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GCSRW Today

January–March 2007

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Women in Ministry

Deacons: Called or sent?



In 1997, a new order of ordination in The United Methodist Church became a reality. The Order of Deacon, approved by the 1996 General Conference, phased out the lay designation of “Diaconal Minister.”

According to The United Methodist *Book of Discipline*, Deacons are called to a ministry of “word and service” as compared to the role of Elder who is called to a ministry of “word, sacrament and order.” According to statistical information, there are currently 1,400 active Deacons and more than 1,600 candidates for the office. Of those currently serving, 78%, or 999, are women and 23%, or 301, are men. The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) in Nashville, Tenn., shows that of those currently on the “Deacon track,” 68%, or 1,121, are women, and only 32%, or 52, are men. With the numbers so heavily skewed toward women, some church leaders question whether the Order of Deacon is a sort of “ordination lite” or the “ministry mommy track,” an idea that appalls members of the Order of Deacons.

The Rev. Anita Wood works with seminaries to provide courses and training programs for Deacons through GBHEM. In that role, she leads the division of ordained ministry in exploring the emerging needs in the church for new forms of Deacon and diaconal ministries and conducts research studies on the work of Deacons and diaconal ministers.

“Deacons fill a distinctive role connecting ‘church’ and ‘world,’” she said. “When the order was created, the church acknowledged a call to a specialized form of ministry that is equal to but distinctive from the call to ministry as an Elder. Elders have a different focus in ministry. Their role is (among other things) to order the life of the church. The Deacon focuses on living a ministry of service,” Wood said.

BECOMING A DEACON

The appointment process for a Deacon is quite different from that of an Elder. While Elders are appointed by the bishop in consultation with the cabinet, Deacons essentially secure their own employment. After doing that, the Deacon then requests that the bishop and cabinet approve the position as a ministry

Order of Deacon will mark its 10th in April

An event marking the 10th anniversary of the Order of Deacon and 30 years for UM diaconal ministry will be held April 19–22, 2007 in Orlando, Fla. Sponsored by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, the event will bring together individuals from around the world for Bible study, mission, and professional development and sabbath-keeping workshops. For more information, visit <http://www.gbhem.org/convocation07>.

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Key
The





Get in the game!

Beginning this spring, each United Methodist annual conference around the world will elect representatives to the 2008 General Conference, the international quadrennial assembly that sets church-wide mission priorities, establishes church law, and speaks for the church on moral and social issues of the day.

Although women comprise 58% of United Methodist membership worldwide, women delegates accounted for only 37% of the 500 clergy (and 51% of the 500 laity) voters at the 2004 General Conference. Women under 30 were only 6.6% or 37 delegates. People of color, who make up 75% of the world's population—were only 22% of the 2004 delegates.

Your voice
is important
... all of us
have
something
valuable to
offer the
church.

If our church is to move in the right direction and remain essential and relevant to Jesus Christ's current and future work in the world, it is up to us to make our decision-making tables more reflective of the fullness of the human family. And we who have walked into positions of leadership through doors pushed open by our foremothers now find ourselves in positions to open the church doors even wider.

So get in the game: Consider running for General Conference delegate. The particulars of how to run are outlined in the July–September 2006 issue of *The Flyer* (pages 8–9), as well as on our website: www.gcsrw.org. If God is not calling you to be a delegate, then support a delegate who cares about the issues you care about, and who will vote to put church money and muscle to work in the right way.

And let the delegates elected by your annual conference know your views. Do you support stronger policies to thwart sexual misconduct in the church? Are inclusive language and theological perspectives important in worship and Christian education? Do you think church spending should reflect our future hopes rather than our past fears? Say so! Your voice is important.

This is our time. Young women, older women, women of color, clergywomen, laywomen, new-to-church women—all of us have something valuable to offer the church. As we gear up for General Conference (and for electing bishops in summer 2008), let's bring our voices, perspectives, and power to the decision-making tables in our church. They've never been more necessary.

On fire for Christ!

M. Garlinda Burton, General Secretary

The Flyer

January–March 2007

The Flyer is published four times yearly by the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (GCSRW) in The United Methodist Church. Primary distribution of The Flyer is through the Annual Conference Commissions on the Status and Role of Women and Response Teams. Women outside the United States, please ask your bishops' office to make sure you get The Flyer.

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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Deacons: Called or sent?

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in the church. Deacons are also linked to a local church and must be involved in the life of a local congregation.

Many of the current and retired Deacons were originally consecrated as Diaconal Ministers. This lay role in the church indicated that they were set apart for a specific function within the church, such as Christian education or music. As the role of permanent Deacon was introduced, many Diaconal Ministers were ordained into the Order of Deacon.

“The difference between being consecrated a Diaconal Minister and being ordained as a Deacon is the public act of the church verifying the call to ministry,” said the Rev. David Dodge, a Deacon in the Florida Annual Conference. Dodge was called to “ministry” but not that of word, sacrament, and order—especially the “Elder expectation” of being a lead pastor and preaching each week. For Dodge, the role of a Deacon more closely fit his view of ministry. “The church is finally catching up with my call,” he said.

