

Daily Christian Advocate

THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Cleveland, Ohio

Saturday, May 13, 2000

Vol. 4, No. 11

As Clock Ticks, Delegates Consider Budget, Education, Racism Issues

A ticking clock would have been a good symbol Friday morning for the United Methodist General Conference.

As the final day of the 10-day quadrennial session began, delegates had one eye on the long day of business awaiting them and the other eye on plane tickets in anticipation of the closing worship Friday night. Much of the afternoon was spent on the denomination's budget for 2001-04.

In a variety of other calendar items, the church's 250-year tradition of supporting schools was affirmed "at a time when public education has become a political battleground." The church, delegates said, "has a moral responsibility to strengthen, support and reform public schools."

In other action, the conference mandated that each of the church's agencies must have on its governing board at least one member from among the three historically African-American Methodist denominations. The additional members will have voice and vote.

Continuing the spirit of reconciliation manifested early in the session, the General Conference adopted a constitutional amendment calling for commitment to eliminating racism in every aspect of church life. The proposal must be ratified by the annual conferences to become effective.

Members of conference boards of ordained ministry must participate in intensive training to help develop multicultural sensitivity for more effective recruitment and support of United Methodist pastors. Backers of the action said communities surrounding United Methodist churches are becoming more racially and culturally diverse.

A proposed specialized missionary conference for evangelicals in the West was rejected by a 615 - 312 vote. The push for a new conference came from the Evangelical Renewal Fellowship, a conservative group in the California-Nevada Annual Conference whose members feel marginalized and want to split from the conference.



Denver Area Bishop Mary Ann Swenson preaches Friday morning.

—UMNS Photo by Paul Jeffery

The Judicial Council has held that the church's constitution does not support creation of a lay assistant category of ministry under appointment of a bishop. The issue arose from the United Methodist Rural Fellowship as a solution to the growing need for ministerial leadership in small-membership churches.

After a dinner break, delegates were back in their places to complete the last of 1,600 calendar items. Dallas Area Bishop William B. Oden conducted the closing worship service. The next session of the General Conference will open April 25 in Pittsburgh.

—Robert Lear

Judicial Council Decision

This copy subject to final editing and correction.

MEMORANDUM NO. 891

IN RE: Petition from the 2000 General Conference Regarding the Constitutionality of Petition #30958-FA-823-D Adopted on May 11, 2000, Which Provides that the Salary of a Newly-Elected Bishop Begins at the Time of Consecration as a Bishop.

On May 11, 2000, a delegate from the North Georgia Annual Conference moved that Petition #30958-FA-823-D be referred to the Judicial Council to determine whether it is constitutional. The Judicial Council has jurisdiction under Par. 2609 of the *1996 Discipline*.

The question of when the salary of a bishop begins has been before the Judicial Council previously. In Decision 781 the Judicial Council stated:

... As set forth in the *1992 Discipline* Par. 923, bishops are paid from the Episcopal Fund, and the General Council on Finance and Administration recommends to the General Conference the budget for the Episcopal Fund. In adopting the recommendation of the General

Council on Finance and Administration, the General Conference makes "plans for their support" as required by Pars. 15 and 25. It is clearly the responsibility of the General Conference to make these plans. . . .

Decision 781 was made pursuant to the *1992 Discipline*. There were no changes in the relevant paragraphs in the *1996 Discipline* to negate Decision 781. It remains the responsibility of the General Council on Finance and Administration to recommend the budget for the Episcopal Fund. Further, it remains the responsibility of the General Conference to adopt a plan for the support of bishops.

DIGEST

Petition #30958-FA-823-D adopted by the General Conference on May 11, 2000, is constitutional as it follows the direction of Article IV of the Constitution, Par. 15 of the *1996 Discipline*, that the General Conference adopt a plan for the support of the bishops of the church.

May 12, 2000

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Daily Christian Advocate

Cleveland Convention Center

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An Open Letter to the City of Cleveland

To all the waiters and food service personnel; maintenance engineers; housekeepers and other hotel personnel; bus, taxi and transit drivers; security personnel; clerks; cashiers; and all of the friendly people who have assisted United Methodists during the two weeks of its General Conference:

Thank you!

We appreciate your service, the long hours you have worked, the kindness you have shown. We know we could not have done the work the church has charged us to do without you. May God bless you.

The United Methodist Church General Conference
 delegates, representatives and friends

Central Conferences, U. S. Church Seek Common Ground

One of the United Methodist Church's biggest challenges is its expansion as a global church.

