

Social Questions Bulletin

Seeking Global Justice through the United Methodist Church

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Time to Cease Being Silent

by Kathryn Johnson, Editor

In a powerful presentation at the New England Chapter of MFSA breakfast in June, Bishop Melvin Talbert spoke of the concerted effort of the religious right to dramatically change the character of the United Methodist Church.

Drawing parallels with the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's, Bishop Talbert quoted Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in saying that the church finds itself facing a double destruction: "the destructive violence of the bad people and the destructive silence of the good people."

Bishop Talbert went on to say that the goals and objectives of the religious right are bad for our church. The more moderate and progressive people in our church must take a stand, he said, or they will see our church torn asunder.

There are two things the more moderate and progressive people must do according to the bishop. We must unite and we must cease being silent.

This newsletter attempts to do both. You will find the full text of **Bishop Talbert's** presentation on page 3. **Network News** on page 2 gives a flavor of ways in which MFSA chapters across the country spoke out and refused to be silent during this year's annual conferences. On page 5 you will find the testimony of **Gilbert Caldwell** at a recent listening event held by the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concern on "Homosexuality and the Unity of the Church." As Co-Coordinator of *United Methodists of Color for a Fully Inclusive Church*, Gil gives personal witness concerning his involvement in working for a more open church.

Likewise, now is the time for peace-seeking persons to **make our voices heard in opposition to war in Iraq**. The consequences of the policies now being put forth by our national leaders are frightening. The article on "Alternatives to War Against Iraq" ends with suggested resources and action suggestions.

In addition to speaking out, MFSA and other progressive forces within the United Methodist Church, are uniting to feel our strength and celebrate our faith at a **National Gathering** on April 25-26, 2003 in Atlanta, Georgia. Please mark your calendars and plan to attend.

The time to act is now, said Bishop Talbert. It behooves us to listen. ❖

Alternatives to War Against Iraq

by the Friends Committee for National Legislation

In 1990-1991, Iraq invaded Kuwait, and, in response, the U.S. mobilized an international coalition, under the authority of the UN Security Council, to force Iraq to withdraw. After an intensive and devastating bombing campaign and a U.S.-led invasion, Iraq withdrew from Kuwait and agreed to the terms of a UN-brokered cease fire.

War is not the answer to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq any more than it is the answer to terrorism.

But the war did not end in 1991. Since then, the U.S.—with the support primarily from the U.K.—has continued waging a deadly war against Iraq in an effort to hasten the end of Saddam

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Voices of Faith

New Life in the Christian Church
A Conference for Progressive United Methodists

April 24-25, 2003

Atlanta, Georgia
Crowne Plaza Ravinia Hotel

Come and celebrate **dynamic worship**, be challenged by **thought-provoking speakers**, and engage in open and **honest dialogue**. This is the time and place to gather the progressive voices of faith in the United Methodist Church. Together we will explore what it means to be people of faith in the 21st century fully committed to justice and inclusivity and envisioning together how to move into the future.

Save the date and look for more information soon!

NETWORK NEWS

MFSA CHAPTERS SPEAK OUT FOR JUSTICE AT 2002 ANNUAL CONFERENCES

MFSA chapters across the country worked for justice in a multitude of ways this year. A sampling follows:

The MFSA Chapter in **South Carolina** successfully sponsored a resolution on **Predatory Lending**, a major emphasis this past year for the chapter, which has worked to bring the issue to the attention of both church and secular press locally.

The **Virginia** MFSA Chapter successfully sponsored a resolution against the **death penalty**, a top priority issue for the chapter.

An organizing MFSA Chapter in the **Oklahoma** Annual Conference successfully worked for legislation supporting the inclusion of sexual orientation, age, and gender, as protected categories in **state hate crimes legislation**. The resolution calls for use of **restorative justice**, where possible, for violations of state hate crimes legislation.