“I see it as a dual role,” he said. “I’m not only aiding people to get up from God’s table and go back to the world, but aiding the world to come back to God’s table.”

The Rev. Joy Melton is a Deacon and practicing attorney in the North Georgia Conference. Known throughout the denomination for her work in the area of *safe sanctuaries* (preventing sexual abuse in congregations), Melton said that she is appointed to her law firm. She often represents churches when they are sued over a sexual misconduct issue. At the local church to which she is partnered, she teaches various classes. Carrying the title “reverend” adds a different credibility in the courtroom

and declares, in a way, that the church has sanctioned her participation.

The Rev. Jan Harry, a Deacon in the West Ohio Annual Conference, says that she felt called all her life to “ministry in the church.” What she was not called to be was an organizer; the “order” part of the Elder’s responsibility did not fit her sense of call. She, too, agrees that there is confusion within the church as to the role of the Deacon in the denomination.

“Local churches ‘get it’ faster than my clergy colleagues,” she said. She feels that the local church can see her living out her call with a clear difference in roles between her ministry and that of the congregation’s co-pastor—an Elder who happens to be Harry’s husband, Tom. “There’s a clear difference in functionality

between the two of us,” Harry said. “I know who I am and he knows who he is.”

WHY ARE MOST DEACONS WOMEN?

Why the Order of Deacon is so significantly female, Wood believes is a function of the transition from Diaconal Ministry to full Deacon. Previously, Diaconal Ministry often centered on functions in the church seen by many as “women’s work” such as Christian education. When Diaconal Ministers had the opportunity to become permanent Deacons, many of them made the transition. Wood feels that this transitional time is slanting the gender comparison significantly toward the female side as a function of getting the order started.

“Persons are making the decision,” Wood says. “They are answering the call to ministry and more are finding their vision of ministry more appropriate to the Deacon.”

76%
of Deacons
are women.



26%
of Elders
are women.

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Something to think about: Are women pastors paid on par with men?

By Craig This and Anne Borish

The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women recently requested a study by gender in clergy compensation from the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits. The study examined compensation levels of a sample of 752 active U.S. clergy, between the ages of 30 and 69, with at least 10 but less than 11 years of service. Aggregate results were provided to GCSRW and no identifying information was part of the analysis. GCSRW also sought background information from the General Council on Finance and Administration for this article.

The study found that the average compensation for clergymen exceeds that of clergywomen except for full-time local pastors and part-time local pastors. Nevertheless, the range of salaries for each clergy status provided in the study indicates that there could be instances where clergywomen compensation exceeds that of clergymen.

Factors that influence compensation

Compensation is a product of a variety of factors, concludes the study, which in turn leads to the variance in the range of compensation figures. Some of these factors include size of congregation (both attendance and membership), congregation mix (age of worshipers, worshipers with families, ethnic diversity), congregational giving, congregation setting (urban, rural,

suburban), local economy (strong, weak), number of point charge appointments, and past appointments and experiences. Any one of these factors or any combination of these factors likely influences the compensation of clergy as well as the range of compensation values.

Space limitations in this newsletter prevent a full analysis of each of these factors, but a few observations about the size of the congregation and its effect on compensation will prove informative about their influence. Half (51%) of United Methodist congregations in the United States have fewer than 200 members (see Table 2). However, one-third (36%) of the total number of female elders in full connection serve in congregations with fewer than 200 members as compared to one quarter (25%) of the total number of male elders in full connection (see Table 3).

One factor in the compensation formula is, typically, the size of a congregation and its ability to pay. This begs the question: If a greater number of female elders in full connection were appointed to churches with membership above 200, would their average compensation rise and thus be more comparable to that of the male elders in full connection?

Is the appointment system a factor?

Another potential compensation factor is that a clergyperson does not receive the compensation until he or she serves a congregation.

However, in The United Methodist Church, a clergyman or clergywoman cannot choose which congregation he or she serves nor may a congregation call a specific clergyperson. Rather, the bishop, usually in consultation with his or her district superintendents, appoints



Table 1:
Clergy Compensation by Gender by Clergy Status

Clergy Status	Clergymen	Clergywomen
Elder, Full Connection	\$52,338	\$45,930
Probationary Elder	\$47,875	\$40,339
Associate Elder	\$44,483	\$39,849
Clergy from Other Denominations	\$42,241	\$41,522
Full-time Local Pastor	\$39,938	\$43,419
Part-time Local Pastor	\$16,366	\$16,768
Student Local Pastor	\$29,906	n/a

Source: General Board of Pension and Health Benefits, "High Level Analysis of Active Clergy Compensation by Gender for Clergy with Ten Years of Service" (May 2006). Statistics for Deacons were unavailable.

Table 2:
Number and Percent of United Methodist Congregations by Size

Congregation Size	Congregations	Percent
1-199 Members	15,012	51%
200-499 Members	7,574	26%
500-999 Members	3,643	12%
1000+ Members	3,012	10%
Total	29,241	100%

Source: General Council on Finance and Administration, 2005 local church data

the clergy to congregations in an annual conference.

