

## **UMC Works Through Differences, Approves Statement of Unity**

The intensity of the differences and conflict among the thousands of UMs gathered around the 2004 General Conference continued nearly to the end. Most publicly these differences were evident in the debate regarding homosexuality. On Tuesday, May 4, dozens of petitions regarding homosexuality were brought to the floor. The Church and Society and Faith and Order legislative committees brought forward their own perspectives on what needed to be changed, each with minority reports in tow. Those in attendance that day arrived after walking through rows of prayerful activists for opening the church to greater participation by and with gay and lesbian persons. **A Church and Society proposal, while leaving in the language of incompatibility with Christian teaching, would have added a statement describing the differences of opinion within the denomination. With a 55%–45% vote, it was replaced by the minority report that, while not mentioning intra-denominational differences, did express a desire for Christian community.**

The tensions continued. **By Thursday, words of “amicable separation” were being tossed about among those in attendance and in the press. Another protest, this one led by the interfaith group Soulforce, interrupted the proceedings** in a manner that was well-planned with the knowledge of conference leadership. Welcomed by presiding bishop Janice Riggle Huie (Arkansas Area), demonstrators marched around the plenary hall while singing hymns, and they poured water into the baptismal font set up for conference worship. After 20 minutes, the group left.

On the last day of the conference, as church leaders and other groups sought to counter the talk of separation, a statement of unity was brought forward by a group of delegates from each jurisdiction and one person from Africa. The text of the statement was simple: **“As United Methodists we remain in covenant with one another, even in the midst of disagreement, and affirm our commitment to work together for our common mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ throughout the world.”** After statements of support, the body approved the resolution with a vote of 869–41.

According to a statement by Bruce Robbins, former general secretary of the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, two delegates in the Church and Society committee with differing perspectives had sought to broaden their conversation earlier in the 11-day meeting. With the assistance of the general commission and the conflict resolution agency JustPeace, a larger group of people—including many from opposing caucuses—came together on May 3. Robbins called the conversation that occurred that night “holy conferencing,” with sharing of pain and ideas for how the church might move forward. The conversation continued the next day. “Some people felt that some form of holy conferencing of all of the delegates could be arranged,” Robbins told the conference on Friday. “Others looked to some kind of separation, perhaps, that could be amicable and just amongst us. And others looked to trying to create some kind of space that would help us move forward.”

**One item shared in these meetings was a draft resolution calling for a “Task Group on Amicable Separation.” While it was never formally presented on the floor, by May 6 it had appeared in the hands of the press. The resolution suggested that a task group would present a process of separation to a special session of the General Conference in 2006. Comments made that Thursday morning by Bill Hinson, president of the Confessing Movement, about the possible need for separation**

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of The United Methodist Publishing House***

also were widely published. In a Friday press conference, Hinson described his concern about sacrificing “truth at the altar of unity,” saying that he does not believe the gap between opposing sides can be bridged. Nevertheless, just before the unity resolution was presented, Hinson stood with Robbins to confirm Robbins’ description of the week’s events and to express gratitude for “this wonderful spirit.”

## General Conference Agrees to \$612.5 Million Budget

**The final budget figure approved by the UM General Conference represents a 12.2% increase over the 2001–04 budget for churchwide ministries.** A motion to reduce that to a 10% increase was first approved by the body but was later reconsidered. After a series of other motions, the assembly finally approved the General Council on Finance and Administration proposal of \$612.5 million. That total will be apportioned to each of the 63 U.S. annual conferences. The amount each conference is assessed is based on the conference’s net expenditures, regional factors such as per capita income, and church attendance. Annual conferences in turn have their own formula for requesting funds of local churches. Less than 4% of local church receipts support general church funds.

**During the 11-day conference, delegates referred to GCFA up to \$61.34 million more than had previously been budgeted for the next quadrennium.** In order to arrive at the final budget, a request for \$2.3 million for communication efforts in conferences outside the United States was reduced to \$1 million. Igniting Ministry’s request for \$33.5 million to continue and expand its media campaign was reduced by a legislative committee to \$22 million but then increased by GCFA to \$25 million. Its request for \$5.4 million for a campaign aimed at youth was reduced to \$500,000. A request for \$1.84 million additional funding for the new Division on Ministries with Young People was reduced to \$500,000, with \$6.3 million coming through other channels. A request for \$977,572 for the National UM Native American Center was reduced to \$232,000, to be used for merging with another existing Native American ministry. A request for \$2.27 million for the “Strengthening the Black Church” initiative was reduced to \$2.1 million.