General Conference struggles with its U.S. roots as it seeks to define its global identity. Some historians have called The United Methodist Church as the "most American" of Protestant churches.

General Conference speaks for the church as it continues to reach out in Jesus' name. One of its most effective outreach efforts is the ministry of the Central Conferences throughout the world. While Central Conferences have powerfully changed the face of evangelism in the Methodist movements around the globe, they also bring challenges that come with any worldwide enterprise.

Thursday's debate on the issue of homosexuality is one example of these challenges. When a delegate from the Congo said a report was out of touch with the church outside the United States, a California-Nevada delegate said, "I am a member of the global church, too!"

One of the problems with being global is the context of the definition. "We always define what global means on our [U.S.] terms," said Dr. Robert J. Harman, deputy general secretary for Community and Institutional Ministries, General Board of Global Ministries.

The Rev. R. Jeremiah Booker, South Central Jurisdiction Communications, said the challenge of defining a global church lies in understanding unique cultures, economies, histories, processes, and politics. "We need to let the Central Conferences develop their own process and journey of faith," he said. "If we can't give them sufficient flexibility, we should give them spiritual and ethical independence."

Missouri West delegate Margie M. Briggs feels strongly about the Central Conferences, "We say we want them, but with our pocketbooks and actions we say something completely different."

Kalimba Kilumba, a Texas Conference elder who grew up in the Congo, said, "Central Conferences need to have the authority to minister locally." He sees some very different issues facing Central Conferences. While issues of sexuality often predominate in the United States, issues of war and survival, starvation, and basic health predominate elsewhere in the world.

Harman said the U.S. church lacks knowledge about Central Conference issues. That makes the Central Conferences "vulnerable to political manipulation on U.S. issues and church politics," he said.

Providing competent access to language resources and translators might help affirm the general church's

true and complete respect and diversity. "How can we expect people to vote and decide on that which they cannot understand?" Kilumba said.

"Faithfulness to the gospel is the better way," Harman concluded.

—David Persons

AMAR Coalition Leaders Say, 'We're Staying In'

In a press conference Friday, leaders of the coalition that included Affirmation, the Methodist Federation for Social Action, the Reconciling Congregation Program and United Methodists of Color for an Inclusive Church said they are committed to remaining in The United Methodist Church to work for change. "The church can pass legislation, but it cannot enforce unity," said Randy Miller, an openly gay man who was arrested both Wednesday and Thursday. "We will continue to step outside the consensus."

The Rev. Gilbert H. Caldwell Jr., spokesperson for United Methodists of Color for an Inclusive Church, said the presence of people of color in the actions indicated "racial ethnic people are not one-issue people." He also noted "the greatest sin of the church is our hypocrisy," saying the church is hypocritical when it denies it has been challenged and encouraged by gay people. Asked if the actions of Soulforce Wednesday were the precipitating cause of the actions Thursday, Caldwell drew a parallel to Rosa Parks. "She knew how she felt the day she didn't give up her seat on the bus. It didn't take Soulforce to remind me of my feelings."

The witness events that resulted in arrest proved "business as usual is over," said the Rev. Gregory R. Dell, spokesperson for In All Things Charity. "We participated in these events, not out of political arrogance, but because we are baptized Christians." He described the Thursday votes related to homosexuality as an attempt at "denominational cleansing."

The leaders agreed the future depends on the dual strategy of direct action and legislation. "The longest trip we must take is from the head to the heart," one leader said.

Twenty-nine were arrested on the conference floor, including two bishops and two district superintendents. One superintendent, the Rev. Janet R. Ellinger, Wisconsin Conference delegate, said she and her brother John, also a district superintendent, joined the group to be arrested spontaneously. Asked why she did, she responded, "I remembered Maxie Dunnam's quote at the end of *Disciple III*, 'If the church is not a home for everyone, it is not the church.'"

—John Thornburg

General Conference Inspires Commitment to Christian Education

Where is Christian education at the 2000 General Conference? I've asked that question for the past two weeks. Like many annual conference delegates and representatives, I was asked to track General Conference actions as they relate to a particular area of ministry; mine was Christian education.

The Christian Educators Fellowship (CEF) devoted its winter edition of *Christians in Education* to "Considering our Roles as General and Jurisdictional Conference Delegates." Joy Carr, director of Christian education, General Board of Discipleship, wrote: "General Conference delegates need to affirm the primary task of the congregation currently reflected in *The Book of Discipline*. If Christian education, i.e., 'transformation and the development of faithful Christians' is the congregation's primary task, should it not be reflected in the work of General Conference?"

