



# The United Methodist NEWSCOPE

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THE WEEKLY NEWSLETTER FOR UNITED METHODIST LEADERS

## Questions Asked of Judicial Council Regarding Gay Clergy

The 2004 General Conference, meeting this week in Pittsburgh, has directed the Judicial Council to reexamine the March acquittal of Karen Dammann, an openly lesbian pastor, and determine if a bishop can legally appoint a self-avowed, practicing homosexual. On April 29, the Judicial Council ruled that the practice of homosexuality is a chargeable offense for clergy. By a 6–3 margin, the council said that the statement “the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching,” contained in *Discipline* ¶ 304.3, is indeed a declaration of the UMC.

Immediately after the April 29 ruling was read on May 1 on the floor of General Conference, Maxie Dunnam of the Kentucky delegation moved that the conference ask the Judicial Council to determine what the “meaning, application, and effect” of the decision would be on the outcome of the Dammann trial. Dammann, a clergy member of the Pacific-Northwest Conference, was found innocent of the charge of engaging in “practices incompatible with Christian teaching” as listed in 2702.1b.

Frank Dorsey of the Kansas East delegation rose to protest Dunnam’s motion, saying that it was “striking at our heart with a knife to . . . destroy our church.” He said he could not trust the Judicial Council with the ability to make a fair ruling on this important issue. Dorsey referred to a corrected preface to the Social Principles, saying “they are not church law.” The statement is included on an errata sheet for the *Discipline*. The General Conference voted 551–345 to approve Dunnam’s motion.

Three Judicial Council members who voted against the April 29 majority decision issued dissenting opinions on the ruling. Larry Pickens and Sally Brown Geis issued a joint dissent, while Sally Curtis AsKew issued an individual dissent. Supporting the majority opinion were John Corry, C. Rex Bevins, Mary Daffin, Keith Boyette, James Holsinger, and Rodolfo Beltran.

The Judicial Council’s ruling followed a motion by Arkansas delegate Fred H. Haustein from the floor of General Conference that directed the council to examine the statement in *Discipline* ¶ 304.3 and decide whether or not it constituted a declaration by the UMC. And, the motion continued, if it was a declaration, did that mean it was part of church law?

The April 29 ruling reaffirmed an October ruling that *The Book of Discipline* is “the law of the church which regulates every phase of the life and work of the church.” At that time, the council upheld the *Discipline* as denominational law and reversed the decisions of two lower-ranking church bodies, the Western Jurisdiction Committee on Appeals and the Pacific Northwest Conference Committee on Investigation. The council also said in October that those “who state that they cannot in good conscience uphold the *Discipline* are ineligible to serve on a trial jury.”

In her dissent to the April 29 decision, AsKew, the council’s secretary, said she “made an error in concurring with Decision 980” in October. Her dissent said that ¶ 304.3 does not constitute a declaration and that the Judicial Council did not have the right to request that investigation committee members step aside. Pickens and Geis, in their joint dissent, wrote that they did not agree that the statement in ¶ 304.3 rose to “the status of church law” but instead made reference to ¶ 161G of the Social Principles. A decision on the Dunnam request was still pending as NEWSCOPE went to press.

— With contributions from Neill Caldwell, UMNS

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## Judicial Council Addresses Cases from Annual Conferences

In another April 29 Judicial Council decision, **council members ruled that local pastors in the UMC do not lose the right to the supervisory process and a possible trial if their appointment is terminated**, provided that they had received a written and signed complaint from their bishop or district superintendent. The request for a declaratory decision came from the California-Pacific Conference. In a third case, the council ruled that **the Louisiana Conference structure and rules are still not in compliance with the *Discipline* and previous Judicial Council decisions**. This is the fourth time the council has ruled the Louisiana Conference's revised structure null and void.

