early 2009 illness and death of their mother, JoAnn. Their petition seeks to amend Paragraph 162V of the *Book of Discipline* to include the following statement:

“We encourage hospitals, physicians, and medical clinics to provide access to primary healthcare to all people regardless of their healthcare coverage or ability to pay for treatment.”

Though she had health insurance, JoAnn Miles had difficulty finding a new primary care physician when the health care

management company changed the kind of coverage it would accept. While she tried to find a new doctor, her treatable medical condition worsened and eventually led to serious illness and death.

“This is something very, very small, but it matters to us,” Rebekah Miles said of the change she and her brother have submitted. “Mom asked us to do something about health care on her death bed.”

Other petitions Rebekah Miles has sponsored or co-sponsored fall within the Ministry and Higher Education legislative committee, of which she is a member. One would grant sacramental authority for

deacons in their primary appointments when no Elder is available. Another would create a new path for local pastors to become eligible for ordination as Elders.

### Urgency of change

Miles believes that of the changes up for consideration, the issue of guaranteed appointment has the greatest potential for impact within the Arkansas Conference.

“I think we’ve got to do something about effectiveness of clergy,” she says. “It especially affects churches who have had, and who have been hurt by, ineffective

pastors.”

Whitaker, the delegation chair, sees leadership as the core issue behind much of the legislation brought before this General Conference. He also perceives an eagerness for change.

“I sense there is a mood across the connection to bring about change, any change that will turn our denomination around,” he said.

But he approaches it with caution and a prayerful attitude.

“My prayer is that our sense of frustration and anxiousness to bring about change will not overshadow our discernment of what that change should be.”

# Briefing gives preview of church restructuring debate

BY HEATHER HAHN  
United Methodist News Service

TAMPA, Fla.—Months before the 2012 General Conference, delegates to the United Methodist Church’s top lawmaking body got a hint of the debate to come regarding restructuring the denomination.

More than 300 delegates, communicators and agency staff gathered Jan. 19-21 for the Pre-General Conference News Briefing at the Tampa Convention Center, where discussions of the proposed changes dominated conversation.

The main piece of legislation—the result of the multiyear Call to Action process—would consolidate nine of the church’s 13 general agencies into a new United Methodist Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry under a 15-member board.

The board would be appointed by and accountable to a 45-member advisory board called the General Council for Strategy and Oversight, which would replace the Connectional Table that presently coordinates the denomination’s mission, ministry and resources.

Essentially, the proposal would reduce agency boards now governed by more than 500 people to a group of 60. The legislation would also allow the board of the newly created center to redistribute up to \$60 million toward funding theological education, recruiting young clergy and fostering vital congregations—about 10 percent of the amount presently budgeted for general church operations.

Delegates heard both an overview of restructuring legislation and concerns that the plan would damage the denomination’s connectionalism, give too much power to the bishops and eliminate

the denomination’s historic “separation of powers” between bishops and General Conference.

An overarching question for many at the briefing: Will the reorganization achieve its goal of promoting more vital congregations or have the opposite effect?

### Harmonizing a ‘cacophony’

The Council of Bishops and Connectional Table initiated the Call to Action to reorder the life of the church in the wake of the 2008 global economic crisis and after decades of declining U.S. membership. The Call to Action Interim Operations Team devised the recommended changes, and the Connectional Table drafted the legislation.

“We do not presume that what we are presenting is perfect by any means,” said Jay Brim, who chairs the Connectional Table’s legislative committee. “It is a proposal to move us toward change, and these changes, we hope, will be a significant step forward for the church.”

He said the proposal does not really address general church staff. “It’s about the governance of the general church,” he said.

Brim, lay leader of the Southwest Texas Annual Conference, said the denomination’s 13 current general boards are “in a constant push to make sure that local churches and annual conferences know who they are, what they have to offer and how to get it from them.”

“What we’re trying to create out of this cacophony is a simple structure that everybody can identify without removing anything we currently have,” he said. “Our hope is that we can find a better way to offer our services at the general church

level down to local congregations and annual conferences.”

Even before the Connectional Table devised its restructuring legislation, 10 of the agencies were also developing their own legislation to shrink their board membership. This followed an operational assessment that found most agencies were too big and met too infrequently to provide accountability.

### Connectionalism

The Council of Bishops endorsed the restructuring at its November meeting, but the vote was not unanimous. Phoenix Area Bishop Minerva G. Carcaño shared her concerns about the plan during a presentation.

“Studies have shown that there is duplication and even competition among our general agencies that does not benefit the mission and ministry that God is calling us to be about,” Carcaño said.

“Yet, general agencies have served a vital function for resourcing the church and enabling us to act connectionally, and we should not lose these essential functions. There are things even our strongest local churches cannot do alone, and some things they will not do.”

In some ways, she suggested, the proposed restructuring of the agencies does not go far enough. She noted that the Connectional Table legislation just puts agency work in new categories and leaves unanswered what agency functions might be dropped or added to better serve a global denomination.

In addition, she and others at the Pre-General Conference News Briefing echoed concerns raised by the denomination’s ethnic caucuses that the smaller governance boards

would severely limit the contributions of people of color. “In the U.S., a church that does not reach out to people of color is a church that will die,” Carcaño said.

### Bishops’ power

The Rev. Tim McClendon, a Connectional Table member and the Columbia (S.C.) District superintendent, explained his worry that the Connectional Table legislation would give too much power to the denomination’s bishops.

At the coming General Conference, delegates also will take up a proposed amendment to the denomination’s constitution to create a bishop without the usual responsibility of overseeing a geographical area. That bishop would be elected by the Council of Bishops and would have—among other duties—the authority to serve as the denomination’s chief ecumenical officer, help align the strategic direction of the church and focus on growing vital congregations.

The Connectional Table endorsed this change, and under the proposed restructuring legislation, the “set-aside” bishop would be chair of the General Council for Strategy and Oversight and ex-officio member of the board of the Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry.

Five of the voting members of the proposed Council for Strategy and Oversight would be bishops. The Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry would make its financial decisions in consultation with the Council of Bishops.

“The power dynamic isn’t equal no matter how someone does the math,” said McClendon, who is a candidate for the episcopacy. “There is no way for the 15 persons, who are



Bishop Minerva Carcaño (Phoenix Area) helps lead a discussion on church restructuring during the pre-General Conference news briefing at the Tampa Convention Center. UMNS PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE

unpaid volunteers, no matter how great they are in all that they do, ... to make these [financial] decisions. It also seems to me that the set-aside bishop is where the real power is in the proposed structure.”

### Separation of powers

The Rev. Thomas E. Frank, a historian of Methodism and professor at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C., noted that the denomination and all but one of its predecessor bodies have maintained a “separation of powers” between General Conference and bishops.

Methodism also historically has separated the authority over programming from authority over money, he said.

“Separation of the two prevents consolidation of power and advances accountability and participation,” Frank said. “The United Methodist Church is hardly alone in this principle. It’s basic to the functioning of any nonprofit corporation or nongovernmental organization.”

Hahn is a reporter for UMNS and a former editor of the Arkansas United Methodist.



# Keeping up with General Conference

In recent years, technological advances have made it far easier for the average person to follow events happening around the world. For example, since the last General Conference convened in 2008, the popularity of the smartphone has surged, and many people expect to be able to stay informed in real-time.

From your computer to your phone to a road trip, here are a few ways you can observe General Conference.

## read

Two of the websites where United Methodists can find coverage of General Conference are [gc2012.umc.org](http://gc2012.umc.org) and [umportal.org](http://umportal.org).

The first site is part of the official website of the denomination, and contains a wealth of background materials, including legislation.

The second site is the website of the *United Methodist Reporter*. For more information about the *Reporter's* perspective, see the commentary by Alan Heath in the special supplement to this issue.

Readers can also gain a more personal perspective through reading delegate blogs. At press time, two Arkansas Conference clergy delegates plan to post blog entries during General Conference. Here's where to find their posts:

Rodney Steele: [steeleumc.wordpress.com](http://steeleumc.wordpress.com)

Rebekah Miles: [rebekahmilesdotcom.wordpress.com](http://rebekahmilesdotcom.wordpress.com)

Jurisdictional reserve clergy delegate Andrew Thompson also plans to blog during General Conference at [andrewthompson.com](http://andrewthompson.com).

Social media provides a variety of ways to follow General Conference proceedings. For example, you can "like" United Methodist General Conference 2012 on Facebook. A few Arkansas delegates have Twitter accounts, as well:

Jay Clark: [@pjayclark](https://twitter.com/pjayclark)

Susan Ledbetter: [@revsledbetter](https://twitter.com/revsledbetter)

Karon Mann: [@karonmann](https://twitter.com/karonmann)

## Arkansas delegates attending General Conference

Lay delegates elected to General Conference are Asa Whitaker (Discipleship committee), Sarah Steele, Karon Mann (Independent Commissions committee), Clefton Vaughan (Financial Administration committee), Carole Teague (Church and Society A committee) and Karen Millar (General Administration committee). Sarah Steele is unable to be in Tampa, so Deborah Bell, the first reserve delegate, will step in to serve (Global Ministries committee). Todd Burriss of Conway and Jay Clark of Little Rock will attend as lay reserve delegates.

Clergy delegates elected to General Conference are the Revs. Rodney Steele (Judicial Administration committee), Rebekah Miles (Ministry and Higher Education committee), Ronnie Miller-Yow (Faith and Order committee), Mackey Yokem (Superintendency committee), Susan Ledbetter (Local Church committee) and John Miles II (Church and Society B committee). The Revs. C.E. McAdoo and Michael Roberts will attend as clergy reserve delegates.

## Arkansas delegates attending Jurisdictional Conference

In addition to the delegates listed above, the following delegates will attend Jurisdictional Conference, July 18-21 in Oklahoma City.

Lay delegates are Sandy Smith, Brian Swain and John Crawford. Reserve lay delegates to Jurisdictional Conference are Brenda Norwood, Brandon Bates and Natalie Clark.

Clergy delegates are the Revs. Roy Smith, Aubrietta Jones, Kurt Boggan and Wes Hilliard. Reserve clergy delegates are the Revs. Andrew Thompson, David Bush and Pamela Estes.

## download

Mobile device users will be able to access information about the United Methodist Church's 2012 General Conference through a new, free mobile application from United Methodist Communications.

The app is now available for iPhone and iPad users, with an Android version soon to follow. To download the free app, go to your device's app store and search for United Methodist General Conference or visit [gc2012.umc.org/app](http://gc2012.umc.org/app) to find the link.

The app was developed to give users instant access to General Conference information without the need for a computer and Internet connection. Features of the mobile app include scheduling, legislative tracking, a map of the Tampa Convention Center and surrounding areas, information about display areas, news, photos and videos.

"Where Internet access is limited, the mobile app makes General Conference more accessible," said the Rev. Larry Hollon, chief executive of United Methodist Communications. "It also provides greater convenience and relevance for those on the go, ensuring that all United Methodists, no matter their location, have up-to-the-minute information as it unfolds at General Conference 2012."

The denomination released a separate United Methodist app in October 2011 with daily devotions, news, videos, photos, social media sites and a searchable index of United Methodist churches by geographic area.

## stream

Live streaming video of plenary sessions, both legislative and worship, will be available at [gc2012.umc.org](http://gc2012.umc.org). In addition, the site includes a Pre-General Conference Video Archive. Look for the link in the right-hand sidebar and watch those items at your convenience.



## visit

Want to make a trip to Florida? General Conference is open to observers. Check the agenda posted under "Follow GC2012" at [gc2012.umc.org](http://gc2012.umc.org) to see what day or days include activities most interesting to you. The website also has a downloadable 60-page visitors' guide (check the "Useful Links" section).



The Rev. Tom Albin preaches during opening worship at the United Methodist Church's pre-General Conference news briefing at the Tampa Convention Center in Florida.

UMNS PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE

'Our goal is to have the entire United Methodist Church membership praying with the elected delegates and praying for God's will to be done, in God's way and in God's time.'

—The Rev. Tom Albin

Want to get plugged into the prayer ministry surrounding General Conference? Visit this link:  
<http://bit.ly/gconf12>

## Calling every UM to pray for General Conference

BY TOM ALBIN  
*United Methodist News Service*

The beauty of being a part of a connectional church is that we can call on one another to pray and support each other in prayer. As the 2012 General Conference approaches, it is important to know our prayer foundation is firm and we are connected in a global prayer network.

Prayer is the foundation for Christian discipleship and the essence of United Methodist spirituality. The Wesley brothers taught us "a sincere desire is an authentic prayer."

Frances Jennings of the Florida Annual Conference and I co-lead the General Conference Prayer Support team that is calling every United Methodist member and congregation, in every state and every nation, to surround and support General Conference in prayer. I am convinced the one thing every United Methodist can do to influence the outcome of this General Conference is to lift it to the Lord in prayer.

In partnership with The Upper Room, the Prayer Support team is providing "50 Days of Prayer for the General Conference," a daily prayer resource available free as an e-pub, email subscription or downloadable PDF at [50daysofprayer.upperroom.org](http://50daysofprayer.upperroom.org). Our goal is to have the entire United Methodist Church membership praying with the

elected delegates and praying for God's will to be done, in God's way and in God's time.

Significant spiritual preparation and planning are taking place to create prayer support for General Conference. Every United Methodist member can participate in this global prayer movement. Whether you are sitting in your home or participating at the Tampa site, your prayers will influence the future of our church.

### How to join the prayer network

Here is how you can get involved in this exciting prayer ministry:

- Visit the prayer website maintained by the United Methodist Board of Discipleship. It contains information, guidance and suggestions to help United Methodists pray together in new and meaningful ways.
- Use the prayer resource, "50 Days of Prayer Before and During the General Conference." Download a free e-book (epub) or PDF version, or subscribe to the daily email at 50 Days of Prayer.
- Organize a prayer vigil in your local church, cluster or district. Consider praying throughout the hours that General Conference is in session (April 24-May 4 from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m.

EDT).

- Conduct a commissioning service for intercessors. Use the online commissioning service for members committing to 50 days of prayer for General Conference and all who will participate in a prayer vigil. The 50 days begin March 16 and continue through May 4.
  - Contribute to social media sites. Visit the Facebook page "2012 UMC General Conference Prayer Ministry" and follow @GC2012Pray on Twitter to participate in conversation about this prayer movement.
  - Make a mantle of prayer for the delegates and leaders to serve as a physical symbol of the prayers of United Methodists around the world. United Methodists in Florida and across the connection are creating these handmade mantles from silk.
- If you can travel to Tampa:
- Participate in the prayer walk April 23 at 1:30 p.m. in the Tampa Convention Center Prayer Room (Riverwalk Area, Rooms 3 and 4). Florida Area Bishop Timothy W. Whitaker will lead us in a prayer service before we pray and walk through the entire convention center with the help of Jonathan Dow and Margie Burger of Aldersgate Renewal Ministries.
  - Visit the Prayer Room at the Tampa Convention Center. It

will be a sacred place of beauty, peace and prayer for delegates and visitors offering multi-sensory experiences created for prayer guidance.

- Serve as a prayer volunteer in Tampa. Pray with and for the needs of elected delegates, visitors and guests. To volunteer, register at The Upper Room, 877-899-2780, Ext. 7110, or email [talbin@upperroom.org](mailto:talbin@upperroom.org).
- Make an appointment with a spiritual guide in Tampa. Trained volunteers will offer holy listening and holy conferencing for those seeking discernment.
- Hear my message about the prayer ministry. This 86-minute video includes the welcome to the Pre-General Conference event and announcements as well as the opening worship service. Fast forward to the halfway mark.

### Ask, pray, seek, listen

John and Charles Wesley taught the early Methodist people, "God does nothing apart from prayer." The teaching of the Bible is equally clear, "Unless God builds the house, those who build it labor in vain." (Psalm 127:1a, An Inclusive-Language Lectionary)

Friends, our prayers are needed for this General Conference. There is more potential for significant change to occur this year than at any other

time since 1968. We need God's wisdom promised in James 1:2-5. We pray because Jesus promised that if we ask, seek and knock, we will receive an answer and the doors will open.

As we ask, pray, seek and listen, I believe God will act and the United Methodist Church will be transformed.

*The Rev. Albin, a clergy member of the Oklahoma Conference, is dean of The Upper Room and director of ecumenical relations. He serves as co-chair of the Prayer Support Team for General Conference 2012.*



Sandy Weber, a member of Hermitage United Methodist Church in Tennessee, wears a prayer mantle created for General Conference 2012.

UMNS PHOTO COURTESY OF TOM ALBIN



# THE UNITED METHODIST REPORTER umportal.org

The independent source for news, features and commentary about the United Methodist Church



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## Wrong-headed outreach

UMC needs to rethink how it deals with youth | 6B



## Wesleyan Wisdom

'Call to Action' should include retired clergy | 7B

Section B

March 16, 2012



# trial by storm

UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE PHOTO BY LINDA OXENDINE DOUGLAS

West Liberty United Methodist Church in Kentucky was nearly leveled in the recent storms. Louisville Area Bishop G. Lindsey Davis called on churches to respond with prayers and gifts.

## UM churches reaching out after series of tornadoes

BY BARBARA DUNLAP-BERG  
*United Methodist News Service*

The twisters that ripped through the Midwest and South Feb. 28 and 29 ushered in another barrage of severe weather March 2 that killed at least 39 people in five states.

But even as United Methodists mourned losses, they continued to reach out.

One of the hardest-hit towns was West Liberty, Ky., population 3,435, reduced to rubble by 150 mph winds.

The Rev. Kenneth W. Jett Jr., pastor of West Liberty United Methodist Church, his wife, Jeanene, and two congregants ran for shelter in a small cubbyhole in the church basement as the building crumbled around them. Both the church and the parsonage sustained major damage.

James Morse, disaster response coordinator for the UMC's Kentucky

■ See 'Storms' page 4B

## Q&A: Bishop makes case for Call to Action

Bishop Robert Schnase oversees the Missouri Conference of the United Methodist Church and is the author of the influential book *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*. With General Conference 2012 fast approaching, he agreed to share his views for why the UMC needs restructuring and other reforms that have been proposed through the Call to Action initiative. Managing editor Sam Hodges posed questions to Bishop Schnase by email.

### Why does the UMC need to change?

Congregations are the most significant arena through which the UMC fulfills the purpose of Christ. God works through our congregations to change lives, and through lives formed

by Christ, God changes the world.

For 50 years, the number of United Methodist members and churches in the U.S. has faced uninterrupted decline while the population has increased. Our mission in Christ is fundamentally at risk. This deserves our absolute attention, not to save the institutional church but to fulfill our mission for generations to come. Unless we change how our local congregations understand their purpose and re-engage their communities, and unless we fundamentally realign our financial, personnel and organizational systems at the conference and general church levels, the decline will continue and accelerate.

The Call to Action report identifies

many contributing factors—a crisis of relevancy, lack of missional clarity, difficulty in reaching young people, structures that are not conducive to our mission. The report also provides examples of vital congregations we can learn from. I'm convinced the United Methodist way—our theology of grace, our practice of service, our global witness—has an extraordinary future, and that God has great plans for us. But we have to change many of our systems of forming disciples and leading faith communities.

**Why is the change put forward through the Call to Action effort—specifically, consolidating nine agencies under one 15-member**

**board—the way to go?**

The first concern of the Call to Action is not structural change. The critical question is how to shift attention, resources and energy toward enriching and extending high-quality ministries through congregations. In a large, complex organization, governance involves forcing future-oriented thinking and cultivating an outward focus. We don't fulfill our mission in meetings; we fulfill our mission at the margins where congregations engage the community and world around them. The Call to Action redirects our energies toward that mission.

Currently, we have more than 500 board members who govern 13 dis-

■ See 'Schnase' page 8B



Bishop Robert Schnase



## FAITH WATCH

**Large church may split from PC(USA)**

First Presbyterian Church in Colorado Springs, Colo., has moved one step closer to leaving the Presbyterian Church (USA). The 4,000-member congregation took an informal vote, with nearly 90 percent of members participating saying they wanted to leave the denomination and align with the new and more conservative Evangelical Covenant Order. A formal vote is expected next month. The congregation is among those upset about the denomination's move toward full inclusion of homosexuals, including allowing them to serve as clergy.

**Prison term for would-be bomber**

A court in Indonesia has given an 18-year prison sentence to a man convicted of plotting a foiled Islamist attack on a church at Easter. A judge in the West Jakarta district court said Pepi Fernando "knowingly used force or threat of violence" in planning to set off a massive bomb in April 2011 under a gas pipeline near a church in Serpong.

**Quake-hit cathedral to be demolished**

The Anglican Church in New Zealand has decided to demolish a 131-year-old cathedral in earthquake-ravaged Christchurch. Repairing the Gothic-style structure on the city's square would be too dangerous and expensive, said Bishop Victoria Matthews. "The decision we have made has been made with prayer, with great deliberation and an utmost concern for safety," she told Reuters. A 6.3 magnitude quake in February 2011 killed 185 people.

**Baptists considered 'BUBBA' as acronym**

The Southern Baptist Convention recently decided to stick with its name, but among the suggested alternatives was Baptist Ultimate Bible Believing Alliance or BUBBA, Religion News Service reported. Other rejected options: Christian Synergy Convention, League of Baptist Messengers, Jesus Christ is Lord Baptist Convention and Global Association of Immersing Christians.

# Second suit hits Gordon, church, conference

BY SAM HODGES  
Managing Editor

DALLAS—A second lawsuit has been filed alleging sexual misconduct by the Rev. Tyrone Gordon and failures by St. Luke "Community" United Methodist Church and the North Texas Conference in their supervision of him.

In the new suit, Jeffery Carson alleges being sexually harassed by Mr. Gordon, who last month resigned as pastor of the 5,000-member Dallas church and surrendered his UMC credentials, but who resumed preaching March 4 in a non-UMC context.

Mr. Carson's suit claims St. Luke and the North Texas Conference failed to do an adequate background check on Mr. Gordon and failed to intervene in a timely way once complaints about Mr. Gordon surfaced.

The Rev. Cameron Greer also recently filed suit against Mr. Gordon, St. Luke and the North Texas Conference. That suit alleges sexual harassment from Mr. Gordon and supervisory failures by the church and conference.

Bill Miller, a spokesman for Mr. Gordon, denied both claims of sexual misconduct.

"There's no truth to the allegations," said Mr. Miller.

Bishop Earl Bledsoe of the North Texas Conference had not as of press time commented publicly on the second suit. Earlier, he said the conference would aggressively defend itself against accusations made by Mr. Greer, a licensed local pastor in the conference.

Mr. Carson's suit was filed by Marilyn Mayse, a St. Luke member who also is representing Mr. Greer.

Mr. Carson's suit says he was a pi-

anist at St. Luke beginning in 1996, and eventually became youth choir director.

On a trip to Washington, D.C., for a 2004 church conference, Mr. Gordon arranged for Mr. Carson to share a hotel suite with him, according to the suit.

The suit says Mr. Carson discovered Mr. Gordon masturbating and watching a pornographic movie or video on a church-issued laptop, and was asked by Mr. Gordon to join in and "talk dirty" to him.

According to the suit, Mr. Carson ran from the room and avoided Mr. Gordon for the rest of the conference, spending some nights in the hotel lobby. Back in Dallas, Mr. Carson informed his immediate supervisor about the encounter with Mr. Gordon, the suit says.

Mr. Carson's suit alleges that Mr. Gordon apologized, but later pressed him for a sexual relationship. The suit also claims that Mr. Gordon groped Mr. Carson, that Mr. Carson received

harassing text messages from him and that there was a second incident in which Mr. Carson walked in on Mr. Gordon masturbating in a hotel room, with a pornographic video playing.

After that, according to the suit, Mr. Carson again complained to church leaders, but was told to pray about the situation.

Mr. Carson's suit says he left the church in 2007, and required psychiatric counseling to deal with depression and stress related to the situation with Mr. Gordon.

Reached by phone, Mr. Carson said he currently works part-time as a church pianist but has struggled with church life because of the expe-

'Trouble has an expiration date. We are just passing through. Do not get stuck. Keep moving.'

—Zan Holmes

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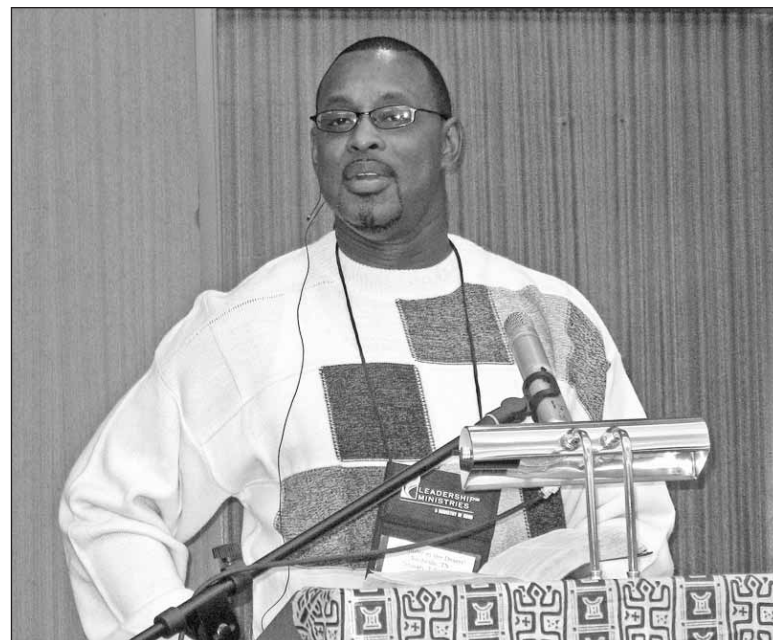
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Please recycle. We do!



UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE FILE PHOTO BY LINDA GREEN

The Rev. Tyrone Gordon addresses a clergy symposium in this 2008 file photo.

riences described in the suit.

"It has definitely jaded me and made me very cynical about organized religion," he said.

Mr. Greer grew up attending St. Luke, and worked there early in Mr. Gordon's tenure. Mr. Greer's suit also alleges sexual harassment by Mr. Gordon, and both suits claim Mr. Gordon targeted young men on staff over whom he had power.

Mr. Miller said Mr. Gordon's lawyer—Ben Hall of Houston—has obtained affidavits from persons mentioned in Mr. Greer's suit, rebutting Mr. Greer's allegations. He said the lawyer had not seen Mr. Carson's suit, filed on March 2 in Dallas County District court, but added that Mr. Gordon "absolutely" denied any accusation of sexual misconduct.

