

Daily Christian Advocate

THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Emotions Run High

The joyful beat of a bishops' band—at the striking Rock-and-Roll Hall of Fame and Museum—marked the beginning of General Conference 2000. By adjournment, however, tears had flowed and pain had been felt among the 992 delegates attending the church's top law-making assembly.

During the opening celebration, banners brightened the ornate plenary hall of the Cleveland Convention Center. On the next-to-the-last day, police were called to escort protesting United Methodists from the hall.

Preparing for the new century meant processing more than 2,000 petitions and getting more than 1,400 legislative calendar items ready for plenary action. More than 1,200 individuals and groups filed requests for changes in *The Book of Discipline*.

This conference had a different look as the church has become more global. More than 150 delegates came from Central Conferences. During the first week it became clear the increased number of Central Conference



—UMNS Photo by John Goodwin

delegates called for special considerations. For instance, there were not enough interpreters for legislative committee sessions to enable everyone to participate in the discussions. Additional interpreters were located with the help of the General Board of Global Ministries.

From these legislative committees came hundreds of changes proposed for inclusion in the *Discipline*. A major surprise in the voting came early when delegates indicated their doubts about the biggest single proposal for change, the report of the Connectional Process Team.

That study, ordered by the 1996 General Conference, proposed major changes in the way the church is organized in the United States and in areas where Central Conferences are located.

Proposals turned aside included creating a global governing body of the church, of which the U.S. church would be a sub-unit; doing away with the General Council on Ministries (GCOM); and creating "covenant councils" at all levels to guide church mission and life. When voting was concluded, GCOM remained, and a series of broad "transformational directions" had been referred to the agency.

A major special event was an evening devoted to repentance for the sin of racism within the denomination.



—UMNS Photo by Paul Jeffery

Wearing symbolic sackcloth patches and ashes, delegates sought to recapture the spirit of Methodism lost when some African Americans in the 18th and 19th centuries felt compelled to leave the church's predecessor bodies and form their own congregations.

Later, a constitutional amendment, pledging work toward elimination of racism in church organizations and policies, was proposed. The amendment now goes to annual conferences for ratification.

Opportunities for celebration abounded. Delegates remembered the 200-year history of the Evangelical United Brethren Church and its predecessor bodies. That church united with the Methodist Church in 1968 to form today's denomination.

A few days later the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev. and Right Honorable George Carey participated in the conference's ecumenical observance. The visit marked the first time the head of the worldwide Anglican movement had come to a General Conference to visit the spiritual descendants of John Wesley, an Anglican all his life.

During a festive Sunday night at the famed Severance Hall, home of the Cleveland Orchestra, delegates heard music presented by the five United Methodist-related colleges and universities in Ohio.

Music director Cynthia Wilson kept spirits high during the long days and nights of legislative action.

Other examples of Methodism growing as a global entity came when Bishop Emerito P. Nacpil of the Philippines gave the traditional "state of the church" Episcopal Address, the first bishop from outside the United States to do so. Later, Rodolfo Beltran of the Philippines became the first person from outside the United States to be elected to the Judicial Council.



—UMNS Photo by Mike DuBose

Tears came when the issue of homosexuality reached the floor. All of the church's current stances were maintained—including the assertion that the practice of homosexuality is "incompatible with Christian teaching" and the prohibition on ordination or appointment of pastors who are self-avowed practicing homosexuals.

Some delegates and visitors had formed a core of protest in the plenary hall during the morning. After debate resumed in the afternoon, Louisiana Area Bishop Dan E. Solomon, the presiding officer, said an agreement had been reached whereby protestors could stand quietly in the aisles or kneel near the worship area.

By midafternoon it appeared the agreement was coming unraveled when the demonstrators moved onto the platform. After they declined to leave, Cleveland police arrested 29 individuals, including Albany Area Bishop Susan M. Morrison and Chicago Area Bishop C. Joseph Sprague, on charges of disrupting a meeting.

It is believed to be the first time police have been called to a General Conference plenary hall to remove protestors. The 29 persons paid fines and court costs totaling \$160 each after pleading no contest.

In the final moments of General Conference 2000, delegates prepared to adjourn and move into closing worship. It was 11:55 p.m. and delegates were ready to depart for home after two weeks of Christian conferencing in Cleveland.

—Robert Lear



—UMNS Photo by Mike DuBose

Multicultural Worship Experiences Enhance Conference

Few services rival The United Methodist Church's General Conference opening worship for its pomp and pageantry. The procession ushered in the theme of the conference: "We Who Are Many . . . Are One Body." Liturgy is the work of the people. Each day's work began with worship that featured music, bishops preaching, and a time for prayer and discernment led by the Rev. Stephen D. Bryant.

The Rev. Cynthia Wilson, minister of music and worship at Atlanta's Ben Hill United Methodist Church, was the conference's music director. The worship committee, chaired by Fort Worth Area Bishop Joe Allen Wilson, brought church musicians from around the globe to participate in morning worship and to give noon concerts in the food court. These included:

- a mass youth choir;
- Africa University and Bethune-Cookman College choirs;
- Methodist Choir of Copenhagen;
- Tongan United Methodist Church, Mesa, Ariz., choir;
- a mass liturgical dance choir;
- Custer Road United Methodist Church Jazz Band;
- a mass deaf choir;
- Agape United Methodist Church, Parnu, Estonia, children's handbell choir; and
- Korean Community United Methodist Church choir.

In addition, pianist Johnetta Johnson Page, Ben Hill Church, Atlanta, and organists John Guliano, Trinity United Methodist Church, Butler Ohio, and Monya Logan, St. Luke Community United Methodist Church, Dallas, accompanied worship services.



—UMNS Photo by Mike DuBose

Bishops and elders from across the church served as celebrants at multicultural communion services held weekdays outside the convention center.

May 4 brought a unique service in the history of the church. The General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns and the Council of Bishops sponsored "An Act of Repentance for Reconciliation." The service incorporated the artwork of African-American artist and professor Barbara Hardaway, Silver Springs, Md. She created a collage entitled, "The Door of No Return." Africans who passed through this door to slavery in the Americas never returned to their homeland.