The **Yellowstone** MFSA Chapter-In-Formation supported several successful including a commendation for the General Board of Global Ministries, particularly Joyce Sohl, chief executive of the Women's Division, and the General Board of Church and Society, and the Commission on the Status and Role of Women, for their **principled advocacy of peaceful measures in response to terrorism**. Other significant petitions that passed included respecting the rights of clergypersons and candidates for ministry the refusal to answer inquiries about their genital sexual activity, support of the "We Will Not Be Silent, a Declaration from the Western

Jurisdiction", and a directive for the conference statistician to collect and distribute data concerning the average clergy compensation for clergymen and clergypersons.

The **Oregon/Idaho** MFSA chapter successfully sponsored legislation calling for an end to the development and deployment of nuclear arms, supporting the Health Action Campaign, and opposing capital punishment. ❖

I BELIEVE...

By John Collins

"Always be ready to give a reason for the faith that is in you."

The United Methodist Church is going through a critical period and as the Bible says, "It does not yet appear what we shall be." There are those in the Church who wish to see our church turn away from its tradition of social witness, which Wesley understood as rooted in the teachings of Jesus. These same groups also want the church to narrow its theological diversity (its "big tent") and adopt a fundamentalist theology to which all must subscribe.

While I disagree profoundly with the direction these groups would take us, it is not my purpose here to argue with them. There are other and better arenas for that. But I think it is of the utmost importance that each of us articulate our own faith stance – that which motivates our life and action in the world – those things about which we say "I believe."

I have always been glad that the Apostle's Creed is not found in the Bible. It was the attempt of the early church to clarify and settle the many conflicting doctrines and dogmas that contended with one another in the early church. And it did succeed in achieving a theological consensus that has served the Church well over the centuries. But I confess that the creed has always been something of a disappointment to me in one very important respect. It enables me to affirm my belief in Jesus' birth, suffering, death, resurrection and ascension, but it is completely silent on what for me is the central meaning of Jesus coming among us, and that is his teaching and example of a life lived for others. I find Jesus' description of his own call to ministry ("The Spirit of the Lord is upon me..." (Luke 4:18-19), and the Sermon on the Mount more

compelling and inspiring than the Apostle's Creed. Now some may say that the Creed serves a different purpose, but what is the purpose of a creed, or affirmation of faith, if not to summarize what we believe to be the most essential and abiding elements of the Christian life?

So I suggest that each of us try to articulate our deepest, most central beliefs, within the broader framework of Scripture and the traditional creeds. Here, for what it's worth, and in a very tentative form, is my attempt:

I believe that love is the central meaning of Jesus' life and teaching. Love, fully understood, means nonviolence, love of enemies, and servanthood.

I believe it is the duty of the Christian to oppose all war, but more important to study and develop alternatives to war and violence. If war was ever just, that day passed with the advent of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.

I believe that Martin Luther King was a prophet sent from God to show us the path to a world without war or violence, the path that Jesus showed, but from which we have strayed.

I believe that it is the duty of the Christian to oppose all forms of discrimination based on race, gender, class, sexual orientation or disability.

I believe that poverty and its companions of hunger, disease and homelessness, are sins not of the poor, but of the rich.

I believe that despite my failure to live out my beliefs, God still loves me, and that enables me to keep trying.

I believe that God was in Christ, but I also believe that God's self-revelation is a continuing one and is not necessarily limited to Christianity.

I believe that God calls me to work and live in a Church and a community with sisters and brothers who do not believe as I do.

I believe in the final victory of love and justice in this world.

Well, that's what I believe. How about you?

John Collins is a retired clergy member of the New York Annual Conference. He serves as a consultant with MFSA. ❖



MFSA field organizer, Amy Stapleton, facilitating the MFSA New Jersey retreat.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

By Bishop Melvin Talbert

Remarks given by Bishop Melvin G. Talbert, Ecumenical Officer, Council of Bishops, The United Methodist Church, on the occasion of a Breakfast Meeting of Methodist Federation for Social Action, New England Annual Conference, Gordon College, Wenham, MA, June 8, 2002

Greetings to you in the name and spirit of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer.

