

QUADRENNIUM CELEBRATION

Women's Division Spring Board of Director's Meeting

March 19-22, 2004

Report and Analysis by Sharon Lodovic

The recent board meeting of the Women's Division of the United Methodist Church can best be described as a celebration. The current quadrennium was coming to a close. Directors would either be leaving as they completed their current term or re-elected to another term. The 13-year tenure of Joyce Sohl, Deputy General Secretary, was also coming to an end. All would be "movin' on," quipped past vice president, Twick Morrison, at the Saturday evening celebration. During the board meeting many postulated as to ways the retiring directors would now occupy their time. Would they sit at home in a corner and vegetate, remembering their busy, glory-filled days at the Division, or would they find new ways to serve and new causes to champion? Genie Bank, outgoing president said that some suggested she might get reacquainted with her family, dog and kitchen. The consensus seemed to be that, even though friendships would be missed and change is sometimes difficult, most would continue in various ways in advocacy for women, children and youth. In her closing remarks, Genie Bank reminded listeners that Jesus has commanded us to "feed the hungry, clothe the naked and take in the stranger."

Two celebration banquets highlighted the weekend's activities. Saturday night's reception and dinner honored retiring directors. Those "graduating" donned red satin mortar boards with gold tassels. Dinner tables were adorned with red table cloths, brightly colored floral arrangements, and red and pink balloons.

A contribution of \$60,000 was given in honor of Genie Bank for leadership training of teen and college women at district and conference levels.

Sunday evening's banquet honored Joyce Sohl in a grand manner. Joyce looked lovely in her sparkling silver attire and beamed as she greeted guests. Beautiful white rose arrangements filled the room with fragrance and beauty. Cameras flashed all evening as friends recorded memories and said their goodbyes.

Bishop Joel Martinez, president of the General Board of Global Ministries, and Randy Day, General Secretary of the GBGM gave tribute to Joyce and emphasized her influence and importance in the GBGM. Genie Bank read letters of congratulations, including one from Hillary Rodham Clinton. But the highlight of the evening was a surprise performance from a youth chorale Joyce had helped form. Inspiring music in various languages from these beautiful young people was enjoyable and uplifting.

Janice Love is elected Deputy General Secretary

The Friday night opening plenary session began with the ballot election of Dr. Janice Love as Deputy General Secretary to replace Joyce Sohl. Dr. Love will begin serving on Aug. 1, 2004. She was chosen by a search team led by outgoing president Genie Bank. Ms. Bank attested that, "Dr. Love was selected because she has the vision to lead the Division into the future, while being mindful of its rich heritage."

Ms. Love currently resides in South Carolina where she is an associate professor in the department of Religious Studies at the University of South Carolina. She has taught courses on religion and politics, globalization and political economy. She is married to Peter Sederberg, a dean at the University of South

Carolina. They have a son who is working on a Ph.D. in Boston and a daughter who is a junior in high school. When Dr. Love moves to New York to head the Women's Division her husband and daughter will temporarily remain in Columbia, SC until their daughter finishes high school.

Ms. Love has written and spoken on issues such as racism, economics, peace and reconciliation, the Global Church, politics and prayer and issues affecting women. She served on the Board of Missions, then the Board of Global Ministries in 1970. She has also been on the board of directors of the UM General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, Church World Service and The National Council of Churches. Globally, she began her work in 1975 when she became part of the youth delegation to the World Council of Churches. Ms. Love has served in other capacities at the WCC, and in 1995 she headed the WCC delegation to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.

Jan Love believes that "This is a great time for women, and a very dangerous and challenging time for women. We have a good grasp of our strengths and capabilities, but it's dangerous in that many political and some religions movements are attempting to shut down the space and freedom that women have enjoyed. So we have to guard the rights that we have and the spaces in which we have been able to express our gifts, concerns and contributions." She plans to continue and expand on the Women's Division's cross-cultural emphasis and also their current outreach to draw younger women into UMW.

