

THE PROGRESSIVE VOICE

MFSA Methodist Federation For Social Action

FALL 2010 (OCT.-DEC.)

ISSN: 0731-0234

VOL. 100, No. 3

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Delegates gathered in Fort Worth, Texas, in 2008 for General Conference.

Road to General Conference 2012

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church will meet again in 2012 in Tampa, Fla. MFSA is preparing for the Conference, which meets every four years and is the denomination's official policy-making body.

MFSA RECEIVES GRANT

As a part of MFSA's planning for General Conference 2012, MFSA received a grant from the Arcus Foundation to fund a full-time organizer to work with the Common Witness Coalition, specifically concerning the full inclusion of all people in UMC membership and leadership.

At the last two General Conferences, the

Common Witness included MFSA, the Reconciling Ministries Network, Affirmation and other progressive groups who share an interest in peace and justice issues. The grant will fund a one-year position focused on 2011 Annual Conference organizing, including election of GC delegates and coordination of petitions to be sent to General Conference.

The grant-funded position begins no later than Jan. 1, with opportunity for renewal through September 2012 to bring the coalition through General Conference.

The grant was approved in October and

ROAD continued on page 2



After serving as MFSA's Executive Director for 12 years, Kathryn Johnson has become the Manager of Field Organization for the National Breast Cancer Coalition. See story page 2.

MFSA Executive Director takes on new advocacy ministry

In late June, Kathryn Johnson resigned as Executive Director of the Methodist Federation for Social Action to take a new position with the National Breast Cancer Coalition.

Johnson became the Executive Director of MFSA 12 years ago and said in a farewell letter to the organization, "Over the last year, as the church began to gear up for General Conference 2012, I realized it was time to hand over the MFSA reins to someone else for this next leg of the journey."

In the letter, Johnson says she regrets not being able to say farewells in person, but events moved fast. She shared her thoughts about her years with MFSA and her excitement about her new advocacy ministry in a letter, available online at www.mfsaweb.org in the staff section.

"MFSA and the United Methodist Church have been blessed by Kathryn's leadership, and will be forever changed for the better," said Tara Thronson, MFSA Board Co-President. "I wish Kathryn much joy and happiness as she embarks the next chapter in her life. She will be missed."

Bishop Cliff Ives, former MFSA Board Co-President, echoed Thronson's comments. Johnson, he wrote, "has written, spoken, and confronted evil and injustice

in our church and society. She has rejoiced with those who rejoice and wept with those who weep. She guided MFSA through three General Conferences...Along with members of the National Board and our many members, I give thanks for Kathryn's leadership and witness and wish her well in years to come. We have been blessed!"

To read Thronson's and Bishop Ives' comments in full as well as other tributes to Johnson's leadership, visit mfsaweb.org and click on "News."

Thronson and Bishop Ives with the members of MFSA's Executive Committee will lead MFSA through the transition period as the Board begins its search for a new Executive Director. The Board will incorporate the focus of the new strategic plan in the search process. The foci of the strategic plan includes:

- articulating a grounded, progressive theology;
- chapter development and base building;
- increasing MFSA's diversity and inclusivity; and
- implementing modern and effective communications.

For a summary of MFSA's strategic plan



Kathryn Johnson rallies with Sojourners in a 2005 demonstration on Capitol Hill, calling for moral budget priorities.

and directions, see the "Mission" section on our homepage.

In the meantime, Rob Walty will continue to serve as the Washington DC office manager and administrator, and Jennifer Mihok has joined the staff as the Outreach and Communications Coordinator. Ginny Lapham has increased her volunteer efforts in the office and now serves on the Board of Directors as a special consultant for organizing at General Conference 2012.

For questions about MFSA leadership, contact Board Co-Presidents Rev. Vicki Woods or Tara Thronson through the national office at mfsa@mfsaweb.org.

MFSA on road to General Conference 2012

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the official job announcement has been posted at www.mfsaweb.org. The ideal candidate will have knowledge of and experience with the UMC structure including General Conference, good people skills and ability to organize. Those who are interested in the position should send their resumes to Ginny Lapham: vlapham@cox.net. We are excited by this possibility and look forward to an expansion of the ministry carried out by the Common Witness Coalition.

