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THE WEEKLY NEWSLETTER FOR UNITED METHODIST LEADERS

Return of Missionaries to Liberia Seen as Sign of Hope

UM missionaries evacuated from war-torn Liberia in June are returning to the West African country. The process is expected to be complete in early December. Bishop John Innis (Liberia Area) said, "The return of the missionaries is a sign of hope for the people of Liberia." Fourteen persons in UM mission service from other countries, mostly from other African countries, were evacuated from Liberia as civil war spread in the early summer. They took up posts in adjoining countries such as Sierra Leone, Ghana, and Guinea, many working with refugees or medical mission programs. They included six regular missionaries and eight Missioners of Hope, a special category of short-term mission personnel that is being phased out. Eleven Missioners of Hope who are Liberian nationals and could not be evacuated remained in the country during the upheaval. All survived.

Henry R.N. Jusu, the area financial executive, was the first missionary to return to Monrovia in early November. He reported that people were able to move freely in the capital city but that many people were seeking assistance and that mission facilities were in need of extensive cleaning. **UM Committee on Relief workers near Monrovia began on Nov. 10 to distribute a boxcar's worth of health kits, layettes, and used clothing.** Workers are also cleaning latrines in refugee camps.

In an update from a Nov. 21 "Short Takes" item, Innis reports that the \$30,000 mentioned previously was recently received from UMCOR, but another \$30,000 was received in two requests during the early days of the war. Furthermore, UMCOR reports another \$52,000 was provided for Liberian aid through other organizations such as Church World Service (Liberian Emergency Advance #150300). — *General Board of Global Ministries*

Georgia Children's Home Settles Lawsuit; Questions Remain

The North Georgia UM Children's Home settled a lawsuit Oct. 30 in which it had been charged with discrimination and violating the state constitution by denying non-Christians the right to work at the home (NEWSSCOPE, 10/18/2002). The annual conference-operated home settled out of court about three weeks after the Georgia Department of Human Resources settled its lawsuit with the same plaintiffs Oct. 9. **The home's directors have not decided whether to continue accepting children from the state.** However, if it continues its relationship with the state, the home will no longer base hiring decisions on an applicant's religious background except in limited cases that are spelled out in the settlement.

The settlement with Aimee Bellmore, a former employee at the home who claims she was fired because she is a lesbian, and Alan Yorker, a therapist who says he was denied employment at the home because he is Jewish, includes an undisclosed amount of money. Richard Puckett, director of development for the Atlanta children's home, says **the amount of the settlement is not coming out of the home's funds.** Currently, about 160 youth are in the home's residential programs, with more than 90% placed there by the state. State contracts account for 57% of the home's operating budget. The state pays a per-diem amount for every child in its custody who is placed at the home.

The final decision on whether the home will continue taking state children will be made by the home's board of directors after the state has issued its new regulations and contracts, which could take up to 12 months, Puckett said. Although the home's current policy excludes the hiring of non-

***A concise, late-deadline report compiled and edited by the staff
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Christians, a board decision in the spring of 2002—before the lawsuit was filed in July 2002—allows the hiring of gays and lesbians. However, they must be celibate and must sign the same agreement as other employees on the matter of sexuality. The policy quotes from ¶ 161 of the *Discipline* and states that individuals should not engage in a sexual relationship outside of marriage.

— Alice M. Smith, *Wesleyan Christian Advocate* (UMNS)

Court Approves \$1 Million Settlement in Camp Rape Case

A Tennessee court has approved a \$1 million settlement in the case of a 12-year-old girl who was sexually assaulted at a UM campground in 2001. **The settlement, signed Nov. 19 in the 2nd Circuit Court for Davidson County, resolves a lawsuit for negligence brought by the girl's family against the Tennessee Conference.** The conference operates Camp Cedar Crest in middle Tennessee, where the assault occurred. The conference had approved the settlement in a July 27 special session in Nashville. **The money will come from dormant conference accounts, active funds, and insurance.**