Upon her election she and Joyce Sohl walked arm and arm down the aisle to the podium where "Jan," as she is called, thanked the search committee and said she is excited about the church. She also thanked the Women's Division for their dedication and service, her family, Theresa Hoover and Joyce Sohl. She expressed that "since the American invasion of Iraq the challenges have been daunting," but she believes love overcomes hate. She accepts the task.

(Evangelicals will feel some measure of caution about Ms. Love due to her pre-employment answers to the question, "What do you consider the biggest challenge facing women/women's organizations today: In the society at large? In the Church?" Ms. Love's first sentence regarding the societal challenge was, "We live in an era of deeply embedded conservatism in the United States and across the world, a reality that undermines any notion that history inevitably progresses to improve life for all." Her response regarding the challenge in the church began with the statement, "The era in which we live affects many religious groups, including Christian churches, making them, too, more conservative. Some, the 'fundamentalists,' even strive to impose their particular religious vision on the whole of society, believing that God commands them to do so. This threatens basic commitments to secularism and religious pluralism at home and abroad. Again, women and children suffer first and most when hard line dogmatic religious groups take hold." It is amazing that Ms. Love sees conservatism, in relation to the church—also translated evangelicalism—as the "biggest challenge" facing women and women's organizations today. It would seem that Ms. Love represents no change in the Women's Division endorsement of religious pluralism/syncretism, progressive theology, feminist ideology and political liberalism.)

The President's Report

Next, outgoing president Genie Bank delivered her report. She noted, "It is the last meeting of the Women's Division for the Quadrennial and in the last four years much has happened in our nation, our world and the Division." Her report looked back to the accomplishments of the last four years. One of the accomplishments she mentioned was "Yes, Count Me In!," a 6-year membership campaign, concluding in

2002 which netted 422 new UMW units and 202 reorganized ones and an increase in the involvement of teen, college and young women.

(The WD's push for younger women came to the forefront in a controversial, closed meeting in December, 2000. *The United Methodist Reporter* and The United Methodist News Service condemned the Women's Division for closing **The National Gathering for Teen and College/University Women** to the press in violation of the *Discipline's* open policy rule.)

Ms. Bank reported that Regional Schools of Mission and Leadership Training Events continued as a vital part of UMW and that "Rekindle the Gift"—a new district leadership training program—has been implemented. Gift to mission cards, including Christmas cards and the double diamond special mission recognition pin are two new means of giving. She interjected that "the giving of United Methodist Women has been faithful through difficult times." According to Ms. Bank, United Methodist Women was recognized during Senate hearings by Rep. Lynn Woolsey for their letter writing campaign in favor of the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**. (CEDAW was signed by the US but never ratified by the US Senate because of troubling provisions. For further information on CEDAW and why it was never ratified, go to www.renewnetwork.org.) Ms. Bank shared that the initiative to get Kinkos to stock and promote the use of chlorine-free paper was successful and that the **Campaign for Children** has been renewed to address concerns of public education. "Study of institutional racism has been done, but there is more to do," Ms. Bank declared.

"All our work is in keeping with Scripture, the United Methodist *Book of Discipline* and the *Book of Resolutions*," claimed Ms. Bank. She added that "the Long Range Planning report will be presented for approval this weekend." In keeping with the initiative of getting younger women involved, Ms. Bank suggested that some present leaders might have to step down. "This IS a day of new beginnings...it's a time to move on!" she exclaimed as she concluded her remarks.

The Treasurer's Report

Undesignated giving was down 1.2% in 2003, according to treasurer, Connie Takamine. It was reported that this was primarily due to a decrease in Special Mission Recognition of 2.4% and a decrease in World Thank Offering of 5.4%.

In 2003, the total operating revenue of the WD was \$27,734,619 as opposed to \$27,817,234 in 2002. Net assets increased \$7,334,083 due to a gain in investments of \$14,999,238. Supplementary Gifts were \$1,373,911, which was a decrease in designated giving of 36.1%. Expenditures in 2003 were \$35,719,585

Ms. Takamine reported that even though per capita giving is up, income outlook is a continuing challenge because of projected membership figures. "We must get new members in order to increase income," she added.

