# **The Monthly Update**

November 2007

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

While we live in the midst of plenty, we do have "plenty" to thank the Lord for His blessings to us. First of all is the gift of life; this is something that all too many of us take for granted. Secondly, is the great country in which we live; the "hate America first" crowd work overtime finding fault with the United States, but with all of its problems, it is still the best country on the fact of the earth in which to live. Another but certainly not the final blessing, what comes to mind are the brave servicemen and women overseas, especially those in Iraq and Afghanistan, who even now are putting their lives at risk to defend our freedoms. I hope that as you say your prayers – whether at home, in church, or in public – you remember these people who are our shield against an unspeakable tyranny.

This edition of the Monthly Update contains more information on the General Conference to be held in Ft. Worth this next year. This promises to be one of the most memorable – if not the most important – in the history of Methodism. It is anticipated that we will face the similar challenges dealing with various issues at this General Conference. Also include in this Update is a disproportionate amount of space dealing with "cyber safety" on the internet. This is an area of especial concern that deserves focused attention from parents. If you do not already have an internet filter, I would recommend you get one. Finally, we have an e-mail that came about our denominational employees involving themselves in "transgender" advocacy. Our mention of this is important because, just as all aspects of sexuality affect who we are as creations of God, to say to Him "Who You created us to be is not good enough; we know more about who we are" is fundamental rebellion and a grave offense against Him. This is why we take these issues so seriously.

I would ask, as we look ahead to our Thanksgiving season this month and the close of our fiscal year in December, that you pray as to how the Lord would lead you to support the ministry of Concerned Methodists. We have had some financial challenges this past year and will in the months ahead, but will have even greater ones as we continue to engage in activism looking toward our General Conference. We have our strategy mapped out – we are in the process of implementing it.

Thank you again for your support and prayers. They are a very necessary part of our ministry as we continue to do what the Lord has called us to. Without both, we would not be able to serve as many people as we do. Your support is truly God's blessing working through you to us.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris, Executive Director

# **November 2007 Update**

# Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

If people let the government decide what foods they eat and what medicines they take, their bodies will soon be in a sorry state as the souls who live under tyranny.

- Thomas Jefferson

# Of Interest

# + Six young people to address General Conference

Six United Methodists ranging in age from 15 to 28 have been chosen to work together to develop and deliver the first Young People's Address at the 2008 General Conference. The speakers - five from the United States and one from Russia - will give a 45-minute presentation on the concerns, hopes and dreams of young people in The United Methodist Church.

They are Becca Farnum, 17, of Mount Pleasant, Mich.; Kira Volkova, 24, of Kirov, Russia; the Rev. Anne Rigo, 28, of Grand Junction, Colo.; Andrew Craig, 15, of Denver; Matt Lockett, 20, of Seattle; and Jason Rathod, 23, of Hastings, Neb. The presentation will be the first time that a Young People's Address has been on the agenda of General Conference, the denomination's top legislative assembly. Historically, the worldwide gathering has included only an Episcopal Address by a bishop and a Laity Address by a layperson.

The 2004 General Conference affirmed the value of the voices of youth and young adults by voting overwhelmingly to add a Young People's Address to the agenda for 2008. The 2004 conference also approved creation of the Division on Ministries with Young People.

According to an Aug. 6 article in *USA Today*, about one in four Protestant young people have left the church. Based on a survey by Lifeway Research of Protestants between the ages of 18 to 30, the article reports that seven in 10 who attended church regularly in high school had quit attending by age 23. Thirty-four percent had not returned, even sporadically, by age 30. Among dropouts, 97 percent cited life changes such as a move. Fifty-eight percent were unhappy with the people or pastor at church, and 52 percent had religious, ethical or political reasons for quitting.

#### The church and young people

Asked how The United Methodist Church could be more inclusive of youth and young adults, Volkova said the United Methodist Church in Russia speaks a lot about young people but "sometimes things do not go beyond talking but remain at this level." A candidate for ordained ministry and member of Kirov United Methodist Church, Volkova seeks more opportunities for ministries with young people and for the church "to take our young people more seriously." She also hopes that the church would more fully live into its global nature. "The situation in the church now is old people trying to be global but who many times fail. Young people are flexible and willing to listen to one another."