On the last day of the conference, Denver Area Bishop Mary Ann Swenson preached using the metaphor of a sword to cut to "the core of our purpose." Her exegesis of Matthew 10:34-39 "cut through all of the stuff that keeps us from doing what we are supposed to do as the church." She noted that the sword could draw a line between the past and the future, and cut an opening in the brush, making way for something new. The sword might well be a fitting symbol of this conference. Bishop Swenson noted its multiple uses. Some were painfully obvious in the past 10 days as words and actions wounded many persons. Although the General Conference began with "pomp and pageantry," it grew more somber as it drew to a close. Many acknowledged that The United Methodist Church's fragments are often held together by Christ alone. "We who are many are one body"—Christ's alone.

—Patty Meyers

Daily Christian Advocate

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Final Votes on Homosexuality Reveal a Church in Pain



Bishop Solomon presides as protestors, including two bishops, disrupt the proceedings.

—UMNS Photo by Paul Jeffrey

Despite dramatic protests, The United Methodist Church policy on homosexual practice remains the same. However, delegates did agree to add a sentence to the Social Principles imploring “families and churches not to reject or condemn their lesbian and gay members and friends.”

Votes during the plenary were punctuated by demonstrations and subsequent arrests of 29 protesters. The arrests—including Albany Area Bishop Susan M. Morrison and Chicago Area Bishop C. Joseph Sprague—followed the final major vote on petitions related to homosexuality. The demonstrators had filled the space in front of the platform, sitting or kneeling in cross formation, after the first vote to maintain the current language in the Social Principles. The Social Principles state that homosexuality is considered “incompatible with Christian teaching.” As the demonstrators took their places, a woman climbed onto the balcony ledge, appealing for understanding and compassion. Witnesses differ about whether she appeared intent on jumping or simply wished to protest.

The protestors sought a four-year moratorium on all “negative language” relating to homosexuality. When that motion was defeated, the demonstrators stood in front of the stage. After a vote to continue prohibition of holy unions,

demonstrators approached the platform and sang “We Shall Overcome.” Louisiana Area Bishop Dan E. Solomon asked the demonstrators to leave. After a second request to leave, AMAR spokesperson Randy Miller refused. Cleveland police immediately escorted the demonstrators from the stage. They were released on bond late May 11 and arraigned May 12. Each paid a fine.

The Faith and Order Legislative Committee, composed of 115 delegates, handled all petitions dealing with homosexuality in the Social Principles. Officers included the Rev. Robert E. Hayes, Texas Conference, chair; the Rev. Scott J. Jones, North Texas, vice chair; and the Rev. Mary-Elizabeth M. Moore, California-Pacific,

secretary.

The committee dispensed with parliamentary procedure and spent six hours spread out over two days attempting to discern God’s will. Four petitions that represented four “clusters of thought” on homosexuality were discussed. Thirty-seven delegates spoke.

“If we reverse our longstanding position on homosexuality,” said Tom M. Junk, Oklahoma Conference, “the fallout of members and money lost will be disastrous.”



“MARCHING IN THE LIGHT OF GOD”—Protesters march around the outside of the Cleveland Convention Center while singing hymns following a vote by The United Methodist Church’s 2000 General Conference to maintain the denomination’s anti-homosexual policies. —UMNS photo by Mike DuBose

"My common sense tells me we're not all at the same point on this," commented the Rev. Jane A. Tews, Desert Southwest Conference. "Scripture tells us Christ loves all people. Christ said nothing about homosexuality. His business was to love and accept all people."

The Rev. Josephat Banda, Zimbabwe Conference, added: "All people are created in the image of God. We are a church, and a church has some principles that need to be upheld. When we uphold them, it doesn't mean we hate each other. We are upholding heterosexual marriage, but not hating homosexuals. Only God condemns. We need to uphold the current language."

"I have a sneaky feeling we're not going to change each other's mind here today," said Mark A. Miller, Northern New Jersey Conference. "But if we don't learn how to love one another, we might as well just close the doors of the church now."

When the committee finished hearing from those who wished to speak, they took 90 minutes in parliamentary puzzlement deciding a starting petition for debate. They finally decided on petition number 30083, urging the church to retain the current language. This passed 59-43-1, or 57 percent.

From there, Faith and Order moved quickly to take up petitions on the issues of homosexual "holy unions," and on the prohibitions on ordaining "self-avowed, practicing homosexuals." Both petitions were voted concurrence, with about 60 percent voting in favor.

The General Conference delegates have turned back every effort to change or moderate the church's position on homosexual practice. The United Methodist Church's policies continue as follows:

- Homosexuals are persons of sacred worth.
- Homosexuals are entitled to "basic human rights and civil liberties."
- "Although we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching, we affirm that God's grace is available to all. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons." (*The Book of Discipline* 1996, Par. 65)
- Pastors may not conduct same-sex unions or allow them to take place in United Methodist churches.
- "Self-avowed practicing homosexuals" may not be ordained or appointed.

A minority report, presented by the Rev. J. Philip Wogaman, Baltimore-Washington Conference, called for the church to "acknowledge with humility that the church has been unable to arrive at a common mind on the compatibility of homosexual practice with Christian faith. Many consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. Others believe it acceptable when practiced in a context of human covenantal faithfulness. The church seeks further understanding through continued prayer, study, and pastoral experience. In doing so, the church continues to affirm that God's grace is bestowed on all and that the members of Christ's body are

called to be in ministry for and with one another and to the world."

Other attempts to make language on holy unions more permissive or to modify the Social Principles to indicate "most" or "many" believe homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching were defeated.

Delegates agreed to ask the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns to continue dialogues on homosexuality.

Consequences of the Vote

Following the votes, four members of the Faith and Order Legislative Committee spoke with church and secular media at a press conference. Responding to questions about expectations for the future, the Rev. Maxie D. Dunnam, Kentucky delegate and president of Asbury Theological Seminary, predicted some pastors will challenge church law on holy unions and "there will be trials."