Membership and Organizational Development

At the Saturday morning session of Membership and Organizational Development (MOD) Delores Garcia led the group in devotions.

Marissa Villareal gave a review of 2003 Schools of Mission. She believes it is not possible to go back to a 5-day school, even though it is hard to cover all the material in four days. For younger women with kids the five-day school is difficult, and people tended to leave early when the schools were five days. Some support 3-day schools with a tighter schedule. “We are still working with the two-year study on public education,” Ms. Villareal interjected, and then added that the recommendation for the theme of the 2005 mission study will be ready for approval in October.

Cheryl Trent, staff head of MOD, used imagery of mountains in her address to the committee and later to a plenary session. She explained how, in the Bible, mountains were often places of God’s activity. Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai, God’s covenant with Noah was made on a mountain, and Jesus gave the Beatitudes on a mountain.

Ms. Trent noted that the 6-year program to reach new women has been a challenge but “there have been steps taken to be more diverse.” The following MOD’s accomplishments of the Quadrennial were highlighted in a video:

- Leadership training in a box for newly elected officers who cannot attend training meetings
- “Rekindle the Gift” training for district and potential leaders
- Training mission teams in new and different ways
- Three staff Mission Team trainers
- Resourcing and strengthening the organization
- Training modules
- Distance learning—web page, on-line training, self-directed workbook, etc.
- Mission schools and studies
- Membership campaign 1996-2003 (1,158 units were organized, with 738 new units, 286 re-organized units, 26 teen or college/university units, 71 District units, 4 prison units, 9 retirement home units, 2 hearing impaired units, 1 work site unit and on-line units and circles)
- 10 years of outreach to Korean women—fulltime Hispanic consultant
- New resources
- Staffing transitions

After the video Ms. Trent concluded her remarks by saying, “We must envision the future and be diligent—guided by the Holy Spirit—to change our mountain.”

(Korean American Hae Sun Kim, a United Methodist minister and consultant with the Women’s Division recently spoke in March 2004 at “Woman and the Word,” a conference for feminist theologians held at Boston Seminary. Ms. Kim spoke of combating male religious authority and symbols. She indicated that in seminary she had learned how to “deconstruct the patriarchy of the church” and rely upon a “hermeneutics of suspicion.”)

Christian Social Responsibility

At the sub-committee **Education for Involvement in Mission** a recommendation was made to give **\$10,000** to fund **The Southeast Regional Economic Justice Network (REJN)**. The network’s purpose is to partner with 50 other organizations to empower workers, women and youth from poverty-stricken and marginalized communities—especially those of color.

In the fall of 2001, Women's Division directors recommended that a poverty survey be done across the country with the help of the Social Action Mission Coordinators. According to Glory Dharmaraj, executive secretary for justice education, this was done in the wake of 9/11 because money going to 9/11 victims hurt other charitable organizations. A survey was developed and distributed to all Conference Social Action Coordinators. One hundred thirty-one surveys were completed across the country and will be analyzed by two consultants. The results will be presented at the next meeting and action plans will be forthcoming to address the issue of poverty. Glory and Sung-Ok-Lee, executive secretary for community action, will be giving a workshop on working with poor and undocumented persons who are not eligible for government aide.

Brenda Thompson, reading program specialist, informed the committee that the 2005 reading program contains 90 books and that the availability of books in Spanish is growing. They are also trying to provide books in Korean in all four categories. Random House, where many of the books on the reading list are published, informed Brenda that UMW books "are on their radar," and they are eager to get books to the UMW. Four hundred books are evaluated for the list, with each book having three reviewers (about 150 people review the books). The new list is embargoed until September

(The RENEW Network has reviewed many books from the UMW Reading Program list over the years and found many to be controversial in content. The reading program is a primary avenue through which the Women's Division promotes a liberal theological, political and social worldview.)

