

# Social Questions Bulletin

Seeking Global Justice through the United Methodist Church

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## Stunned by Stupak

by Kathryn Johnson, Editor

I couldn't stop myself. On November 14<sup>th</sup>, the day that health care legislation was being debated on the floor of House of Representatives, I couldn't bring myself to turn off CSpan. I had it on my radio at home, on the radio in the car, and streaming live on the computer screen when I sat down to check email. The struggle to reform our broken health care system has been long and arduous. Reform is finally on the horizon. I was transfixed.

Having said that, let me say that the experience listening to (and watching) the debate was something akin to watching sausage made, but worse. Once sausage is made you can decide to eat it or not. Decisions made about health care will profoundly affect us all. The stakes are high, counted in human lives.

My admiration for the late Senator Ted Kennedy and others who have fought these battles in Congress for decades has grown immensely. The process isn't pretty. To tell you the truth, it kind of reminds me of General Conference. But that's another story.

I had resigned myself to the fact that a single-payer plan was off the table and the bill about to be passed did not contain a number of the things that progressives had hoped for. But it was a step.

I wasn't prepared, however, for the Stupak amendment. I was utterly stunned. It didn't take long for my surprise to turn to anger, fury really.

I couldn't believe my ears. Could it really be true that the passage of health care reform was being held hostage in this manner? That in granting rights to one group, the uninsured, they were removing rights from another, women?

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## OnFire Experiences the Border

From October 28-31st, 10 members of OnFire, MFSA's young adult chapter, traveled to the US-Mexico border for an immersion trip with BorderLinks, a popular education center based in both Tucson, AZ and Nogales, Sonora (Mexico). The purpose of the trip was to connect with people living in and traveling through the region in order to better understand the immediate and far-reaching effects of US-border policy.

The itinerary provided by BorderLinks included: visiting with high school students in Nogales, Sonora; fellowshiping and sharing with migrants at a shelter in Altar, Mexico; meeting with an artist who designs art along the wall; discussing the broken system of "le-

gal" immigration to the US; and talking with many locals about life in Nogales.

The young adults left with a mix of emotions. There were feelings of challenge, confusion, and empowerment, among many others. Beth Rambikur, a participant and an associate pastor serving a church in Las Vegas, shared during the reflection session: "It gives me a lot of hope to be working for the church [amidst all of this]. We are in a position to be prophetic, to share what we've seen, and to provide a vision. Christ is at work, like the weeds that spring up through cracks in the wall. And we, as the church, are called to be a part of that."

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## Program Council Off to a Great Start

The very first meeting of the MFSA Program Council took place from October 15-17 at the Scarritt-Bennett Conference Center in Nashville. The Council consists of representatives of each MFSA chapter. The conversation was lively, the connections made between chapters exciting and the exchange of information helpful. Participants shared with one another about how their faith journey

came to involve working for justice and discussed instituting MFSA book studies in the chapters. We celebrated the significant increased representation of young adults at our meeting and discussed how to make real our commitment to racial/ethnic diversity.

A highlight of the meeting was connecting with former MFSA Organizer, Amy Stapleton, via Skype. Deep gratitude was expressed to Amy for her significant ministry with MFSA.

At the opening worship service we took time to remember and celebrate the life of Rev. Lee Williamson who recently died. Lee led an exemplary life of love and service and was a tireless activist for justice. His presence will be missed, but the difference he made in the lives he touched will live on as a testament to his amazing spirit.

The Council elected Ms. Betty Kobata from the California-Nevada Chapter to join as the second co-convenor along with Glenn Bosley-Mitchell of the Florida Chapter. ❖



*Kevin Nelson (NY) and Tara Thronson (MFSA Board Co-Chair) in Nashville*

## ONFIRE BORDER TRIP continued from page one

The trip was organized by MFSA Mission Intern, Jennifer Mihok, whose overseas mission placement was in what was formerly East Germany.

During her 16 months in the small town of Genthin, she experienced the persisting cultural effects of the Berlin Wall, nearly 20 years after its physical demolition.