- By Linda Green, United Methodist News Service (UMNS); §386; Nashville, Tenn.; Aug. 8, 2007.

#### + General Conference briefing set for head delegates, communicators

A Pre-General Conference News Briefing will be held Jan. 24-26 in Fort Worth, Texas, to help heads of delegations, church communicators and secular journalists prepare for The United Methodist Church's legislative gathering in the spring. The briefing, sponsored by United Methodist Communications, will focus on key issues and legislation facing General Conference. The event will include information to help delegates and communicators get oriented to the assembly and downtown Fort Worth.

The Pre-General Conference News Briefing is held every four years, just before the legislative gathering. In 2008, the briefing will be at the Hilton Fort Worth, which is near the convention center where General Conference will meet. The briefing will include a tour of the center as well as the surrounding vicinity. In addition to plenary sessions, the communicators and heads of delegations will have the opportunity to focus on specific topics of interest in breakout sessions. The agenda has been planned by United Methodist Communications staff working with the host conference communicator, the president of the United Methodist Association of Communicators, and a committee that includes a staff member of the United Methodist Board of Discipleship and several conference directors of connectional ministries. A team from the Central Texas Conference has also planned worship events for the briefing.

Registration details, an overview of the agenda and information on hotel arrangements will be posted by mid-September at www.gc2008.umc.org. Afterward, inquiries may be made to InfoServ at United Methodist Communications at infoserv@umcom.org or (800) 251-8140.

- UMNS; Sep. 10, 2007.

# (UM) General Board of Global Ministries. Global Ministries board dismisses chief executive

STAMFORD, Conn. - Directors of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries have abruptly dismissed the mission agency's chief executive. The decision not to re-nominate the Rev. R. Randy Day came Oct. 9 upon recommendation from the board's personnel committee during the board's annual meeting in Stamford. The dismissal was effective that day. Directors then approved the appointment of an interim chief executive, and retired United Methodist Bishop Felton May immediately filled that role. Day, who took office Jan. 1, 2003, had led the Board of Global Ministries for nearly five years. In a statement issued Oct. 10 by the Board of Global Ministries, Bishop Joel Martinez said the decision "does not diminish our appreciation for the many talents and skills of Randy Day but indicates that directors are looking for a different style of administrative leadership to take us into the future."

At the time he assumed office, the mission agency had suffered through staff layoffs, program cuts and a reduced budget. At this month's meeting, board treasurer Roland Fernandez, reported that operating expenses, both in 2006 and the first eight months of 2007, were the lowest in several years and that an operating surplus - \$2.9 million in 2006 - had occurred "for the first time in many years."

A search committee for a permanent replacement for Day is expected to be named before the annual meeting ends on Oct. 11.

- By Linda Bloom, New York, UMNS; Oct. 10, 2007.

## (UM) General Board of Discipleship. United Methodists explore 'cyber safety' in ministry

NASHVILLE, Tenn. - A United Methodist conference was held that explored topics dealing with "CyberSAFEty in Ministry." The event was sponsored by the United Methodist Board of Discipleship. About 150 people from across the United States gathered in Nashville to share strategies and tools to harness the potential gift that technology promises in an environment of stewardship and safety.

"I think it's important for churches to consider a presence in cyberspace because that is where the people are," said Paul O'Briant in his opening address. Director of technology for Currituck County Schools in North Carolina, O'Briant cited U.S. statistics that 143 million people use the Internet, and that two-thirds of Internet users have searched for spiritual topics online. "So much of the population uses cyberspace on a daily basis and searches for answers in that space, so we need to be there where they are," he said.

#### Lurking dangers

With the opportunities of cyberspace come dangers as well. "I think it's important if we are going to go into that space we understand the dangers and how to keep our people safe. Understanding that our kids and congregations are already in those spaces, we need to provide them the tools they need to keep safe," he said. O'Briant reported that some 27,000 registered sex offenders have MySpace accounts, and half of American youth have MySpace accounts. The average age of initial exposure to Internet pornography is 11, and there are an estimated 100,000 Web sites that feature child pornography. "Cyber safety needs to be a part of our Safe Sanctuary planning and implementation," said O'Briant, noting that the church and its leaders are far from immune to the growing problem of sexual addictions.

