



3

Large Churches



5

Worth Watching



7

Young Stewards

July–September 2009

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Large-church pulpits remain a frontier for women



Study seeks best practices and challenges facing U.S. women leading large-membership congregations

By Erik Alsgaard

Five years ago, 1,154 United Methodist churches in the United States had memberships of 1,000 or more. Of those, only 64 were served by women as senior or lead pastors. And of those 64, only one was a person of color.

Today, the situation has changed for the better—currently, 94 women serve as lead pastors of these large U.S. congregations—but there are still barriers to be crossed. And still only one woman of color serves as a large-church senior pastor.

Those are some of the results from a recent survey conducted by the Division of Ordained Ministry at the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) and released at an event in late April in West Palm Beach, Fla.

The survey was conducted by GBHEM to describe unique ways women lead large church ministry compared to 300 men serving in similar settings.

While the research indicates common leadership skills shared by women and men, there were notable differences, says the Rev. Susan Wilhauck, a consultant with GBHEM, formerly at Wesley Seminary in Washington, D.C., and now at the Atlantic School of Theology in Halifax, Nova Scotia.



Lead women pastors gather together in West Palm Beach, Fla.

Photo: Scott O'Neal, GBHEM



A consultant with GBHEM, the Rev. Susan Wilhauck delivers results of the survey.

Wesley



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

continued on page 3

Hallmarks of the 'women-friendly' church



In the past year, the small congregation I call home has enjoyed an infusion of new members, all under age 38. Two are women in seminary; one is a single mom of two. Two are men sporting multiple tattoos and piercings who, though not your everyday United Methodists, were drawn by the opportunity to sing in the choir without people staring or even giving it a second thought. They've become good friends with another new guy, a pastor/academician seeking tenure at a local university.

What is interesting about these five people is that each of them was seeking a church that welcomed and embraced "diversity" in general and women's leadership in particular. Though they come from different walks of life, they commonly describe a "woman-friendly" church is one where:

- **Women (and men) of all ages and circumstances are trained and groomed to be leaders.** Our church council co-leaders are a 75-year-old white woman and a 28-year-old black woman corporate executive. The single mom of two served as liturgist on her first Sunday of membership. Our trustees include a homeless man, a 25-year-old recruitment executive and me, the chairperson.
- **"Family" is defined broadly.** Of our 200 members, we have only about five "nuclear" families in our congregation. So, our concept of and language about "family ministries" includes traditional and nontraditional families and both are discussed and respected as equally valid. Families are defined as single-parent-headed families, two 80-year-old widows who've been friends for 30 years and talk every day, college roommates who have become "play sisters," and a single, recovering addict (estranged from her birth family) and her prayer partner, who prays with and for her each day.
- **Women's (and men's) clothing and appearance are non-issues.** On Easter Sunday I wore a dress, but the young woman who teaches church school with me wore jeans and a T-shirt. Another wore her fast-food job's uniform. One tattooed young man wore a coat and tie, while another sported his typical green Mohawk haircut. And we celebrated the Resurrection with exuberance.
- **God is revered as "father, mother and more."** Every member, from age 1 to 81, expects and is comfortable with language about God that is expansive. We may say the traditional Lord's Prayer in praise of God our Father, and sing "She's Got the Whole World in Her Hands" for the song of praise. And the young, new members say that helps them experience God and walk closer with Christ, because God is not limited.

As we continue to seek and celebrate best practices, we want to know from you: Where are the "women-welcoming" United Methodist congregations and what traits do they share? Describe it for us in 200 words or less and send that information, along with the pastor's name and contact information, to gburton@gcsr.org. Your church may be featured in a future issue of *The Flyer* or on our website.

And you might ask visitors and new members how your congregation is doing in supporting and welcoming women—and the men and children who love them.

Be the transformation you seek!

M. Garlinda Burton, General Secretary

The Flyer

July–September 2009

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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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Large churches *continued from page 1*

Both men and women respondents said that being an excellent preacher was important. Women listed the three greatest gifts of ministry as: preaching, leadership and administration. Men listed preaching, teaching and administration.