The responses of three participants, Lindsey Hazel, Shannon Sullivan, and David Hosey, are included below. Other reactions will be posted on the OnFire blog as they become available: [www.umonfire.blogspot.com](http://www.umonfire.blogspot.com).

## Presente

by Shannon Sullivan



The brilliant color throughout the cultural center to celebrate El Día de los Muertos certainly clashed with my middle-

class, white USAmerican understanding of death. My mother has taught me to think of funerals as a celebration of life, but the reality of drab, icy funeral homes did not reflect this idea of celebration. Skeletons dressed to the nines, colorful paper strung from the ceilings, altars lovingly decorated. But here, to encounter death with such vibrancy seems the only way to cope with living on the border. For so many people in Nogales, Sonora, Mexico and Arizona, USA, living on the border is a constant encounter with death.

We met with a group of high schoolers and introduced ourselves by going around in a circle saying our names and what the word *border/frontera* meant to us. As USAmericans, we spoke of separation, of walls, of discrimination. Certainly true, but also in our cases very abstract words. For the Mexican high school students—fourteen, fifteen, sixteen year olds—the word *frontera* means death. A few said that the border meant “my life” or “culture” but overwhelmingly, “death.” The border is a violence—a physical, emotional, spiritual violence.

We journeyed to Altar, a town that for many is the beginning of the final leg of the journey to the USA, the place where guides are contacted and preparations are made to cross the desert. Here, we stayed at a migrant shel-

ter. Before dinner, we shared songs to welcome tired souls as people came in. We met Pedro, a man in Altar looking for money to buy a prosthetic leg as his old prosthetic was splitting. He said he needed the leg so he could work harder. We met José, an eighteen year-old, small, quiet man who sang softly along with us even when he didn't know the words. We met Juan, who came for dinner but did not stay the night as he was going to begin to cross the desert that night. He told us he had been deported fifteen times. What kind of desperation is it that someone who had been deported fifteen times would be getting ready to again cross the desert?

And then, of course, there is the wall, cutting through Nogales. Lupe Serrano, who has installed many pieces of art along the wall, told us that it was illegal to put art on the side of the wall facing the U.S.A. I was immediately struck by this having visited the remnants of the wall in Berlin last year. On the western side of the Berlin wall, graffiti calling for the destruction of the wall. On the east, nothing. The Soviet guards did not permit people to get that close to the eastern side of the wall alive for fear of escape. And the U.S.A. was so adamant about tearing down the wall; forgetfulness is a blessing for governments who are more concerned about profits than people.

And so we come to our part as characters in this story. Ours is a ministry of making present by naming. When confronted with the question “Now what?” our response is to make present by naming. Our response is to speak of the high school students, of migrants like José, Pedro, and Juan, of justice workers like Ceci and Susanna who led us on this trip. To speak of that pain of families ripped from their lands, of communities divided by the horror of a Wall. And to name ourselves and our governments as culprits. To say human beings deserve better than the choice to die in the struggle or to die of hunger. They deserve better than to leave their home to become expendable labor in a rich (white) society. We must educate ourselves. We must act to educate our communities, to reach out to immigrants outside of our communities, to demand change from our government. In the words of the women who volunteer at the migrant shelter in Altar, we must bring the gospel to life.

*Shannon Sullivan is a first-year Masters of Divinity student at Drew Theological School. A native of Norrisville, MD, Sullivan has followed her passion for reconciliation on nu-*

*merous trips to Bosnia, working in communities now divided along ethno-religious lines as a result of recent genocide.*

## Much to Learn

By Lindsey Hazel



I recently participated in a delegation with MFSA. We traveled to Nogales, Mexico, with a border immersion program called Border-Links. Glancing

over the schedule, I noticed our first stop was a two-hour visit with high school students in Nogales, Sonora (Mexico). This brief visit seemed to pale in comparison to visiting a migrant shelter, conversing with migrants at the shelter or seeing the wall that divides Mexico and the U.S. I was skeptical about how valuable it would be to spend two hours conversing with local high school students. Reflecting on the trip, however, the time spent with the high school students was the highlight of my experience.

