

2015 Report of the Chair to the UMMA Gathering

October 3-5, 2015 in Newark, NJ

As the City of London was celebrating the 40th anniversary of the coronation of Elizabeth II only a few days after a remodeling project at Windsor Castle ended in a major conflagration in one wing of the Castle — 23 years ago now — Queen Elizabeth gave a singularly memorable speech in which she said, early on, “1992 is not a year on which I shall look back with undiluted pleasure. In the words of one of my more sympathetic correspondents, it has turned out to be an 'Annus Horribilis.'”

Aside from the Castle fire, Wikipedia tell us about other horrible events of the Queen’s year: In March 1992, two of her children separated from or divorced their spouses, one daughter-in-law was involved in a public scandal, and another, Princess Diana, published a tell-all book about life with Prince Charles and the royal family. The Windsor Castle fire topped it all off just four days before the celebration.

By comparison, my year has not been an annus horribilis, but it has been problematic and discouraging in many regards.

However, like the Queen, UMMA can look back at decades — only two, but still a score of years — to reflect on where we have been and to contemplate where we may yet wish to go. At the 1996 GBGM Missionary Conference and Consultation, gathered missionaries instituted what has become an established and acknowledged association of missionaries related to the General Board of Global Ministries which has, I believe, been instrumental in helping keep Global Ministries aware of pitfalls along the way and in calling the agency back onto its course. They have been turbulent years in many regards. As luck would have it, 1996 was a year when Helen and I and our two younger children were scheduled for itineration aka home assignment in the U.S. We were present when the decision was made to form our organization. I have played one role or another in it since then.

For ten of those twenty years I was either chair (six years in two terms from 2005-2007 and 2011-2015) or vice-chair (four years 2001-2005). Howard Heiner served six consecutive years from 1996-2002. Jim Gulley served four years between my two terms, and Norma Kehrberg served three years from Howard’s retirement from office until I succeeded her. Until Katherine Parker’s recent election by the Steering Committee I was the only active missionary to serve as chair and the first to serve while on assignment outside the U.S.A. (Norma and I often enjoyed the fact that each of us had a window of opportunity to contact the other and get a quick response because Hawaii and Germany were exactly 12 hours apart. We could be in touch from breakfast till late morning or supper time to late evening without worrying about the hours the other might be sleeping! Mostly they were quick emails, since we were not into Skype so much and did not have Facetime or all the other instant communication options yet, of course!)

As I looked back through the issues of the UMMA UpDate, which are now available in PDF format on our new website at <umma-global.info> (and soon to be connected back to the old URL of <umma-global.org>), I was reminded of previous trials and tribulations we have faced, and reminded that the past year was not the only difficult one.

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Yet, memories of the 2014 Gathering, which lies only 9 months in the past in January 2015, do still come to mind. Although in many regards, it came off with only minor difficulties, our vice-chair Katherine Parker could not be present, I came down with a severe cough and bronchial irritation as did many other residents of Pilgrim Place before and after the Gathering, and I was successful in delegating only a few responsibilities to other people.

We did manage to have a good Skype connection up for most of that Gathering, but only a very few people were able to connect, for whatever reason. We did benefit from the remote contributions of our new Global Missionary in Fiji, Wes Neal, and Congolese Global Mission Fellow in the Philippines, Glory Mulimba.

The Double Tree provided comfortable accommodation, Claremont UMC's narthex was a convenient meeting place, and our encounter with Kah-Jin Jeffrey Kuan, President at Claremont School of Theology, and a train ride into Los Angeles to visit the United Methodist Social Justice Museum at the heart of old Los Angeles were great enrichments to our understanding of regional United Methodist realities and their international elements. Deaconess Jeanne Roe Smith added much local lore to that outing. Rev. Judy Chung, Associate General Secretary at GBGM, whose home conference is the Cal-Pac Conference, was able to be present as well to discuss issues before Global Ministries.

Meals, a social hour with residents of Pilgrim Place, and a folk-music concert in the Claremont Village allowed many to renew Methodist and Ecumenical ties to various points of assignment around the world (aka "mission fields"). Indeed, a good half of those in attendance were UMMA members and friends who are now residents of Pilgrim Place. (Unfortunately, I personally missed the folk-music event, arranged by Mavis Streyffeler.)