The Rev. Linda Campbell-Marshall, New England delegate, and Wogaman expressed pastoral concerns for people at home. "The body is lacerated," Campbell-Mar-



WATCHING THE VOTE—Standing in civil disobedience to disrupt The General Conference during a vote to maintain anti-homosexual policies are, from left: Randy Miller, Susan Laurie, Greg Dell and other protesters.

—UMNS Photo by Paul Jeffrey

shall said, “and will be in profound need of pastoral care. . . . One-third of our people are bleeding today, and that won’t stop just because legislation is resolved. There are people who don’t feel at home in our church.” She also expressed concern for pastors “whose pastoral integrity may be called into question.” Campbell-Marshall is a district superintendent in Maine. Wogaman is pastor of Foundry United Methodist Church, Washington, D.C.

The Rev. Kathryn Johnson, staff executive of the Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA), said AMAR—a coalition of MFSA, Affirmation, Reconciling Congregation Program and United Methodists of Color for a Fully Inclusive Church—has “no regrets” about their participation in the dialogue on homosexuality before and during General Conference. “We have done everything to raise awareness and reach out to people. The decisions by the church were particularly devastating.”

Johnson expressed appreciation for the diverse groups who worked together to make common witness before and during General Conference. She said AMAR has not yet developed future plans.

Protests to Continue

Soulsource, an ecumenical group seeking inclusion for gays and lesbians, and the group behind protests inside and outside the convention center, is “promising” in a press statement several activities over the next four years. Called “Relight the Flame,” the five promises begin May 14, 2000, and continue until General Conference 2004 in Pittsburgh.

The promises threaten a “massive civil disobedience” on the opening day of General Conference 2004 with:

- “1,000 people of faith [being] arrested”;
- United Methodist congregations across the nation “whose clergy or laity have been especially

outspoken in support of these discriminatory policies” will be the sites of civil disobedience;

- organizing on the Internet to recruit people to “stand vigil on Sunday mornings in front of United Methodist congregations” that support “discriminatory policies”;
- asking people to redirect their giving to “congregations who support full inclusion for sexual minorities”; and
- asking staff “at congregations that support these discriminatory policies to offer their services to United Methodist congregations that support full inclusion.”

Good News, an evangelical caucus within The United Methodist Church, said, “The United Methodist position on homosexuality is both compassionate and redemptive. It is a balanced and nuanced position that affirms the ‘sacred worth’ of all persons even while acknowledging that as Christians we cannot affirm every expression of human sexuality. After all, there are certain sexual practices that contradict biblical standards, and as faithful disciples we must be willing to declare them to be incompatible with Christian teaching. United Methodism must continue to endeavor to do that with mercy and grace extended to all of God’s children.”

The Rev. Thom White Wolf Fassett, general secretary, General Board of Church and Society, issued a statement May 12, saying, “Underlying all other positions of the Church is the Constitutional Principle of Inclusiveness of the Church,” stated in the *Discipline*. This principle states, “The United Methodist Church is a part of the church universal, which is one Body in Christ. Therefore all persons shall be eligible to attend its worship service, to participate in its programs, and when they take the appropriate vows, to be admitted into its membership in any local church in the connection.” Fassett also highlighted paragraph 66H of the *Discipline*, which proclaims the church’s position of “Equal Rights Regardless of Sexual Orientation.”

—Ann Whiting and Erik Alsgaard



IN SOLIDARITY—United Methodist bishops stand in solidarity with people protesting the church’s anti-homosexual policies during the denomination’s 2000 General Conference.
—UMNS Photo by John C. Goodwin

Episcopal Address Urges United Methodists: 'Make Disciples of All Nations!'



—UMNS Photo by
Mike DuBose

Confess the truth of the Resurrection and live by it so others hear, see, believe, and are transformed. Prepare to make disciples of all nations!

That was the challenge issued by the bishops of The United Methodist Church in the traditional episcopal address delivered the opening day of General Conference by Manila Area Bishop Emerito P. Nacpil of the Philippines.

Bishop Nacpil, in an address noted more for its scholarly tone than its ringing challenge to the church, declared, "The direction in which to move is clear. It is to abandon the ways of the old order and follow the new way of discipleship."

The bishops also exhorted the church to affirm the need for more "inclusive fellowship—sexually, racially, culturally, and globally."

"In the epochal change we are going through today, are we any more certain than those early Christians were

in deciding insightfully what is an appropriate lifestyle in the new creation?" Bishop Nacpil asked.

The bishops called on the church to join them in bearing the cross of discipleship even though it might entail suffering. Why go through suffering, they asked? "This is quite simply the way of discipleship, and it cannot be avoided if one is to participate in the apostolic mission of the crucified and risen Christ!"

Bishop Nacpil described discipleship as "the only alternative lifestyle in the world that has a future in the kingdom of God," and named three essential factors:

- renouncing sin and evil;
- dealing with the world but not taking it as an ultimate concern; and
- "claiming all things in Christ for God."

"Your bishops believe that the making of people as disciples of the crucified and risen Lord, and forming them into a community of discipleship is the most radically significant event that can happen to humanity and the world... Let us get on with it!"

—Cathy Farmer

Laity Address Focuses on Partnership



—UMNS Photo by
Mike DuBose

Partnership is necessary for making disciples of Jesus Christ.

With that as his theme, West Ohio Conference lay leader Jim Nibbelink delivered the laity address to the 2000 General Conference.

Relating the story of a 3-year-old boy attending worship for the first time, Nibbelink painted a picture of a mother frustrated by her son's boisterousness and eagerness to see everything. Like the boy, Nibbelink noted, many congregations and pas-

tors are "sitting down on the outside, but standing up on the inside."

Many lay people want to be active in ministry, while many clergy want to be more innovative in minis-

try, Nibbelink said. Unfortunately, both are constrained by the same issues, including tradition. Specifically, traditional roles for clergy and laity restrict effective ministry.

"It's imperative that teams of lay and clergy work together to make disciples of Jesus Christ," he continued. A cooperative spirit must be established before a partnership can be effective. "Partnership frees pastors and laity to do what they do best."