Women leadership style more ‘collaborative’

“Women have a more collaborative leadership style,” Willhauck notes. “They tend to be more relational, and tend to [delegate more], equip better and exercise a more compassionate leadership.”

Women also spend more time in pastoral care with their congregations, and tend to “lead change by planting seeds of ideas in the congregation.” Men, she says, are more likely to recruit support from individuals to lobby for change.”

“Women’s leadership is increasingly being accepted in The United Methodist Church as a way of reviving the church. And this is not to disparage the male model of leadership at all—we need that—but to acknowledge the



The Rev. Sara McKinley, pastor of First UMC in Coral Springs, takes communion during the closing worship service.



The Rev. Joan Carter-Rimbach, pastor of First UMC in Hyattsville, Md., is the only woman of color serving a church of more than 1,000 members as lead pastor.

role and the exciting things that women are doing.”

Another difference between women and men is their career path leading to large-church pulpits. “More women lead pastors come from appointments beyond the local church and have served more churches than their male counterparts,” Willhauck says.

And women tend to be barrier breakers, in that 90% of those leading large churches are the first woman to serve that congregation in that capacity.

The Rev. Debbie Wallace-Padgett, senior pastor of St. Luke’s UMC in Lexington, Ky., agrees that women bring a collegial leadership style that is quite natural to working interpersonally with staff and with laity.

A member of GCSRW, Wallace-Padgett adds that a lot of progress has been made in women cracking the “stained glass ceiling,” but there’s still progress to be made.

No women lead 100 largest churches

“The denomination is well under way,” she says, “but statistically, [this survey] indicates that there are glass ceilings remaining to be broken.”

Some of those ceilings identified in the survey include the fact that not one woman

continued on page 4

Large churches *continued from page 3*

serves as a lead pastor in the top 100 largest-membership congregations in the United States, and that women tended to serve churches outside large, urban areas.

The Rev. Joan Carter-Rimbach of First UMC, Hyattsville, Md., near Washington, D.C., is the only woman of color serving a large membership church.

“It’s been an eye-opener,” she says. “We still have a lot of work to do.”

Carter-Rimbach credits several unofficial mentors for paving the way for her current clergy assignment, and she plans to become a mentor for a woman identified as a possible lead woman pastor.



This is the parament on the altar during the closing worship service. It represents a crack in the stained-glass ceiling, and all the “colors of the rainbow” are streaming through the crack.




The Rev. HiRho Park discusses with other clergywomen the findings of the lead women pastors survey. Park is an executive in the division of ordained ministry at GBHEM.

“As an African-American woman, I have not just been serving African-American churches,” she said. “That has benefited me and our denomination because I can serve any church and . . . I know that I can go into any church anywhere and be the pastor. So I think that as I have done that throughout my ministry, it has helped me get where I am today, along with other clergy sisters who have been mentoring me and encouraging me and supporting me and stirring me along.”

Mentoring and identifying other women as future large-church pastors make up the second phase of GBHEM’s research project.

For the Rev. Sue Hauptert-Johnson, lead pastor at First UMC in Ocala, Fla., offers some cautions, noting that in her experience, lead women pastors often don’t receive the “plum” appointments.

“Very often, [lead women pastors] are appointed into churches that are declining, where there is a low risk,” she said. “If they go in and do well, great; if they don’t do well, it continues the decline. If you look at [worship] attendance, do churches with the highest attendance get women pastors?” 

Erik Alsgaard is director of communications at Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church.

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The full survey is posted on the GBHEM website at <http://www.gbhem.org>.

GCSRW member is Estonia's first female seminary president

This fall, Meeli Tankler will become the first woman to serve as president of Baltic Seminary in Estonia. The United Methodist-related school includes 150 students from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Moldova, Ukraine and Finland.

"It is harder to be a female leader in a church setting than in broader society," says Tankler, who is also in her second term as a voting member of the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (GCSRW).


