# **The Monthly Update**

## October 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Although we have not received all of the reports from the annual conferences, we shall continue on with the news that has been put on the "back burner" during this coverage of what has been happening in the United Methodist Church from around the world.

This "Update" contains some news that is several months old – but I had felt that you need to know it despite the fact that we have not been able to squeeze it into any of the previous months' updates. There are some momentous happenings in our church that will be occurring this month as the Judicial Council meets when it convenes Oct. 22-25 in Minneapolis. Please especially be in prayer for those deliberations – that they will exercise judicial restraint and not overturn any of the actions decided by previous judicial sessions or passed by previous general conferences. In addition you will find what may very well be Billy Graham's "swan song" as he led a spiritual invasion of the "Old French Quarter" in New Orleans. You will also find different "life issues" examined along with news of the damage done by Hurricane Ike and news of the overseas church in Africa.

I try not to print too many "Good Advice" articles on how to live your lives, but this "Update" contains one that I had wanted to share with you. In addition two books dealing with innovative ways of "doing church" are *Book Revolution* by George Barna (the well known Christian researcher) and *Reimagining Church* by Frank Viola. Both of these show promise.

Assuredly, we need to continue remembering our country in prayer, especially as we go into what may be the most important elections of our country. Tragically, too often we are not told the complete truth by the mainstream media. Now, we are faced with the prospect of having to make decisions base on information we get from the public media.

Please pray and vote for the candidate that reflects sound Judeo-Christian values. After all, it is the solid rock of these values that have prospered our country for these 200+ years. Also, please continue to pray for our United Methodist Church and for those of us in Concerned Methodists as we "contend for the faith" as the Lord has called us to do.

Finally, we send you our heartfelt "thank you" for your faithful support. You have been very generous in your response to our appeal. We have not yet closed the gap in our bills but we are trusting the Lord to provide these needs. We know that He will provide the solution to this situation.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris, Executive Director

# October 2008 Update

# Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give. – Winston Churchill

<u>Of Interest</u> U.S. membership continues to decline in The United Methodist Church, according to denominational statistics. Membership decreased by eight-tenths of a percent over a one-year period to more than 7.9 million. Specifically, U.S. membership was 7,931,733 in 2006, the most recent year for which statistics are available, according to the United Methodist General Council on Finance and Administration, which compiles data for the denomination. U.S. membership in 2005 was 7,995,429. Another 45,220 people were listed as clergy members of the denomination for a total of 7,976,953 in 2006. Worldwide United Methodist lay and clergy membership, which stood at more than 11.5 million in 2005, is still being tallied for 2006 and is expected to be released later.

- By Marta W. Aldrich, United Methodist News Service (UMNS); Nashville, Tenn {#110}; March 14, 2008.

