

ARE UNITED METHODIST WOMEN AND THE WOMEN'S DIVISION UNITED?

Women's Division Board of Directors Meeting October 6-9, 2006, Stamford Connecticut Report and Analysis By Sharon Trense

(Note: RENEW reporters attend different committees and report their findings.)

“Creativity” was the theme of the Friday evening opening plenary session of the Women's Division Board of Directors Meeting. A film depicting Pablo Picasso creating a work of art was shown, followed by the participants at each table creating their own work of art about the future of the Women's Division. Those present were urged to use their creativity to facilitate the reorganization and restructuring of the Women's Division.

As the evening progressed, it was apparent that a great deal of creativity would be necessary to lift the flagging spirits of those who were affected by the restructuring and spending cuts essential to restore the Women's Division to financial health. Deep cuts in giving to (Undesignated) Mission Giving triggered unprecedented spending of reserves and created a crisis that affected the lives and careers of many support staff, some professional staff and a few executive staff. One could not help but be deeply touched by the sorrow and anguish expressed in this opening plenary session. Even more, one could not help but be grieved by the failure of leadership to acknowledge the disappointment on the part of many faithful United Methodist Women with Women's Division leadership that had prompted the slowdown in giving.

Financial Report

Undoubtedly, the primary reason the Women's Division is restructuring is their bleak financial outlook. Andrea Hatcher, treasurer of the organization, gave her report to directors, guests and staff for 2005 as well as the first eight months of 2006. Hatcher reported that total Mission Giving for 2005 was lower than 2004 by \$1.4 million or 7%. Total Operating Revenue decreased by about half of that amount, or 3% due to increased investment income. The increase in investment income is due to new investment advisors and the overall buoyancy of the market, according to Hatcher. Additional revenue of \$1.4 million was generated by the sale of the Methodist San Antonio property. Hatcher stated every category of Mission Giving was down in 2005 in comparison to 2004, the most dramatic being in Pledge to Mission (now Mission Giving) by \$1.1 million. Although Hatcher stated the revenue for 2006 was buoyed by giving at the Anaheim Assembly through the World Thank Offering and Walk for Missions, the 2006 eighth month comparative picture is relatively flat. She predicted it should increase in December when the “lion's share” of pledges are received. Although receipt patterns are predicted to remain stable in 2006, Hatcher predicted 2006 giving would exceed 2005 but still be less than 2004.

Designated Giving declined in 2005, according to the treasurer. For the first time the Call to Prayer and Self-Denial giving was less than \$1 million.

Operating Expenditures, excluding the Brooks Howell Home, however, increased by \$450,000 due to an increase in the support of mission programs, pension and post-retirement costs and decreases in property

maintenance and insurance, administration, fundraising, and support of the Service Center, *Response* and CCUN, said Ms. Hatcher. In 2006 the comparative figures for the first eight months show an increase of \$1.63 million or 7% between 2005 and 2006. This increase is largely due to the significant increase in mission programs related to the Assembly in Anaheim as well as the reduction of administrative expenses and property maintenance.

The Operating Deficit in 2005 was higher than 2004 by \$1.23 million or 19%. There was a decrease in net assets due to the decline in appreciation of investments and endowment/sale of properties. The Operating Deficit is significantly less in the first eight months of 2006 as compared to 2005 largely due to the efforts being made to more closely monitor expenses, according to Hatcher.

Hatcher explained the three Net Assets—(1) Unrestricted Funds, which consist of Undesignated and Board Undesignated, (2) Temporarily Restricted and (3) Permanently Restricted. The Undesignated monies consist primarily of the General Fund which is the operating fund of the Women’s Division, explained Hatcher. The revenue sources for this fund are the five channels of mission giving, plus some investment and miscellaneous income. Appropriation expenses are paid from this budget. The balance of Undesignated Funds at the close of 2005 was \$3.37 million, down from 2004 by \$2.4 million. Although receipts are down in the first eight months of 2006 by \$1.55 million, Hatcher projected this deficit will be eliminated by the end of the year.

The total Net Assets of the Women’s Division have declined from \$80.65 million in 2001 to \$57.96 million in August of 2006 with \$13.63 million in unrestricted assets. Although the deficit for 2005 was \$6.3 million and the deficit for 2006 is anticipated to be \$ \$4.5 million, the treasurer anticipates an even smaller deficit in 2007 of about \$218,000—a deficit nonetheless.