MFSA has been part of my life's journey for a long time. I'm a founding member of Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR). MFSA has worked in partnership with BMCR and other group focusing on issues of justice and peace in our church and in society over many years.

When Dick Harding wrote and asked me to share some reflections with you this morning, he suggested I might focus on the concern of our church moving to the right and the forces within our church working toward that end. He asked that I reflect on the role of the more moderate and progressive persons in our church in addressing this matter as we look to the future.

Last week I completed reading, again, the last complete book written by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. before his assassination on April 4, 1968. That book is entitled, **Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?** It was his proscription for future directions of the Civil Rights Movement in this country. His analyses and perspectives are as relevant now as they were thirty-five years ago. My reflections for this morning are motivated by Dr. King's book. Thus, my topic: **Where Do We Go From Here?**

The final chapter of Dr. King's book is entitled "World House". The context is a plot of a famous novelist who had died. Among his papers were found a list of suggested plots for stories, the most prominently underscored being this one. "A widely separated family inherits a house in which they have to live together." Dr. King used that plot to lift up the concept of the world community for humankind. I want to use that same plot this morning to talk about the people called United Methodists. "We are a widely separated

family who have inherited a church in which we have to live together."

The Right Wing movement in our church is clergy led. Years ago the more moderate or progressive clergy in our church took a stand suggesting that our church is inclusive and there is room in it for those with a more conservative theological or political view. Thus, clergy sessions of conferences across this nation voted these persons into membership in our conferences. Now, these more conservative clergy, after accepting the open invitation to inclusiveness, have drawn the conclusion that those who opened the doors of our church to them are no longer acceptable to them. They have decided to do some house cleaning, and we are it. They have re-drawn the line or re-written the criteria for who are welcomed to the table of this church as full members in good standing. In short, unless you think, act and believe as they do, you do not belong. Their message to us is, do as we say or get out.

The question for us is, "What are we doing and going to do about this phenomenon in our church?" My sisters and brothers, I believe the time has come for us to deal with that question. I believe that time is now!

Who are the movers and shakers behind this movement to the right? Do we know who they are? Well, yes! We know their names and faces. But do we really know who they are? Let me tell you who I believe they are. They are the same forces that were the antagonists for the Civil Rights Movement; they are the same forces that worked in opposition to the inclusion of persons of color and women in our church and in society; and they are the some forces that oppose the inclusion of persons because of their sexual orientation. They are the conservative, Bible carrying, segregationists who have not given up on their goal of the total reversal of all reforms. At the core of this movement is white supremacy, total dominance by white males who would exclude all who would oppose their views. We see it in the Republican Party in the country. We see it in our church.

Now, I realize this is very strong language. Also, I recognize that within these groups are women and people of color. My response to that phenomenon is "What's

new?" We have seen this type of manipulation throughout the history of the struggle for inclusiveness, freedom and justice.

What can or will we do about it? It was Edmund Burke who said, "when evil men combine, good men must unite." My sisters and brothers, it is wrong to practice segregation and discrimination against persons because of their race, gender and sexual orientation. It is time for us to take a stand and stop trying to appease those who do it.

In speaking of the dilemma of blacks in America in 1967, Dr. King described how, after the Civil Rights Act was signed by President Lyndon Baines Johnson on August 5, 1965, liberals in America became threatened when the focus shifted from the South to the North. He said that liberal whites supported civil rights for blacks in the South, but were not prepared to embrace full human right for blacks in the North. So in the midst of this shift of the civil rights struggle from the South to the North, the white liberal chose to disengage the struggle for full human rights and to find comfort with those who publicly fought against it. He went on to say, blacks found themselves facing a double destruction: "the destructive violence of the bad people and the destructive silence of the good people."