#### **The Good Stuff**

- + *Good Advice* 'Never borrow from the future. If you worry about what may happen tomorrow and it doesn't happen, you have worried in vain. Even if it does happen, you have to worry twice.' [Note: This contains good advice for any age.]
- 1. Pray
- 2. Go to bed on time.
- 3. Get up on time so you can start the day unrushed.
- 4. Say No to projects that won't fit into your time schedule, or that will compromise your mental health.
- 5. Delegate tasks to capable others.
- 6. Simplify and unclutter your life.
- 7. Less is more. (Although one is often not enough, two is often too many.)
- 8. Allow extra time to do things and to get to places.
- 9. Pace yourself. Spread out big changes and difficult projects over time;don't lump the hard things all together.
- 10. Take one day at a time.
- 11. Separate worries from concerns. If a situation is a concern, find out what God would have you do and let go of the anxiety. If you can't do anything about a situation, forget it.
- 12. Live within your budget; don't use credit cards for ordinary purchases.
- 13. Have backups; an extra car key in your wallet, an extra house key buried in the garden, extra stamps, etc.
- 14. K.M.S. (Keep Mouth Shut). This single piece of advice can prevent an enormous amount of trouble.
- 15. Do something for the Kid in You everyday.
- 16. Carry an inspirational book and/or the Bible with you to read while waiting in line.
- 17. Get enough rest.
- 18. Eat right.
- 19 Get organized so everything has its place.
- 20. Listen to a tape while driving that can help improve your quality of life.
- 21. Write down thoughts and inspirations.
- 22. Every day, find time to be alone.
- 23. Having problems? Talk to God on the spot. Try to nip small problems in the bud. Don't wait until it's time to go to bed to try and pray.
- 24. Make friends with Godly people.
- 25. Keep a folder of favorite scriptures on hand.
- 26. Remember that the shortest bridge between despair and hope is often a good 'Thank you Jesus.'
- 27. Laugh.
- 28. Laugh some more!
- 29. Take your work seriously, but not yourself at all.
- 30. Develop a forgiving attitude (most people are doing the best they can).
- 31. Be kind to unkind people (they probably need it the most).
- 32. Sit on your ego.
- 33 Talk less; listen more.
- 34. Slow down.
- 35. Remind yourself that you are not the general manager of the universe.

36 Every night before bed, think of one thing you're grateful for that you've never been grateful for before. And remember, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31)

## + Billy Graham Shocker

In what might prove to be the crowning achievement of an illustrious career in ministry, the 87-year-old evangelist, Billy Graham shocked the 16,300 in attendance at the Celebration of Hope crusade in New Orleans Arena on Sunday Night (March 30, 2008). Touted in advance as possibly his last Evangelistic crusade, Graham invited the packed house of evangelical Christians and the hundreds of new converts to join him on the one mile walk from the arena to New Orleans' infamous Bourbon Street.

"While we have seen God do tremendous things here the past couple of evenings. Yes, it is true that a great healing and a great many salvations have occurred within the confines of this auditorium. Still yet, there lies a great mountain in this city which needs to be conquered."

Then taking from the Biblical Book of Joshua Chapter 14 he read, "I am this day, eighty-five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as on the day that Moses sent me; just as my strength was then, so now is my strength for war, both for going out and for coming in. Now therefore, give me this mountain of which the Lord spoke in that day," his voice suddenly sounding more forceful than during his 22 minute sermon.

"I last preached in the City of New Orleans in 1954 and I felt then that there was some unfinished business. Tonight, in what very well might be my last evangelistic service, I aim to finish that business and lead as many of you that would follow me to the multitude of lost souls that fill Bourbon Street tonight. That is my mountain!

That is where we shall see the harvest!" said Graham as the stadium erupted in cheers that lasted the next several minutes. Utilizing a waiting mobility scooter, the elder Graham joined his son and heir to the ministry, Franklin across the Arena floor and through the opened doors leading towards the French Quarter. In a show of solidarity and determination reminiscent of civil rights marches of the 1960's, nearly the entire capacity crowd joine d in the 20 minute trek while singing, "When the Saints Go Marching in".

As the march crossed Canal Street and headed northward towards Bourbon Street, many onlookers stood in stunned silence as the massive crowd of people began singing in unison the Christian hymn, Amazing Grace. Upon entering the west end of Bourbon Street, Billy Graham was soon recognized by partiers. Soon those joining in the march began to approach those partying on Bourbon Street with the Gospel message that they had heard preached just a half hour before Graham himself joined with a group of local street evangelist in ministering to a man who had survived Hurricane Katrina in the lower 9th Ward.

Within 30 minutes the entirety of Bourbon Street was packed with Christians and the once blaring music of nightclubs and strip joints had been replaced by weeping and worship as people poured out their drinks and sought prayer from the Christians who were now reaching out to them.

"I have never seen anything like this in my life," said 20 years New Orleans Police Department veteran, Tom Phillips. "This is unbelievable! We thought a riot was going to break out, but this looks more like a Revival than a riot!"

