



DECEMBER 2011

General Commission on the Status and Role of Women
in The United Methodist Church



To honor the Commission's work and ministries toward full participation of

women throughout The United Methodist Church, GCSRW offers our commemorative pin. To purchase, please send your name, mailing address and a \$25 check payable to GCSRW, 77 W. Washington Street, Suite 1009, Chicago, IL 60602.

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You can make a donation to the Advocacy for Women Endowment Fund to fund antisexism ministries around the world, a permanent GCSRW internship, and research about women. Click [HERE](#) for more information.



The people of the United
Methodist Church®

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WORLD AIDS DAY

The Church must address the crisis of HIV/AIDS

“God wants us to live.” That sentiment is a succinct and profound theology that must guide The United Methodist Church as it ministers to African-American women—and all people—living with HIV/AIDS. [read more»](#)

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Commission members are encouraging donations of linens and towels for displaced widows in Mozambique. [read more»](#)

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The church must address the crisis of HIV/AIDS among African American women

December 1 is World AIDS Day

By Melissa Lauber

“God wants us to live.” That sentiment is a succinct and profound theology that must guide The United Methodist Church as it ministers to African-American women—and all people—living with HIV/AIDS, says the Rev. Cheryl Anderson, a professor at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary near Chicago.

Anderson was one of the keynote speakers at a General Board of Global Ministries Conference on African-American women and HIV/AIDS, held in Columbia, S.C., last spring. The three-day conference, “Enabling, Enriching, Enhancing Individuals,” was the first of its kind to be sponsored by the United Methodist Global AIDS Fund, and it came not a moment too soon, organizers and participants says.

HIV/AIDS has been one of the most urgent threats to global health more 30 years, yet activists say that the Christian community has been silent and complacent in its wake. “But within the African-American community, especially among women, HIV/AIDS presents a crisis that cannot be ignored,” says Sandra Ferguson, director of missions of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, where the number of cases of HIV/AIDS in parts of that region rivals rates in sub-Saharan Africa. In Washington, D.C., more than 3% of the population over age 12 lives with HIV/AIDS.

In the United States, African American females comprise only 14% of the national population, and yet African-American women make up **66% of women living with HIV/AIDS**, the Centers for Disease Control reports. Two of every three U.S. women who are newly infected with HIV are African-American, and AIDS-related illnesses are the leading cause of death for African-American females ages 25-34.

For Ferguson, confronting HIV/AIDS is a justice issue, compounded by poverty, lack of affordable health care and social stigma. Black Americans are disproportionately represented among the poor and are less likely than white people to have health insurance and sufficient health care.

In many African-American communities, there is a high ratio of women to men, and a large number of men have been in the prison system, where the rate of infection is estimated to be 10 times higher than normal rates. (In the United States, one in 15 black adults—and one in 9 black men ages 20-24—is in currently incarcerated.)

Learn more about how your church can help address HIV/AIDS, particularly in the African-American community through the Balm in Gilead Project, a national, interfaith ministry committed to education, advocacy, compassionate outreach and consciousness raising.



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“Such systemic social woes create a cultural cauldron in which women are victimized in a number of ways,” Ferguson says. “As a church of social justice, we are called to address these issues and their consequences.”

But the fact that, for most black women, HIV/AIDS is a sexually transmitted disease raises a whole other set of issues the church needs to be talking about, says Anderson.

In the African-American community, Anderson says, women tend to outnumber available black men and yet there is pressure to have a man in their lives. As a result, women will sometimes engage in risky sexual behaviors in order to get or keep a partner.

The church is often reluctant to talk about sex, preferring to simply affirm that it should not take place outside of marriage. However, the reality is that marriage rates are decreasing and the percentages of children born to unwed mothers are increasing, Anderson says.

“In this context, honest conversations about HIV prevention are crucial.”

Anderson also lamented the tendency by many Christians to assume that a person who is HIV positive is being punished by God. In fact, Anderson says she learned in her research on HIV/AIDS in South Africa, that it is more accurate to affirm the presence of a loving God who wants us to live.

“These are things the church needs to work through. Given that someone in the United States is infected with the virus every nine and a half minutes, these are things we need to rethink,” Anderson says. She hopes the church will begin to more deeply explore, through a lens of faith, what it means to be fully human, whole, healthy and safe in today’s context.

Natasha (who asked that her last name not be used) is a woman who lives with HIV/AIDS. The Baltimore resident has experienced first hand the power of being part of a faith community who affirms and supports her, rather than shuns and shames her.

“When the church puts aside all the ‘shalt-nots’ and really treats women, especially women who might be poor, or overweight, or addicted, or have a positive (HIV) status, like they are made in God’s image, it makes a difference,” says Natasha.