Tankler reports that the United Methodist Church in Estonia did not ordain a woman until 2003, and only three of the 40 pastors in the Estonian Church are women.

"It has been a very masculine church for a long time, so it is not easy for a woman to earn the trust she needs to lead a church," admits Tankler, a laywoman. However, the future looks different for United Methodists living in northern Europe, especially since half of the current student body at Baltic Seminary are women.

Tankler hopes the seminary community's increasing national—and denominational diversity—will "support the spiritual growth of students in the best way and create good ecumenical experiences that lead to closer cooperation."

"One of the biggest challenges I'll have as seminary president is coping with the poor economic situation and high unemployment in [Estonia]," Tankler says. "Another challenge will be developing our faculty and keeping our academic level high."

Born in Tallinn, Estonia, Tankler married a United Methodist clergyman, and she was later nominated by Bishop Oystein Olsen to serve on the GCSRW board. She says she spent much of the 2005-2008 term learning the work of the commission. As she enters her second four-year term, she hopes to "contribute insights from the international experience of working with European women and insights from post-communist countries where Christianity has been viewed as something for old ladies and uneducated people."

This fall, Tankler will also begin her doctor of ministry studies at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Ky. 



Meeli Tankler



What is your favorite hymn, and why?

"It Is Well With My Soul" (UMH No. 377)



When you were young, what did you want to be when you grew up?

A doctor.



If money were no object, what would you like to do?

I'd like to write books.



Do you have any words of advice for our sisters in the UMC?

Find good friends who are honest with you, who help you discover your gifts and encourage you to use them in ministry, and who pray for you when you are in ministry.

Living God's generosity in a world

Churchwomen make stewardship, ministry with poor the priority

By Jane Gibbs DuBose

Just like any other aspect of United Methodist Christian living, stewardship is an ever-changing discipline, currently affected by our nation's economic downturn, by the dramatic efficiencies of technology and also by a generation with a large number of female leaders.

Simply put, just seeing women in leadership positions makes both men and women more serious about stewardship, says Christine Dodson, treasurer of the North Carolina Annual Conference. "We are getting a little bit closer to equality. You do have women leading the charge and a lot more women chairing finance committees," Dodson said.

"It always has a positive effect when we show equality. Anytime you show that, people see us as inclusive," she said.

Dodson's conference will likely end 2009 slightly off its 2008 year financially, but "it's not as bad as some might think," the treasurer said.

In Western Pennsylvania, United Methodist giving in 2009 is up about 5 percent from the year before, said conference treasurer Pat Morris. She attributes the upturn to church member beliefs that it is more important than ever for stewardship to remain intact amid cuts to social programs outside the church.



Christine Dodson

"We see it as a year of God's activity in Western Pennsylvania," she said.

Stewardship—giving money to the church and more responsible, generous use of resources to meet spiritual and human need—is getting a makeover in the 21st century as churches wake up to the possibilities of using technology (e.g., electronic bank drafts and Facebook mission groups), and sharpening their message.

Women and younger people want their dollars to go to certain things, and the church must not "talk down" to them about finances but must connect giving with discipleship and impact on the world, explained Bishop Sally Dyck of Minnesota, board president of United Methodist Communications. "We need to help them figure out a way to give to things they're excited about." She cited Nothing But Nets, the anti-malaria campaign, as an example.

If not speaking down to female church members is lesson No. 1, then what is the message women want to hear? Dyck says women have been managing money successfully for generations and are skilled at stretching dollars. "Women have always been really good managers of money, from the poorest on up," she says. And Dodson says all church members can learn from United Methodist Women who "are always challenged to stay within their budget."

Dennis "Corky" Fowler, a lay leader in the Texas Annual Conference and GCSRW board member, says in his experience women have been "big-picture oriented." He also says the stereotypes often tend to be true—that men care about "bricks and mortar and institutional giving," while women are more interested in "direct service and ministry giving."



of financial uncertainty

“Younger people want their dollars to go to certain things. We need to help them figure out a way to give to things they’re excited about.”