We were given an orange book containing **Christian Social Responsibility (CSR)** accomplishments during the quadrennial. As I was perusing the booklet I was reminded of the liberal slant of many Women's Division initiatives and at the same time made note of initiatives we, as evangelical women, can support. Under the first category—those organizations which the Women's Division funds that I think are objectionable include:

- 1.) A grant of **\$25,000** to the **Women's International Coalition for Economic Justice**. Funds will be used to "facilitate the production of UN Action Resources to assist local groups, including United Methodist Women, in translating the outcomes of key UN Conferences into action." (I suspect many United Methodist Women would not want their UMW leadership working closely with the liberal, sometimes radical agenda of the United Nations.)
- 2.) A grant of **\$8,000** was given to **Citizen's Project** "to produce additional radio spots, purchase commercial spots and work with public radio to address issues related to the separation of church and state." This organization's web site states that they battle the religious right. (In the April 2003 *Response* magazine pro-family organizations were identified as part of the "religious right." Evangelical Christians are usually lumped into this group.)
- 3.) **Women Vote** was allocated \$1,500. On the homepage of the Women Vote web site (www.USAVoteNet.com) is advertisement for a 14-minute video by liberal TV commentator Bill Moyers, a public service announcement for radio by Democratic activist Martin Sheen and a picture of John Kerry with a caption stating that he "vows to mount an early legal challenge in any district that might repeat the problems that bedeviled Democrat supporters in 2000." (Is this partisan politics, or what?)

The Women's Division joined the "**End the Occupation of Palestine Campaign**" and in 2002 and 2003 staff attended "**The International Conference of Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People**" organized by the United Nations. They also voted to accept the **Resolution on Terrorist Attacks**, saying that "As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to choose life over death" Deut. 30:19. (The Anti-Israel bias in these programs is totally inappropriate.)

Many of the Women's Division grants and gifts go to politically left-leaning groups which many UM women would not choose to support. The Division has been quoted as saying that they do not speak *for* the women of the United Methodist Church, but *to* them, much as representatives in our government. (The problem with this attitude seems to be that what is spoken does not represent the views of many of the women of the church—however, their funds make it possible for the Division to speak at all!)

In other categories of mission, we would gladly join the Women's Division in support of the **Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids**, the **World Conference on Breast Cancer** and the endorsement of H.R. 669 to **Protect Children from Video Game Sex and Violence Act**.

How the Women's Division Hurts Women

The Women's Division helps women in many ways, and it harms them in other ways by a theological, political and social witness that is based upon a worldview that is more secular than Christian. There is one way in which I believe the Women's Division hurts women tremendously.

Women are not helped, but hurt by abortion! Because I have been active in the pro-life movement for 30 years I have had occasion to witness how abortion not only kills babies, but devastates women. I have friends who have suffered unbearable pain when they come to the realization that they had killed their own babies, and not just eliminated a "blob of tissue" as they had been misled to believe. Sometimes it takes years for a woman to deal with the pain of her abortion.

Recent research has confirmed the many ways abortion hurts women. I will further elaborate on those studies in a separate report which can be found on the RENEW web site in a few weeks. A brief list of the ways women are harmed from abortion include: increased risk of breast cancer, depression, guilt, suicide, divorce, drug abuse, death from accidents, death from cardiovascular disease, etc. I agree with Wanda Franz Ph.D. when she said that "abortion is lethal for unborn children and bad for women and their subsequent children." This conclusion seems obvious and leaves me with great sadness that the women's leadership in my denomination supports abortion when abortion hurts the very women and children they claim to champion.

The Women's Division not only supports abortion rights and is a founding member of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC), but is partnering with a very long list of liberal, feminist organizations as a co-sponsor of the pro-abortion "March for Women's Lives," April 25, 2004. A grant of **\$5,000** was approved for the march. (A list of organizations is on the website www.Marchforwomen.org).

