

Women's Division Unveils New Structure, Financial Information, and Membership Initiative at 2008 Fall Board Meeting

By Liza Kittle

At the fall board of director's meeting in Stamford, Connecticut, October 11-13, the financial report for 2008 and the appropriations budget for 2009 were disclosed. A new board structure and rearrangement of executive staff was also introduced as well as new initiatives concerning membership development and financial giving.

Treasurer's Report

Women's Division Treasurer Martha Knight reported that United Methodist Women Mission Giving for 2008 was up slightly (3.3%) or holding steady over the same time period for 2007 in each of the five channels of giving. "United Methodist Women giving has remained strong even in the midst of economic downturn," Ms. Knight said. Although this report looks promising for the yearly mission giving total, United Methodist Women giving has been steadily decreasing for many years by substantial amounts indicative of the decreasing membership in the organization.

Other revenue increases as of August 31 compared to 2007 included designated giving by \$17,000(2.1%); bequests, gifts and contributions by \$330,000(302% due to large gift for support of Brooks Howell Home); and publication, rental and other program revenues by \$1.1 million (attributed to increases in subscriptions to RESPONSE magazine, Mission Resource Center sales, Church Center for the United Nations (CCUN) and Alma Matthews House income rental). Interest and investment income decreased however by 26.1%.

Operating expenditures through August 2008 were down by \$800,000(4.0%) due to the following reasons. Programs administered by the General Board of Global Ministries decreased by \$335,000(7.1%) due to the approved budget of 2008, i.e., the Women's Division decreased their usual giving to GBGM by this amount. Other areas of reduction included pension and post-retirement costs by \$220,000(7.5%) explained by timing in submission of medical claims. Brooks Howell Home expenses increased considerable by \$315,000(19.6%) due to rising food costs, administrative services, maintenance and nursing costs. Expenditures related to the Church Center, Mission Resource Center and RESPONSE magazine decreased \$475,000(14%) due to the fact that CCUN and RESPONSE staff salaries and related expenses were moved to the operating budget of the Women's Division.

The operating expenditures of \$19.3 million exceeded the operating income of \$15.2 million through August 2008 creating an operating deficit of \$4.1 million. Operating deficits have been an annual occurrence for many years as the Women's Division continues to spend more than they take in, resulting in a continued decline in their net assets. There was also a decrease in the fair value of investments of \$11.3 million due to market conditions further eroding the net assets of the division for a total of \$15.4 million (21%) decrease in net assets.

In December, 2006, the Women's Division has net assets of \$75.2 million. As of August 2008, that total has dropped to \$59.3 million. This downward trend in Women's Division assets will eventually have a major impact on the financial future of the organization.

Board and Executive Staff Restructuring

The Women's Division has implemented a new structure which will result in more areas of the Division's work coming under the **Office of the Deputy General Secretary (DGS)**. Ecumenical relations, general contingencies, director's participation and division-wide program will come under the General Office of the DGS. Mission Education which includes schools of Christian mission, leadership training event and the reading program will now come under the Office of the DGS. A third area moved to this office will be Spiritual Growth which includes spiritual formation and mission theology.

Four other major areas in addition to the Office of the Deputy General Secretary include: 1) **Finance and Administrative Services** (includes financial interpretation, finance and division office and administration and liability insurance); 2) **Christian Social Action and Nation Ministries** (includes children, youth and family advocacy, research and hospitality-CCUN, racial justice, public policy, community action, global justice, special orientation/enrichment, ecumenical work and grants to national mission institutions); and 3) **Membership and Leadership Development/International Ministries** (includes young women resource and program, language ministries, mission team training, officer update, conference relations, jurisdictional training, division-wide cultivation functions, membership development, resource and program development and grants and programs to international missions).

Women's Division Appropriations Budget for 2009

The appropriations budget for 2009 is \$18,775,703. The monies will be spent as follows:

1. Salaries and Benefits for 33 executives and 13 professional staff persons--\$5,226,357 (27.8%)
2. Office and Administration and Travel for all areas of the Division--\$1,865,238 (9.9%)
3. Office of the Deputy General Secretary--\$2,318,620 (12.3%)
4. Finance and Administrative Services--\$300,000 (1.6%)
5. Christian Social Action--\$270,800 (1.4%)
6. Membership and Leadership Development--\$392,000 (2.1%)
7. Insurance costs--\$1,000,000 (5.3%)
8. Joint board costs with General Board of Global Ministries--\$1,906,565 (10.2%)
9. Grants to National Mission Institutions--\$2,748,211 (14.6%)
10. Grants to International Mission grants and programs--\$2,748,211 (14.6%)

Only 29.2% of monies given so generously by United Methodist Women will actually go to specific national and international missions. A whopping 37.7% will go to salaries, benefits, travel and office expenses for 33 executive and 13 professional staff persons of the Women's

Division. 17.4% will go to the various program areas with the majority of funds being spent by the Office of the Deputy General Secretary (12.3%). Joint board costs with the General Board of Global Ministries (10.2%) and insurance coverage for Women's Division properties (5.3%) make up the remaining budget.