Our delegation of nine split into eight groups with two or three Mexican high school students in each group. The groups were given some markers and a large sheet of paper. We were asked to sketch our response to three questions: (1) what are the root causes of migration (2) what are the effects of migration and (3) what can be done to improve the current situation. I was shocked at how articulately the students responded to the questions. As we began to discuss the questions, I realized that I had so much to learn from the students.

The lives of these sixteen and seventeen year-old students represent the reality of a border town. They are witnesses to death as a result of migration. They are witnesses of the wall. They are witnesses of families divided by the border. They are witnesses of death as a result of narco-trafficking. They are witnesses of border violence. The lives of these sixteen and seventeen year-old students represent the reality of a border town—and we have much to learn about this reality.

*Lindsey Hazel is an intern at the Washington Office on Latin America. Originally from Broad Run, Virginia, Hazel has studied in Cen-*

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tral and South America and worked with immigrant communities in Fredericksburg, VA. In March she will begin 2 years of service with the Peace Corps in Costa Rica.

## Tell Them

(in response to the question, what do we say when we go back?)

By David Hosey

Tell them:  
what you are hearing.

Tell them:  
Migrants are not criminals  
nor are they terrorists.

Tell them:  
They are people - struggling for a better life.

Tell them:  
Their crime is trying to work.

Tell them:  
You cannot quell this tide.

Tell them  
the same thing that the migrants told us  
at the other border  
the Mexico-Guatemala border  
before they grabbed hold of the train  
when we told them that they would suffer  
and what could happen and the risks

They told us:

"Better to die in the struggle than die of hunger."



*David Hosey is a mission intern with the General Board of Global Ministries, currently serving in Washington, DC, at the US Campaign*

*to End the Israeli Occupation.*

*As a part of the internship, David also served for 16 months at the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center in East Jerusalem.*

## TAKE ACTION ON HEALTH CARE

**Communicate with your Senators** in every way possible: by telephone, email, visits when they are in your home district over the holidays, and by visits to their Washington offices. **Let them know:**

- **you strongly support comprehensive health care reform**
- **the Senate health care bill must contain reproductive health care coverage for all women**

The UM General Board of Church and Society suggests communicating:

*As a person of faith, I take the matter of abortion very seriously. However, important personal decisions on reproductive health matters, including abortion, should be between women, their families, clergy and doctors and should not be legislated by Congress.*

### STUNNED BY STUPAK continued from page one

I know that some of those voting for the Stupak amendment did so as an act of conscience. Others, however, appear to have been voting as a matter of political expediency. I find it unconscionable that representatives would deny women the right of moral agency over their own bodies for this reason.

On Wednesday, November 18<sup>th</sup>, I joined representatives from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, Planned Parenthood, and the National Organization of Women (among others) for a series of briefings from a number of Senators who will now be working to pass a health care reform bill in the Senate.

We learned how it is that the Stupak amendment came to be introduced. The most influential proponent of the Stupak amendment was the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. An amendment crafted by Representative Capps, expressing a compromise between those who hold opposing convictions of a woman's right to choose, was rejected by the bishops. Instead they evidently saw the health care reform bill as a means to pursue their goal of making abortion illegal. At the eleventh hour, Representative Stupak and his supporters, including the bishops, threatened to scuttle the entire bill unless the restrictive language on abortion coverage was included.

It is imperative that such language not be incorporated in the bill now in the Senate. Our Senators must hear a clear word from us that we believe decisions on reproductive health matters, including abortion, should be between women, their families, clergy and doctors, not legislated by Congress.

*Senator Dodd, speaking at a Nov. 18th briefing, has picked up the mantle from Sen. Kennedy in seeing health care legislation through the Senate.*



During the briefing with Senator Dodd, he said that moments for fundamental reform don't come along very often, sometimes only once or twice in a generation. "This is one of the moments," he concluded.