A 2000 survey by Christianity Today indicated that about 40 percent of clergy had acknowledged visiting sexually explicit Web sites.

## A tool for predators

"Internet safety with kids is so important because the problem is prevalent, and exposure to inappropriate material and file sharing are growing," said Tom Evans, an agent investigator with Internet Crimes Against Children. Evans has seen a rise in the number of cases involving children, including (in order of prevalence):

Possession of child pornography Distribution of child pornography Solicitation of a minor Manufacturing of child pornography Endangering the welfare of a child "There is a need for legislation to put offenders behind bars for crimes against a child. We need to increase sentencing guidelines, and stiffer penalties are needed," Evans told the conference.

## Evans advised participants to:

Reign technology in, remembering that "kids don't need to be that wired";

Encourage parents to have a MySpace account:

Ensure that kids don't include identifying information on social networking sites such as MySpace and FaceBook:

Know all user names and passwords;

Leave off names and limit the number of photographs posted on social networking sites.

Fifty-five percent of all online Americans age 12-17 use online social networking sites such as MySpace, according to Pew Internet Research. Meanwhile, the typical profile of an Internet child sex offender is a white male ranging in age from 19 to 70, according to Evans. "It is not unheard of for children to be abducted. Anything that identifies a child on a Web site can be used by a predator to focus on where a child is located," he said. Alerting participants to the dangers of file sharing, Evans warned that "it is not just in big cities. It's everywhere. File sharing is important because it lets us know how prevalent child porn is. Kids are using this for free."

Society must be vigilant to monitor the Web and safeguard against dangers as the Internet continues to evolve, participants were told. "Cyber safety is not a one-time event," said the Rev. Stephen Streett, an associate pastor from the North Georgia Annual (regional) Conference. "We must have an awareness of youth culture ... and find out what they are listening to."

The Nashville-based Board of Discipleship is the United Methodist agency that works to support annual conference and local church leaders in their task of equipping world-changing disciples.

- By Jeanette Pinkston, UMNS #493; Nashville; Oct. 8, 2007.

# Homosexuality.

# + Is it the ENDA Religious Liberty in Hiring?

Today the attack on religious liberty kicked off in the House Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions Subcommittee, where a hearing was held on the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) of 2007. The legislation would prevent employers from taking their most deeply held beliefs into account when making hiring, management, and promotion decisions. If it passes, ENDA would radically transform the workplace discrimination law by granting special rights to homosexuals and transsexuals--while ignoring those of employers. Although the bill's first incarnation had a broad religious exemption, that exemption has been narrowed in the 2007 version. In fact, the current exemption is so complicated that the editors of the New York Sun argue that "...the Supreme Court will spend as much time figuring out exactly what it says as deciding that it's unconstitutional." Although in its present form churches wouldn't be forced to hire homosexuals, any of their sponsored organizations, such as schools, nursing homes, adoption agencies, soup kitchens, and summer camps, would all be subject to ENDA's reach. These programs could no longer refuse to hire homosexuals simply because the behavior violates the groups' core doctrine. Instead, faith-based programs would have to publicly outline which "religious tenets" they consider significant, marking an unprecedented intrusion by the federal government into religious freedom.

- Family Research Council: 801 G Street N.W. Washington, D.C. 20001.Received by e-mail; September 5, 2007;

Tel: 202/393-2100; 800/225-4008; Web: frc.org

#### + United Methodist Church Supports Transgender Rights

Hate crimes legislation has passed both houses of Congress as an attachment to the Department of Defense Appropriations Bill which is now in conference--meaning that assigned members of both chambers will work out any differences in the main bill before it is sent to the President for signing. We need you to call, email or fax your concerns about the hate crimes provisions and request the conference members strip it away from the defense bill--so our President can appropriate the money our troops desperately need to conduct the war without declaring open season on biblical preaching here at home via hate crimes legislation.