Looking at petitions alone, I find little evidence General Conference was concerned with this primary task. Very few petitions directly addressed Christian education, and most, if not all, were put on the consent calendar.

The CPT report and General Conference's subsequent action regarding it indirectly deal with Christian education because of its interrelationship implications for the General Council on Ministries, the General Board of Discipleship (GBOD), annual conferences, and local churches. The GBOD report, especially its response to 1996 General Conference referrals, is the 2000 General Conference's best indication the church is involved in educational ministry. (See the *Advance Edition Daily Christian Advocate Volume 1, Section 1.*)

Has the 2000 General Conference affirmed this primary task? As with most issues, opinions will vary. When we return to our homes and congregations, each of us will have stories to tell of many kinds of experiences and ministries. I may be hard pressed to find specific General Conference references to Christian education, but I will reaffirm my own commitment to it. To paraphrase Thomas Groome, "Christian religious education may not be the most important ministry in the church, but it is surely second to none."

—Patty Meyers

Thank You

The marshals and pages express their appreciation for the generous offering of \$14,133.91 given by visitors, delegates, bishops, staff and others participating in General Conference 2000. Each volunteer who helped make the conference possible will receive about \$90. The marshals and pages thank the conference by saying, "It has been a pleasure serving you!"



Nigeria Conference has three clergy delegates, including two women—the only ordained women elders in the conference: the Rev. Liatu J. Kane and the Rev. Salamatu M. Yaro (shown above). —UMNS Photo by John Goodwin

Provisional Liturgical Texts Gain Delegate Approval

General Conference delegates approved provisional liturgical texts for services to commission, consecrate and ordain persons for ministry. The texts will remain provisional until 2004, when a final document will be presented for adoption.

Services for the ordination of deacons and elders retain much of the 1992 version, with adaptations to accommodate legislation in the 1996 *Book of Discipline*.

New services are the "Order for Commissioning Probationary Members for Service," for use at times other than consecration and ordination, and "A Celebration of Christ's Ministry," which focuses on the ministry of all Christians and the diversity of calls and gifts for ministry. The celebration is flexible and adaptable to the needs of an annual conference.

The General Board of Discipleship (GBOD) presented the revisions, which were developed by a working group of representatives from GBOD, the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) and the Council of Bishops.

The Rev. Jeffrey E. Greenway, Western Pennsylvania delegate, chaired the Legislative Committee on Disciple-

ship. He said his committee recommended the services to the General Conference with three amendments.

"We reinstated the Trinitarian language in the prayer of blessing; reinstated two additional questions for ordination that were in the 1992 service, but not in this one; and voted not to mandate the use of a particular hymn in the services."

To develop the new services, the working group met over the past four years and:

reviewed sections of the 1996 *Discipline*, the orders for consecration and ordination in the *United Methodist Book of Worship*, and the proposed revisions from the Committee to Study Ministry which were published in the 1996 *Daily Christian Advocate*;

identified liturgical resources for bishops and annual conferences; and

distributed provisional texts for use by 1997 and 1998 annual conference sessions and received feedback.

Thomas Anderson Langford III edited the text for consistency and clarity.

Members of the working group developing the revisions included: Daniel T. Benedict Jr., convenor, and Donna Gaither of the GBOD; Jimmy L. Carr and John E. Harnish of the GBHEM; and Bishops William B. Oden, Dallas Area, Roy I. Sano, Los Angeles Area, and Ann B. Sherer, Missouri Area.

—Jackie Campbell

Delegates Say 'No Dice' to Gambling

With little fanfare, the 2000 General Conference held fast to the denomination's opposition to gambling.

Delegates expressed concern for the impact of gambling on Native American communities.

They approved a petition calling on the church's Native American Comprehensive Plan to join with the General Board of Church and Society's Native American Economic Development and Empowerment Task Force to develop "an innovative and economically strategic report for a God-centered alternative to gambling-centered economic development for Native American communities." Recommendations are to be brought back to the 2004 General Conference.

The body also recommended delegates study and share with constituents the National Gambling Impact Study Commission Report compiled by a task force of the U.S. Congress. The study looks at the legal, social and economic impact of gambling in the United States and is available on the Internet at www.ngisc.gov.

In a move to reduce duplication, the body approved a request from the General Board of Church and Society to delete from the *Book of Resolutions* the church's stated position on gambling. The statement remains in the denomination's Social Principles.