Characteristics of successful partnership, the lay leader added, include respect, responsibility, and risk. "Making disciples takes hard work," he said. "Even God cannot steer a parked car."

Nibbelink was selected to deliver the laity address through a quadrennial competition by the National Association of Annual Conference Lay Leaders (NAACLL). He has served as secretary of the association and as president of the North Central Jurisdiction Conference Lay Leaders' Team.

—Davie Burgdorf

Ethnic Participation Increases at 2000 General Conference

The recruitment of younger delegates led to an increase in ethnic participation at the 2000 General Conference, observers said.

The Interethnic Strategy Development Group (IESDG), an organization comprising the five ethnic groups in The United Methodist Church, agreed this General Conference witnessed higher involvement of ethnic minorities in clergy and lay participation than at previous conferences.

The five groups that make up IESDG are Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR), Metodistas Asociados Representando la Causa de Hispano-Americanos (MARCHA), National Federation of Asian American United Methodists (NFAAUM), Native American International Caucus (NAIC), and Pacific Islander National Caucus United Methodists.

In addition to the overall increase of ethnics, for the first time there was a larger number of younger generations or baby boomers, said Mark Nakagawa, director of NFAAUM.

"This is a tribute to the work of the five leaders of our ethnic minority caucuses who worked with their respective constituencies to encourage and develop leadership for this General Conference," he said.

Leadership Roles

In all areas of the conference, especially in legislative committee meetings, people from racial and ethnic minorities took leadership roles. At least 15 percent were subcommittee chairs, and 18 chaired legislative and General Conference committees.

"Ethnic participation at this General Conference increased, and I am heartened by what [appeared] to be a younger delegate," said Washington Area Bishop Felton Edwin May, one of 10 active African-American bishops in The United Methodist Church.

While overall participation increased, a Native American woman said her constituency was not as actively engaged as other ethnic bodies. She applauded the fact that a Native American man chaired a legislative committee and presented issues to the entire assembly.

"We've never had visibility up front in a leadership role," said Anne Marshall, an executive with the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns. "This was a huge step for us in having that type of role, and the fact that there was someone in leadership [who] was Native American is a step forward. But, since there has been only one, this shows we really are invisible."

Thirteen Native Americans from across the country were among the 992 delegates of the United Methodist General Conference addressing legislation affecting and supporting the Native American community, ministries and programs. In addition, an inter-tribal team observed the conference.

Manila Area Bishop Emerito P. Nacpil of the Philippines agreed the ethnic presence at General Conference showed an increase. While ethnic people did not often take the plenary floor to speak, their contributions occurred in legislative committees.

Central Conference

Although many Central Conference delegates spoke against changing the denomination's proscriptions against homosexuality, Bishop Nacpil noted many did not participate in floor discussion because most of the matters were issues related to the United States. "Most from outside the United States will find it intimidating to talk about U.S. matters," he said.

Bishop Nacpil played an important role at this General Conference. He was the first United Methodist bishop living outside the United States to deliver the traditional Episcopal Address to the assembly.

African Americans were the largest ethnic group to have leadership roles at the conference. Twelve African Americans and one African chaired legislative or General Conference committees.

The Rev. Tyrone D. Gordon, a Kansas West delegate and immediate past chairman of BMCR, said annual conference delegations included more African Americans. He said the increase was the result of the conservative movement in some conferences. "African Americans tend to be more conservative theologically, and that may be the attraction of the evangelical push in the delegations for African Americans."

Involvement in annual conference activities and exercising leadership were behind Korean-American participation, said the Rev. Se Hee Han, California-Pacific Conference. She said there were more Korean-American delegates at this conference than ever before. This was especially true for the involvement of Korean-American women, she said. The 15-person delegation had four clergywomen.

"Our increase [was] also because we are more visible [in our annual conferences] and contribute gifts and graces as clergy and laity," Han said.

The Hispanic constituency was active, said Orlando Rivera, MARCHA president. Two members were elected to general church positions. One was elected to serve on the University Senate, the other as a Judicial Council member.

The General Conference, in a resolution, offered a formal apology to delegates who were denied adequate material and services. Delegates also voted to ensure that 30 days before the 2004 General Conference, the necessary materials to do conference business would be translated in a variety of languages. Those languages include French, German, Korean, Portuguese, Spanish, and Swahili.

—Linda Green

News Coverage Proves Challenging But Efficient

Reporting about events at General Conference 2000 provided some unique challenges, but information was often available faster than ever.

"The number one question we've been asked is when a particular piece of legislation will be discussed," said Tom McAnally, United Methodist News Service (UMNS) director. "Reporters find it incredulous that we can't tell them, 'homosexuality will be discussed at 2 p.m. Thursday.'"

However, McAnally said, once reporters realized the UMNS staff wasn't trying to be difficult, secular media representatives understood. When a vote on a petition was taken, the results were usually available worldwide within one or two hours through the Internet. Web sites of the general church, the General Conference and UMNS offered news about conference events. Some even offered photos and videos.

McAnally said the unique architecture of the Cleveland Convention Center made news coverage difficult. For example, the newsroom was located in Hall C in the northwest corner of the facility. However, the observation area for working press was located in the southeast area of the arena.

Despite those problems, McAnally said secular media interest was strong, especially May 10 and 11 when issues related to homosexuality and the church were debated. "We've probably had more secular media here than in a number of conferences," McAnally said. "Not only did the number increase, but also the quality. There were some top-notch journalists here."

Photographers

Three of those were award-winning UMNS photographers Mike DuBose, John Goodwin, and Paul Jeffrey. They were charged with finding interesting visual images and making them available quickly on the Internet. That meant getting film processed as fast as possible.

"We used a lab about a block away, and they've been slower than we would like," Jeffrey said. "We were shooting some digital images, which was faster, but the quality was not as good."

Jeffrey said the biggest problem photographers faced was making long legislative committee meetings and plenary sessions appear interesting. "Meetings are atrocious for photography," he said. "As photographs, people protesting are much more interesting."

