

SOCIAL QUESTIONS BULLETIN

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Methodist Federation for Social Action

Seeking Global Justice through the United Methodist Church

The Role of the State The Role of the Church

For the past few months, MFSA members across the country have joined their voices with those expressing grave concerns about the Bush administration's proposals for direct federal funding of programs carried out by "faith-based organizations."

Opposition from all sides, and action in the U.S. Senate, have resulted in a slow-down of the entire initiative.

Concerns raised in recent weeks have included the fact that the proposed legislation, like the "charitable choice" provision in the 1996 Welfare Act, would do away with the workable and longstanding practice of encouraging religious groups to administer federally-funded programs through tax-exempt organizations which have clearly public purposes and non-discriminatory policies.

There is also concern that the new proposals would override constitutional protections and allow overtly sectarian organizations to receive taxpayer dollars. Even more disturbing is the danger of religious institutions engaging in religious discrimination in their employment practices, even when they receive federal funds and administer federal programs. Indeed, Representative Robert Scott from Virginia has said that charitable choice "in practice represents a fundamental assault on our civil rights laws."

While the Bush "Faith-Based Initiative" has been slowed down, it has not gone away. Discussion of the possibilities and pitfalls of the Bush initiative must continue. In the

meantime, we must not lose sight of the underlying issue of the crying need to address fundamental human needs in the U.S.

At our recent national board meeting MFSA Field Organizer John Collins clearly articulated MFSA's position as follows:

Poverty and racism are the primary causes of crime, drug addiction, family breakdown, poor schools, teen pregnancy, malnutrition and homelessness in US society. We do not accept the idea that poverty cannot be eliminated or that the poor are to blame for their poverty. We do not accept that the richest and most powerful nation in history cannot solve the problem of poverty and racism affecting its own citizens. The elimination of poverty and racism can only be accomplished by the organized will of the people working together, which is to say, by government, which at its best is all the people acting together. What is needed is increased funding for job creation, housing, schools, health care, drug rehabilitation and prisons which emphasize rehabilitation rather than punishment.

The religious community, because of its deep roots and long presence in affected communities, has a unique role to play in solving social problems. That role is primarily in ministering to individuals and families, but the elimination of poverty has never and will never be achieved by helping individuals without addressing the deeper social cause of their problems. Therefore, while we welcome increased opportunities for religious groups to partici-

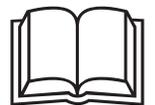
PRIORITY ACTION GUIDE

now available from the national office featuring:

- MFSA resolutions and MFSA-supported resolutions from General Conference 2000
- Background information
- Suggestions for action
- Resource Lists
- and much, much more!

Cost: Loose-leaf Action Guide \$10 plus \$2 S & H. Get your copy today!

New MFSA Priority Action Guide



The **United Methodist Book of Resolutions** is filled with a wide range of resolutions addressing critical justice issues of our day.

At General Conference 2000, MFSA submitted a number of resolutions on issues ranging from white privilege to U.S. foreign policy in Colombia. We also actively supported a number of resolutions submitted by others.

The vast majority of these resolutions were adopted and are now in the **UM Book of Resolutions**.

In addition to continuing to advocate in areas where we were not able to make

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MFSA Board of Directors Looks to the Future

ment among progressive United Methodists after General Conference to work to impact the church.

Efforts to adjust the structure within the MFSA Board of Directors to effectively carry out its work included the creation of eight "Justice Action Committees" and plans for the executive committee of the board to meet more often. An MFSA Legislative Task Force was also constituted to plan for General Conference 2004.

Immediate plans for the future include the hiring of a new staff person to work as a field organizer with MFSA and dissemination of a **Priority Action Guide** to aid chapters across the country in building on the several pieces of MFSA-sponsored and supported legislation that passed at General Conference 2000.

On Saturday evening, February 24th a celebratory dinner was held and awards were presented to five persons honoring their excellence in social justice ministry. The awards, given in memory of MFSA stalwarts Lee and Mae Ball, were presented to the Rev. Phil Lawson, Jean and Jim Strathdee and the Revs. Virginia and Bruce Hilton.

The Rev. Eric H.F. Law, a consultant and trainer in multi-cultural organizational development, helped the MFSA board of directors look at the dynamics of multi-cultural communication.

Meeting at St. Mark's UMC in Sacramento, California from February 21 to 25, members of the National Board of Directors of the Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA) reflected on where things stand for progressive United Methodist Christians after General Conference 2000 and sought to discern faithful directions for the future.

Focusing on their priority commitment to racial justice, the board spent the first two days of the meeting with the Rev. Eric Law, a consultant and trainer in multi-cultural organizational development. MFSA has a long way to go in being a fully inclusive organization that effectively combats racism within our members, our organization, the church and society. Board members viewed this time with Eric Law as a helpful beginning on what they hope will be a fruitful journey to continue addressing issues of racial justice.