After this mixed start (successful gathering accompanied by ill health) developments took a turn which I had not anticipated. After years of trying to develop a cooperative, collaborative relationship with Global Ministries at the official level — efforts certainly reciprocated by General Secretary Thomas Kemper and his staff — remnants of a previous era of a confrontational relationship between UMMA and GBGM arose. As I try to analyze how this happened and what happened I have to look to a wide variety of factors. Without casting aspersions on anyone's intentions or even their direct actions, personnel and personal changes in the Administrative Council brought a new dynamic which surprised me.

Gordon Greathouse, in his role as Missionary in Residence, was able to fulfill one of UMMA's long-time goals of providing opportunities for missionaries to get together, at least on a regional basis, to discover one another, share common personal and professional issues with one another, and raise common concerns to and get a hearing from elected staff from GBGM who were present and open to encounter and exchange. While these gatherings are to be valued as largely positive experiences, I imagine that part of what happened to UMMA was a certain sense of an arrested development being triggered back to life, a *status quo ante* recalling conflicts in part no longer of the same immediate relevance. (As a historian I have noticed in other contexts that people or countries sometimes get stuck in patterns which become out-of-sync with

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the progression of events which may have moved to make these patterns obsolete — as perhaps evident in the massive movement of Syrian refugees and the lack of a coordinated political response on the part of a European Union still in formation.)

Stated another way, after initial years of more or less confrontational advocacy for missionaries against injustices perceived as perpetrated by existing systems and leadership and proportional push-back from that leadership, UMMA's more recent years — perhaps since 2006 or 2007 — have been marked more by cooperatively exercised diplomacy in which unresolved issues from the missionary community were negotiated in good faith with UMMA representatives by the responsible staff at Global Ministries and steps taken toward resolution or else unresolved issues were openly identified for further study and conversation.

For the first time in recent years, there had been no consultation with UMMA leadership about the naming of the MIR. Had there been, we would, of course, have welcomed Gordon and Teca's nomination, but we might also have been able to help Gordon or Global Ministries avoid a few of the pitfalls which appeared before them. Gordon had previously been a long-time member of the UMMA Steering Committee representing South America and was an active advocate for missionary issues and a fighter for improved policies to deal with many issues including cost-of-living adjustments, salaries, housing and retiring with dignity.

After Gordon's term on the Steering Committee had ended, many who continued addressing these issues felt that they had been regularly addressed in the best achievable manner under the circumstances in the changes which took place in 2015 and would again be addressed in the next broader review of worldwide salary structures for all Global Ministries workers now in process. Diverse views on current progress or lack thereof brought lack of focus for UMMA.

Meanwhile, Katherine Parker had been seeking to find herself in her new situation after her transfer from Cambodia to Nepal, and Nan McCurdy was only beginning to come to terms with leaving Nicaragua, after she and Miguel were transferred to the position of Mission Advocate in the Western Jurisdiction. As I also retired from paid service with GBGM in 2014 and began to take on new tasks at Pilgrim Place and to plan for my future, post-GBGM and post-UMMA, and a life as a grandfather to children on both coasts, I was also distracted from some of our issues in less helpful ways.

Conflicts arose early in the year as efforts were made to turn our approach back to a more confrontational style of advocacy, disregarding the more recent patterns of diplomacy, which by their nature require more channelled conversation outside of public meetings to prepare for fruitful exchanges when all parties are present. Katherine Parker and I agreed that we both wanted to keep to the previous direction of a diplomatic approach, factually anchored, without presenting or eliciting confrontation. Lacking opportunity to engage in lengthy conversation, many aspects of our relationships on the Administrative Council remained tentative.

Our traditional luncheon at the invitation of the General Secretary just prior to the convening of the April Directors' meeting in New York brought out our lack of unified

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focus. The previous pattern broke down and our input was not as we would have wished.

The pattern had become that the chair or a designated person would present the issues we had agreed would come from UMMA, while Thomas Kemper, Roland Fernandes, George Howard and Judy Chung would respond to issues which had been presented in writing previously and bring their own items of news, insight, or concern before we engaged in an open conversation, limited to one or two aspects from the many issues addressed formally. One member of our body determined not to follow the pattern, sowing acrimony.

A number of specific issues from a regional gathering were presented as demands of the missionaries, although we had agreed that mentioning them in writing was sufficient for our purposes. Unfortunate accusations were raised about lack staff response. Although we were finally able to move on to the one agreed-upon point for open discussion, namely new ways to offer care to missionaries, the atmosphere did not allow for much fruitful give and take after the derailing of our intentions for our time together.

It was suggested as we left the meeting in April that we would have to find another forum for dialogue —that the luncheon in its current form had served its purposes. Whether as a consequence or for other reasons, UMMA officers present at the Directors' meeting this week were not invited to a luncheon meeting for direct conversation with staff, but reverted to the old pattern of being auditors of public meetings, most of which are open, but several of which are closed when dealing with personnel and property issues, especially as Global Ministries prepares to move to Atlanta.

