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January–March 2009

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## Women seminary heads offer church new voices

By Kelly L. Gilbert

**In less than 10 years, women have been called to the helm at five UM seminaries. What impact will their presence have on training clergy leaders?**

Five women who lead United Methodist-related seminaries are making giant leaps in dismantling the “sin of sexism” and educating men and women for faithful leadership in the world and the church.

Women have slowly emerged as leaders in seminary education in The United Methodist Church. Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, now retired, was named dean of Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C., in 1983. Maxine Beach was named dean of Drew Theological School, Madison, N.J., in 2000. Mary Elizabeth Moore became the fifth woman to head a United Methodist seminary when she became dean of Boston University in January 2009.

Each of these women say United Methodist seminaries are making strides in recruiting and equipping women, but they also pointed to challenges yet to be overcome.

“When God calls you to this ministry, either you respond favorably to God or you don’t,” says Wendy J. Deichmann Edwards, who last October became the first woman president of United Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio. “If you say yes, you have to trust that God will make it possible to address the challenges specific to women, in the role of presidency.”

Her being named the first woman president of a free-standing United Methodist seminary (i.e., not aligned with a larger university) signals a step forward in “dismantling the institutional and social sin of sexism,” Edwards adds.

“Female leaders in the pulpit, ecumenical arenas and the academy are becoming more common, but women still constitute a significant minority of top educational leaders,” according to Jan Love, dean of the Candler School of Theology.

Beach of Drew Theological School says that not all seminaries are prepared for women as students and leaders.



Beauty Maenzanise



Wendy J. Deichmann Edwards

Key  
The



# What have you got to give?

Recently, the pastor of my small church in Nashville set a moratorium on adding to his “to do” list. He asked that, instead of suggesting to him (or the few who do *everything* in the church) ideas for a new ministries, that members rephrase their idea with a sentence that begins, “I am willing to do ...”



In other words, he said pointedly, the ministries and witness of the church community can only be as strong and effective as each member’s willingness to offer time, talents, resources and service to the glory of God.

That’s my invitation to you as we begin a new year and a new quadrennium in The United Methodist Church worldwide. Bishops, congregations, conferences and agencies have said “yes” to an ambitious agenda over the next four years.

We want to start new churches, identify and prepare dynamic leaders, and tackle poverty and world hunger. And, we want to bring the Gospel to bear on countering the sin of sexism and sexual abuse in the church to ensure that women and girls are equally nurtured as Christian disciples, missionaries and prophets.

But we cannot accomplish all this work in agency offices. So we invite you to offer your ideas, nominations, presence in our website community (could you lead a webinar on inclusive worship or Christian education, or a chat group for women trustees?), advocacy for women in your congregation or conference, and support for your annual conference COSROWs (and if your conference doesn’t have an effective commission push for one).

Specifically, the Commission plans to:

- Extend our reach to bring young women, women of color and international women to a global Women’s Congress;
- Assist pastors and congregations in preventing sexual misconduct in order to build more Christ-filled communities of grace and action;
- Celebrate women-positive churches by sharing their stories with the entire denomination;
- Give voice to the new and growing communities of women who are changing the church for the better in Jesus’ name;
- Hear the stories and wisdom of men—lay and clergy—who work for gender justice as part of their ministry.

We solicit your prayers and your ideas, but we also invite you to consider getting involved directly in your church, in your conference or at the churchwide level. To learn more, call us at 312.346.4900 or email [gcsrww@gcsrww.org](mailto:gcsrww@gcsrww.org). Let us hear from you soon!

Get involved—for Christ’s sake!

M. Garlinda Burton, General Secretary

## The Flyer

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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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## Seminary education *continued from page 1*

“There are still concerns about whether women can raise money and if they are strong enough to make the hard decisions,” she admits. “The United Methodist Church’s seminaries have been way behind in hiring women to run their schools.”

### Unique gifts

Still, unlike many faith groups around the world, The United Methodist Church understands, appreciates and affirms that God calls women to ministry, says Love.

“As United Methodists, we need to realize that we are in a small minority among the entire world of the Christian faithful,” she said. “Most Christian churches in the United States and across the globe do not embrace the concerns, perspectives, gifts and talents of women.”

In 2005, Beauty Maenzanise became dean of the faculty of theology at Africa University in Mutare, Zimbabwe. She told a gathering of United Methodist women scholars in 2006 that the challenge of the global church is to empower women in a society that just wants women to support men and that often treats women as second-class citizens. A significant part of her role, she adds, is to identify and support more women for the ordained ministry and as leaders in theological education.

Moore agrees that is an important part of her work as well. “Hidden sexism still permeates theology, church and world, [in the seminary community],” she says. “We need to realize that women are gifted human beings with much to offer.”

“As women, we will not always agree with one another or support particular positions that we each as individuals hold,” Love adds. “But that’s the fun of having a critical mass of women in leadership. We can be ourselves and exercise the fullness of our particular talents and perspectives.”

### Theological education

Edwards says the purpose of seminary education is to prepare men and women for leadership and that such education should

include a balance of theological and biblical knowledge, practical ministry skills, and vital spiritual formation.

Drew was founded 142 years ago to provide “educated clergy,” Beach explains. “I still see that need. We live in complex times where the really important questions that confront us cannot be answered without care and commitment to wisdom.”

Religious leaders should lead and nurture “communities of faith into joy and celebration and away from fear and judgment,” she says. “A seminary education is the best way to prepare for that important role. It is so much more than managing a congregation—it is being whole and competent and confident for a hungry, hurting world.”