The argument is usually made that the appointment system allows the gifts of a clergyperson to be matched to the appropriate congregation's mission.

What other factors are being considered? Bishops and district superintendents should be aware of the congregations in their conferences and district as well as the factors

that affect compensation within those congregations. Are these factors, openly or subconsciously, being taken into consideration in both a positive and negative manner when appointing clergywomen?

In other words, if both a clergywoman and clergyman have the gifts matching those needed by an affluent congregation, is the clergyman being appointed to the congregation instead of a clergywoman?

And, if both a clergywoman and clergyman have the gifts that match those needed by a financially strapped congregation, is the clergywoman being appointed to that congregation instead of the clergyman?

Conclusion

Analysis of compensation figures across the denomination provides a different perspective of the appointment process in The United Methodist Church. The compensation figures for the various clergy statuses as divided by the number of clergymen and clergywomen raises questions about the appointment process, not only as to who is appointed where, but what factors are taken into consideration when the appointments are made. In the future, the compensation provided to clergymen and clergywomen should be monitored closely to ensure greater inclusivity, equity, and diversity across the connection. ✨

Craig This is a faculty member of the Department of Sociology, Geography, and Social Work at Sinclair Community College.

Anne Borish is research and information manager of the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits.

Source: General Board of Pension and Health Benefits, "High Level Analysis of Active Clergy Compensation by Gender for Clergy with Ten Years of Service" (May 2006)

Table 3:
Clergywomen Appointments by Congregation Size by Clergy Status

	Members				Total
	1-199	200-499	500-999	1000+	
Elder, Full Connection	1,157	1,217	448	325	3,147
Deacon, Full Connection	37	96	138	234	505
Associate Member	98	53	11	5	167
Probationary Elder	434	170	72	127	803
Probationary Deacon	6	20	38	48	112
Full-Time Local Pastor	473	94	58	77	702
Part-Time Local Pastor	958	111	76	41	1,186
Student Pastor	127	22	14	9	172
Total	3,290	1,783	855	866	6,794

Clergymen Appointments by Congregation Size by Clergy Status

	Members				Total
	1-199	200-499	500-999	1000+	
Elder, Full Connection	2,751	4,380	2,315	1,496	10,942
Deacon, Full Connection	15	18	32	105	170
Associate Member	314	209	12	10	545
Probationary Elder	541	290	84	150	1,065
Probationary Deacon	3	12	11	24	50
Full-Time Local Pastor	1,312	305	69	120	1,806
Part-Time Local Pastor	2,549	150	94	65	2,858
Student Pastor	358	36	24	28	446
Total	7,843	5,400	2,641	1,998	17,882

Source: General Council on Finance and Administration, 2005 local church appointment data for clergy

Women comprise two-thirds of general agency workforce—but at what level?

By Craig This and Elaine Moy

Of the 1,944 individuals employed by the general agencies of The United Methodist Church, 68% (1,323) are women.

The findings for this report come from the *2006 Council, Board, or Commission Annual Members Profile* jointly conducted by the General Commission on Religion and Race and the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women.

Overall, women are well-represented

Women, who are 58% of total United Methodist membership, hold more than half of the executive (52%), managerial (59%), technical (61%) positions and over two-thirds of the professional positions (69%) (see Table 1).

In some agencies women do not occupy a single position at the executive level. For example, only 4 of the 13 general agencies have a woman general secretary, and women hold a minority of the executive positions at the General Council on Finance and Administration (33%), United Methodist Publishing House (43%), General Board of Church and Society (0%), General Board of Discipleship (42%), General Commission on Archives and History (0%), General Commission on Religion and Race (0%), and General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns (25%) (see Table 2).

In this sense, women’s progress in the church mirrors that of the secular world in that women are being promoted to a certain level of leadership and responsibility, but they are not given as many opportunities at the highest management and administrative levels. A glass ceiling does exist for women in the church as it does in the secular world.

Not surprisingly, women hold 77% of the administrative and clerical support positions in

Table 1:
Gender Representation by Employment Level in General Agencies

	Male	Female	Total	Male %	Female %
Executive	57	61	118	48%	52%
Managerial	185	269	454	41%	59%
Professional	108	240	348	31%	69%
Technical	44	68	112	39%	61%
Administrative	192	660	852	23%	77%
Manual/Service	35	25	60	58%	42%
Total	621	1323	1944	32%	68%

the general agencies. The church often limits the leadership opportunities for women and tends to pigeonhole women in certain occupations.

Majority of women at four general boards

Of the four general program boards of The United Methodist Church, women occupy a majority of the positions. The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry has 83% women in its workforce. The General Board of Global Ministries employs women as 72% of its workforce. The General Board of Church and Society employs women as 57% of its workforce (see Table 2). The General Board of Discipleship—the only general program board which is led by a female general secretary—employs women as 74% of its workforce.

Despite these high numbers, women tend to occupy a greater percentage of the administrative, clerical,

continued on page 8

e numbers

Table 2: Gender Representation by General Agency (Each agency categorizes staff levels independently.)