GENERAL CONFERENCE LEADERS NEEDED

This General Conference, MFSA is seeking to partner new participants with experienced organizers to chair the legislative

and volunteer positions needed for MFSA's General Conference work. Fresh perspectives matched with knowledgeable backgrounds will make our General Conference team stronger than ever. If you've never been to General Conference, but are committed to organizing for justice in the United Methodist Church, contact the MFSA National Office to find out how you can be a part of this important effort.

Volunteers are needed to monitor various General Conference committees. There are also openings for volunteers to chair several committees or serve in positions such as Meal Coordinator and Coordinator of Technology.

People are also needed to help publish

the daily MFSA *Progressive Voice*.

Tampa will be a challenging location, in part because of the cost of lodging, for MFSA and Common Witness to do our work. Early coordination is essential.

Interested in volunteering for General Conference 2012?

Contact the national office at (202) 546-8806 or mfsa@mfsaweb.org.

MFSA chapters witness for peace, justice at sessions

ARKANSAS

By Liza Godwin

Two resolutions sponsored by several MFSA and Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR) members passed at Annual Conference this year. The resolutions were "To Affirm the Support of the United Methodist Church for Universal Health Care" and "Requesting the Judicial Council to Reconsider Decision 1032 On Its Own Motion." The Judicial Council ruled in 2005 that the denomination's *Book of Discipline* "invests discretion in the pastor-in-charge to make determination of a person's readiness to affirm the vows of membership."

Steve Copley, Sam Teague and Harold Hughes led the way on the resolutions, making the Arkansas Conference one of three conferences calling on the church to reconsider Decision 1032. The other two conferences were Minnesota and Northern Illinois.

The Associated Press picked up the story, giving it national attention.

MFSA National Board member and Reconciling Ministries Network Associate Director Rachel Harvey sat with us at our display table the entire time. She was very excited about what the Arkansas chapter is doing and we were thankful for her presence.

"Imagine Justice," our coalition with BMCR, was introduced at the Unity Dinner, sponsored by BMCR on the Sunday evening of Annual Conference.

DETROIT

By Richard Peacock

Following the opening worship service of the Detroit Annual Conference, MFSA conducted an outdoor celebration emphasizing Matthew 5's call for peace with justice.

The Honorable Alma Wheeler Smith, a State of Michigan District Representative and the first African American to run to be

Michigan's Governor, spoke at the MFSA Banquet during annual conference this year. She described a progressive agenda focusing on the necessity of funding and upgrading public education. The Bishop Jesse and Annamary DeWitt Peace with Justice Award was presented to the Rev. Dr. Joe Perez. He has built bridges by leading seven delegations to Cuba.

Four MFSA Resolutions were adopted. "A Better Policy for Afghanistan" included better plans for development projects by the Afghan people and increased aid for the refugees and internally displaced persons. Churches were encouraged to ask municipalities to call on Governor Granholm to "Declare a State of Emergency" and use her police powers to establish an immediate two-year moratorium on foreclosures, evictions, and utility shut-offs.

The Conference Board of Church and Society was instructed to develop resources for advocacy to "Improve Education and Reduce Poverty in Michigan." That 2010 action was built on a 2009 resolution calling for a 25 percent reduction in military spend-

ing and a second resolution that, "resolved that the Detroit Annual Conference petition the United Methodist Board of Pensions and Health Benefits to divest itself of funds it has invested in corporations whose business and products are supporting the Israel occupation of Palestinian land."


EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

By Margaret Harris

The EPA Chapter of MFSA sponsored two events during Annual Conference.

The first was a dinner at St. Paul's UMC in Lancaster with speaker Peter Pedemonti from the New Sanctuary Movement. We were welcomed by Rev. John Smith, the pastor of St. Paul's, himself an immigrant from Jamaica. Peter Pedemonti spoke about the suffering and anguish in the Philadelphia immigrant community caused by fear of Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids and the threat of deportation. He also played an audiotape of one young man's personal experience. MFSA is en-

Round up *continued page 4*



Published by the **Methodist Federation for Social Action**

The Progressive Voice

United Methodists in Action for Justice
(Formerly published as the *Social Questions Bulletin*)

FALL 2010 (OCT.-DEC.) ISSN: 0731-0234 VOL. 100, No. 3

The Methodist Federation for Social Action newspaper, *The Progressive Voice*, is published four times a year: Winter (January-March), Springs (April-June), Summer (July-September) and Fall (October-December).