Mr. Carson said he stands by all the allegations in his suit and was persuaded to file suit after learning of other victims.

"I wanted to help bring this to a stop," he said.

**Back in action**

Mr. Gordon has become senior pastor for a new "interdenominational" church called Transforming Life Christian Fellowship, which held its first worship service March 4 at a Dallas hotel. More than 200 people attended.

Mr. Miller said some St. Luke members encouraged Mr. Gordon to resume preaching and start the new church.

Mr. Gordon remains ordained as a Baptist pastor, according to Mr. Miller. Mr. Gordon's resignation from St. Luke and surrendering of his UMC credentials ended an investigation by the North Texas Conference into complaints about him.

Mr. Miller said the resignation represented Mr. Gordon's decision to change ministries.

"He hasn't done anything wrong," Mr. Miller said. "He's just moved on."

Mr. Gordon, who is married and has two grown daughters, came to St. Luke in 2002 from Saint Mark UMC in Wichita, Kan. At St. Luke, one of the denomination's largest predominately African-American churches, he succeeded a legendary pastor and civil rights figure, the Rev. Zan Holmes.

Dr. Holmes has returned to St. Luke as interim pastor until another appointment can be made. On Feb. 19, in his first sermon since returning to the church, he offered encouragement.

"Trouble has an expiration date," he said, according to an account posted on the North Texas Conference website. "We are just passing through. Do not get stuck. Keep moving."

Bishop Bledsoe also spoke at the church on that occasion.

"My commitment to you, St. Luke, is that I will walk with you and with Dr. Holmes," he said. "I am committed to this church. We will continue to lift up the name of Jesus Christ in good times and low times."

A statement on the St. Luke website noted that the church has begun "sacred healing sessions" led by a Crisis Assessment Response Team. The church also is having briefings to help members understand the UMC pastoral appointment process.



Zan Holmes

shodges@umr.org



## Board says 'no' to divestment

BY SAM HODGES  
Managing Editor

Directors of the UMC's General Board of Pension and Health Benefits have unanimously approved a resolution opposing divestment from three firms critics say have aided Israel in violating human rights in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories.

Tim Smith, a member of the board's UMC Principles Committee, said the denomination can have more influence by retaining shares of Caterpillar, Motorola Solutions and Hewlett-Packard.

"If you sell stock as a protest, another investor simply purchases it," he said. "As an investor, having a seat at the table with a company has generally proved to be a more powerful means of communicating with a company's management."

The resolution, approved March 2, notes that six annual conferences, the Board of Church and Society and "other faithful United Methodists" have submitted petitions to the 2012 General Conference, calling on boards and agencies of the UMC to divest of securities in the three companies.

The resolution also says the companies have been in discussion with pension board staff and have taken "positive actions," such as, in Caterpillar's case, implementing a code of conduct and providing humanitarian aid to Palestinians.

And the resolution asserts that "Caterpillar equipment used by the Israeli Defense Forces to destroy Palestinian property was likely acquired from the U.S. Foreign Military Sales Program and not Caterpillar directly."

The Rev. John Wagner, convener of United Methodist Kairos Response, which favors divestment, criticized the board's resolution.

"We fully understand that the Board of Pensions prefers shareholder advocacy over divestment, but I'm frankly astonished by the implication that there has been discernible progress with the companies in question, especially when the key issue is the use of their products to violate human rights in the occupied territories," Mr. Wagner said.

"The simple fact is that some very large corporations have been unwilling to change practices within their control, and this after many years of negotiation with representatives of the United Methodist Church and other denominations."

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## BOOK REVIEW

# Book unveils story of slave-owning bishop

BY A. V. HUFF  
Special Contributor

## **The Accidental Slaveowner: Revisiting a Myth of Race and Finding an American Family**

Mark Auslander  
University of Georgia Press, 2011  
383 pages, paperback

Bishop James O. Andrew of Georgia is one of the prominent names that students of American Methodist history will recognize. It was the controversy about Andrew's ownership of African-American slaves in 1844 that resulted in the division of the Methodist Episcopal Church over slavery.

While teaching anthropology at Oxford College of Emory University from 1999 to 2001, Mark Auslander, now on the faculty of Central Washington University, began to research the story of Bishop Andrew and his slaves. That quest has resulted in *The Accidental Slaveowner*, a book that reads much like a detective novel as he put the pieces of evidence together. It gives us new insight into the ways slavery and race relations shaped the history of Methodism in America.

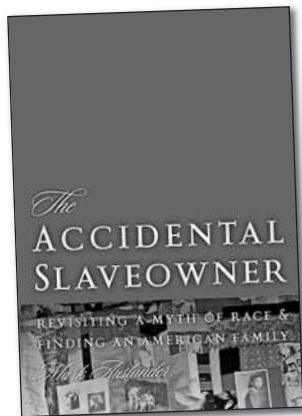
According to the traditional narra-

tive told by the bishop and his fellow churchmen, James Andrew was an "accidental slaveholder." He became the owner of a young enslaved woman, Kitty, willed to him by a former church member in Augusta, with the understanding that when Kitty reached the age of 19 she would be given the choice of going to Liberia as a free person or remaining in Georgia as a slave.

When given the opportunity, Kitty refused to migrate to Liberia and remained with the Andrew family. According to the bishop, Kitty became like one of "his own children."

Andrew also became the owner of a young male slave from his first wife and later the owner of 14 additional slaves from his second wife. Under Georgia law none of Andrew's slaves could be emancipated, but he did transfer ownership of the 14 to his second wife by a deed of trust.

At the General Conference in 1844 Andrew's ownership of slaves became the focus of the dispute over slavery between north and south. Andrew offered to surrender his episcopal office, but the leaders of the southern annual conferences refused to allow that. Instead the General Conference adopted a plan of separation which resulted in the division of the denomination into northern and southern churches. At Kitty's death she was



buried in the Andrew family plot in the Oxford cemetery, and later her house was preserved as a historic site by white Georgia Methodists.

Dr. Auslander's research tells a very different story from the traditional one. Over the course of his life James Andrew seems to have owned some 42 enslaved persons. Two were inherited from his father in 1830 and later one from his mother. There were Kitty and her three children from her subsequent marriage, and one from the estate of Andrew's first wife. In 1844 he acquired 14 slaves from his second wife and in 1855 at least 12 from his third wife.

Weeks before the 1844 General Conference, Bishop Andrew for the token amount of \$10 dollars deeded to his close friend Augustus B. Longstreet, a fellow Methodist minister and president of Emory College, the 14 slaves acquired from his second wife. Longstreet was a former attorney and a judge, and perhaps drew up the deed to remove the ownership of these slaves from the discussion at the General Conference.

However, the terms were unusual. The deed stipulated that though the slaves were owned by Longstreet, they were for the joint use of Andrew and his wife. Longstreet himself was a former slave owner. Bishop Andrew's involvement with slavery was much more extensive and complicated than the traditional story allowed.

Intrigued by the story of Kitty, Dr. Auslander also uncovered the identity of her husband, Nathan Boyd, and the history of their children. He eventually

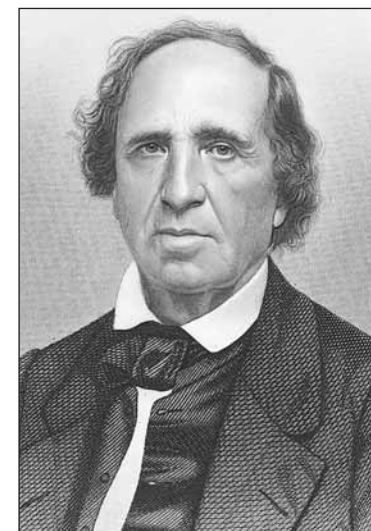


IMAGE COURTESY OF DREW UNIVERSITY

### Bishop James O. Andrew

discovered the whereabouts of their descendants who had no knowledge of their connection to a crucial event in American Methodism.

In parallel stories the author discusses the history of the preservation of "Kitty's Cottage," as it became known, race relations at Emory College and in the town of Oxford, and the fascinating account of the town's black and white cemeteries. All of this becomes more interesting to Methodists because the town of Oxford (including the original campus of Emory College and Kitty's Cottage) is one of the historic landmarks of the United Methodist Church.

Dr. Huff is historian of the South Carolina Conference.

## North Texas band plays to fight malaria

BY JOEY BUTLER  
United Methodist News Service

A group of United Methodists in Texas is singing "Bennie and the Jets"—and raising some serious "Benjamins" for battling malaria.

Connections, a band made up of clergy and laity from the North Texas Conference, performs at churches to raise money for two United Methodist causes, Imagine No Malaria and the United Methodist Committee on Relief.

At its most recent show, the band surpassed an impressive milestone: It has now raised more than \$100,000 for Imagine No Malaria.

"Hitting this goal is amazing to all of us," said the Rev. Eric Folkert, senior pastor of Northaven United Methodist Church in Dallas and one of the band's leaders. "We're just grateful for the chance to play music, provide a

great evening for the crowd and be a part of making the world a better place."

Connections was formed after a 2004 clergy retreat, when Mr. Folkert met the Rev. Rusty King, music minister at First United Methodist Church in Allen. Both avid guitarists, they bonded over their common love of the music of Dan Fogelberg and had jam sessions at the clergy retreat each year with other fellow pastors.

Mr. King suggested putting on a Fogelberg tribute concert, which wound up raising almost \$2,000 for UMCOR. As most of the band members are United Methodist clergy and laity, the name Connections reflects their Wesleyan bond.

From that original show, the band has developed a number of other themed concerts, celebrating artists such as Chicago, The Eagles, James

Taylor, Elton John, Billy Joel, Stevie Wonder and two different "Super Hits of the '70s" productions. As many as 40 different people participate in various incarnations of the band, which has now performed 40 concerts at United Methodist churches in the North Texas area, raising close to \$200,000 so far.

The musicians donate their time,

and the host church decides whether the money raised will go to Imagine No Malaria or to UMCOR.

Now that it has surpassed \$100,000 for Imagine No Malaria, the band has its eye on the next milestone: \$200,000 in total dollars raised.

"It's all but certain that we'll make that goal at the next show," Mr. Folkert said.

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PHOTO BY DAN GANGLER



PHOTO BY BRITT BRADLEY

**ABOVE:** Julie Pohl, Kansas East Conference disaster-response coordinator, and Kansas Area Bishop Scott Jones visited with a member of Harveyville UMC. The church building was destroyed by a Feb. 28 tornado. **LEFT:** Henryville (Ind.) UMC was host to one of many relief tents that popped up following the deadly tornadoes on March 2.

## ■ STORMS Continued from page 1B

Conference, said the West Liberty church “may not be salvageable.”

Louisville Area Bishop G. Lindsey Davis assured the devastated communities, “God sees our pain, and God will provide for us in these days to come.” Encouraging prayer, he said, “We are a generous people, and I urge our churches to respond by giving. . . . May God bless us as we work together.”

“We are still in the early stages, but we are committed to rebuilding and ministering to people in the midst of turmoil.”

In battered Salyersville, Ky., the United Methodist church is still standing and serving as a feeding station three times a day, Bishop Davis said. Churches in the Kentucky Conference have already provided hundreds of blankets to a nursing home without power.

### ‘Rallying to assist’

In Ohio, the village of Moscow experienced the fury of an EF3 tornado with winds of about 160 mph. Three people lost their lives. Grant Memorial United Methodist Church, Point Pleasant, Ohio, is just three miles from Moscow.

“The congregation immediately went into servant mode, providing relief to those families affected by the tornadoes,” said the Rev. Jocelyn Roper, assistant to the Ohio River Valley district superintendent. Members provided food as the church became a depository for relief supplies.

“The churches have done everything they could to help,” Ms. Roper said. “They’ve tried to be very creative” in their response. “This is a very rural area, close to the river. These folks usually get affected by floods. They don’t expect tornadoes.”

According to news reports March 5, many still lacked electricity as snow, rain and plummeting temperatures hampered cleanup efforts.

Volunteers from the Tennessee Conference continued to respond to the deadly tornado outbreak experienced across the South.

“Our hearts and prayers are with those affected by these devastating storms,” said Brandon Hulette, director of mercy, mission and disaster recovery for the conference.

Tornadoes touched down in several parts of Middle Tennessee on March 3.

By Saturday evening, the conference had deployed two trained emergency response teams to Kingston Springs, Tenn., with operations based out of the United Methodist church there, which was damaged in the storm.

In addition, two emergency response teams were deployed to the Dodson Branch area of Jackson County in Tennessee. Conference personnel are coordinating the volunteer effort there in conjunction with partner agencies, Mr. Hulette said.

### Comfort food

In Rome, Ga., members of the 350-member Chapel Hill United Methodist Church offered storm survivors and volunteers “comfort food”—steaming bowls of soups and stews. The congregation counted their blessings, particularly because the tornado struck just two hours after the Lenten service.

The Rev. Ken Kulp said members felt called to reach out to their hurting community and to give thanks for the lives that were spared. “Our plan was to bring volunteers and [survivors] together,” he said, calling it “a bit of therapeutic ministry.”

The sanctuary’s minor structural damage was repaired in time for Sunday worship, but “the mission building took a pretty hard hit,” Mr. Kulp said. “It was knocked off its foundation about a foot.”

The earliest reports of tornadoes on March 2 came from the Huntsville, Ala., area, still reeling from April 2011 twisters. No United Methodist churches reported losses of life or property, Danette Clifton, North Alabama Conference communicator, said.

In the Alabama-West Florida Conference, the Verbena United Methodist Church received the most damage. Several members of the congregation and the community had major damage to their homes. The conference has a couple of disaster response teams working in the area, and “progress is slowly being made,” according to an email received March 5.

Harveyville, Kan., a town of 200, lost its only

United Methodist church Feb. 28. The United Methodists worshipped Sunday with their Church of Christ neighbors and celebrated that two of their church’s stained-glass windows survived the tornado.

### UMCOR assesses

In Harrisburg, Ill., which bore much of the brunt of the midweek twisters, the Rev. Tom Hazelwood, head of U.S. disaster response for the United Methodist Committee on Relief, was surveying damage March 5 with Bishop Gregory Palmer and disaster response officials of the denomination’s Illinois Great Rivers Conference.

Several members of Harrisburg UMC were among the many who lost homes, said Bishop Palmer in an earlier pastoral letter about the storm. He said the church was serving as a disaster response center.

The area saw at least six tornado-related deaths, including an on-duty nurse at Harrisburg Medical Center, where 100 people were treated for injuries.

“Pray for the people of Southern Illinois,” Bishop Palmer said in the pastoral letter. “Above everything else, we can uphold our sisters and brothers, knowing that in these times where our faith is tested, God is the nearest.”

In a posting on Twitter, Mr. Hazelwood reported that the United Methodist church in nearby Ridgway was fine, but that St. Joseph’s Catholic Church a block away had been destroyed.

Mr. Hazelwood planned to visit later in the week parts of Indiana and Kentucky struck by the tornadoes.

The Rev. Charles Wilfong, a district superintendent in the Indiana Conference, reported widespread damage, especially in the towns of Henryville, Marysville, Pekin and Palmyra.

“I learned that two Pekin UMC families have lost their homes,” Mr. Wilfong said in an email message, adding that several congregants were in serious condition and hospitalized. “The church, parsonage and family life center all have power restored, and the congregation is rallying to assist the community.”

## How to Help

Those wanting to help tornado victims can give to the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), specifying Advance # 901670, “Tornadoes 2012.”

Make a check payable to UMCOR and mail to UMCOR, P.O. Box 9068, New York, N.Y., 10087. Donations are also accepted by phone at (800) 544-8583 and online at [www.umcor.org](http://www.umcor.org).

Bishop Mike Coyner of the Indiana Conference joined members of the conference’s Disaster Response Team for a March 5 meeting with the Rev. Wilma Sawyer Bone, pastor of Henryville UMC. The bishop promised support for her and her 105-member congregation.

The southern Indiana town of Henryville, with a population of under 2,000, is reeling from deaths and property damage suffered when a tornado struck on March 2. A local high school and Baptist church were destroyed. Henryville UMC had mostly minor exterior damage, but also a hole in the sanctuary ceiling.

Indiana UMC churches have been collecting supplies for families affected by the tornadoes, and relief workers will be helping farmers clear their fields of debris.

A group of nine UM clergy and laity from the Memphis Conference, which includes West Tennessee and Western Kentucky, did debris cleaning March 3 in Bandana, Ky. A Feb. 29 storm there caused considerable damage, including blowing down the steeple from Bandana UMC. That church also lost shingles.

“We were very, very lucky to have escaped these storms with no loss of life, and I am grateful,” said the Rev. Sky McCracken, Paducah District Superintendent, and among those helping with debris removal.

Sam Hodges of the Reporter contributed.





PHOTO BY THE REV. SKY MCCRACKEN



PHOTO BY BILL CARR

ABOVE: Bandana UMC in Bandana, Ky., lost its steeple in an early morning storm on Feb. 29. LEFT: The Rev. Jamie Lee of Grace UMC and Joe Petty of Mt. Carmel UMC (on roof) and Bill Carr (foreground) inspect storm-caused building damage at a business in Barlow, Ky.



PHOTO BY DAN GANGLER



PHOTO BY BRITT BRADLEY



PHOTO BY LINDA OXENDINE DOUGLAS

ABOVE: Construction crews worked around piles of debris in Henryville, Ind., left by two deadly tornadoes. ABOVE RIGHT: The remains of a piano from Harveyville United Methodist Church in eastern Kansas. RIGHT: The Harveyville UMC parsonage was severely damaged by the tornado that hit the town of 200 people. The building was not used by the church pastor, but was rented out. LEFT: James Morse, disaster response coordinator for the Kentucky Conference, said West Liberty (Ky.) UMC "may not be salvageable." At least five people died in Morgan County, where the church is located.



PHOTO BY JULIE POHL



## AGING WELL

## 'Grand Camp' fosters bonds

BY MISSY BUCHANAN  
UMR Columnist

A grandmother paused while her 9-year old grandson tried to scoop up sand with his bare feet. For the last half-hour, they had been strolling along the wide beach of the Atlantic, feeling the mist on their faces and picking up sea shells. She couldn't remember the last time she had felt so free to enjoy her grandson in the beauty of nature.

Over the years she had traveled many places with all three of her grandchildren. They had ridden horses in the mountains and amusement rides at Disney World. One summer they had squeezed eight family members into a three-bedroom condo for a week-long romp at the beach. But this outing was different.

This year she was participating in Grand Camp at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island, Ga., an intergenerational camp for grandparents and their elementary-aged grandchildren. More than a fun-filled vacation, Grand Camp is designed to nurture both the emotional and spiritual bond between grandparent and grandchild.

Faye Lacey affirms that Grand Camp is different from other family trips she's taken with her grandchildren. When her youngest grandchild Rose lamented that she was not old enough to join her siblings for church youth activities and mission trips, Faye began to search for something special they could do together. She discovered Grand Camp and was soon convinced that she had found just the right place for a meaningful intergenerational experience in a faith-filled environment. Her expectations were exceeded.

"Grand Camp was special to both of us because neither of us had to divide our attention or schedules among others. The one-on-one experience was exceptional. The focus was on doing things with each other. It was truly a godsend,"



Missy Buchanan

Faye says.

Judy McWhorter of Swainsboro, Ga., agrees. Last summer she took her 8-year-old grandson Patrick to Grand Camp. The middle child in his family, Patrick enjoyed not having to share his grandmother's attention with his siblings.

"There was a variety of well-planned activities, but there was also free time in the afternoon," she says. "Since Patrick enjoys sea animals, he really loved the dolphin cruise."

Don't make the mistake of thinking, though, that the four-day event is just for solo grandparents with one grandchild. Grandparents, in pairs or singles, can attend with one grandchild or a dozen. Epworth, a well-known United Methodist retreat center, has lodging accommodations to fit the needs of each family.

There is a litany of traditional camp experiences for all to enjoy: swimming, biking, fishing, storytelling, crafting, beachcombing, sing-alongs, cookouts, bonfires and more. But there are two activities that seem to garner the most excitement: the shrimp boat cruise aboard the Lady Jane and the skits/talent show involving both grandparents and grandkids.

This year's Grand Camp is scheduled from June 22 through 25 and is available to all, not just United Methodists in the South Georgia Conference. The theme this summer will be "Exploring the World of the Boy Jesus and His Family." The camp director will be Dr. Ron Hall, a retired United Methodist minister who lives in the area and is a surf fishing enthusiast.

After discovering Grand Camp at Epworth By The Sea, there is one thing I know for sure. I look forward to the day when my toddler grandsons get a little older so their Poppi and I can take them to Grand Camp. I want to watch them scoop up the sand with their bare feet and share with them the wonder of it all.

Ms. Buchanan is the author of *Aging Faithfully* (Upper Room Books.) Reach her at [missy@missybuchanan.com](mailto:missy@missybuchanan.com). For Grand Camp info, see [www.epworthbythesea.org](http://www.epworthbythesea.org) or call 912-638-8688 and ask for Tiffany Benson.



PHOTO COURTESY MISSY BUCHANAN

Grand Camp participants posed last summer at Epworth By The Sea.

# Don't ask what youth can do for the UMC

BY BEN BORUFF  
Special Contributor

"Young people need positions of leadership if the United Methodist Church is to survive."

"Young people are not the answer to the denomination's problems, but we should try to reach out to them anyway."

"Get real. Young people can't save the denomination."

These quotes offer different opinions, but there is a common thread. All are, in some way, responses to the question, "Can young people save the Church?"

Whether vocalized or not, this question permeates United Methodist dialogue about membership decline, denominational vitality and the state of young people in an ever-changing world. Many of our conversations about these topics are well-intentioned attempts to answer this question.

But the question of whether or not young people can save the Church is not effective because it is based on inaccurate assumptions about young people and membership decline.

**Assumption:** Young people *want* to save the Church.

Dialogue about young people and the church is littered with rhetoric which suggests that, if given the opportunity, young people would try their best to save the denomination. But some recent polls suggest otherwise.

A 2011 report from the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life noted that, while they aren't necessarily less spiritual, Millennials are much less likely than older generations to attach themselves to a religious tradition.

Religion doesn't play a major role in their lives. While the young people currently affiliated with a Christian denomination may earnestly work to keep their denominations alive, we cannot afford to believe that all young people who walk through our doors feel the same way.

United Methodist Millennials make up a very, very small portion of the Millennial population. In our current culture, the United Methodist Church must learn to justify its existence to a generation of young people who, quite frankly, wouldn't notice its death.

**Assumption:** Young people are naturally connected to church vitality.

The question itself offers some insight into the level at which we connect young people with church vitality. While, in most cases, adding some young people to sanctuary populations wouldn't hurt local church vitality, there is little to suggest that the simple act of acquiring youth and young adults inherently adds to the long-term strength of a church or denomination.

Don't misunderstand me: I believe that the United Methodist Church should make the well-being of young people a top priority. The problem, however, is that our casual juxtaposition of young people and church vitality comes at the expense of young people.

When we focus only on attracting young people to our churches in an effort to save our denomination, we forget to sustain an environment that is nurturing for those young people once they arrive. We create hip, new worship services, but we forget to adapt those services. What was contemporary three years ago is not contemporary today, and what appealed to young people of past generations may not appeal to Millennials, Generation Z and Digital Natives.

It takes work to nurture young people and to appeal to their ever-changing preferences, and it is *that* work which fosters vitality—not simply the addition of bodies that haven't existed longer than a couple of decades.

**Assumption:** We only want young people if they can save us.

While attracting young people to local churches is a difficult task, it is not impossible. It takes intentionality, enthusiasm, humility and a constant dedication to the task of adapting to modern cultures.

Many United Methodist pastors, laypersons, youth leaders, bishops and young leaders have successfully reached out to new communities of young people across the globe. This means that it can be done. As a denomination, however, our populations of young people are dwindling, and we are not successfully offering our ministries to new groups of youth and young adults.

While we wrestle with the fruitless question of whether or not young people can save the Church, we miss countless opportunities to reach out to younger generations. In this way, our actions as a denomination suggest that we only value young people as a commodity, a possible last-ditch lifesaver.

As Christians, our approach to young people should not be guided by a desire to preserve our denomination and religious traditions. Instead, ministry with young people should be fueled by a desire to better the lives of the youth and young adults within our communities. If young people are a part of a plan to revitalize the denomination, that is wonderful, but we should reach out to young people regardless of their potential ability to keep struggling churches afloat.

The question of whether or not young people can save the denomination is plagued with dangerous assumptions. In fact, the only arguably true assumption found in this question is that the United Methodist Church needs to be fixed.

We must rethink the language we use when discussing the value of young people within the United Methodist Church. Young people are not lifesavers, nor do they have any obligation to help the United Methodist Church. Young people are young individuals, and they have plenty of issues and problems that they must face. Young people today need a loving, inclusive, adaptive community to help them face these issues.

Maybe, one day, the United Methodist Church can be that community.

Mr. Boruff, a senior at Indiana University, is a member of the UMC's Connectional Table and served on the Call to Action Steering Committee. Reach him at [bwboruff@indiana.edu](mailto:bwboruff@indiana.edu).



Ben Boruff



## WESLEYAN WISDOM

## Should we 'call to action' more retired clergy?

BY DONALD W. HAYNES  
UMR Columnist

My much younger UMR columnist colleague, Andrew Thompson, has dropped the "Gen-X Rising" name for his column, admitting that his generation of young adults has been replaced by ones with other experiences and other voices. Funny, how short a span of life constitutes our "young adult" years.

Andrew's brilliant mind merits an even larger readership. Dr. Richard Heitzenrater once told me that Andrew Thompson was one of his best students, with the potential for superlative contributions to our Wesleyan heritage. So as he "grows in wisdom," we welcome Andrew's sharing his research and insights with all generations.

We all see life from a different perspective as we grow older. I must now write from the vantage point of a septuagenarian. The older I get, the more I feel that there is "so much to do, so little done." I tell my congregation that every sermon must be my latest insight into the "gospel truth" because they are the last audience I will have for proclaiming the greatest story ever told. The words "eternal life" are not chronological like "everlasting life," but qualitative, beginning when we are "in Christ" here and now.

Some child commented that "scars are what we have left after we get well." That is a wise statement containing both bad news—the scar—and good news, in the healing. Ernest Hemingway wrote in *A Farewell to Arms*, "The world breaks everyone and afterward many are stronger at the broken places." How true! This can be one of the gifts we give to younger generations—assurance that by God's grace, we can heal and, like a welded beam, we are stronger at the welded point. St. Paul wrote to the Galatians, "Let no one make trouble for me; for I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body."

