



RENEW

NETWORK for Christian Women

A publication of the RENEW Network
A Resourcing, Enabling Network for Evangelical Women
133 Clarkesville St., Cornelia, GA 30531

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INSPIRING MODELS EVENT LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY

For some time our conference representatives for the Tri-State Area of Kentucky, Ohio and West Virginia have envisioned holding an "Inspiring Models for Effective Ministries Event" in the greater Lexington, Kentucky area. This event is now scheduled for May 21, 2005, at the Lexington First United Methodist Church, 200 West High Street, Lexington, KY. The event will begin at 9:00 a.m., with registration from 8:30-9:00, and will end at 3:00 p.m.

The theme for the day is *Jesus Calls Us*, and our theme scripture is John 1:29-51. There will be special music and worship and a morning and afternoon keynote address by Donna F. G. Hailson, professor of Evangelism and Renewal at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Donna is active within the mainline reform and renewal movement through the Confessing Theologians Commission and the Association for Church Renewal. Her creative and challenging topics for the day will be: "The Raccoon, the Door to Door Salesman and the Home Away from Home: Coming to Faith in Christ," and, "The Scum of the Earth and the Garden Alone:

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- *A Clear and Present Danger: The 2005 UMW Reading Program List*
- *National Day of Prayer*
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UMW STATISTICS SHOW DECLINE Are pastors responsible?

Report from Good News/RENEW Editorial Team, July/August 2004 *Good News Magazine*

When the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church merged in 1968 to form the United Methodist Church, the combined church membership was 11 million, with more than 42,000 churches. According to the May 1968 issue of *Together* magazine, there were more than 38,000 United Methodist Women (UMW) groups, with a total membership of 1.7 million.

Since 1968, there has been a steady UMW decline. Statistics from 2002 show 775,939 members of UMW. Comparing the 2002 UMW membership with the original combined Methodist and Evangelical United Brethren membership in 1968 shows a membership drop of 56.8 percent. (Total membership loss in the same period is more than 25 percent.)

It is noteworthy that the number of churches with UMW groups has declined along with individual UMW membership. In 1968, more than 38,000 churches are identified as having UMW groups; the 2001 statistics show them in only 22,321 churches. This is a loss of 42.8 percent of UMW groups, while the denomination-wide number of churches lost was 16.3 percent.

The decline does not seem to have plateaued in recent years.

Within the last five years, UMW has lost more than 129,000 individual members (14 percent loss) and more than 1,600 churches no longer have UMW units (7 percent loss).

2003 Update

According to a General Council on Finance and Administration report, the 2003 figures for the year ending December

31, show another decline in UMW membership and units. The membership figure for this period is 765,724 for a decrease of 10,215 members. The number of churches reporting UMW membership was 21,521 for a decrease of 399 units.

Who is responsible?

Most interestingly, letters to the editor from two former Women's Division retired staff persons blamed "Good News pastors" for this decline. One letter made a slight accusation against the RENEW Editorial Team—but pastors were the really bad guys (or gals). It was even suggested that the day may come "when the Judicial Council is asked to consider whether the active and willful subverting of Para. 255.4 is a chargeable offense against a pastor."

A recent mailing to a bishop by the chief executive of

Since 1968, there has been a steady UMW decline. Who is responsible?

UMW STATISTICS SHOW DECLINE

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facilitate the work of RENEW to close UMW units (which RENEW *does not* advocate), some receive no information about such efforts, even in their own congregations and some express indifference.”

This is strange indeed. The Women’s Division comes under the authority of the General Conference, not under the Council of Bishops or any other agency. The local United Methodist Women’s organization comes under the Women’s Division through the district and conference UMW, not under the Administrative Council of the local church or the pastor. The Women’s Division has *responsibility* for the programs, policies and spending of the UMW organization. Pastors have no input, even if they disagree with the spending or program content. Are pastors, then, to blame if UMW membership declines, or if the women of the church refuse to give their funds to support things with which they disagree?

Thousands of women have connected with the RENEW Network, or other viable renewal groups, to educate themselves and to make informed, intelligent decisions about their UMW ministry and the influence of the Women’s Division—yet, the truth that women can and do think for themselves and make their own decisions is not acknowledged. Instead, pastors are held responsible for a program over which they have no oversight. Who’s really responsible for UMW membership loss? Someone needs to look in the mirror.

Inspiring Event...