The theme of the importance of storytelling was brought up many times throughout the fall board meeting of the Women's Division. These financial numbers tell a story of an organization that is top heavy on salaries, travel and administrative costs and woefully lacking in mission outreach. It is obvious that the multi-faceted machine of the Women's Division takes a substantial amount of financial backing from the faithful United Methodist Women at the local level.

Membership Initiative for the 2009-2012 Quadrennium

A new initiative was introduced at the fall board meeting. The goal is for the Women's Division through its elected leaders (district, conference and jurisdictional officers, committee on nominations members, directors, staff, consultative group members and language coordinators) to visit every local church in the United Methodist Church of the United States. The number of churches to visit would be 35,255 and the number of elected leaders would be 9,077. That would mean that each leader would need to visit approximately 4 churches for every church to be visited. What kind of interaction with or presentations to the churches was not fully disclosed, but a goal was set for 50% of churches to be visited by 2010 and 100% by the 2012 quadrennial meetings.

Expansion Announced for the Repairers of the Breach Initiative

This initiative was originally adopted in October 2005 as a response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. United Methodist Women responded generously with gifts of over \$100,000 to assist in conferences most severely impacted by these hurricanes. The funds were used to assist UMW units that were providing relief and rebuilding efforts to help defray loss of income of conferences impacted by the storms and to support national mission institutions that were damaged.

The policy committee to the Women's Division recommended that "the scope of the initiative be expanded to address subsequent natural and human-made disasters, such as those related to climate change and the current economic crisis, by providing technical and other forms of assistance."

The rationale for the initiative is that the "raging fires in California and Florida, tornadoes in the South and Mid-west, ice storms in the Northeast and additional hurricanes are becoming a norm, likely due to climate change." The pressure caused by these "natural" (their emphasis) disasters and the economic crises currently taking place impact women, children and youth as families lose their homes, jobs, insurance and retirement security.

According to the proposed expanded initiative, further rationale is that hurricanes Katrina and Rita revealed national issues of deep racial and class inequality, as well as negligence and incompetence of people across the United States, and in local, state and federal governments. The document presented to the board of directors contains inflammatory language and presumptive reasoning. Reaching out to suffering people through generous giving of United Methodist Women through the Repairers of the Breach initiative will now be focused on public advocacy concerning every perceived instance of systemic and institutional racism.

The document reads, “While we identify and address the systemic and institutional sources of injustice, we must also recognize our own culpability. Often, while protecting our own need for jobs, lower taxes and private schools over the common good, we bought into the mentality of reducing taxes and privatizing public services, leaving larger and larger groups of people behind. This trend has been coupled with an increasing shift from public services to military spending, and a military response to crises—from Afghanistan and Iraq to New Orleans—has occasioned guards to point machine guns at local residents to protect property rather than save lives.”

The pontification continues, “In a race-based society that privileges Whites, these policy decisions are not neutral. They affect people of color disproportionately, locking many into poverty and death. We have witnessed this in an intense and painful way as we watched the poor of New Orleans, particularly Black people, abandoned in the flooded city. Immigrant populations, including undocumented persons, are able to access benefits, yet may be called on to rebuild the city at sub-minimum wages if labor rights are waived for reconstruction. Our response, based on the United Methodist Charter for Racial Justice, must be immediate and long-term—dismantle racism at all levels.”

The intent of the expansion of the Repairers of the Breach initiative is “to enable the further resources of United Methodist Women to be solicited and brought to bear in these circumstances.” United Methodist Women will be urged to:

1. Celebrate the diverse and faithful communities who have joined in support of those in the Gulf Coast region.
2. Study biblical and ethical obligations to respond and address immediate and long-term systemic injustices.
3. Advocate building the capacity and will of government to serve the public good and insist that the voices of those affected be included at the table.
4. Raise race, class and public policy issues in conversations with our neighbors, in response to the media and in monitoring public policy.
5. Support community organizations in the Gulf region that work for people’s rights in unequal and unjust situations.
6. Serve as advocates for displaced persons to claim resources and relief.
7. Affirm the rights and self-determination of those affected by natural and man-made disasters.
8. Actively work for the return of displaced persons to their communities.

9. Lead and participate in dialogues in our communities about how to welcome strangers in our midst and offer hospitality.
10. Provide resources for assisting local units to analyze and respond to the systemic injustices unveiled by Hurricane Katrina.

The recommendation was passed unanimously.

The RENEW Network puts these questions before United Methodist Women: Does the financial spending allocations of the Women's Division represent your understanding of where the bulk of "mission giving" should be spent?; and, Do the "Repairer's of the Breach" initiatives represent your political and social worldview? If not, you will want to revisit your commitment to undesignated "mission giving."