### Wesley as an example

When Wesley was 83, he boasted that he could still mount a horse as quickly as ever. When he read a small-print book on a return trip from Holland in 1786, the author, Sophie von La Roche, wrote, "If the Methodists' principles keep their sight as clear as that to the age of 83, then I wish I had

been educated in their sect." Sadly enough, according to Dr. Heitzenrater, that was the last year Wesley could read. In 1789, at 86, he wrote, "I now find that I grow old. . . . I am an old man, decayed from head to foot. However, blessed be God, I do not slack my labour. I can preach and write still." (Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, p. 303.)

As spokespersons for various generations remind us of the wealth of their knowledge and creativity, at age 76 I must speak for my generation. I love the words of Wesley's covenant, "Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee." Many of us love being "employed." While many clergy simply quit upon their official retirement, most are like an old Dalmatian dog when the fire bell rings! They are ready to jump on the truck and willing to serve at the point of need.

As the Call to Action report looks for ways to economize, my dream is for every bishop to look more creatively at ways to tap the experience, energy and dedication of retired clergy. What a marvelous opportunity for appointments at and between annual conferences if every bishop had a current file on the ways in which each retired clergyperson has offered to be "at your service." Some, like Mr. Wesley, are bright of mind and healthy in body well into their 80s, and beyond!

We have thousands of station churches that simply cannot maintain a full-time pastor. Today many churches have delayed building maintenance to the point of deterioration. Most churches threatened with being "put back on a circuit" would much prefer to remain a station with a part-time retired pastor. Retired clergy on multi-staff churches is commonplace, but like Abou ben Adhem, "may [their] tribe increase." We require no pension, little or no medical insurance supplement, and no housing! Many of us love visiting home-to-home.

### Interim appointments

One creative movement in United Methodism is TIMS (Transitional Interim Ministry Specialists). Kenneth Lambert of the Texas Conference had this vision which became a reality, and is now in the *Book of Discipline* and associated with the General Board of Higher Education and Ordained Ministry. TIMS are trained clergy—retired or younger—with special gifts for conflict resolution, helping a congregation recover its vision for ministry, and other interim needs. I have had five of these ap-

pointments since my retirement in 1999 and all have been positive experiences.

Bishop Larry Goodpaster tapped Dr. Peter Graves from the British Methodist Church to serve for two-and-a-half years as interim at Centenary UMC in Winston-Salem, N.C., after the senior pastor went to Marble Collegiate Church in New York City. As I write, Bishop Goodpaster has interims in several key appointments. Bishop Janice Huie has been highly influential and successful in developing this option for some who virtually make a career of "interim ministry." In Arkansas, Ed Matthews has assisted Bishop Charles Crutchfield in developing this model, and Ed has been interim at one of their largest churches. Many other bishops see TIMS as a trained pool of clergy for turning churches around, leading them through difficult periods, helping them relate to a changing community, or resolving conflict.

The other phrase of Wesley's covenant prayer must be noted. Having said how valuable we retired clergy are to the connection, I should add there is one area in which we are a financial liability—voting privileges at annual conference. When the General Conference determined that annual conference lay membership had to equal clergy membership, it meant that for every retired clergyperson, there had to be a lay member "at large." This puts a challenge on the Committee on Annual Conference to find a location that can seat the total membership who are eligible to register and vote.

Reality is that many retired clergy do not attend their annual conference session. Many have moved out

of the geographic area and are serving in some capacity in churches and communities far from their own annual conference. One example is Marvin Arnpriester, who is now in Arizona and "up to his eyeballs" in church and community work, but might not go to the expense of returning for Annual Conference in Iowa, where he was a leader for so many years. Yet the Iowa Conference must have a lay member to counter-balance Marvin's potential vote. And there are thousands more like Marvin, especially in retirement meccas like Florida, Arizona, and the Sun Belt beach and mountain communities. The United Methodist churches near Lake Junaluska, N.C., have retired clergy from all over the country in their congregations, many of whom do not attend their home conferences.

### 'Voice but not vote'

We retired clergy owe our dearly beloved United Methodism a debt which we can never repay, but relinquishing our vote might be a way to be helpful. Most of us have enjoyed guaranteed appointment from seminary graduation to retirement. During that time we had the safety net of the Equitable Salary Fund. All of us receive the benefit of a most generous pension. We enjoyed the benefit of either a parsonage or a housing allowance and most of us enjoy comfortable housing in retirement. Many have more income in retirement than they did before!

Now might be the time to relieve the church of the enormous fiscal burden of matching all retired clergy with lay members of the annual conference. Can we, like the retired bishops,

have "voice but not vote" at annual conference? Another option would be a covenant model—to elect a lay member only for each retired clergy who signed a covenant to be in attendance at the ensuing annual conference "unless providentially hindered." The bottom line is that if retired clergy did not have the right to vote, the balance between active clergy and lay members would be more equal when the typical vote is taken.

Retired clergy were described in Bishop Asbury's day as "wore out" leaving the itinerancy at an average age of 38! Today, even at 80, we who were ordained for task rather than status are blessed with experience, and often blessed with energy and willingness to work. We pray that if we are simply "laid aside" we will be gracious in not being used, but if we are to be "employed" in some capacity, we can provide effective ministry with remunerative benefits already provided by a benevolent connection.

There is an old gospel song, "Work for the night is coming. . . . Work for the night is coming when [man] can work no more." Work is my therapy, whether planting a tree or writing today something that might be of benefit tomorrow. Kierkegaard wrote, "Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards." Let us anchor ourselves in our tomorrows rather than in our yesterdays. Mr. Wesley's dying words are apropos for every day: "Best of all, God is with us."

Dr. Haynes is a retired member of the Western North Carolina Conference. He's the author of *On the Threshold of Grace: Methodist Fundamentals*. Email: dhaynes11@triad.rr.com.

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## ■ SCHNASE Continued from page 1B

tinct agencies, each with its own mission statement, financial system, logo and identity. The proposal suggests unified governance that includes a 45-member council and a 15-person board. The intention is to increase collaboration, align resources, reduce redundancy and streamline decision-making. Most large churches and many annual conferences have discovered the effectiveness of small boards.

Is this the best plan in the world? There is no such thing. But we can make the best decision among options when we are guided by proven principles for large organizations. We need a plan that supports a clearly articulated purpose, with high accountability, good horizontal communication and vertical alignment, characterized by simplicity, missional clarity and the agility to respond to change and adapt. This plan offers those things.

**One objection is that a 15-member board will struggle to represent the diversity of the church. How do you respond?**

I don't believe reducing size and moving to a more unified structure means we're stepping back from our commitment to diversity in any way. A smaller, more efficient leadership model is no contradiction to inclusiveness. And I'm offended when people suggest we must choose between diversity or competency-based models for identifying leadership. These are absolutely not mutually exclusive. Finally, the diversity of the teams that created the Call to Action demonstrates that we can work effectively with smaller teams with great diversity.

**One proposal would redistribute \$60 million in general church funds for a range of purposes related to boosting the number of "vital congregations." Do you favor that, and why?**

The General Council for Finance and Administration's *proposed* (\$603 million) budget for the next quadrennium is about 6 percent less than the *adopted* budget in 2008. Since the actual General Conference apportionments decreased over the last few years, the difference between 2012 and 2013 would be nominal. For instance, the Missouri Conference would see a reduction of General Church apportionments of about \$30,000 on a \$13 million budget, and a few conferences would increase under this plan. This does not address the serious reality of 50 years of fewer churches and fewer members to carry those costs.

Most bishops I know wish we would reduce the budget more dramatically, closer to 15 percent. This

has been discussed by the Connectional Table, the Council of Bishops and the Interim Operations Team (who developed the \$60 million proposal you describe). Whenever leaders discuss major reductions, two opinions surface. The first is to ask less of annual conferences and churches, and the second is to ask the same amount, but redirect the resources toward new initiatives that align with the critical challenges, including Central Conference Theological Education, young adult leadership development, etc. While I wish the alternative plan for the \$60 million were more refined, I honestly would prefer either of the two scenarios to the currently proposed budget reduction of 6 percent. We either need to return resources to the local churches and conferences, or redirect them toward the critical challenges of vital congregations and leadership development.

**Another proposal would end guaranteed appointment for ordained elders. But some say guaranteed appointment protects prophetic voices, as well as minority and women clergy who might face barriers—or higher barriers—in a different system. And others say the mechanisms are in place to remove ineffective clergy; it's the will that's often missing. What's your position here, and why?**

Every bishop I know wants a system that protects pastors from abuse of authority related to gender, ethnicity, theological bias, etc. Reasonable checks and balances through the Board of Ordained Ministry or judicial processes protect pastors from arbitrary abuse of authority by bishops and protect bishops from the accusations of the same. However, most bishops want procedures that allow for quicker assessment and intervention regarding ineffective clergy.

The real issue surrounding guaranteed appointment is not the 3 percent of ineffective clergy. It's the disconnection between the numbers of people credentialed and the numbers we need to maximize our mission. It takes an average worship attendance of 125 or more people to support a full-time elder without strangling vital ministry. Each year we have fewer churches that can afford full-time pastors. Some conferences have one elder in a pastoral role per 70 people in attendance. This is unsustainable, and we need mechanisms to regulate the numbers to fit the mission. Frankly, we need to move from credentialing processes with a default of "as long as you complete the assignments and we find nothing egregious, you are approved," to a default of "you are not likely to be approved unless

you've demonstrated exemplary fruitfulness in ministry."

**One argument that has emerged is that the Call to Action represents a power shift in favor of the episcopacy. Is that wrong, especially given the proposal to create a non-residential or set-side Council of Bishops president?**

More than 30 bishops now serve on the boards of the general agencies that are affected by the legislation. Fourteen bishops currently serve on the Connectional Table. The proposal for streamlining and unifying governance reduces the number of bishops serving to five. This hardly feels like a takeover! In fact, some have expressed concern that bishops will become too remote from general operations. On the other hand, the new model allows bishops to give more time to their conference responsibilities.

The proposal for a non-residential bishop does not invest new authority in the Council of Bishops over the church. Freedom from residential responsibilities allows a bishop to organize the work of the Council to give priority to creating more vital congregations, and to work collaboratively with bishops, annual conferences, seminaries and general agencies to develop models for redirecting resources toward this task.

**You've been a pastor and a bishop. How confident are you that organizational changes at the general church and annual conference levels can make a big difference in whether congregations are vital?**

In the short term, growing churches will continue to grow and declining churches will continue to decline no matter what General Conference does. But in the long-term, it matters how we address issues of clergy recruitment, education, training, deployment and evaluation. It matters how we realign resources to start new congregations, develop ways to interrupt decline and help congregations focus on their mission field. It matters that our leaders focus on the right questions and deal with issues relevant to our mission around the globe. It matters that we connect our money to our mission. It matters that we leave a legacy to the next generation, not of complex and impenetrable rules and ineffective systems, but of a church that is clear about its mission and confident about its future, and which is agile and responsive and engaged with the world for the purposes of Christ.

**The proposed restructuring changes seem to put the squeeze on agencies, or at least take them out**



UMNS FILE PHOTO BY KATHY L. GILBERT

**Bishop Robert Schnase consecrates Communion elements during Exploration 2011, a young adult event in St. Louis.**

**of their comfort zones. Ending guaranteed appointment would reduce security for clergy. But the reforming of the Council of Bishops seems limited to creating a full-time presidency of the Council of Bishops. Why not give up life terms or something else, to show shared sacrifice?**

Great question. Actually, I'd invite such a conversation.

What concerns me is the "we/they" sentiment which implies that bishops are asking others to change while we continue as usual. This is not the case. The recommendations come not only from the COB but also from the Connectional Table and from teams comprising laity and clergy. And we are asking nothing of others that we are not willing to do ourselves. First, the number of U.S. bishops has been reduced during the last quadrennium. Second, we support legislation that calls for better evaluation and accountability systems for bishops. Third, more bishops are committing themselves to ongoing case-study and best-practices learning groups to improve mission-focused leadership. Fourth, the non-residential bishop creates a role to hold the Council accountable to the Call to Action. When the Council voted unanimously to support the Call to Action report, we accepted responsibility for reforming the Council of Bishops and for establishing a new culture of accountability throughout the church, including asking the church to hold us accountable for improving results in attendance, professions of faith, etc. We've invited others to share this responsibility with us.

For years, United Methodists have ignored, denied or blamed others when confronted with the reality of our decline. We say, "The problem is the bishops, the general agencies, the

seminaries, the pastors, the ordination process, the churches, the liberals, the conservatives." This hasn't helped. Now it's time for every one of us, including the bishops, to confess our part in our failure to fulfill the mission of Christ more fruitfully, and to take responsibility for a future with hope. We all have to offer ourselves to being changed afresh by the Holy Spirit.

**You'll be doing a lot of writing about these issues between now and General Conference. Explain that effort.**

*Remember the Future: Thirty Days of Preparation for General Conference* is a series of blogs/essays that I'm writing that focuses on the mission of the United Methodist Church, change in the church, and the Call to Action using scriptural and Wesleyan themes. People can subscribe to receive daily emails of the blogs which begin March 26. They can sign up now for the free subscription at [www.MinistryMatters.com/30Days/](http://www.MinistryMatters.com/30Days/).

**For delegates who are really torn about reforms—believing there's a need for profound change, but uncertain about specifics—what counsel would you give?**

I would ask delegates to vote according to some basic principles: 1. The mission of the church through Christ comes first. 2. Remember the future, and consider the legacy we are leaving. 3. Value simplicity, which includes streamlining, unifying, and creating a clear line of sight between our general work and the local congregation. 4. Be mindful that every single dollar we spend was first placed in an offering plate and offered up to God. 5. Pray without ceasing.

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Make Disciples of Jesus Christ to Transform the World

# The 2012 United Methodist Church General Conference



UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE FILE PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE

Delegates to the 2008 United Methodist General Conference met in Fort Worth, Texas. Many church leaders anticipate historic changes at the 2012 session in Tampa, Fla., which will include proposals to restructure the denomination and to end guaranteed appointment for clergy.

## Proposals for major change at GC 2012

BY SAM HODGES  
Managing Editor

Expectations run high before every General Conference, but this time even a seasoned hand like the Rev. Don Underwood feels there's a strong prospect for major change in the United Methodist Church.

Mr. Underwood, pastor of Christ UMC in Plano, Texas, attended his first General Conference in 1976. The one set for April 24 to May 4 in Tampa, Fla., under the theme "Make Disciples of Jesus Christ to Transform the World," will be his fifth as a delegate.

Eager to shake up a denomination that has long seen numerical declines in the United States, he favors restructuring the UMC's general agencies, ending guaranteed appointment for clergy and reallocating millions in general church funds to help congregations thrive.

As General Conference looms, he's balancing hope and realism.

"This has the potential to be the most important General Conference since 1968," Mr. Underwood said, referring to the one that created the United Methodist Church through a denominational merger. "And it could all fizzle."

■ See 'Proposals' page 3

## What is the *UM Reporter*? Why does it matter?

BY ALAN HEATH  
CEO, UMR Communications

A little more than six months ago, I could have answered the first question above, but I would have been wrong. That was when I first read the ad for the CEO position of UMR Communications. Even though I had been an avid reader of the *United Methodist Reporter* for several years, I assumed the *Reporter* was an official publication of the United Methodist Church, published by United Methodist Communications in Nashville. I was surprised to see a Dallas address for the ministry, and thus began my own per-

sonal process of discovery.

Now that I have served as CEO of this organization for six months, I obviously know a lot more than I did then. So, let me attempt to answer the first question. The roots of UMR Communications and the *United Methodist Reporter* go back 165 years to 1847 with the advent of the *Texas Christian Advocate* newspaper. Over many decades, a newspaper has always been at the heart of this ministry. It grew from a regional publication with a single edition to multiple church and conference editions with news, features and commentary addressing regional, national and international

audiences. And now, UMR Communications, the parent organization of the *Reporter*, is a multi-faceted communications ministry.

So, why does the *United Methodist Reporter* matter? Even though our ministry includes printing, mailing and distribution services for churches, boards and agencies, other faith-based organizations and non-profits, the *Reporter* is still the heart of what we do. And the most descriptive word for the paper is *independent*. We receive no direct financial support from the church, so we are financially independent. But, more importantly, we are also an independent *voice* within

the church. We are not a public relations arm nor do we presume to speak on behalf of the general church. Our goal is reporting news, providing interesting and informative features, and commenting on issues with fairness and civility. We work diligently to present divergent views in the spirit of what John Wesley called "holy conferring."

As an independent voice within the church, we are presented with a special challenge every four years when the church prepares for and convenes General Conference. At the 2012 General Conference, the church

■ See 'Reporter' page 2



Alan Heath



■ **REPORTER** Continued from page 1

appears to be at a crossroads. We see nearly universal agreement about the need for substantive change if we are to survive as an effective expression of the church of Jesus Christ. However, we are also hearing a multiplicity of voices attacking the “Call to Action” as the blueprint for change.

In the words of the country philosopher, “We have no dog in that hunt.” Our desire is to listen with acuity, to analyze with heightened perception, and to report with precision as our church prepares for this incredibly important and potentially historic General Conference.

While we do our best to maintain objectivity, we fervently hope that whatever changes come as a result of decisions made at this General Conference will have a positive impact on the direction of our church. And we pray that “making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” will be more than a motto or a mission statement. Rather, we pray that it will be realized in the form of

vital and revitalized congregations made up of individuals with a commitment to evangelism, discipleship, and growth toward spiritual maturity.

And we pray that the delegates to General Conference will truly participate in “holy conferencing,” internalizing and practicing

John Wesley’s three simple rules: “Do no harm, do good and stay in love with God.”

The *United Methodist Reporter* will be there through the entire process. We will review, report, comment, question and highlight—all from an *independent* perspective.

But we will also rejoice when and if our church takes bold steps to ensure we are fulfilling the mission Jesus gave all his disciples so many years ago: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matt. 28:18-20)

‘We will review, report, comment, question and highlight—all from an independent perspective.’

## What will be different this time?

BY RICH PECK  
*Interpreter Magazine*

Holy conversations, evening worship and a program of celebration and challenge are among the changes for General Conference 2012.

Others include a proposed deadline for legislative committees to complete their work.

Planning the 2012 event is the 25-member Commission on the General Conference, led by Randall Miller of Emeryville, Calif. The Rev. James Harnish, senior pastor of Hyde Park United Methodist Church in Tampa, is chair of the host committee.

### Speaking, listening

While General Conference planners hope holy conferencing will be the norm, delegates will engage in three specific times of “holy conversation.”

On Wednesday, April 25, delegates will break into 13 groups for discussions designed by the Unity Team of the Council of Bishops.

The first conversation, focusing on the church’s identity and theology, will reflect on questions based on the Episcopal, Laity and Young People’s addresses that delegates heard that morning.

The second conversation will focus on human sexuality. Bishop Sally Dyck, chair of the Unity Team, said planners are drawing on the experiences during a previous gathering of representatives from groups with opposing views on homosexuality.

“There is a lot of pain involved in these discussions,” Bishop Dyck said. “Sometimes people just want assurance that their views have been heard. The purpose of the gathering is to discuss how we can live together in spite of our differences on homosexuality.”

On April 30, the Committee to Study the Worldwide Nature of The United Methodist Church will coordinate a discussion of how each regional group can serve and be served by the denomination.

### Legislative committees

Delegates will be asked to mandate all legislative committees to complete their work by 9:30 p.m. on Saturday, April 28. Any petition not processed by that time will not go to a plenary session unless 20 delegates file a written request for it to be considered.

The Rev. Alan Morrison, General Conference business manager, said the schedule calls for about 25 percent more time for committee work than in 2008. In the past, some legislative

committees have met during the plenary to finish considering all their assigned petitions.

### Worship and music

Marcia McFee of Truckee, Calif., is the director of worship and music for General Conference. She is designing the service of worship and celebration of Holy Communion that will open General Conference at 4 p.m., ET, on Tuesday, April 24. Dr. McFee is also responsible for worship scheduled for 8:30 p.m. most evenings and the prayer services that will begin each day. Bishops will preach for most of the evening services. United Methodist musicians from around the world will be among the worship leaders.

### Celebration, challenge

Dr. McFee is also designing “We Need a River: A Plenary Celebration and Challenge of the Mission and Ministry of The United Methodist Church.” Scheduled for 7 p.m., ET, Sunday, April 29, it will feature presentations and reports looking at the past, present and future connective life of United Methodists.

The Rev. Peck, a retired clergy member of the New York Conference, is a freelance writer in Nashville, Tenn.

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## ■ PROPOSALS *Continued from page 1*

Every four years, the United Methodist Church gathers about a thousand delegates from around the world. They constitute the General Conference—the only body that can speak for the UMC.

Delegates are chosen by their geographical conferences, and according to church law half must be clergy and half laity. Bishops preside, but don't vote.

During the first week, delegates will meet in 13 legislative committees and one central conference committee to consider 1,200 petitions from individuals, churches and agencies. Recommendations from these committees will be debated in plenary sessions. Delegates will decide on the quadrennial budget for the general church; consider revisions to the *Book of Discipline*, the UMC law book; and pass, amend or reject proposed resolutions addressing social issues.

Delegates and visitors will also gather regularly for worship, and may get to hear a high-profile speaker. (Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, president of Liberia and a United Methodist, spoke in 2008. President Obama has been invited this time, though there's no indication he'll accept.) They will also try to keep emotions in check amid debate and protest over a persistently problematic issue—homosexuality.

Much of the planning for, and on-the-fly decision making during, the gathering falls to the Rev. Fitzgerald “Gere” Reist II, secretary of General Conference.

“Sometimes people offer me sympathy, and sometimes I need sympathy,” he said at the Pre-General Conference Briefing in January. “But we're a wonderful church. It's a wonderful thing to see the delegates gather from around the world.”

This General Conference—to be held in the Tampa Convention Center—will underscore how international the denomination has become.

Of the 988 delegates, those from outside the United States will constitute 38 percent, an 8 percent rise from 2008. In 2004, non-U.S. delegates accounted for 20 percent.

Membership is crucial to the formula for allotting delegates, and African membership in the UMC grew from 3.5 million to 4.4 million between 2005 and 2009. In the United States, the church declined from nearly 8 million to 7.6 million members during that period.

So a General Conference power shift has resulted, with the U.S. losing delegates and Africa gaining them.

The two largest delegations this time are African—North Katanga, with 52 and Côte d'Ivoire with 40.

Having a worldwide church makes for an even more expensive General Conference. In 2008, the cost was \$7.1 million, up from \$5.3 million in 2004.

The Rev. Alan Morrison, business manager for General Conference, projects the cost this time at \$8.5 million. Much of that owes to transporting more international delegates. Another rising cost is for translators to accommodate those delegates.

“If we want to be a global church, that's the price we pay,” said Mr. Reist.

### ‘A new church’

Church operations worldwide are largely underwritten by congregations in the United States, and the long, slow decline of membership here has had a financial effect.

The UMC's General Council on Finance and Administration and the Connectional Table are recommending that General Conference approve a \$603 million budget for general church operations during 2013-2016. That's about 6 percent lower than expenditures for the quadrennium that's ending, and marks the first time a smaller budget has been put forward.

Within the United States, the average age of UMC members is 57, leading to warnings by the Rev. Lovett Weems, a church growth expert, of a looming “death tsunami” that could jeopardize the denomination's future.

Reform efforts have been stirring for years, and quickened with the last General Conference and the ensuing recession.

The Council of Bishops and Connectional Table commissioned a Call to Action Steering Team that in 2010 issued a report, drawing on two outside studies of the church. That in turn has led to a range of reform proposals before General Conference, endorsed by the bishops in a public letter that begins, “For the sake of a new world, we see a new church.”

One proposal would consolidate nine of 13 general agencies into a new United Methodist Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry, governed by a 15-member board, with oversight from a 45-member advisory panel. The new structure would eliminate 524 board positions allotted to agencies.

Another proposal would create a “set-side” Council of Bishops president who would devote full time to the job—as it stands, the president continues to oversee a geographic area. The proposed non-residential bishop would preside over the 45-member advisory panel and assume the role of ecumenical officer for the UMC. The proposed structure would also move the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious

Concerns to the Council of Bishops.

Yet another high-profile reform measure, aimed at minimizing the problem of ineffective clergy, would end guaranteed appointment for ordained elders. Then there's the proposal to redirect \$60 million in general church funds toward boosting the number of vital congregations.

The 2008 General Conference approved “Four Areas of Focus” for the UMC: improving global health; engaging in ministry with the poor; creating new places for new people and revitalizing existing congregations; and developing principled Christian leaders.

Bishop Robert Schnase of the Missouri Conference hopes this General Conference will enact more extensive change.

“It's a critical conference,” he said. “Not that we're going to settle everything or get it all right, but I think we're going to set a direction of whether we're going to seriously engage all these things in the years to come, or whether we're going to continue to evade and ignore.”

Mary Brooke Casad, top executive of the Connectional Table, is another who's challenging delegates to be bold. “The plan before us is innovative, forward-thinking and hopeful,” she said.

### ‘Blowback’

But opposition has formed already to the restructuring plan, with critics saying the 15-member board will fail to reflect the diversity of the church and struggle to understand the detailed work the various agencies do. They doubt a 45-member advisory panel meeting once a year would offer adequate oversight.

“There's a lot of blowback from the agencies,” said Mr. Underwood. “They don't mind their boards being downsized, but they don't want any major restructuring.”

The Rev. Tim McClendon, a district superintendent in South Carolina, has written and spoken about what he sees as an alarming shift of power to the episcopacy in the proposals.

Bishop Gregory Palmer, a leader in the reform effort, disagrees with that interpretation.

“I absolutely reject it,” he said.

“There are no new explicit powers going to the Council of Bishops. . . . The whole non-residential bishop thing—I do not see that's a power hoarding or a power grab. I see it as a way of focusing leadership.”

Left to find their way are delegates such as the Rev. Steve Zekoff of the Wisconsin Conference. He's still working through the issues, though he considers the main restructuring proposal to be “radical,” and favors a compromise offered by the Methodist



UMNS FILE PHOTO BY MAILE BRADFIELD

**Delegates pray prior to a vote on issues related to homosexuality at the 2008 United Methodist General Conference in Fort Worth, Texas.**

Federation for Social Action.

But he definitely wants change.

“We've been knowing for years about the aging population of the U.S. church,” he said. “So we're dealing with that reality of needing to revitalize.”

