

## Should the General Church Be Centralized or Decentralized?

With members of the **General Council on Ministries (GCOM)** agreeing last spring to examine GCOM's dissolution, their **writing team is now preparing centralized and decentralized general church alternatives** for GCOM's entire membership to consider at its March meeting. According to writing team member Thomas "Andy" Langford, the question is "What does the church want of its general church agencies?"

One option would be for a centralized executive body to replace the GCOM and the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA). The alternative is a decentralized system whereby the GCOM's responsibilities become distributed among the GCFA and other general agencies. If both proposals pass through the GCOM, they will be brought to the 2004 General Conference for final consideration.

In considering a centralized body, the GCOM is looking for better coordination among the general agencies, Langford said. **A centralized body would have authority over the general agencies**, holding them accountable and implementing the decisions of General Conference between each session. General Conference would remain the only body that could speak for the denomination.

The initial idea brought forward at the spring GCOM meeting included the dissolution of most general agency governing boards. Along with the discussion at the Oct. 25–29 GCOM meeting, the centralized proposal shifted to leaving the general agencies as subject to oversight by a new executive agency. Each general secretary and each governing board president would be represented in the new body **under the current proposal**. In addition, **each annual conference in the United States would have a single representative**, one bishop from each jurisdiction, the president of the Council of Bishops, **and three representatives from each central conference**. Up to five at-large members may be added to balance lay and clergy representation. Under this proposal, **central conference membership would be approximately 18%, which is about the same as general church membership, according to Langford**. Current central conference representation on general agencies is closer to 10%. **Total membership in the proposed agency would not exceed 116**.

A straw vote on Oct. 26 showed majority support for the basic direction of the proposal but fell short of consensus. The council later voted to request a 90-minute time slot early in the 2004 General Conference to present the plan to delegates. In other business, the **GCOM approved an extension of Bruce W. Robbins term as general secretary of the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns (GCCUIC) for another year beyond the 12-year term limit**. A GCCUIC search committee is looking for a replacement.

## New Missions Established Through Cooperative Work

The General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) formally designated UMC work in Cambodia, Honduras, and Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) as "mission churches" during the meeting of the board's directors Oct. 21–24. According to *The Book of Discipline*, such designation may "be the initial stage in moving toward the formation of a provisional or missionary conference."

***A concise, late-deadline report written and edited by the staff  
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The GBGM began work in Cambodia in the 1980s and now has 11 missionaries in the country. In 1997, a coordinating board was created for the **Cambodia Methodist Mission** including **collaborative work with the Methodist Church of Singapore and the Korean Methodist Church**. There are 100 churches among the various partners. In January there will be a joint ordination service for all in the partnership as they move toward creating a single Methodist denomination in the country.

UM church plants began in Honduras in 1998, leading to the current number of 11 churches and two other faith communities not yet formed as congregations. **Work in Honduras is done collaboratively with the Methodist Church of the Caribbean and the Americas** with support from the Latin American Council of Evangelical Methodist Churches and the Christian Commission on Development.

**The Protestant Methodist Church of Cote d'Ivoire is an autonomous, 1.4-million-member denomination coming out of the British Methodist tradition.** The church in Cote d'Ivoire approached the UMC asking for affiliation. "They felt they needed to be a part of a large institution . . . the larger Christian family," said Lorene F. Wilbur, deputy general secretary with GBGM. Cote d'Ivoire already has three districts and 853 local churches. There are 89 active pastors, four of them women, and 38 evangelists.

## Council of Bishops Focuses on Latin America and Global Trends

Meeting for the first time in the homeland of an affiliated autonomous Methodist Church, 95 active and retired members of the **UM Council of Bishops** came together in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Nov. 3-8, to connect their work with the church in Latin America. The council **focused on the Episcopal Initiative: Children and Poverty, concentrating on poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean** and the church's response. UM bishops were joined by bishops of autonomous churches in Latin America.

**In the president's address to the council, Bishop Sharon A. Brown Christopher** noted that the critical centers of the faith have moved to Africa, Latin America, and Asia. She quoted Philip Jenkins, a professor at Pennsylvania State University, saying, "The balance will never shift back. By 2025, 50% of the Christian population will be in Africa and Latin America, and another 17% will be in Asia." The bishop **asked the council to find ways where theological discourse can be modeled in such a way that we do not fall into two theological camps** and instead "engage in a 146-sided theological discourse that transcends division and offers a sign of unity to our fractured church and world."

The Council of Bishops voted, 33 to 18, to ask for a Judicial Council ruling on the constitutionality of electing an active bishop to a four-year term as president without any assignment to an episcopal area. The bishops agreed to finalize a General Conference petition calling for such a position if the court finds no problems with the plan. The Council of Bishops learned that the rules committee of General Conference **would not forward** a suggestion from the Commission on General Conference proposing that bishops chair legislative committees.

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Andrew J. Schleicher

Mickey N. Frith

Harriett Jane Olson

Neil M. Alexander

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The bishops urged annual conference leaders to circulate *The Urgent Call*, a campaign seeking 10 million endorsers to make nuclear disarmament a priority on the national agenda, and asked the council president to write a letter to the U.S. State Department indicating concern about the denial of a visa to Bishop Ricardo Periera of Cuba to attend the San Juan meeting. — J. Richard Peck

## Vieques Residents Receive Support from United Methodist Bishops

“We consider this sacred ground,” Bishop Elias Galvan told **27 bishops and church officials gathering Nov. 6 in a shed across the street from Camp Garcia**, a U.S. naval base in Vieques, Puerto Rico, the **site of Navy bombings and live-ammunition practices**. The team visiting the 18-mile-long island was the second group to travel there in association with the Nov. 3–8 meeting of the Council of Bishops in San Juan. The first 25-member group included Methodist bishops from Latin American nations.