Agency	Male	Female	Total	Male %	Female %
Finance and Administration					
Executive	6	3	9	67%	33%
Managerial	4	7	11	36%	64%
Professional	1	3	4	25%	75%
Technical	1	1	2	50%	50%
Administrative	2	13	15	13%	87%
Manual/Service	0	0	0	0%	0%
Total	14	27	41	34%	66%
UM Communications					
Executive	5	7	12	42%	58%
Managerial	5	8	13	38%	62%
Professional	9	18	27	33%	67%
Technical	10	4	14	71%	29%
Administrative	3	24	27	11%	89%
Manual/Service	0	0	0	0%	0%
Total	32	61	93	34%	66%
Board of Pensions and Health Benefits					
Executive	3	11	14	21%	79%
Managerial	13	14	27	48%	52%
Professional	19	45	64	30%	70%
Technical	18	9	27	67%	33%
Administrative	25	76	101	25%	75%
Manual/Service	0	0	0	0%	0%
Total	78	155	233	33%	67%
UM Publishing House					
Executive	8	6	14	57%	43%
Managerial	95	128	223	43%	57%
Professional	51	97	148	34%	66%
Technical	8	4	12	67%	33%
Administrative	123	347	470	26%	74%
Manual/Service	28	19	47	60%	40%
Total	313	601	914	34%	66%

Agency	Male	Female	Total	Male %	Female %
Church and Society					
Executive	1	0	1	100%	0%
Managerial	3	2	5	60%	40%
Professional	5	4	9	56%	44%
Technical	0	2	2	0%	100%
Administrative	0	4	4	0%	100%
Manual/Service	0	0	0	0%	0%
Total	9	12	21	43%	57%
Board of Discipleship					
Executive	7	5	12	58%	42%
Managerial	25	36	61	41%	59%
Professional	10	30	40	25%	50%
Technical	2	38	40	5%	95%
Administrative	3	28	31	10%	90%
Manual/Service	2	0	2	100%	0%
Total	49	137	186	26%	74%
Higher Education and Ministry					
Executive	2	4	6	33%	67%
Managerial	5	8	13	38%	62%
Professional	3	7	10	30%	70%
Technical	0	1	1	0%	100%
Administrative	0	30	30	0%	100%
Manual/Service	0	0	0	0%	100%
Total	10	50	60	17%	83%
Global Ministries					
Executive	19	23	42	45%	55%
Managerial	30	62	92	33%	67%
Professional	9	34	43	21%	79%
Technical	4	8	12	33%	67%
Administrative	34	128	162	21%	79%
Manual/Service	5	6	11	44%	56%
Total	101	261	362	28%	72%
Religion and Race					
Executive	1	0	1	100%	0%
Managerial	2	3	5	40%	60%
Professional	0	0	0	0%	0%
Technical	0	0	0	0%	0%
Administrative	0	4	4	0%	100%
Manual/Service	0	0	0	0%	0%
Total	3	7	10	30%	70%

Agency	Male	Female	Total	Male %	Female %
UM Men					
Executive	1	0	1	100%	0%
Managerial	2	1	3	67%	33%
Professional	1	0	1	100%	0%
Technical	0	1	1	0%	100%
Administrative	2	0	2	100%	0%
Manual/Service	0	0	0	0%	0%
Total	6	2	8	75%	25%
Archives and History					
Executive	1	0	1	100%	0%
Managerial	1	0	1	100%	0%
Professional	0	0	0	0%	0%
Technical	1	0	1	100%	0%
Administrative	0	1	1	0%	100%
Manual/Service	0	0	0	0%	0%
Total	3	1	4	75%	25%
Christian Unity					
Executive	3	1	4	75%	25%
Managerial	0	0	0	0%	0%
Professional	0	0	0	0%	0%
Technical	0	0	0	0%	0%
Administrative	0	4	4	0%	100%
Manual/Service	0	0	0	0%	0%
Total	3	5	8	38%	63%
Commission on Women					
Executive	0	1	1	0%	100%
Managerial	0	0	0	0%	0%
Professional	0	2	2	0%	100%
Technical	0	0	0	0%	0%
Administrative	0	1	1	0%	100%
Manual/Service	0	0	0	0%	0%
Total	0	4	4	0%	100%



General agency workforce

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and support positions within these agencies than executive staff positions. While 55% of Global Ministries' executive staff positions (6 of the 23 women executives are from Women's Division) are held by women, more than three-fourths (79%) of its administrative and clerical positions are filled by women. Higher Education and Ministry has 67% of its executive staff positions and 100% of its administrative and clerical positions filled by women. Discipleship has 42% of its executive staff positions and 90% of its administrative and clerical positions filled by women. Church and Society has 40% of its managerial staff positions and 100% of its administrative positions filled by women.

Clearly, while women have earned more leadership positions in recent years, there are some positions that are still seen as "women-only" (see Table 2).

Women and the commissions

The 2004 *Book of Discipline*, ¶703.2 & 3, defines a general board as a continuing body of the church to carry out assigned functions or programs, administration, or service and a general commission as an organization for the fulfillment of a specific function for an indefinite period of time. Commissions have smaller staffs and budgets than do the general boards. As a result, calculating employment based on small numbers creates somewhat skewed results.