During the business sessions of the board meeting, two new chapters and one new chapter-in-formation were welcomed into the organization. Representatives of the two new chapters, in Western North Carolina and Arkansas, spoke of the exciting MFSA initiatives that are taking place in their annual conferences. Likewise, the representative of the chapter-in-formation in Desert Southwest Annual Conference, spoke of renewed energy and commit-

Recipients of the MFSA Ball Award, Virginia (front) and Bruce Hilton, have been life-long social activists. A brief sampling of the many ministries they have undertaken include: working for racial justice and fair housing in Dayton, Ohio; serving on the staff of the Delta Ministry in Mississippi (Bruce as an organizer and Virginia as a nurse volunteer with evicted sharecroppers); working against militarism and war; and working for the rights of sexual minorities. The Hilton's recently helped to found a United Methodist network of parents of gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgendered children . The witness of these parents at General Conference last May was profoundly moving.

Jim and Jean Strathdee (left and center) received the MFSA Ball Award for the significant justice ministry they carry out through music. Directors of Music at St. Mark's UMC in Sacramento, the Strathdees have taken their gift of music around the world including Nicaragua and the Nevada Nuclear Test Site.

Currently running for mayor of Hercules, California, Rev. Phil Lawson (right) has worked passionately for social justice throughout his life. As Deputy Administrator to the Berkely City Manager, Phil was responsible for the Community Action Program. As pastor at Easter Hill UMC, he led the congregation in Community Economic Development, including the building of affordable housing.

Speak Up on Budget Priorities

by Kathryn Johnson

Before my little Honda Civic got rearended on a rain-slicked highway outside of Washington, DC, it used to bear a bumper sticker that read: IF WE CAN RISK NUCLEAR WAR, WE CAN RISK DISARMAMENT. The bumper sticker conveyed two messages. First, it signaled my opposition to nuclear arms. Second, this "Cold War" vintage bumper sticker signaled that my car had reached a venerable old age (15 years and counting).

I actually considered removing the bumper sticker at one point when it seemed obvious, with the end of the Cold War, that there was absolutely no justification, assuming there ever had been, for nuclear arms.

Unfortunately my bumper sticker, had it not met its demise, would be very current once again as members of the new administration in Washington refuse to ratify the nuclear test-ban treaty (CTBT), promote a national missile defense system which would violate the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, and advocate putting weapons in space.

It is essential that those of us committed to upholding current arms control treaties and opposed to an acceleration of the arms race, make our voices heard early on as the new administration tests the limits as to how far they can go.

As MFSA members we do not always stand in the mainstream of the policies of our own denomination. On this issue, however, we stand on very solid UM ground.

The resolution "The United Methodist Church and Peace" (paragraph 318 in the 2000 Book of Resolutions) states in part:

True priorities in national budgeting are distorted by present expenditures on weapons. Because of fear of unemployment, desire for profits, and contributions to the national balance of payments, the arms industry engenders great political power. Arms-producing nations seek to create markets, then vie with one another to become champion among the arms merchants of the world. Food, health, social services, jobs, and education are vital to the welfare of nations. Yet their availability is constantly threatened by the overriding priority given by governments to what is called "defense."

We support initiatives in every part of the world that move toward the goal of disarmament. This demands a radical reordering of priorities coupled with an effective system of international peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peace building. The church must constantly keep that goal before peoples and governments.

The time is now to let your members of Congress and the Bush Administration know that:

-- The notion of protecting the nation from a nuclear war by buying more weapons is a dangerous and expensive illusion. Offensive nuclear arms are much easier to build than the arms designed to intercept them, and no such system would work perfectly. This explains why the billions of dollars spent on missile defenses over the years has never resulted in a workable system.

-- The deployment of strategic missile defenses would violate the ABM Treaty, the key arms control agreement making possible reductions in strategic offensive weapons.

-- Nearly all of our friends and allies want the U.S. to refrain from building strategic missile defenses.

-- Russia and China would feel so threatened by U.S. strategic missile defenses that they would be likely to increase significantly their nuclear arsenals and possibly put them on a hair-trigger launching system.

Encourage the administration and Congress to ratify the CTBT, preserve the ABM Treaty, and open up negotiations to ban weapons in space. Our lives depend on it.

Role of the Church

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pate in government sponsored programs, we call for vigilance against those who would use faith based initiatives as an excuse to reduce or avoid government's primary responsibility for programs of job creation, public education, Medicaid, public housing, family planning, drug rehabilitation, humane prisons, Social Security and health care.