Two hours later, a glowing Graham sat back down on his scooter and smiled "Now I know how the Apostle Paul must have felt at the end of his ministry. Do the work of an evangelist; make full proof of thy ministry. For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."

Hours later hundreds of Christians remained on the street ministering to the many people eagerly waiting to receive prayer and ministry. New Orleans will never be the same. And the press remained mute on this "news item?" Did anyone see it on TV/hear it on radio/read it in the paper?

Why are we not surprised? Can't have THAT just prior to a major election, now, can we? Well, just on a whim, spread the news, anyway. It cost our elder brother, Billy Graham, more than any of us know to make that effort.

Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. – Psalm 37:4

- Received from multiple sources to include by e-mail.

- + Book Revolution by George Barna. World-renowned pollster George Barna has the numbers, and they indicate a revolution is already taking place within the Church-one that will impact every believer in America. Committed, bornagain Christians are exiting the established church in massive numbers. Why are they leaving? Where are they going? And what does this mean for the future of the Church? Using years' worth of research data, and adhering to an unwavering biblical perspective, Barna predicts how this revolution will impact the organized church, how Christ's body of believers should react, and how individuals who are considering leaving (or those who have already left) can respond. For leaders working for positive change in the church and for believers struggling to find a spiritual community and worship experience that resonates, Revolution is here. Are you ready?
- + **Reimagining Church by Frank Viola** this is the follow-up to the bestselling controversial book <u>PAGAN</u> <u>CHRISTIANITY?</u> by George Barna and Frank Viola. Discover the church you've always longed for and how we can see it emerge in our day.

#### Commentaries

"Dissent is a gift to the church. It is the imagination of the prophets that continually call us back to our identity as the peculiar people of God. May Viola's words challenge us to become the change that we want to see in the church ... and not to settle for anything less than God's dream for Her.

Shane Claiborne, author of The Irresistable Revolution & Jesus for President

"True to form, this book contains a thoroughly consistent critique of prevailing forms of church. However, in Reimagining Church, Frank Viola also presents a positive vision of what the church can become if we truly reembraced more organic, and less institutional, forms of church. This is a no-holds-barred prophetic vision for the church in the twenty-first century."

Alan Hirsch, author of *The Forgotten Ways & The Shaping of Things to Come* 

#### Abortion, Assisted Suicide, Euthanasia & Other Life Issues.

+ Killing for Organs: How the Extinction of the Dead Donor Rule is Putting Patients at Risk by Wesley J. Smith

Leading members of the organ transplantation community—backed by some bioethicists—have been waging a quiet campaign for more than ten years to do away with the "dead donor rule," a crucial ethical protection that requires donors of non paired vital organs to have died before their body parts can be procured. This isn't a fringe movement. Indeed, an article urging the extinction of the dead donor rule just appeared in the New England Journal of Medicin, probably the most prestigious medical journal in the world. ("The Dead Donor Rule and Organ Transplantation" NEJM (359:7, August 14, 2008). The authors, Robert D. Troug, MD, a physician at Harvard Medical School, and Franklin D. Miller, a bioethicist at the NIH, claim that patients brain dead may not really be dead, since, as one example, some patients declared dead by neurological criteria secrete certain hormones. Nor, they argue, should patients whose organs are procured under protocols that permit harvesting two-to- five minutes after full cardiac arrest be considered deceased because some of these patients might be resuscitated with vigorous CPR. But if they are right—and be clear, I don't accept their premise—then surely the ethical answer isn't to broaden the categories of living patients who are harvested

- Received by e-mail. The full story is at LifeNews.com.