**GCFA also turned down a number of additional funding requests.** A request for \$1.32 million for holistic strategies on Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean was eliminated, noting that funds are available through the General Board of Global Ministries. After being reduced to \$4 million by a legislative committee, a \$10 million request for a Global Education Fund was eliminated as an apportionment item. GCFA called on the group to use one of the denomination’s voluntary giving plans. A request for \$4 million for a Global AIDS Fund was also eliminated as an apportioned item, and fund supporters were encouraged to expand their use of one of the church’s voluntary giving channels. In removing the request for \$425,000 for town and country ministries as an apportioned item, GCFA noted that GBGM has budgeted \$620,000 to fund this ministry.

**The quadrennial targets for the various funds of the church include:** 1) World Service Fund, \$323.5 million; 2) Ministerial Education Fund, \$113.1 million; 3) Black College Fund, \$45.1 million; 4) Africa University, \$10.1 million; 5) Episcopal Fund, \$83.5 million; 6) General Administration, \$28.3 million; and 7) Interdenominational Cooperation Fund, \$8.8 million.

— *With contributions from J. Richard Peck, UMNS*

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## Connectional Table Created to Lead General Agency Work

The UMC has decided to create a “Connectional Table” to guide the work of the denomination’s general agencies. **The Connectional Table that was approved May 5 by delegates to the General Conference is substantially different from the model proposed by the General Council on Ministries.** The legislative committee that processed the GCOM proposal essentially set that plan aside and came up with an alternate that is smaller and, according to proponents of the new model, less costly. Delegates in the full assembly voted to adopt the General Administration Legislative Committee’s proposal.

**The new Connectional Table will begin operating next Jan. 1—two years before the date in the GCOM proposal. The GCOM will go out of existence at the end of a transition period.** The table will have 47 members, compared with about 130 in the council’s proposal. The “Living into the Future” plan would have combined the functions of GCOM and the General Council on Finance and Administration, bringing mission and money to the same table, and both agencies would have gone out of existence. Under the successful proposal, GCFA will remain intact.

**The new table’s members** will consist of 28 people elected through jurisdictional and central conferences. One will come from each of the seven central conferences, and a total of 21 will come from the five U.S. jurisdictional conferences. Jurisdictional members are to represent the proportionate membership of each jurisdiction based on combined clergy and lay membership. Presidents of most of the church’s general agencies will be members of the table with voice and vote, while general secretaries will have voice and no vote. The general secretary of the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits and the president and publisher of the UM Publishing House (the general agencies not receiving general church funds) will be present with voice and no vote.

Other members of the Connectional Table will include one youth and one young adult from the new Division on Ministries with Young People along with a member from each of the denomination’s racial-ethnic caucuses. An “effective bishop,” selected by the Council of Bishops, will be the chairperson of the table. The new table is to be half laity, half clergy; half female, half male; not less than 30% members of racial-ethnic minority groups (excluding central conference members); and at least 10% youth and young adults. The Connectional Table will determine its own internal structure and staff needs. — *Tim Tanton, UMNS*

## Judicial Council Defers Decisions, Elects New Officers

**The top judicial body of the UMC has deferred three items from the General Conference until its fall meeting.** One item dealt with the constitutionality of a petition approved on May 6 regarding clergy pensions and “the broad, new powers it appears to grant to the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits.” The second request dealt with the Connectional Table plan adopted on May 5. The request centered on how membership of this new plan of church organization would be determined. The council also received a request during the evening session on May 6 to examine a petition dealing with *Discipline* ¶ 102, “Doctrinal Standards in American Methodism.”

**In a decision handed down on May 5, the council ruled that unwillingness by a pastor to lead a local church toward full payment of apportionments is not a chargeable offense.** The Judicial Council ruling’s “Analysis and Rationale” section did state, however, that any clergy member’s “deliberate” encouragement of a church “not to pay its apportionments in full, when the church is otherwise able to do so . . . may rise to the level of a chargeable offense under ¶ 2702” of the *Discipline*. The council was asked by the General Conference to determine whether or not a pastor’s unwillingness to counsel his or her church to pay apportionments constituted “failure to perform the work of the ministry” or “disobedience to the order and discipline of The United Methodist Church,” two of the chargeable offenses listed in ¶ 2702.

