



# NEWSCOPE

THE WEEKLY NEWSLETTER FOR  
UNITED METHODIST LEADERS

## SPECIAL EDITION

NEWSCOPE has invited leaders from across the connection to share their hopes, prayers, and priorities for General Conference. Watch for two more special editions between now and the start of General Conference on April 23.

### Heart, Not Policies, Need Change

After the last seven General Conferences, five as a delegate, I admit my immediate hope for 2008 is rather modest. I know we will set budgets, bulk up the Book of Resolutions, pass initiatives and programs, add layers of bureaucracy, authorize studies, meet old friends and use words like “exciting” and “hopeful”—but I

am not impressed that these things by themselves will lead to significant change and a new day for United Methodism. Indeed, there is potential for fragmentation and dissension. One approaches General Conferences these days with apprehension. It is a sign of the times that at least on one level the hope is that General Conference will do as little harm as possible and not embarrass us before the larger world.

But one should have a bigger hope. On this level my prayer is not so much that the legislation I support will pass but that somehow in the process we might sense that Jesus Christ is leading the church. When we leave Fort Worth could we believe that United Methodism has the doctrine, the polity, the sense of mission and the will to carry it out to—in the words of the proposed new mission statement—“transform the world”?

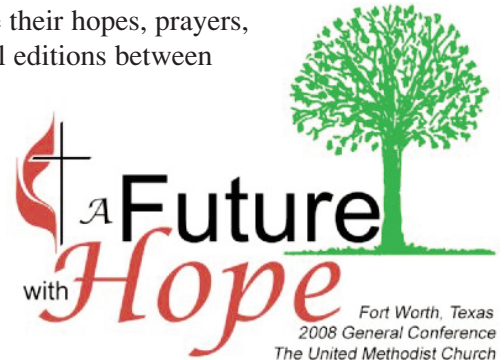
The State of the Church report authorized by the Connectional Table records some telling statistics. For example: only 51% of the Americans surveyed envision a hopeful future for United Methodism—and this in the country with all the resources. By contrast, 58% of the Europeans, 68% of those from the Philippines and 90% of the Africans envision a hopeful future. If only 51% of the Americans envision a hopeful future for United Methodism, that means 49% either do not know or are unsure about a hopeful future. That is a discouraging statistic.

But that could change. We don’t need new programs. We need an attitude change, or better, a heart change. The African UMs, where 90% see a hopeful future, might have something to teach us (a reason in itself not to segregate the church into regional conferences). Let us sit at their feet and learn. The hope is that in four more years, when surveyors will again study UMs, 100%, or at least 75%, would see a hopeful future for United Methodism. And if the attitudes change could the denominational turn-around be far behind? — *Riley Case, retired elder of the North Indiana Annual Conference*

### Questions to Consider

My hope for General Conference is that delegates will ask the following questions as they review each piece of legislation:

1. Does this legislation help us accomplish our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world?



***A concise, late-deadline report compiled and edited by the staff  
of The United Methodist Publishing House***

2. Does this legislation help us observe the General Rules: do no harm, do good, stay in love with God?
3. How can I help frame the conversation about this legislation so that the guidelines of Holy Conferencing are honored?
4. How does this legislation help move the church into a future with hope?
5. How does this legislation impact the worldwide nature of the UMC?
6. How does this legislation support the Seven Vision Pathways and the *Four Areas of Focus* (Leadership, Congregational Development, Global Health and Elimination of Poverty)?
7. How does this legislation help us reach more people, more young people and more diverse people?
8. How does this legislation enable the best stewardship of our resources that the people of the UMC have offered to God?
9. How can I maintain a healthy perspective in processing this legislation, not taking myself too seriously, but taking God very seriously?
10. After careful prayer and discernment, how is the Spirit leading me to act on this legislation?

The best advice I've received about my role as a General Conference delegate came in an e-mail sent to me by the Rev. Edgar Bazan, Associate Pastor of Oak Cliff UMC, Dallas, Texas. After reading several articles about the upcoming General Conference, he reflected on Matthew 28:19-20 and Acts 1:8. With his permission, I share with you his conclusion: "As long as we obey God, doing what we are supposed and called to do, Christ will be with us and the Holy Spirit will empower us in this mission-commission, because without them we become nothing."

— *Mary Brooke Casad, Executive Secretary of the Connectional Table*

## Praying for Delegates to be Positive, Gracious

I hope and pray delegates to the General Conference will keep in mind that in their deliberations they need to answer the question, "What should the church of Jesus Christ do?" rather than place their personal opinions and agenda first.

I pray delegates will bring a positive, calm, peaceful and joyful heart to the General Conference rather than one that is negative, anxious, confrontational and angry. May the spirit of love, grace, and abundance prevail over law, condemnation, and scarcity.

I hope delegates will not assume every rumor is true or that every report of scandal or wrongdoing is accurate, whether it is shared with them by a bishop, general secretary, best friend, treasurer or caucus representative.

Delegates must pace themselves through long days and nights and keep in mind that life and the church will continue after General Conference. Delegates should keep matters in perspective and try to see the big picture. It will not be possible to deal with or control every single detail, ministry or program in the allotted time.

