

**Questions for Dr. Janice Love, Deputy General Secretary, Women's Division, GBGM
Posed by Katy Kiser, Press Representative, RENEW Network/Good News, October 16, 2004
Submitted in writing per the request of Dr. Janice Love, October 19, 2004
Anticipated response time per Dr. Love, one to two months**

1. Ecumenism/Interfaith Pluralism

The ecumenical movement began in an effort to draw from all Christian denomination's theological strengths and to coalesce around core Christian beliefs. This effort, begun in part by the work of our own Albert Outler has been applauded by Christians of all denominations. But at the same time, many women across the United Methodist Church have become concerned that the Women's Division has confused Christian ecumenism with an interfaith pluralism that equates all religions as equally valid ways to God.

Do you think it is right for the Women's Division to embrace a syncretistic view of religions, and what to you say to the women of the church who find this in conflict with the Great Commission and the claims of the supremacy of Jesus Christ found in Scripture?

I am thinking here of:

- The November 2000 issue of *Response* magazine on "Interfaith Challenges, Interfaith Understanding" went beyond understanding world religions to embracing them as the equivalent of Christianity. The author of one article stated, "Christian faith must see itself as *one* of the religious options for the Peoples of the world."
- At the 2003 National Seminar, Bible Study leader Aruna Gnanadason stated, "...we shouldn't take the Bible as perfect—but just one of many 'sacred texts' and should not place the Bible over all other sacred texts. It is really, really sad that we feel Christianity is the right and only way. They are all about the same God."
- At a 2004 Regional School of Mission it was reported that a staff person of the Women's Division gave a presentation in an Interfaith Issues focus group that emphasized that Christians should co-exist with every other religion, that we are to let everyone believe what they wish, and that we are not to share our religion with other faiths. The participant reporting from this event said that during the question and answer time she asked what part the Great Commission played in all this. She indicated that the presenter became very upset and stated she never expected any questions like "this." Then she asked, "Surely you don't think that there is only one way to God?" To which the woman replied, "That's what the Bible says." The presenter responded, "Surely you don't think everything in the Bible is right?" To which the participant said, "Yes, or else why bother to be here at all?"

2. Mission of the Church

The Women's Division has a long history of reaching out to the disposed and oppressed of the world. Evangelical women are totally supportive of this and have long been engaged in social justice ministries. At the same time, evangelical women believe the sharing of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in an effort to win the peoples of the world to Christ is an imperative part of missions. Many United Methodist Women are concerned that the Women's Division defines the gospel in mere terms of global social justice and consequently seeks to advance

a partisan political solution to domestic and world problems, excluding the offer of Jesus Christ as the (personal) Lord and Savior of the world. How do you define the mission of the Church?

For example:

- The concept of a mission mandate driven by “justice” permeated the 1998 UMW Assembly. The pre-Assembly Bible studies in *Response* magazine set the tone for the “justice” focus of the Assembly. Justice issues, the stories and struggles of women and a sense of being a prophetic voice for a new world order were pervasive in the handbook and in Assembly presentations. In her closing speech, Joyce Sohl, Deputy General Secretary, Women’s Division, told her audience, “As change agents for God’s vision, we must have a passionate conviction for justice....”

“Justice” issues are no doubt of great importance, and ministering to human need a significant element in Christian discipleship. However, it is unfortunate that not a single speaker at the UMW Assembly put forward Jesus Christ’s atoning death on behalf of sinful humankind as the most powerful change agent in all of history—nor promoted the fact that proclaiming Christ remains God’s chief mandate for the Church today.

3. Left-leaning Political/Social Actions

The RENEW Network has sent press representatives to the Women’s Division board meetings for many years. We are appreciative of the opportunity to attend these meetings, and by-in-large, have been received with courtesy and treated with respect. Two observations have been consistently made by our press representatives: (1) the left-leaning political and social bias in Women’s Division policies; (2) the failure of Directors to speak out publicly or to vote against biased, narrowly defined social and political policies or programs, despite a wide range of public opinion on the issues being addressed.

As the new Deputy General Secretary of the Women’s Division, will you seek to encourage a non-partisan political and social balance that more equitably respects and represents the varying political and social views of United Methodist Women at the local level?