**Responding to a May 1 request by the General Conference, the Judicial Council ruled that it could not review the trial court decision regarding Karen T. Dammann. However, it did say that a bishop could not appoint a person that the trial court found to be a self-avowed, practicing homosexual.**

At an organizational meeting of the 2004–08 council, James Holsinger was elected president, Mary Daffin was elected vice president, and Keith Boyette was elected secretary. Holsinger is a physician in Lexington, Ky., currently serving as secretary of health and family services for the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Daffin is a civil law attorney in Houston, and Boyette is pastor of Wilderness Community Church in Spotsylvania, Va. **The new council will be the most international in church history** when Paul Shamwange Kyungu, North-West Katanga Conference, moves onto the board to fill the opening created by the resignation of Larry D. Pickens, who will become the new general secretary of the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns. Returning council member Rodolfo Beltran is from the Philippines Central Conference. The council will also have to adapt to the fact that Kyungu speaks French and Swahili but not English.

Other new members are Judge Jon R. Gray of the Missouri Conference, attorney Beth Capen of the New York Conference, Susan Henry-Crowe of the South Carolina Conference, and Dennis L. Blackwell of the Greater New Jersey Conference. Solomon Christian of the Memphis Conference is the lead lay alternate. C. Rex Bevins, who is a member of the 2000–04 council, will become the top clergy alternate when Kyungu joins the board to replace Pickens.

— *With contributions from Neill Caldwell, UMNS*

## **Judge Upholds Alaska Missionary Conference's Property Rights**

Judge Richard D. Savell of the Alaska Superior Court has supported the Alaska Missionary Conference's position in a property dispute with members of a former congregation in Fairbanks. In a 27-page decision released April 13, **Savell upheld the conference's right to control the disposition of the property of the former St. Paul UMC.** In 2002, the conference voted 61–1 to discontinue the church. Afterward, some members of the former congregation denied the conference access to the church building. The conference then went to court to assert its right of ownership of the property. In his decision, Savell ruled, "The property belongs to the AMC [Alaska Missionary Conference]" and ordered that the name of the dissident congregation, "St. Paul Inc.," be removed from the title of the property. He also directed that the board of trustees of the Alaska Missionary Conference be listed as the legal, titled owner of the property.

**A spokesperson for St. Paul Inc. said UM officials expelled the church from the denomination's membership and did not explain the reasons.** "A key element appears to be St. Paul's decision to elect its leadership freely rather than accepting demands from the superintendent of the annual conference," said Cam Carlson in a written statement provided by the defendants in the case. "If this very dangerous precedent of expelling churches and seizing their property is allowed to continue in The United Methodist Church, any minority voice in any conference in the country could be silenced with no recourse," Carlson said.

**In a 2003 interview, Lieder Simeon, superintendent of the conference, said the congregation's core lay leadership was "unwilling to be subject to the authority of the denomination"** and would not take instructions from the pastor, superintendent, or bishop. After this month's decision, Simeon said the conference intends to continue using the property for ministry in Fairbanks. The conference will work with defendants to implement an orderly transfer of the property back to the conference.

Savell upheld the Alaska Missionary Conference's argument that the case should be decided using the U.S. Supreme Court's "neutral principles" test without resorting to any analysis of doctrine or

theological position. In his decision, Savell referred to the *Book of Discipline* regarding the ownership of property. He ruled that the section of church law known as the trust clause contains “no references to any theological tenets” and is “wholly secular” in its application to property. Savell’s ruling follows a UM Judicial Council decision that upheld the conference’s right to discontinue using the church. — *UMNS*

## Short Takes

- Sarah Wilke, a 20-year-veteran of urban mission, has been named the first woman chief executive officer of UMR Communications, which oversees *The United Methodist Reporter* and Lumicon Productions. Wilke’s appointment as president and CEO was announced April 15 by Mary Brooke Casad, chair of UMR’s board of directors. For the past four years, Wilke has served as director of urban strategies for the North Texas Conference.
- After the close of business on April 16, the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits discontinued the Diversified Investment Fund (DIF) and transferred all participant account balances invested in DIF to other funds as previously announced. In conjunction with this transfer, the board of directors declared a final special distribution of 13.85% that was applied to all affected accounts. Concurrent with the transfer of account balances from DIF, the board has established a Participant-Directed Account that provides eligible participants nearing retirement age with control over the investment of account assets. For more information, visit [www.gbop.org](http://www.gbop.org).
- A youth or young adult will make a presentation to the 2008 General Conference, the 2004 conference decided. Jay Williams, co-chair of the Shared Mission Focus on Young People, made the motion on the floor of the conference on the last day of the quadrennial meeting. The person who will make the address will be chosen by the new Division on Young People approved May 1. The 2008 conference will be held in Fort Worth, Texas. The new division will become a part of the General Board of Discipleship. Youth and young adults were present throughout the 2004 conference as vice chairs of committees, chairs of subcommittees, and speakers from the floor.
- Many other items have also been debated on and approved by delegates to the 2004 General Conference. From approval of the Holy Communion study to a new annual conference in Cote d’Ivoire, so much occurred during the 11 days of meetings in Pittsburgh that it is impossible for us to treat these issues adequately in one issue. Keep reading *NEWSCOPE* in the upcoming weeks for your ongoing news of this global denomination.