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I hope delegates will not assume that because they may not have been personally involved or consulted on something it means it was done incorrectly or without integrity. Not everyone can be involved in everything.

I pray delegates will avoid an ‘us versus them’ mentality. The local church, annual conference, and general church levels complement one another and are not mutually antagonistic.

Friends, acquaintances, and strangers will give delegates instructions and suggestions on how to vote. That’s life. I hope delegates will use their best judgment and, it bears repeating, attempt to keep the interests of the whole church in mind and not only those of their own congregation or annual conference.

I pray the General Conference will make a clear and unambiguous call for peace and for an end to the war in Iraq.

I pray the proposed Social Creed, crafted with the active participation and input of UMs in Africa, Europe, the Philippines and the United States, and one that transcends theological, ideological and geographical divides, will be adopted.

I hope delegates will remember the lessons of recent church history as they consider proposals to spend down the denomination’s assets and reserves to meet short-term financial needs.

— *Jim Winkler, General Secretary, General Board of Church and Society*

## **Imperatives to Build Up Younger, More Diverse Clergy**

I hope that General Conference will consider the future movement of the church in the following ways:

1. Our denomination is missing out on prime opportunities to promote and encourage young people to go into the ministry. General Conference should direct denominational boards and agencies to include time in up-coming events to encourage professional ministry careers.
2. Shorten and streamline the ordination process. Current processes are prohibitive, particularly for young families. Changes should include counting seminary pastoral internships and CPE as probationary time toward ordination.
3. Standardize the ordination process for U.S. conferences. Create a denominational database that tracks elders and deacons through education and ordination to facilitate “cross-conference” appointments for a younger, more mobile generation.
4. Women make up 6% of senior pastors leading U.S. congregations of 1,000 members or more, but are 19% of all active UM clergy (GCSRW and GCFA data). Empower the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women to assist in equipping women to take roles as lead pastors of larger churches.
5. Initiate bilingual immersion programs for clergy and lay leaders to enhance their ministries in the realities of growing, diverse cultural settings.
6. Our denomination has a strong social justice history and should continue that tradition into the future. It is time to fully welcome and include all people into the church, including gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.
7. There is time yet before the exodus of retiring pastors to benefit from their long-time experience and knowledge. Identify funding for “last-pastorate” sabbaticals or renewal times to reinvigorate clergy in their final years of ministry.

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Monday, April 14.

8. Before the coming increased numbers of clergy retirements, we must look to new and resourceful ways to share expertise and experience with up-coming generations of leaders. Genuine opportunities and inclusion, with bold approaches and leadership at all levels of our church will create a more fluid transition during those years of change.
9. Take an honest look at the hard and disappointing reality of closing churches. As a denomination we can look at Bishop Rueben Job's book, *Living Fully, Dying Well*, to model how dying local churches can embrace their reality in healthy ways.
10. Recognize that like Esther, younger generations are ready for just such a time as this, and are prepared to lead.

—Amanda Stein, Senior Pastor of Trinity UMC in Madison, Wisconsin Council of Churches board member and chair of the Conference Board of Church and Society.

## Prayers for Inclusion

10. Prayers for safe travel to and from General Conference. May the Lord bless our international sisters and brothers with safe and peaceful passage across borders and into the United States.
9. May every aspect of the General Conference be seen as an opportunity to seek and glorify the Lord.
8. May the overall purpose of our being together bring a new sense of relevance of our church to the world.
7. May the General Conference allow the church to once again be seen as God's voice of hope, joy, peace, life in abundance, and life eternal to a hurting world.
6. May this session of General Conference allow our church to reclaim the role of being, as Dr. Martin Luther King said, the thermostat of society rather than being simply a thermometer.
5. May all the comprehensive plans for our ethnic minorities be re-adopted, funded fully and strengthened, and that the church see them as "our" plan not as "their" plans.
4. That the General Conference provide ways for our pulpits, Sunday school classrooms, board and committee meetings, etc., to serve as teaching opportunities which can stop the spread of fear because of ignorance.
3. That the General Conference ensure that all our church doors, as well as our hearts, be open to all, especially God. May the inside of our church reflect the invitational love of God.
2. That a worldwide commitment be made to identifying, encouraging, recruiting and funding opportunities of younger clergy into professional ministry, while affirming all who feel called into arenas where God can be faithfully served.
1. That all at General Conference affirm that Jesus is Lord.

—Eradio Valverde, Jr., Senior Pastor of First UMC of San Marcos, Texas.

## Hopes for Empowerment to Maximize Mission

It is my hope that General Conference will give responsibility to the Council of Bishops and the Connectional Table to:

1. Develop a denomination-wide strategic plan for setting measurable missional goals in regard to new members, worship attendance, local congregations in mission beyond themselves both locally and globally and the development of new sources of income for financing mission and ministry. A progress report would be done annually at each annual conference session.