### Leaders in the church

Students and churches are yearning to be partners with each other, Moore said. “They want theological schools to take leadership... they want schools of theology to be visionary.”

All five women leaders stressed the importance of encouraging women and men to respond to God’s call, whatever it might be.

“We really don’t have time to get hung up over human prejudices when there is a whole world out there needing the Good News of Jesus Christ,” said Edwards. ❀

**Kathy Gilbert** is a writer and reporter for *United Methodist News Service*.



*Jan Love*



*Mary Elizabeth Moore*



*Maxine Beach*

*“Help! I’m new, and I don’t know how to get up...and running!”*

# Getting a COSROW Annual Conference started

## *A Suggested Model*

By Kim Coffing

### 1 » Pray

- For yourself for discernment, courage, gracious patience and palpable love.
- For annual conference leadership, including the Commission on the Status and Role of Women.
- That you may walk with the Spirit by studying the scriptures as part of your discipleship development.
- To be part of the community of faith which you are shaping.

### 2 » Design a calendar as the scaffolding for building COSROW’s ministries

- Lay out a calendar along with your annual conference’s calendar. Begin by planning your next annual conference, then the meeting dates of other boards, committees and commissions.
- Identify ballpark dates when COSROW education, training and resource development can take place. (For instance, it would be helpful to have monitors prepared and well-practiced at least two months prior to your annual conference.)
- Test what days and times work best with your committee and schedule a regular meeting.

### 3 » Build your communication system

- Recruit a communications chair to phone, mail, email and/or shout from your conference office rooftop when your next COSROW meeting is taking place.
- Set a doable agenda of no more than two hours per meeting. People are more willing to attend meetings when they know the goal(s). Training events generally require more time. It’s helpful to let folks know if/when educational opportunities will be incorporated into a business meeting.
- Submit the committee information to the annual conference calendar. Let people know you are working and how to contact you.
- Be certain to include your bishop, district superintendents and United Methodist Women leaders in your communication.
- Assess your communications: What’s working? What needs to be strengthened? And implement changes according to your strengths.

### 4 » Make meetings matter

- Begin and end on time. Stewardship of time and talents, as well as shaping an “honoring” culture of members’ commitments, is part of reliable leadership.

# 5 »

## Collect the data and follow the Spirit's challenge

- From the monitoring data and/or surveys you've gathered, assess your annual conference's ministry challenges. Where are women/girls? Where aren't women/girls? Research to find out why.
  - Strategize what else you need to know to address the issue(s).
  - What advocacy strategies are needed? What is required according to *The Book of Discipline* and your annual conference rules to affect change? What needs to be heard? What must you do to be heard? Who do they need to hear it from? How do we get them to hear it?
  - Who else in the annual conference is affected by the information you've gathered? Can they become allies in making systemically just changes?
- Put the action plan in place with follow up dates, prayer and courage.**
- Budget to meet your challenges and goals.
  - Submit articles to your annual conference, GCSRW and jurisdiction publications.
  - Be certain to have a report in your annual conference journal.

# 6 »

## Spread the word—and the thanks

- Be intentional in recognizing and thanking people: your committee members, annual conference staff, other board/committees you worked with, publication editors and women in leadership in your annual conference.
- Plan to have a display table at your annual conference.
- Plan a gathering during your annual conference—breakfast, luncheon, dinner or end-of-day reception—to honor the ministries among you.
- Continue to grow, build and challenge where the Spirit is leading by scheduling next year's meetings, with a consciousness of developing leaders.

*Kim Coffing is assistant general secretary for GCSRW.*

- Plan for what you are able to do with those who are present. Keep energy flowing toward your objectives.
- Know you are building an important and needed baseline of skills, information, bias-busting perspectives and a leadership community.
- In using a consensus model, build in time for check-ins (inviting everyone's reflections).
- Before ending the meeting, build the next meeting's agenda and be certain everyone understands what is expected of them.
- Evaluate: How do you know it's working? What barriers are present and how will they be addressed? What bridges need to be built and how will they be built? What injustice(s) will continue unless COSROW challenges and changes it?



# Seeking women-positive congregations!

Yes  No  Maybe **Has your church nurtured women into ordained ministry?**

Did your congregation have women trustees, lay leaders and ushers before most other churches in your area? Have you introduced girls to church leadership at the district/conference/churchwide level? Do your evangelism and church-growth efforts reach single women—including those with children?

Yes  No  Maybe **Do women and men in your parish share mission and power to God's glory?**

Is yours a congregation that has welcomed, invited or given to the world a women pastor, superintendent, bishop or other denominational leader?

Yes  No  Maybe **Is inclusive language used joyously and seamlessly in your worship and Christian education?**

**If the answer to one or more of these questions is yes, we want to hear from you!**

During the next 18 months, GCSRW will examine women-positive churches to discover what about their faithfulness, lay and clergy leadership, history and mission makes them nurturing places for women and girls in the denomination.

We will create a web page where these congregations can share their wisdom and good ideas with the rest of the denomination, adding churches as your nominations come in.

To nominate women-positive churches for our consideration, send up to 500 words explaining what sets the congregation apart. Include the name and address of the church and the pastor's name, phone number and email address.

**Mail or fax submissions to:**

*Women-Positive Churches, Attn: Garlinda Burton  
GCSRW • 77 W. Washington, Suite 1009 • Chicago, IL 60602 • Fax 312.346.3986*

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

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