#### + Alaska Woman Won't be Starved to Death Thanks to Pro-Life Law Firm's Help

Anchorage, AK (LifeNews.com) -- A leading pro-life law firm has stepped in and helped save the life of an Alaska woman who was in danger of becoming a euthanasia victim. The case involved what is becoming a growing and disturbing trend -- with doctors and hospital staff deciding a patient is too far gone and removing a patient's life support. The unnamed patient's husband filed a lawsuit against the hospital and a doctor in May to keep the medical staff from removing his wife's life support, which would have terminated her life. Kenneth Kirk, an attorney working with the Alliance Defense Fund, subsequently filed a motion for stay on the husband's behalf to keep the hospital from taking the patient's life. The motion was granted, and the Alaska Supreme Court issued a temporary restraining order on May 30 prohibiting the hospital from discontinuing life support pending appeal and further order of the court. The hospital then determined that it would remove her feeding tube instead, which would have caused the woman to starve to death. Following additional proceedings and efforts by Kirk, the hospital changed positions and will now allow continuation of the patient's nutrition, hydration, and pain treatment.

- Received by e-mail. The full story is at LifeNews.com.

#### + Prenatal 'Testing' not Mandatory and is Usually 'Search and Destroy'

Karen L Brauer MS, RPh, president of Pharmacists for Life International, submits the following and is available for comment: As a pro-life mother, I feel it's my place to explain to reporters another significant reason why a woman, sharing my beliefs about abortion, might conceal a pregnancy when there is an untoward fetal diagnosis. Each time a mom

like us mentions that her preborn child has been diagnosed with a disability, she risks hearing the suggestion that she ought to abort.

- Received by e-mail. Christian News Wire. http://www.christiannewswire.com/news/956957820.html

#### + New Effort Launched to Decrease Eugenic Abortion of Down Syndrome Babies

In an effort to curb the rising abortion rate for babies with Down syndrome, Concerned Women for America of New York has teamed up with prominent Down syndrome groups to develop an informational brochure focused on giving "hope" and "help" to parents and families of children with Down syndrome. The small brochure, titled, "When you've learned that your baby may have Down syndrome ... There is help and hope!", offers "encouragement, a positive perspective, and a list of resources and support groups to help families learn more about their baby's opportunities," said a CWA release on the brochure. According to Physicians for Life, after discovering their preborn baby has Down syndrome via prenatal screening, between 84 percent and 91 percent of parents choose abortion in the U.S. While this figure is similar in Canada, it is even higher in England and Spain where 94 percent and 95 percent of unborn babies with Down syndrome are aborted respectively.

- Received by e-mail. Life Site News. http://www.lifesitenews.com/ldn/2008/sep/08090908.html

## + Abortion-Free States: The Ambitious Objective of 40 Days for Life Fall Campaigns

This fall, 40 Days for Life vigils will take place at the last remaining abortion centers in North Dakota and Mississippi, states which each have only one remaining abortion facility, as well as the last two abortion facilities in Nebraska and the last two in Kentucky. "Despite the increasingly shrill rhetoric of the abortion industry, the simple truth is that business is off," said David Bereit, national campaign director of 40 Days for Life. "Abortion numbers have dropped so significantly that several states are now down to only one or two remaining abortion centers. This fall's 40 Days for Life campaign presents a great opportunity to finish the life-saving work in these states, creating abortion-free zones and encouraging other states to follow suit."

— Received by e-mail. Life Site News. http://www.lifesitenews.com/

+ *Pro-Life Memorial Day: October 6, 2008* 49,640,766 preborn children have been murdered by abortion since Roe v. Wade. Join us in remembering these lost children by holding a vigil and spread the word in your community.

- Received by e-mail. Visit www.prolifememorialday.com to find out what you can do.