At the board meeting they stressed that the money for the march is not coming from undesignated funds. According to Julie Taylor, coordinator for the march, "the amount will be paid from The Designated Temporary Funds." My concern is not from which fund the money comes, for all of the Women's Division money comes from United Methodist women, but that the Division supports the march at all, and that they

believe that they are helping women by advocating for abortion—even the deplorable practice of partial birth abortion.

(See the National Organization of Women’s article on the above-referenced web site. One wonders if the Designated Temporary Funds allocated were indeed “designated” for pro-abortion causes. And, since the 2000 General Conference overwhelmingly voted to “oppose the use of late-term abortion known as dilation and extraction (partial-birth abortion) and calls for an end of this practice except when the physical life of the mother is in danger and incompatible with life,” participation in the “March for Women’s Lives” finds the Women’s Division out of compliance with the *Book of Discipline*, and ignoring the teaching of Scripture regarding the sanctity of human life.)

Sunday morning’s plenary

Sunday morning’s plenary began with the question—“Can you imagine a world where people are not judged by the complexion of their skin, their sexual orientation, etc.” The speaker desired that God would bless all the women with “anger about injustice.” (I understand this concept, for God has “blessed” me with anger about the injustice of abortion.)

Lois Dauway, speaking on racial justice, proclaimed that diversity is the strength of the Women’s Division, and they possess a prophetic voice concerning racism and diversity.

Rita Arni reported on the Policy Committee’s mid-quadrennial review of the Division’s anti-racism work. The consensus of the committee’s survey was that the presentation by Tex Sample at the 2001 Retreat and the one given by Rev. David Ostendorf (a United Church of Christ pastor) on the Christian Identity Movement were the two favorite events.

Tex Sample speaks at WD retreat

Tex Sample is a United Methodist elder who received his M.Div. from the Boston University School of Theology and His Ph.D. from the Boston University Graduate School. His book *The Loyal Opposition* was displayed on the book table at this and the previous board meeting. In this book he and his co-author Amy DeLong attempt to give a scriptural and theological basis for the practice of homosexuality. Dr. Sample signed a letter written to Dr. James Dobson, an eminent psychologist and founder and chairman of *Focus on the Family*, an organization which has done immeasurable good for Christian families over the world. A quote from this letter says:

Increasingly, homosexuals who are faithful disciples of Jesus Christ are overcoming the stigma fostered by the “ex-gay” movement and are successfully reconciling their spirituality and their sexuality. We share their understanding of homosexuality as a good gift of God.

By inviting Dr. Sample as their retreat speaker, we must conclude that the Women’s Division does not concur with the statement in the *Book of Discipline* that the practice of homosexuality is “incompatible with Christian teaching” (Par. 161 G). It would also appear that funds are being expended to invite speakers who challenge the church’s standard on homosexual practice, thus violating the *Discipline’s* prohibition against using funds to promote homosexual practice.

(Transforming Congregations is a ministry in our denomination which ministers to homosexual persons and others affected by sexual brokenness. This organization, along with most in our denomination, hold to the primacy of Scripture for Christian living and “affirm the Biblical position that God loves all persons, that homosexual practice is one sin among many and that the Holy Spirit is available to transform all persons—including homosexual persons.” We do not help people when we tell them that what they are doing is okay when the Bible teaches it is not. Scriptures that address the sin of homosexuality include: Leviticus 19:33; 22:13; Romans 1:26-27; I Corinthians 6:9-11; I Timothy 1:9-10 (as well as other scriptures dealing with the created order of male and female and marriage between one man and one woman). Verses that deal with the power of the Holy Spirit to transform the life of all persons, including the homosexual are: I Corinthians 6:9-11; Romans 12:2; Galatians 5: 16-25 and I Peter 2:24. The acceptance of homosexuality as normal would appear as part of the Women’s Division’s advocacy for diversity and inclusiveness, as attested in the Division’s Policy Statement.)