### Lingering issue

One key issue where change seems unlikely is homosexuality.

As U.S. society at large has become accepting, some mainline Protestant denominations have moved toward full inclusion of gay people, including as clergy and even (in the case of the Episcopal Church) bishops. But the position of the UMC remains that while all persons have sacred worth, the church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.

General Conferences have become the arena for contentious and fairly close votes for changing the church's position on homosexuality. Demonstrations before and after the votes have been covered by the religious and secular media.

The year leading up to this General Conference saw more than 900 clergy pledging in writing to officiate at same-sex unions in spite of church law, followed by a larger counter-movement calling on bishops to enforce the *Book of Discipline*.

At the Pre-General Conference Briefing, the Rev. Bruce Robbins, a leader of the pledge effort, and the Rev. Tom Lambrecht, who supports church law on this issue and serves as vice president of the unofficial conservative caucus Good News, agreed that the impasse will likely continue.

Delegates from Africa have traditionally favored the present statement on homosexuality found in the UMC's Social Principles.

“The perception generally is that the larger the number of delegates from the Central Conferences in Africa, the more conservative votes there will be on social issues,” said the Rev. William Lawrence, dean of the Perkins School of Theology.

This General Conference has set aside time for “holy conversation” on sexuality issues; but Mr. Morrison also expects another demonstration from gay rights advocates, should they fail again legislatively.

Others are sure emotions will run high as delegates deal with this issue and others during 11 days crammed with long, intense committee meetings and plenary sessions.

“While we desire, I believe with our hearts, to do holy conferencing, General Conference is not necessarily structured to bring that about,” said Erin Hawkins, top executive of the UMC's General Commission on Religion and Race, at the Pre-General Conference Briefing.

She got a laugh from the crowd by adding: “Maybe we need to structure more time for the beverage-of-choice meetings.”

### Signs of renewal

This General Conference is in fact planned to allow for more down time. Unlike four years ago, there will be no work on the Sunday that falls midway through, and the schedule calls for following work sessions with evening worship that wraps up by 9:30.

“Humans are not necessarily made to be working 14 to 18 hours a day,” Mr. Morrison said. “I'm not necessarily sure you get to your best decision-making when you're working those kinds of hours.”

One keenly interested observer will be Bishop Will Willimon, who retires in July as leader of the North Alabama Conference. He co-wrote a book 16 years ago that called for major reform in the denomination.

He considers the serious talk of change to be a sign that renewal is finally underway.

“I'm accustomed to the Lord taking time for the Holy Spirit to breathe among us,” he said. “I think the momentum forward is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and I give thanks.”

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# Delegates to decide on restructuring, other issues

BY SAM HODGES  
Managing Editor

General Conference 2012 won't lack for proposals that would profoundly change the way the United Methodist Church operates, particularly at the agency level.

Here are the matters likely to preoccupy delegates:

## Restructuring

Legislation drafted by a Call to Action committee and proposed by the Connectional Table would consolidate nine of 13 agencies into a new United Methodist Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry, led by an executive. It would have a 15-member board led by an executive and overseen by a 45-member advisory panel called the General Council for Strategy and Oversight.

Within the center would be five offices, overseeing ministries now cared for by the nine agencies.

The Office of Shared Services would include functions of the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA), United Methodist Communications and the General Commission on Archives and History.

The Office of Congregational Vitality would do the same for the General Board of Discipleship, and the Office of Leadership Excellence would take on most work done by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry.

The Office of Missional Engagement would consolidate the General Board of Global Ministries and the United Methodist Committee on Relief, while the Office of Justice and Reconciliation would assume the work of the General Board of Church and Society, General Commission on Religion and Race, and General Commission on the Status and Role of Women.

The proposal would cut 524 board positions that go with the current agency structure and could set the stage—in combination with budget cuts—for further agency staff reductions.

(In response to the Call to Action report, agencies drafted proposals to reduce their boards by 266 directors. Agencies have been reducing staff annually. In 1971 there were 3,139 on staff in 11 agencies. In 2010 there were 1,384 in 13 agencies.)

Opposition to this proposal has mounted. Ethnic caucuses worry that they'll have less input in the new, smaller board structure. Others, too, feel a 15-member board can't reflect the diversity of a worldwide church.

Leaders of some agencies have

complained their agencies will get lost under the new structure, without their own board devoted to understanding their issues, personnel and budgeting.

Others have fretted about concentration of power, the potential for the Council of Bishops to dominate the board of the new center and about lack of autonomy for GCFA.

The Methodist Federation for Social Action has introduced an alternative restructuring that would have a coordinating council with 43 voting members and 24 non-voting members, and four ministry centers (combining work of some current agencies), each with its own 33-member board, balanced for diversity and geography.

The Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops has suggested that each of the five offices proposed by Connectional Table be governed by 15-member boards and that three members of each board would be named to a 15-member coordinating body.

There are other restructuring ideas up for consideration, such as bringing the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns under the Council of Bishops, and letting the Women's Division (United Methodist Women) separate from GBGM.

## Clergy appointments

Another proposal would change the *Book of Discipline* from saying that ordained elders in good standing "shall" be continued in appointment to saying they "may" be.

The Commission to Study the Ministry concluded that guaranteed appointment is a major contributor to ineffective congregational leadership.

But some say guaranteed appointment protects "prophetic" voices, helps provide opportunities for minorities and women, and compensates clergy for the demands of itinerancy.

There are other ministry-related proposals. One would streamline ordination, allowing candidates to be eligible as soon as they finish educational requirements.

## Homosexuality

Polls suggest increasing acceptance of homosexuality by the American public, and a growing number of states have legalized gay marriage or civil unions.

But successive General Conferences, while embracing language of compassion, have continued to uphold the denomination's position that homosexual practice is incompatible with Christian teaching. Bans on ordaining gay clergy and allowing

clergy to officiate at same-sex unions also have stood.

Conflict within the UMC on this issue was underscored this summer, when more than 900 clergy signed statements pledging to officiate at same-sex unions. That led to a counter-movement, with thousands of clergy and laity signing online petitions urging UM bishops to uphold the *Book of Discipline* against the former group.

This General Conference will see a range of petitions seeking to change where the church stands on homosexuality, and unofficial caucuses will be active on opposing sides.

Few insiders see a prospect for change, given that socially conservative African delegations are gaining in numbers. With like-minded U.S. delegates, they seem to constitute a reliable majority for the status quo.

## 'Set-aside' bishop

Currently, the president of the Council of Bishops serves two years while continuing to oversee a geographical area.

The bishops propose changing the church's constitution to give the office of president a four-year term, free of conference or area overseeing. Any permanent plan to elect a bishop without a residential area would require a constitutional amendment. Action by two-thirds of the delegates would have to be ratified by two-thirds of voting mem-

bers of all annual conferences.

The set-aside bishop would serve as president of the Council of Bishops and as the denomination's chief ecumenical officer; help with strategy and alignment of resources toward the goal of increasing the number of vital congregations; and serve as a more identifiable public face of the denomination.

The idea for a set-aside bishop leader has been pushed before, without success. There's momentum this time, but also opposition to vesting more power in the episcopacy.

## Budget

The shrinking of the UMC in the United States has reduced giving, and the recession hasn't helped.

GCFA and the Connectional Table have put forward a \$603 million general church budget for 2013-2016. That's about a 6 percent drop from the previous four years, and represents the first time General Conference will be asked to approve a smaller budget than the one before.

Agencies' budgets have increased previously, but income has not kept pace with inflation. That's caused staff reductions and program realignments. The workforce of the general agencies has gone from 3,139 in 1971 to 1,384 in 2010.

The budget supports seven funds. Here they are, with the amount they would get under the recommended budget: World Service (funding most agencies), \$311,600,000; Ministerial

Education, \$105,668,000; Black College Fund, \$42,150,000; Africa University, \$9,433,000; Episcopal Fund, \$90,336,000; General Administration, \$35,649,000; and Interdenominational Cooperation, \$8,264,000.

Delegates will consider a proposal to amend the constitution to empower a body or bodies of the church to raise and distribute funds between General Conference sessions. As it stands, no entity can change allocated budgets after General Conference adjourns.

Delegates will also consider whether to allow the mid-quadrant reallocation of up to \$60 million in general church funds, for efforts to increase the number of vital congregations.

Some believe delegates may go a simpler route, reducing the recommended budget by \$60 million, to provide apportionment relief for congregations. Such action would curtail or eliminate many programs now offered by general agencies.

## Other issues

A range of other causes have surfaced in legislation, including divestment by general agencies from companies that support the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories; pulling the UMC out of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice; and calling for Congress to enact immigration reform.

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# Q&A: Choosing symbols for worship at GC 2012

**Marcia McFee** is worship and music director for the 2012 General Conference in Tampa, Fla. A well-known worship designer and leader with experience in music, theater and dance, Dr. McFee has taught workshops, preached and led worship at numerous United Methodist gatherings. She also served as co-director of worship and music at the 2008 General Conference.

She spoke recently with staff writer **Mary Jacobs**; here are excerpts.

## Can you describe for us, briefly, the process for the planning of worship for General Conference?

In my design process, I begin to find what I call an anchor image, a metaphor that's rich enough to carry us through the whole series of services. In the case of GC that's quite a lot—28 services, including morning prayer, noon communion and all the evening services. We will be worshipping at the Tampa Convention Center, which is a beautiful place right on the water.

So I began to play with the idea of the shoreline as something that would be provocative enough to offer us a direction for all of our services. The most famous shoreline in the gospels is the Sea of Galilee. I began to pull out all of the stories in the

Book of Mark of Jesus at the Sea of Galilee, and in all of these, there was a message coming from Jesus, about who we are to be as disciples, which of course really related to the theme of General Conference about making disciples.

The shoreline is a place of taking off into the unknown, into new adventures. It's a place of coming home. It's a place of going from the known to the unknown. The stories often talk about the storms, and Jesus being with us in the storms, and all of those things seemed to have a connection with the sometimes very difficult process of discerning where the church is going in the next quadrennium, which is one of our purposes for General Conference.

## So how will that "shoreline theme" show up in worship at General Conference 2012?

The first opening worship begins with the call of the disciples on the shoreline, when Jesus calls the fishermen and says, "I will make you fishers of people." Then the conference ends with the last closing worship, with the post-resurrection story of Jesus, again at the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee, when he's saying, "Drop your nets on the other side, don't give up, even though it doesn't feel like you're catching any fish right now, don't give

up." So it spans the whole of the ministry of Jesus in that time frame.

In between we have stories of Jesus teaching at the shore of the Sea of Galilee, we have stories of Jesus walking on the water, to the disciples who are scared to death because they're in the middle of a storm. We have stories of Jesus inviting a tax collector at the porch at the Sea of Galilee to dinner. So there's a whole wonderful range of very familiar biblical stories that we'll be exploring at General Conference.

There will be a symbol each day that will be a metaphor for our work together. One day it is a piece of sailcloth. One day it is the grasses that grow on the shoreline. One day it is a river rock. One day it's water. One day it is a piece of sailing rope that connects us, that brings us safely to the harbor, or that we unwrap to go out on new adventures. So there's a series of symbols that we'll use every day. On the last day it will be a net, because Jesus says, go into the world and make disciples; we have to lay down our nets again, and go into the world.

To give you a sneak preview, the very first symbol in the opening worship will be lightning, which we will create audio-visually. Tampa has the most occurrences of lightning strikes in the whole U.S. I thought that was

really interesting, related to the fact that the Sea of Galilee, because of its geographical layout, there's a reason why scriptures say that violent storms just whip up in an instant. So I thought that was a very interesting connection. And I think that it's important to acknowledge that, sometimes it feels like our churches are experiencing storms, and we need Jesus with us.

## How do you begin to plan worship for an "audience" that is so large and so diverse, to make it meaningful for everyone?

Because the Sea of Galilee is so much a part of the Christian scriptures—we all as Christians have those stories in our DNA. It's really the biblical metaphors that we draw on, rather than worrying that everyone needs to live on a shoreline to get the metaphors. We're all steeped in the metaphors of the Sea of Galilee. The biblical scriptures really are our common thread; no matter where you're from or what language you speak. The trick is to create moments that are very big and grand to fit the space but also create some moments that are more intimate. So at times, we will turn to the people around us and we will share particular things, such as, what are our prayers for healing for the church, the world, and ourselves? So we create the larger experiences and also times when we can share intimately and really pray with each other. It's not always all about pomp and circumstance; it's about facilitating an environment where we can really worship.

Because we have a congregation that is so diverse in terms of language and experience, we will be worshipping with a variety of expressions—drawing on readers, singers and visual artists from around the world. We will be hearing some liturgies in Swahili, French and Portuguese. We have the benefit of media that can translate these into English, but we don't need to translate that every time. In some places, I asked the translators not to translate. I believe that, even if we don't understand the words, we feel the spirit moving in that moment. About 38 percent of the delegates will be non-English speaking. That's a big percentage. We get to honor that.

## Can you give us a "sneak preview" of some of the new or innovative elements you're planning for worship for General Conference 2012?

We are using some of the latest digital media technology through the generous collaboration of a company called Triple Wide Media, and that is



COURTESY PHOTO

## Worship designer Marcia McFee will lead services during the 2012 General Conference.

that the entire backdrop will be a triple-wide, panoramic screen—about 90 feet in width—so we can literally create the environment of being on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. It will help us in a very sterile, generic convention center room to imagine ourselves in a different place. So this is the cutting edge digital tech we're looking forward to using.

Another point of interest is that for the memorial service, in which we will memorialize the bishops who passed away in the last quadrennium and also have the opportunity to name anyone who's been associated with General Conference. Anyone who's listening in the room can lift up the names of those they would like to be remembered. Because we are right on the water—we will, as names are read, be launching small memorial boats that have candles in them into the water just off the dock outside the plenary room. We will have a live-stream of that happening inside the room as we do that. It's going to be absolutely gorgeous. This is a tradition that is well known in Hawaii and some other Asian cultures.

The noon communion, which at General Conference 2008 we had in the plenary space, will be in a portico, a porch-like setting, outside and on the water. So each day at noon we will be outside, having a communion service right there on the water. It's a stunning setting and wonderful because it's a covered area, so that even if we have some of those spring storms that Tampa's known for, we will be OK. Especially during our breaks, people really yearn to be outside. This will give them a chance to attend communion services if they'd like to and also get some fresh air.

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# A beginner's guide to 'speaking Methodist'

BY SAM HODGES  
Managing Editor

The United Methodist Church doesn't lack for obscure terms or for acronyms, including "UMC." And the verbiage has gotten thicker as General Conference 2012, with its many reform proposals, draws near.

**Adaptive Challenge**—The term comes out of the Call to Action Steering Committee report and serves as a focus statement for the reform efforts that have led to the restructuring legislation and other proposals before General Conference. The specific language of the adaptive challenge 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.

**Book of Discipline**—This is the UMC's all-important law book, which governs how churches, annual conferences and general agencies are structured, and also sets policies for church membership, ordination and judicial procedure. General Conference's key task is the revising of the *Book of Discipline*.

**Book of Resolutions**—This book is published after every General Conference, and it includes resolutions adopted by General Conference delegates, expressing the policy of the UMC on current social issues and concerns.

**Call to Action**—This is the catchphrase for an effort that has led to legislation for restructuring general agencies and focusing the UMC's attention on boosting the number of "vital congregations." The UMC's Council of Bishops and Connectional Table leaders, working with presidents and general secretaries of the general agencies, began the initiative. Then came the commissioning of a 16-member Call to Action Steering Team by the Council of Bishops, with support from the Connectional Table. The steering team drew on two outside research projects: one by Towers Watson, on vital congregations; and the other, an operational assessment, by Apex.

Then the steering committee issued a lengthy final report stressing the need to focus on congregational vitality for 10 years. It also called for consolidating agencies, reforming the Council of Bishops, reforming clergy training and accountability and using

statistics more effectively to measure performance across the connection.

**Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry**—Under the restructuring legislation to be decided on by General Conference 2012, this new organization would consolidate nine current general church agencies. Its 15-member board would replace hundreds of agency board seats under the current structure. The Center would have an executive general secretary, chosen by its board.

**Daily Christian Advocate or "DCA"**—The *Daily Christian Advocate* is the official journal of General Conference, recording actions by delegates. The *Advance Edition* publishes legislation submitted for consideration by delegates.

**Four Areas of Focus**—The 2008 General Conference affirmed that the UMC should concentrate on the following: Combating the diseases of poverty by improving health globally; engaging in ministry with the poor; creating new places for new people and revitalizing existing congregations; developing principled Christian leaders for the church and the world. General church agencies have targeted programming efforts for the last four years in these areas. The "Imagine No

Malaria" effort is probably the best-known example. There's some grumbling that the Call to Action proposals will divert attention and resources from the Four Areas of Focus.

**General Council for Strategy and Oversight**—This new council would consist of 45 people, representing the diversity of the UMC, and provide oversight for the Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry.

**IOT**—Interim Operations Team. This is the group of eight, led by Bishop Gregory V. Palmer, named by the Council of Bishops and Connectional Table to "guide change management" after the Call to Action Steering Team issued its report. The IOT shaped the legislation to restructure the general agencies.

**Key Drivers of Vitality**—The Call to Action Steering Team's final report identified "key drivers of vitality" for congregations. They are: effective pastoral leadership; multiple small groups and programs for children and youth; mix of traditional and contemporary worship services; high percentage of spiritually engaged laity in leadership roles.

**Metrics**—This is another term that's come to summarize the push to provide real-time, highly transparent

information on how local churches and annual conferences are doing in such areas as membership, attendance, baptism and outreach.

**Study of Ministry**—The 2008 General Conference charged the Study of Ministry Commission to report to the 2012 General Conference with legislation pertaining to "the ordering of ministry." This group did indeed produce a much-discussed study, and from it came legislation to do away with guaranteed appointment for clergy, as well as a streamlining of the ordination process.

**Vital Congregations**—The Towers Watson study drawn on by the Call to Action Steering Committee found that only 15 percent of more than 32,000 UMC congregations in North America qualify as "highly vital." The focus of reforms as pushed by the Council of Bishops and Connectional Table is to boost the number of such congregations, and a Vital Congregations Initiative is underway, led by Bishop John Schol of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, to share best practices and stress the use of "metrics" in determining how conferences and churches are performing.

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## A Summit Experience

### In 2009, the people of Summit on 16th United Methodist Church were fearful.

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April Blaine  
M.Div. 2009



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## COMMENTARY

# Separating truths, myths about Call to Action

BY BISHOP GREGORY PALMER  
*Special Contributor*

There is a myth that the Call to Action started with discussions by UMC leaders in 2008. But the truth is that it originated when the Wesleys first began organizing the people called Methodists for the work of personal and social holiness.

From its inception, the movement that is shaping today's response to God's call to participate in God's transforming work in the world has been characterized by continuous renewal and enduring relevance.

What propels the Call to Action initiative? Not the unwelcome but undeniable truth of decades of decline in participation and influence in the U.S. and Europe. Not even the necessary adjustments needed in light of the world economic crisis. What compels us to welcome the refreshing winds of reform are vivid visions of a new United Methodist Church, a church that is clear about its mission, is always reaching out, inviting, alive, agile and resilient. We see a church that is hope-filled, called of God, and courageous. It is a church that is passionately committed to the mission and vision of the Wesleyan movement.

**Truth:** The focus is on creating more vital congregations. The Call to Action (CTA) recommendations are about finding and walking the paths that lead to dramatic increases in effectiveness for thousands of congregations. The aim is first and last to nourish an intense 10-year emphasis to generate and sustain an increase in the number of vital congregations.

**Myth:** The CTA is punitive toward and mostly focused on restructuring the general agencies. In fact, we have great evidence that the agencies perform important work that supports and extends the ministries of congregations and annual conferences and other parts of the UMC Connection. We also know that our polity sets the annual conference as the primary unit for organizing resources and deploying leadership to support vital congregations. The reason to reorder how agencies are governed and managed with greater cohesion has mostly to do with increasing alignment to support the work of annual conferences. Related benefits include greater efficiency at lower cost, increased clarity

about essential outcomes and more agility to adjust to emerging needs.

**Truth:** The CTA proposals strive to promote healthy, vibrant congregations that work for justice and mercy nearby and around the world. Appreciating the need for both personal and social holiness is part of our rich Wesleyan heritage. We are passionate about the interconnections of holiness of heart and mind and making our communities and the world more loving and just.

**Myth:** CTA recommendations will result in an inward focus on the local church and obsession with institutional maintenance. In fact, the focus on congregations is not in the least about retreat from the world. To the contrary, the task is to assure that we provide the base camps from which we all move out with confidence and passion, having been fully equipped and fortified for the journey.

**Truth:** CTA calls for increased accountability and responsibility for outcomes at ALL levels of the church. Our ministries benefit from clarity about actual results as well as intentions and we improve when we measure progress as well as celebrating more elusive signs of hope. Giving due attention to measures (ex., growth in weekly participation in worship, involvement in ministries of justice and service, number of professions of faith) are not substitutes for the ultimate outcomes we seek, but they provide indicators of fruitfulness.

**Myth:** CTA places the greatest emphasis on formulas and metrics that will apply cookie-cutter evaluations of pastors and ignore diversity of settings. In fact, reaching genuine shared agreement in each annual conference about ways of monitoring progress and health and then publicly accounting for how churches, laity, pastors, district superintendents and bishops are doing will help us focus and evaluate our work together.

**Truth:** The CTA proposals call for greater emphasis for resident bishops to concentrate on leading and supporting work that results in an increase in the number of vital congregations in their areas. The proposal for the president of the Council of Bishops to be dedicated (set aside) for church-wide work is to assure that the bishops will have a peer leader to help them share and apply best practices; make vital congregations the centerpiece agenda for the Council of Bishops; provide the chair for the new General Council on Strategy and Oversight, a liaison to align the work of the general agencies; and assign an

available and designated leader for key ecumenical relations.

**Myth:** The CTA plan promotes a consolidation of power by the Council of Bishops. In fact, the CTA proposals provide for no new authority for the bishops whatsoever. What is called for is greater intentionality, capacity and accountability for the bishops to focus on the main agenda of supporting the work in each annual conference to increase and sustain the number of vital congregations.

**Truth:** The CTA calls for changes in governance of the general agencies. Since the work of the agencies is the "means" of getting work done and not an end in itself, the CTA proposals provide for effective oversight using best practices for non-profit groups while dramatically reducing the more than \$8 million currently spent each quadrennium for meetings. The plan also removes many of the structural barriers that cause independent and less cohesive and integrated work among the agencies, streamlining administration to better support and extend the ministries of annual conferences and local churches.

**Myth:** CTA's approach means exchanging missional values for business models and reduces the

participation of racial/ethnic leaders. In fact, CTA's recommendations are hardwired to the imperative of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The important change is not adjustments in agency structures or even how to use performance measures to improve outcomes, but choosing first and foremost to focus on the work of the churches and communities where people live, learn to love God, grow in grace, and seek justice and mercy. In the U.S. we reflect less and less the way communities look. We aim to make available leadership and resources for explosive growth in the numbers of racial/ethnic people active in existing and new churches.

The CTA proposals reorder priorities and assure intense concentration on cultivating and maintaining more vital congregations. Instead of an emphasis on a few hundred people attending costly meetings far from home, we envision an exciting movement where millions of people in local churches reach out to more children and youth, embrace new immigrants, involve ever more people in vibrant worship and life-changing small group study and prayer; churches that form communities of faith that hold

each other accountable, invest in bold mission and love their neighbors close to home and around the world.

The Call to Action has precipitated any number of generative conversations throughout the United Methodist Church. There are also countless cynical quips. One that I have heard repeatedly is "the Call to Action proposals are about merely moving deck chairs and maintaining the institution."

I see it differently. The Call to Action proposals are about living into the future with determination, laser focus, courage and hope. They are about taking action to move in the direction of our adaptive challenge: 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.

Bishop Palmer is episcopal leader of the Illinois Great Rivers Conference. This article first appeared in *Circuit Rider* (Feb/Mar/Apr 2012) and online at [MinistryMatters.com](http://MinistryMatters.com). Follow General Conference coverage from *Circuit Rider* and *Ministry Matters* at [www.ministrymatters.com/gc2012](http://www.ministrymatters.com/gc2012).

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## COMMENTARY

# Four steps toward vitality in our denomination

BY ADAM HAMILTON  
*Special Contributor*

Nearly everyone in leadership in the United Methodist Church agrees that something must change. We're aware of the decline in our denomination in the U.S.

If nothing changes, the United Methodist Church in the U.S. will have less than one million people within four decades. We will, by that time, either have merged with several other smaller mainline churches or we will have eliminated nearly all of our boards, gutted our missions programs, and we will have reduced our number of bishops by two-thirds. We will also have closed at least 20,000 of our 33,583 churches in the U.S. It doesn't take a prophet to see this—only a mathematician analyzing the most recent statistical report from the GCFA.

I don't believe this has to be our future. In fact, I think there are a handful of strategies that could lead us to a very different future—one in which we become an even more vital movement than we are today, effectively making disciples of Jesus Christ

for the transformation of the world. In this article I'd like to offer four suggestions for changes and strategic initiatives that I believe could have a significantly positive impact upon the future of our denomination. Three are included in the recommendations of the Interim Operations Team (IOT) of which I am a part.

## Bring together nine of our existing general boards to function as one team.

Our current organizational structure emerged from the aftermath of the merger of two denominations. It made sense in the 1970s. Today the structure seems bloated and "siloeed." We have nine separate legal entities, each with their own board of directors, each working independently from one another, often in separate cities, and all vying for increasingly scarce resources. They are doing important work, and their staffs are remarkably gifted people. We are fortunate to have them in our church. But the organizational structure is outdated, ineffective and unsustainable in the future. Rather than wait until our church simply cannot afford it anymore (many would say that time is already here), the IOT is proposing that we reorganize now and bring nine of our boards together as one team with staff working closely together to

fulfill the church's mission.

As an aside, I don't believe that restructuring the general boards is the key to having a future with hope; I see it as an opportunity to more effectively do the work of the church. This is more than rearranging the proverbial "deck chairs on the Titanic" but if this is all that we do, the Titanic will still sink.

## Ensure that our seminaries are preparing graduates to create vital congregations.

I chair the board at Saint Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, one of our 13 United Methodist seminaries. I am proud of the work our faculty do and believe in them. Our mission as a seminary is to "educate leaders to make disciples for Jesus Christ, to renew the church and to transform the world." What is lacking, not only for Saint Paul, but for most of our seminaries, is a clear mandate from the United Methodist Church that identifies the specific skills we must provide so that our graduates are prepared to revitalize declining congregations, to effectively launch new congregations, and to reach new generations of young people while continuing to serve the older members of our congregations.