The Commission on Men and the Commission on Women are each charged by General Conference to focus on a specific ministry of men and women, respectively, in the church. As a result, 75% of the UMM workforce is male and 100% of the GCSRW workforce is female. That is to be expected.

Further, three of the general commissions—Archives and History, Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, and Religion and Race—have a greater percentage of men than women at their executive levels as compared with the general boards. However, when one looks closely, each of these commissions has 1, 4, and 1 executive positions, respectively, to fill, unlike the number of positions available with the general boards. (It should be noted that the General Commission on Religion and Race recently achieved an even distribution of men and women in the leadership level.)

The employment numbers of the general agencies stand in stark contrast to the number of women serving as members of the various boards and agencies.

Conclusion: So what does this all mean?

The employment numbers of women in the general agencies stand in stark contrast to the number of women serving as members of the various boards and agencies (see "Women aiming for national agency leadership often hit glass ceiling" *The Flyer*, October–December 2006). In that article, it was shown that although women are the majority in terms of overall church membership, they are not as well represented (45%) as members of agency governing councils, boards, and commissions.

The United Methodist Church at all levels has made strides in bringing women into full participation and leadership in our work and ministry. General agencies hire and promote women at a higher level than do some other entities in the church. Women are 68 of the general agency workforce, compared to only 22% of active bishops, 19% of active clergy, 37% of General Conference delegates, and 45% of voting members of general agency governing boards. It would seem that when it comes to empowering women, church-wide agencies overall are setting a strong example in answering the call to greater parity for women. 

Craig This is a faculty member of the Department of Sociology, Geography, and Social Work at Sinclair Community College.

Elaine Moy is associate general secretary for finance and administration, GCSRW.

★ **Pamela Lightsey** has been appointed dean of students at Garret-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Ill. The position is newly defined as a part of the academic affairs office and includes responsibilities for pastoral care, enhancement and support of student life on the campus, participation in worship leadership, and oversight of spiritual formation opportunities for the student community. Lightsey is an Elder in the Northern Illinois Conference.



➤ **Clare J. Chapman**, formerly associate general secretary with the UM General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, is now deputy general secretary for administration and finance with the National Council of Churches USA.

★ **Sharon E. Strother** is the new chief financial officer of the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits. She had been treasurer, business manager, and pension officer of the North Carolina Conference since 2002.

★ **Soozung Sa Rankin**, a former staff member of the General Board of Discipleship, now serves as executive director of A UM Witness, the advocacy arm of four annual conferences in Pennsylvania.

★ **Barbara A. Boigegrain**, general secretary of the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits, was elected chairperson of the Church Benefits Association Board of Directors for a term beginning this year. She is the first woman elected to that position. **Sarah Hirsén**, general counsel of the Board of Pensions, was also installed as secretary of the Church Benefits Association board.

★ **Marsha R. Base** was elected to the position of associate general secretary of organizational development with the General Council of Finance and Administration during its recent annual meeting.

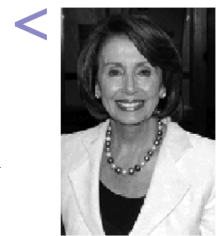
★ **A. Cherrie Epps**, senior vice president for academic affairs and former dean of the school of medicine at UM-related Meharry Medical College, Nashville, Tenn., has been appointed interim president by the board of trustees.

★ **Sarah McCraney**, 71, a member of First UMC in Dunedin, Fla., recently reached 65 years of perfect Sunday school attendance. McCraney's attendance record has been broken only by the births of each of her three children. Her late husband, Alvin, insisted she take a Sunday off for each birth.

★ **The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry** has completed a new DVD on its Women of Color Scholars program. The video, called "Following the Path," presented current and former participants in the program. Among those featured in the video is **Pamela Lightsey**, new dean of students at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, and **Beauty Maenzenise**, vice president of the World Methodist Historical Society representing Africa.

★ **The women of Paxton UMC in Harrisburg, Pa.** have enlisted 11 other Central Pennsylvania Conference churches to sew dresses for a girl's school in Iraq. Paxton's pastor, Richard Dennison, received the request from a girl while he was handing out soccer balls and sweatsuits to children while serving as chaplain in Iraq. So far, more than 700 dresses have been made.

★ **Nancy Pelosi** was sworn in as the first woman to serve as Speaker of the House of Representatives. In addition, two United Methodist women were sworn in as governors: **Janet Napolitano** (D-Ariz.) and **Ruth Ann Minner** (D-Del.).



YES! I want to be a delegate... *I think*

By Kristin Knudson Harris

The idea of becoming a part of the decision-making process for the whole United Methodist Church was tantalizing.

I was urged to become a candidate by the California Nevada Conference Council on Youth Ministries and the Young Adult Council for the Methodist Bicentennial General Conference in 1984. I ran and was elected to what would be one of the most amazing and overwhelming experiences of my life. Surely it would be just like annual conference—only bigger. Even at 21, I wasn't that naive. I knew it was an important event, clear across the country, and that it was an honor to be selected to attend. It was all of that and more.