« BISHOP SALLY DYCK, MINNESOTA

Dyck says church people also want to support a healthy, efficient infrastructure, which requires money to fund and which supports mission. She drew on the image of one of the nation’s worst bridge disasters when I-35 in Minneapolis collapsed in 2007, killing 13 people. Dyck and other United Methodists were directly affected and offered prayers and support for victims. “Infrastructure is important. In Minnesota, it’s easy to see that. When you don’t support infrastructure, bad things can happen.”

Just as concepts as basic as infrastructure may be gaining favor again, so too are the concepts of tithing and talking about money from the pulpit. “We shouldn’t be afraid to teach the Biblical concepts of tithing,” says Morris of Western Pennsylvania.

Morris says pastors are sometimes reluctant to speak to parishioners about money, believing it to be a “private” issue.

However, Dyck said, the uneasiness over money is overcome by simply talking about it frequently. “The most creative and effective stewardship

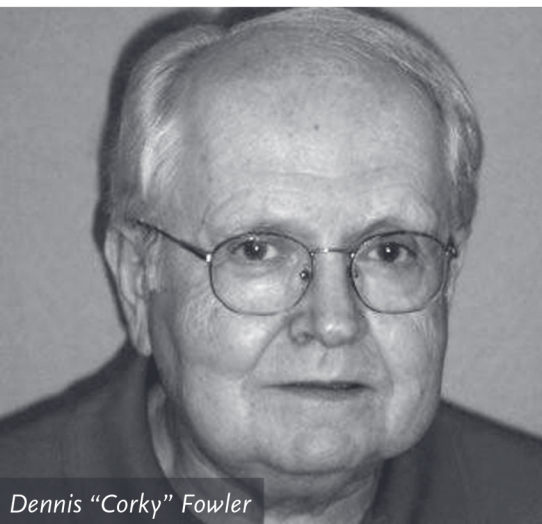
campaigns are those that periodically remind people to give and that stress the joy of giving.”

Lessie Vonner, a 16-year-old United Methodist from Texas, who serves on the board of GCSRW, believes stewardship is about listening. “A lot of times young people jump right into things without stopping to listen. For me, it’s important not to rush into anything and to understand it.”

Overall, Dyck gives the church strong marks for communicating and believes the Internet generation has no excuse for not understanding how denominational money is being spent. “It has never been easier to find out where your money goes outside the local church,” she says.

As the church assesses the financial fallout of the recession, it will be critical to communicate the right message, Dodson says. “We need to stress that we are using the resources we have in order to reap what is out there. The more we show optimism and hope, the easier it will be.”

Jane Gibbs DuBose is a freelance writer in Nashville, Tenn.



Dennis "Corky" Fowler



Pat Morris



Lessie Vonner

LARGEST ATTENDANCE EVER

Conference leaders urged to focus on core mandates

Organizers for the quadrennial training event for annual conference Commissions on the Status and Role of Women (COSROW) expected 25 persons at their March confab.



However, more than 70 representatives from 40 annual conferences attended what was the largest conference leader “boot camp” in recent Commission history.


Individuals and teams from nearly two-thirds of U.S. United Methodist conferences gathered in Chicago this spring for an intensive, two-day training event, sponsored by GCSRW. The purpose: to encourage, equip and coach conference COSROW leaders charged with anti-sexism, pro-justice-for women monitoring and advocacy in their home regions.

Church law mandates that the churchwide and regional commission coordinate their efforts to transform institutional sexism in the denomination and to advocate for full and equal inclusion of women at all levels of United Methodist mission, ministry and administration around the world. Gender bias, discrimination and violence against women, the denomination has declared, are antithetical to the Gospel message of Jesus Christ.

At the March event, participants received basic training in advocacy for individuals and for groups of women, monitoring conference structures

for gender-inclusiveness, and effective models for pushing needed change. Presenters included COSROW leaders in the Virginia and the Oregon-Idaho annual conferences, both of which have particularly effective leadership, strong ties with bishops and other top-level leaders, and a proven track-record of advocacy.