## Raise up 2,000 gifted, outstanding young adult clergy to reach new

generations.

We currently have more clergy than we need in the United Methodist Church. Our shrinking numbers have left us with something like 800 more clergy than we need. But our clergy are nearly 60 years old on average. We have thousands who will be retiring in the next 10 years. The single most important key to revitalizing most churches is the shepherd who is appointed to love and lead the flock. Gifted and committed lay people eventually give up in frustration when their clergy are ineffective. When a gifted and effective clergy is sent to a local congregation that is struggling, the results are often surprising.

I recently spoke with 12 clergy across the United States who had been assigned to declining congregations that are now growing. Most were part-time appointments. When they arrived at their churches, average worship attendance ranged from 8 to 120. These were our typical churches. Only a couple of them were in growing communities, yet all of them had doubled, tripled or quadrupled in size in the last five years. They shared an emphasis on caring for people, preaching effective sermons, intentional outreach to the community and passionate, visionary leaders.

We need outstanding second career clergy, and I am grateful for them, but if we are going to reach new generations of young people, we must focus a great deal of our attention on raising up a new generation of clergy. All of these 12 pastors were under age 40 when they were assigned to their churches. We've seen a dramatic decline in the number of children in our churches. We've got to raise up a generation of clergy who will reach today's 5-year-olds.

The IOT continues to propose setting aside a fund from General Church apportionments to provide scholarships for gifted young adults to pursue ordained ministry. Many of these young adults are in junior high or high school right now. By the time they graduate from seminary, thousands of our existing clergy will have retired. This initiative alone could determine whether our church has a future.

At the church that I serve we invite children to begin considering whether God might be calling them to be pastors when they receive their third-grade Bibles. We focus on this in one session of confirmation, and I preach about listening for God's call at least once a year. Our members have set aside money in the budget and from memorial gifts to fund scholarships to

raise up a new generation of gifted pastors.

## Encourage strategic partnerships between small and large churches.

Finally, in a denomination where 19,000 of our churches have less than 60 people per weekend in worship attendance, I believe we must find ways to create voluntary partnerships in which churches work together to strengthen one another. The Call to Action study found that we have 5,000 highly vital congregations in the U.S. What would it look like for each highly vital church to invite one or two less vital congregations to partner with them in the hope of creating two or three highly vital churches?

In Indiana, a church of 220 per weekend in worship has voluntarily partnered with two churches with an average attendance of 14 each, supplying the pulpit with lay and clergy and sharing resources. All three churches are stronger today. At Resurrection, we are piloting a program in which we're partnering with three smaller churches across the U.S., offering coaching, tools and Resurrection's sermons via video to see if these resources can help revitalize these churches.

If you are one of those highly vital congregations, would you be willing to partner with smaller churches that are struggling, to help them have a future with hope? If you are a smaller church, would you be interested in partnering and sharing resources with churches that are growing? This connectionalism would see our large number of smaller churches not as a liability but a tremendous opportunity.

We stand at an important crossroads as we go into General Conference. If fear of change immobilizes us, we have a very limited future. But I believe that bringing our general boards together to work as one team to serve the church, giving a clear mandate to our seminaries on the practical skills our pastors must be trained in to revitalize existing churches, raising up 2,000 outstanding young clergy in the next 12 years, and creating voluntary partnerships between churches could lead us down a different path, one that offers us a future with hope.

The Rev. Hamilton is pastor of the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kan. This article first appeared in *Circuit Rider* (Feb/Mar/Apr 2012) and online at [MinistryMatters.com](http://MinistryMatters.com). Follow General Conference coverage from *Circuit Rider* and *Ministry Matters* at [www.ministrymatters.com/gc2012](http://www.ministrymatters.com/gc2012).



Adam Hamilton

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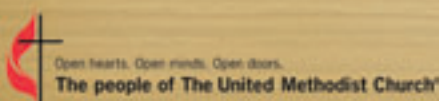
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# Will restructuring of the UMC cut vital ministry?

BY HEATHER HAHN  
United Methodist News Service

Plans to restructure the United Methodist Church's 13 general agencies could imperil ministries that local congregations need and value, say agency executives.

"We need vital congregations," said Gilbert C. Hanke, the top executive of United Methodist Men. "But we also need a vital general church at the same time to do what it is we as United Methodists are called to do."

Mr. Hanke and 12 other members of the United Methodist General Secretaries Table released a statement Jan. 26 to respond to proposals that would consolidate agencies, shrink their governing boards and potentially slash their funding. The General Secretaries Table consists of the chief executives of the 13 general agencies.

The group's statement urges 2012 General Conference delegates to "identify essential functions best provided by the general church system and support those functions through organizational structure, resource allocation, and church-wide action."

General Conference, the denomination's top lawmaking body, will meet April 24-May 4 in Tampa, Fla. Mr. Hanke, who is also a General Conference delegate from the Texas Annual Conference, and at least five other agency heads have issued personal statements sounding a note of caution about the restructuring plans.

## What will it affect?

One significant piece of legislation—the result of the multi-year Call to Action process—would consolidate nine of the general agencies into a new United Methodist Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry under a 15-member board.

The legislation also would allow the new center's board to redistribute up to \$60 million toward funding theological education, recruiting young clergy and laity, and fostering vital congregations.

The legislation does not specify where that total will come from, but agency executives expect either a majority or the entirety of the money will come from the World Service Fund, which provides most of the funding for agency work.

Agencies already face more than a 6.5 percent cut to the World Service Fund under the 2013-16 budget of \$311.6 million, which the denomination's General Council on Finance and

Administration has submitted to General Conference. The redistribution potentially would represent another reduction of nearly 20 percent.

"That being the case, the essential functions of all general agencies will not continue," Mr. Hanke said. "There is not a single one that can take that large a reduction."

Under the restructuring legislation, United Methodist Men would be among the few agencies that remain a separate body. However, Mr. Hanke joined other agency executives in expressing concerns about what the redistribution of \$60 million in general church funds could mean for the ministry his and other agencies provide.

United Methodist Men, for example, relies on the World Service Fund for 25 percent of its budget.

Without United Methodist Men, Lee Donley said his congregation and others would lack the resources for the men's ministries and Boy Scout troops that help churches grow.

For example, he cited the commission's Understanding Men's Ministry program, which helped Oxford (Mich.) United Methodist Church, his congregation near Detroit, set up ministries that appeal to men ranging from Bible studies to service projects.

"I feel very strongly that if we don't get more men in our church, we're going to suffer for it," said Mr. Donley, who was first drawn to his church by men's ministry and is now president of the North Central Jurisdiction's United Methodist Men.

But that program and other general agency resources could be in jeopardy, Mr. Hanke said.

Slightly more than a penny of every dollar given by local church members in the United States supports the ministries of general agencies through the World Service Fund, according to the General Council on Finance and Administration.

Over the decades, the downturn in U.S. membership and declining revenue already have forced general agencies to eliminate some staff positions and programs. The number of staff positions in 13 general agencies has decreased from 3,139 in 1971 to 1,384 in 2010.

The loss of \$60 million means, "there will be fewer missionaries, fewer Sunday School resources, less advocacy for peace and justice, fewer scholarships and less assistance to the growing part of the church: Africa and the Philippines," said Jim Winkler, top executive of the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society.

At least one agency executive, however, is not wary of the restructuring proposal or the funding

changes.

Neil M. Alexander, the president and publisher of the United Methodist Publishing House, has been a leader throughout the Call to Action process that led to the legislation. He also signed on to the General Secretaries Table statement. "While the [executives] do not all agree on either one analysis or a number of proposed improvements, the General Secretaries Table wanted to be sure that United Methodists know that we share common commitments around core values and the specific affirmations found in the statement," he said.

Under the Call to Action legislation, the United Methodist Publishing House and General Board of Pension and Health Benefits, as agencies supported by fees for service, would remain as separate bodies.

The Council of Bishops and the Connectional Table, which coordinates the denomination's ministry and resources, initiated the Call to Action after decades of declining U.S. membership.

The U.S. membership has decreased by 29 percent since 1968, falling from 10.7 million members to fewer than 8 million. The average U.S. member's age is now 57. After two independent studies, the Call to Action Steering Team concluded that the status quo of a shrinking and aging U.S. church is "toxic" and unsustainable.

The Call to Action report exhorted the denomination to redirect its attention, energy and resources toward fostering and sustaining an increased number of vital congregations. Agency executives, in their statement, affirmed that goal. Another group, the Interim Operations Team, devised the recommended changes, and the Connectional Table drafted the legislation.

"These proposals can certainly benefit from additional work to perfect them," said Mr. Alexander, the executive coordinator of the Interim Operations Team. "At their essence, the proposals call for intense and concentrated focus on vital congregations, new approaches in leadership, changes in how we deploy resources and unified governance and administration of program agency work."

## Other concerns

The potential funding cut is not the only change that worries some agency executives about reorganization proposals. The Rev. Larry Hollon, top executive of United Methodist Communications, is troubled that the proposal puts communications in an office of shared services. That office includes the work now done by the General Council on Finance and Administration, the General Commis-



UMNS FILE PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE

**Delegates consider legislation during the 2008 General Conference in Fort Worth, Texas. During the 2012 session, delegates will face varying proposals to restructure the church.**

sion on Archives and History and information technology departments across the agencies.

"The ability to project the church's voice into the wider public conversations about faith and values is critical today," Mr. Hollon said. "In fact, it is a responsibility of our call to be faithful disciples. Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, admonishes us to bring the light of the gospel to a culture of darkness. The communications function of the United Methodist Church is about supporting disciple-making."

The Methodist Federation for Social Action, an unofficial progressive caucus, has submitted legislation for an alternative reorganization that preserves most agencies under their own, smaller boards.

However, the group's proposal also creates a Center for Resourcing of Operations that combines the roles of the General Council on Finance and Administration, United Methodist Communications and the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits.

That combination of agency functions could pose a liability risk to the denomination's finances, said Barbara Boigegrain, the pension board's top executive. "If the [board] is merged with other entities in the church under a common board, the opportunity for legal action impacting all church financial assets is much greater," she said.

"The temptation to lower conference contributions to the pension plans in favor of more immediate missional and programmatic priorities increases dramatically. Today, in

the public sector, we see the result of mixing public priority and authority over the pension funds in the severe underfunding of many state and public pension plans."

## Action already taken

Both Mr. Hanke of United Methodist Men, and Thomas Kemper, the top executive of the General Board of Global Ministries, point out that the agencies have already taken steps to respond to the Call to Action. "We have sometimes been depicted as intransigent, that we don't want to change," Mr. Hanke said. "But that's not true; we have already changed."

He points out that even before the Connectional Table devised its restructuring legislation, most of the agencies were developing their own legislation to shrink their boards by some 266 members. Mr. Hanke said his and other agencies have increased interagency collaboration and now meet and provide more online training to curb costs.

Mr. Kemper, a German citizen and the first top executive from outside the United States to lead a general agency, said he recognizes the strengths of the global United Methodist Church as well as the need for change. His governing board, the largest of the agencies, has voted to cut its membership by two-thirds.

"I pray that the 2012 General Conference will take wise and careful actions that will greatly enliven our whole church and result in greater numbers of more vital congregations everywhere," he said. "The general agencies receive a relatively small percentage of what United Methodists contribute annually to the church, but in whatever configuration, these organizations are connective tissue within the denomination—necessary and vital."



**Gil Hanke**



**Barbara Boigegrain**



# A brief history of General Conference sessions

BY BILL FENTUM  
Associate Editor

Here's a review of some General Conference landmarks since the 1968 Uniting Conference that brought together the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren to form the UMC.

## 1968—Dallas, Texas

- Accepted church-wide responsibility for ministerial education.
- Authorized autonomous status for 28 overseas annual conferences in 14 countries.
- Established the General Commission on Religion and Race to ensure racial integration in annual conferences following the dissolution of the Central Jurisdiction.
- Appointed commissions to develop United Methodist doctrine, church structure and the Social Principles.
- Approved a special session of General Conference for April 1970 (in St. Louis, Mo.), to receive progress reports from the commissions.

## 1972—Atlanta, Ga.

- Adopted the merged *Book of Discipline*.
- Adopted the Social Principles as part of the *Discipline*, including a statement on homosexuality that said in part: "We declare our acceptance of homosexuals as persons of sacred worth . . . although we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching."
- Voted to make permanent the General Commission on Religion and Race, to lead the transition into a racially just and fully inclusive church.

## 1976—Portland, Ore.

- Established the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women.
- Authorized the General Board of

Discipleship to prepare a *UM Hymnal* supplement, eventually published in 1982. The task force working on the supplement agreed to be "sensitive to the importance that United Methodists place on inclusive, nonsexist, and nondiscriminatory language."

- Created the office of diaconal minister, designed to give a permanent place to professional laypeople employed by the church, including musicians, Christian educators and church administrators.
- Revised the 1972 paragraph on homosexuality to state the church did "not recognize"—rather than "not recommend"—marriage between people of the same sex.

## 1980—Indianapolis, Ind.

- Established the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns.
- Rejected a proposal to ban self-avowed, practicing homosexual men and women from ordained ministry in the UMC.
- Directed the General Council on Ministries to establish a task force on guidelines for inclusive language. Its report became available in 1985 in a study booklet, *Words That Hurt, Words That Heal: Language About God and People*.
- Granted voice but no vote at annual conference sessions for student local pastors—those who serve part-time appointments while attending seminary.
- Placed the denomination's Volunteer in Mission program under the direction of the General Board of Global Ministries.

## 1984—Baltimore, Md.

- Celebrated 200 years of Methodist history in America by observing the bicentennial of the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church.
- Approved a proposal to ban self-

avowed, practicing homosexual men and women from ordained ministry in the UMC.

- Passed a resolution to appoint a committee to revise the 1972 doctrinal statement to "reflect the needs of the church, [and] define the scope of our Wesleyan tradition in the context of our contemporary world. . . ."
- Established a commission to prepare a new hymnal.
- Officially adopted new liturgies for the sacraments of baptism and communion, and for services such as weddings and funerals. Baptism was made the only initiatory rite for the membership in the UMC, ending both infant dedications and the two-stage process of baptism and confirmation.

## 1988—St. Louis, Mo.

- Adopted a revised doctrinal statement stressing the primacy of Scripture.
- Approved the *United Methodist Hymnal*, which was published in 1989.
- Formed a committee to study homosexuality.
- Voted to establish Africa University in Mutare, Zimbabwe, to be funded primarily by congregations in the United States.
- Celebrated the centennial of the Deaconess movement in American Methodism.

## 1992—Louisville, Ky.

- Authorized a new *Book of Worship*.
- Received but did not endorse the report of the committee to study homosexuality. A statement was approved to "insist that all persons, regardless of age, gender, marital status, or sexual orientation, are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured."
- Expanded the role of lay speakers in the church to include caregiving ministries, and instituted the position of licensed lay preacher, an unpaid office with more extensive training and responsibilities than the certified lay speaker.
- Established a new episcopal area for Russia with headquarters in Moscow.

## 1996—Denver, Colo.

- Passed a resolution opposing the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy that banned openly gay, lesbian or bisexual persons from U.S. military service.
- Adopted "By Water and the Spirit," a theological statement dealing with baptism. It declared that "God's presence in the sacraments is real, but it must be accepted by human faith if it is to transform human lives." The statement identified "baptism as the initiatory sacrament by which we enter into the covenant with God and

are admitted as members of Christ's church."

- Restructured ordained ministry in the UMC, creating the orders of deacon and elder as separate and distinct offices.
- Banned same-sex union services in UM churches, and barred UM clergy from officiating at same-sex unions anywhere.
- Passed legislation that simplified the required structure of the local church, and allowed a more flexible structure for annual conferences.
- Authorized a major study of the denomination's domestic and international structures.
- Approved a new book of hymns and liturgies for Spanish-speaking congregations, *Mil Voces Para Celebrar: Himmario Metodista*. The book was not a Spanish translation of the English-language *UM Hymnal*, but a selection of Spanish-language hymns and rituals that followed the denomination's basic pattern of worship.

## 2000—Cleveland, Ohio

- Approved the publication of a Korean-English hymnal.
- Reiterated the denomination's position that homosexuality is "incompatible with Christian teaching."
- Through an Act of Repentance service, delegates confessed the sin of racism that had caused major divisions among American Methodists since the 19th century. Leaders from Methodist traditions outside the UMC were present and participated in the liturgy.
- Launched the Igniting Ministries campaign to raise public awareness of the UMC through advertisements in print, television and other media. "Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors" was adopted as the campaign theme.
- Authorized a study of Holy Communion.

## 2004—Pittsburgh, Pa.

- Approved "This Holy Mystery," a theological statement of the meaning of the Lord's Supper in United Methodism.
- Specified "being a self-avowed practicing homosexual" as a chargeable offense for which a United Methodist clergyperson could be tried in a church court.
- Approved an expansion of the Igniting Ministries campaign.
- Held a service of thanksgiving and appreciation for the contributions of African Americans who had remained in the UMC and its predecessors.
- Amended the denomination's Constitution to create two membership categories, "baptized members" and "professing members" (persons



UMNS FILE PHOTOS COURTESY GENERAL COMMISSION ON ARCHIVES AND HISTORY

## Evangelical United Brethren Church Bishop Reuben Mueller (l) and Methodist Bishop Lloyd Wicke join hands during the 1968 Uniting Conference.

who, in addition to being baptized, take "vows declaring the Christian faith").

- Created two additional categories of lay ministry: Lay Missioners trained to team with pastor mentors in congregational development and community ministries, and Certified Lay Ministers who assist pastors by preaching and supporting the ministry of the local church.

## 2008—Fort Worth, Texas

- Passed 23 amendments to the constitution of the United Methodist Church, to allow for creation of a U.S. regional conference. However, the amendments then failed to win approval from a two-thirds majority of delegates to annual conferences.
- Approved a budget that would be guided by four focus areas of mission and ministry: developing Christian leaders; starting new churches and renewing existing ones; ministering to the needs of the poor; and improving global health.
- Approved a full communion agreement with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).
- Gave full rights and responsibilities to the United Methodist Church in Côte d'Ivoire, the denomination's largest conference.
- Voted 501-417 to uphold the church's 2004 stance that describes homosexual practice as "incompatible with Christian teaching."
- Raised nearly a half million dollars for the anti-malaria campaign Nothing But Nets.

Information from sources including *United Methodist News Service* and the book, *United Methodism at Forty: Looking Back, Looking Forward* (Abingdon Press, 2008).

bfentum@umr.org



A young guest listens along with delegates to the proceedings of the 1968 Uniting Conference.



## Q&A: Planning the Act of Repentance

History has not been kind to the 32 million indigenous peoples in the world, according to the **Rev. Stephen Sidorak Jr.**, but he hopes that United Methodists can begin a process that helps create change for the future at General Conference 2012 in Tampa.

As general secretary of the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns (GCCUIC), Dr. Sidorak is responsible for the Act of Repentance Service for the Healing of Relationships with Indigenous Persons, which takes place on the evening of Friday, April 27 at General Conference. He spoke recently with staff writer **Mary Jacobs**.



**Stephen Sidorak Jr.**

### What will the Act of Repentance entail?

It will be a worship service, and we think a meaningful one. The act will be directed to God—and that's no small matter, because a lot of people are confusing the purpose of the service, thinking that we're going to apologize to indigenous peoples. That might be appropriate, and that might even be advisable, but that's not what the purpose of the Act of Repentance worship service will be. "Turning around" is the root meaning of repentance.

### How did this service come about?

The Act of Repentance was mandated in Resolution 3323 at General Conference 2008. This is the third in a series of three acts of repentance and it focuses on indigenous peoples. That means not only Native Americans in the U.S., but indigenous peoples wherever the church has spread its blanket across the land.

Resolution 3323 is not to be confused with the first Act of Repentance at General Conference in 2000, which was for those who left the church—namely, African Americans who left the Methodist church to form their own churches. Then, in 2004, there was a second Act of Repentance for those who stayed—because United Methodist African Americans said, "What about us? We didn't leave."

**Was there a particular historical impetus behind this, such as the Sand Creek Massacre in 1864, in which a Methodist minister, Col. John Chivington, led an attack that killed 200 Native Americans, mostly women and children? Or is it broader than that?**

I don't think Sand Creek was pivotal at all to the resolution. However,

there was a resolution adopted at the 1992 General Conference, an apology to Native Americans, which is a precursor to this current Act of Repentance.

At the pre-conference briefing, GCUICC executive staff discovered that, in Tampa, there's a lamentable history locally speaking. We knew about the Indian Removal Act and President Jackson's forced removal of Indians from their homelands, particularly in the southern states. But we discovered, a block or two from the convention center, a historical marker that indicates that, near that site, was a temple mound that dates before the time of Christ. It was razed and the dirt was used as landfill to extend Jackson Street in downtown Tampa to the river. There you have the destruction and desecration of a sacred place to Native American people.

Likewise, when you walk down the Riverwalk in Tampa, in front of the Historical Society building, there's a series of bronze plaques that talk about the Seminole Wars, and in point of fact, Tampa became a deportation center for Native American peoples out of Florida who were then sent to New Orleans across the Gulf of Mexico and from there they were put on the Trail of Tears and forcibly removed to Oklahoma. So we will have that haunting specter in front of us at General Conference as well. The very site brings home what we are trying to accomplish in the Act of Repentance.

### Some have expressed skepticism about how meaningful an Act of Repentance will really be and whether it can really make a difference. Your response?

I was on the panel at the pre-conference briefing with Anita Phillips, who served on my general secretary's advisory council on the Act of Repentance, and she was just communicating what's on the minds and in the hearts of native peoples everywhere, I think, which is, "What if your biggest hope was also your greatest fear?" The hope is that the United Methodist Church would turn around in its relationships with indigenous peoples. But what if they just put on a show at General Conference and there's no tangible follow-up, so that it lacks any credibility in the future? I share that concern myself.

### Is there anything concrete that you hope will come out of this Act of Repentance?

I hope there would be outreach in a very concerted way for evangelization of indigenous peoples wherever we are, particularly in the U.S., and the renewal and revitalization of existing Native American congregations or

new church starts for them; the enhancement of Native American and indigenous peoples' ministries wherever the UMC is present. That the Act of Repentance Service, either the template that we'll provide the General Conference or annual conference and central conference would develop their own liturgy—that those would occur everywhere we are. That we would as a church—internally—look to indigenous peoples for greater degrees of leadership involvement in the common life of the UMC. We've never had a Native American bishop, for example. Hopefully this will open the eyes of some people so that in the future that might happen.

I would hope that funding would continue for the Native American Comprehensive Plan—that we don't lose sight of the Native American Offering. What would it be like to have an Act of Repentance and then do away with Native American Sunday? People need to be thinking these things through, and I trust the delegates will. There are glaring needs in ministries to indigenous peoples across the U.S. and around the world. If you go to any Indian reservation, the unmet human needs are palpable.

### Have you had input from indigenous people in planning the Act of Repentance?

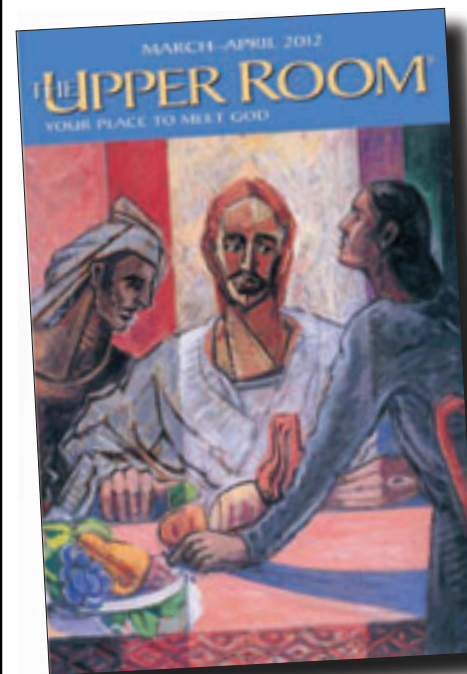
Informally, we were told by some Native Americans, not all, that indigenous people shouldn't be telling white people what they should repent for, that the "white man," so to speak, should be doing his own homework on what needs repented of. So there were different schools of thought, particularly within the Native American community, about whether or not they should be involved. But, of course, I consulted with Native Americans and indigenous peoples. We held scores of listening sessions across the U.S., and with indigenous Filipinos in Manila, with the Sami, the indigenous people of Norway, and others. We will also have an African perspective as part of the Act of Repentance service.

I've had the benefit of a number of indigenous people serving on the General Secretary's advisory council, on purpose—I recruited them—and this advisory council was instrumental in the conceptualization of the worship service itself—so yes, there was an intentionality in involving indigenous peoples in conceiving what the worship service might look like.

The hope is that, whatever we do, it will be meaningful and faithful to the intent of Resolution 3323, and pleasing in God's sight. If we can do that much, I'll be gratified.