People who attend General Conference will tell you about the inspirational worship services, the frank discussions, the ups and downs of being “church.” What they may leave out are some of the realities of giving up months of your life to prepare and attend this happening.

The minute you are elected as a General Conference delegate, your life is shaped and directed over the next 10–11 months by preparations for the event. Before leaving the site of your election, delegation chairs are elected and your preferences for legislative committees are solicited. If you are elected as a delegate, as the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts say, “Be prepared”...

...TO BE SHOWN A NEW DIRECTION.

As Rich Peck noted in the July–September 2006 issue of *The Flyer*, just because you are interested in the work of the Board of Discipleship, for example, doesn't mean you will be assigned to that legislative committee. Keep an open mind. You may find that the committee to which you are assigned is the committee where your voice is needed the most.

...FOR A LOT OF MAIL.

After the lists of conference delegations are released, your mailbox will get a workout! Delegates receive letters of information, advocacy, candidacy, and even support as they begin to prepare for the General Conference session. A file folder won't cut it. A file *drawer* is a beginning. My tenure as a delegate came before the electronic communication age. You may want to open a special email account just for General Conference electronic correspondence.

...TO PROCESS INFORMATION.

Since any member of The United Methodist Church may submit legislation to be considered, many do. In addition to the legislation prepared by church-wide boards and agencies, you will receive phone-book sized tomes filled with petitions and resolutions. Each one must be considered and acted upon by General Conference. Chances are, your delegation will assign you to become the “authority” on specific topics of legislation in your



UMNS file photo by John C. Goodwin

assigned legislative committee so that you help inform your delegation's voting.

... TO WORK—HARD.

After months of preparation, the time at the conference itself is intense. Don't expect to see much of the host city—except the path from your hotel to the convention center. With early breakfast meetings followed by worship at 8 a.m. and legislative sessions continuing until 9 or 10 p.m. (not counting extra committee—or subcommittee—or caucus discussions), you will be exhausted, physically and mentally.

... TO SACRIFICE.

Two weeks is a long time to devote to any meeting or convention. Spending 10 nights in a hotel is not inexpensive. Restaurant meals are not cheap. Each delegate receives a per-diem remuneration that covers a portion of your expenses but by no means everything! Some annual conferences provide additional reimbursement, some do not. For clergy, attending General Conference as a delegate might be seen as “part of the job.” For the layperson, it often means taking your two-week vacation to do church work. Even if a friend, spouse, or other family member accompanies you to General Conference, you probably won't see them much.

... TO BE CHALLENGED.

Things that seem so clear to you as a member of your local church or your own annual conference will be challenged and stretched and tested. Seeing yourself now in the context of a national, global, and highly diverse context is an epiphany. The decisions you make will not only affect United Methodists in your community, but in Russia, Africa, Sweden, and Germany.

... TO BE CHANGED.

Once you have been a part of a General Conference delegation, you will be a dif-



UMNS photo by Mike DuBose

ferent person. Your view of “the church” will be expanded. Your commitment to live in discipleship will be strengthened. Your perspective will be altered in ways you never considered before.

... TO SHARE.

As a delegate, you are key in helping people in your local church understand and participate in the decisions and the struggles faced by General Conference delegates. Your responsibility doesn't end when you return home. Quite the contrary. Some would say that's when it begins. ☺

Kristin Knudson Harris is the communication coordinator for GCSRW. She lives in West Des Moines, Iowa.



Women Worth Watching

The Rev. Kathleen Baskin-Ball



- First clergywoman in the North Texas Conference to serve a church with average worship attendance of 500.
- Currently serving Suncreek UMC, Allen, Tx., the largest mainline denomination church pastored by a woman in the Dallas area (1,125+ members).
- First North Texas Conference clergywoman serving a local church appointment to be elected as a delegate to General Conference.
- Appointed as founding pastor of Nueva Esperanza (New Hope) Fellowship, a Hispanic ministry in West Dallas in 1989. She took an intensive five-week Spanish course to prepare for this appointment to this bilingual church in a multi-ethnic, lower income, inner-city neighborhood. It was constituted as a United Methodist Church in April of 1994.
- Served as senior pastor at Greenland Hills UMC from 1994 to 2001, located in an eclectic urban area of Dallas. Membership more than doubled in size and the budget increased over 2.5 times. The church completed extensive building renovations and grew from a limited part-time staff to a multiple-ministerial staff.



What did you do “in a previous life”?

Due to my fascination with travel, I had always wanted to be a flight attendant and because I love sports, becoming a professional tennis player or physical education teacher had also captured my attention for the future. By the time I was 18 years old, a senior pastor asked me about entering ministry and by the time I was 20 I was picking out a seminary to attend. God led me early on the path to ordained ministry and by the grace of God I was surrounded by a supportive network of family and friends that enabled me to pursue God’s call upon my life.




Who were/are your role models?