Several organizations have written extensive background material that will help in understanding the complexities and the impact of the Stupak amendment. You will find links to several of these organizations on the MFSA website at [www.mfsaweb.org](http://www.mfsaweb.org). ❖

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# MFSA Gives Input to the Study Committee on the Worldwide Nature of the UMC

by Kathryn Johnson

**Background:** For decades, leaders of the United Methodist Church, at the General Church level, have been seeking solutions to the inequities present in the structure of our denomination. A few of the bodies that have struggled with these issues are: the Commission of Structure of Methodism Overseas (COSMOS); the Committee to Study the Global Nature of the United Methodist Church; the Connectional Process Team; the Task Group on the Global Nature of the Church; and, the Study Committee on the Worldwide Nature of the UMC.

In addition to these groups others who have weighed in include the Council of Bishops, the General Council on Ministries, the Connectional Table, the members of several General Conferences and the members of Annual Conferences. Most of these bodies have included church leaders from both the UMC in the US and the UMC in Central Conferences in the Philippines, Africa and Europe.

It is clear from the amount of time, energy and resources we have poured into this effort, that the issues involved are both important and not easily resolved!

Indeed, twenty-three of the proposed constitutional amendments that were approved by General Conference 2008, to be voted on by Annual Conferences in 2009, related to this topic. Although not all of the Central Conferences have voted yet on the amendments, it seems clear from the unofficial vote counts taken in US Annual Conferences that none of the amendments related to the structure of the church will pass. Note: The official count on these amendments will be announced by the Council of Bishops at their spring meeting.

One of the groups that has picked up the task of studying and recommending what needs to happen next is called **The Study Committee on the Worldwide Nature of the UMC** (hereafter referred to as the **Study Committee**). I say *one* of the groups because there are currently several other groups addressing many of the same issues. The groups themselves are working to figure out how to stay in communication and work collegially.

In September, MFSA received a letter from the Chair of the Study Committee, Bishop Scott Jones, inviting us to attend the

Committee's November meeting. He said in his letter that "the questions we must ask and answer are complex, and we seek to listen to a wide range of church leaders early in our process." He continued later in the letter to say, "I write to you as a leader of the Methodist Federation for Social Action to ask if your group would like to make a presentation to the Study Committee so that we might know of any concerns, ideas or possible ramifications of our work that we should consider."

We took them up on this invitation and I went on behalf of MFSA to Lake Junaluska on November 10th. Other groups and agencies invited to make presentations included: Reconciling Ministries Network, Women's Division, Commission on the Status and Role of Women, United Methodist Men, Confessing Movement, Lifewatch, the General Board of Discipleship, Black Methodists for Church Renewal and the General Board of Global Ministries.

Below I have printed an excerpt from my presentation. To see the entire paper go to [www.mfsaweb.org](http://www.mfsaweb.org) and click on the icon labeled "Justice in the UMC."

## EXCERPTS OF MFSA PRESENTATION

It is striking really, that since the 1960's every commission, council, connectional process team and study group has come up with very similar recommendations when it comes to transforming the structure of the UMC.

The reasons for needing to change the structure are clear. The current structure lends itself to many inequities:

- By matter of history, language, resources and location, the governance of the UMC continues to be dominated by the U.S.
- An inordinate amount of time is spent at General Conference dealing with matters that do not directly affect those in regions outside of the U.S.
- Even on the face of it, our structure is odd (some would say flawed) by virtue of the fact that Central Conferences and U.S. Jurisdictions are clearly set up as parallel structures and yet--in some very significant respects--do not operate in a parallel manner.

- The *United Methodist Book of Discipline* does not apply consistently and uniformly to everyone in the UMC. Those in regions outside of the U.S. are able to adapt much of the *Discipline* within their own cultural context; those in the U.S. are not able to do so.

- Those from the United States have no forum in which to discuss issues that relate specifically to their own region of the world when all others countries have such a forum.

It is clear that we need to create more equity among what we now call the Central Conferences and the U.S. UMC. We need a way for the UMC in the U.S. to gather and address issues within the U.S. context, while at the same time allowing and encouraging continued exchange and mutual ministry through the church at the worldwide level. Thus several of the study committee reports over the years have suggested such things as making the United States a Central Conference, or changing the Central Conferences to Regional Conferences and making the U.S. church one or more regions.