[mjacobs@umr.org](mailto:mjacobs@umr.org)

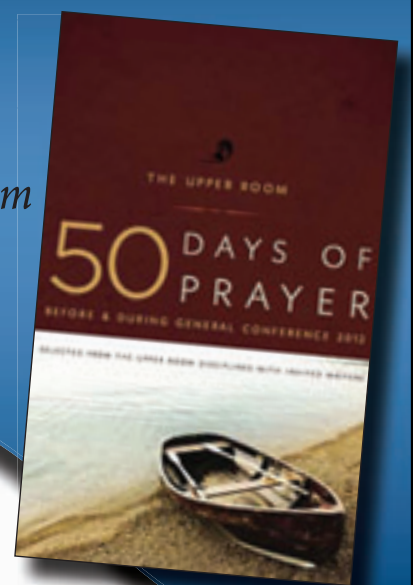
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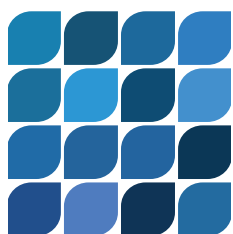


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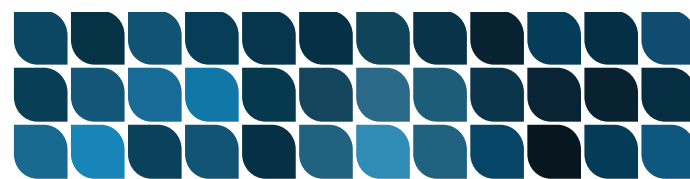
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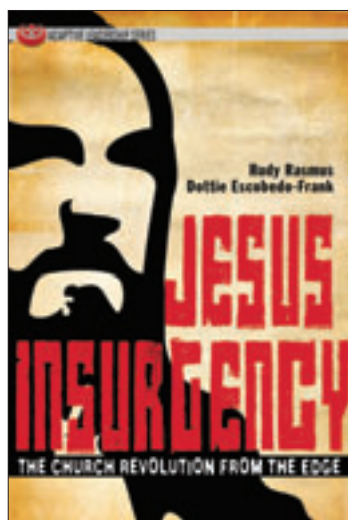


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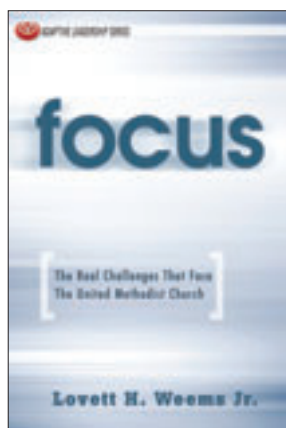


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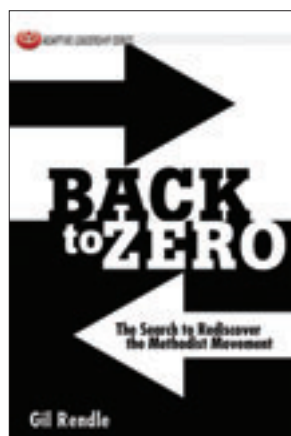
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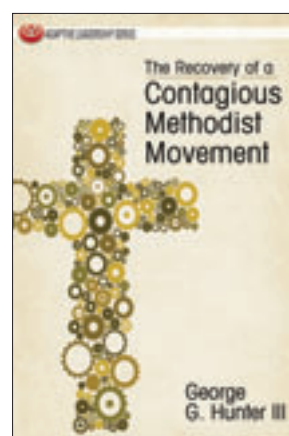
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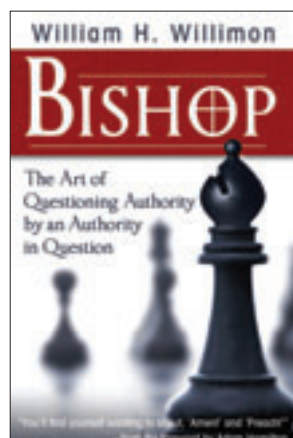
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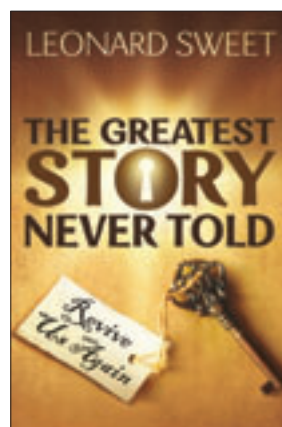
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Make Disciples of Jesus Christ to Transform the World

# The 2012 United Methodist Church General Conference



## Hosts in Tampa area stand ready to serve

BY MARY JACOBS  
Staff Writer

The Rev. Jim Harnish, pastor of Hyde Park UMC in Tampa, Fla., likes to say that “people who live in Tampa are always happy to welcome people to Tampa.”

And he’s counting on that.

As chairperson of the host committee for General Conference this year, Dr. Harnish and his team are in the process of recruiting volunteers to fill more than 2,000 four-hour time shifts during the General Conference. Volunteers will serve as greeters at the airport, hotels and convention center, and will staff the information booth, hospitality lounge and registration area, as well as serving on the prayer ministry team.

“Our mission is to offer a gift of warm welcome, which provides a setting for the unity and health of the church,” Dr. Harnish said.

As of mid-February, more than half of those time slots had been filled by over 600 volunteers. Many will travel from other cities in Florida, and have scheduled vacation days and booked hotel rooms for the trip. The committee expects to easily fill the remaining slots with local volunteers as the date of the event nears.

“We have volunteers coming from all over the state, including Tallahas-

see, Miami and Jacksonville,” said Marilyn Swanson, staff liaison for General Conference in the Florida Conference office. “Some districts and churches are bringing their vans or buses.”

“We’re finding a really great response,” Dr. Harnish said. “I think people here are getting excited about being hosts.” Dr. Harnish’s church is located six blocks from the Convention Center, and will host a few events during the General Conference.

The host committee has created a recruitment video that’s now showing in churches in the South Central district of the Florida Conference. An online tool allows volunteers to register and select time shifts via the Internet.

For host team members and the massive, coordinated army of volunteers, Dr. Harnish offers a role model: “the guy in Luke 22,” who prepared the Upper Room for Jesus and the disciples.

“We’re the ones preparing the room, in the hope that the spirit will do something new and fresh in the life of the church,” he said. “We’re praying and hoping that God will use General Conference in a way that will re-energize our church for its ministry.”

### Gathering at the water

The General Conference will convene in the Tampa Convention Cen-



UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE

Marriott and Embassy Suites hotels stand across the street from the Tampa Convention Center in Florida, site of the 2012 United Methodist General Conference.

ter, a 600,000 square foot facility located right on the waterfront in the heart of downtown Tampa. The Convention Center boasts a 200,000-square foot exhibit hall, along with 36 breakout rooms, 10 of them with water views.

Five hotels near the Convention Center—the Hyatt, Embassy Suites, Marriott Waterside, Sheraton and

Westin—will house most of the delegates. As of mid-February, some \_\_\_\_\_ rooms had been booked for General Conference attendees.

A stone’s throw away from the Convention Center is the Tampa Bay Times Forum, which will host the Republican National Convention in August. (When asked to compare the General Conference to the Republi-

can gathering, Dr. Harnish likes to joke that “General Conference is much more political, because the decisions will have all been made for the Republicans before they get here.”)

Ms. Swanson, a Tampa resident, says that the area near the Convention Center is a busy port, and con-

■ See ‘Tampa’ page 2

## No free cookies at this General Conference

BY MARY JACOBS  
Staff Writer

For the first time since anyone can remember, General Conference is strictly BYOC—bring your own cookies, according to the conference’s business manager, the Rev. Alan J. Morrison.

At past General Conferences—nobody’s sure how many—local volunteers have baked homemade cookies for delegates to enjoy during breaks at General Conference. This year, however, the Commission on the General Conference made an executive decision to eliminate the cookies—in part, to practice the church’s preaching about healthier habits for church members.

“Some folks were asking, ‘Why are we stuffing these unhealthy delegates with more unhealthy food?’” is how the Rev. Jim Harnish, chairperson of the host committee for General Conference, explains it.

At General Conference 2008 in Fort Worth, an army of volunteers from the Central Texas Conference tackled the considerable task of baking some 100,000 cookies.

“It is a major effort of the host committee to do things like that. And you’re preparing them so far in advance that, frankly, there’s a percentage of them you end up having to throw away because of health concerns,” said Mr. Morrison.

He added that handing out homemade goodies has “become more of

an issue dealing with convention centers because of the changing health codes.” In some cases, the cookies pose problems at convention centers where vendors have exclusive rights on sales of food and snacks.

The good news—ending the cookie tradition could save delegates from gaining a ton of weight—literally.

Counting 100 calories per cookie, General Conference attendees will avoid a total of 10 million calories. With every 3,500 excess calories producing one pound of body fat, that means the cookie-free environment could prevent attendees from gaining some 2,857 pounds.



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IMAGE COURTESY WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



## ■ TAMPA Continued from page 1

ference delegates likely will see cruise ships docked nearby. Within walking distance is a new children's museum and art museum. Delegates may also spot the campus of the University of Tampa, across the river, with its distinctive minarets.

### Colorful history

Tampa was initially settled as an Indian fishing village; native tribes called the village by the bay "Tanpa," which means "sticks of fire," and the spelling was later changed to Tampa.

Ponce de Leon traveled just south of Tampa in search of the fountain of youth in 1521; Hernando de Soto sailed into Tampa Bay in 1539 in search of gold. In 1821, Spain ceded the Florida territory to the United States, and three years later, Fort Brooke attracted traders to what is now downtown Tampa.

In 1884, the railroad was extended to Tampa, and a steamship line connected Tampa to Key West and Havana, Cuba.

Don Vicente Martinez Ybor, a Cuban exile and cigar manufacturer, moved his business from Key West to Tampa in 1885, becoming the first of many cigar businesses to set up shop in Tampa. Spanish, Italian, German

and Cuban workers settled in the area to work in the cigar industry and created a vivacious Latin community known as Ybor (EE-bore) City.

Ybor City was the "Cigar Capital of the World" until the embargo on Cuban tobacco in the mid-20th century. Today, Ybor City is one of three National Historic Landmark districts in Tampa, with historic buildings, galleries, shops and nightclubs.

The Tampa Bay area lays claim to the birth of the airline industry. Tony Jannus piloted the first regularly scheduled commercial flight from St. Petersburg to Tampa in 1914. During World War I and II, Tampa became a shipbuilding center, and in World War II, MacDill Air Force Base opened.

Today, Tampa is a multi-cultural city, named one of the five most diverse, integrated urban areas in the country by the U.S. Census Bureau. About 10 percent of Tampa's population is Hispanic, with people representing every Latin American country.

With a population of more than 335,000, Tampa is the state's third largest city and the nation's 54th largest city. The Tampa area's diverse economic base includes tourism, agriculture, construction, finance,



PHOTO COURTESY OF TAMPA BAY & COMPANY

**Bayshore Boulevard, linking South Tampa and downtown, skirts Tampa Bay and boasts the world's longest continuous sidewalk—about four and a half miles.**

health care, government, technology and the port of Tampa.

### Change in venue

Tampa wasn't the initial plan for General Conference 2012. Originally, the denomination made plans to hold the gathering in Richmond, Va., but in 2006, announced a change to move

the conference to Tampa.

In making the change, the United Methodist Commission on the General Conference cited a church policy regarding meeting in cities that are home to professional sports teams with Native American names. (At the time of the initial selection, commission members were unaware that

Richmond was home to the Richmond Braves, a minor league baseball team affiliated with the Atlanta Braves. The team was later relocated to the Atlanta area in 2008.)

The next General Conference, in 2016, will take place in Portland, Ore., and will meet at the Oregon Convention Center May 10-20, 2016.

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# WiFi presents challenges for Conference planners

BY MARY JACOBS  
Staff Writer

For those who can't travel to Tampa for General Conference 2012, technology will offer United Methodists an array of ways to connect—by way of smartphones, iPads and computers—and to join in the worldwide conversation as decisions are considered and made.

For those delegates and visitors inside the Tampa Convention Center, however, getting access to the Internet could prove a bit dicey.

At press time, General Conference planning team members were not yet clear whether Wi-Fi would be available to delegates who want to access the Internet via their laptop computers or mobile devices while inside the Convention Center.

"We don't have a final solution yet," said the Rev. Alan Morrison, business manager of the General Conference and director of support services for the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA).

## Rapid change

General Conference organizers have faced an extraordinary challenge in planning and budgeting for General Conference in a technological environment that has undergone vast changes just in the last four years, since the last General Conference met in Fort Worth, Texas.

In 2008, Apple's iPad was still two years away. The iPhone had been on the market less than a year, and relatively few people relied on cellphones to check email or access the Internet. The percentage of people in the U.S.

who use iPhones and other smartphones has since exploded—from 18 percent in late 2009 to 44 percent as of October 2011. And 4G phones—notorious data hogs—were only a glint in Steve Jobs' eye.

Wireless internet connections were available, but not ubiquitous, in 2008. All of the official systems used for General Conference were "hard-wired," rather than Wi-Fi based, and that was the focus when planning began seven years ago.

"When the site selection process was done in 2005, the need for Wi-Fi was not high on the priority list for any event," Mr. Morrison said. "Many convention centers did not have it available or only had it available in a limited area of their building."

United Methodist Communications' technical team is currently looking at options and potential vendors to find a cost effective way to provide Wi-Fi access, Mr. Morrison said. The cost for adding a Wi-Fi system is likely to be substantial—\$40,000 to \$50,000—given the number of people expected at the Convention Center.

But the prospect of doing without Wi-Fi was not good news for the Rev. Bradley Laurvick, associate minister at St. Luke's UMC in Highlands Ranch, Colo., and a Rocky Mountain Conference delegate.

He spoke out at the pre-Conference briefing in Tampa in January, where he was using social media to communicate with folks who couldn't be there, adding that he'll be "very disappointed" if that's not possible at General Conference.

"I'm a digital native," said Mr. Laurvick, age 30. "It's one of my primary

modes of connection with my peers, with community, with my parishioners. And so, this is how I plan to be connected with them. I would hope the church would find ways to facilitate that."

General Conference organizers, however, say they're stymied by the fact that convention centers are government-owned and, unlike for-profit businesses like hotels, don't have the ability to respond quickly to technological change. The Tampa Convention Center has a three-year plan to implement Wi-Fi throughout the building, which is just starting, and "that won't do us any good," Mr. Morrison said.

One option under consideration may be to offer Wi-Fi on a "for purchase" basis for those who want it.

## There's an app

At the pre-Conference briefing for delegates from Africa in Harare, Zimbabwe in February, the Rev. Larry Hollon noticed that virtually every person present had a cellphone—another sign of how the world has changed since 2008.

"Today, in the U.S., there are more mobile devices than there are people," said Mr. Hollon, who is chief executive of United Methodist Communications (UMCOM).

UMCOM's team is offering a mobile tool for following the event. General Conference 2012 apps for iPhone, Android and the iPad are slated for release by early March and will allow users to track legislation, access the conference schedule, find meeting locations and view maps of the convention center and Tampa area.

With 4,000 or more delegates and visitors in the Convention Center at any one time, cellphone access there could be tested at times, too, but again, General Conference planners say their options are limited for boosting bandwidth.

"It will really depend on which wireless company people use and how close the towers are for that particular company," Mr. Morrison said, who added that he's used his cell phone in a number of different rooms in the Convention Center, without problems.

## Remote access

For those folks following General Conference from their computers and other devices, live video streaming will also be available. By logging on to [www.gc2012.umc.org](http://www.gc2012.umc.org), virtual visitors can watch all of the plenary sessions as they happen, including the episcopal address, the laity address, the young people's address and daily evening worship services. Website visitors may also track legislative petitions and get news and updates, and



COURTESY PHOTO

**The Rev. Bradley Laurvick is a high-tech pastor who plans to use social media while a delegate at General Conference.**

find daily news updates and photos from the conference.

With the website as well as the apps, visitors can use a search engine to find and follow legislation. Users will have five ways of locating a particular piece of legislation: using a petition number, keyword or the name of the person or organization submitting the petition, as well as by way of the legislative committee considering the petition or the reference number to the section of the *Book of Discipline* or *Book of Resolutions* to which the legislation relates.

The GC2012 website will also publish the Daily Christian Advocate (the "DCA"), the official journal of the proceedings of General Conference, every morning in PDF format. Delegates will receive paper copies on their desks each morning of the conference.

Anyone with questions about General Conference can get help via InfoServ, either by emailing [infoserv@umcom.org](mailto:infoserv@umcom.org) or visiting [www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org) and clicking on "Questions."

In the days leading up to General Conference, bloggers and webmasters may also add a "Countdown Clock" to their sites by way of the General Conference website. The clock displays the number of days, minutes and seconds as they tick away toward the conference's opening session on April 24.

## Game changer

All of these technological options should make the General Conference more accessible and easier to follow. But the real game-changing technology at this General Conference, Mr. Hollon believes, will be social media.

"Facebook and Twitter were not even factors at General Conference

2008, but today they are major sources of information and conversation," said Mr. Hollon.

About 750 million people currently use Facebook, up from 100 million in 2008. UMCOM has created a General Conference Facebook page as well as a Twitter feed (#GC2012) which will be updated frequently during the conference.

Instead of hearing the results of General Conference days or even weeks after the fact, church members can follow and discuss legislation, within their own networks, as it is considered and voted upon. Followers of the Twitter feed can opt to "retweet" posts about developments at General Conference, and Facebook users may share and comment on posts from the GC2012 Facebook page.

And individual delegates can post their own updates, as well as Mr. Laurvick did at the pre-Conference briefing in Tampa.

"I've got folks who aren't delegates in any way, shape or form, asking questions and feeling like they're a part of the pre-Conference briefing because I can let them know what's going on and things that are being said," he said. He'll do the same at General Conference. He plans to borrow the hardware for mobile Internet access if Wi-Fi isn't made available at the Convention Center.

"I think [social media] will be a significant new factor in the whole conversation leading up to and during the General Conference, not only because it's a growing area in media, but also because the conversation takes place in real time and it's uncontrolled," Mr. Hollon said.

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UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE PHOTO BY HEATHER HAHN

**Karen Greenwaldt (left), top staff executive at the UMC's General Board of Discipleship, and Nebraska Area Bishop Ann Brookshire Sherer-Simpson learned how to use Nooks to download material at a Council of Bishops meeting last year.**



# Q&A: Transformed lives will transform the world

Professionally, **Steve Furr** is a family physician in a small town of about 5,000 in southwest Alabama, who does “everything from delivering babies to taking care of patients in nursing homes.”

At the General Conference in Tampa, Fla., he'll be one of three speakers delivering the Laity Address on April 25, along with Amory Peck and Betty Spiwe Katiyo. He spoke recently with **Mary Jacobs**; here are excerpts.

## Can you give us a preview of your address?

This year is unique, in that we're going to have three people do the Laity Address. I'm excited about that, because that way it's not focused on one individual but it's focused on the address itself. One of the first Laity Addresses at General Conference was given by five different laypeople. I'm glad we're going back to this, so there's not a personal focus. The focus is just on the message itself.

We were given the theme of the General Conference, “Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” Each one of us submitted an individual address; mine was a story of a personal transformation. We've combined those three, and our combined topic is, “If it's going to be, it's up to me.” Amory came up with that title because that was the title of her original talk.

## What led you to choose that topic, and why is it important?

As we're going into this General Conference, we're talking about these

huge changes in structure in the church. As an individual and a layperson in the church, you have to think, “What can I do in all this massive restructuring?” And it's the same thing that you did in the time of Jesus. He focused on 12 individuals and transformed their lives. So, that's what I want us to focus on, when we try to transform the world. If we transform ourselves individually then the world will tend to take care of itself.

## What was your personal transformation and what did it involve?

What I'm focusing on, as a physician, is that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, and taking care of our bodies as we would take care of the temple. I had a personal transformation in that area, which I'm trying to keep a little bit of a secret until General Conference.

## How does the calling of laity differ from the calling of clergy?

Our message is for both. Even though this is the Laity Address, we're addressing the laity and the clergy. We each individually have to do our part to make the gospel really reach out into the world. It's just like Paul, talking about each part of the body has a purpose. If each of us will do our part then the body takes care of itself. If the eye is busy telling the ear what its needs to be doing, rather than just doing its own job, then none of the jobs get done.

## What change would you like people to make?

You look today in the news. We just had the news of Whitney Houston's death and addictions. Unfortunately, many people in our church are addicted to many things, whether it's alcohol, drugs, pornography or food. There are a lot of addictions that we are enslaved with, even though we are Christians. I think we need to recapture that idea that our bodies truly are the temple of the Holy Spirit, and we wouldn't any more defame our bodies than we would go in and trash our local church.

As good people, we tend to say yes to everything that comes along. Sometimes you need to say no to some things in order to say yes to the very best things in life. That means sometimes you've got to give up certain things. Whether it means you might need to skip a meal, because you know you'll be sitting a lot and if you eat that big meal you'll gain two pounds by tomorrow. So it's deciding what's really important in your life.

## When you talk about seeing bodies as temples, what does that mean practically speaking?

All of the disciplines, taking care of your body, both spiritually and physically. Both your Bible reading, prayer and study, watching what you eat, what you take into your body, whether it be drugs, alcohol, food—also what you put into your mind. What TV shows do you watch? What websites do you go to? Do you avoid pornography websites and things that might lead your mind astray?

If there's a theme to come out of my section of the Laity Address, it's to

not just preach a sermon but to be one. It's real easy to preach a sermon but it's a whole lot more difficult to live one. When you preach a sermon, it often goes in one ear and out the other, but when people see a sermon lived, that really gets their attention.

## You have served on a number of church committees and boards and you're a physician in your spare time. How do you keep balance and stay focused on what's important?

It's very difficult. I don't sleep very much. I live in a small town of 5,000. One of the best things that happened to me was, we had a fitness gym open up called Anytime Fitness. It's open 24 hours a day. I'm sometimes working out at 4 in the morning or 11 at night. You have to make a commitment and do just what you have to do. At the same time, in all the responsibilities that have come my way, those are doors that the Lord has opened up and amazingly He has made my schedule work. I'm just amazed at how meetings will fall at times when I can be there. I try to go through doors that He opens and not try and force any doors that are not there.

## What are your hopes for the 2012 General Conference?

Something that is important for me is, we complain in the church that we don't have more younger people involved or we don't have more professional people involved. Part of that is because we tend to meet when they can't meet. General Conference is a good example. We meet right during the school year, so people who are in



Steve Furr

school have a very difficult time coming. As a church, as we move forward, I think we really have to change how we do business in order to get young people and professional people involved.

The hope is that we will come out with a unified message and that we'll all focus on truly being disciples of Jesus Christ ourselves. There's so much talk about structure that we sometimes forget to be what we're supposed to be. Again, if we focus on what Christ meant us to be each as an individual—the body and the church will take care of itself. When we become what Christ meant us to be, and people see that within us, they'll want to be where we're at—whether it's in our church, our Bible study, our small group—to see what led us to become transformed disciples.

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# All UMs urged to pray for General Conference

BY SAM HODGES  
Managing Editor

The Rev. Tom Albin sees prayer as the wind behind the sails of General Conference. And he wants a big wind.

“The Wesleys taught us that God does nothing apart from prayer,” said Dr. Albin, dean of the Upper Room. “I'm absolutely thrilled with the direction we're going, but my goal is to engage every United Methodist around the world in the process of intercessory prayer for our leaders.”

United Methodists have long been intentional about prayer for General Conference. For the 2012 General Conference, that has only intensified, Dr. Albin said.

Here's a breakdown of prayer activities and initiatives, some new, some reprised from past General Conferences:

## • Pre-General Conference

**Prayer.** The Upper Room has published a print-on-demand booklet titled *50 Days of Prayer Before & During General Conference 2012*. It can be ordered by calling (855) 469-3386. The book also is available free in e-book versions and in PDF files. The PDF files offer the guide in English, French and Portuguese. See [www.upperroom.org/news/25](http://www.upperroom.org/news/25).

• **Online Prayer.** The Florida Spiritual Formation Team has created a Facebook page named “2012 UMC General Conference Prayer Ministry” and a Twitter account, @GC2012Pray. The General Board of Discipleship has a General Conference Prayer website: <http://bit.ly/ydmc3d>.

• **Mantles.** In a first-time effort, volunteers are making mantles of prayer, made of hand-dyed silk, to place on every delegate, worship leader, bishop, staff member and

prayer volunteer attending opening worship of General Conference. “We wanted to create something that would be a physical symbol of the prayers of the United Methodist people,” Mr. Albin said. (Those who want to help can contact Joyce Estes, artistic designer for the effort, at [enjoyce-silks@gmail.com](mailto:enjoyce-silks@gmail.com)).

• **Prayer Walk.** On April 23 in Tampa, the day before General Conference begins, Bishop Timothy Whitaker of the Florida Conference will lead a 1:30 p.m. prayer service at the Tampa Convention Center. It will be in the Prayer Room, River Walk Rooms 3 and 4. Participants will leave that room and walk and pray through the entire Convention Center, led by Jonathan Dow and Margie Burger of Aldersgate Renewal Ministries.

• **Prayer Room.** Having a prayer room for General Conference has be-

come standard. “In 2004 and 2008, virtually every segment of the General Conference came—delegates, visitors, bishops, worship leaders, speakers,” Mr. Albin said. “You'd find people from [conservative caucus] Good News and [liberal caucus] the Methodist Federation for Social Action, and everything in between.”

• **Spiritual directors.** New this year in the prayer room will be trained spiritual directors, from the Fellowship of United Methodist Spiritual Directors and Retreat Leaders, to help other volunteers. “They're coming at their own expense,” Mr. Albin said. “They have experience in discernment and holy listening.”

• **Scheduled prayer.** Daily sessions of General Conference will begin in prayer, and prayer will be a major part of worship.

In 2008, more than 700 UM congregations committed to pray for Gen-

eral Conference while it was in session, and Mr. Albin is hoping for many more than that this time. In his view, prayer guarantees greater civility and mutual understanding. But he thinks its importance goes beyond that.

Mr. Albin believes United Methodists and other mainline Protestants have been “seduced by the clarion call to modernism, or even the call to functional atheism, the idea that if we can't do it, nothing will happen because God can't.”

That self-reliance is dangerous, and cured best by prayer, he added.

“We've overvalued statistics and studies and best practices, and we've neglected prayer. Not that I want us to stop thinking or stop studying, but I want to balance planning with prayer and statistics with silence before almighty God.”

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# GC 2012 delegates already burning midnight oil

BY SAM HODGES  
Managing Editor

At 20, Ricky Harrison looks as if he ought to be parking cars at General Conference, not attending committee meetings and casting votes.

But he's the lead lay delegate from the North Texas Conference, and will be in the thick of things when General Conference convenes in Tampa, Fla., on April 24.

Already, the McMurry University sophomore has been driving one

Tuesday a month from the campus in Abilene, Texas, three-and-a-half hours back to the Dallas area for delegation meetings. And he comes prepared, having done all the assigned reading.

"He's an inspiration," said the Rev. Don Underwood, who is leading the entire North Texas delegation, and will be a delegate for the fifth time. "He's never missed a meeting. He's always well-prepared. I think this has been an eye-opening experience for him."

General Conference gets talked of as an event, but it's really a legislative body, composed of about 1,000 delegates (this time the early count is 988), coming from around the world.

Half are clergy, and half laity. Each has a story, and a particular motivation for being willing to put in the preparation time, not to mention the nearly two weeks away from home.

For Mr. Harrison, elected last summer at age 19, serving as a dele-

gate is an extension of his involvement at First UMC in Richardson, Texas, as well as his work in North Texas Conference youth ministries.

"I decided I'd lift my name up for election as a General Conference delegate or (South Central) Jurisdictional delegate," he said. "I expected to be part of the team. I had no expectation of being the lead delegate as a 20-year-old college student."