The conference screens every counselor at Camp Cedar Crest yearly, and its annual training includes issues related to sexual behavior and misconduct. Carl Steven Bentrup, 21, of Nashville, passed through the screening each time, but he had a juvenile court record that was under seal and unavailable to the conference. He worked at the camp for nearly three summers before allegedly raping the girl July 19, 2001. The girl had left her cabin to use the restroom in the middle of the night when Bentrup allegedly took her inside a bathhouse and assaulted her. He later called police and told the dispatcher he had raped the girl, according to the Hickman County Sheriff's Department. He was arrested and charged with child rape, aggravated kidnapping, aggravated sexual battery, and sexual battery by an authority figure. On Oct. 25, a few days before a scheduled court hearing, he was found hanged in his cell. The Hickman County sheriff said the death was a suicide. — *UM News Service*

Short Takes

- The assembly of Methodists Associated to Represent the Cause of Hispanic Americans (MARCHA) approved 24 petitions for the 2004 General Conference. The petitions include: 1) the continuation of the Hispanic/Latino Plan; 2) a funding request for the Holistic Strategy on Latin America and the Caribbean and for the Holistic Strategy on Africa; 3) a resolution celebrating the permanent fund "Encounter with Christ in Latin America and the Caribbean"; 4) a resolution on general amnesty for undocumented Latino immigrants; and 5) a resolution supporting the Council of Bishops' recommendation to establish a concordat between the UMC and the Methodist Church of Puerto Rico. — *MARCHA*
- The directors of the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits accepted the recommendation of the asset/liability committee to replace the reserve-based Diversified Investment Fund as an investment fund with the market-based Multiple Asset Fund. All eligible participant accounts and conference deposits in DIF will be transitioned to the MAF when operationally feasible and when DIF has a positive reserve. Participants age 61 and older will have an option to convert their accumulated employer account balances to an investment fund gradually. Account balances

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for Ministerial Pension Plan participants who achieved the age of 62 or 35 years of service as of June 30 will not be affected.

- The Southeastern Jurisdictional Administrative Council announced Nov. 3 a new Web portal site at www.sejumc.org. It is comprised of the SEJ Ministry Team site, Lake Junaluska Conference and Retreat Center site, and the Discovery Tours Lake Junaluska Marketing site. New features include on-line registration for selected events and ministry on-line donation options; event information with on-line brochures, videos, and links; and connections to SEJ agencies, conferences, and related ministries. — *Jerome Smith, SEJ Communications*
- The Church Center for the United Nations has for 40 years provided office and meeting space for religious and other non-governmental organizations concerned with U.N. issues, serving as a focal point for their activities. The anniversary for this UM-owned building at 777 U.N. Plaza was celebrated Nov. 10. From the beginning, the building was an ecumenical center, not a Methodist one, and it has served as a place where the needs of the world community were addressed. Religious groups now occupy half of the space, and the rest is used by non-governmental organizations. — *Tracy Early, World Council of Churches*
- The UMC supports more Cub Scout dens than any other denomination. A report on 2003 activities found that there are 218,207 Cub Scouts participating in dens sponsored by the UMC. The second highest faith community sponsoring dens is the Roman Catholic Church, with 196,915 Cub Scouts. The UMC has nearly twice as many Cub Scout affiliations as all the public schools in the United States, with a total of 114,891. There are 130,417 Boy Scouts affiliated with troops chartered by UMCs, the second highest of all faith groups. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints leads the nation, with 191,670 Boy Scouts. — *J. Richard Peck, General Commission on UM Men*
- Among the pieces of legislation the Methodist Federation for Social Action has submitted to the 2004 General Conference is an affirmation of academic freedom in UM-related schools and a call to remove the word “usual” from the sentence in the Social Principles that begins, “We reject war as a usual instrument of national foreign policy. . . .” — *UMNS*
- A number of UMs participated in workshops and public seminars on the work and concern of churches during an International Affairs and Advocacy Week, organized by the World Council of Churches in New York City, Nov. 10–14. As a respondent on a human rights panel, Mia Adjali, executive secretary for global concerns, Women’s Division, General Board of Global Ministries, said it is important first to remember that human rights apply to both individuals and groups. Second, strategies for defining human rights require recourse to political action. Third, “universal human rights apply to our own situation and to the situations encountered by others.” Finally, Adjali suggested that people, especially in the United States, should look at violations within their own country. — *WCC*
- UM pastors Robert W. Edgar, National Council of Churches USA general secretary, and John L. McCullough, Church World Service executive director, took part in a specially convened National Council of Churches in Korea Assembly and an international Interfaith Peace Conference during their time in South Korea. The seven-member delegation of which they were a part also visited North Korea, where the Korean Christians Federation hosted them Nov. 12–14. In Pyongyang, the group monitored the distribution of 420 metric tons (132,000 pounds) of refined wheat flour donated by Church World Service. — *NCC, USA*
- The Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights honored on Nov. 20 a Florida-based migrant labor organization whose cause has recently been championed by the National Council of Churches USA. The 2003 Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award was presented to Julia Gabriel, Lucas Benitez, and Romeo Ramirez, three leaders of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers in Immokalee, Fla. The NCC earlier this month joined a boycott of Taco Bell restaurants after negotia-