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Submissions are due Dec. 15, March 15, June 15, and Sept. 15, for publication in the next issue. Material will be edited for style, grammar and space.



Led by Bishop Julius Trimble, 12-year-old peace activist Frankie Hughes, and Des Moines Mayor Frank Cownie, over 300 people joined in the March for Peace and Social Justice, sponsored jointly by MFSA and the Board of Church and Society.

couraging churches in the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference to support immigrants and the New Sanctuary Movement.

Our second event was a prayer and hymn-singing vigil for an inclusive church, which we hold every year before the ordination service. As usual, we were blessed by having the Rev. Jay Newlin lead us with his beautiful voice.

IOWA

By Eloise Cranke and W. Michael Biklen (photographer)

Well over 200 people were challenged, inspired and entertained by Dr. Barbara Lundblad's address at MFSA's Annual Awards Banquet at Annual Conference. Her topic, "They Say You Can't Command People to Love, (Except Jesus Did)" included comments on many of the issues facing followers of Jesus today. (A transcript of her address is on MFSA Iowa's web site at:

www.mfsaiowa.org.)

Social Action Awards were presented to Doug and Rita Swan of Bronson, and to Paul and Janet Linn of West Des Moines.

On Monday of Annual Conference over 300 people joined in the March for Peace and Social Justice, sponsored jointly by MFSA and the Board of Church and Society. Led by Bishop Trimble, 12-year-old peace activist Frankie Hughes, and Des Moines Mayor Frank Cownie, the march began at Hy-Vee Hall and proceeded to Nollen Plaza in downtown Des Moines, where a brief prayer service was held. There the Bishop reminded us that we have a "script" to follow in determining our position on issues such as immigration, war and peace, and others. More information about these exciting events, along with the quotes from the service at Nollen Plaza, can also be found on MFSA Iowa's web site: www.mfsaiowa.org.

NORTH CAROLINA

By Henry Jarrett

The North Carolina Annual Conference passed a resolution calling for immigration reform as well the MFSA/RUM sponsored resolution, "We Shall Not Discriminate."

At least 70 people attended this year's MFSA luncheon, held in conjunction with Reconciling United Methodists and Friends North Carolina. Jimmy Creech preached a heart-and-soul-stirring sermon. Later, he received the first Jimmy Creech Award for Prophetic Ministry, created to honor those who have spoken prophetically for conscience's sake and paid a price. A few legislative victories occurred as well.

The North Carolina MFSA Chapter had a table at our Annual Conference session, held June 10 through 12, and provided pots of fair trade coffee and chocolate from Equal Exchange to people stopping by the table.

WEST MICHIGAN

By Susan Hagans

Liz Balck, a lawyer with the Grand Rapids "Justice For Our Neighbors" spoke at the MFSA luncheon held during Annual Conference session this year. Balck works with immigrants who find themselves in legal difficulty. Rev. Jorge Rodriguez, pastor at La Nueva Esperanza UMC in Grand Rapids, also told several stories of struggles with immigration and documentation issues. Close to 90 people attended the luncheon.

MFSA buttons were handed out to Conference members as a way to raise awareness, and the Cokesbury display included suggested reading: "Enrique's Journey," by Sonia Nozario, "Trails of Hope and Terror," by Miguel A. Dela Torre, and the UMW recommended reading, "They Take Our Jobs and Twenty Other Myths." Michigan has significant Hispanic populations and migrant workers are essential to agriculture production, thus the luncheon was very relevant.

Round up *continued page 5*

Round up *from page 4*

WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA

By Esther Megill

The Rev. James Hipkins spoke at the Western North Carolina Conference MFSA lunch meeting about the war in Afghanistan. Over 30 people were in attendance. Five new members joined the WNC MFSA chapter during and after Annual Conference.

Resolutions supported by the Reconciling Ministries Network as well as the national MFSA office were presented, but it was quickly voted that they be tabled. This was true also of the chapter's petition on the war in Afghanistan. The vote was called before MFSA members, who had prepared to speak on the resolutions, could address the conference.

The Western North Carolina MFSA chapter continues to work on social issues to present to our Conference, despite infrequent successes.