(Continued from page 1)

Spiritual Disciplines and Discipleship in the Now.”

Workshop topics include: Jesus Leads Us—Into Mission Opportunities We Never Expected; Jesus Leads Us—To Teach and Nurture Young Women; Jesus Leads Us—Into Personal Well-Being, Faithful Friendships and Strong Families; Jesus Leads Us—To Celebrate Him and All That He Offers. United Methodist laywomen will lead these workshops involving interactive participation by those attending.

We are excited about this special day and invite any of you who are within driving distance to join us—or come the evening before and stay at one of two local hotels close to First UMC. If you are interested, use the order form in this newsletter to send for the brochure. If you are too far away to attend, please pray for this meeting. If your interest is piqued and you would like to consider hosting such an event in your area, check for the free brochure on Inspiring Models Events.

RESOURCES FROM LIFEWATCH

Holy Abortion? A Theological Critique of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice

Founded in 1973 as the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights (RCAR), the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) is an affiliation of Christian, Jewish, Unitarian and humanist organizations which condone and promote abortion rights and abortion. Among its member organizations are the United Methodist Church (Women’s Division and General Board of Church and Society), the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA) (Women’s Ministries), and the United Church of Christ (Justice and Witness Ministries).

Holy Abortion? is a careful analysis and critique of RCRC’s literature and a comparison of its positions on abortion to the official statements from the mainline denominations associated with it. The comparison clearly demonstrates that the RCRC positions radically contradict the official position of the United Methodist Church.

Michael J. Gorman, one of the co-authors, is a member of the United Methodist Church and the Lifewatch Advisory Board. His co-author, Ann Loar Brooks, is an Episcopalian.

The book is a must-read for all clergy and lay members interested in ending the RCRC association with their denominations. For a donation of \$15.00 to Lifewatch, you can receive a free copy of *Holy Abortion?* (See contact information below.)

Where can I go for help and healing?

For the first time since abortion was legalized in 1973, the 2004 General Conference recognized that “some” regret a past abortion and added a short paragraph to the Social Principles (161K).

Lifewatch created the brochure, *Where can I go for help and healing?*, in response to the passage of that legislation. The brochure contains a partial list of emotional symptoms of post-abortion stress, as well as the names and addresses of 12 national organizations which provide help to those who suffer from post-abortion stress.

For pastors to whom “post-abortion stress” is a new concept, the brochure is a valuable resource, and a starting point for counseling anyone who may come to them for help.

For those—female or male, laity or clergy—who regret a past abortion, this brochure provides a first step on the road to personal healing and wholeness.

Write for a copy of this new brochure which you can copy for our use. It is our hope that members of annual conferences everywhere will reproduce and distribute this brochure in their area.

Contact Lifewatch at:

1564 Skyview Drive
Holts Summit, MO 65043
Ph: 573-896-2582
E: lifewatch@mchsi.com

A CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER THE 2005 UMW READING PROGRAM LIST

United Methodist Women should be seriously concerned about the books selected through the Women's Division for the 2005 UMW Reading Program. Red flags are in order with the featuring of Bishop Joseph Sprague's book, *Affirmations of a Dissenter*. The content of Bishop Sprague's book has been questioned by numerous individuals, including Bishop Timothy Whitaker, Florida Annual Conference. In this book Bishop Sprague denounces most of the historic doctrines of the Christian faith, including the divinity of Christ, the virgin birth, the miracles of Jesus, the atonement and the resurrection. With all of the controversy swirling around this book, one would not have expected it to show up on the UMW reading list.

It is equally perplexing to see *War, Racism and Economic Injustice: The Global Ravages of Capitalism* by none other than Fidel Castro! One would expect an assessment of capitalism from someone other than the communist dictator of Cuba under whose leadership the nation is experiencing a failing economy, widespread poverty, political repression and an impoverished population.

If there were only two books to concern UMW members, regardless of how outlandish they may be, we might say someone just made two very inappropriate selections. But, the RENEW review team found that many other books are problematic. A look at the publishers from which most of the Reading Program books are selected increased their suspicion that the books recommended to the women of the church are largely contrary to their Christian faith and Biblical worldview, and that they fail to provide a balanced and accurate perspective on many political, social and theological issues.

You may send for the Analysis of the 2005 UMW Reading Program List by using the order form in this newsletter.

CONGRATULATIONS DIANE KNIPPERS!