Ms. Hatcher reported the search for Director of Development continues after six months of posting the position. Only two resumes’ have been received by candidates with experience and those were received within the past two weeks. She asked directors and staff to send her any names and recommendations of qualified candidates for this position. She announced the new on-line giving program for those women not affiliated with a unit.

Hatcher attempted to allay the fears generated by the reckless overspending of this autonomous organization, stating, “In 2005, we came to a fuller realization of our income and expense patterns and their effect on our net assets. Once recognized, we set the goal to revamp our budget process and replenish our undesignated funds.” This reason is about as palatable to those who believe in fiscal responsibility as the “passion for mission” excuse for overspending given in the spring of this year. In closing, the treasurer encouraged those present “to remain strong in mission outreach even as future budgets are reduced.” Unlike Picasso, she was not able to paint an uplifting picture.

The Report and Recommendations of the Executive Committee on Appropriations

Actual total income for 2005 was \$16,842,050. Total expenses were \$23,160,708 leaving a deficit of (\$6,318,659). *Budgeted* income for 2006 is \$18,333,205. Total expenses are *projected* to be \$22,842,445 which will leave a deficit of (\$4,509,240). Requests for 2007 still exceed income and a deficit of (\$218,127) is anticipated. The Women’s Division is still overspending. Areas of interest that continue to be funded and the inability of directors and staff to cut costs show in the following projected deficits:

Church Center for the UN in 2007 is projected to produce a deficit of (\$70,053) and *Response* magazine is projected to produce a deficit of (\$261,235). Allowing for accuracy in future income projections, without these projected deficits, the budget would be balanced and the leadership could potentially fulfill their promise to balance the budget by 2007.

Women's Division President's Report

The promise of fiscal austerity from the Women's Division treasurer, was followed by the report of the Women's Division president, Kyung Za Yim. She gave rave reviews about her trip to Cambodia. Twenty-one other women representing the United Methodist Women accompanied her—so much for fiscal austerity! The president warned of “anti-immigration forces that continue to fight hard to put into place state legislation banning citizenship for aliens” as well as her concern for the war in Iraq, Lebanon, Darfur and the threat of Korea's nuclear bomb, and the violence in Pennsylvania.

Kyung Za Yim then reported on the Search Committee's recommendations for a replacement for Jan Love. The Search committee which is made up of Personnel Committee members, first met in August 2006. Jan Love resigned in the Spring of 2006 to accept the position of Dean of the Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. Thus far, the committee has sent search letters to twenty-five women, received thirteen applications and interviewed two candidates. They have not hired a replacement for the popular Love.

The Search Committee made several recommendations as follows: (1) an interim Deputy General Secretary be appointed who will not be eligible for a permanent appointment; (2) Lois Dauway be appointed to fill the temporary position until the new appointee assumes office; (3) the search committee be authorized to hire a national search firm to conduct the search for the new DGS; (4) \$60,000 from the Contingency Fund be allocated should a search firm be engaged. Lois Dauway was elected unanimously on Friday evening to serve until Love's replacement is hired.

Policy Committee/Covenant Group Questions

The Policy Committee began their report with the following quotation from the *New York Times* editorial, December 31,1999: “American Idealism...has always existed in a paradoxical linkage with greed, an alarming intolerance for social injustices and the racial blindness that allowed the same mind that shaped the Declaration of Independence to condone slavery.” The members were asked to reflect on the following:

1. What are your first recollections and experiences of “racial differences” and how are we affected by them?
2. What is “whiteness?” Does “white privilege “exist? If so, how can this everyday form of whiteness be addressed to enable people of color to become more empowered?
3. Why do people of color and whites remain largely isolated from each other in their daily lives, and perceive reality so differently?
4. What part does race play in our interaction with people we encounter daily?

The Policy Committee also recommended the following amendment: “With regard to all real property wherein the Women's Division's interest is less than 100%, the Treasurer and the Deputy General

Secretary of the Women's Division, with the approval of the Administrative Committee of the Women's Division, shall be permitted to approve the sale or conveyance of any fractional interest of any property, howsoever acquired, when either the Women's Division's interest in the property is less than 5% the entire property or the Women's Division's interest in the property has a value less than \$100,000." What is the reason for this amendment and how will it be utilized in the future?