WISCONSIN

By Wesley White

The Wisconsin MFSA has presented Perry Saito Awards for 25 years to individuals and organizations exemplifying the best ideals of MFSA. This year, Steven Schooler was given the award for modeling Jesus' Way in the World through his faithful presence with the homeless, moving from volunteer to Associate and then Executive Director of Porchlight in Madison, Wis. Porchlight provides emergency shelter, food, employment services, counseling, and affordable transitional and permanent housing to homeless people in the Dane County area. Services are designed to foster independence and transition to permanent housing and employment. Every year Porchlight provides over 350 women, men and children with over 100,000 nights of shelter.

The other Perry Saito Award went to the Wisconsin Annual Conference Disaster Relief Team for organizing logistics, communications, child care, spiritual/emotional



Steve Schooler, left, and Tom Blumenberg, Wisconsin Annual Conference Disaster Response Coordinator, received the Perry Saito Award. The Award is presented to individuals and organizations exemplifying the best ideals of MFSA.

care, First Response Teams and Case Management since the tornado in Siren in 2001. The Team has taken the lead in the Adams County fire, the Stoughton tornado, and flooding in 2007 and 2008, delivering effective and efficient recovery services to the survivors of disaster. The team helps individuals plan and take responsibility for their own recovery by providing emotional and spiritual care as well as physical resources and referrals for their long-term recovery

plans. Wisconsin MFSA honored the Wisconsin Annual Conference Disaster Relief Team for connecting congregations and individuals with Acts of Mercy.

YELLOWSTONE

By John and Linda Lewis

Margaret Novak made an excellent presentation on predatory gambling. She sparked our interest in a critical social issue. Now we need to follow through.

MFSA prepares for 2011 Annual Conferences

Right now, MFSA needs your help in getting ready for 2011 Annual Conferences, where delegates will be chosen and petitions passed to be submitted to General Conference 2012.

Please support delegates who support peace with justice and participate in writing and supporting petitions to Annual Conferences that further the ministry and witness of MFSA. Let the national office know what your chapter is working on, and share your successes—and frustrations—with us.

MFSA and partner groups will be sending out sample petitions and ideas for use at Annual Conferences, especially in the areas of LGBT inclusion, racial justice and Palestine/Israel fairness. We are currently compiling the dates of Annual Conference gatherings and deadlines for submission of petitions.

If you have this information about your Annual Conference, please send them to Jennifer Mihok (Jennifer@mfsaweb.org) at the MFSA office.

Young Adults Blog up a Storm

OnFire, MFSA's young adult chapter, has been heating up the blogosphere, providing a progressive commentary to issues facing our church and world. Featured here are three entries from young writers around the country.

For the latest, visit www.umonfire.blogspot.com. If you have a blog you'd like to share, or are interested in becoming a regular writer, contact OnFire member Shannon Sullivan at shasullivan@gmail.com.

JESUS' STRATEGY: HEARTS AND MINDS

by Brian Schlemmer

My home state of Arizona enacted Senate Bill 1070, an anti-immigrant law which, among other things, tasks local law enforcement with the duty to enforce federal immigration law.

Yesterday, US District Judge Susan Bolton enjoined four provisions of Senate Bill 1070 from going into effect until various lawsuits challenging the constitutionality of the law can be settled.

For folks all around the country who oppose SB 1070, the judge's ruling is a victory. People outside of Arizona, who never had a say in this bill or even in the legislators who voted for it, can celebrate a legal victory. For those folks, the law was neither moral, nor legal, and therefore the court did exactly what it was meant to do: defend the rights of the minority against the tyranny of the majority! Let the celebrations ensue!

But for those of us who live here in Arizona, legal battles are not enough. The fact

of the matter is, many here in our state support this law and a judge cannot rule over the hearts and minds of a community. And this is my community. These are my brothers and sisters, both those being persecuted by SB 1070, and those who support it. The folks who speak in bro-

ken English about the fear of broken homes that will result from this bill, and those who speak in angry tones about "illegals" and their drain on our society, these are all my people. Here in Arizona, there are no winners in these "winner-take-all" legal battles, whether they are fought in legislatures or court rooms. We are a broken people.