Prior to visiting the resistance base near the naval station, the bishops stopped at a Methodist Church in Vieques where four local leaders, including Victor Emerit, vice mayor of the island community, offered a litany of disasters accompanying the 60-year military occupation of two-thirds of the island.

“Thousands of Navy men take over our town,” said Emerit. “They piss on our sidewalks and pick fights with locals.” He and others told of displaced farmers, economic stagnation with 73% living below the poverty line, the 1999 killing of a security guard at Camp Garcia, cancer rates 26% higher than the rest of Puerto Rico, a higher rate of infant mortality, and tremendous noise pollution.

**Governor Sila Maria Calderon of Puerto Rico** paid a surprise visit to the bishops during an executive session in San Juan. Calling them “men and women of peace,” she **expressed appreciation for the bishops’ support for ending military exercises on the island**. She said President George Bush has assured her “steps are being taken” to end the bombing by May 2003. On their final day, the bishops passed a resolution calling for steps leading to demilitarizing and decontamination of the island. — J. Richard Peck

## Short Takes

- With the deadly storms that hit 13 states on Nov. 10, UMCOR is making available emergency grants to any affected conference at the request of the area’s bishop. At least 35 people were killed, and many more are missing (Advance #901670-1, please note: “November 10 Storms”).
- Many needs still exist in the Louisiana Conference in the wake of Hurricane Lili and Tropical Storm Isidore. Supplies of flood buckets, health kits, and school kits are seriously low, and volunteers are needed for cleanup and recovery efforts. The areas affected are primarily in the south central and southeastern portions of the state. This includes the Acadiana, New Orleans and Northshore Districts but does not exclude all other districts in the entire south Louisiana area. For more information, visit [www.gbgm-umc.org/umcor](http://www.gbgm-umc.org/umcor) (Advance #901185-6).  
— Betty Backstrom, *Louisiana Now!*
- The Academy of Parish Clergy (APC) has chosen William H. Willimon’s book *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Abingdon Press, 2002) as one of the Top Ten Books for 2002. The APC is an interfaith professional development body comprised of Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish clergy members. The book is a guide to the joys and challenges of pastoral ministry. A companion volume, *Pastor: A Reader for Ordained Ministry*, was also published by Abingdon Press in 2002.

- Based on the results of a spring 2002 survey, John C. Green of the Bliss Institute at the University of Akron and Amy L. Sherman of the Hudson Institute found that faith-based organizations (FBOs) receiving government funds are satisfied (93%) with their government relations and are finding ways to maintain their program's religious character. However, FBOs are mostly unfamiliar with the charitable choice guidelines and find the reporting requirements burdensome.
- Twelve pastors and laypersons from Eastern Europe met Oct. 24–26 with about 80 others to explore how the U.S. church can be in partnership with churches in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Poland, Slovakia, and the former Republic of Yugoslavia. In Mission Together, [www.inmissiontogether.com](http://www.inmissiontogether.com), is a program of the General Board of Global Ministries. There are currently 24 U.S. partners in Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia.
- UM Communications will provide a one-year fellowship to a UM young adult of racial ethnic minority. Now in its fifth year, Judith L. Weidman Racial Ethnic Minority Fellowship program selects one person a year to be placed in an annual conference and be mentored by an experienced communicator. While working with the conference, the fellowship recipient will gain experience in multiple forms of communication such as newspaper writing, video production, and church public relations. For more information, visit <http://crt.umc.org/rem/>.
- With 80 local church and annual conference Web developers present in person and another 306 listening to a Web cast, two panels of experts discussed how the Web and streaming media can be of use in ministry for the UM Web Ministry Guild meeting in New Orleans, Oct. 31, in conjunction with the annual gathering of the UM Association of Communicators. To obtain more information and to hear the presentations, visit [www.umc.org/webministry](http://www.umc.org/webministry).  
— *Chuck Russell, UM Communications*
- **Correction:** The UM Association of Communicators endorsed a General Conference proposal **recommending**—not requiring—that there be a coordinator for communications in each annual conference.

## On the Record

“With war looming large in our future, our churches have to take the lead and remember that fundamental message of peace and love that Jesus preached. . . . It must be the responsibility of our churches to lead the call for peace.” — *Tyrone Gordon, pastor of St. Luke UMC, Dallas, Texas*

“God has allowed me to serve both as a soldier and as a pastor as a means of preparing me for the challenge of being a chaplain. . . . During my time as a soldier, I learned the rigors and rewards of Army life both in peace and in war. God has prepared me to be a spiritual leader for today's military family.” — *Capt. Edward H. Franklin Jr., UM chaplain at Fort Sill in Oklahoma*

## Positions Available

Full-time communication coordinator. Contact: Kentucky Conference Office, 7400 Floydsburg Rd., Crestwood, KY 40014; phone: 502-425-3884; fax: 502-426-5181.

## Personalia

**Bishop F. Herbert Skeete** (retired) has been temporarily named bishop of Zimbabwe while **Bishop Christopher Jokomo** seeks medical care during the next six months..... **Charles Sherwood McCoy**, 79, UM pastor, emeritus professor, and founder of the Center for Ethics and Public Policy at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, died Nov. 3.