#### (UM) Bishops United Methodist leaders tour hard-hit Texas areas

HOUSTON (UMNS)-United Methodist leaders in Texas feared the worst is yet to be discovered as they began touring churches and communities battered by Hurricane Ike and its 110-mph winds. Bishop Janice Riggle Huie, who leads the church's Texas Annual (regional) Conference, traveled to areas south and east of Houston Sept. 15-16, but authorities blocked her group from reaching Galveston, a city of 57,000 people with five United Methodist churches. Another 20 of the denomination's churches dot nearby areas in and around Freeport, Texas City, LaMarque and Baytown. Ike was the worst storm to hit Texas in 25 years and killed at least 40 people in 10 states, including 11 in Texas. Galveston was among the hardest hit. City government leaders have urged residents to stay away from the coastal community, saying the city is unsafe as a massive cleanup begins with no power and little clean drinking water.

Three days after the storm hit landfall on Sept. 13, more than 2 million homes remain without electricity in Houston, the nation's fourth-largest city. Damage was also significant in Beaumont, which lies 78 miles east of Houston. Additionally, Ike ripped off roofs of at least a half dozen churches across the conference's more than 700 churches. It also tore off the roof of its east district office, which is housed 120 miles inland in Lufkin. Flooding ranged from six inches to nearly six feet in churches and parsonages.

- By Eleanor L. Colvin, UMNS, Nashville, Tenn.; {#386}; Sep. 16, 2008. Colvin is the director of communications for the Texas Annual Conference.

## (UM) General Board of Church and Society U.S. religious leaders urge moral hurricane response

[Note: In all of this, one cannot help but ask why denominational leaders do not guide the United Methodist Church to take action. These leaders need to understand that the government cannot do everything. Indeed, in natural disasters such as this, the people and local governments need to take primary responsibility to rebuild communities where they live. I speak as one who grew up on the Texas Gulf Coast where we weathered hurricanes every year and had to rebuild after one devastated our hometown. Compare this political posturing to that of the reaction by the Southern Baptist Convention. After reports of the hurricanes' devastations they, activate field kitchens to send to the devastated areas and dispatched work teams to do on site repairs and construction. Our denominational leaders need to take a hard look at their own leadership. – AOM]

U.S. religious leaders are calling for a prompt and just "moral response" from government leaders as Hurricanes Gustav and Ike have heaped more pain and suffering on the shoulders of the people of the Gulf Coast and Cuba. "Three years after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita struck and the levees breached, the slow pace of recovery and the new needs caused by Ike and Gustav's destruction have created a moral crisis along the Gulf Coast that demands a powerful response from people of faith," the Sept. 15 statement said. While noting that the Bush administration promised in 2005 to rebuild the Gulf Coast, the religious leaders say the region is still plagued by the collapse of local institutions, homelessness, internal displacement, poverty, abusive labor practices and environmental degradation. They urged federal officials to cross party lines and enact the Gulf Coast Civic Works Act, which would provide jobs to restore the region, and to make it a priority to help families return and participate in rebuilding their communities, create living wage jobs, restore the coastal wetland and ensure human rights along the Gulf Coast. Among those signing the statement were Jim Winkler, top executive of the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, the church's social action agency, and the Rev. Michael Kinnamon, chief executive of the National Council of Churches.

- Kathy L. Gilbert, UMNS, Nashville, Tenn.; {#387}; Sep. 17, 2008.

### (UM) General Council on Finance and Administration. Pa. treasurer to oversee United Methodist finances

NASHVILLE, Tenn. Moses Kumar, 54, of Jeffersonville, Pa., was elected as the sixth general secretary of the General Council on Finance and Administration on July 8 and replaced Sandra Lackore. He officially begins his tenure on Sept. 1. He will be responsible for overseeing the Nashville-based agency that coordinates and administers finances for the 11.5 million-member worldwide denomination, as well as safeguarding its legal interests and rights.

- By Marta Aldrich, UMNS, Nashville, Tenn. {#285}; July 9, 2008.

## (UM) Judicial Council. Judicial Council sets docket for fall meeting

The United Methodist Church's Judicial Council will include five new faces when it convenes Oct. 22-25 in Minneapolis. The meeting will be the first of the new quadrennium for the denomination's "supreme court." Issues covered on the 13-item docket include the ban on United Methodist clergy from performing same-sex marriage ceremonies, questions relating to who is eligible for membership in the local church, and the creation of a U.S. regional conference, which was part of the debate at the recent General Conference in Fort Worth, Texas.