There is much confusion about the legislation proposed by the Bush Administration, not only in the general public but among members of Congress as well.

At a very minimum, before this initiative is allowed to move forward, there must be full public hearings in both houses of Congress before any proposed legislation proceeds to a vote in committee or on the floor. Issues that demand careful examination include:

- the constitutionality of the proposals;
- the effectiveness of faith-based organizations in the delivery of services;
- the consequences for clients, the organizations themselves, and the general public.

In the meantime, we must hold the government accountable in allocating resources to address the needs of the people.

MFSA Chapter News

The **California-Pacific MFSA Chapter** will be sponsoring a day-long conference on March 24th entitled, *Salvation Matters: Can Progressives Be Saved?* Dr. Mary Elizabeth Moore, professor of Religion and Education at Candler School of Theology, will give two keynote addresses and Bishop Mary Ann Swenson will serve as the worship leader for the day. The event will introduce a bible study on salvation from a progressive Christian point of view for individuals and local churches. According to chapter leaders, "Salvation Matters will help people discover that salvation is about the community of justice, love, joy and peace that scripture calls the realm of God. By grappling with the concept of salvation, progressive Christians can rediscover how we are seeking to heed the authentic teaching of Jesus and be faithful in following the leading of God's Spirit in this age."

On March 3rd, the **New England MFSA Chapter** co-sponsored a day-long workshop along with the New England Conference Committee of Church and Society. James Winkler, General Secretary

of the General Board of Church and Society, served as the resource person for the workshop which focused on enabling the local church to engage in social action. Resources for social action were highlighted and emphasis was given to understanding and making use of the United Methodist Social Principles.

The **Wisconsin Chapter of MFSA** joined with a number of other conference groups on March 2-3 to sponsor a spring retreat with the theme: "Racism and God's Vision of Wholeness, Unity, Justice and Healing." The event was co-sponsored with the Wisconsin Conference Commission on Religion and Race, Black Methodists for Church Renewal, Ethnic Local Church Concerns Committee and Board of Church and Society. Retreat and discussion leader, Curtiss Paul DeYoung, is the president of TURN (Twin Cities Urban Reconciliation Network) in Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota. Those gathered for the retreat were challenged to, "cultivate harmonious partnerships, put aside the hostility that divides us, lose our inferiority, rage, fear and be-

come a new creation in Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The Rev. Darren Cushman Wood will serve as the keynote speaker at the Spring Retreat of the **Oregon-Idaho MFSA Chapter** on the theme: "What Price Privilege? The United Methodist Church and Worker Justice." In addition to the keynote address, time will be spent in worship, bible study, and discussions highlighting specific issues around the theme of labor and the church. Darren Cushman Wood, pastor of the East Tenth UMC in Indianapolis, is a member of the board of directors of the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice and a member of the United Methodist Concern for Workers Task Force.

Leadership for the **Virginia Chapter MFSA** Retreat in early February was provided by the Rev. Dr. Jeanne Knepper. The theme for the retreat was "Heterosexism in the Church and Strategies for Change." Dr. Knepper is currently Director of *Shalom To You: A United Methodist Ministry of Empowerment, Education and Justice*, based in Portland, Oregon.

The newly reactivated Missouri East MFSA Chapter met together in St. Louis, Missouri with MFSA Executive Director Kathryn Johnson, on February 8th. The chapter chose the death penalty as a priority issue for chapter action. An April Retreat Day is planned to engage in a study of the Rev. George McClain's book, Claiming All Things for God.

TWO RESOURCES FROM RECONCILING MINISTRIES NETWORK (formerly RCP)

Shaping Sanctuary: Proclaiming God's Grace in an Inclusive Church, edited by Kelly Turney, is a collection of essays, sermons, liturgies, and hymns produced with colleagues from the Welcoming movements in 10 other denominations. **Shaping Sanctuary** is for anyone who values Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender persons as an integral part of the Body of Christ. It explores themes of embodiment theology, integrating spirituality and sexuality, and inclusive worship. Also included is a flexible and easy-to-use eight-week group study guide building connections between faith, embodiment, and worship. Whether for personal study, daily meditation, or worship planning, **Shaping Sanctuary** encourages worship and living that more deeply reflect the gospel message of incarnation, inclusion, and the interconnectedness of all life.

Also available from RCP/RMN is a 15 minute professional **video** of RCP's witness at **General Conference 2000**.

This video of General Conference by videographer Karen McCrocklin includes footage from:

- The arrests of United Methodist protestors working for an inclusive church.
- The powerful Reconciling worship service preached by civil rights leader Rev. James Lawson and including a powerful procession of the Shower of Stoles project.
- The Saturday Rally with over 600 volunteers from around the country.
- The circling of the Convention Center in witness and love.