- One of the most egregious examples that comes to mind occurred at the Fall 2003 board meeting, which I and another reporter was covering. The Directors were informed that the very qualified Janice Rodgers Brown was being “watched” by the Women’s Division because the Women’s Division found her unwillingness to legislate from the bench an “extraordinarily different perspective” from their own. The comment was even made that Judge Brown was the “twin of Justice Clarence Thomas.” Ms. Brown is an African-American woman whose record is impeccable. She is the daughter of a sharecropper. But all of the qualifications that would normally cause the Women’s Division to be her champion were laid aside because she was a conservative judge who understands that the role of judge is to interpret the law and not legislate it from the bench.

4. The United Nations

The June issue of *Response* magazine extolled the work of the United Nations, linking the UN to the mission of the church—that is, to spread the gospel to all the world. Why does the Women’s Division rely so heavily upon, and support the programs of, this secular institution, particularly given the current scandal in the UN and its past failures in the area of peace keeping?

Example of promotion of UN programs:

- Although Women’s Division programs and policies have long endorsed the policies and treaties of the United Nations, this was affirmed again at the 2004 General Conference when numerous petitions submitted by the Women’s Division championed UN programs, including: The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); The Convention on the Rights of the Child; and the Statute of the International Criminal Court. Close examination of all of these treaties show serious problems that weaken rather than assist women, children and nations.

5. **Abortion**

RENEW has received many complaints regarding the Women’s Division’s financial support of and participation in the “March for Women’s Lives” this past spring. We continually hear from United Methodist Women who hold a pro-life perspective and view Biblical sexual purity and practice as very important. These women want to see the church seek solutions that lead to a culture of life and away from a culture of death through abortion on demand. In fact, those very concepts were expressed a year ago at this board gathering by two of the directors.

In light of the deeply held convictions of women on both sides of this issue would you encourage the Women’s Division to participate again in such a march? And, secondly, do you think that the church should be giving young women the same answers as the secular society?

6. **Homosexual/Lesbian Practice**

The issue of homosexual/lesbian practice is unquestionably the most divisive issue in the United Methodist Church. The current statement in the Book of Discipline, affirming the sacred worth of all persons and the legal rights of all persons, also states that homosexual practice is incompatible with Christian teaching.

Women’s Division policy and program resources have repeatedly pushed the boundaries regarding homosexual/lesbian practice. (See examples below.)

Is the Women’s Division committed to upholding the position of the General Conference on the issue of homosexual/lesbian practice? Will the Women’s Division assure that advocacy for the acceptance of homosexual/lesbian practice will not be a part of Women’s Division programs, policies or spending? Would the Women’s Division consider starting or supporting ministries of transformation to homosexual/lesbian persons given the church’s position that this lifestyle is incompatible with Christian teaching?

Examples:

- At the 1988 General Conference, then national president of United Methodist Women, Sally Ernst, was the first signatory on a minority report advocating for deleting the statement in the *Discipline* “Although we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider the practice incompatible with Christian teaching,” and substituting, “We find mixed testimony about the practice of homosexuality in Scripture, tradition, and in the human sciences.”
- A book on the 1991 reading list, *Revolutionary Forgiveness*, was a travel documentary of the Amanecida Collective. In the introduction, this group spelled out their objective: “Amanecida is committed to the well-being and human rights of gay men and lesbians in the United States and elsewhere.... Our commitment to the liberation of lesbians and gay men requires that we confront those people and policies which proclaim sexual relationships between men and women, heterosexual marriage, and nuclear family constellations as normative for the health of society.”
- A program by Inelle Cox Bagwell appears in the 2002 UMW Program Book, *Seeking Shalom*. In the program “Invisible Families in the United States Today,” Ms. Bagwell postulates that it is time to “let go of some of our most cherished certainties about families in order to affirm the complexities of the diversity of God’s creation.” Ms. Bagwell further states that unborn children do not know “whether they will be born female or male, heterosexual or homosexual or bisexual....”

No substantive research data is provided to support Ms. Bagwell’s claims about the family or being born homosexual. No other viewpoints are considered. The strong body of evidence verifying the significance of the nuclear, traditional family and the significant studies discounting the claim that homosexuality is hereditary go unmentioned.

(Additional examples in these various areas can be found in a White Paper prepared by the RENEW Network, December 2001, “Our Basis for Concern.” Current documentation beyond 2001 can be found in various reports on the RENEW Network web site, www.renewnetwork.org.)