



LIZA KITTLE

LET THE RESTRUCTURING BEGIN!

In a historic vote, the Women's Division Board of Directors voted unanimously to "structurally separate" from the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) and become an independent agency within the United Methodist Church. The action took place at its spring semi-annual meeting April 7-11 in Stamford, Connecticut.

While separate, the plan states that the Women's Division will be "missionally connected to GBGM, and would intentionally release seats at the GBGM Board of Directors...to make it possible for GBGM to add additional representation from Central Conferences within a smaller board."

Later that week, the Directors of the General Board of Global Ministries affirmed the proposal from the Women's Division. The directors also voted to reduce their number from 92 to 32—a recommendation from the board's executive committee.

Key components of the new Women's Division-GBGM relationship plan include:

- The Women's Division would have 5 seats on the 32 member GBGM Board of Directors. (Currently, the Women's Division makes up 30-40 percent of the GBGM Board of Directors as mandated by the *Discipline*.)

- Women's Division staff would continue to operate the UM Office at the United Nations on behalf of both GBGM and WD at the Church Center for the UN, which is owned by the WD.

The structural separation plan will now be presented to the 2012 General Conference in legislative form.

Other major organizational changes concerning United Methodist Women were also approved today by the Women's Division Board of Directors:

- The name "Women's Division" will be replaced with "United Methodist Women, Inc.," and the organization will now be classified as an agency of the United Methodist Church.

- The term "unit" will be replaced with "local organization of UMW" and each local organization would organize as they see fit.

- A new Board of Directors of UMW, Inc. will be created with 25 members (20 elected from jurisdictional organizations of UMW and 5 nominated by a special committee to ensure diversity). The current board size is 50 members.

- A UMW Program Advisory Group would be created, made up of 70-80 members, which would meet annually and be responsible for recommending to the Board of Directors major program directions, strategic plans, and plans for Schools of Christian Mission, leadership training, social policies, Reading Program, and Assembly.

The rationale and impetus behind these major structural changes being proposed by the Women's Division reflect a pro-active position toward impending structural reorganizations across the general church.

RENEW prays that these historic changes reflect a willingness by the Women's Division to adapt to the realities facing the United Methodist Church as a whole, and the organization of United Methodist Women in particular. These realities for UMW include continued dramatic membership loss and revenue decline. (See www.renew-network.org for a current report on UMW membership and financial structure.)

Hopefully, in the midst of promoting flexibility in structure and reaching more women within the UM Church, the Women's Division will understand the need to embrace other women's ministry models within the church in addition to United Methodist Women. Building vital congregations means building vital women's ministry programs across the UM Church.

What remains to be seen is whether these changes mean that the Women's Division will be supportive of other women's ministries that are not under the auspices of United Methodist Women, Inc. Although the leadership organization of UMW is advocating flexibility, there has been no indication of support for other ministry models that have a different theological and ministerial focus.

RENEW represents women who believe that evangelism is a key component in Christian witness, that maintaining the historic, biblical tenets of Methodism are critical, and that leftist political advocacy doesn't represent their core values. The feminist theology and leftist political activism of the Women's Division will never mesh with the more orthodox, conservative leanings of many women within the United Methodist Church. These irreconcilable differences mean that supplemental woman's ministry vehicles apart from UMW, Inc. will be essential for a thriving and vital denomination.

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