Why is it, that if group after group of representatives from across the church, year after year, come up with very similar recommendations for making changes to our structure, that time after time, either the General Conference itself, or the members of our Annual Conferences reject those proposals? Perhaps, more importantly, is there something we can do differently so that we get another result?

I recently heard someone modify a saying which is familiar to us all. "It's not true," she said, "that if you do what you've always done you'll get what you've always got." What *she* said is "that if you do what you've always done, you'll get *less* than what you've always got." The world continues to change around us and presenting the same or similar proposals to another General Conference, in the way we have in the past, will certainly get us less.

**What to do? I have some suggestions:**

1. Face the problems head on.
2. Be guided by a clear set of principles.
3. Offer a vision.
4. Involve the participation of people across the church.

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**Problems need to be identified and faced head on.**

When a person or a group (or in our case a denomination) is going to make significant changes, they are doing so in response to a problem or problems. If an individual decides they want to change their weight, usually to lose weight, it is in response to a problem: they are over the weight at which they are comfortable. If a group, say a local church, decides to sell its building, it does so in response to a problem: perhaps they do not feel they are effectively reaching those to whom they are called to minister and thus want to change their location, or perhaps they are unable to pay for the upkeep of their current facility. The first step in making a change is to clearly articulate the problems.

If our denomination is going to make significant changes to its structure, the problems this change will address need to be *clearly* stated. I don't think we always do that very well.



*MFSA Director, Kathryn Johnson, addresses the Study Committee on the Worldwide Nature of the UMC*

The problems aren't easy – either to resolve or to discuss. Money, power, inequity, varying cultural contexts, a history of colonialism and neo-colonialism. But that's what we have before us, and unless we talk about it frankly, honestly and openly I don't believe we will be able to convey to those at the General Conference level, and certainly not at the Annual Conference level, why it is worth traveling the difficult path of change.

Even though it is beyond the capacity of this Study Committee to resolve the thornier problems we face as a church, I still think that it is

essential that the problems, the points of tension, be named.

I would encourage the study committee to name the theological differences that exist in various parts of the church. I would encourage you to name the differences that exist among United Methodists on issues such as sexual orientation and abortion. Leaving these realities unnamed does not make them go away. Naming them up front, I believe, allows us to honestly ask ourselves the question of whether we are going to make proposals about a structure that can contain these differences – or if your intent is to propose the creation of a structure where one theological understanding and one set of beliefs dominates. Again, even if these can't be resolved by this group, name the problems that you are addressing in your proposals.

**Second, I believe any proposals for change must be guided by a clear set of principles.**

I would hope that this study group will decide upon, and then clearly state, the values or principles that will guide this work and against which any proposals for change can be measured.

The legislation presented to the 2008 General Conference had a section entitled "Basic Guidelines." In essence, most of these were principles. I personally didn't agree with some of them, but if those are the principles chosen, state them and claim them. If not, make clear what principles are being used.

In his book, *A World Parish*, Bruce Robbins suggests a comprehensive set of principles to govern proposed changes. I hope this Study Committee will take time to consider these and take advantage of the thoughtful and careful work that Bruce has done. [They can be found on page 112 of his book. ]

Recently Bruce proposed a more condensed set of principles and included these in legislation that he and Elizabeth Okyama submitted to General Conference 2008.

The principle listed therein that most differs from the principles in the legislation submitted by the predecessor group to this study group is as follows:

*Each Regional Conference shall be empowered to permit United Methodists in each region to adopt and effectuate appropriate structures to address the following:*

- a) regional and cultural considerations relating to missional activities*
- b) qualifications for ordination*
- c) chargeable offenses, and*
- d) adopting "Social Principles" appropriate to the region.*

Within the deliberations of this study committee, I've heard this principle suggested in a very direct manner: that the work of the church be done at as local a level as possible.

Clearly people in this room have different opinions about the content of this principle and I'll return to this in a minute. My point here is this: if delegates to General Conference and members of Annual Conferences are going to be asked to adopt proposals coming from this group, I believe it is essential that you articulate, and then communicate with them, the underlying values and principles that have guided your work.