Jeffrey noted that doesn't mean all pictures from plenary sessions are dull. Worship services tend to be more visual, and Jeffrey said he tried to keep an eye for unique situations. "I looked for images that reflected the diversity of who we are as a church," he said. "If people are holding

hands and singing, a black person and a white person holding hands is much more interesting than two white people."

Internet Access

Many United Methodists tracked General Conference events themselves on the Internet. UMNS provided updates following significant votes or events, and posted daily summaries. In addition, UMNS offered e-mail subscriptions to that information. Some 6,000 people received free subscriptions to the daily summaries, and another 6,000 received individual stories. The number would have been higher, but some subscriptions were lost when servers crashed as a result of the "I Love You" virus.

UMNS also coordinated news coverage in Korean and Spanish languages.

Another group had to overcome technical problems. *The United Methodist Reporter (UMR)*, an independent weekly newspaper based in Dallas, basically moved its newsroom to Cleveland for the conference. Editor Cynthia Astle said the biggest problem her 12-person General Conference staff encountered was installation of a high-speed Internet line. A misunderstanding over who would install the line prevented its availability. Some work the staff intended to do at the convention center was moved to hotels.

"Chris Smith and Eric West (of United Methodist Communications) were wonderful in trying to help us solve the problem," Astle said. "Jennifer Proudfoot of Epworth Euclid United Methodist Church here in Cleveland tried to help us in negotiations, but the problem was unsolvable."

UMR published two editions from Cleveland, posted daily updates on its Web site and posted Web casts including video and audio. *UMR* received coverage help during the first week from researchers commissioned by the General Council on Ministries. They provided reports on committee sessions they observed.

Considering news gathering, Astle said she thought the events of May 11 caught most at General Conference by surprise. "I guess we had not appreciated the determination of the AMAR coalition in bringing to the church their sense of pain and exclusion." AMAR, a coalition of four groups seeking more rights within the church for gay, bisexual, lesbian and transgendered people, sponsored a protest that resulted in 30 people being arrested on the convention floor.

"It was a very sad day for the church in that we had to have sisters and brothers in faith including two bishops, removed by law enforcement," Astle said. "We had not appreciated their willingness to disrupt the conference."

—Woody Woodrick

'It's High Time to Say We're Sorry,' Bishop Declares at Repentance Service



CELEBRATION—Participants in a service of repentance for racism at The United Methodist Church's 2000 General Conference in Cleveland celebrate during worship. In the service that included the symbolic wearing of sackcloth and ashes, the church confessed to the sin of racism within the denomination. Standing from left are: Bishop Roy Sano, Rhymes Moncure and Byrd Bonner of the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, Bishop Charlene Kammerer and William McClain, professor at Wesley Theological Seminary. Seated is Bishop James Thomas. —UMNS Photo by Mike DuBose.

Three biblical symbols of repentance and accountability marked "An Evening of Repentance for the Sin of Racism." During worship, a giant plumb line was lowered from the Cleveland Convention Center ceiling, glittering in the lights and rotating slowly.

Ruth A. Daugherty, Eastern Pennsylvania delegate who helped plan the service, described the plumb line as a light rope and weight that shows whether "a line is vertical and, therefore, stable and true. Amos had a vision of God holding a plumb line with which to test the people's capacity for true righteousness. The plumb line hangs in the midst of this assembly as a constant reminder that we must pass God's test for righteousness."

Daugherty also introduced the symbol of salt as "a sign that the parties to an agreement intended to preserve their covenant vows." She continued, "God alone knows how fast the church began to break apart [over racism]. The walls have not been plumb with justice. The salt with which we sealed the covenant has been [made] tasteless by our careless handling and willful disregard of others."

Following her statement, members of the Edna Duffy Liturgical Dance Company, Shaker Heights, Ohio, danced around the blocks and then smashed the blocks of salt, signifying the breaking of the covenant of inclusiveness.

Elements of the third symbol, sackcloth and ashes, were offered to delegates and visitors as signs of repentance. Bishops stationed around the convention center rubbed ashes on wrists and offered strips of rough cloth to be worn on the clothing for the rest of General Conference.

Representatives of three traditionally African-American Methodist denominations were introduced:

- Bishop McKinley Young, African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME);
- Bishop Clarence Car, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ); and
- Bishop Nathaniel Lindsey and Juanita Young, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME).

Recalling the history of American Methodism, Bishop Lindsey said, "We appreciate . . . this symbolic act



"RICHARD ALLEN"—Anthony Alexander, a delegate from the Central Pennsylvania Conference, portrays Richard Allen, founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church during a service of repentance for racism at The United Methodist Church's 2000 General Conference in Cleveland. —UMNS Photo by John C. Goodwin.

of repentance and forgiveness. As we know, a symbol participates in the reality . . . it symbolizes. I see this ritual tonight as an act of supreme importance. . . . We forgive you. By our entering into this ritual of forgiveness and repentance, we will be waiting to see what will happen. And as we wait, we will be working with you. . . . We want to begin anew, to the glory of God."

The history of racism and separation in the Methodist tradition in America was presented by Anthony Alexander, portraying African Methodist Episcopal Church founder Richard Allen; Dr.

William McClain; and Indiana Area Bishop Woodie W. White.

Historical Background

In the early 19th century, three African-American Methodist denominations were formed as African-American Methodist clergy and laity felt increasingly excluded from the majority church. McClain said, "The corporate sin of racism divided the early Methodist family. . . . A church that preached prevenient, justifying, sanctifying grace, and talked the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ could not find in its heart the will and a way to practice what it preached and taught."

In its history, American Methodism split over slavery in an 1844 schism and came together (along with the Methodist Protestant Church) in 1939, but with a non-geographical Central Jurisdiction including all African-American churches and clergy. The Central Jurisdiction was eliminated with the 1968 union between the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church.

"There is more than a kernel of truth in the adage, 'The more things change, the more

things remain the same.'" Bishop White went on to suggest the consequences White clergy and laity might suffer if they were suddenly persons of color, including loss of appointments and leadership positions.