2. Develop the strategic direction of the UMC as a global church.
3. Develop what it means to be in “holy conferencing” with the understanding that “holy conferencing” is an expectation of our general boards and agencies as well as individuals.
4. Assist and empower every annual conference in the development of disciple-making systems that strengthen the spiritual base of the ministry of every local congregation. The economic, social and political impact of our denomination, both locally and globally, grows out of our spiritual healthiness.
5. Assist and empower every annual conference in the development of ministries with and for young adults, employing young adults to lead in the development of those ministries.
6. Assist and empower every annual conference in the development of strategic partnerships with annual conferences from other parts of the globe. These partnerships should encourage every local congregation to send at least one work team a year to be in ministry with fellow UM Christians beyond themselves and/or receive fellow UM Christians from other parts of the world to work in ministry in that annual conference.
7. Assist and empower every local congregation to be connected in mission through support of at least one General Advance project or a covenant relationship with at least one UM missionary each year.
8. Assist and empower every local congregation to identify and participate in and/or develop ministries with the poor both locally and globally.
9. Assist and empower every local congregation to participate in the elimination of malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. The goal should be that no child should suffer from a disease in a third world country from which a child does not suffer in the United States.
10. Develop systems which identify and develop the clergy and lay leaders needed to give effective leadership and support to the strategic direction of the denomination. Specific attention should be given to identifying and developing young adult leaders.

—*Timothy L. Bias, Pastor of First UMC, Peoria, Ill.*

## **Civility, Openness to Change Will Empower Visionary Future**

1. Let us begin by covenanting to live within the guidelines of holy conduct similar to the Global Young People’s Convocation and Legislative Assembly held in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2007, by extending a greeting to each other and respect, exercising civility, striving toward mutual understanding while sharing and receiving our varied voices and experiences of God.
2. We must adopt a common language of care and witness that does not play “gotcha” games nor insist on practices of “discernment” that often become instruments for expressing “spiritual superiority” resulting in majority culture control and manipulation. This common language could well embrace gospel themes of love, justice and freedom. In all of this, we must remember that our children are watching us.
3. The General Conference must stop seeking to preserve (patch, mend, strengthen) those things the Holy Spirit is possibly attempting to destroy. Let us provide the space for Wesleyan values to breathe in the fresh oxygen of a 21st century vision even though it will change the church as we now know it.
4. Theological education is critical in this age of Christian decline and marginalization. The UMC needs to regain its professionalism and cutting edge position in areas of academic study embracing issues that impact our intellectual and spiritual lives. If we are serious about living in a global age and a global church, we must learn more about concepts of creation, understandings of cosmologies, the mysteries of the mind and the impact of prayer and meditation, the teachings of ancient scriptures and histories as

well as oral teachings and knowledge of meaning represented in art and story and the traditional belief systems of other peoples.

5. We need to regain our footing and clarity in the practice of ministry, especially in oration and blending the intellectual with the spiritual, in linking ethics to decision-making in western cultures while exploring issues of hope, peace and justice in the face of current values of wealth and privilege, specialization and competitiveness and the challenge the current trend of individualism expressed through a zeal for one's own point of view and the personalization of individual experience resulting in the exclusivism of our church.

6. It is essential that we find less cumbersome means of credentialing pastoral leadership in the UMC as a means of attracting and retaining gifted pastoral leaders. The current process of candidacy for ordained ministry is complex, draining and frustrating for eager younger persons who are committed to the ordained ministry of the church.

7. The General Conference must embrace the new movement of the Christian unchurched, who do not affiliate with a denomination or a building or a worshipping community, as an exciting option for some believers. It will be important to prepare our church agencies and annual conferences to engage in the development of resources and leadership that will support people who are spiritually searching in new ways outside of the walls of the organized church. Racial-ethnic priority planning in the UMC has produced some viable models to begin this process.

8. Oversight of the office of the episcopacy needs to be redefined to bring greater effectiveness to the leadership of bishops. While committees on the episcopacy exist in areas and jurisdictions, they currently do not, generally speaking, play a defining role in the performance reviews of bishops and the fulfillment of results-oriented, quantifiable, measurable ministry plans for their episcopal areas.

9. The elimination of war, poverty and racism are three themes that could easily galvanize a viable agenda for the great church of United Methodism. Perhaps it is the task of this General Conference to draw the lines of these themes connecting them with all that we propose, all that we plan and all that we legislate. Such a matrix would be pleasing to God and faithful to our evangelical movement in this age.

10. The General Conference is responsible for the structures of our ministries. Is it possible for us to move from control systems to grace systems? As long as money is the driving force, vision will suffer harm and a longing world will find answers in short-term solutions that will offer no salvation for humankind or their societies.

— *Thom White Wolf Fassett, Emeritus General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society and member of the Connectional Table*

## **A Prayer for Hope**

My prayers for General Conference are for us as a denomination to buy into the theme "A Future with Hope." That future is Jesus Christ and I hope we do not lose sight of our focus. I am convinced that if we are able to work together, keeping biblically aligned, God will bless us more than we have room enough for (Mal. 3:10). I believe in the UMC. It is where I was birthed in Christ. And I believe that God is not done with us yet. Our best years are yet to be, because our future is in Jesus Christ, a future of hope. May God bless us as we grow in Christ so others can know Christ.

— *David Adams, General Secretary, General Commission on UM Men*