## Digests from Spring 2004 Judicial Council Meeting

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

### DECISION NO. 982

*IN RE:* Request from the California-Pacific Annual Conference for a Declaratory Decision on the Meaning, Application, and Effect of ¶¶ 346 and 359.1 of the 2000 *Discipline* as to Whether a Local Pastor Has the Right to Trial after Being Discontinued from Appointment.

*DIGEST:* A local pastor under appointment, who receives a notice in writing from his/her bishop or district superintendent informing him/her that she/he is being discontinued from that appointment and that his/her license for pastoral ministry is being discontinued for the reason that said local pastor is accused of violating specifically one or more cited chargeable offenses (¶ 2702.1), does not have a right to the supervisory response mandated in ¶ 359.1 unless the notice clearly states that it is a written and signed complaint claiming misconduct or unsatisfactory performance of ministerial duties, in which case the notice must also inform the local pastor of the process for filing the complaint and its purpose.

If the notice clearly states that it is a written complaint and it is properly signed, the local pastor has a right to the supervisory process. If the supervisory process results in a judicial complaint, the local pastor has the right to trial as provided in ¶¶ 2702.1, 2703.2, 2704.2, 2706.2c and 2713. The termination of an appointment does not negate a local pastor's right to trial.

#### **DECISION NO. 983**

*IN RE:* Review of Revised Structure of the Louisiana Annual Conference as Required by Decision 900.

*DIGEST:* The revised and amended Conference Structure and Rules of the Louisiana Annual Conference, adopted on June 3, 2002, does not comply with the *Discipline* and the decisions of the Judicial Council. When an annual conference seeks to establish its own structure, that structure must be in accordance with the requirements of the *Discipline* and the decisions of the Judicial Council in order to be constitutional. The Louisiana Conference Structure and Rules is null, void and of no effect until such time that the deficiencies are cured and the Judicial Council approves the revised and amended structure and rules. The Conference Structure and Rules is remanded to the Louisiana Annual Conference for further action, with the direction that any revision or amendments be submitted to the Judicial Council for review by July 15 in the year in which the revision or amendments are made. When the Louisiana Annual Conference submits its Conference Structure and Rules to the Judicial Council for further review, the Conference is directed to identify the changes that have been made from the 2002 modifications so as to expedite review of its modifications. The Judicial Council retains jurisdiction to review any subsequent action of the Louisiana Annual Conference with respect to its Conference Structure and Rules until such time as its Conference Structure and Rules conform with the *Discipline* and the decisions of the Judicial Council.

#### **DECISION NO. 984**

*IN RE:* Declaratory Decision Regarding the Meaning, Application or Effect of ¶¶ 304.3 and 2702.1(b) of the 2000 *Discipline*.

*DIGEST:* Paragraph 304.3 of the 2000 *Discipline* is a declaration of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church that "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching." The practice of homosexuality is a chargeable offense under ¶ 2702.1(b) of the 2000 *Discipline*.

#### **DECISION NO. 985**

*IN RE:* Request for a Declaratory Decision from the General Conference Regarding the Application of the *Discipline* to Actions of an Annual Conference in a Church Trial and the Meaning, Application or Effect of ¶ 304.3 of the *Discipline* to the Findings of the Trial Court.

*DIGEST:* The Judicial Council does not have authority to review the findings of the trial court in the Reverend Karen T. Dammann case. A bishop may not appoint one who has been found by a trial court to be a self-avowed, practicing homosexual.

#### **DECISION NO. 986**

*IN RE:* Request from the General Conference for a Declaratory Decision Concerning Pastoral Leadership in Paying Apportionments as a Chargeable Offense under ¶ 2702.

*DIGEST:* Unwillingness by a pastor to lead a local church toward full payment of apportionments including proportionality in the Episcopal Fund (¶ 823) does not constitute a chargeable offense under ¶ 2702.