The worship bulletin described the experience as not a "comfortable service of worship." McCallister Hollins, newly elected vice chair of Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR), said, "It is my prayer you will be sensitive to the pain of those of us who are African Americans and United Methodists. For as the service was formed, we believe that there should have been more sensitivity, but we find ourselves at this place. Some of us were planning to walk out tonight. But I plan to stay. I hope others will do the same, as we have that responsibility to God and to one another as members of this great church. . . . May this service truly be more than just a litany and a worship service, but a means of us beginning to . . . implement ways to become the true family of God."

The service was sponsored by the United Methodist General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns and the Council of Bishops. A study is available to explore the historical roots of racism and division in the church and to prepare other United Methodists for acts of repentance.

Bishop William Boyd Grove, retired ecumenical officer for the Council of Bishops, compared lingering racism in the church to "a malignancy in the bone marrow of the church" and called for an apology. "It's high time to say we're sorry, and only the conference can do it."

Also participating was the Ohio Area Ecumenical Choir, composed of members of AME, AMEZ and CME churches and directed by Tillie Colter.



REPENTANCE SERVICE—Mississippi Conference delegates (from left): Joe W. May, Larry M. Goodpaster and Dora S. Washington sing the closing hymn together during a service of repentance for racism within The United Methodist Church during the denomination's 2000 General Conference in Cleveland. —UMNS Photo by Mike DuBose.

— Ann Whiting

Delegates Gut Restructure Proposal, But Keep Guiding Principles

A massive plan to restructure the United Methodist hierarchy was whittled down to a few paragraphs by delegates of the 2000 General Conference.

By a vote of 784 to 144, top decision-makers of The United Methodist Church rebuffed the 53-page report and recommendations of the Connectional Process Team (CPT), and basically agreed to maintain the denomination's current structure.

The four-year study group had proposed:

- creating a global governing body of the church, of which the U.S. church would be a sub-unit;
- doing away with the General Council on Ministries (GCOM); and
- creating "covenant councils" at all levels of the church to guide the denomination's mission and life.

Instead, General Conference delegates affirmed only the broad "transformational directions" the study team had recommended, and referred those to the GCOM, the program coordinating body for churchwide work. The transformational directions ask the church at all levels to:

- center on Christian formation;
- call forth covenant leadership;
- empower the connection for ministry;
- strengthen global and ecumenical dialogue and relationships; and
- encourage dialogue around church doctrine and theological understanding.

In a separate action, delegates agreed to set up a churchwide body to do planning and research and to evaluate the emerging needs of the church. The new entity would also do specific research for the Central Conferences (regional units outside the United States). The action provides for a gathering of researchers and church leaders whose work would inform the actions of future General Conferences. The original CPT report had also recommended research and ongoing study of congregational and churchwide needs.

These General Conference actions are the culmination of a four-year process during which the CPT met with church leaders and grass-roots members, considered the denomination's heritage and mission, and studied the challenges facing the church in an increasingly global context. More than 1.2 million United Methodists live in the

Central Conferences in Europe, Africa and Asia. U.S. membership stands at about 8.4 million.

The 38-member CPT cost the church \$660,000 during its four years of work.

Concerns about CPT

The team's proposals sought to make United Methodists outside the United States more equal players in church leadership by creating a Global Conference to replace the General Conference, the top legislative body. The U.S. church would have become a geographic central conference under the CPT plan.

But the proposal was met with resistance from church leaders in the months leading up to the May 2-12 legislative session. By the time the proposal went to legislative committee, many church watchers agreed it was dead on arrival.

In recommending the severely slimmed down "Living into the Future" petition, including the transformational directions, North Georgia delegate Tom Jackson said he objected to the "top-down, radical changes" and "imposition of structure" in the original CPT report. Still, he affirmed the general directions that had guided the team's work.

North Texas delegate Mary Brooke Casad tried to resurrect a centerpiece of the team's work with an amendment to replace the GCOM and create a "transformational leadership team," which would bring new recommendations on structure to the 2004 General Conference.

Another member of her delegation, the Rev. Scott J. Jones, agreed. "I yearn for a church that is more effective and more global than it is now," he said. "Do we trust an agency that has been around for 28 years and which has an investment in the status quo to lead us to renewal?" (The current church structure and its agencies—including the GCOM—were created in 1972.)

In the end, however, delegates seemed to agree with the Rev. David L. Severe, a district superintendent from Oklahoma. "The General Council on Ministries is the only agency with representatives from every annual conference," Severe said. "We need the centrality of that kind of grass-roots representation to guide our future mission."

Illinois Area Bishop Sharon Brown Christopher chaired the CPT.

—M. Garlinda Burton

Social Principles Resolutions Call for Environmental, Social and Global Justice

Unified on the first day of deliberations by their fight for justice on behalf of Central Conference delegates denied translators in the committees to which they had been assigned vote, the Legislative Committee on Church and Society divided over only three resolutions of the 149 assigned them. Nearly every recommendation of the committee was affirmed by the plenary.

The delegates did accept a minority report amending the preface of the Social Principles making it clear the document is a "call to faithfulness" and "not church law." This action came after language concerning holy unions was moved out of the Social Principles to the ministry sections of the *Discipline*.

In many instances, the legislative committee amended resolutions to convert U.S.-based legislation to a global focus. One of the most noteworthy examples was Resolution 30587, calling for capital punishment to be abolished in the United States and amended by the committee to call for its abolition in all nations of the world. Similarly, the already-sweeping anti-gun legislation was amended on the floor to call for a ban on guns in any nation where The United Methodist Church has a presence.

One contentious debate resulted over a Methodist Federation for Social Action resolution. It called for the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) and the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) Women's Division to expand their campaign to alert constituencies about the threat of lost reproductive and end-of-life health care in the case of increasing hospital mergers. The committee split 62 - 20 favoring concurrence. The minority concern was that providing information about the threat of losing contraceptive, fertility, and AIDS/HIV services would amount to advocacy for those services.

Delegates added a sentence to the Social Principles calling for an end to so-called "partial birth abortions" except when the physical life of the mother is in danger and no other medical procedure is available, or in the case of severe fetal anomalies incompatible with life.