Richard, a 15-year-old from the inner-city who constantly reminded me that “the business of the church is to cross railroad tracks”; a Salvadoran mother who taught me that *Dios es bueno* (“God is good”) even when it appears that evil has been victorious; my Granny, who shared with me her rocking chair, her patient and grace-filled ear, and her unending faith that closed every day with a “Glory be!”.



Any words of advice for church women?

Share the journey with other women, lifting them up in love and looking to them for grace, accountability, and godly wisdom. Learn to get beyond the insecurities that can damage women’s relationships and seek the feminine company that can empower and equip us for greater service to the church. 

Embracing the next season

By Rev. Lauren Heather Lay

Advent and Epiphany are lovely seasons of hope, anticipation, and joy. Even the most Scrooge-like among us can be caught singing along with Christmas carols and being drawn into the pageantry and festivities.

Fast forward a few short weeks, though, and we come face to face with a season that most of do not embrace eagerly: Lent. Do we really need another wilderness journey? Aren't the realities of life wilderness enough?

Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness in preparation for what was to come. As with Advent, we are invited to take a journey during the Lenten season—a journey toward *shalom*, wholeness. Jesus knew exactly what he was preparing to do. Part of our Lenten travels will take us to the depths of who and whose we are, whether or not we know exactly what comes next on our individual or corporate journeys.

As Christians, we already know how the story ends. Many of us would rather skip over the whole mess of Lent and Holy Week and get to the “good part” of Easter. Clearly we are not Good Friday people, stranded at the cross or at the grave, but we are Easter people, glorifying the resurrected Christ. Yet, without the journey to the cross, we cannot fully appreciate or honor the Risen Christ.

Although the destination is essentially the same—a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ—the route is never the same from Lent to Lent. I may choose to listen to requiems or blues. I may embark on a creative project, in which I unpack and express biblical or personal revelations. I might design a worship service that incorporates artwork related to the Passion narratives. I might retreat into silence. I might write poetry reflecting

my journey. I might take on a new mission project. I *always* give up sweets for Lent (and I mean ALL chocolate, candies, and desserts of any kind).

Like many of my colleagues, I sometimes compensate with life's stresses by treating myself to sugary treats. Giving up sweets each Lenten season gives me an opportunity to regroup physically, emotionally, and spiritually. My sweet-free journey makes me very cognizant of how I need to surrender control to God.

A journey through the wilderness requires movement, and a shift in focus and intentionality. Listening to God is essential. One Lent several years ago, I was faced with a dilemma. I had managed to avoid sweets, even through weekly Lenten potluck suppers with dessert-laden tables calling my name. But I was offered a slice of cake by a shut-in member during my pastoral visit with her. And this was not an ordinary cake, for it represented a sacrificial gift of love from a woman who frequently could not function for days at a time. I broke my self-imposed fast to accept the hospitality of this woman I had come to see. That act, I am quite certain, was more pleasing to God than any other act of sacrifice I'd done during the season.

So, as we move into the season of Lent, I invite you to participate fully in its meaning. The Holy Spirit will nudge you when your own rituals are leading you away rather than toward God. Embark on the Lenten journey with the same enthusiasm as you did last November, when you heard the first strains of “It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year.”

Lauren Heather Lay is pastor of Idlewyld UMC in Baltimore.

GCSRW still relevant in today's church

By Mary Gilbert and Suzanne Jacobson

The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women in The United Methodist Church (GCSRW) was established as a standing commission in 1976. Thirty years later, as we celebrate the 50th year of full clergy rights of women in The United Methodist Church, one might wonder about the continuing relevance of the Commission at a church-wide and annual conference level.

A review of the mission statement clarifies such relevance: "Our mission is to challenge The United Methodist Church at all levels to work for full and equal participation of women in the total life of the denomination, including ordinations of women, equal access to policymaking, and recognition the Jesus Christ calls men and women alike to salvation, liberation, discipleship and service in church and society."

Along with the Commission on Religion and Race, GCSRW calls The United Methodist Church to value all persons regardless of color, language, nationality, class, education, gender or lifestyle. Statistics gathered by GCSRW indicate that despite a full 50 years of opportunity for women to serve as clergy, only 13% of all ordained elders are women and 13% of all ordained women in pastoral ministry (elders and deacons) are racial ethnic women. (More information on the statistical relationship between male and female clergy can be found at <http://www.gcsr.org/research/index/htm>.)

In the Desert Southwest Conference, our commission has recently experienced an increase in participation with members, both male and female, meeting regularly. The DSW Commission has set forth an agenda that includes a focus on implementing the *Safe Sanctuaries Program* at churches throughout the conference, creating and instituting a "Words that Heal" award to honor clergy and laity who reflect inclusiveness in word and deed, celebrating the 50th anniversary of full clergy rights for women in the church, and fostering programming for women that encompasses the ethnic diversity of the conference.

In an effort to truly reflect the diversity of The United Methodist Church in the Southwest, clergywomen of various racial-ethnic backgrounds have been invited to attend our commission meetings.