Fortunately, I believe in a God of broken people. I believe in a God who treks across human boundaries with migrants who care more about feeding their families than legal documents. I believe in a God who offers them powerful mercy and comfort in the face of fear, if they can just find a way to admit they are afraid. And I believe in a God who came down to hear our stories, feel our pain, and offer us a new life and a new chance to be the loving neighbors and gentle stewards we were created to be.

And so, as much as this bill breaks my heart, you won't find me protesting today. I won't be carrying signs or attempting to shout down the voices of power. But you won't find me idle either. I'm gonna try to listen to some stories today, from folks who need people like me - Arizonans, Christians, human beings like me - to hear their stories. I'm gonna try to talk to folks - respectfully, lovingly, honestly - to folks who don't always agree with me. And I'm gonna try to pray, and trust that the God who can lead a people out of slavery in Egypt and out of slavery to our own selfish desires can lead my people, my home state, out of slavery to our own fear. In other words, I'm gonna



try to give up the short game that makes me feel good about myself but does little to bring love into the world, in exchange for the long game. It takes time to build community with folks you don't agree with, and even more to love them, and yourself, into the people that God created us to be. But maybe, if we take the time, we can create a world in which everyone wins.

Did I mention that I also believe in a God of miracles?

Brian Schlemmer is an MFSA Board member who lives and pastors a church in Tucson, Arizona. He graduated last spring with a Masters in Divinity from the Theological School at Drew University in Madison, NJ.

ROMANS 12:21

*A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE PARK
51 COMMUNITY CENTER*

by Whitney Pierce

I do not remember a time when my stomach has turned so violently just from reading about a particular issue in the news. But I literally feel sick as I read about the protest by some Americans over the planned community center and mosque near Ground Zero in New York City.

BLOG NEWS *continued next page*





What astounds me most is that some of our nation's leaders are vocally promoting this discrimination. Do we not remember the principles upon which our nation was founded? Religious freedom. People came here to escape the persecution they were facing because of their religious beliefs. How is this any different? How can we claim to be the land of the free and stand behind our first amendment rights when people are openly and publicly decrying the building of this mosque?

It infuriates me that people want to equate Islam with terrorism. That is stereotyping in its worst and most blatant form. We cannot allow ourselves to associate the actions of the very few with the intentions of the much larger group with which they identified themselves.

I understand that people are up in arms because of the new mosque's proximity to Ground Zero. However, I think we would better honor the victims by graciously welcoming the building of the mosque. If we reduce ourselves to an attitude of hate, we are acting out of the same irrational fear that motivated these terrorists. What have we learned from this terrible tragedy if we cannot choose to act differently ourselves?

Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good.

This is our chance to show the world that we are not ignorant, selfish Americans. We can live up to the ideals on which we claim to stand. It is my deepest prayer that our Muslim brothers and sisters, especially those here in this country, will hear the voices that rise in support of them. That they will know that there are people who think it is sacrilegious to protest the build-

ing of a space of worship--in NYC, in Tennessee, anywhere.

I think we--people--are more than this. I believe we have the capacity to love more than we have to hate. I believe we best express our faith in God by expressing our faith in each other. I pray that this situation will be peacefully resolved, in a way that doesn't involve the Muslim community feeling pressured to back down. I pray that our country will elect and support leaders that don't actively promote discrimination. I pray that we can learn from the past as we live in the present and look towards the future.

Love wins.

Whitney Pierce is a 2010 Beatitudes Summer Fellow alumna who served at Bread for the World in Washington, D.C. She is beginning her second year as a Master of Divinity student at Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta, Ga.

The Catch 22 of New Leadership

by Rachel Birkhan-Rommelfanger

At the 2008 General Conference, the Reconciling Ministries Network and the Methodist Federation for Social Action hosted the first-ever young adult day. This space brought young people to speak, rally and proclaim to the church that what we want most of all is empowerment and equality for all God's people. These young United Methodists demonstrated passion, faithfulness, idealism, and raw, unbridled hope that could nourish a soul for a lifetime. Speaking with wisdom beyond their years about the call of God on their lives, they boldly declared that the change we seek has already come, be-

cause it is alive and vibrant in this new generation.