My sisters and brothers, I believe we face a similar force of double destruction in our church now. We face "the destructive violence of the bad people and the destruc-

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SOCIAL ACTION NEWS

MENUM TO PARTICIPATE IN UPCOMING UNITED NATIONS SYMPOSIUM

By David Graybeal

The United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People will convene a symposium for international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) at UN headquarters in New York September 23-24, 2002. Leaders of NGO's will come from nearly every continent to share their views and to consider alternative strategies in the establishment of peace with justice in the Middle East.

This meeting provides an extraordinary opportunity for MENUM and MFSA members to share with other NGO's our concerns and convictions. There will be plenary presentations by scholars and Middle East leaders as well as a variety of workshops. Similar symposia meetings in the past have included a final statement written by the NGO's to the UN Secretary General, urging the Security Council and the General Assembly to take actions in support of the Palestinians.

Security is tight at the UN. It will be necessary for all who wish to participate in the September symposium to request credentials before September 9th when a list must be submitted. Please contact David Graybeal at dgraybea@drew.edu or Kathryn Johnson kj@mfsaweb.org for further information and/or to add your name to the list of those attending and thus needing credentials. ❖



David Graybeal, standing with Martie Fischer and Diane Roe, is honored for his many contributions to the work of MENUM.

Alternatives to War continued from page 1

Hussein's regime, or, failing that, to coerce the regime to comply fully with the terms of the cease fire. The U.S. and U.K. have imposed and enforced "no fly" zones over Iraq, leading to periodic bombing of Iraqi air defenses installations. The U.S. has also led the UN Security Council in maintaining and enforcing punishing economic sanctions. As a result of these campaigns, tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians have died from the economic sanctions, many other civilians have died from the bombing, and the once highly-developed Iraqi economy has been destroyed. Yet, Saddam Hussein remains firmly in power and as defiant as ever.

Now the Bush Administration is preparing the American public and foreign governments for the possibility of U.S.-led military action to topple Saddam Hussein's regime.

There is no doubt that Saddam Hussein is a brutal dictator. His regime has oppressed the Iraqi people, committed acts of aggression against its neighbors, and developed and used weapons of mass destruction. These activities have contributed greatly to the suffering of Iraqi citizens and citizens in neighboring countries, and these activities have threatened peace and security throughout the region. There is justifiable cause for concern and intensive, multilateral engagement on this matter. However, demonizing and threatening Saddam Hussein—as others have recently demonized, threatened, and attacked the U.S.—will only increase the violence and hatred and deepen the suffering for all involved. The U.S. and the UN must seek another way.

War Is Not the Answer

War is not the answer to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in

Iraq any more than it is the answer to terrorism. War with Iraq will not make the world more secure from these weapons. Indeed, war could lead Saddam Hussein to use such weapons as a last resort on the battlefield or against civilian populations. Further, other regimes, seeing what the U.S. is doing to Iraq and fearful that they will be next, may feel compelled to equip themselves with such weapons in self-defense against the U.S. or other potential aggressors. A dangerous proliferation of WMD may result.

If Not War with Iraq, Then What?

Instead of risking a war that may result in the unleashing WMD by all sides, the U.S. and the UN must take a different path—a way that strengthens the international rule of law, demonstrates respect for human rights, and breaks the cycle of violence. We recommend the following alternative approaches to war.

1. Stop threatening to violently overthrow Saddam Hussein. This U.S. policy undermined the rule of international law. Further, it will likely provoke Saddam Hussein and others to respond in kind with violence, undermine efforts to reduce terrorism and stop the proliferation of WMD, under-cut domestic political opposition in Iraq, and elevate Saddam Hussein's political standing among his many sympathizers at home and abroad.

2. Resume direct negotiations with Iraq. U.S. and Iraqi diplomats must begin talking to one another. Diplomatic engagement helped prevent a devastating nuclear war between the U.S., Soviet Union, and China during the Cold War. Diplomatic engagement now, under the auspices of the UN Security Council or other third party mediation, can help lead the U.S. and Iraq away from the brink of war.