The Policy Committee also raised the policy of men who are on staff and the hiring of men. It was agreed that "this is a conversation worth having."

Introduction and Recognition of Outgoing Staff

Perhaps one of the most tragic results of the fiscal irresponsibility by the administrative leadership was the recognition of staff members that were either retiring, being forced to retire or resigning.

Twenty-five members of the Service Center staff in Cincinnati, Ohio and eight staff members from Washington were relieved of their responsibilities. The operation performed by the Service Center has been placed under *The United Methodist Reporter* in Dallas, Texas. One devoted employee told the members and staff of her "total disbelief" upon hearing the news of the closing of the Service Center, now called the Mission Resource Center. She talked with bitterness and candor of the "hurt, anger and disappointment and experiencing the feeling of having the rug pulled out from under her."

J. Ann Craig, Executive Secretary for Spiritual Development, retiring after twenty-one years stated, "there is great sorrow on this stage." She said "we are going in the wrong direction." Furthermore, she quoted a past board member who told her, "I don't know where the Women's Division will be in ten years." She urged directors to support the "staff who remain" and explained, "although the programs have not decreased that much, the staff has." According to Craig, there were forty staff members when she was hired, now there are half that many. (According to the Executive Committee for Appropriations and Long Range Planning the number of staff positions has decreased from 116 in 2000 to a projected 63 in 2007.) Craig urged those present to "be creative and to stand up for what you believe."

Report on Reorganization to the Executive Committee for Long Range Planning

According to the report from this committee, the staff and directors have been envisioning the future of the Women's Division for over two years. The first action taken was to implement new budgetary procedures to better match yearly income with annual expenditures. They also "gave urgency to the task of reorganizing the Division's work and realigning staff positions."

A plan was brought forth by the Executive Committee for Appropriations which would include provisions to move most of the Women's Division Communications, Current and Deferred Giving and Development functions from the GBGM to the Women's Division. Staff would be realigned and reduced overall. The establishment of three new positions at the director's level was recommended: Director of Mission Education and Enrichment; Director of Spiritual Formation and Mission Theology; and Director of Fund Development. These positions will be filled by Cheryl Trent, Glory Dharmaraj and Andris Salter in that order.

The Tillman Chapel and The Church Center for The United Nations

According to the Women's Division, The Church Center for the United Nations is a "faith-based witness for peace" located across the street from the United Nations. The 12-story facility was first built in 1963 by The United Methodist Church. The Women's Division assumed ownership of the building in 1984. The Women's Division and the General Board of Church and Society, which have UN-related offices in this building, are said to offer a ministry of "presence and education."

The Church Center also houses religious and other non-governmental organizations concerned with UN issues. Several of these groups which hold feministic, socialistic, pluralistic and anti-American agendas are: The American Humanist Association; The Global Policy Forum; The International Women's Tribune Center; The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns; The NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security; Religions for Peace; The Unitarian Universalist UN Office; and The World Federation at the UN Office.

A peace conference initiated by the United Methodists held this summer during the crisis in Lebanon included several denominations and religions. One of the sessions closed in a pluralistic, politically correct prayer stating "As we bless the source of life: so we are blessed." There are many United Methodist Women who want peace in the world but find the political leanings expressed at the Church Center for the UN contrary to theirs. Incidentally, according to the approved Report and Recommendations of the Executive Committee on Appropriations dated October 6, 2006, the Church Center for the UN is projected to show a deficit of \$34,580 in 2006. A larger deficit of \$70,053 is projected for 2007.

The Seminar Program

The United Methodist Seminar program is also held in the Church Center. The Seminar designer, Jay Godfrey, related the seminars at the center in an age of "globalization," to John Wesley's statement, "I look upon the world as my parish, in the age of "industrialization." The purpose of the Seminar Program according to Godfrey is to "provide custom-designed interactive educational seminars throughout the year in New York City and Washington, D. C., for groups interested in studying complex social issues from a perspective of faith." Some of the seminars include the following: Economic Justice; Hunger/Poverty; Racism; Inter-Religious Dialogue; Immigration; The UMC and the UN; Globalization; Living Justice; HIV and Aids; and Nationalism and Extremism.