Rev. Dave Ostendorf criticizes “Christian Right”

Rev. Dave Ostendorf, another speaker at the retreat, was also highly touted. His expertise seems to be criticizing the “Christian Right,” which he characterizes as “those who organize to advance the cultural and religious influence of a literal, personally moralistic, and inerrant interpretation of the Bible, and to transform the USA into a Christian nation in their own image.” It is false to assert the religious right wants to “transform the USA into a Christian nation in their own image.” Such a definition would only apply to a few “radical right” groups that are beyond the category of “religious right.” Those who are Biblically orthodox want to be salt and light in a society which is becoming morally corrupt. If this can be accomplished by influencing public policy and helping elect like-minded legislators and judges, it is an appropriate use of the democratic process. No condemnation was forthcoming for those in our country aggressively pushing agendas such as same sex marriage, and violating the law in the process. An amendment to the constitution to protect our society seems necessary, and we are thankful to live in a democracy where this is a political option we can pursue.

Inclusive language

It was reported that Jean Saul is retiring after 10 years and 10 months as a Membership & Organizational Development (M&OD) staff person. Also retiring is Sandy Ruby, who lamented that “The UMW has been my life. I don’t know what God will have for me to do now, but I’m sure *she’ll* (emphasis mine) let me know.”

That seems to be beside the point. The WD is so adamant about “diversity and inclusiveness” that they have gone so far as to bring a petition before General Conference advocating that both masculine and feminine words be used for God. Janice Crouse, Ph.D., reflects the opinion of those who hold Scripture sacred in the UMC when she states in her critique of this petition, “Christians ought to be respectful of the diversity of human beings, but the liturgy of the church and the translation of biblical texts ought to adhere to the original language and faithfully reflect the original texts. While in many instances, inclusiveness and diversity are positive and helpful, in the case of changing the Holy Bible we must strongly object!” Dr. Crouse’s excellent analysis of Women’s Division petitions can be found at www.renewnetwork.org.

Conclusion-When did this happen?

The fact that United Methodist Women is celebrating their 135th anniversary this year has led me to ponder just where and when the women's leadership of our denomination changed its focus. The Women's Division claims they are continuing the heritage passed down to them, but I remember when my grandmother was part of the Methodist's women's organization when I was young. The women gave their money so the gospel message of Jesus Christ could be shared with people in far away lands. At the three Division board meetings I have attended I have heard much about racism, diversity, injustice, empowerment for women, monitoring hate crimes, xenophobia, reparations, affirmative action, etc., etc., etc. I have never once heard anyone mention an appropriation of funds to take the gospel message of Jesus Christ to people in far away lands. The saving grace of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins is the one thing that lifts people from helplessness and hopelessness, but I have never heard that mentioned. I believe my dear grandmother, who taught a women's Sunday School class in her Methodist Church in Merkel, Texas for many years, recoils at the very thought of God being referred to as "she." I also believe she would be just as grieved as I am that the women's leadership of the United Methodist Church supports the killing of our very own unborn children.

I remember attending the Women's Society of Christian Service when my children were young. I recall the thrill of having studies that reported the reaching of people around the world with the gospel message. And, that seems not so long ago.... What has happened to us? When did we change our emphasis? Where did we go wrong?

It would appear that the rebellion of the 50s, 60s and 70s within the culture spilled over into the churches, and that much of the leadership shaped in that era now holds positions within the church, influencing the mission and ministry of United Methodist Women with a worldview that is secular, radical feminist and a far cry from the Christian worldview that has the power to change the lives of individuals and cultures, as attested to in other parts of the world untainted by tired, liberal social constructs.

Evangelical women do not long for the days of yesteryear, but we are aware that the Gospel of Jesus Christ transcends time and cultures with true liberation and life-giving purpose. We believe the message of Scripture is relevant to every age, without compromising its unchanging revelation of God and His grace to humankind through Jesus Christ. We endorse the Church's action in the world to relieve suffering and injustice, while reminding ourselves that we are the Church of Jesus Christ—not the church of secular society or a subsidiary of the United Nations.

It is not difficult to remain faithful to our 135-year heritage and to our upward call of God in Christ Jesus in today's world—they are one in the same—modified slightly by the times in which we live, but forever held together by unchanging truth.