tions on behalf of the Immokalee workers failed to achieve the needed changes in labor conditions for the migrant workers. The tomato pickers work for companies that supply Taco Bell. — NCC

- A new study by Barna Research Group shows that young people less than 35 years of age are more likely to attend small churches (fewer than 100 members) than are older adults. Small churches are also more likely to attract those with lower incomes and those without college degrees. The research also said that small churches are less “spiritually alive,” which refers to individual church attendance, Bible reading, and prayer during the week. Another study reported that 31% of persons in their 20s attend church on a typical Sunday, while 42% of those in their 30s and 49% of those 40 and older attend. Attendance by those 25–29 is 22%. For more information, visit www.barna.org.
- Meeting in Antelias, Lebanon, Nov. 17–20, a World Council of Churches consultation of 36 church leaders, ecumenists, theologians, and social scientists called for broad participation in more intensive discussions about the future configuration of the ecumenical movement. Participants queried whether the new global realities are leading to more emphasis on a life-centered vision of the ecumenical movement. A statement from the earlier youth consultation stressed that the desire of many young Christians to solve the current problems of the *oikoumene* “is finding more and more expression outside the churches and ecumenical organizations.” — WCC

On the Record

“If we are to be re-builders, we have to see things as they can be, ask why they are not, and then do something about it. Because we see Africa as God would have it be, we must commit ourselves to rebuild.” — *Mvume Dandala, general secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches*

“God is the God of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:19), and in reality there is only one church, only one body of Christ. The church is not a club of the like-minded, a group of those who are happy to agree. We belong together whether we like it or not, and ultimately we cannot get away from one another.” — *Njongonkulu Ndungane, Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa (ACNS)*

Positions Available

Children’s resource consultants. Contact: Kim Miller, The UM Publishing House/Cokesbury; phone: 615-749-6524; e-mail: kmiller@umpublishing.org..... Treasurer/CFO, General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. Contact: Cheryl Stacker, Human Resources Manager, P.O. Box 340007, Nashville, TN 37203-0007; phone: 615-340-7360..... Organist/choir director. Contact: Tom Griffith, Woodland Hills UMC, 5650 Shoup Ave., Woodland Hills, CA 91367; phone: 818-346-6528; e-mail: griffith@megapathdsl.net.

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Arnetta Beverly, Northeastern District Superintendent, Western North Carolina Conference, has been endorsed for the episcopacy by the Black Clergywomen of the Southeast Jurisdiction..... **Mark Fenstermacher**, senior pastor of Trinity UMC in Elkhart, Ind., has been endorsed for the episcopacy by the North Indiana Conference delegation to general and jurisdictional conferences..... **Gregory McGarvey**, senior pastor of the Carmel UMC in north suburban Indianapolis, has been endorsed for the episcopacy by the South Indiana Conference delegation to general and jurisdictional conferences..... **Roberto Gomez**, Rio Grande Conference, was endorsed for the episcopacy by Methodists Associated to Represent the Cause of Hispanic Americans. MARCHA has previously endorsed five other candidates for the episcopacy..... **Rodney Steele**, senior pastor of First UMC, Texarkana, Ark., has been endorsed for the episcopacy by the Arkansas Conference delegation to general and jurisdictional conferences..... **Canaan Sodindo Banana**, 67, a former Methodist minister who served as the first Black president of Zimbabwe from 1980 to 1987, died of cancer in Harare Nov. 10.