There is no mention of Jesus, the Prince of Peace in either the peace initiatives or in any of the seminars. Rather than replicating Wesley's spiritual mission, the United Methodist Church Center for the UN and the Seminar Program espouse the liberal, pluralistic, anti-American political agendas of the staff and the scandal-ridden, ineffective United Nations.

Meeting of the Christian Social Responsibility Sub-Committee

Mia Adjali distributed a packet of information and articles about the war in Lebanon from some articles she "happened to have." There was concern that the American media had not accurately reported on the war and there will be an analysis done on that subject. Adjali lamented that "Lebanese voices are missing but God works in mysterious ways." The following excerpts are from the articles circulated. All reflect one political agenda. None represent the Israeli side of the war.

- A quote from an address by Rev. Riad Jarjour in the Middle East Report WACC Board of Director's Meeting in Toronto 2006: "The war on "terror" or what is carried out under that pretense, has caused death and destruction in so many countries and mostly to innocent people." Regarding the tension between Israel and Palestine, "It remains true that Israel is the aggressor. Regarding human rights, "The question the Christian media address today in this arena is how it can help in keeping pluralism while further deepening national unity, which will eventually lead to equal citizenship for all irrespective of their religious or cultural belongings."
- A quote from the General Secretary of the General Board of Global Ministries the Reverend R. Randy Day: "I want especially to call on my brothers and sisters on the political right in the United States to rethink their automatic endorsement of anything Israel does. It does the cause of eschatology no harm to condemn acts of terror and military excess. I realize that some Christians approach this region of the globe with theological misconceptions, but there are times when humanitarian concern must override contemporary ideology based on selective biblical interpretation. Peace is more important than visions of Armageddon."
- A quote from Rev. Albert Isteero, a Christian Egyptian-born leader speaking at a weekly worship service at the Upper Room Chapel, and reported by the United Methodist News Service. "The United States, a so-called Christian country, has a double standard. With one hand it gives bombs to Israel and with the other it gives milk and flour to those affected by the bombs. Is this Christian? Forget Christian, is this human? Terrorism is initiated by the policy of the United States."
- A quote from Madre, an International Women's Human Rights Organization, which claims to demand justice for women and families and the designated recipients of \$8,000 in the international ministries budget for 2007: "Iran is Israel's main competitor and is at logger-heads with Israel's sponsor, the U.S., over its nuclear program." And, "The Bush Administration has recklessly inflamed the crisis by pinning blame on Syria and Iran and casting the conflict as part of a wider 'war on terror.'"

Adjali urged members to explore Islam, stating 22 centers for non-violence have been opened in Arab nations. She also asked rhetorically, "Are we a just war church?" Several other similar articles were distributed by Adjali, after which she apologized for not including "Lebanese voices" in the packet of information. There was no mention, however, of Israeli or American voices. Claiming to be concerned about social justice without analyzing all sides of an issue is not true justice but merely political debauchery. The staff position on the war in Lebanon is anti-American, pro-Islamic, controversial and divisive. Unfortunately the directors appear to accept the information given them as fact and do not question their staff leaders.

Women's Division and Wal-Mart

In June of 2006 the Women's Division attended a forum sponsored by the National Consumer's League Conference in Washington, D.C. The purpose of the conference was to "explore how big box retailers are dramatically impacting communities, consumers and workers in the U.S." According to the attendees, the Women's Division and the NCL have had, "...a close relationship with this organization through the years." The purpose of the one day event according to the NCL was to "provide tools, ideas and information to help consumers and workers mobilize their communities and organizations on two fronts:

putting the squeeze on big box retail expansion until dramatic corporate changes occur and putting pressure on these corporations for corporate social responsibility.”

Bernie Horn, Policy Director, Center for Policy Alternatives asserted that “big box” retailers such as Wal-Mart, which is the largest private employer in the world, places undue burden on the public health care system and undermines public education and community welfare. He reported 5% of Wal-Mart employees and 27% of the Wal-Mart employees’ children are on Medicaid. Charles Fisher the author of a book entitled *The Wal-Mart Effect* charged, “Over time, even though the price is lower, you may not be getting a better deal at Wal-Mart.” Heather Boushey, Economist, Center for Economic and Policy Research, placed her focus on the “flawed Wal-Mart business model which is detrimental to the U.S. because of its substandard employee benefits and low wages, coupled with declining union membership and deregulation.” Boushey further charged that Wal-Mart employees earn on average one-fourth less than other retail workers because wages and benefit packages are hard to fight for because Wal-Mart is not unionized.