Shaping Sanctuary is \$14.00 plus \$3.00 for Shipping and Handling = \$ 17.00

RCP/RMN General Conference Video is \$10 plus \$2.50 for S&H = \$ 12.50

Shaping Sanctuary and the **RCP General Conference video** are available directly from the RMN/RCP office 773-736-5526 or email orders@rcp.org

FESTIVAL OF GOD'S CREATION 2001

The United Methodist Board of Church and Society has produced a worship resource to be used on Earth Day which falls on the first Sunday after Easter. The resource entitled, **Witnessing to the Resurrection: Caring for God's Creation**, includes liturgy suggestions, sermon notes and suggested hymns. Suggestions for actions that might be taken by churches (as well as contact numbers to obtain more information) are also included in this four-page resource. If you don't have your copy yet you can phone the board at 202-488-5641 or find an electronic version of the resource at the following web site: www.umc-gbcs.org.

As stated in the resource: We cannot, by our own efforts, "save the earth." Only God, who is the Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer of all creation, can do that. But we can join God in this good work.

AN ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE MINISTRIES CONFERENCE MAY 20-23, 2001 Catholic University Washington, DC

This Conference, entitled "**On Earth As It Is In Heaven: Witnessing to God's Healing of Creation**," is sponsored by the Eco-Justice Working Group of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA and the General Board of Church and Society of the UMC.

Designed for Environmental Justice Coordinators and other environmental justice leaders across the nation, the conference will include:

- presentations on significant environmental justice issues
- theological anchor presentations on selected biblical passages
- worship services in several traditions
- briefings on environmental issues before the U.S. Congress
- opportunities for participants to gather together and to learn about denominational environmental ministries

- suggestions for starting and growing environmental ministries in congregations and judicatories
- in-depth workshops on particular environmental issues.

For more information contact Ministry of God's Creation, GBGS-UMC at 202-488-5641 or email at dbrandyberry@umc-gbcs.org

MFSA Social Justice Prayer Network

By *Edie Harris*

It has been a while since we have offered a reminder, or extended an invitation, for folks to join the MFSA Social Justice Prayer Network. As a former member of the MFSA national board of directors, and one who understands prayer to be an important component of doing social justice, I volunteered to coordinate this aspect of MFSA's program.

To subscribe to the prayer network, just contact the national office (mfsa@olg.com) and let the staff know if you'd like to be added to the e-mail list or to receive the mailings by regular post. Every few weeks I will put together a prayer request list of items related to the social justice work of MFSA.

I invite new persons to join the network and all who are on the network to submit prayer requests directly to me at bricedie@juno.com.

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MFSA Priority Action Guide

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progress, it is essential that we build on the areas where we **have** made progress and to build on the strength of the places where General Conference resolutions call the church to faithful justice action.

To aid MFSA chapters and individual members in pursuing such action, the national staff of MFSA, with the help of many members of the MFSA board of directors, has put together a **PRIORITY ACTION GUIDE**.

This guide is divided into the issue areas defined as MFSA priorities leading up to General Conference. All MFSA Resolu-

tions are listed with information about whether they passed and any amendments made. The **PRIORITY ACTION GUIDE** goes on to give background information, concrete suggestions for action, and a wide variety of resources that persons can use related to the subject at hand.

The New **MFSA PRIORITY ACTION GUIDE** is a "work in progress." Produced in loose-leaf style, this guide is meant to be used in an interactive manner. Add pages to the guide, remove those that you don't find helpful, and send updates and comments to the national office.

Order your **MFSA PRIORITY ACTION GUIDE** now from the national office (phone 202-546-8806 or e-mail mfsa@olg.com). Available for \$10.00 plus \$2.00 shipping and handling. Make checks payable to MFSA.

MFSA OFFICE MANAGER EXTRAORDINAIRE OFF TO SEMINARY THIS SUMMER

Laura Folkwein, office manager at MFSA for the last two years, has been accepted at Iliff School of Theology in Denver where she will begin attending classes next fall.

Laura came to MFSA after serving as a United Methodist missionary in the US-2 Program. Her US-2 placement was with "Just Neighbors Ministry" a program designed to provide low-cost legal services to immigrants.

At MFSA Laura has done everything from data entry to student organizing and new chapter development. Her many talents, flexibility and passion for justice have made her an invaluable addition to the MFSA staff.

Laura will continue at MFSA for the next few months and help us to train a new office manager before leaving for Denver.

MFSA Executive Director, Kathryn Johnson (l), takes the podium at a recent board of directors meeting to publicly thank Laura Folkwein(r) for her many contributions to MFSA as a member of the staff.

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