In the California-Pacific case, a local pastor received a letter of termination from his district superintendent, citing chargeable offenses under *Discipline* ¶ 2702.1. A clergy advocate of the terminated pastor regarded the letter of termination as a formal complaint and asked the annual conference to request a decision from the Judicial Council as to whether the termination of an appointment ends a local pastor's right to due process. **The council ruled that once a complaint is filed, the right to fair process is not affected by any change in a pastor's appointment status. However, the local pastor must be informed of the process for filing the complaint and its purpose.**

Four of the council's nine members signed a dissenting opinion stating that the ruling dilutes the power of a bishop to discontinue a local pastor's appointment. **The dissenters argued that termination of an appointment ends a local pastor's right to due process.**

In the other case, the **Louisiana Conference** had approved revisions and amendments to its conference structure and rules in 2002, after the Judicial Council had found that deficiencies continued to exist. The court had instructed the conference to revise and resubmit its structure and rules. However, **in reviewing the 2002 revisions, the council found that many of the same deficiencies still existed**. The ruling listed a number of examples where Louisiana's rules "fall short" of the *Discipline* and also stated that the list of examples was "not exhaustive." The conference was directed to review its entire plan for compliance. The council remanded the structure and rules back to the Louisiana Conference and directed that any revision or amendments be submitted to the Judicial Council by July 15 in the year in which they are approved. — *Neill Caldwell, UMNS*

## Division on Ministries with Young People Approved

The 2004 General Conference voted on May 1 to approve a Division on Ministries with Young People. The conference voted 780–109 to approve the division. The budget of \$6.6 million, which included \$1.8 million outside of the GCFA proposed budget, was approved by a vote of 749–140.

The Shared Mission Focus on Young People, an initiative of the UMC since 1996, brought legislation to create a Division on Ministries with Young People. The division will be a part of the General Board of Discipleship in Nashville. As part of the proposal, the United Methodist Youth Organization and the Forum for Adult Workers in Youth Ministry will disband. The Shared Mission Focus on Young People will be folded into the new division.

In preparing the petition, the team's research showed that while the general church offers many opportunities for youth and young adults, those ministries remain disconnected, and often the

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message does not reach the local church. The division is designed to create a central place for youth, young adults, and workers with young-adult ministries to find direction for their ministries.  
— *Kathy L. Gilbert, UMNS*

## Sudan Needs Increased Attention, Church Officials Say

The Sudan Council of Churches and Norwegian Church Aid issued on April 27 an emergency appeal for refugee assistance regarding those fleeing ethnic violence in the Sudan. The UM Committee on Relief is engaged with other agencies in ministering to refugees who have moved into the nation of Chad (**Sudan Emergency Advance #184385**). R. Randy Day, general secretary of the General Board of Global Ministries, joined a call by Church World Service that requests a stepped-up investigation by the United Nations.

An official of the U.S. Agency for International Development said on April 27 that Black Africans in Sudan were victims of “ethnic cleansing.” Bishop Joseph Humper (Sierra Leone Area), chair of his country’s Commission on Truth and Reconciliation, also sent a letter to UN secretary general Kofi Annan requesting quick action in the Sudan. According to Day, the African Union is also investigating the conflict with plans to set up a regional peacekeeping force.

## UMC Officially Joins Taco Bell Boycott

A petition to join a consumer boycott of Taco Bell was approved without plenary debate on May 1 as a part of a consent calendar. **First called in March 2001 by the Florida-based Coalition of Immokalee Workers, the boycott is in protest of Taco Bell’s refusal to address the issue of alleged worker exploitation by its tomato suppliers.** Other religious endorsers include the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the United Church of Christ, the American Friends Service Committee, and the National Council of Churches.

**The boycott petition was submitted by Methodists Associated Representing the Cause of Hispanic Americans (MARCHA).** The petition said that Immokalee farm workers “earn sub-poverty wages for picking tomatoes used in Taco Bell food products. According to the Department of Labor, their average wage (40 cents per 32-pound bucket) has not changed in more than 20 years.” Six L’s Packing Co., one of the largest U.S. tomato growers, has been cited by the coalition in particular for exploiting its workers.