Among subjects discussed at the meetings are the attrition rate of female ordinands and clergywomen and difficulties encountered along the path to ordination. All individuals following a call to serve might undergo what can be called a "wilderness experience." Such an experience seems likely to result from challenges faced by women and men of color in the church. In an effort to discover what specific experiences clergy and ordinands of various ethnic backgrounds have had and how those experiences have affected their walk, DSW Commission confidentially asked a number of individuals to share a "wilderness experience" from their ministry:

"As a woman, the worst experience in a local church has been being appointed to a church that had asked the district superintendent and cabinet for a pastor who was white, male, married, young, with children—and they got me: ethnic, single, middle aged, woman, with no children. No one welcomed me. The Pastor-Parish Relations Committee chairperson never showed up for one meeting all the time I was there."

"I have experienced rejection, racism, prejudice, but the way I look at it is that God called me into the ministry and I stay focused on that. I depend on God to carry me through whatever storms I go through and it only confirms even more that I am being obedient to the call of God and that God is there for me."

Photos by Keith English





Photos by Keith English

“Being the only person [of my ethnic background] in the conference I came from, I had the unpleasant experience of being isolated. I was treated as a second-class citizen in many aspects of my ministry, especially in the matter of church assignment. I was given church assignments that were not equal to those of white pastors with the same education, seminary training and experience. Those were mostly in rural areas with small populations and churches. The way I came out of those wilderness experiences was to change the frame of mind of those dying congregations. I developed programs that met the needs of the parishioners as well as the community so they made a big difference in the life of the congregations. Churches became alive through increased memberships and giving to the church. They felt that they belonged to an alive and vibrant church once again. They paid their apportionments in full every year and doubled the salaries of their staffs. The bishop and cabinet see the changes taking place in these churches and appreciate my ministry. People of color do make a big difference in the life of the church. God has opened up new horizons for me.”

“I have served on the Covenant Council, the Sessions Committee, and other annual conference committees and have found a generally unwelcome attitude towards new ideas and new people. Whether or not that is rooted in any racism is unclear to me. Sexist comments, however, were made on a regular basis during those meetings.”

“As a female pastor, I have been berated in ways I don’t believe male pastors would be berated. The “in-your-face” type of confrontation that would inspire fist fights outside, in any other setting, with any other people. As a female pastor, I have been told by a male pastor that there is no difference for me as a female pastor than for him as a male pastor. My question is

“how would he know?!” My greatest wilderness experience so far has been that of being in the process of ordination, or working hard in my ministry for the church. I am virtually ignored by my male senior pastor. Nothing is said unless there is a complaint and my opinion is never asked for. I work in silence for the most part. The people of the church are my affirmation, and the inner-knowledge that I am fulfilling God’s calling are what keep me going.”

Clearly, there is much work to be done to create a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere for all who have been called to serve the Lord in the church. GCSRW was founded during a time when women were crying to be heard and held as equal in a predominantly male economic and political arena. People of color were reaching for the respect given to white men. In many ways, a look back over the years since 1976 will reveal many steps forward both in the secular world and in the church. However, as long as there are prejudicial experiences like the ones we’ve read about here, there will be a need for groups like GCSRW. In a world as diverse as the one we inhabit, the church must stand for the acceptance of a multi-cultural society and the reality that everyone of every gender, age, color and size is called to serve God. “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

Encourage your local church to establish a local COSROW. ✨

Mary Gilbert is a member of Scottsdale (Ariz.) UMC. She has served on the DSW Commission since 2005.

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Deacons: Called or sent?

continued from page 3

The fact that Deacons do not itinerate (have the possibility of moving annually) is attractive to some women. Some see the ministry of a Deacon as a way to fulfill call and family obligation without violating the covenant commitment to itinerate. For some, the idea of a more equalized balance between ministry and family responsibilities makes the ministry of the Deacon a more realistic option. “I don’t believe that’s the majority,” Wood said. “In many ways it would be easier for me to be an Elder since Deacons have no guaranteed appointment and the church is still not clear about who Deacons are.”

Melton agrees that the role is unclear on all levels of the church, and she recalled anecdotal conversations that some boards of ordained ministry have been channeling candidates to pursue Deacons orders for those deemed not “good enough” to be an Elder giving some the message that Deacons, and by extension, women, should not pursue the order of Elder.

Dodge believes that there are many who enter the ordination process believing they are called to be Elders, and as they work with their boards they find that “the call they seem to be expressing is not what they’re headed for.” Some candidates are strongly urged to abandon their perceived call to the ministry of an Elder and enter the Order of Deacon.

The order of Deacon is not a “second-class” ordination and people go into professional ministry for many different reasons, Wood noted. Everyone receives a call from God and possesses gifts for ministry. The question Wood said is how is God calling you to *use* those gifts. 



Based on a report by *Congressional Quarterly*, the new Congress has 62 United Methodists—13 in the Senate and 49 in the House of Representatives.

The breakdown is fairly evenly split between the two major parties, though the Republicans have the edge with 8 UMs in the Senate and 26 UMs in the House. However, all five newly elected UMs are Democrats.

Ten of the UMs in Congress are from Texas, while half (three of six) of the delegation from Kansas is UM. Thirty states elected at least one UM to Congress. Methodists are the third largest denominational family in Congress after Catholics and Baptists.