A GBCS resolution opposing prison privatization was approved. At issue are the motivations for implementing restorative justice when keeping more criminals in prison for longer terms reaps more profit for prison-owning corporations.

Environmental petitions were largely successful, including those which:

- expanded the Paragraph 64 definition of creation;
- called for an end to mountaintop-removal coal mining and a phase-out in dioxin production;
- asked for reduced water-usage; and

- required United Methodist general boards and agencies to use recycled paper within four years. The last resolution, hotly contested by United Methodist Communications as financially unfeasible, was approved, then sent to GCFA to report on its financial implications. GCFA overrode the General Conference vote, removing the time line and recommending implementation "where economically feasible."

Economic Justice Resolutions Passed

- calling for a boycott of *USA Today*, the *Detroit News* and the *Detroit Free Press*;
- supporting access to U.S. Department of Agriculture programs for African-American farmers; and
- supporting the rights to organize and collective-bargaining.

Supported Health-related Proposals

- affirming the National Comprehensive Tobacco Control Legislation;
- encouraging organ donation; and
- calling for the end of a religious exception to a parent's right to withhold medical care from a child without risking neglect and abuse charges.

Two resolutions supporting the needs of older adults passed, and The United Methodist Church was called upon to declare universal health care a basic human right. On the genetics front, General Conference opposed human-germ-line therapies, rejected human cloning and called for the GBCS to form a bioethics task force on relevant ethical issues.

Anti-gun legislation, not passed at the 1996 General Conference, was not only approved but expanded by the committee to include handguns and by the plenary to call for a gun ban in all nations where The United Methodist Church has a presence.

A world perspective was reflected in legislation:

- to pardon Latin-American debt as an aid to reestablishing human lives;
- to call for the United States to provide a framework to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict;
- to seek justice for Filipino World War II veterans; and
- to call for GBCS and other agencies to bring an end to the oppression of Native Americans.

Immigration resolutions called for economic, political, and environmental justice for those living along the Mexico border, for abolishing the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Resolution Act, and for working toward welfare benefits for legal immigrants.

—Gretchen Hakola

Youth, Young Adults: 'We're the Church of Today'

They are clear to point out they are the church of today, not tomorrow. They are clear they don't agree on every issue, but they love the church and can work together to benefit the world and fulfill Christ's mission.

They are the youth and young adult delegates who created space for togetherness and dialogue, even as the adults at General Conference talked of disagreement and discord.

"Of course I think we do a better job getting along," said Memphis Conference delegate Craig Tate, 19.

"I think a lot of good work has gone on, but there has also been a lot that is frustrating," added Northern Illinois Conference delegate Ana Kelsey-Powell, 17.

General Conference delegates demonstrated their support for youth by supporting the Shared Mission Focus on Young People. The \$3 million allocation will go to the General Board of Discipleship.

The youth and young adult delegation met together during the celebrations and frustrations of General Conference to discuss the tough issues before them, including homosexuality. During plenary session breaks, they gathered informally in their own room to talk about the day's issues and concerns.

Part of their ability to get along and work together came from pre-conference organizational efforts.

"The youth organized ahead of time for this conference," explained Central Pennsylvania Conference delegate Shawn Hartman, 22. "We had our own room, e-mail list and leadership team. We were connected and knew each other through e-mail and our organization."

Hartman, who was also a delegate in 1996, said the young people had more of a fellowship and community atmosphere in Cleveland than in Denver. "We come down to the room [to] talk and visit. We don't get lost in our delegations," he said.

All four young people said adult delegates were surprised at their church knowledge. "Overall our voices re-

ceived a good response, but sometimes the adults were shocked we had our own opinions on certain issues," Kelsey-Powell said. "We actually know what we're talking about." This is not always the case in the church, she said. "There were a lot of things that felt like injustices. You feel like your vote doesn't matter, but you know in the long run it does."



Delegate Lane Winn helps present a report on the Shared Mission Focus on Young People.
—UMNS Photo by Paul Jeffrey

Rocky Mountain Conference delegate Jana M. Bennett, 24, said the defeat of much of the anti-youth legislation demonstrates their impact on General Conference. "People are recognizing we [will] be moving the church into directions we think it needs to go, to do ministry with people in our age group," she said.

She hopes the church will increase its efforts to reach out to youth and young adults and make room for their questions and doubts. "I don't think the church is open to that kind of doubt and the kind of pressing questions we ask," Bennett said. "I almost felt like leaving the church because I didn't know where to turn, because there wasn't any forum for discussion. What was helpful for me was learning John Wesley went

through the exact same thing."

Looking toward the future of the church and General Conference 2004, the young people hope United Methodists will learn to agree to disagree. "We're probably not as split as the adults," said Kelsey-Powell. "Our generation, as a huge generalization, is much more accepting. We're more open."

Tate also hopes for a better understanding of who United Methodists are as a church. "I pray we can come to a general consensus with one another over hard issues like homosexuality."

Hartman hopes to return to Pittsburgh for his third General Conference, but he is concerned about the church's future. "I'm terribly afraid of the explosiveness that 2004 could bring on all sides. We've seen a regionalism develop here that's not going to get better. There has to be a way to adjust the equity in the system," he said.

—Kurt Gwartney

Life, Rights of People Worldwide Claim Delegates' Attention

Despite lengthy debates on internal matters, General Conference delegates passed legislation reflecting the denomination's traditional concern about the life and rights of people around the world.

Bishop Juan Vera Mendez of the Methodist Church of Puerto Rico, for example, arrived late at the quadrennial meeting because he and other Methodists were arrested May 4 during a peaceful demonstration against the U.S. naval occupation of the Puerto Rican Island of Vieques. General Conference also approved a resolution calling for an end to the military occupation.

Special concerns for the suffering of children led delegates to overwhelmingly urge the United Nations to lift the 10-year-old economic sanctions against Iraq. UNICEF estimates that 5,000 to 6,000 children die each month as a direct result of the sanctions.