The General Conference was also the scene of an effort by United Methodists to speak out decisively and firmly in opposition to the expansion of gambling in Ohio and other states. Reiterating the church's stance at a May 4 press conference were Chicago Area Bishop C. Joseph Sprague, Mississippi Area Bishop Marshall L. Meadors Jr., and Tom Grey, executive director, National Coalition Against Legalized Gambling. The Ohio legislature is considering options for shoring up sagging profits from its state lottery by joining a multistate lottery game or reducing the profit requirements which fund Ohio education so the lottery can offer larger prizes.

— Jane Dennis

PETS Tracks General Conference Actions on the Internet

General Conference relies on the Petition Entry and Tracking System (PETS) that follows petitions from the time the Petitions Secretary receives them until they are accepted/rejected or revised by the plenary.

PETS generated the list of petition numbers to calendar items included in this issue. It does not disappear with the end of the conference. Data can still be retrieved by anyone with an Internet connection at the Web page <http://www.gc2000.org/pets>.

At that site you will find petition listings, calendar listings and relationship of actions to the 1996 *Book of Discipline*.

Corrections

The article "Alphabet Soup: NYMO Becomes UMYO" (p. 2283), attributed to Kurt Gwartney, was written by Woody Woodrick. The *DCA* regrets the error.

The name of the Rev. F. Belton Joyner Jr., North Carolina was misspelled. The *DCA* regrets the error.

The article "Western Jurisdiction Loses Representation" (p. 2282) states "The Western Jurisdiction has not had a Judicial Council member for more than 30 years." However, James M. Dolliver, a member of the Washington State Supreme Court, served the Judicial Council from 1984 to 1992. The *DCA* regrets the error.

The name of Djamba Mumba was misspelled on page 1747. The *DCA* regrets the error.

GCFA Fulfills Role as Servant of Church

The quadrennial budget developed by General Conference delegates is “the church’s mission statement,” according to Sandra Kelley Lackore, general secretary, General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA).

Understanding its role—to be a servant of the church—is key to the GCFA’s success. It does not advocate for anything, but helps to interpret the church’s mission through financing the decisions made by General Conference. In its servant role, the GCFA puts together a team of staff from offices in Evanston, Ill., and Nashville, Tenn., and volunteers, most of whom are annual conference treasurers, to accomplish that mission.

Together they help prepare reports presented to General Conference, track petitions, prepare spreadsheets, monitor and review legislation for financial implications of proposed petitions, and set up a local bank account. Controller Frank Soo Hoo says the GCFA tracks general church funds and makes sure financial statements are filed according to General Conference and *Book of Discipline* rules. He is responsible for seven different audits, including the general funds.

The Treasurer’s Office assists with paying delegate expenses. In the past two weeks they wrote more than



Pictured (left to right) are GCFA staff Dennis Belton, director of internal audit; Sandra Kelley Lackore, general secretary; Frank Soo Hoo, controller; and Brent Smith, Nashville Service Center controller and office manager.

—Dewayne and Ginnie Lowther Photo

2,000 checks for delegate travel and per diems amounting to \$1.5 million. During General Conference, staff and volunteers shared office responsibilities.

Striving to be a good steward of church funds, the GCFA continues its work on Saturday. While most delegates start their journeys home, GCFA staff will have training and a meeting before they leave.

—Patty Meyers

Agape Children’s Choir Offers Peace, Reconciliation

Through a ministry of the arts, the Agape Children’s Choir in Parnu, Estonia, joins Russian and Estonian children for peace and reconciliation. Handbells and voices brought forth the choir’s heartwarming music of praise and thanksgiving during the May 11 morning worship.

This program is one component of the Agape Christian Learning Centre. Ministering to 90 students who study English and Estonian languages, music and religion, the center is located in an area that, until several years ago, was unchurched and experiencing tensions between Russians and Estonians.

Today—through this dynamic program—young people are educated as their faith is strengthened. Helvi Treiblut is the center’s director. This effort is one of the pilot projects sponsored by the Shared Mission Focus on Young People (Advance No. 194790-2).

—Linda Bales, director, Shared Mission Focus on Young People

Prayer Concern

J. B. Gray, 22, Grand Rapids, Mich., who has a brain tumor.

All in the Family

The Rev. Byrd Hillman and Sara Hillman (re-serve)—Mississippi Conference delegates—were able to sit together during some of the sessions.