New members are the Revs. Belton Joyner of the North Carolina Conference, Kathi Austin-Mahle of Minnesota, and Bill Lawrence of North Texas, along with lay members Angela Brown of California-Nevada and Ruben Reyes of the Philippines. The four returning members of the council are the Rev. Susan Henry Crowe, the first woman president of the Judicial Council, the Rev. Dennis Blackwell, and laypersons Jon Gray and Beth Capen. The council has nine members, lay and clergy, who are elected every four years by General Conference, the church's legislative body.

The same-sex marriage item follows a string of actions over the course of the summer. After the state of California approved same-sex ceremonies, a group of retired clergy in the United Methodist California-Nevada Annual (regional) Conference offered to perform such unions in spite of the denomination's disciplinary prohibition on leading same-sex weddings or similar ceremonies celebrating homosexual relationships. In June, the California-Nevada Conference approved a resolution commending those retired clergy, but following a request for a decision of law, Bishop Beverly J. Shamana issued a ruling declaring the statement "void and of no effect." All bishops' decisions of law are automatically reviewed by the Judicial Council. The United Methodist Church, while affirming all people as persons "of sacred worth," considers the practice of homosexuality "incompatible with Christian teaching." Its Book of Discipline prohibits pastors from conducting such union ceremonies, and those denominational standards were again affirmed by the 2008 General Conference.

#### Questions on inclusiveness

The Alaska Missionary Conference is asking whether Paragraphs 214 and 225 in the Book of Discipline are constitutional under Paragraph 4, Article IV, of the church's Constitution. Paragraph 4 states the inclusiveness of the church includes all persons; Paragraph 214 deals with the eligibility of members, saying that "all people may attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments and become members of any local church in the connection." Paragraph 225 deals with transferring into The United Methodist Church from another denomination. In Decision 1032, issued in 2005, the Judicial Council ruled that "Paragraphs 214 and 225 are permissive and do not mandate receipt into membership of all persons regardless of their willingness to affirm membership vows." The pastor-in-charge of a local church has the power to determine "a person's readiness to receive the vows of membership," the council said in Decision 1032.

Another item with far-reaching implications comes directly from the floor of the 2008 General Conference and is related to the creation of a "regional conference" for the church in the United States. During General Conference, delegates passed nearly two dozen amendments to the Constitution of the church that would allow for creation of such a U.S. regional conference. The amendments were proposed to make the denomination's structure more international and would combine the church's five U.S. jurisdictions into a regional body, similar to the church's non-U.S. central conferences. This action would separate business that relates only to the United States away from General Conference. The item before the Judicial Council deals with a specific petition that would change language in Paragraph 10, Article III, of the church's Constitution from "central" conferences to "regional" conferences. Paragraph 602 relates to clergy membership within an annual conference, while the newly passed Paragraph 320.6 would let local pastors who have completed the Course of Study choose whether to be listed as local pastor or laity upon their retirement.