Attendees were schooled in methods of keeping Wal-Mart out of their communities. Julie Taylor, Women’s Division Executive Secretary for Children, Youth and Family Advocacy, reassured directors and staff, “We as consumers can have an effect on the Wal-Marts of this world.” Taylor compared Wal-Mart’s hourly average wage of \$11.52 (\$9.68 others report) per hour in 2006 to General Motor’s average hourly wage of \$18.53 an hour in 1950. Taylor emphasized, “...there is a cost behind the low prices of Wal-Mart and that is an exploitation of workers and land.” She applauded Costco, which is partially unionized, while chastising non-unionized Sam’s Club (Wal-Mart) stating while 91% of Costco employees have retirement benefits, only 64% of Sam’s Club employees have retirement benefits. She also reported that the Costco CEO has one of the lowest salaries of any in the country, Wal-Mart’s CEO salary is 150 times his worker’s salaries.

It is critical, as in the Lebanon crisis that all the facts surrounding an issue are known. The following are just some of the facts on the other side. Julie Taylor parroted what had been told her at the National Consumer’s Conference when she criticized the General Motors/Wal-Mart salary differential.

Conversely, according to The Labor Research Association, Wal-Mart’s CEO Lee Scott stated, “Critics believe Wal-Mart should play the role General Motors played after World War II...(and) establish the post-war middle class that the country is so proud of. The fact is that retailing doesn’t perform that role in any country.” To compare the manufacturing industry with the retail industry is simply not an “apple to apple” comparison. The auto industry manufactures a product, the retail industry, such as Wal-Mart, is responsible for marketing products. The making and selling of projects are two distinct industries.

Whether one agrees with Scott or not, there are distinct differences between Wal-Mart and Costco. Wal-Mart hires 1.6 million employees while Costco hires 113,000 employees globally. Wal-Mart has 3,600 stores in the U.S. while Costco has 336. While it is true the Wal-Mart CEO’s salary plus bonus of \$5.3 million far exceeds the Costco CEO’s salary of \$350,000, Wal-Mart is over ten times the size of Costco. There is no doubt that Wal-Mart’s employment practices are not what they could be. However, according to USA Today.com, the real reason Wal-Mart is being beleaguered is a “test for organized labor whose membership has atrophied from 30% of the work force in the 1950’s to 13% today. According to Eric Gordon, a professor from the University of Florida in Gainesville, “Failing to unionize is frustrating to the unions and damages their claim that they’re needed by today’s workers.” Labor has “unionized stores like

Safeway and Kroger...,” according to Satish Deshpande, a management professor at Western Michigan University, “...but those organizations are now asking the union for wage and benefit cuts because they say they can’t compete with Wal-Mart, whose labor costs are so much lower. So their only option is to go after Wal-Mart.”

In addition to the opposition of the Women’s Division and the World Council of Churches, among others, the giant retailer has also been targeted by the National Organization for Women. In September they named the company its fifth National Merchant of Shame. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, October 18, 2006, the “low-priced retailer has become the Democratic Party’s favorite piñata.” The two most prominent anti-Wal-Mart groups, Wal-Mart Watch and United Food and Commercial Workers Union are funded by the Service Employees International Union and the United Food and Commercial Workers Union. Paul Blank, the campaign director for UFCW has close ties to the Democrat party. He was political director for the failed Howard Dean presidential campaign.

Also according to the *Wall Street Journal* report, there has been more than one study showing that the “real” Wal-Mart effect has been to increase purchasing power of working families by lowering prices for groceries, prescription drugs, electronic equipment and many other products that have been modern household necessities.” Global Insight, an economic consulting firm, calculates, “Wal-Mart saves American households an average of \$2,300 a year through lower prices.” That equates to a \$33 billion savings for low-income families from the federal food stamp program.