3. Demilitarize the conflict with Iraq. The U.S. should immediately stop enforcing the "no fly" zones and bombing Iraqi military installations. The Iraqi government has little incentive to cooperate with weapons inspections when its sovereignty is being violated daily and it is being fired upon regularly by U.S. aircraft. Over the years, many civilians have been killed by errant bombs or as a consequence of attacks on military sites located near

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civilian populations. The end result of this policy has been to strengthen Saddam Hussein's regime domestically in the face of what many in Iraq believe to be a hostile enemy and to diminish U.S. standing in the Muslim and Arab world generally.

4. End the inhumane economic sanctions immediately. The U.S.-led UN economic sanctions have violated both international humanitarian and U.S. law by harming civilians as a means to coerce action by a government. The sanctions have harshly punished the people of Iraq for the actions of an oppressive regime over which they have no control. Tens of thousands have died from curable and preventable diseases due to the lack of adequate nutrition, medical supplies, clean water, and sanitation. The end result of this eleven-year U.S.-led policy is a generation of civilians without hope.

5. Continue the current embargo on the sale and transfer of military equipment. The sale and transfer of weapons to Iraq and the region by the U.S., Russia, China, and others has helped to fuel both the escalating violence and the increasing lethality of that violence. The U.S. should work with others to extend an international moratorium on the sale and transfer of major weapons systems to all countries in the region. Long-term peace and security will require ending the current weapons build-up, reducing the level of threat, building confidence, and supporting civilian control of militaries.

6. Continue to press Iraq to accept UN weapons inspections and monitoring. Iraq has an international obligation to assure its neighbors that its WMD stockpiles and production facilities have been destroyed. This is an essential confidence-building measure to advance peace and security in the region. However, the same inspections should be extended to other countries, as well. The U.S. should work to expand this monitoring effort in the context of a regional arms control and disarmament agreement. The region has a long history of devastating wars. Countries will disarm only when leaders are assured of their security through other, more effective means. ❖

Friends Committee for National Legislation's website <www.fcnl.org> contains excellent resource material on Iraq including avenues for action.

TAKE ACTION NOW CONTACT YOUR SENATORS

Urge them to call for fair and balanced congressional hearings on U.S.-Iraq relations, with testimony from internationally recognized authorities. Let them know that you oppose U.S. efforts to violently overthrow Saddam's regime.

CALL

Capitol Switchboard: 202-224-3121

Call the Capitol Switchboard and asked to be connected to your Senator's office. Ask to speak with the legislative aid covering military and foreign affairs. Urge your Senator to take leadership in pressing for immediate hearings into this matter of utmost importance.

WRITE

Senator _____

U.S. Senate

Washington, DC 20510

Write to your Senators and reinforce the urgency you convey in your phone call. Personalize your letter. Let your Senators know why you are opposed. Use information from the previous article as well as the directions for U.S. policy below.

SUGGESTED DIRECTIONS FOR US POLICY

Congress should hold fair and balanced hearings on U.S.-Iraq relations and policy options.

The U.S. should work with the UN Security Council to end economic sanctions.

The U.S. should support the return of UN weapons inspectors to Iraq to objectively assess the status of Iraq's Weapons of mass destruction.

The U.S. must engage actively with the Israelis and Palestinians to help bring about a just resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Saddam has exploited and encouraged this violent conflict for his own political advantage against the U.S. throughout the Arab world.

The U.S. should work with the international community to maintain and strengthen the international embargo on weapons sales to Iraq and to expand this embargo to the entire region. ❖

Homosexuality and the Unity of the Church

On Saturday, June 15th, the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns (GCCUIRC) hosted a listening post on "Homosexuality and The Unity of the Church." This event was one of several being sponsored by GCCUIRC in response to a General Conference mandate that they hold a series of dialogues. The focus on this day was to hear from caucus groups. Each group that spoke was allotted 45 minutes for a presentation and follow-up questions and answers.