Bible study leader and keynote presenter Laura Dean Friedrich, director of Education and Advocacy for Protestants for the Common Good in Chicago, led a discussion and exercises on best practices for identifying emerging issues and organizing for advocacy. Other presenters included event coordinator S. Kim Coffing, GCSRW assistant general secretary for advocacy and education, who reviewed the history of the Commission, and Elaine Moy, GCSRW assistant general secretary for finance and administration, who led a practice session on monitoring.

Handouts and PowerPoint presentations from the training event are available on the GCSRW website, www.gcsr.org, under the “Resources” tab, or by contacting the Commission office at 312.346.4900; lgraham@gcsr.org. 

Leadership event stirs young pastor

By Sara Baron

I'm the only clergywoman under 35 in the Wyoming Annual Conference so I'm used to feeling alone! The next youngest women are 10 years older than I am, although there are quite a few male young adult clergy. Last year I found a book called *A Church of Her Own* (2008) about clergywomen's experiences, with a focus on younger women. I remember exclaiming, "There is a book about us! There are enough of us for there to be a book about us!"



The March national training event for conference COSROW leaders also had the unexpected impact of making me feel less alone. There were not a lot of young adult clergywomen, but there were a lot of like-minded people (mostly women, but some great men as well).

I care deeply about the impact of sexism on women and on the church as a whole, but I also care deeply about other forms of exclusion or "partial inclusion." It was very exciting to me that our trainers were intentional about many forms of inclusion while promoting COSROW's specific responsibility to issues of gender. And I've rarely seen a group as stirred up by Bible study as this group (even though I usually try to stir up groups I lead!).

Of particular value was the chance to connect with other COSROW leaders from our yet-unnamed "New York State without the City" annual conference, slated to begin in 2010. No other event has calmed my fears about the new conference as much as this Chicago event, because of the chance to connect with others who share my concerns about how power exists and how it is shared and how God might wish it to be shared. We've come back home on fire with energy to promote diversity and intentionality as we form our new conference.

Through this training session, I experienced hope that there are many working together to form the church of today and the church of tomorrow into the best that it can be. May it be so.

The Rev. Sara Baron of Morris, N.Y., is the chair of COSROW for the Wyoming Annual Conference.

BEST PRACTICES: PROGRAM, MISSION AND MONITORING IDEAS

Rio Grande sponsors clergy spouse luncheons, scholarships

An organization of clergy spouses in the Rio Grande Conference sponsors luncheons for clergy spouses at annual conference and provides financial help for spouses who want to continue their education.

More than 40 spouses attended the 2008 luncheon, held during the legislative session of the Rio Grande Conference. The events are hosted by rotating districts, says Mary Silva, a laywoman in leadership in the conference.

The yearly gatherings for women and men married to area pastors provide them a chance to "to come together for fellowship and share some of our concerns," says Silva, who is also executive director of MARCHA, the national United Methodist Hispanic caucus.

The Conference Organization of Clergy Spouses also provides annual scholarships of \$350 to help their spouses attend college. Funds for the scholarships are raised by organization members through yard sales, silent auctions and individual contributions.

"I believe the scholarship fund was established because we saw how our clergy spouses wanted to further their education on a part-time basis, but scholarship funds from the annual conference were for full-time students only," Silva explains.

She adds that most applications are approved and that some spouses have completed their undergraduate degrees and are now working on graduate degrees, thanks to the financial support.

An executive team shares the various responsibilities of the organization and spouses of the superintendents serve as district coordinators.

While recognized by the annual conference, the organization is currently self-supported. However, Silva says they hope the conference will provide financial support for some of its work, including COSROW training on the rights and benefits of clergy spouses. ✍️

Deacons defining their call,

Women, who comprise more than half of ordained U.S. deacons, seek to broaden understanding of professional ministry

By Kathy L. Gilbert

Deacons are specialists in the church, much as cardiologists are specialists in the medical field.