At informal youth gatherings I have heard another message as well: Being a young voice in the church can be isolating and lonely. The world tells you that people are not willing for change or new ideas. Our systems and structures at times crush the passion and vision of our young leaders. If we are to create the inclusion we desire—and be on the cutting edge of what we know our church can be—we must empower new and varied voices.

We all have a lot to learn from each other. The passion and the energy that young people have may need a direction, a task, or an outlet. We cannot just tell young people they are leaders. We have to do the work of empowerment, skill training, and mentoring while being open to new ideas and energy. Leadership development takes



time, energy, and resources, and we have to be willing to prioritize it to honor new leadership.

We must remember that God told

Jeremiah, "Do not say 'I am only a youth.'" Each of us is more than our age or race or gender identity or sexual orientation or social class. We are children of God called to do great things. All new leaders of any age or identity need guidance, instruction and support to make their dreams into a reality. As a movement, groups like MFSA and RMN (Reconciling Ministries Network) have the ability to nurture new voices and support young leaders. Those that have new vision need the skills and experience of those who have come before to create the change they wish to see.

Rachel Birkhan-Rommelfanger is a second-year student at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., and former Chair of the United Methodist Student Movement. She spends much of her time advocating within the church around LGBTQ equality, anti-racism, and young people's ministries. She currently serves on the General Commission on Religion of Race, Division on Ministries with Young People and the Reconciling Ministries Network Board of Directors.

Social media for social justice

Are you plugged into MFSA's social media? We're on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and on YouTube. Don't miss out on connecting with us online. Go to www.mfsaweb.org and click on the following links:

MFSA Facebook Group: Keep up with news from MFSA, share your thoughts and tell us about what's happening in your MFSA chapter.

MFSA Facebook Fan Page: www.facebook.com/MFSAVoices.

Connecting Voices Facebook Page (www.facebook.com/connectingvoices): Share your experiences of Connecting Voices (see article on the right) on our Facebook page. Tell us about events you're planning and what you've learned about hosting a Connecting Voice gathering.

MFSA Lectionary Planning Page (www.facebook.com/MFSALectionary): Struggling with this week's lectionary text? Visit the MFSA Lectionary Planning page and seek out discussion. And once you've got something, don't forget to share your ideas with the group.

LinkedIn: Include MFSA in your professional networking. Visit [LinkedIn](http://www.linkedin.com) and search the groups for "Methodist Federation for Social Action."

Want to get in touch with young progressives? "UMOnFire" is your key to the Facebook page, Twitter feed, and blog.

UMOnFire Facebook Page (www.facebook.com/UMOnFire)

UMOnFire Twitter feed (www.twitter.com/UMOnFire)

UMOnFire Blog (www.umonfire.blogspot.com)

Not into the social media scene? Why not give it a chance? It's a quick and easy way to connect instantly with other MFSA members around the country. If you're new to Facebook, [here's a quick and easy guide to setting up an account](#).

See you online!



Connecting Voices—it's here!

Are you tired of being unheard or shouted down?

Have you experienced isolation when your own understanding of faith didn't match those louder voices?

Do you consider yourself progressive or want to know what it means to be progressive?

Is your faith calling you to act boldly, but you're not sure where to start?

If you answered "yes" to any of the above questions, come and join us in Connecting Voices, an MFSA initiative encouraging progressive Methodists to meet up, talk up, and build up the movement for peace and justice in the UMC. By simply hosting a house party, or organizing a get-together at a local coffee shop, you can help to grow the movement of Methodists for peace and justice.

Connecting Voices seeks to create spaces to be

in conversation about how you have experienced God and to move out into the world in Jesus' name to address the causes and symptoms of injustice.

It's not *just* a conversation, but rather the beginning of a larger movement to connect progressive Methodists more effectively. After scheduling your meeting, be advertised on our interactive map, and share your pictures and plans on our Connecting Voices Facebook Page.

This is an opportunity to extend a personal invitation to those unfamiliar with MFSA to engage in conversation around core issues of our faith. Reach out to those folks in your church, district and conference who are interested or supportive of MFSA's work, and invite them to become a part of the movement.

Come connect!

For questions, contact Jennifer Mihok (jennifer@mfsaweb.org) at the National Office. To access the [Connecting Voices Leader's Guide](#) as well as promotional materials, simply click on "[Connecting Voices](#)" on the "Quicklinks" section of the MFSA homepage.