At a United Methodist retreat for people with HIV/AIDS, Natasha found an oasis. “Living with this shapes you and not always in the best ways,” she says. But she turns to God to help her find ways to make it through the day.

“I’m a work in progress,” she says. “And I am living proof that miracles happen. How many women can say that?”

Hopefully, all of us can, says Ferguson, who claims she hopes people in the denomination’s leadership and pews begin to fully understand that “if one of us is infected, all of us are affected.”

Melissa Lauber is editor of the UMConnection, the newspaper of the Baltimore-Washington Conference.



Give to the
United Methodist
Global AIDS Fund
(UMCOR Advance
#982345).

SEXUAL ETHICS

Evangelistic ethics: Healthy boundaries for the mission field

By the Rev. John Edd Harper

Effective evangelism begins with relationships, and healthy relationships require healthy boundaries. In an effort to pursue excellence in ministry and to be better prepared for the fertile mission field to make disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, the Louisiana Conference of The United Methodist Church trained 423 clergy and 129 laity by offering three healthy boundaries training events in September. A partnership between the Louisiana Conference and the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (GCSRW), this effort was directly inspired by a national sexual ethics summit sponsored by GCSRW earlier this year.

In January, Bishop William Hutchinson, the area bishop for Louisiana, all seven district superintendents, six conference staff members, one member of the conference board of ordained ministry, and two laity from Louisiana attended the “Do No Harm 2011” event in Houston, sponsored by GCSRW. Theirs was the largest delegation from any conference attending this event. Realizing the importance of the information being shared, Hutchinson subsequently required all Louisiana conference clergy participate in sexual ethics training in order to receive an appointment for the next conference year, 2012-2013. General Conference has called for “episcopal areas to require that all clergy, local pastors, assigned laity, and commissioned members appointed in each annual conference have regular, up-to-date sexual ethics training to be in good standing for appointment” (*Book of Resolutions 2008, p. 139*).

The Rev. John Edd Harper, coordinator of the conference board of ordained ministry, organized the three days of training. District superintendents encouraged all of the clergy (ordained and licensed) and lay employees working in the church to attend. Harper received registrations from all attendees and updated each district superintendent weekly as to clergy registered from their district. He created the certificates of participation that offered continuing education credit for the event which were handed out at each training, and he distributed copies of each certificate to Hutchinson and district superintendents to be placed in the clergy’s file, verifying that they had attended the training.

Support from GCSRW was invaluable. M. Garlinda Burton, general secretary of the commission, facilitated all three trainings based on curriculum from the FaithTrust Institute, “A Sacred Trust: Boundaries for Clergy and Spiritual Leaders.” The format for the 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. event included a Power Point presentation, statistical information, video vignettes, small group discussion around tables of eight people, debriefing of small group discussions, and question and answer opportunities. Clergy also participated in a denomination-wide opinion survey on issues related to sexual misconduct ([contact GCSRW](#) to learn how your conference can participate).

Those who attended remarked how informative and enjoyable the event was and that the time was well spent together with colleagues in ministry. Evaluative comments included, “I appreciate the work of the annual conference and their efforts in providing this informative and interesting workshop and training. We must remember how much influence and impact we have on others inside and outside the church.”

Hutchinson was very pleased with the training and said, “I am much more comfortable with our clergy and lay employees serving in Christ’s holy church now that they have had this experience. I do not want the conference

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to be accused of negligence of supervision and lack of training should any unfortunate boundary transgression occur. It is incumbent upon us to assure God’s people that we are doing everything we know to provide a safe environment in which their spiritual lives are cultivated and nurtured.”

The Louisiana Conference will continue to offer healthy boundaries training on an annual basis to all new clergy in the conference and lay employees of the church. Discussion has already begun regarding offering another tier of training each quadrennium, presenting the most current statistics and new medical, psychological and emotional research findings.

The Rev. John Edd Harper is coordinator of the conference board of ordained ministry, Louisiana Conference.

Your gift can **Empower Women**
Give to the Advocacy for Women Fund

Learn More, Click Here.

The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women receives .001 cents for every dollar that is placed in the offering plate at a United Methodist church (one of the lowest rates in our denomination).

With women making up more than half of the church’s total membership, it’s clear that the Advocacy for Women Fund—which provides research, scholarships, skill development, theological studies, and salary support for pastors outside the United States—is vital.

YES!

I would like to give \$ _____

- in honor of
- in memory of
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I do do not consent to be thanked in an upcoming publication.

Mail this form and your contribution to:
Advocacy for Women Fund, GCSRW,
77 W. Washington St., Suite 1009,
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Or call: 312.346.4900
All contributions are tax deductible.