Thankfully, the President has once again assured the American people and members of Congress that he WILL veto this bill if the hate crimes provision is not removed. Leave it to liberals to use the war and the safety of our troops to pursue their radical agenda. Unfortunately, many pastors and most Christians are sleeping

through the war on our nation. Of this legislation, Chuck Colson states, "No business would be allowed to refuse to hire a homosexual for any reason." He goes on, "If passed, ENDA would place all the power of the federal government in direct opposition to the beliefs of all major faith groups in America regarding the teachings about sexuality."

I have obtained a confidential email that was sent out by the radically homosexual organization, National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE), urging their members to voice their opposition to any version of this bill which does not include transgender people. Translation: If we want to come to work every other day dressed as a different sex, what right do you Christians have to refuse us! Read their email alert sent out this week here.

In a letter dated October 1, 2007, a coalition of radical homosexuals and their allies wrote to the committee marking up this legislation stating the following:

"Although we believe that the bill's sponsor, Congressman Barney Frank (D-MA), and the House Democratic Leadership have a sincere desire to protect the LGBT community from discrimination we believe the process and strategy that has been adopted is a mistake. That mistake is compounded by moving forward with a markup tomorrow."

The "mistake" they were referring to was the removal of transgenders from the bill, which happened because there has been such an outcry from across America as people have discovered what their elected officials were attempting to do. Now for the part that should make the blood of millions of ordinary American's blood boil. This effort to force all sincere people of faith to accommodate what they believe to be abhorrent and deviant behavior in their businesses is being led by the usual suspects like the National Organization of Women, the ACLU, the Human Rights Campaign, People for the American Way and other radical leftist organizations.

But, it is also being advanced by organizational heads of some of the largest organizations in American, representing millions of Americans who would oppose such legislation and who view homosexuality and transgenderism as deviant behaviors—and I suspect many of them have no idea their organizations and their money is involved in such reprehensible activities. Let me cite just a few, whose names appear on the letterhead of the letter sent to George Miller, Chairman, Committee on Education and Labor, U.S. House of Representatives: The United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society; William D. Novelli, American Association of Retired Persons; Bruce S. Gordon, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; Andrew J. Imparato, American Association of People with Disabilities; Edward McElroy, American Federation of Teachers; Reg Weaver, National Education Association; Richard Womack, American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations; and Rev. Robert Edgar, the National Council of Churches [Emphasis added.].

I realize that some of the aforementioned groups are liberal, but I am certain that the majority of members of every one of those organizations, who contribute hundreds of millions of dollars in dues, have no idea their leaders are conspiring toward the moral collapse of the workplace in America and attempting to further dismantle religious freedom in America.

Do you think most of the people who attend small country Methodist churches across America, or larger city churches for that matter, believe the federal government should use its power and resources to force Methodist owners to hire people whom they believe are living contrary to their deeply held religious tenets?

Sincerely,

Rick Scarborough, Vision America Action, P.O. Box 10, Lufkin, TX 75902. mail@visionamerica.us

- Received by e-mail. Rev. Rick Scarborough; Friday, October 12, 2007 7:00 AM

God didn't promise days without pain, laughter without sorrow, sun without rain, but He did promise strength for the day, comfort for the tears, and light for the way.

## **Global Outlook**

Likening culture to the weather, Frederica Mathewes-Green (March) counsels: "God has not called us to change the weather. Our primary task as believers, and our best hope for lasting success, is to care for individuals caught up in the pounding storm."

# Albania. United Methodist Church now official in Albania

Formal papers were signed Aug. 20 in the capital city of Tirana by Bishop Patrick Streiff, leader of the denomination in Central and Southern Europe. The United Methodist Church in Albania has about 150 members and friends in a nation of 3.8 million people. "We praise God that The United Methodist Church is now officially recognized in Albania," said the Rev. R. Randy Day, chief executive of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries. "We owe a debt of gratitude to the German United Methodists and other German Christians who developed the recent contacts there and continue to provide spiritual support and material aid. We are deeply pleased that the United Methodism in Albania is being developed in a spirit of collaboration with churches already present in the country."

The small Balkan country has a highly diverse religious heritage including Albanian-Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholics, Muslims and now a slowly expanding Protestant presence. About 60 percent of the people are Muslim, but there is a high degree of religious tolerance.