**Third, I believe people must be offered a vision.**

If people are going to enter into the kind of turmoil that making structural changes in the church will cause, they must be buoyed by a vision that lights up their imaginations and touches their souls. As I read back over the reports from over the years, I am struck by how much of what is being offered has to do with the "hows" of change. Rationales are sometimes given, but I have to admit little catches my imagination and helps me to see how the changes being proposed are going to involve me in creating a church that will truly make a difference in the world as we move into the future.

It's true that the "church needs to be more fully ready for world-wide mission and ministry." It's true that "nations are more interdependent socially, economically, politically and spiritually than ever before." It's true that the "missional witnesses of the disciples of Jesus Christ should be appropriately connected and interdependent."

All of these phrases can be found in the opening paragraphs of the report by the Task Group on the Global Nature of the Church. What I don't find is a vision of what that church might look like. If the UMC is making disciples for the transformation of the world – and the changes being proposed are going to help us do that - what is the church going

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to look like, and what is the world that we create going to look like?

Tell me about how God will pour out the spirit on all flesh: how our sons and daughters shall prophesy and our old men shall dream dreams. Tell me about how young people shall see visions. Tell me about how we are helping to create that world where God's spirit will be poured out on everyone – the menservants and maidservants among them.

Tell me plainly and clearly and honestly about the problems that need to be addressed within our current structure. Propose structural changes that will help us to address those problems. But then paint for me, in broad strokes, a vision of what a transformed church will look like within this new structure and how this transformed church will help to transform the world.

Once you have painted this vision in broad strokes, then hand me, the United Methodist in the pew, the member of Annual Conference, hand me the paint brush and let me participate in creating that vision and figuring out the ways we can change our structure to get there.

**And this is my fourth point. Any successful proposal to transform the structure of the church – any proposal that will be accepted and implemented – must involve the participation of people across the church.**

Share a vision, propose a structure and then entrust it to the people. Let people across the church read about it, talk about it, disagree with it, and most importantly let them dream about it. Invite them into the vision and let the vision expand to include the gifts that they bring to the table. It is my belief that the proposals to change the structure of the church will come back to you, enriched with the gifts of the people who have added their hopes and dreams.

It is here that I would like to briefly return the content of one of the principles articulated in the Robbins/Okuyama legislation with which I know some of you here disagree. This was the principle that United Methodists in each region of our church be empowered to bring cultural considerations to decisions around missional activities; that each region be empowered to determine qualifications for ordination; that each region be empowered to

determine what will constitute chargeable offenses and - this one's the kicker – each region will be empowered to adopt "Social Principles" appropriate to the region.

I have returned to this at this point, as I talk about visions and dreams, partly because my own visions and dreams have changed over the years in relation to this principle. At one point in my journey I would have been rather adamantly opposed to lodging these responsibilities in the regions of the church.

In more recent years I have begun to reflect on whether or not insisting that the authority in these matters be held at the General Church level is not in and of itself rather paternalistic. Whether it isn't somehow based on fear.

The questions that I would offer for reflection are these:

What do we fear might happen if we allow different regions of the church to develop their own guidelines to express their understanding of how they actualize their faith in addressing the social issues of the day? For this is, in fact, what our social principles are – they are guidelines. They are guidelines that change over time; they are guidelines that express our best understanding of how to ground and express our faith in our daily living.

Indeed, I ask myself, is it perhaps paternalistic to assume that people in the various regions of the world cannot do this in a faithful and responsible manner? Why would I think that United Methodist Christians in Africa, or Europe, or the Philippines or the United States wouldn't faithfully take into consideration Scripture, tradition, reason and experience? Why would I think they wouldn't remain faithful to our Wesleyan heritage? Why would I think that these guidelines must be developed at the worldwide level?

Yes, there are clearly global issues to which the worldwide church must speak. But what do we fear would happen, I wonder, if social principles or guidelines were also articulated at a regional level?