Mr. Harrison, who is exploring candidacy to become a UM deacon, will serve on the Discipleship Committee. He was drawn to it because it deals with youth-ministry related matters.

"Mainly my goal is to be a voice for young people in North Texas and the United Methodist Church," he said. "So many times we talk about bridging this gap between young people and the rest of the church, but it's difficult to put into practice sometimes. So it's my hope that I can help build those bridges."

## Not so secret

The Rev. Becca Clark, pastor of Trinity UMC in Montpelier, Vt., is another first-time delegate. And she's a veteran blogger with a sense of humor.

She's recording her pre-General Conference thoughts and experiences in a blog titled "Secret Diary of a Delegate." She's the first to admit that "secret" is meant ironically.

"I want to process what I'm experiencing and I hope it may be interesting to others to read about the process, ask questions, or engage in conversation that way," said Ms. Clark. "I plan to continue to blog about General Conference up to, during and after the conference."

Ms. Clark will be on the Church and Society 2 Committee, which handles petitions dealing with sexuality issues. She's made plain on her blog that she'll work to overturn the UMC's ban against clergy officiating at same-sex unions, its ban on ordaining gay and lesbian clergy and its official position that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.

"That is why I ran for GC delegate, and where I feel our church is currently committing the gravest errors," she wrote on her blog.

Ms. Clark is not a one-issue delegate. She opposes the Call to Action agency restructuring proposal, supports divestment of UMC funds from companies that assist the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and strongly favors a greater environmental emphasis by the denomination.

Her General Conference preparation has included attending delegation meetings, and lots and lots of reading. And she's talked to those

who have been through a General Conference.

"Veteran delegates have told me that the schedule is packed and tiring, that I will need comfortable shoes and a shawl or jacket for inside air-conditioning, and that I will want to soak in the worship and prayer and keynote speakers so that I don't become discouraged by the negative politics that will crop up," she said by email.

Ms. Clark is clearly fired up about attending General Conference—"I love church polity and dynamics"—but acknowledges that it's not convenient for her or her family. Her husband, a special education teacher, will be scrambling to take care of their 7-year-old daughter and 18-month-old son.

"Our parents can help out a little, but he may also end up taking some time off work to cover for me while I'm away," she said. "Not to mention that 12 days is a long time to be away from my babies!"

## Six-time delegate

Joe Whittemore will be serving for the sixth time as a lay delegate from the North Georgia Conference, and while he's retired now, he can recall

when attending was a considerable sacrifice of time and income.

"As the managing partner of a CPA firm, when I was not at work I did not have billable time," he said.

Mr. Whittemore is a well-known expert on many aspects of General Conference and UMC governance, including apportionment of delegates.

He's quick with advice to first-time delegates: Try to get enough sleep; make time for devotional life, including prayer; and don't get too upset over incremental defeats in committee or plenary session.

"In something like this you have to have a compelling love for the institution and what you are doing," he said. "You can never get discouraged over specific happenings. Anyone that does, does not stick with it—because you could always be doing many other things at that particular moment, like having eight or nine hours of billable time per day."

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Ricky Harrison



Becca Clark



Joe Whittemore



UMNS PHOTO BY JOHN C. GOODWIN

Delegates at the 2009 General Conference in Fort Worth worked long hours in both committee meetings and plenary sessions.

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*The Rev. Thom White Wolf Fassett, former chief executive of the General Board of Church and Society and author of *Giving Our Hearts Away*, visits the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site in Colorado.*

Photo by Ginny Underwood



# Unity within a diverse church

BY BISHOP ROSEMARIE  
WENNER  
*Special Contributor*

The United Methodist Church in Germany is a small but vital part of our church. Six delegates representing three annual conferences are preparing themselves to travel to Tampa, Fla. They value the fact that they belong to a church serving Christ on four continents and are looking forward to meeting fellow United Methodists, experiencing oneness in Christ despite all the differences in language, ethnicity, race and culture.



**Bishop  
Rosemarie  
Wenner**

The theme of General Conference 2012 describes the core of our calling. We expect that we will focus on the question of how to make disciples for Jesus Christ in openness for the people whom we serve in different contexts. The challenges are different in a postmodern and even post-Christian neighborhood in Western Europe than they are in

Africa, the Philippines, and the U.S. We therefore hope that General Conference will take bold steps to reorganize the church so that we really focus on common themes at the General Conference level and at the same time strengthen annual conferences and local churches through the means of the connection and through mutual support to do their work in the disciple-making task.

The motto "Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world" and the Four Areas of Focus are brilliant expressions of the United Methodist identity. In this quadrennium we attempted to prioritize the ministries in the annual conferences according to the four focuses.

For example, we offered leadership training for pastors and lay leaders who sought to motivate inward-focused congregations to turn around and serve their communities. We shared the best practices of congregations that started ministries with the poor. The four areas of focus keep personal holiness and social holiness together and they help us to regain the spirit of a mission movement. The United Methodists in Germany hope that the discussions

linked to the core issues of the mission of the church will dominate General Conference. We expect that the Four Areas of Focus were not a short-term enterprise but a redirection of the various constituencies for the vitalization of the UMC in all geographic areas.

## Unique gift

In my episcopal area, we are not of one mind on the question of homosexuality. However, we respect each other as Christians with different opinions. Many United Methodists in Germany would appreciate it if General Conference would recognize that we live with different opinions in answering the question of whether homosexuality is incompatible with biblical teaching or not. According to the European culture of speaking openly, such a change would help to truly show who we are: We are of one mind in naming the theme of General Conference as the task for all United Methodists. And we are also a diverse church, reflecting the many colors of God's grace in the many faces of our membership on four continents.

We celebrate our diversity as a unique gift from God to serve people in an ever more diverse world, and at the same time we struggle with the fact that it hurts our longing for harmony when we are divided in our understanding of the Bible.

Last but not least, United Methodists in Germany hope that General Conference will continue the process of finding better ways to live as a worldwide church. As long as the UMC in the U.S. needs to discuss all of its unique questions of how to respond to the national context in the U.S. at General Conference, we will not have sufficient time to discuss all of the issues that are truly global.

The conversation on how to restructure the UMC so that the church on all four continents can respond to the needs of the various areas and at the same time continue to exist as one organization must go on. We need to listen to each other in order to find new and creative ways to be a global church with local relevance wherever possible in covenant with other Methodist churches, as well as in fellowship with ecumenical partners.

Bishop Wenner of Germany begins a two-year term as president of the UMC's Council of Bishops during the 2012 General Conference. This article first appeared in *Circuit Rider* (Feb/Mar/Apr 2012) and online at [MinistryMatters.com](http://MinistryMatters.com). Follow General Conference coverage from *Circuit Rider* and *Ministry Matters* at [www.ministrymatters.com/gc2012](http://www.ministrymatters.com/gc2012).

# What will serve as our guide during General Conference?

BY BISHOP LARRY  
GOODPASTER  
*Special Contributor*

Preparations for the 2012 General Conference began almost as soon as all the delegates departed from the previous General Conference in Fort Worth in May 2008. Many people have worked tirelessly in an effort to make our gathering in Tampa a place of hospitality and hope for our denomination. Now, delegates have been elected, travel plans have been made, themes have been established, and strategies devised.

Those who have participated in the past know that fatigue and frustration are often the results of yet another General Conference. Some see General Conference as a political-legislative assembly where parliamentary procedure reigns and voting for or against something is a sign of one's loyalty. Some see General Conference as a convention where delegates gather for two weeks of a torturous agenda and where arguments are advanced, protests lodged, and money spent.

It does not have to be this way!

The opening hours are but a sign of how we view General Conference. Again this year, we will begin with inspiring worship as we celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion where we claim our life and identity through the sacrificial love of God in Christ Jesus. Almost before the last chord fades, and the crumbs are swept from the floor, we will move to the business of establishing the rules that will govern the Conference.

It will be a telling sign if we expend more time, energy and passion on the rules than we do on the ritual that grounds our actions in the love of God. It will be a telling sign if the rules determine our life together for two weeks, more so than the sacrament.

One of the most important challenges facing the delegates in Tampa will be whether the mission of the church is paramount in our decision-making, or whether it will be an afterthought of nice words written and recited but not practiced or implemented. If the mission (making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world) really is everything—our purpose and our direction—then it must be the driving

force behind every decision we will be called upon to make. The challenge for delegates and visitors alike will be to ask this question: How will this action, this item, or this decision move us toward accomplishing the mission?

This is a challenge for us because in the midst of hours upon hours of committee meetings and plenary sessions, it is easy for us to be distracted. To stay focused on the mission, we must ask: Will we listen for and discern the promptings of God's Holy Spirit before any debate, discussion or disagreement? Can General Conference be a means of grace that is framed by prayer and worship rather than speeches for and against or majority and minority reports? Through our actions, will we claim our Wesleyan heritage to spread Scriptural holiness across the land and to reform the continent, starting with the Church?

At this 2012 General Conference there will be significant proposals with the potential of renewing the movement of Methodism around the world. The Call to Action, the Ministry Study, and the Worldwide Nature of the Church proposals are three among several recommendations that take seriously the mission and invite us to shape our church for the future not on institutional maintenance but on missional vitality.

In November 2010, I invited and challenged the Council of Bishops to engage in an 18-month period of preparation for General Conference through the disciplines of prayer and fasting. In the weeks that followed, I was encouraged by messages that I received from across the connection. Churches, classes and individuals wrote to say that they would join the bishops in this spiritual preparation. I can only hope that these first signs of commitment are now being practiced.

It is not too late for all of us in every corner of the world to undergird the gathering in Tampa with prayer, fasting and seeking the guidance of God's Holy Spirit.

One thing is sure: we will not vote or legislate our way to fulfilling the mission. The church, as God's mission strategy in the world, will faithfully and fruitfully move forward only by loving as we have been loved (Matthew 22:34-40 and 1 John 4:7-12). Even at General Conference!

Bishop Larry Goodpaster is president of the Council of Bishops and bishop of the Western North Carolina conference. This article first appeared in *Circuit Rider* (Feb/Mar/Apr 2012) and online at [MinistryMatters.com](http://MinistryMatters.com).



**Bishop  
Larry  
Goodpaster**

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# 'Prone to wander'

BY JORGE ACEVEDO  
*Special Contributor*

"Have you experienced a 'sense of distance' among parts of the UM Connection?" My short answer to this question is a sad yet firm "Yes!"

The week after Easter 2011, I gathered with many of the pastors of the top 100 largest United Methodist churches in America (in terms of worship attendance) at Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kan.

Adam Hamilton had asked me to convene a discussion at my table. In response to a similar question posed by the leadership, I asked the seven pastors at the table with me this question: "In your entire ministry, not just at the church you are currently serving, beyond administrative assistance, how much help have you gotten for your day-to-day ministry from the General Church?" I was stunned as every one of these loyal United Methodist pastors said, "None."

Now, I know that the resources and ministries of our denomination have helped many churches. But the sampling of leaders at my table on that day left me bewildered. The distances between the people and parts of our Connection are wide.

I'm not sure when I first heard the maxim, "Form follows function." The concept is that our structures, when they are at their best, flow from purpose and intentionality. Teams that organize themselves to accomplish very specific goals and objectives do better than teams that are haphazard. Every one of us has been on a team that was carefully designed and led. We know the joy of accomplishing something lofty and ideal while on that team. And the opposite is also true. We know the frustration and agony of being on a team that is haphazardly planned and lackadaisically implemented.

One Methodist has described the early Methodists as those who were "organized to beat the devil." Regardless of our tendency to romanticize the early Methodist movement, one thing cannot be denied. The first Methodists were an organized lot and they accomplished amazing ministry in a very difficult socio-economic and religious context.

I think this institutional memory is what pains so many of us who lead in 21st-century American United Methodism. We have a faint remembrance of who we once were. Less than

5,000 of our more than 30,000 churches in the U.S. are "highly effective" in reaching and discipling the people they serve. This makes many of us shudder in light of our glorious past.

It seems to me that our institutional forms have drifted from our missional functions. We no longer are "organized to beat the devil."

How do we close the gap? After 25 years in the ministry and 15 years leading one congregation, I have discovered a fundamental premise that experience—in my own life, as well as in the lives of countless other church leaders—has proven to be true. It's that spiritual leaders who live in community foster transformational cultures and establish fruitful processes! When both clergy and laity leaders live richly and deeply in Christian community, nurturing their relationship with Jesus and one another; when they cultivate environments that are life-giving and transformational; and when they are crystal clear about their processes of disciple-making, the result is vitality.

The older I get, the stronger my belief in the doctrine of original sin gets. Left to ourselves, even the most faithful follower of Jesus will drift. Left to ourselves, the most faithful local church will drift. Left to ourselves, the most finely tuned institution will drift. Eugene Peterson, in *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, reminds us that the institution of the Church is a sinner too! Whether it's an individual, a church, or a denomination, left unchecked the drift is always south. The 18th-century hymn writer Robert Robinson said it best in the classic hymn "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing":

*O to grace how great a debtor  
Daily I'm constrained to be!  
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,  
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.  
**Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,  
Prone to leave the God I love;**  
Here's my heart, O take and seal it,  
Seal it for Thy courts above.*

We wander individually and institutionally. Could it be that in the United Methodist Church, just as in the life of an individual follower of Jesus, change begins with confession and repentance?

**The Rev. Acevedo is lead pastor of Grace Church, a multi-site United Methodist church in Southwest Florida. This article first appeared in *Circuit Rider* (Feb/Mar/Apr 2012) and online at [MinistryMatters.com](http://MinistryMatters.com).**



**Jorge  
Acevedo**

# Please listen beyond the noise

BY ERIC VAN METER  
*Special Contributor*

Dear 2012 General Conference,

Please listen to us. And please don't.

Listen to the people of the United Methodist Church. We everyday pastors, staff, and volunteers have never felt more disconnected from the larger church bureaucracy. We visit hospitals and hold youth retreats and preach and try to serve faithfully. But how do the most important things we do connect with the work of our high-level leaders?

The answer, if you ask us, is that it connects very little. The Call to Action report, for example, piles words upon words in description of what upper church management should do. Among the key themes is that they must institute high standards of accountability to measurable outcomes. Getting rid of guaranteed appointment is a key component of this.

But introducing more anxiety into an already anxious system does nothing to solve our problems. It's like screaming at a child who is crying from fear. The Call to Action lays blame and offers solution, but only

from one perspective. It contains, after all, no reciprocal accountability.

This is just one example of the disconnect. The truth is that most of what's happening at the Annual Conference level and higher is going on without significant input from those of us on the front lines.

But General Conference is not limited to upper management. We have elected you as delegates because we believe you can represent us well. It will certainly mean listening to us.

So please listen.

But don't listen just to what we talk about. Some of the things that cause the most noise don't matter as much as the volume might lead you to believe. We have passionate feelings about the ordination of our GLTB brothers and sisters, for instance. But most of us realize that cooler heads have not prevailed in the ongoing discussion, that it's not something that can be solved in the near future. Even more of us have grown weary of hot button issues taking center stage. We realize there are things nearer to the heart of the gospel.

Listen instead to our deep concerns.

Many of our countries are divided over politics and economics. This is certainly true in the United States. We need you to model a way of doing business that is respectful in disagreement, but also looks for common ground. We want to be proud of the way you conduct yourselves, regard-

less of how we feel about specific decisions.

Our leaders have paid lip service to younger generations, yet our youth groups continue to dwindle and our campus ministries go underfunded, if they are not closed altogether. Can you do more than talk about investing in the young?

We worry about getting old and dying. In our best moments, however, we recognize that these fears hinder us from really living. Jesus insistently calls us to lay down our lives, to make decisions based not on what will pamper or prolong our existence, but on what will most accurately reflect a character marked by self-sacrifice and concern for others. Can you do your work without worrying about whether or not the UMC will survive in its present form? Can you consider instead what is right for this moment in time?

We—the ordinary people who call ourselves United Methodists—are not without hope. We believe God has called us through the power of the Spirit to follow Jesus in our local contexts. We believe in the beauty of the UMC. As frustrated as we are at times, we still think of her with affection and compassion. We need to know that the higher levels of UMC leadership can extend that same grace to us.

**The Rev. Van Meter is director of the Wesley Foundation at Arkansas State University. Contact him at [eric@astatewesley.org](mailto:eric@astatewesley.org).**



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# Why numbers won't motivate us

BY MARY JO DAHLBERG  
*Special Contributor*

I am a layperson, served as Lay Leader for the Minnesota Annual Conference for two quadrenniums, elected to the General Board of Discipleship for two quadrenniums, and now elected a General Conference delegate for the third time. I am a lifelong Methodist/United Methodist and have served the Church, in various positions and levels, throughout that time.

The 2012 theme for General Conference is *Make Disciples of Jesus Christ*, while the mission of the UMC is to *make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world*. When I hear "make disciples, be a vital congregation," it seems to be connected with numbers and money. Numbers are a way of measuring, but numbers do not motivate people to reclaim the mission we talk about.

The numbers and money giving are dwindling in our denomination, but I am not convinced the Interim Operations Team recommendations will produce the results needed. It may be a Band-Aid fix to keep us afloat for a while, but will not sustain us into the future. We do need to restructure, but I feel that, rather than a top-down plan, it would be more helpful for the

Council of Bishops to put the challenge out there and have each General Board and agency begin to work together, to cross lines and listen to constituents, especially the young people within our denomination. I believe the four focus areas have helped to begin that process, but more time is needed to carry out the plans and strategies that each board and agency has put together. I see less and less trust within the systems we have. We need to gain trust with each other to move forward.

Congregations are a diverse group with many individuals looking at how "I" can get "my" cup filled, rather than how can I share my time, talent and witness. In order to be the Body of Christ, we need to serve and be served like Mary and Martha. As a community of faith we need to have our hearts and minds prepared and desire a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. John Wesley developed a way of living and Bishop Rueben Job simplified it with three simple rules: do good, do no harm, and stay in love with God. We need to go back to our Wesleyan heritage, adapting it for today. We have put aside the Covenant Groups and small group settings that could help build the community and help us grow in our faith with a better understanding of who and Whose we are.

I was with a church group recently and the discussion turned to visioning and purpose of the Church. We need to look outward and not inward in our

disciple making. It is not about "me" and if it really is then we are truly in trouble. Ministry is contextual and different in every setting and we need to look at how to help the local church rather than design something that indicates "one size fits all."

Approximately six years ago Bishop Sally Dyck, resident bishop of the Minnesota Area, spent a good part of the year asking, "Why church?" The question kept being asked and going deeper and deeper. I was the Conference Lay Leader and in attendance at various meetings and events where the exercise took place. No matter how many times I was asked, even though I would try and change the end result, it was always about community—a place of belonging, a place to serve and be served, to be loved and cared for.

I want my church to be a faith community that is not about numbers, but about caring, serving, reaching out, and for me to be a part of making a difference in the world.

*"Glory to God, who is able to do far beyond all that we could ask or imagine by his power at work within us."*—Ephesians 3:20, CEB

**Ms. Dahlberg is a lay member and chair of the Minnesota delegation to the 2012 General Conference. This article first appeared in *Circuit Rider* (Feb/Mar/Apr 2012) and online at [MinistryMatters.com](http://MinistryMatters.com). Follow General Conference coverage from *Circuit Rider* and *Ministry Matters* at [www.ministrymatters.com/gc2012](http://www.ministrymatters.com/gc2012).**



Mary Jo Dahlberg

# Pursuing new history between UM Church, indigenous peoples

BY TEX SAMPLE  
*Special Contributor*

John Wesley understood quite clearly the atrocities carried out by Europeans against Native Americans. In his sermon, "A Caution Against Bigotry," he wrote:

"Even cruelty and bloodshed, how little have the Christians come behind them! And not the Spaniards or the Portuguese alone, butchered thousands in South America: not the Dutch only in the East Indies, or the French in North America, following the Spaniards step by step: our own countrymen, too, have wantoned in blood, and exterminated whole nations; plainly proving thereby what spirit it is that dwells and works in the children of disobedience."

The Anglo European takeover of a continent from its native peoples occurred through a host of means—political, economic, military, cultural, social and religious—and the guilt for these measures is historically broad in sweep and pervades the land. Neither our government nor our economy is innocent, and our faith traditions are complicit—indeed, often actively engaged in the violations and even the cultural and physical genocide of those we now call Native Americans. It is long past time for the United Methodist Church to recognize these wrongs and to take steps to begin a healing process which will begin with the 2012 Act of Repentance to Indigenous Peoples during the General Conference on April 27, 2012 in Tampa.

In the church we must name our sinful participation in the arrogant claims of a national "Manifest Destiny," in the forced removal of native tribes and populations, in the destruction of traditional forms of relationship to the land, in the transfer of massive tracts of territory for roads, railways, water, mining and timber, and in privileging white companies, farmers and ranchers with leases of native land, and other resources.

We must recognize a range of methods devised to destroy the culture of native people: strategies of as-

similation and Westernization; national education and job training programs committed to the removal of native people from their tribes; schools and curricula designed to divest indigenous people of their appearance, language and ways of life; among many others.

The church has not stood guiltless in these government programs but has also engaged in abusive and exploitative practices of its own. While some in the church protested the transgressions against indigenous people, the dominant pattern has been one where:

- By its silence and its sometimes active support, the church has participated in the violation, the exploitation and even the genocide of indigenous people.
- Evangelistic efforts legitimated colonization and manifest destiny.
- Church schools and educational efforts stripped native charges of their culture and extended family relationships.
- In some cases these very schools committed acts of physical, sexual and mental abuse.
- Our congregations and ministries benefited from native lands ac-

quired unjustly when it was not a result of outright confiscation.

These and other injustices stand as a painful testimony to the sin of the church.

The time for confession and for repentance is outrageously late and

overdue. We must confess first the ignorance of our ignorance because so many of us in the church are uninformed of the history of our nation and our church about the violation of native people.

But we must go further than this. Our repentance must be a turning around, an active pursuit of a new history and a new relationship between Anglo-Europeans and Native Americans. It is a time not only for words but to make amends. What has been done cannot be made right, but what can now be done right is a towering moral claim on the church and a faithful work to be done.

**The Rev. Sample is the former academic dean at Saint Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, Mo. He is an ordained United Methodist clergy person and member of the Missouri Conference.**



Tex Sample

'The time for confession is outrageously late ...'

## AFRICA UNIVERSITY GRADUATES AND THE FOUR AREAS OF FOCUS

Photo credit: David Manyonga



### Leadership

The Rev. Tolbert Thomas Jallah Jr. serves as secretary general of the Fellowship of Christian Councils of Churches in West Africa.

**2006 graduate:**  
Home Country: Liberia



### Church Growth

The Rev. Daniel Mhone was instrumental in establishing 28 local churches in the Malawi (Africa) Missionary Conference.

**1997 graduate:**  
Home Country: Malawi



### Ministry with the Poor

Isaiah Njambu started the Child Action Initiative, a non-governmental organization to help orphaned children whose parents died of AIDS.

**2006 graduate:**  
Home Country: Congo (DRC)



### Global Health

Bigi Ruhigita returned to Congo to work in a 50-bed clinic she and her siblings founded.

**2008 graduate:**  
Home Country: Congo (DRC)

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# Look at what unites us, not at what divides

BY BISHOP GASPAR JOAO DOMINGOS  
*Special Contributor*

*I was glad when they said, "Let us go to the house of the Lord."—Psalm 122:1*

What willingness and satisfaction is seen on the face of the Psalmist when he utters these contagious words? These words, even today, are still proclaimed with the same emotions when we remember the day of the Lord.

Going to the house of the Lord seems to lead us to a place that is different from other common spaces, with its own captivating rules and edifying principles. Yes, in the house of the Lord there is a foretaste of a cul-

ture of differences, but equal among equals. In it, we can hear of what the Lord has spoken, speaks and will say; what the Lord has done, does and will do; how the Lord has loved, loves and will love. We speak of sin and forgiveness, of justice and reconciliation, of serving and not being served, of watchfulness, peace and salvation.

There, we are on a ground unique for those who share, obey, comply and fulfill. A land where one does not go out looking for God, because in a sense, that would presup-



**Bishop Gaspar Domingos**

pose that God is trapped within the four walls of the temple. Instead, God is walking and living among us day in and day out. What a place of excellence!

There are signs of dark clouds hanging over the voices calling the delegates to work at the General Conference of the United Methodist Church. What joy do we feel when we come to this magnum forum of the church? However, instead of seeing us as equals, we are deemed unequal. When will we see and hear about what God has done and spoken in Asia, Africa, America, Europe and in Oceania, so that we can rejoice with the Lord's good work and that the world may believe?

Who is interested in the incredible

growth of evangelization in Africa, Asia and South America? Who is concerned about the members decline in Europe and North America? How important is the use of resources to favor the mission of God? How to interpret the saying "The world is my Parish"? Where can we find the abundance for all in light of the interest of a few?

It is time for the General Conference to look at what unites the church and not what provokes disunity. Therefore, let us create a space for equality of circumstances, unambiguous sharing and solidarity that can demonstrate the love that exists among the Methodists, as we serve the people of God in the world. Let us no longer be "those who wait, but those who are hoped for." (Agostinho Neto,

in *The Sacred Hope*). Let us, then, share our agonies, but also rejoice in our achievements. Let us examine everything, but keep only what is good, for "everything is permissible, but not everything is beneficial." (1 Cor. 10:23, NIV)

May there be joy when they say, "Let us go to the General Conference." We pray and hope for good to come from the 2012 UMC General Conference.

**Bishop Domingos is the episcopal leader of the West Angola Annual Conference. This article first appeared in *Circuit Rider* (Feb/Mar/Apr 2012)s and online at *MinistryMatters.com*. Follow General Conference coverage from *Circuit Rider* and *Ministry Matters* at [www.ministrymatters.com/gc2012/](http://www.ministrymatters.com/gc2012/).**

## Time for UMC to embrace 'smart decline'

BY LAURIE HALLER  
*Special Contributor*

I noticed it over the past several years as I traveled to the Phoenix area to spend a few days with my father and other family members. Every time we visited we'd play a new golf course in a brand new town that seemed to spring up overnight. The infrastructure was there for huge planned communities: wiring for phone, cable, and Internet; sidewalks; paved roads; and half-built houses. The only thing missing was people.



**Laurie Haller**

For decades this 14th largest metropolitan area in the United States experienced a building boom. In the years before the real estate bubble burst, however, developers gambled and overbuilt. Except for the golf courses, many of these brand new towns are ghost towns.

