



THIS MONTH



**WOMEN BY THE NUMBERS:
A SNAPSHOT**

Lay membership 2004-2008

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**Commission advocates
for clergy spouses and
families**

*By Kim Coffing**

The Flyer is published monthly by the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women in The United Methodist Church.

The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, an agency of the Worldwide United Methodist Church acts as advocate, catalyst and monitor to ensure the full participation and equality of women in the church.

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UM SEXUAL ETHICS
**Top 10 stories and
events of 2009**

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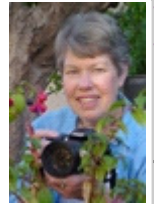
The scene is found in Luke 9:18-20. Jesus has been praying alone but his disciples are nearby. Jesus approaches them and asks, "Who do the crowds say that I am?"

The disciples reply, "John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others that one of the ancient prophets has arisen." Jesus asks those before him, "But who do you say that I am?"

The dynamics of this scene can be replayed in any congregation where a clergy spouse is "in the picture."

"Who does the congregation say I am?" the spouse may ask of his clergy wife when hearing there are grumblings about the spouse and clergy family. "Who do you say I am?" asks the spouse of her clergy husband while the tension escalates between them because of the congregation's complaints that the "pastor's marriage isn't right with her working on Sunday and not helping her husband's ministry."

Four United Methodist co-sponsoring agencies asked these clergy spouses to complete a Clergy Spouse and Families Survey in November 2008. More than 3,000 clergy spouses replied to basic clergy spouse role and identity questions,
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**WOMEN WORTH
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Your contribution to the **Advocacy for Women Endowment Fund** will allow GCSRW to continue to: advocate for women; identify discriminatory policies and practices; prevent inequities; develop women as leaders; raise awareness of issues and concerns of women; and much, much more.

Commission advocates for clergy spouses and families

(continued from page 1)



including: Who do congregations say you are? Who does your clergy spouse say you are? Who do you say you are? And what of your experiences as a clergy spouse lives in between these questions? The results of this survey can be found [HERE](#).

The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (GCSRW) has long advocated on behalf of United Methodist clergy spouses (nearly 70% of whom are women), many of whom have given leadership, supplemental ministries to their clergy spouse's ministry, only to suffer deep institutional loss of financial, emotional and pastoral presence in a family crisis or divorce.

The General Board of Discipleship has oversight of family ministries; yet, the clergy family is a family unit clearly *in* the church but needing specialized spiritual care *from* the church.

The General Board of Pension and Health Benefits (GBPHB) and the General Board of Higher Education and Ministries have long and multifaceted concerns for the health and well-being of clergy and their families.

Fifty years ago, clergy were considered some of the healthiest and fittest professional groups in the United States. Now, clergy are one of the professions with one of the highest risks of chronic health impairment (Duke Divinity School *Clergy Health Initiative Study*).

Other findings from the clergy spouse survey:

- * Most clergy spouses are "extremely satisfied" in their marriages;
- * Children of clergy are "fairly happy" and like being asked to do things at church;
- * Male spouses are happy in their marriage and are keenly aware that congregational expectations on them are nearly non-existent in the role as "clergy spouse";
- * U.S. United Methodist clergy spouses, as a group, are highly educated (graduates of college and graduate school);
- * Parsonages and the lack of standardization of housing conditions are prominent places of tension and disappointment;
- * Clergy self-care is often perceived as disregarding the needs of the congregation;
- * The feeling of powerlessness and "caught in between" is pervasive among clergy spouses when their clergy husband/wife does not wish to "push for better housing conditions and time away."

Drawing from the Clergy Spouse and Families

Possible recommendations from GCSRW to better support clergy spouses and families:



- * Engage clergy and their families as partners in the appointment/relocation process by "offering" rather than demanding the change. Create a culture where clergy and their families participate in the conference's ministry strengths' assessment of a family's gifts, graces and skills that may allow the clergy family to reject an offer without fear of appointment punishment for the rejection.
- * Be deliberate in discussing the pastor's spouse's career and children's needs when considering a new appointment/relocation. Have a reporting/check-list type mechanism in place where the annual conference would know that the spouse is indeed aware of a pending move.
- * Create a standardized system of excellent care of parsonages. If possible (and in consultation with clergy members), strategize the elimination of the parsonage system in your conference. Clergy spouses and families express feelings of "homelessness" and receive uncaring messages of being intruders to church property. Exploring ways to help clergy families rent or buy homes would go a long way toward countering this feeling of never feeling "at home."
- * Institute a denominationwide recommended work schedule in which clergy are *expected*, if not *required*, to take two days off each week and their full allotment of vacation days. Creating an institutional culture of support from the conference, congregations and clergy for predictable time away would enhance the well-being of the clergy and family and congregations' perspective of healthy ministry.
- * Conflict-resolution skills should be regularly taught to and readily used by clergy, cabinet and local church leaders. Clergy spouses report pain at watching church members treat their partners cruelly and maliciously, and say they feel powerless to respond. Such conflicts are common, so develop a culture where conflicts are addressed quickly, directly and with openness. While much is dependent on the competence of the clergyperson, resources from the denomination and support from cabinets could be helpful.
- * Discuss expectation of pastors, their spouses and families at introductory meetings between churches and clergy, with the primary purpose of letting the clergy spouse name his/her desires regarding attendance, leadership, role expectations, etc. Assert plainly that spouses and children are allowed or even encouraged to attend other churches or none at all. Clergy spouses and children must be empowered to establish their own boundaries. They are not to be considered unpaid employees of the church.
- * Incorporate a clergy spouse orientation session at the Clergy Benefits Academy when presented by GBPHB.
- * Incorporate training modules on clergy spouse and family issues at the Board of Ordained Ministry training events.
- * Encourage annual conferences to recruit, train and deploy

Survey (CSFS) analysis from the survey designer, the Rev. Gail Murphy Geiss, staff from the co-sponsoring agencies met last November to begin assessing recommendations to the denomination.

retired pastors to serve as pastoral caregiver to clergy, their spouses and their families.

—*Kim Coffing is assistant general secretary for education and advocacy for GCSRW.*

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WOMEN BY THE NUMBERS: SNAPSHOT

Lay membership in 2004-2008



Between 2004-2008 there has been little change in the race/ethnicity of the lay membership within the United Methodist Church in the United States.

The only growth was within the African American/Black population, .80%. The other categories stayed the same. (The "multiracial" category has only been added within the last five years.)

As The United Methodist Church is trying to increase membership and grow new churches, it needs to be aware of the changing population of the United States. According to the 2008 U.S. Census Bureau, 65% of the U.S. population is White, 15% is Hispanic, 13% is Black, 4% is Asian, 2% is Multi-Racial, 1% is Native American and .2% is Pacific Islanders.

Meanwhile, membership in the U.S. United Methodist Church is more than 91% White. For denomination to grow in the nation, it needs to become more deliberate in evangelizing and engaging more racial-ethnic people in its membership.

Gender has changed by approximately 1%, females went from 58% to 57%, and men went from 42% to 43%.

*Statistics are the reported numbers collected by the General Council of Finance and Administration. For more information, please see the related spreadsheets.

—Complied by Elaine Moy, assistant general secretary of finance and administration for GCSRW.

Lay membership 2004

Female 57.90 percent
Male 42.10 percent
Asian 1.08 percent
Black 5.07 percent
Hispanic .84 percent
Multi-racial (n/a)
Native American .31 percent
Pacific islanders .21 percent
White 92.50 percent.

Lay membership 2008

Female 57.02 percent
Male 42.98 percent
Asian 1.07 percent
Black 5.87 percent
Hispanic .88 percent
Multi-racial .44 percent
Native American .29 percent
Pacific islanders .17 percent
White 91.27 percent

*Source of data – GCFA

** Detail of data by annual conferences, see Table 1 and Table 2 here: www.gcsr.org.



United Methodist Sexual Ethics top ten stories and events in 2009

By Darryl W. Stephens*

Over the past year, we've seen many headlines related to sexual ethics, some harrowing and some uplifting, some fleeting and some that still deserve our attention. While any top-ten list is to some degree arbitrary—important news will always be left off and some events were never covered by the media—consider the following chronological list as a spark to an ongoing and fruitful conversation about sexuality and appropriate interpersonal boundaries in ministry.