Delegates called for an end to armed conflicts in Sierra Leone, the Philippines and the Democratic Republic of Congo. As General Conference met, a loosely held peace in Sierra Leone disintegrated, and Islamic rebels in the Philippines continued to hold hostages. United Methodists affirmed their financial, political and spiritual support for the Congo peace initiatives of the All Africa

Congress of Churches and Central Congo Area Bishop Onema Fama.

Reflecting on a historical conflict, the conference silently remembered those who died during World War II, including 25 percent of the population of Russia.

By a large majority, delegates endorsed a total ban on most handguns and automatic weapons in all countries where the church has a presence.

Other approved resolutions focused on such global issues as the rights of religious minorities in India, the international treaty to ban landmines, the pitfalls of a global economy, responsible travel, and new mission work in Indochina.

For the first time, a United Methodist bishop living outside the United States—Manila Area Bishop Emerito P. Nacpil of the Philippines—delivered the traditional Episcopal Address to the assembly. Roldolfo Beltran of the Philippines was elected as the first Judicial Council member from the Central Conferences. Concerns regarding a lack of translators and increased representation of the Central Conferences also were addressed.

—Linda Bloom

Church Nurtures Mission, Ministry Through Higher Education

Delegates addressed several issues that have an impact on the church's mission in education. They:

- approved a \$300 million development fund for the 11 historically Black colleges and universities to be raised from individual donors over a 25-year period;
- affirmed Africa University, recommending financial apportionments to expand programs;
- affirmed the significant mission of the four women's colleges related to the denomination;
- approved the development of an endowment fund to address the indebtedness of seminary students;
- encouraged local churches to use the revised study, *Education: Gift of Hope*, an examination of United Methodist involvement in educational access and opportunity, and suggesting how United Methodists can become involved in supporting public education; and
- retained United Methodist Student Day as a separate churchwide special Sunday with offering.

Several issues were addressed that had an impact on ministry:

- Candidates for ordained and licensed ministry shall be members of The United Methodist Church for two years before beginning the candidacy process.
- A new definition of commissioning defines it as an act of the church that publicly acknowledges God's call and the response of the candidate.

- Local pastor license was changed to "license for pastoral ministry" and will include commissioned probationers and local pastors.
- Local pastors may be appointed to the same church after reaching the mandatory retirement age.
- A retired clergy member of the annual conference is eligible to receive an appointment to the same appointment from which he or she has been retired.
- Disability leave was changed to "incapacity" leave.
- A revised process for administrative and judicial complaints was approved.
- The deadline for persons seeking to meet requirements for ministry under the 1992 *Book of Discipline* was set as Dec. 31, 2008. Associate members and diaconal ministers seeking to enter conference membership under provision of Par. 365.2-3 was set as Dec. 31, 2004.
- The conference board of ordained ministry may include diaconal ministers and a local pastor with voice but no vote.
- Rural chaplaincy was commended and affirmed.
- Support was given to the current Ministerial Education Fund formula.
- Financial support was approved for theological education in Eastern Europe.

—Duane A. Ewers

Committee Adjusts Congregational Leadership Structure

The Local Church Legislative Committee renamed two church groups, refocused and redefined two others. It turned back proposals to let congregations leave the denomination with their property or to affiliate with unofficial caucuses.

Delegates encouraged renaming and expanding youth ministry with the creation of a Council for Youth Empowerment in each charge conference. Three-fourths of the members of this council would be youth, as would all officers. Membership includes youth workers as well.

Renaming and redefinition changed the Committee on Nomination and Personnel into the Committee on Lay Leadership, charged with identifying and deploying Christian spiritual leadership for the congregation. The pastor remains the chair for the committee.

The work of the Committee on Staff-Parish (or Pastor-Parish) Relations was refocused to include assisting the pastor(s) and staff to assess their gifts and setting priorities for leadership and service.

In other actions, the Local Church Legislative Committee:

- allowed district superintendents to appoint study groups to assess the viability of marginal congregations;

- required a pastor be informed when a meeting is held at which her/his continued appointment is being discussed, but rejected that requirement for non-appointed church employees;
- added earth advocacy chairperson, small-group ministries coordinator, and scouting coordinator to the list of optional offices;
- allowed legal guardians to speak for persons whose disabilities prevent them from assuming the vows of membership;
- encouraged congregations that build or remodel to make their chancel areas accessible;
- removed the requirement that confirmation classes be conducted annually in each congregation;
- refused to allow absentee balloting at charge conferences;
- refused to limit the annual conference lay member's term to four consecutive years;
- continued the denomination's prohibition of rebaptism and rejected a service of dedication of infants as an alternative to baptism; and
- kept the time requirement for removal of a name from the membership roll at two years.

— Tom Slack

What Happened in Cleveland?

Delegates and visitors arrived at General Conference with hopes and dreams for their church. Caucus groups, petitions, and legislative committees provided input and direction. General Conference is the only body that can speak for the denomination, and people listened carefully to hear it speak. While the church spoke in many ways, with many clear directions, its raised voice deeply affected delegates and visitors alike. The homosexuality-related debates and protests of May 10-11 will ring in the ears of all who attended. Those who followed the events from home were aware the church was in pain.

The final day of General Conference 2000 had a feeling of sadness and an overwhelming concern for the healing that must happen at Christ's table. It didn't matter what side of the issue a delegate was on; everyone could palpate the hurt and concern for Christ's church.

Perhaps the pain was best expressed by Bishop Talbert in the final moments of General Conference;

"Just to remind you, this is your much-maligned bishop of the California-Nevada Annual Conference, and I want you to know that we in the California-Nevada Annual Conference pride ourselves in being good United Methodists. And I would hope that we would use this as an opportunity to remind ourselves that when one is maligned, it would be courteous to at least have a conversation with that person before you make your final judgements. I am a proud bishop of this church. I have done my best to be faithful. I have upheld every law of the church. What I have refused to do is to allow my mind and my freedom to speak, to be chained. I think that is the official position of the church."

This General Conference made some clear decisions. Their impact and effect on the church will soon be felt. Every United Methodist needs to be in prayer for the church we love. May God's Holy Spirit give us strength, wisdom, and healing as we go forth to serve the living Christ in the world.

—Brad Motta