“Deacons serve in specialized fields of ministry such as education, health, worship and music with a working knowledge of the broader field but the ability to attend to the details of their ‘called’ areas of ministry,” says the Rev. Cynthia Wilson.

Wilson has served as a music minister for 35 years, first as a diaconal minister and since

1997 as an ordained deacon. She is currently a full-time doctoral student at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in the area of liturgics.

“It is an amazing thing to return to school at the age of 58, 29 years after my seminary education,” she said. “Yet I now feel a clear call to the academy to help prepare 21st century worship leaders.”

A recent survey of deacons by the United Methodist Board of Higher

Education and Ministry (GBHEM) reveals that deacons feel accepted and valued but misunderstood in the church.

Deacons work to connect the church and the world, the Rev. Anita Wood, GBHEM director of professional ministry development, explains. While some use the image of a bridge to describe deacons’ work, Wood prefers the image of a swinging door.

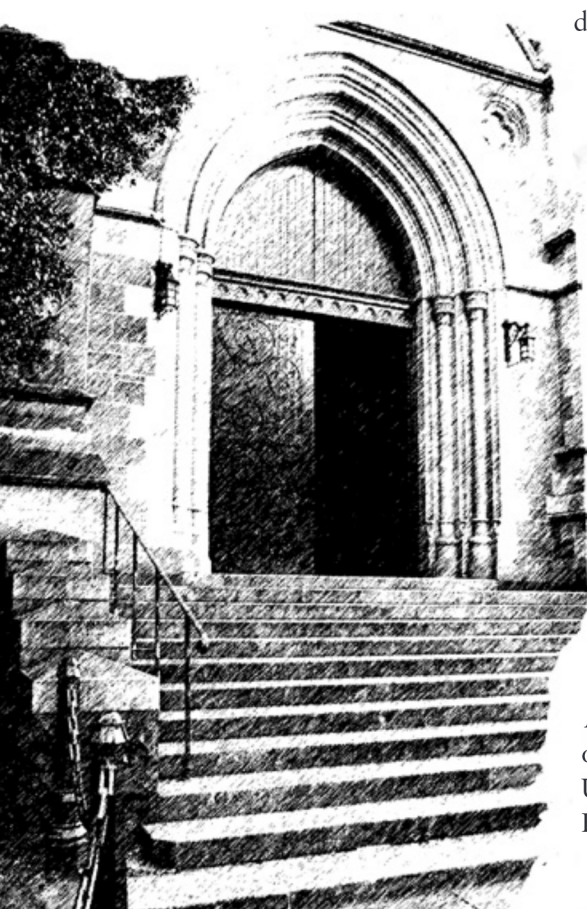
“The deacon’s role is to keep the door swinging—out to the community and bringing the community into the church.”

Where do deacons serve?

While women comprise 17% of U.S. ordained elders, they make up 74% of deacons (according to General Commission on Finance and Administration 2008 statistics).

Wood explains, “The order of deacons grew out of diaconal ministers and consecrated lay workers.” She notes that many women were serving as diaconal ministers in the roles of Christian educators, musicians and other specialized areas of ministry that had traditionally been viewed as “appropriate” vocations for women before women had been ordained elders.”

Wood says men who received similar calls to specialized ministry were often “re-directed to become elders. This practice has continued to some extent as the new order of deacon was created,” she said. “However, those who are now coming into ministry are being urged to discern their call more clearly and those coming



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claiming diverse roles

into the order of deacon are doing so because of a focus on service.” As a result, she sees an increase in the number of males becoming deacons.

According to the survey, 60 percent of United Methodist deacons serve in local churches, while 32 percent serve beyond the local church. Another 8 percent were listed as “other” and most of those are college.

And, although 95 percent of deacons surveyed say they are well satisfied with their work, advocates say the church needs to embrace the need for ministry that flows from the sanctuary to the sidewalk.