We join countless others in congratulating RENEW friend and consultant, Diane Knippers for the recognition given to her in *Time* magazine as one of the 25 most influential contemporary evangelicals in America! Diane is President of the Institute on Religion and Democracy. At one time she was on staff at Good News magazine. Diane has led the IRD to a place of prominence as a Christian "think tank" that brings integrity and astute insight to the witness of the Church in society. The IRD is an ecumenical organization with numerous denominational committees serving under its broad umbrella. UMAction is the United Methodist committee of the IRD.

NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER First Thursday of May

The theme for the 2005 National Day of Prayer observance is "America, God Shed His Grace on Thee," based on Hebrews 4:16: "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

The National Day of Prayer newsletter reminds us, "This is undoubtedly a time of great need as the virtues that once defined our country are deteriorating steadily. Evil is flourishing on many fronts as pornography, abortion, the homosexual agenda and other destructive forces seem to go unchecked. We simply cannot battle this erosion of morality without humbling ourselves before God's throne and beseeching His gracious and merciful intervention...."

You are invited to be a part of this national prayer effort. Excellent resources are available to promote The National Day of Prayer in your local church or community. Visit www.nationaldayofprayer.org for more information, or call, 1/800-444-8828

ORDER FORM

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

- Lexington Event Brochure Free
- Inspiring Models Brochure Free
- Analysis of the 2005 UMW Reading Program \$3.00

(Postage & Handling \$5.00 or less—\$2.00; \$6.00-\$25.00 orders—\$5.00; orders over \$25.00—\$6.00)

Mail this order form with check to:

RENEW Network
P. O. Box 889
Cornelia, GA 30531

Or Charge to:

Visa MasterCard

Card No. _____

Expiration Date _____

Name on Card _____

Signature of Holder _____

INTEGRITY

“Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience.”

--2 Corinthians 5:11

A friend loaned me a taped version of *Fierce Conversations* by Susan Scott. I was impressed with the principles Ms. Scott applied to help individuals and companies resolve problems and move toward their full potential. One section on integrity particularly impressed me.

In this section Scott expressed the importance that actions and words be in alignment with the core beliefs embraced as our standard for behavior. She indicated that when core beliefs and actions are in conflict with each other, particularly for extended time periods, spiritual, emotional, mental and even physical illness can result. I deduct from this that if we are being dishonest about our core beliefs, or deceiving ourselves or others by acting contrary to embraced values—evidence of that will eventually surface.

For Christians the principles of personal and corporate integrity are essential. *Webster’s New World Dictionary* gives one meaning of integrity as, “The quality or state of being of sound moral principle; uprightness, honesty and sincerity.” As followers of Jesus Christ, we have embraced a set of values God has revealed through Scripture, which embody the *Webster* description. We are not free to lie or misrepresent things to others.

Despite Women’s Division charges to the contrary, RENEW endeavors to operate within the parameters of the scripture quoted above. Because we love and fear God, we know that all that we do and say is open before God—and we trust, plain to the conscience of others as well. We embrace the truth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, Lord of all and the one and only Savior of the world. Our faith is the same historic faith the Christian Church has proclaimed for over 2000 years. The only standard for our moral or ethical behavior is God’s Word, the Holy Scriptures. Social holiness, we believe, flows most effectively through a transformed life.

As for our calling and task, we work for renewal among the women of the church and accountability on the part of the Women’s Division. We encourage United Methodist Women to work within the organization for reform, reminding them if they leave UMW, they no longer have a voice for change. (We understand and support those who leave over integrity issues). We forthrightly let the Women’s Division know our documented concerns and ask for reform of the programs, policies and spending practices that offend the beliefs of women within the church.

“A value is a tightly held belief (as opposed to a vague notion) upon which a person or organization acts by choice” says Ms. Scott. If the values of the Women’s Division differ greatly from those of most UMW members, there will be unhealthy tension. “Integrity,” states Scott, “requires alignment of our values—the core beliefs and behaviors that we have claimed as important to us—and our actions.” The organization of United Methodist Women must endeavor to reclaim integrity, lest internal duplicity destroy our spiritual and organizational health.

“For Christians the principles of personal and corporate integrity are essential.”



Faye Short
President, RENEW



About this newsletter:

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RENEW NETWORK

P. O. Box 889 - 133 Clarkesville St. - Cornelia, GA 30531

706/778-4812 - FAX: 706/778/4818

E-Mail: renew1@hemc.net - www.renewnetwork.org