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WOMEN BY THE NUMBERS

Does the church allow balance between work and home?

By Elaine Moy

According to *Working Mother* magazine (October 2011) all of their Working Mother 100 Best Companies offer:

- » professional development opportunities,
- » employee assistance programs,
- » medical flexible spending accounts,
- » flextime,
- » telecommuting,
- » on-site lactation room,
- » and paid maternity leave.

According to *MORE* magazine (November 2011):

- » 65% of women say it's more important to have personal time than to make more money at their jobs
- » 92% consider flexibility to be important in a job (up from 73% percent in 2009)
- » 40% of women would take a pay cut for more flexibility
- » 43% say they are less ambitious now than they were 10 years ago; only 15% say they are more ambitious.

How do these two surveys impact the life of The United Methodist Church?

First, let's consider women who work for the church — local churches, annual conferences, seminaries, camp sites or general agencies. Does the church help their employees balance their work and private life? In the past, middle class and upper class men worked outside the home and women took care of

the home and kids. Now that men and women work outside the home, who is taking care of the home and kids? Many surveys find that men are doing more inside the home and with kids (but not as much as women). The issue of flexibility is not just a women's issue but an issue for all people.

Specifically regarding clergy, does the local church assist clergy in balancing work and private life? How much time do the clergy have off each week? Are clergy on call 24/7? Are there evening meetings every night of the week? Are the expectations of clergy realistic? How can the local church support clergy to be at his or her best?

Let's look at women who sit in the pew. Most women work these days, and they are busy trying to balance work and home. How can the church assist women who are looking for more flexibility in their lives? Are we asking the women to do many things that take a lot of time (program-related ministry)? Do we ask the men to do those ministries as well? Are meetings or activities held at times that are convenient to women? Is the church supporting women who work outside the home?

Secular work places are changing and trying to accommodate the needs of their employees because they want to retain their employees. We at the church also want to retain our employees and our members. We need to be active in looking at ways to support and encourage our employees (clergy and lay) and congregations.

Elaine Moy is assistant general secretary of finance and administration for GCSRW.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH

‘Shower of blessings’ for displaced widows in Mozambique

The board members of the General Conference Commission on the Status and Role of Women decided to begin a ministry that provides linens and towels for the women living in the newly built homes for displaced widows in Mozambique. Partnering with Bishop Joaquina Nhanala who helped lead the awareness of this need, GCSRW is inviting annual conference CSRWs and



Photo: Naftal Massela

United Methodist Bishop Joaquina Nhanala (in clerical collar) celebrates the completion of three permanent shelters with widows at the Hanhane Shelter.

other individuals to send donations to “Shower of blessings.”

In December 2009, M. Garlinda Burton, general secretary of GCSRW, visited some of the widows and heard their stories. In Mozambique, sometimes when a husband dies, the widow is abandoned and accused of witchcraft by their families.

Donations may be made payable to GCSRW and sent to GCSRW with a footnote of **Shower of blessings**.



Photo: Naftal Massela

Permanent shelters will provide protection and comfort for 25 widows.



WWW.WORDSMATTER.ORG

KUDOS AND OVATIONS:

Bishop Rosemarie Wenner of Germany will be the next president of the Council of Bishops, marking the first time a woman from outside the United States will lead the global body. The council on Nov. 2 unanimously elected Wenner president, and Bishop Warner H. Brown Jr. of the California-Nevada Annual (regional) Conference as the president-designate. **Wenner** will start her two-year term on the third day of General Conference, the denomination's top-lawmaking body. **Brown** will succeed her in 2014. (UMNS)



Photo: Ronny Perry

Bishop Rosemarie Wenner is elected president of the Council of Bishops. Wenner is the first woman from outside the United States to preside over the council.

YOU'RE INVITED!

<p>WHO:</p> <p>2012 General Conference Delegates</p> <p>Delegates, as chosen/sent by their Delegation – clergy, lay. Attendees are expected to conduct follow-up educational session(s) in their Annual Conference regarding the Briefing contents.</p>	<p>WHAT:</p> <p>Briefing on UMC legislation concerning women:</p> <p>To educate, skill-build and strategize for informing Annual Conferences.</p>	<p>WHEN:</p> <p>February 17–18, 2012</p> <p>Noon to noon</p> <p>Online Registration Required by January 5, 2012</p>	<p>WHERE:</p> <p>Renaissance Airport St. Louis Hotel St Louis, MO</p> <p>Registration includes: one double-occupancy room for one night and onsite meals during the event, per annual conference. All other expenses are the delegate's responsibility.</p>
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To register: <http://www.eventrebels.com/gcbriefing>