#### Other docket items include:

- A review of a decision of law by Bishop Marcus Matthews of the Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference regarding the mandatory appointment of a clergy member after a trial court decision declaring the clergy member not guilty of the alleged offenses.
- A request from the California-Pacific Conference related to previous Judicial Council Decision 799 on the authority of the board of ordained ministry or its executive committee to overturn a ruling on a question of law by the chairperson of the board. Ruling 799 does mention separation of powers, but primarily states that questions of law presented to a bishop must pertain to the business being conducted by the annual conference.
- A request from California-Pacific Annual Conference for a ruling on Paragraph 327.6 of the Book of Discipline, which deals with requests of discontinuance from probationary membership.
- A request from the West Ohio Conference for a decision regarding Paragraph 405.2c, adopted by the 2008 General Conference, concerning the relationship between the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy and General Conference. The paragraph deals with the formula for determining the number of bishops in a jurisdiction.
- A review of decisions by Bishop Edward Paup of the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference regarding the consultation process in the appointment of pastors.
- A request from the Western North Carolina Annual Conference to rule on whether or not Paragraph 1117.9 of the Book of Discipline as amended by the 2008 General Conference contravenes Restrictive Rule 1 of The United Methodist Church regarding Article XVIII of the Articles of Religion. Paragraph 1117.9 deals with training laity to take communion elements to sick and homebound with a language change from "following a service of Word and Table" to "as approved by the pastor."
- A review of a decision of law by Bishop John Schol of the Baltimore-Washington Conference on the right of the annual conference to amend the nominations to the board of ordained ministry.
- A review of determination by Bishop John Hopkins of the East Ohio Conference that a motion to refer a matter to the Judicial Council was not a request for a decision of law.

The deadline for submitting briefs to the Judicial Council was Aug. 22. Thirteen copies of each brief should be submitted, signed by the person submitting the brief. Rev. Joyner is the secretary of the Judicial Council. For information, e-mail judicialcouncil@umc.org.

– By Neill Caldwell, UMNS, New York.; {#317}; Jul. 25, 2008.Caldwell is editor of the Virginia UM Advocate and covers the Judicial Council for UMNS.

Experience is the name everyone gives to his mistakes. – Oscar Wilde

## **Global Outlook**

There is no education like adversity. – Benjamin Disraeli

#### Africa. African bishops issue renewed call against poverty

Describing poverty as a "scourge to human dignity" that "robs people of hope," UM bishops in Africa have issued a church-wide call for renewed ministry to bring hope and greater prosperity to poor people on their continent. Meeting for their second time, the 13 bishops that make up the church's African College of Bishops outlined new actions to combat poverty in a Sept. 11 letter sent from the campus of United Methodist-related Africa University in Mutare, Zimbabwe. The bishops expressed "righteous indignation at the current plight of our continent" and resolved to work with professional, community and nongovernmental organizations to alleviate poverty in Africa. "Poverty robs people of hope, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a call to hope, salvation and abundant life," they wrote. "In Africa, we see poverty manifesting itself in environmental degradation, disease, hunger and malnutrition, inequitable access to education and even the exposure of some of the most vulnerable among us-the girl child, for example-to sexual and economic exploitation." While appreciative of the Holy Spirit for bringing peace and stability to areas of conflict in Africa, they expressed concern for those displaced and still suffering as a result of the violence. They called upon churches in Africa and across the world to "continue to advocate for tolerance and understanding of differing views, cultures, ethnic and religious affiliations as well as for the equitable sharing and use of God's gifts for the common good." [Note: This is veiled reference offering a socialist solution. Economic empowerment based on a free market system is the answer.]

"It is our belief that Africa has all that it needs to build a future with peace, greater prosperity and hope," they wrote in their letter. The African bishops' letter also addressed climate change, youth migration and corruption, resolving to:

- Engage the membership of The United Methodist Church in Africa and the wider community, including youth, in practical efforts to renew God's creation and in dialogue on the use and protection of non-renewal resources;
- Work to instill a love for one's country and continent among African youth and young people and continue to educate, encourage and provide them opportunities to become more involved in community-building, leadership and development while ensuring an environment in which their gifts and energies can be fully used;
- Begin a process of self-examination, engaging clergy and laity to look at church structures and practices, establish definitions of what constitutes corruption and work to eliminate corrupt practices at all levels.

[Note: This last action – with a view toward eliminating wasteful and unnecessary expenses – is one that would benefit the UMC in the United States as well.] – By Linda Green, UMNS, Nashville, Tenn.; {#382}; Sep. 15, 2008.

We have forty million reasons for failure but not a single excuse. – Rudyard Kipling