1. Jan. 1, 2009: All legislative changes made by the United Methodist General Conference 2008 go into effect. Among those items related to sexual ethics is Par. 605.8, requiring every annual conference to adopt “a comprehensive policy for handling sexual and gender harassment of clergy when laypersons are the perpetrators.”
2. Jan. 9, 2009: “Sex and the Seminary: Wake Up and Smell the Incense,” by Mary E. Hunt (Religion Dispatches). [READ MORE](#)
3. January 2009: Article about “Sex and the Seminary: Preparing Ministers for Sexual Health and Justice,” a research report by Kate M. Ott issued by the Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing. Based on a survey of 36 seminaries across the US, the authors conclude, “Seminaries are not providing future religious leaders with sufficient opportunities for study, self-assessment, and ministerial formation in sexuality.” [READ MORE](#)
4. Feb. 11, 2009: “Commission names new sexual ethics coordinator,” by Linda Bloom (UMNS). I joined the staff of GCSRW in March, filling a new position dedicated to addressing issues of sexual misconduct across the denomination. [READ MORE](#)
5. March 2009: “Sex and the Church,” an ongoing series of monthly articles sponsored by the General Board of Church and Society, is launched. [READ MORE](#)
6. April 2009: “The Final Report of the Independent Panel for the Review of Child Abuse in Missionary Settings” was received and embraced by the General Board of Global Ministries. Sponsored by General Board of Global Ministries, this report responds to “allegations of the abuse of children by mission personnel of The United Methodist Church in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) in the period between 1945 and 1978.” [READ MORE](#)
7. September 2009: The United Methodist Inter-agency Sexual Ethics Task Force celebrates its eighth year under GCSRW leadership by welcoming for the first time a representative from the Council of Bishops to its membership. Bishop Max Whitfield joined the Task Force in time for its September meeting. The Task Force’s mandate is found in *The Book of Resolutions 2008*, p. 138.
8. Oct. 20, 2009: “Study finds clergy sexual misconduct widespread,” by Ken Camp (Associated Baptist Press). [READ MORE](#) Article about “The Prevalence of Clergy Sexual Misconduct with Adults: A Research Study,” a groundbreaking research project by Diana R. Garland of the Baylor School of Social Work. The study reveals that “More than 3% of women who had attended a congregation in the past month reported that they had been the object of CSM [clergy sexual misconduct] at some time in their adult lives.” [READ MORE](#)
9. Oct. 26, 2009: “New website expands audience for misconduct issues,” by Linda Bloom (UMNS). Revision and relaunch of www.umsexualethics.org by GCSRW, with new attention to addressing those accused of misconduct. [READ MORE](#)
10. Nov. 9, 2009: “Judicial Council voids sexuality statement,” by Linda Bloom (UMNS), Nov 9. [READ MORE](#) Judicial Council rules that “the Baltimore-Washington Conference went too far in adopting its own statement declaring ‘a more authentic and truthful representation of The United Methodist Church’ is that ‘we disagree’ on gay and lesbian issues.” [READ MORE](#)

Tell us what stories you'd include in this list. Send comments and suggestions to Darryl Stephens at (312) 346-4900 or dstephens@gcsrw.org.

—Darryl W. Stephens is assistant general secretary of sexual ethics and advocacy for GCSRW.

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Women Worth Watching




Cancer survivor creates prayer-inspiring photos for cancer patients

by Heather Peck Stahl*




During her 2004 battle with breast cancer, Elizabeth Thoman, a Catholic nun, discovered how difficult it was to pray.




“Chemotherapy does something to the brain. When people are in pain or are anxious, it’s difficult to pray with words. You lose your concentration and thoughts jumble together; you need to come to prayer in a non-linear way to reach God,” Thoman says.

Thoman, the founder and former publisher of *Media & Values* magazine, says during her treatment, she combed through a book of nature photographs and was overcome by God’s presence.




“When you face death through cancer, you become changed. Many people wake up and realize that they’ve not paid enough attention to their family and friends and to their surroundings. This realization caused me to go back into the garden.”




Thoman says she’s always had a love for photography, so after chemotherapy she again picked up her digital camera.

The idea to start a ministry of flower photos began when a neighbor who had been in isolation for weeks for a bone marrow transplant said she wished she could have flower photos in her hospital room because real ones were not permitted.




“I want to create a space for cancer survivors to think about being a different person,” she says. “Cancer is a spiritual journey, not just a physical one. Beautiful photographs of nature provide a way to talk and encourage people to pray. If you learn to see what’s beyond the photo and into God’s creation, you can channel God to see God’s creativity. By doing this, you’re raising your heart and mind to God in prayer.”




Thoman says most people are trained how to visit patients and verbally pray, but not trained how to use nature to pray.


“Digging your toes in the dirt, opening yourself up to how the sun and rain feel on your face, allowing yourself to feel a part of the Earth and beauty of God, are all ways nature can be a very feminine ministry to your senses,” she says.



Thoman has a collection of at least 250 photos of various flowers. “I’ve photographed almost every flower; calla lilies are my favorite,” says Thoman, who will photograph a flower 100 different ways in the natural morning, afternoon and evening sunlight.



The retired founder of the Center for Media Literacy donates many photos to cancer caregivers, churches, nursing homes, and hospitals, but she also sells her photographs and provides prayers and liturgy to accompany them.



She also writes thought-provoking invitations and questions for each photo, such as, “Take a deep breath and relax; look at the photograph. If you can, think back for the words of a song or poem that come to mind,” and “Imagine yourself in the center of the flower; how is it different from what you experienced of God in the past?”

For more information, go to www.facebook.com/healingpetals or email lizthoman@sbcglobal.net



—Heather Peck Stahl is communications coordinator for GCSRW.

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