What follows are excerpts from the testimony of the Reverend Gilbert Caldwell. The testimony of Kathryn Johnson can be found on the MFSA Website at www.mfsaweb.org

EXCERPTS FROM THE TESTIMONY OF THE REV. GILBERT H. CALDWELL, CO-CONVENER OF UNITED METHODISTS OF COLOR FOR A FULLY INCLUSIVE CHURCH

Many "persons of color," particularly those within the African American community have wondered why some of us have found it necessary to develop a statement and a group around the theme, "United Methodists of Color for a Fully Inclusive Church." My personal response is simple.

I was a participant, not as one of the nationally known persons, but as an unknown, sometimes frightened, Black preacher from New England, who answered an internal and external "call" to go to my native south to give witness to what I understood God was calling the racially diverse human family to do and to be. When the "call" was made to come to Selma, I was pastoring Union Church in Boston. I was asked to be one of the leaders of the group from Boston. Within "my" group was a young Unitarian minister whom I was just getting to know. We flew together to Selma and marched across the bridge as our response to the earlier "bloody Sunday" march.

That evening our Boston group separated and ate in different locations. As Jim Reeb,

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The Delta District Sophia Circle: Information from the Source

By Elaine Jacobsen

(Editors Note: RENEW Women's Ministry, the women's program arm of the conservative Good News Movement within the UMC, is sharply critical of the Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries. Among their complaints is that the Women's Division has allowed a district-level UMW group calling itself "Sophia Circle" to exist in Sacramento, California. Elaine Jacobsen, Co-chair of the Sophia Circle has written the following helpful explanation of the origins and ongoing life of the Sophia Circle.

WHAT IS THE DELTA DISTRICT UNIT SOPHIA CIRCLE?

Several years ago, a friend and I (now co-chair with me of Sophia Circle) attended a women's group that met once a month on the University of California, Davis Campus, at the women's center. One of the campus ministers, a UM pastor, was the leader. The format for the meetings, which we attended for a year, was to spend one hour together and to focus on sections of books, or other articles or materials that had been announced at the previous meeting.

We attended for a year, then decided we could just as well have a group with similar format in Sacramento. We met with one other woman, and discussed the possibilities. We decided to ask a UM church close to the Sacramento State University campus to let us meet in their facility (Central United Methodist Church, Sacramento CA). This happened and we have met there since. We had in mind to meet close enough that college women could come.

We also knew of the possibility within the United Methodist Women organization to have a discussion group as well as the possibility of a District Unit that could include women from more than one church. We decided on that.

When it came time to choose a name, WISDOM/SOPHIA was suggested. Since Sophia is the word for Wisdom in Proverbs in some translations and is in the Bible, we decided to use it alone. Additionally, most of us are older and considered that we were "wise."

After meeting several times, we asked the District UMW President to charter us as Sophia Circle, Delta District Unit. She readily agreed. Several district officers

attended the meeting as well as two CA/NV Conference UMW officers.

Most of our small group are members of UMW units in their own local UM churches, with our attendance usually around eleven. Persons from seven United Methodist Churches and two women from a local Presbyterian Church participate.

Since we already knew and worked with UMW materials, we decided to use the Re-Imagining Newsletter as a conversation starter. Three of us had attended a Re-Imagining meeting in St. Paul and found it to be challenging, certainly not frightening or threatening to our core beliefs.

We pledge to our Annual Conference Undesignated giving budget (our giving was double the pledge last year) and at-

Re-Imagining and Sophia are expressions that provoke fear and I am concerned that lack of knowledge is producing reactions that literally have no foundation.

tend District and Conference meetings. We participate in Schools of Christian Mission and Assembly (2002). We are active in our local units, most of us in leadership.

Many of us are leaders in our local churches, lay members of Annual Conferences, and on District and Conference commissions and committees. One was a delegate to General Conference in 1996.