### The importance of communication

In order for people across the church to fully participate, it will be essential that this Study Group communicate. The MFSA Board of Directors recently spent two days with a consultant who led us through a very exciting strategic planning process. One of the things she stressed several times was the importance

of communication. Communication, she said, is the central point of change management. It is important that your communication is early, intentional, often and constant.

I don't need to belabor the point. Yesterday afternoon I heard Bishop Jones talk about his commitment for this process to be transparent and to communicate as clearly as possible. I guess my only caveat might be to make sure that the communication is broad, and not just to other church leaders and agencies.

**Finally, I'd like to briefly address the misinformation that was coming fast and furious just before Annual Conferences last year.**

There were several videos making their way around cyberspace via YouTube – some produced by conservatives, others by progressives, all encouraging people to vote one way or another on the constitutional amendments. The narrator on a video that MFSA found quite troubling would have one believe that MFSA, and other groups on the progressive end of the spectrum, have one goal and one goal only when it comes to the church and anything that happens within the church: that goal being to hasten the day when lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons are fully accepted as members and clergypersons within our denomination - a day when one's sexual orientation is understood as a good gift from God and is fully affirmed by the church.

The narrator of the video talks about the hidden agenda of what he calls "radical gay advocacy" groups. He avers that these groups, and I assume he is including MFSA in that number, took the stands we did on the constitutional amendments because of this secret agenda.

The first thing I would like to say in response, is that there is nothing secret about where MFSA stands on the human rights and the full inclusion of LGBT persons in the life of the United Methodist Church. We have agonized for decades over what we understand as the grievous harm done by the church in excluding LGBT persons. And we have taken every action we can think of to hasten the day when the church will change.

Let me also make clear however, that MFSA members are United Methodist Christians who serve God and love the church. Our beliefs and our actions grow out of our commitment to follow Jesus, to seek justice, love mercy and to walk humbly with God.

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Yes, we carry in our hearts, always, the grief that stems from the actions of exclusion practiced by our church. But how small would be our God, how meager our faith, if we did not hold in those same hearts, the desire for the well-being and inclusion of *all*. Yes, we want a church where LGBT persons are accepted and affirmed....

And....

We want a church that is a witness for peace in a world torn by war...

We want a church where young and old feel that their voices matter and that their lives are cherished...

We want a church where the Liberian United Methodist and the United Methodist from Boston can break bread together and enrich one another's lives by sharing their faith journeys...

We want a church where the structures that surround us -- local churches, annual conferences, jurisdictions, regional conferences, general conference -- where these structures are designed so that no one region of the church dominates another, where all regions of the church share of their resources as they are able, where cultural context *does* impact the decisions made by the Body of Christ as it is manifest in the lives of people in various regions -- whether that be in Uganda or Sacramento.

Our vision for the church includes worldwide gatherings of United Methodists where we learn from one another, celebrate our common heritage, worship together, speak with one voice on global issues where we are in accord, and challenge one another where we are not. A church where we gather by regions to discern the ways in which our own cultural contexts guide the ways in which we are called to embody the Gospel. A church where we gather by local church, district and annual conference to support and uphold one another in these ministries.

I look forward to following the work of the Study Committee and to hearing your visions and dreams of how we can best be in the church in this day and in this age.

Thank you again for allowing me to share my reflections. ❖



## Advent Appeal 2009

### Finding God in the Details

Friends,

These last months have been turbulent ones outside the windows of the MFSA national office. With health care legislation moving through Congress, proponents and opponents of various provisions are boldly making their voices heard, both in the streets and in the halls of Congress.

As we watch the agonizingly slow pace with which health care legislation is making its way through the legislative process, it's tempting to say that in efforts like this, "the devil is in the details."

Where the devil may or may not be, I do not know. What I *do know* is that **God is most certainly in the details**. Believing as we do in a God who is **most present** in places of pain and struggle, we know God is squarely in the messy and challenging parts of life where the details are being worked out.

And so, in recent months, MFSA has been present in a variety of actions, challenges and struggles.