Who is right, Wal-Mart or the unions? That is a difficult decision given the limited amount of information previously documented. There is so much more information to be gathered in order to make a wise decision. Yet the directors were only given the anti-Wal-Mart information. The Women’s Division selects sides of an issue that match their political bias and the directors, like sheep, follow blindly. Their areas of interest have nothing to do with religion. It is pure politics.

Ironically, there is another issue related to Wal-Mart that the Women’s Division *has not* weighed in on. The American Family Association recently reported that Wal-Mart had aligned itself with the gay and lesbian cause by joining the National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce and by donating to several homosexual causes. AFA began calling for a boycott of Wal-Mart by concerned Christians. The Women’s Division made no public statements about this concern and voiced no recriminations for Wal-Mart for this action. After Wal-Mart donated \$60,000 to a homosexual organization, “Out and Equal,” and determined to automatically donate 5% of online sales directly to the Washington, D.C., Community Center for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender People, Wildmon turned up the heat, asking Christians to refrain from shopping at Wal-Mart and Sam’s Club on the Friday or Saturday following Thanksgiving.

Shortly after the issuance of this call for boycott, Wal-Mart announced they “will no longer make corporate contributions to support or oppose controversial issues unless they directly relate to their ability to serve their customers.” In good faith, AFA cancelled its call for boycott of Wal-Mart. While many women of the United Methodist Church may have participated in the AFA call to action against Wal-Mart’s support of the homosexual agenda—where was the Women’s Division?

Report of the Deputy General Secretary to the Women's Division

Jan Love's "swan song" was mostly a repeat of past addresses to the membership. She spoke of the "spirited debate, assertive assessments and the need to change—and even of some grief she had given the Women's Division and the General Board of Global Ministries. She stated they had given her some grief as well. She spoke of the tough times together one of which was the pain that was evident on the stage on Friday evening. She talked about the Assembly, the new DVD, the new on-line community and the Global Methodist Women's Center in Korea. She lamented about her time with the Division as being too brief after only two years together.

Love spoke of the lessons she has learned, the first being: "If you ask them, they will give." The second lesson being: "If you offer an engaging, hospitable organizational environment, they will join." The third lesson being: "I have come to believe that the single most important threat to the vitality and growth of United Methodist Women is simple ignorance and indifference on the part of many United Methodists, including church leaders." The last lesson being: "We need to continue to preserve the place we hold and the role we play in the church, even in the face of others' ignorance about or hostility to them (us)." She reiterated her desire to make sure that the Women's Division preserves their appropriate place in the church, continues their vital partnership with the General Board of Global Ministries, with "clear authority of our own to direct our program and finances." In closing, she reassured the membership that "we're going to be fine even with all the transitions."

Closing Remarks

The former director who lamented about where the Women's Division will be in ten years and the retiring staff member who said "we are going in the wrong direction" reflected the aura of forced enthusiasm and denial which was evident all weekend. After all, income declined from \$43.22 million in 2001 to \$29.49 million in 2005. In spite of the promise to balance the budget, a balanced budget is not forthcoming. All weekend there was talk of reorganization, restructuring and the need to think creatively. Bitterness and anger was evident on the stage on Friday night as employees were released due to budget constraints. One of the youngest directors candidly asked, "Are *you* willing to change? There is a reason why young people are not joining this organization." The search for a Director of Development for two months has produced no viable candidates. The Women's Division has lost their leader, Jan Love, and has not succeeded in finding anyone interested in replacing her. The only enthusiasm was evidenced in the Section of Christian Social Responsibility when directors and staff talked about their trips and their political agendas.

Sadly, the feminist, pluralistic, liberal agenda of the directors and the staff of the Women's Division has caused them to drift farther and farther from the membership. The directors have relinquished their responsibilities to the staff and the staff has squandered their responsibilities. There is a sinking feeling about the future and talk of organizational change—but there is no introspection on root causes. In fact, there is no acceptance of any personal responsibility regarding the mishandling of funds. There is no truth in the politics the leadership espouses, only division. There is no social justice in the agendas of the leadership, only social prejudices. There is no promotion of Christ, the only source of truth. In fact, His name is very seldom mentioned. Could this be the reason everything seems to be spiraling out of control?

Can the women of the church be committed to such an agenda? Can United Methodist Women and the Women's Division be united when their world views collide? It is highly improbable.