We have no formal connection with the Re-Imagining Community.

Some folks became troubled about our existence when a small article was published in the Re-Imagining Newsletter, saying that we were in our 4th year of existence and that some women were thinking of starting another unit.

I don't know what RENEW is saying about us, so can't respond to whether or not it is accurate. I have seen references to their objections going to the Women's Division and insisting that they deal with us. I think one suggestion was that we be prohibited from using the Re-Imagining Newsletter as focus material. My comment would be that there is a very wide range of materials being used in small groups across the

United Methodist Women organization and that it is not screened by anyone.

On a personal level, at 82 years of age, I have been a member of the Methodist Church's women's organizations for nearly 50 years, having served as a leader at the local, district and conference levels. I think it is one of the most wonderful organizations in the world. I have attended Assembly four times and wish I could have gone this time. I am stimulated by new ideas, some of which I discard and some of which I incorporate into my life and thinking . . . that is how we grow.

I am troubled that it appears that much is being said and promoted without ever having been in touch with us. I would invite any of the critics to attend our meetings to check it out for themselves.

Re-Imagining and Sophia are expressions that provoke fear and I am concerned that lack of knowledge is producing reactions that literally have no foundation. Our intention, of course, was not to provoke fear, but to use a catchy, distinctive name, and alternative materials for focus since we were already familiar with and using Women's Division resources.

In short, operating under guidelines of the Women's Division for groups with special emphasis as well as the District Unit organizational framework, we are a community of women, seeking to know God, to experience freedom as whole persons through Jesus Christ, to develop a supportive fellowship and to participate in mission through contributions to the global ministries of the church.

Additional note from the editor: When requesting information from RENEW, one receives information about the following programs:

- Transforming Congregations (committed to transforming homosexuals from their sinful lifestyle)
- Lifewatch (an unofficial movement within the UMC opposed to abortion)
- The Confessing Movement (seeking to enable the UMC to retrieve its "classical" doctrinal identity)
- The "Good News" publications, and
- The Mission Society for United Methodists.

Run, Don't Walk, to Your Nearest School of Christian Mission

By Eric A. Stone, Chaplain/Director, The Wesley Foundation at Central Michigan University

Testimony of Gil Caldwell continued from page 5

that young, white Unitarian minister left the Black restaurant where he and others ate, he was beaten with clubs and as a result died in Selma. It was my privilege to participate in his memorial service at Arlington Street Unitarian Church soon after we returned to Boston.

If white persons from the north, south, west and east could join with Black persons in those days of violent struggle, when they did not have to be our allies, what about "persons of color" today? As an African American male, heterosexual, I speak out today as an ally of my gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and trans-gender sisters and brothers, as Jim Reeb spoke out for me and persons like me.

I remember well those moments in history when white church-persons, north and south, separated and segregated those of us who were not white, "because the Bible said so." I remember the anger, legislation and sometimes violent death that resulted from any imagined manifestation of interracial sexual activity between white and black persons, "because the Bible said so." I remember the laws in state after state that forbid marriage between blacks and whites.

I sometimes observe in the body language and in the anger in the eyes of those who oppose same-sex unions, "because the Bible said so," the same mood that I have seen for racial reasons. My prayer and my hope has been that the prejudice and anger and violence that race has birthed within some persons, will not be visit upon my sister and brothers who are gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and trans-gender. But tragically it has, and the greater tragedy is that some of those within the church, who claim to follow Jesus, have led the way.

Historians at some later date will record their understandings of the preoccupations of United Methodist at the beginning of this 21st century. May they be able to write that we listened to each other with "open hearts and open minds" and discovered in new ways that we are able to trust what God has done in and through Jesus Christ for ALL humanity. Our God-given task as people of the book and of the Church, is to "screen people in, rather than screen them out." ❖

Wherever you are, seek out your nearest United Methodist Women (UMW) group and find out when and where the nearest School of Christian Mission (SCM) is taking place. If it has already passed in your conference, there may be another school later in the fall. Please promote and attend if possible. I especially encourage you to seek out people in the legal or criminal justice system to participate.