Because farm workers are not covered by the National Labor Relations Act, they also are routinely denied unemployment and workers’ compensation benefits. **UMs will remain a part of the boycott until Taco Bell “convenes serious three-way talks between the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, representatives of Taco Bell, and their tomato suppliers to address exploitation and slavery in the fields.”** Taco Bell also must help raise worker wages by increasing the per-pound rate it pays for tomatoes and work with the coalition, tomato industry, and suppliers “to establish a code of conduct that would ensure workers’ fundamental labor rights by defining strict wage and working condition standards required of all Taco Bell suppliers.”

**The Council of Bishops is called to consult with the General Board of Church and Society to name a monitoring committee** to assess the progress of negotiations between the workers’ coalition and Taco Bell. That committee also will be empowered to recommend an end to the boycott once the criteria in the petition are met. Denomination-wide boycotts are rare in the UMC and can only be approved by General Conference. The last major boycott, endorsed by the 1988 General Conference, was against Royal Dutch/Shell Oil, related to its connections to the apartheid system in South Africa. The church also joined a boycott initiated in 1977 against Nestle Co. because of its marketing of infant formula to developing countries. — *Linda Bloom, UMNS*

## Delegates Fund Action Plan for Town, Country Ministries

In an effort to stem the decline of UM rural churches, delegates to the denomination's top legislative body voted May 1 to financially undergird town and country ministries. Delegates to the 2004 General Conference sent the \$425,000 budget request for strengthening rural congregations to the General Council on Finance and Administration according to official budgeting procedures. **The 2000 General Conference adopted a foundation for Town & Country Ministries called "Born Again in Every Place" and requested that an action plan be developed over the next four years.** Delegates to the 2004 assembly gave support to implement the plan because rural UM churches are more than one-third of the denomination's membership, and those congregations account for half of the overall membership loss in recent decades.

By approving the budget's referral, delegates gave permission to the denomination's National Comprehensive Plan for Town & Country Ministries to develop, support, and affirm effective ministries in rural cultures and contexts for the next four years. The plan will also assist in developing, strengthening, and sustaining effective leadership for town and country ministries. Town & Country Ministries is a program of the General Board of Global Ministries. — *Linda Green, UMNS*

## Short Takes

- A total of 24 persons were nominated for four open positions (two clergy, two lay) on the UM Judicial Council. The Council of Bishops submitted an initial slate of 12 nominees before the process was opened to all General Conference delegates. At one point the nominations were closed, but they were later reopened when a delegate rose to complain that presiding Bishop Joel N. Martinez (San Antonio Area) had not called on people from all sections of the floor. The elections were scheduled for May 3 but were put on hold after an electronic voting anomaly was discovered.
- The central conferences communications initiative was approved on May 3 by the 2004 General Conference. Submitted by UM Communications, the plan calls upon that agency to identify new partnerships or assist with established partnerships among UMs in Africa, Europe, Asia, and the United States. The agency will collaborate with central conference bishops, communicators, and other leaders giving voice "to those who otherwise might not be heard" and sharing stories in "culture-appropriate" ways. Funding of \$2.3 million is included in the initiative.  
— *Linda Bloom, UMNS*
- Despite questions about the Methodist Church of Puerto Rico receiving benefits not usually accorded to an autonomous Methodist denomination, more than three quarters of the UM General Conference voted on May 3 to approve the concordat between the two bodies. The agreement renews special provisions drafted in 1992 and covers such items as mutual recognition of ordained ministries, voting rights at each other's General Conference, interaction with general agencies and the Council of Bishops, and partnership in mission programs. — *Linda Bloom, UMNS*

## Positions Available

Lay director, Chrysalis. Contact: Maria James, Office of Human Resources, General Board of Discipleship; phone: 615-340-7100; toll-free: 877-899-2780, ext. 7100; e-mail: mjames@gbod.org.

## Personalia

**Sally Dyck**, East Ohio Conference, **Hee-Soo Jung**, Wisconsin Conference, and **Ed Kail**, Iowa Conference, have been endorsed for the episcopacy by both the North Central Jurisdictional Town & Country Association and the North Central Jurisdictional Urban Network.