## Looking back

Through U.S. missionaries, Methodist work began in Albania in the 19th century when the nation was part of the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire. The mission lasted only a few decades, however. After World War II, the country fell under a rigid, anti-religious brand of communism until the 1990s. [Commentary: The term "anti-religious" was used; try "rabidly atheistic".] The transition from communism to a republic was not easy for Albania, and poverty was acute in many areas. Methodism was reintroduced from Germany in 1992, and Albanians began to show an interest in the Germans' spiritual motivations. A United Methodist aid center was established in 1997 in the mountain village of Bishnica. By 1998, the first 25 people were baptized and became charter members of The United Methodist Church of Albania.

Streiff acknowledged all of the mission work that brought the church to this point. "The signature for establishing a foundation of the UMC in Albania is not the first step as a church but the consequence of a presence of German Methodists who brought help to suffering people in the mountains of Albania since the 1990s," he said. "As often in history, the mission began with the initiative of devoted laypeople and their pastor. It is my joy to see the fruit of their ministry and to build on it."

## Challenges and opportunities

Because the Albanian economy is weak, a primary challenge is migration from mountain and other rural areas into cities and emigration to other countries to seek a better future. The bishop's office reports that the migration factor has affected the congregation in Bishnica and created many changes including new house groups in Pogradec and Tirana.

Two young Albanians, Rigels Kasmollari and Englantin Lushka, have graduated from the theological seminary in Waiern, Austria, and are expected to return home in 2008 to provide indigenous leadership.

- Linda Bloom, UMNS; New York; Sep. 4, 2007. Urs Schweizer, assistant to Bishop Patrick Streiff, provided the

primary information for this story.

# The Episcopal church. Episcopal church faces large departures over gay bishops

A spokesman with the Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD) says the U.S. Episcopal Church is at a crossroads. This week, the House of Bishops plans to meet with conservative leaders in the church --known as primates. The conservative leaders will ask for assurance, that by September 30 the church will no longer approve the consecration of bishops living in homosexual relationships, or approve same sex blessings.

Ralph Webb is IRD director of Anglican Action and he says liberal leaders have not given any indication they will meet demands of the conservative leaders. "They have expressed dismay at the primates, for making such requests of the church. And, so, sadly, it doesn't look like we're going to see something positive," he says.

Three of the largest dioceses in the Episcopal Church, Fort Worth, Pittsburgh and Quincy, have all signaled they are prepared to depart the denomination if it does not reverse course. Webb says that thousands of people have already left the denomination and the Episcopal Church is writing that off as a "small percentage of parishes." But according to Webb, the people who have already left make up a good percentage of the "total population" of the church.

The Episcopal Church made headlines back in 2003 when it consecrated V. Gene Robinson, an open homosexual, as bishop.

- Allie Martin, OneNewsNow.com; September 20, 2007. Copyright 2007 American Family News Network.

## Zimbabwe.

# + Africa University staffer resigns after investigation

OLD MUTARE, Zimbabwe (UMNS) - A staff member of Africa University has resigned following an investigation into allegations of sexual harassment and sexual misconduct toward female students and women related to the university.

Benon Kigozi, the school's music lecturer and choir director, resigned April 23 after being suspended April 14 by the executive committee of the university's Board of Directors. Findings of an independent investigation had been presented to the committee during the board's annual meeting April 12-14. The board guides policy and overall development of the private, pan-African and United Methodist-related university, located nearly 11 miles outside Mutare, Zimbabwe's fourth largest city. Allegations and complaints had been lodged against Kigozi over a two-year period, prompting the board's executive committee in November to authorize the investigation. "The allegations that were received cover both sexual harassment and sexual misconduct," said Vice Chancellor Rukudzo Murapa, adding that the university's policy and position on sexual harassment is "very clear." "We will not allow, we will not tolerate sexual harassment, particularly one that takes place between the students and staff," he said. "We will not tolerate that and will take the sternest action. We are guided by our rules and regulations and the laws of (Zimbabwe) to follow certain procedures."

The investigator, who is a member of The United Methodist Church and also a local magistrate, presented her findings to university officials, legal counsel and the board's executive committee. Murapa called it "a disturbing report."