There has been misunderstanding about the role of deacons and elders for many years, said the Rev. Stephanie Tunison, a deacon and executive director of a nonprofit agency that runs youth group homes as alternatives to jail or foster placement. She is also appointed to Hyde Park Community UMC, Cincinnati, Ohio.

“I see over 500 teens a year. It provides an opportunity for the children to find a pathway for their lives,” she said. “I liken it to being the hands and feet of Christ.”

Sacramental authority concerns

Tunison suggests that the role of deacons and their place in professional ministry stems from a concern that deacons are simply “non-itinerant” elders seeking sacramental privileges.

She and other active deacons say their calling and passions for ministry are not simply to be “elders lite.”

“As deacons we need to find a way to better articulate and account for all that we do, and The United Methodist Church needs to let us be a part of their overall reporting. They are missing some vibrant ministry at work in the world.” 

Kathy L. Gilbert is a news writer for United Methodist News Service in Nashville, Tenn.

★ OVATIONS AND KUDOS

- ★ The UMC Foundation, on behalf of its investors, including GCSRW, filed a shareholder resolution with Expeditors International of Washington to challenge its all-male board of directors in December 2008.
- ★ As a celebration of Women’s History Month, members of the Baltimore-Washington COSROW honored retired Bishop Violet Fisher as a “woman of wisdom and great, great hospitality” at an April 18 tea in Columbia, Md., with the theme of “Phenomenal Woman.”

- ★ Colleen Perry Keith has been > named as the seventh president of United Methodist-related Spartanburg Methodist College, effective July 1.



- ★ Sharon MacArthur is the new chair of the board of trustees of Pacific School of Religion (PSR), in Berkeley, Calif., effective at the close of the May board meeting; MacArthur is the first woman of color to head the board. PSR also announced that Mary A. Tolbert will be dean of the faculty and vice president for academic affairs, effective July 1.

**A Commentary: Proposed Constitutional Amendments Concerning
the Worldwide Nature of The United Methodist Church**

Protecting gender justice in the worldwide UMC

By the Rev. Tim McClendon, with the Rev. Darryl W. Stephens

This year there will be a flurry of proposed amendments to the United Methodist constitution that will be voted on by lay and clergy members of annual conferences across the connection. Specifically, the proposed changes to the worldwide structure of the UMC may allow discriminatory practices against female clergy to be codified into church law.

Cultural attitudes toward female clergy vary tremendously within both jurisdictional and central conferences. Historically, Judicial Council Decisions 155 and 172 exemplified how certain regions perceive that women are unfit for ordained ministry and precipitated a desire for autonomy by some of our former central conferences. Today, women are still unequally represented among our clergy around the world. For instance, there are no female clergy in one of our European annual conferences.

The issue of gender justice has personal importance to me. My daughter is an elder in the South Carolina Annual Conference. It would be an anathema if she were not welcome to serve as a clergyperson in any of our annual conferences whether in central conferences or jurisdictions. By our common baptism we are all, male and female, called to be servant leaders. This means that there must be no discrimination or gender bias across the connection.

The proposed constitutional amendments threaten the integrity of this shared discipline by allowing any regional conference in the connection to adapt church law to local custom.

Currently, conferences across Europe and Africa regularly adapt the Social Principles and other portions of the *Book of Discipline*, utilizing their power under paragraph 543.7. Passage of the proposed amendments, which mandate the creation of a regional conference(s) in the United States (Judicial Decision 1100, Fall 2008), would allow the new U. S. conference(s) to adapt and choose certain portions of church law to follow, just as central conferences do now. This fragmentation leaves great room for latitude and could cause divergent opinions to run amok. It is usually the marginalized who suffer the most in a hands-off approach to local autonomy. Left to do as each area of the church pleases breaks our connection and the checks and balances necessary to protect those who need it most.

“Connection” is the operative word in deliberating these amendments from an ecclesiological and justice perspective. In my second quadrennium as a member of the denomination’s Connectional Table, in my role as a district superintendent, and as an adjunct professor at Candler School