I noticed it over the past six years as I traveled around the Grand Rapids District. A number of our churches either remodeled or built additions in the 1990's and early 2000's, hoping that if they built it, new people would not only come but would pay the mortgage. Unfortunately, many congregations don't understand that adding more space is often the result of applying technical solutions to adaptive challenges.

"If you build it they will come" will usually not grow churches that are experiencing decline. People today yearn for an encounter with God, not a gym where they can shoot baskets. They yearn for authentic community, not a

fancy lounge. They want to spend their time making a difference in the world outside their building rather debating whether beverages should be allowed in the remodeled sanctuary.

It was already a challenge for some of our churches to take care of their bills before the economy collapsed. Now they are faced with the agonizing choice between paying their mortgages or paying their pastors. One Finance Committee asked me, "Who will bail us out if we can't pay our mortgage?" I smiled weakly and replied, "I'm sorry, but you're on your own."

I notice it as I travel around the connection. The infrastructure of the United Methodist Church is too top-heavy. We've experienced 40 years of declining membership and attendance in the United States, yet our structure has pretty much remained the same. The cost of maintaining the current size of our general boards and agencies is not only diverting resources away from mission and ministry, but it is hindering our effectiveness and ability to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

Not only do we need to downsize our boards and agencies, but we also need to right-size our churches. It is fascinating to observe local churches where attendance is half or a third of what it was 15 years ago. Often the decline is gradual, so no one really pays any attention until there is a recession or a few generous members of the Greatest Generation die and leave a huge void in the budget.

By then it may be too late. Attendance is now less than 100, church leaders have failed to create a compelling vision, mission and strategic goals, and it's a struggle to pay ministry shares (apportionments).

The superintendent is finally called.

One of my roles is to help congregations face their own reality. We cannot reinvent and transform our churches into healthy, vital centers for ministry until we admit the truth about our decline and choose to address it openly and honestly. Living in denial is the greatest impediment to positive change.

### Being smart

What if the United Methodist Church were to adapt the concept of smart decline?

When the market crashed, an estimated 1 million dirt lots in central Arizona were in some stage of development for new homes, and more than a third of ZIP codes in major Sun Belt cities saw population losses. Where many people saw tragedy, however, others saw possibility.

Smart decline is a relatively new theory of land use that was first coined by Frank and Deborah Popper in 2002. Based on a German model of city management in the deteriorating cities of the former Eastern Bloc, smart decline embraces the reality of decline by intentionally reinventing city services, re-imagining land use and restoring fiscal sustainability.

Flint, Mich., has seen a double-digit population decline in the last 40 years, but city planners have worked creatively to achieve a sustainable population through smart decline. Because Michigan law enables cities to take over foreclosed and abandoned properties, the City of Flint has chosen to concentrate growth in a few neighborhoods while demolishing properties in declining neighborhoods and converting them into green space through a local conservation land bank.

The time is now for the United

Methodist Church to be smart about its decline as well. Our leaders have made radical proposals to the 2012 General Conference about right-sizing our denomination in order to assure greater efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability in our ministries and poise ourselves for future growth. Some of those include:

- Changing the guaranteed appointment system to employ "a just, reasonable and compassionate process" for low-performing clergy to leave the itinerancy.

- Consolidating 10 of our 13 general agencies into five offices that will be part of a new United Methodist Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry. The center will have a 15-member board of directors, which will be accountable to a 45-member advisory board that will "represent the diversity and inclusiveness of our Church."

- Authorizing the board of the new United Methodist Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry to evaluate programs and spending at all levels of the church and reallocate up to \$60 million during the 2013-2016 quadrennium for the purpose of increasing the number of vital congregations.

- Forming a task force to study and recommend the most equitable and effective apportionment system in our annual conferences.

None of these proposals will enable our churches to make disciples of Jesus Christ and bring in the kingdom of God on this earth if we don't start at the local church level. Smart decline in our congregations mandates intentional planning for:

- Holy conversation, involving an honest and comprehensive evaluation of all church ministries, structures

and personnel.

- A careful and prayerful right-sizing of budgets and staffing costs to achieve fiscal sustainability, stability and responsibility.

- An alignment of all programs and ministries with the stated vision and mission of the congregation.

- An emphasis on identifying, training, equipping and rotating gifted laity into positions of spiritual leadership.

- Streamlining committee structure to create a culture of permission-giving and maximize the best use of human and financial resources for mission and ministry.

- Re-imagining building space for innovative community use as a means of hospitality as well as evangelism.

- Teaching and modeling generous giving for all ages.

- Creating a culture of call where the very best of our youth, young adults and second-career persons are encouraged to consider professional ministry.

Smart decline. Is it an oxymoron, a fantasy, a foolish hope?

Ask any congregation that has risen from the ashes of its decline or has discovered the miracle of doing more with less, with God's help. Ask God's created world, where "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." (John 12:24)

In our end is our beginning. What does the United Methodist Church need to die to in order for the new to emerge?

**The Rev. Haller is the Grand Rapids district superintendent of the West Michigan Conference. Reprinted from her blog, *Leading From the Heart*.**



## We need 'call to integrity' more than Call to Action

BY DAN DICK  
*Special Contributor*

Following the endless conversations about “what comes next?” in the United Methodist Church, it becomes more and more apparent that most of the suggestions, reports and recommendations made thus far are all designed for just one purpose: to avoid the hard work that actually must happen.



Dan Dick

In my humble opinion—one I have espoused now since 1986—there are three things we MUST do to create a viable future:

**Become Christian.** We must actually embrace our spiritual disciplines, rituals and practices as the baseline standard for what it means to be United Methodist. You don't care to pray? You're too busy for weekly worship? You don't give generously of time and money? All great . . . but you don't get to be a Methodist.

**Get out of our buildings.** The ministry is in the world, not sitting on our butts in a sanctuary. Church suppers and craft fairs and bazaars are great fun—and we should enjoy the fellowship they bring—but they are not our ministry. More of our churches are known by the “witness” of their dinners, buildings, entertainment and websites than by any work of compassion, mercy, justice or spirituality.

**Institute a learning culture with accountability.** Here's a clever concept: Let's make “discipleship” our standard for inclusion rather than “membership.” The key to discipleship is a lifelong commitment to learning and improvement. As long as people are on the path of development—of their inward growth in relationship to God, Christ and others, as well as their outward service to neighbor, community and world—they are “active” members of the community. The only real change we would make to membership would be the acknowledgment that there is no such thing as an inactive member.

### Higher standards

So, to summarize: growing, giving, loving, learning, out in the world = in; complacent, comfortable, consumeris-

tic, coddled, contented = out. Results? Fewer folks, smaller and fewer buildings, higher standards for leadership, true accountability, and much stronger witness and impact.

We might not have the same access to resources, but then again we would quit mortgaging our future so that money for missions no longer is drained away in unGodly interest payments. Our leaders would stop thinking big buildings are actually indicators of good leadership. We would be embarrassed by our waste instead of so grossly proud.

Smaller, better churches dedicated to serving God. Not a bad vision for the future. Good enough for Jesus, good enough for us.

Our current reports and recommendations are beautiful illustrations of worldly, materialistic, acquisitive values founded upon image, ego and popularity. We loved the report that showed how nice people think we are, but we have yet to find any report that points to our importance or effectiveness. Being liked is so much more important than being good.

Actual inclusion in a community of faith should be dependent on our willingness to serve God, not on our demands to be served. Can multitudes attend our services? Sure, but they won't be “members” (or friends, associates, affiliates, pals, Facebook friends, etc.); they will be the people the church serves, not the church. This is kind of biblical—check out the Gospels and Paul. . .

The key to our future is simplicity itself: We must shun the cultural values of more, bigger, brighter, shinier, easier and insipid and embrace once more a commitment to quality, integrity, accountability, learning and improvement. Bigger isn't better; better is better.

Let's trade a Call to Action for a Call to Integrity—might be a good move.

**The Rev. Dick is director of connectional ministries for the Wisconsin Conference.**

‘We must shun the cultural values of more, bigger, brighter, shinier ...’

## Leadership Institute Fellows watch denomination in action

BY KATHY L. GILBERT  
*United Methodist News Service*

TAMPA, Fla.—A small group of young people—inquisitive, well-educated and diverse—will carefully watch the proceedings during the 2012 United Methodist General Conference. These “watchers” are learning how the United Methodist Church really works.

During a pre-conference news briefing Jan. 19-21, the Bishop Melvin G. Talbert Leadership Institute Fellows got a taste of what to expect when General Conference convenes.

More than 300 delegates, communicators and others were part of the preview at the Tampa Convention Center, the site of the 2012 legislative assembly April 24-May 4. General Conference is held every four years and is the only body that speaks for the entire denomination.

Attending the news briefing was part of the training the fellows are receiving in their two-year tutorial that started in January 2011. The program honors one of the church's most prophetic leaders, retired Bishop Melvin G. Talbert. He and his wife, Marilyn, are part of the team of leaders and coaches advising the young people.

Black Methodists for Church Renewal, the organization that established the program, chose this first class of fellows for their leadership potential.

During a breakfast hosted by representatives of the six United Methodist national ethnic plans on Jan. 21, the fellows heard repeatedly how vital it is to the future of the church to raise and nurture young leaders.

During panels representing different views on some of the major legislation set to come before the conference, participants were encouraged to ask questions. The fellows listened, and for the most part, they were impressed.

“I really enjoyed hearing from Bishop [Minerva] Carcaño,” said Deliah Fakalata, a member of Tongan United Methodist Fellowship of Sacramento, Calif. “The things she said really inspired me, especially about how we need to keep the church alive and vital.”

Bishop Carcaño was part of a panel discussing proposals to restructure the United Methodist Church.

“This weekend was very beautiful. I was able to see respect from a lot of people—respect and understanding, even when they didn't



UMNS PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE

**Fellows from the Bishop Melvin George Talbert Leadership Institute visit with Cassie Hinnen (right) outside the Tampa Convention Center in Florida during the United Methodist pre-General Conference news briefing.**

agree with each other's point of view,” said Liberia native Walter Gizzie Jr., in the United States to pursue a degree in nursing. “It gave me a lot of hope. They actually showed that they had the spirit of God in them.”

Linda Furtado is a married mother of two small children. Her spouse is on the ordination track to become a United Methodist elder. She said the time to debate and debrief after the plenary sessions was “unbelievably valuable.” Ms. Furtado is just beginning the process to become an ordained deacon.

The presenters at the conference represented themselves and the church well, she said. “I just want to aspire to be able to be that kind of person wherever I am. It seems they engrain that in their whole selves.”

### Long-distance bonding

The institute held its first meeting a year ago, and the fellows have grown close to each other through interactive webinars, phone calls and face-to-face meetings, said Marilyn Talbert.

Through technology, the fellows have started “meeting” Saturday mornings at 7:30, she said. “They developed a buddy system amongst themselves, and it has been rewarding to watch their growth and how they are now beginning to lead us.”

Cassie Hinnen, a young person acting as a liaison between the fellows and the leadership team, sees herself as an “honorary fellow.”

Listening to Erin Hawkins, the top executive of the General Commission on Religion and Race, talk about the importance of holy conferencing was important to Ms. Hinnen.

“That brings a lot of hope and

spoke to me personally because that is what I strive to do—to understand all people when I find myself judging another person,” said Ms. Hinnen, a kindergarten teacher assistant who will go to seminary in the fall.

Marcus Smith, enrolled at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, said he is “straddling the line between government leadership and church leadership.” Forming a bond with people who have something in common has helped him grow, he added. “We'll see what happens.”

Theon Johnson III, director of the Wesley Foundation at Jackson (Miss.) State University, did not lose sight of the importance of the issues being discussed by the church. He is also on the track to become an ordained elder.

In April, when the full conference is in session, the 10 days delegates will spend deciding church policy will have far-reaching effects, he said. “Meetings like this become gathering moments for doing the business of God in ways that really matter.”

Kevin Kosh Jr. said the leadership institute opened the door for graduate school.

“When we first got together, I got to meet the president of Gammon Theological Seminary, and through that, I was actually able to make the connections to get into Gammon.”

Mr. Kosh said the honesty and openness from presenters and participants at the briefing made the experience “very insightful.”

“Even though the church is representing God, we realize we are not doing everything right—but just because we aren't doing everything right doesn't mean we can't be more Christ-like,” he added.



# GC 2012 book series aims to prepare delegates

BY MARY JACOBS  
Staff Writer

Before delegates arrive in Tampa, Fla., for the 2012 General Conference this April, Abingdon Press would like them to do a little homework.

And it's a reading assignment.

The United Methodist Publishing House has issued five new books, available online and in print, called the "Adaptive Leadership Series." Each book offers an analysis of where the United Methodist Church stands and the changes that are needed to create a viable future.

The series provides "a platform for six prominent church leaders . . . to examine our situation and critique various assertions and recommendations as we make important decisions" about the future of the denomination, said Neil Alexander, president and publisher of the United Methodist Publishing House.

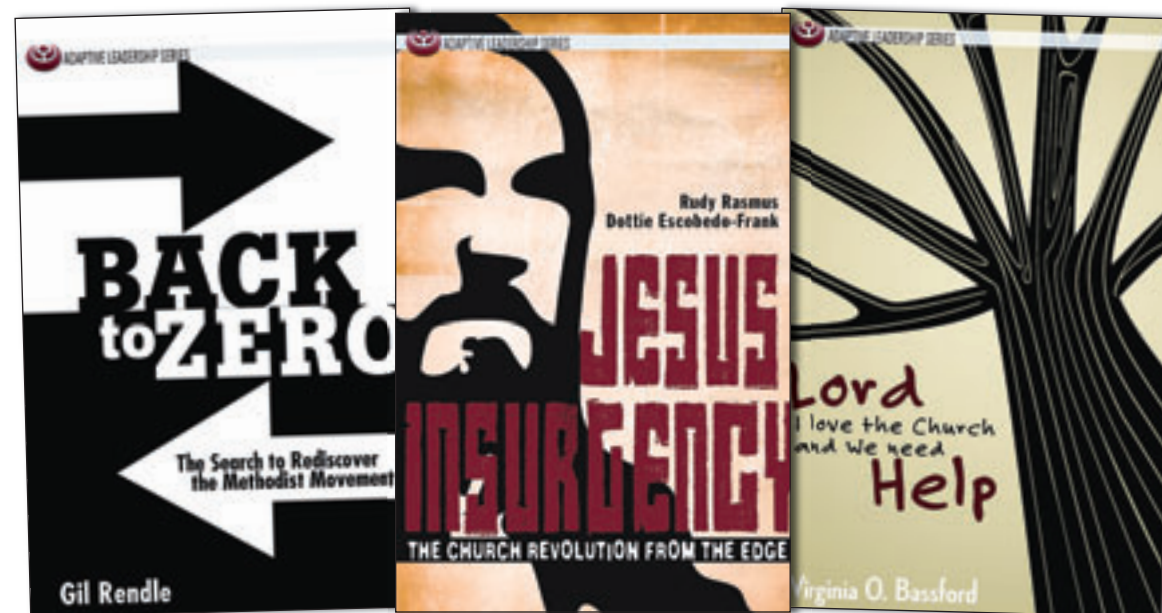
The books arrive as General Conference delegates prepare to consider proposals to restructure and streamline the denomination's general agencies and end guaranteed appointment of clergy. Declining membership and the resulting decreases in contributions are driving many of the proposed changes.

Books in the series vary widely in their applicability to these issues—from practical and specific proposals about cutting costs to broader and more abstract visions of how the church might transform itself. Series authors range from local United Methodist church leaders to church growth experts, like the Rev. Lovett H. Weems of the Lewis Center for Church Leadership at Wesley Theological Seminary.

The new titles: *Jesus Insurgency: The Church Revolution from the Edge* by Rudy Rasmus and Dottie Escobedo-Frank; *Focus: The Real Challenges that Face the United Methodist Church* by Dr. Weems; *Lord, I Love the Church and We Need Help* by Virginia Bassford; *Back to Zero: The Search to Rediscover the Methodist Movement* by Gil Rendle; and *The Recovery of a Contagious Methodist Movement* by George Hunter III.

All of the authors agree that change is needed for the denomination to survive and thrive. For the most part, the books don't address specific legislation or urge delegates to vote in some particular way, but rather cast a wider vision for rethinking the status quo and looking for a new vision for the church.

Key themes include: focusing on the church's core purpose; embracing change; empowering clergy and laity to recover the Wesleyan movement; and meeting hard realities like the end



of guaranteed appointment—with hope and resilience.

## Nothing new

Books have often figured prominently in the run-up to General Conference. The United Methodist Publishing House has a "longstanding practice" of seeking out commentators and leaders "who bring important perspectives and views to the conversation," Mr. Alexander said. Abingdon published *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* by Bishop Robert Schnase in 2007; by the time delegates gathered for the 2008 General Conference in Fort Worth, Texas, Mr. Alexander says, some 40,000 clergy and laity had studied the book.

"Schnase's work introduced the vocabulary of radical hospitality, passionate worship and other practices that were used in vision casting and shaping considerations such as the Four Areas of Focus that have become core concepts and emphases in UMC life and ministry," he said.

Similarly, the Episcopal Address at General Conference 2008 lifted up Bishop Rueben Job's *Three Simple Rules*, published in 2007.

"The teachings in this extraordinary little book became a recurring part of worship and General Conference conversations as the body deliberated about what it means to live in the 'United Methodist way,'" said Mr. Alexander.

Five years later, sales are still steady for both books.

So what ideas do authors hope delegates will bring from these new books to the 2012 General Conference? Here's a short summary of each.

## Resetting the baseline

Dr. Weems' book, *Focus*, describes a coming "death tsunami" as more and more of the church's aging membership passes away. But, he says, "The book is not about fear, death or de-

nominal survival."

Instead of simply seeking to survive, he says, the denomination needs "to reset the financial baseline at every level of the church in order to focus energy on reaching more people, younger people and more diverse people." Dr. Weems proposes a number of steps, such as addressing the cost of General Conference, converting assets (such as real estate) to funds for new church development, and reducing the size and length of annual conference gatherings.

"Keeping spending within income will free us from the time, energy and focus required to maintain income at unrealistic, higher levels," he writes.

"Just as David found strength in what fit him, so the church today lightens its load, not to retreat, but to engage better the daunting challenges to God's reign in lives, communities and the world."

Dr. Weems admits that the book's proposals alone "will not in themselves produce the new United Methodism we need. But they will give emerging generations a chance to develop that new movement."

## Redefining connection

Methodism as a "movement" is also a key theme of *Back to Zero*, by the Rev. Gil Rendle, a retired United Methodist pastor and church consultant.

Within the denomination "the rhetoric of a Wesleyan movement is gaining traction in people's speech," he writes. "Yet the reality is that, despite our change in language, the United Methodist Church and its congregations are still long-established, large, bureaucratic institutions . . . that lumber slowly to make critical decisions."

He contrasts the church's "public mission"—to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world—with its "persistent private mission of satisfying constituent voices that compete over denominational resources of attention, structure, dollars and importance."

Proposals before the General Conference, however, likely aren't enough. "Finding new ways doesn't mean to constantly try to fix the old ways," he says. "We need to find a different way to be with one another and redefine the connection."

Mr. Rendle cites an observation that the largest United Methodist churches have "found a way to make it work in a broken system." Moving ahead will mean discarding or even breaking the existing rules of the denomination, he writes, but it must be done responsibly and with an eye toward the church's central mission.

## Recovering mojo

"Movement" is also at the core of Dr. Hunter's book, *The Recovery of a Contagious Methodist Movement*,

■ See 'Books' page 12

# Real



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## ■ BOOKS Continued from page 1

based in part on a series of lectures he delivered in 2011 at the United Methodist Congress on Evangelism.

“Methodism was once a great contagious movement in North America,” he writes. “Our current mess in United Methodism, and in mainline Christianity in general, is the consequence of many changes over time.”

To transform the church, he writes, United Methodists can look to the example of John Wesley.

“His magnificent obsession was simply to recover the gospel, the theology, the vision, the mission and the contagion of early Apostolic Christianity,” he writes. “It is hard to imagine any way that American Methodism will ever recover its mojo without recovering John Wesley’s theological vision.”

### From the edge

*Jesus Insurgency* authors Rudy Rasmus and the Rev. Dottie Escobedo-Frank, both United Methodist pastors, already see a movement afoot—one that General Conference can’t dictate.

“Change does not happen from the center,” Ms. Escobedo-Frank asserts. “It happens, almost every time, from the edge. The center may hope for and call for change, but here’s the problem with that: it usually is an external cry that has no internal ability to transform.”

She assesses the current situation in blunt terms. “We are dying, if not already dead, and our future is no longer in the hands of positional leaders,” she writes. “There is an insurgency rising up.”

The “insurgency” might look like St. John United Methodist in Houston, which grew from nine members in 1992 to over 9,000 members, about a third of them homeless or formerly homeless. Mr. Rasmus, co-author of the book and pastor of St. John, says that love is the “core ethos” of his church, and he expects it will “change the landscape of the church in the

same way that the Arab Spring is transforming the Middle East.”

“If the world sees us as a place that loves unconditionally, regardless of race, gender or social status, then we’re going to be a place that can make an impact on the world like never before,” he says.

### Going fishing

In *Lord, I Love the Church*, Dr. Bassford, a district superintendent in the Central Texas Conference, offers a prescription for the United Methodist Church: Go fishing. Church members must get out of the pews and engage with those outside of the church.

“There is a difference between fishing because we love to fish and fishing to boost the numbers or bring in the bucks,” she writes. “We are supposed to fish because that is what we are called to do.”

Accountability is one of the most important issues facing the General Conference, she says, and that’s creating anxiety and hopelessness. But she asks: “Is our perception that there is no life after death, no resurrection of the body, no hope for the hopeless?”

Cultivating resilience, she says, will help the church to thrive despite adversity. “The paradox of resilience is that the worst of times can also bring out one’s best,” she says.

Thus, changes facing the church need not result in fear. “Disruption opens new possibility,” she writes. “Disequilibrium can lead to growth.”

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Thus, changes facing the church need not result in fear. “Disruption opens new possibility,” she writes. “Disequilibrium can lead to growth.”

### Reaching delegates

Abingdon has sent copies of the books to all active bishops, informed General Conference delegates about the books, posted excerpts online, and featured the books in a special edition of *Circuit Rider* that all delegates received in February.

This is the first time that General Conference-related books were made

available in eBook format as well as print editions, giving readers a few months of extra time to read the books in advance of the print publication date.

Abingdon hope the books will generate insights that spark “a fresh consensus about the values, policies and practices that can lead to greater ef-

fectiveness in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world,” said Mr. Alexander.

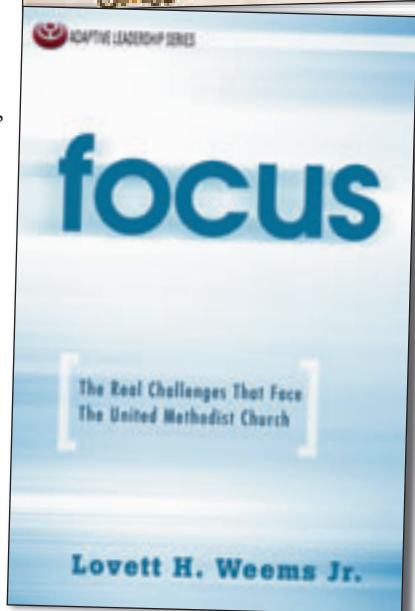
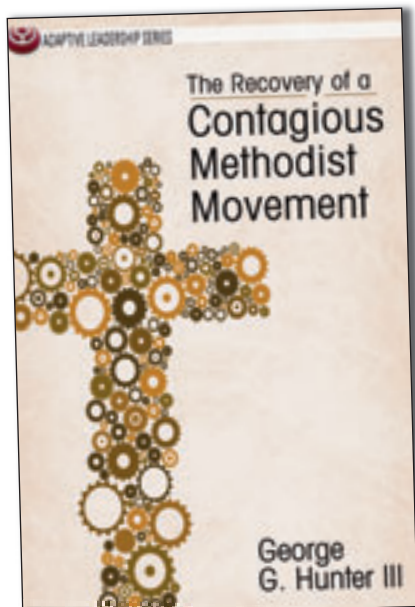
And, despite their sometimes disparate ideas, and their calls to face hard truths, all of the authors expressed hope for the future.

“I’m very hopeful about where our conversation, as a denomination, is

taking us, even though there are going to be some difficult steps along the way,” Mr. Rendle writes.

Dr. Hunter also expressed hope. “A greater future is not assured, nor even probable,” he writes, “but it is clearly possible.”

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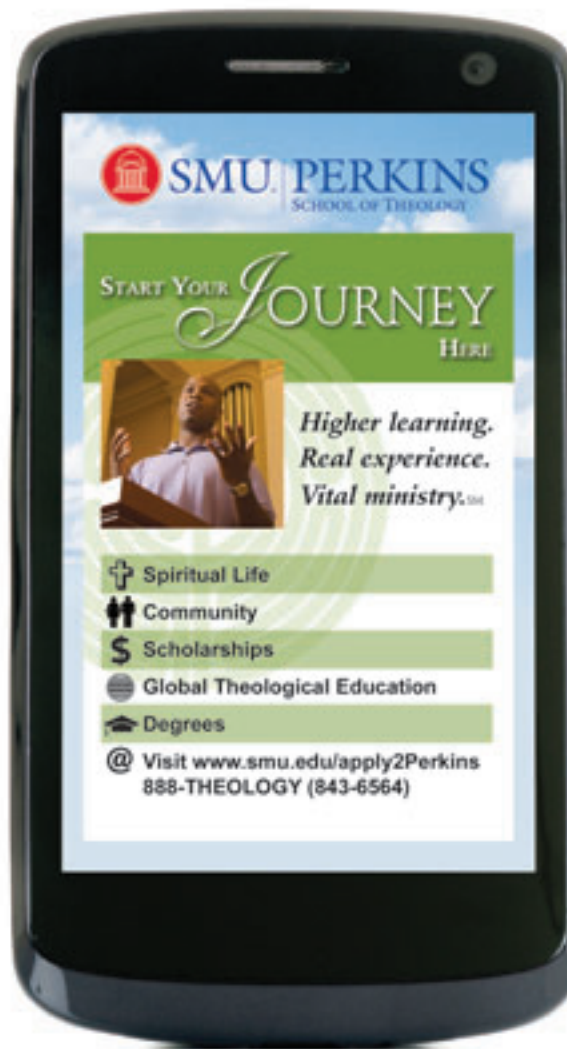
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