"What's the big deal?" you ask. "Isn't that just for United Methodist Women?"

Let me back up a bit. Some time ago I was asked if I would be a study leader for the Detroit Conference SCM, I knew relatively little about the event, having never attended. I assumed it was primarily for UMW. I was asked to lead the study on Restorative Justice. I had very little knowledge about the topic, but soon received a lengthy reading list. A group from the Wesley Foundation even read one of the books co-authored by a professor from Central Michigan University that was on the list. Reading those books has been a tremendous experience. Desmond Tutu's book, **No Future without Forgiveness**, was gripping, disturbing, and profoundly grace-filled.

A few weeks ago I attended training, and the excitement for this topic has been building ever since. Harmon Wray has written the excellent study book "Restorative Justice: Moving beyond Punishment." Even if you can't make it to a SCM, get this book, urge your church to offer a study and use it, or offer to lead it yourself. Perhaps local UMW groups could join with church and society committees to co-sponsor the study.

Why is it so important?

- The United States imprisons a higher percentage of its people than any other nation in the world.
- In 1993, during the apartheid regime in South Africa, the incarceration rate for black men was 851 per 100,000. In 2000, the incarceration rate for black men in the US was 7,119 per 100,000.

- Of the 109,000 federal prisoners in 1998, only 11 % were there for violent offenses and an astonishing 60% for drug offenses.
- On any given day, one-third of the nations black males in their twenties are under the control of the criminal justice system - in prison or jail, on probation or parole.
- The smallest group of prisoners by far - approximately 1% - consists of white-collar, corporate criminals
- The annual figure for imprisoning a juvenile is \$35,000 compared to \$7,000 for a year of public school
- Between 1993 and 1999 rates of violent crime fell 34% and those of property crime fell 38%, while the rate of incarceration increased.
- Prison construction is estimated at \$50,000 per prisoner, and the average cost of one year in state prison for one adult is \$23,000
- Estimates of the total annual cost of the prison system throughout the US range from \$40 billion to \$50 billion as compared to \$7 million in 1980.

Most would agree that these statistics are disturbing, and that our current criminal justice system is in need of drastic changes. The good news is that restorative justice offers a new paradigm to replace the retributive system we have relied on in the past. The principals of restorative justice are not only applicable to transforming the criminal justice system they can be applied to conflicts dealing with economics, labor and management, political factions, and global violence. So what are the methods, and models of restorative justice? Attend the study and learn more about restorative justice.

I am grateful to the Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries of for their wisdom in choosing this topic and providing such an excellent resource. I hope that women and men will be motivated by it to move us away from retribution to restoration and forgiveness. ❖

Where Do We Go From Here

Continued from page 3

tive silence of the good people." It's time for the good people in our church to let their voices be heard and their positions be known. I believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ is on our side.

The goals and objectives of the movement to the right are wrong and bad for our church. Yet, that movement is combining forces and forging ahead to accomplish them at any costs, even it destroys the church.

The more moderate and progressive people in our church must take a stand, or they will see our church torn asunder. (Certainly many of you know of the public document of IRD which outlines its strategy for

attacking individuals and groups in our church, the Presbyterian Church and the Episcopal Church.) There are people in our church who are open and ready to hear

Photo by UMMS



Bishop Melvin Talbert

more moderate and progressive voices.

What can we do? What is the challenge before us?

There are two things the more moderate and progressive people must do. We must (1) Unite and (2) Cease being silent.

My sisters and brothers, in the spirit of love and non-violence, we must name the demon and seek to eradicate it from our midst. In my humble opinion, the issue is not theological or political conservatism or liberalism. Rather, the issue is justice – what is right and what is wrong. It's time to choose sides. ❖

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