- **Providing analysis of the justice implications** of the 32 constitutional amendments coming before United Methodists at their annual conference sessions, and working with our chapters to carry that word to those who voted.

- **Organizing and providing leadership** for young adults to travel to the U.S./Mexico border to understand the immediate and far-reaching effects of living in the shadow of a wall.

- **Testifying** before the Study Committee on the Nature of the Worldwide UMC, which is tasked with returning to General Conference 2012 with recommendations for restructuring the UMC.

- **Engaging in a strategic planning process** so that the work of MFSA's board of directors is focused and effective.

- **Creating a Program Council** to bring together MFSA leaders from all of our chapters to connect with one another, share resources and be inspired.

- **Standing with** those in California and Maine who worked hard to manifest their belief that GLBT persons should be given full rights, including the right to marry.

- **Resourcing** our chapters as they continue their efforts in working for a just peace in Israel/Palestine and comprehensive immigration reform.

I recently attended a meeting where representatives of the Confessing Movement said the **majority voice** on the United Methodist constitutional amendments was clear, including the voice in opposition to defining our church as a church that *welcomes all*. The "church has spoken" they said, and it's time to move on.

MFSA believes that it is often the **minority voice** that holds the truth, particularly when that minority voice is coming from those who have been marginalized. This is where MFSA is committed to stand. Whether in the minority or majority, MFSA continues to strive to be a sign of Advent Hope to the church and to the world.

It has been a tough year financially for all of us, including -- and perhaps most particularly -- non-profits such as MFSA, which depends entirely upon donations from our constituents. **Please give as generously as you are able.**

Blessings,

**Kathryn**

Kathryn Johnson  
Executive Director

Please note that there is a return form and envelope with this mailing. You may also give a secure donation at [www.mfsaweb.org](http://www.mfsaweb.org).



## SOCIAL QUESTIONS BULLETIN

Methodist Federation for Social Action  
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### In this issue:

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- MFSa Program Council Meets
- Stunned by Stupak
- Take Action on Health Care
- MFSa and the Study Committee on the Worldwide Nature of the United Methodist Church

November - December 2009

<http://www.mfsaweb.org>

## MFSa is Going Green!

Attention all readers and recipients of the *Social Questions Bulletin (SQB)*. Starting next summer, the *SQB* will be transitioning from print to electronic versions only. This decision has been long-discussed and long-debated, but the time has arrived to make the change. Below are some questions you might have, and we've done our best to answer them. More information will be available in the coming issues. For more information, feel free to contact the national office.

### HOW WILL I RECEIVE THE SQB?

Electronic versions of the *Social Questions Bulletin* will be sent out via email at approximately the same increments that current issues are published. It is important that our email database be kept up-to-date, so please inform us of any changes by sending an email to [mfsa@mfsaweb.org](mailto:mfsa@mfsaweb.org). As is currently the case, all future *SQB*s will also be available on the MFSa website: [www.mfsaweb.org](http://www.mfsaweb.org).

### CAN I STILL REQUEST A PRINT VERSION FROM THE NATIONAL OFFICE?

No, unfortunately. MFSa will no longer be ordering copies from the printer. Regrettably, the national office does not have the ability to print and mail individual copies to those who desire them. We are asking local chapters to assist in making sure the *SQB* remains accessible to all members of the MFSa community.

### WHAT IF I DON'T HAVE INTERNET ACCESS?

If you do not have an e-mail address or internet access, please inform your chapter leaders. They will be glad to help make arrangements for you to receive the latest version of the *SQB*.



### New to MFSa?

MFSa is a movement at the heart of the United Methodist Church that mobilizes clergy and laity to take action on issues of peace and justice. We are an unofficial organization composed of United Methodists across the country, organized into 35 chapters.

### Get involved!

We'd love to welcome you to the MFSa network. Please visit our web site at [www.mfsaweb.org](http://www.mfsaweb.org) to find out more about the MFSa movement and ways we can connect with one another.

### Ways to Give:

The new MFSa website [www.mfsaweb.org](http://www.mfsaweb.org) makes it convenient and easy to **give to MFSa online**.