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PRESS RELEASE

UNITED METHODIST WOMEN'S DIVISION EXPERIENCES FINANCIAL CRISIS AND MEMBERSHIP DECLINE

THE RENEW NETWORK TRACKS DECLINE, OFFERS CAUSE

The Women's Division, the church agency with oversight for the finances, programs and policies of United Methodist Women (UMW), was forced to acknowledge a severe financial crisis fueled by a "long-term pattern of over-spending" at its Spring 2006 Board of Directors Meeting. Chief executive officer, Dr. Jan Love, confessed to the directors, "...the Division was chronically overspending about four million dollars a year." She lamented, "Our passion for mission has outstripped our income." The Women's Division reported overspending between 2001 and 2004 at \$11.2 million. The 2004 operating deficit was \$6.49 million. The operating deficit for 2005 jumped to 8.02 million.

The RENEW Network, a network for evangelical United Methodist Women, had noted exaggerated claims in print that the yearly giving of United Methodist Women was \$25 million dollars. Correct figures were reflected in Women's Division reports, but, not until now has there been a public acknowledgement of a decline in giving. For example, 2005 giving was \$16.8 million dollars. At the 2006 spring meeting it was reported that undesignated giving fell 7.6% in 2005, from \$18.2 million to \$16.8 million.

Membership is also declining. RENEW has reported a membership decline in the UMW organization even as the Women's Division continues to claim "approximately one million members" in press releases. According to a report from the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA), the 2005 UMW membership totaled 727,680. New statistics obtained from the GCFA indicate the number of United Methodist Churches with UMW groups fell from 21,521 to 21,168 in 2005, a loss of 353 units. In 2004 the number dropped from 21,920 to 21,521, a loss of 399 units. That is a loss of 752 units in just 2 years.

Undesignated giving by local units of United Methodist Women is the major source of funding for the Division, making up 98.5% of the general fund budget. At both its fall and spring board meetings the Women's Division explored reasons for the decline, speculating that it might be staff shortage, disaster appeals or "trends in society" to give to specific causes. RENEW press

representative Sharon Trense lamented in her report from the spring meeting, “At no time was there any introspection about the displeasure of the membership regarding the political ideology of missions the directors and staff chose to support with undesignated funds.”

Members of the RENEW Network continue to lament the left-leaning political advocacy, anti-American bias, feminist theology, socialist ideology, interfaith pluralism and the virtual absence of evangelism that permeate the philosophy and spending patterns of the Women’s Division. RENEW Network Representative, Liza Kittle, states, “It is difficult to even find the name of Jesus when you explore the various organizations the Women’s Division aligns itself with. What a missed opportunity!”

RENEW President Faye Short concludes: “The RENEW Network hears regularly from UMW groups who have decided to designate or withhold their pledges because of their dissatisfaction with the Women’s Division’s programs, policies and spending. Many opt to withdraw from the organization of United Methodist Women. It is unfortunate the Women’s Division chooses to ignore a reality that could provide answers to their membership decline and financial shortfall.”