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RENEW Statement on the Women's Division and Healthcare Reform Bill

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As fallout across the denomination continues over House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's shout-out thanking the United Methodist Church for their support of the healthcare reform bill, church leaders are trying to placate members fed up with the political lobbying of some of our boards and agencies. Letters, emails, and calls have poured in from disgruntled Methodists stating their intent to leave the church or withhold their giving.

While the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) is the denominational entity that led the lobbying effort on the reform bill, the Women's Division (WD) of the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) also participated in a major way. Some have defended and justified the advocacy. A commentary posted on the United Methodist website (umc.org) stated that "very little United Methodist money is involved in advocacy efforts...with only 3% of every dollar going to support all the ministries of the denomination, and even smaller amounts going to the entire GBCS budget".

First of all, if we are only spending 3 cents of every dollar to support "all the ministries of the denomination", it's no wonder the UMC has such little impact on taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Secondly, while the GBCS may have a small advocacy budget, the Women's Division does not. With an investment portfolio that would rival any Fortune 500 company, the Women's Division, the leadership arm of United Methodist Women, had a 2.1 million dollar budget for Christian Social Action in 2009 alone. Their annual budget is around 36 million dollars, half raised from local UMW groups and the other from investment income and other sources. This huge budget plus extensive ecumenical partnerships create a political force to be reckoned with.

In 1969, the Women's Division opened its **Office of Legislative Affairs** in the Methodist Building on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. The office has engaged United Methodist Women in a variety of ways such as annual legislative training events, action alerts through their social action network, and collaborative work with other agencies and non-governmental organizations. The office educates UMW membership on current issues important to the Women's Division, trains women to engage in political activism, and visits congressional and senatorial leaders. Their healthcare advocacy includes:

- In fall 2008, the Women's Division voted to partner with **Healthcare-NOW!**, an advocacy organization promoting the passage of a universal single-payer health plan in the United States. The group has established a broad coalition, mobilizing a large body of advocates in more than 300 cities and in nearly every state. Representatives from the Women's Division and the GBCS

serve on the board of directors of Healthcare-NOW!. United Methodist Women were encouraged to lobby for universal, government-run health care through the Washington office and through state and community coalitions.

- The Women's Division has been an integral partner with the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) in their **Health Coverage for All Children Campaign** that would guarantee comprehensive health coverage for all children and pregnant women. This includes advocacy of the **State Child Health Insurance Program (SCHIP)** over the past several decades. The CDF consistently has a partisan, left-leaning perspective on most social issues.
- In fall 2008, the **Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC)** (of which the Women's Division is a founding member and active board participant) sent an open letter to President Obama entitled "*An Interfaith Call to Action on Reproductive Health*", calling for expanded access to "comprehensive sex education, abortion services, and contraceptive information and options." Central to the letter was the passage of the **Freedom of Choice Act** which would give women legislative support in the "right to terminate a pregnancy". While the General Board of Church and Society withdrew its signature from the controversial letter on the grounds it violated the church's position on parental notification laws, the GBCS, along with the Women's Division, are active participants in the RCRC, thus indirectly supporting the bill.

NOTE: The Chairman of the Board of the RCRC Carol Blowers, in the 2008 Annual Report introduction, praised the RCRC staff and volunteers she joined at the 2008 General Conference of the United Methodist Church for prevailing (narrowly) in attempts "to dissolve the historic relationship between the UMC and the RCRC".

- In June 2009, the Women's Division joined the General Board of Church and Society in the **Believe Together: Health Care for All** interfaith rally at Freedom Plaza in Washington, D.C. The day started at the United Methodist Building where participants gathered to pray for the passage of government-run healthcare and receive resources from health care activists. About 1000 persons participated in the event which was attended by top officials in the Obama administration and several democratic Congressmen. The coalition was formed after an April 2009 meeting between faith leaders and President Obama.
- At their fall 2009 board meeting in Stamford, CT., Women's Division directors held an roadside vigil in support of health care for all. The directors stood with signs and chanted "affordable, accessible, quality health care" to passing motorists. They also improvised songs of the church to reflect their support of health care legislation "for all God's children" in the U.S.
- Also at the fall 2009 meeting, the Women's Division passed a resolutions that reaffirmed the principles that "lift up health care as a human right...for ALL within our borders; regardless of age, income, race, gender, or residency status....including coverage for reproductive health care

services". They affirmed a "Medicare for All" (or single payer plan) as the most effective method of reform. The Division urged United Methodist Women to "actively engage in education, advocacy, and public witness at this decisive moment for the future of a justice-filled system of health care that is inclusive, affordable, accessible, and accountable."

The Women's Division believes that the following components must be present in an acceptable healthcare system: 1) a full range of family planning services that promote reproductive health and freedom, access to contraception, comprehensive sexuality education, and confidentiality; 2) inclusive of citizens, residents, and undocumented immigrants as a justice and public health imperative; and 3) equality to young, middle aged and old, without differential cost or requirements.

NOTE: The Women's Division released a response to the healthcare bills saying that both the House and Senate versions "are troublesome" due to components that fine people for not having insurance, limit abortion services, and leave out coverage for undocumented immigrants.

- The Women's Division joined with **Faithful Reform in Health Care** as a signee on two open letters to President Obama and the members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives calling for passage of the health care reform legislation, one in January 2010 and one the week before the final vote in March 2010. The letter contained an attached "Faith-Inspired Vision of Health Care" signed by 200 organizations and 4000 individuals.

While the General Board of Church and Society is mandated by the General Conference to implement the social action policies of the United Methodist Church, the Women's Division is usually right beside them or not far behind. As many church members have expressed anger at Speaker Pelosi's thanking of the United Methodist Church, many members of United Methodist Women were equally upset over the political advocacy of the Women's Division in their name and with their dollars. UMW members continue to vote with their feet and their pocketbooks and leave an organization which at one point was so important in spreading the Gospel around the world. Sadly, this legacy has been replaced with the radical social justice agenda of the Women's Division.

Most Americans agree that healthcare reform is needed, but many citizens, including United Methodists, don't believe this 2500 page, \$940 billion dollar expansion of government contains the solutions we need. Many are fearful it will make a bad situation even worse and devastate the finest medical system in the world.

United Methodists need to be aware of the social policies currently present in our Book of Resolutions and take action to change them. Until we do, the Board of Church and Society and the Women's Division will continue to speak for us in the public square.