"It was clear that this was a serious allegation and we had to act on it promptly," said Bishop Marcus Matthews, the board's vice president. "The board, along with the university administration, took immediate steps to protect the students and all others involved." Matthews said it is critical that the board and administration "provide a safe space at the university for these young people."

Speaking with United Methodist News Service, Kigozi said he resigned because "for the last few years I have been victimized and defamed by my supervisor," who is a woman. "The allegations are not true at all," he said. "I have never,

never had sex with any student, not at all." Murapa said the magistrate cannot take legal action against Kigozi, but that the complainants or alleged victims can. "The magistrate carried out this investigation, not in her capacity as magistrate, but in her capacity as an independent assessor acting on (my) request," he said. "Her opinion is not a legal opinion. It is simply her findings and therefore using university procedures, those findings became the basis for a disciplinary hearing."

Because Africa University is a church-related institution, Murapa conveyed to the entire United Methodist Church that "we at Africa University take seriously the issues and allegations of sexual harassment. We are committed to routing it out from our campus and will take appropriate action whenever we receive a complaint."

- By Linda Green, UMNS; Apr. 24, 2007.

## + African bishops focus on poverty at historic meeting

MUTARE, Zimbabwe (UMNS) - United Methodist bishops in Africa ended their first continental meeting with a renewed resolve to work together strategically to fight poverty in Africa. The three-day African Bishops Roundtable brought together 12 active and retired bishops to the campus of Africa University in Mutare. The bishops, representing congregations from west, east, central and southern Africa, developed strategies against poverty and committed to make United Methodist-related Africa University a partner in their efforts. The Sept. 10-13 roundtable was the first gathering of its kind for the denomination's African bishops, who lead 3.2 million United Methodists and 1 million preparatory church members.

The bishops had wanted to meet as a group similar to the way their U.S. counterparts meet as a college of bishops within each of the five U.S. jurisdictions. Previously, the only times the African bishops have met has been at the spring and fall meetings of the denomination-wide Council of Bishops.

## Education and quality of life

The bishops explored how issues of health, food security, governance and education intersect with poverty to negatively impact the quality of life of people in their congregations and communities. They agreed that a poor quality of life leads many Africans to migrate to Europe, North America and elsewhere, which hurts development efforts in Africa. "(People) aren't able to live in their own communities and localities and so they move away to other countries in an effort to find a better place and life," said Nigeria's Bishop Kefas Kane Mavula. "We have to convince people that moving away is not the solution. ... We have to make sacrifices, remain in our situations and try as much as possible to do what we can to improve those situations."

Saying education is a key to fighting poverty, the bishops committed to partner with Africa University in efforts to increase skills, nurture responsible leadership and help to change unconstructive mindsets. They need the university to train professionals, but limited resources make it difficult for young people to receive higher education. "We have everything to be rich in this continent," said South Congo Bishop Kainda Katembo. "Where we are poor is in our minds and way of thinking. We want an education that will set free our minds and change our mentality so that we realize that we have resources and there is much we can do together, here on the continent."

In Angola, Mozambique, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, the bishops are spearheading local efforts to increase access to professional training. They are founding church-related, tertiary-level institutions and upgrading existing ones to offer training in the fields of health, information technology and agriculture, among others.

# Role of Africa University

The bishops view Africa University as a primary source of educators, managers and administrators to implement training programs and nurture new development projects in various countries. Because the bishops want country-specific programs, they are taking a more active role in finding resources to pay for scholarships for students going to Africa University from their countries and conferences. They agreed to take a proposal for scholarship support for the university to the Nov. 4-8 meeting of the Council of Bishops. The proposal, dubbed "Hope for African Students," seeks support to enroll four students a year at Africa University from each episcopal area in Africa.

The United Methodist-related school has 1,300 students from 26 African countries and more than 2,000 alumni - pastors, teachers, agriculturalists, public health workers, business professionals and others - at work across sub-Saharan Africa. It offers undergraduate and graduate programs in six faculties and an institute.

By Andra Stevens, UMNS; as reported by Linda Green, Nashville, Tenn.; Oct. 5, 2007. Stevens is director of information and public affairs at Africa University.