Steering Committee members have in recent weeks participated in the election of a slate to serve as Administrative Council beginning with this Gathering for a term of two years. Katherine Parker has been elected new chair, Becky Harrell will assist her as vice chair, Hillary Taylor will become our secretary and Alina Saucedo Paucara will be our treasurer. DarEll Weist has expressed his readiness to retain the function of treasurer through the end of the year to enable a smooth transition. Thereafter, an assistant treasurer or coordinator to be identified at this meeting, will be named who can function in relationship to our U.S. bank account, since Alina does not have the needed U.S. credentials to be a signatory.

It is ironic that the issues of focus of the past year should have surfaced just after UMMA was able to participate successfully in a substantial further development of pension and salary issues — one of the main issues at the personnel level which UMMA has addressed. It is also ironic that we have allowed relatively petty issues, seen on a global scale, to distract us from any greater vision of a world in need and the church's response. For that reason I am also pleased that the Rev. Pat Watkins (James Patrick Watkins, to be more precise) has agreed to come to talk to us Monday about his work in "Ministry with God's Renewed Creation." Mary Ellen Kris, GBGM Consultant for Ministry with the Poor will also be with us on Sunday afternoon. And I look forward to our study together in this Gathering of Global Ministries' "Theology of Mission" Statement and of a

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paper by Thomas Kemper on better providing global leadership to The United Methodist Church, as well as devotional opportunities to respond to the work of Global Ministries.

As I leave the office of chair to my successor Katherine Parker, I would like to recall some of the things we have accomplished together over the past 20 years, during which time I have twice served as your chair.

At the time of UMMA's founding, the former World Division and the National Division were disbanded as separate Divisions of the General Board of Global Ministries. (The only remaining "Division" was the "Women's Division.") New structures were applied which were intended to flatten distinctions and harmonize policies applying to Alaska and Puerto Rico, Japan and Korea, Central and South America, Europe, Central Asia and the rest of the world wherever The United Methodist Church might be represented through the work of GBGM. Missionaries perceived a new disregard for input from those whose experience might logically have influenced both policy and practical decisions in New York. Waves of budget cuts and restructuring deprived missionaries serving outside of the USA of many of their established methods of keeping their thinking honed and their spirits fed from international springs of insight and encouragement. The Missionary Conference and Consultation were replaced by a representative Global Mission Personnel Conference including delegate representatives of U.S.-based personnel and those serving around the world. Then the GMPC also was diminished and became infrequent before disappearing altogether. Complimentary subscriptions for missionaries to *New World Outlook* and *Response* were discontinued. Region gatherings became infrequent or were discontinued altogether until Gordon Greathouse's implementation of this idea again.

In all honesty I doubt that either missionaries or staff realized how quickly the day might arrive when the balance between missionaries of non-U.S. origins and those of U.S. origins might approach 50/50. This has happened in part due to the rapid reduction of funded missionary placements which has occurred simultaneous to the former "mission fields" moving out to take their up their role in providing personnel and leadership in mission in their own and neighboring countries and to the world, as we properly celebrate mission "from everywhere to everywhere." The waves of U.S.-origin missionaries, almost always of European descent, sent out in the 50's and 60's were also retiring in waves.

There seemed to be a convergence of efforts and accidents to limit communication with those outside the US. Repeated restructure of responsibilities of various "desks" in New York into "Mission Personnel," "Contexts and Relationships" and "Mission Evangelism" further muddied the waters. Through all of this UMMA was a focused voice which (1) encouraged and enabled communication among missionaries and (2) demanded a hearing on behalf of missionaries with successive General Secretaries and their staffs. UMMA leadership, in cooperation with CCWO and the representatives of the Office of Deaconess/Home Missioner, worked to initiate a number of forums with executive leadership of Global Ministries to discuss issues such as the meaning of commissioning, what our "place at the table" could look like, why a "United Methodist" brand seemed so important to some, and whether the Directors would be willing and able to hear input from missionaries on matters of vital concern to them.

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Among other points of light, we were granted two positions on the Pensions sub-committee of the Board's Investment and Pensions Committee. Dakin Cook and Richard Vreeland, our previous UMMA treasurer and one-time treasurer of the World Division, were named to serve on that committee. More recently, Dakin and I continue to serve.

With regard to the pension question, UMMA under the strong leadership of Howard Heiner found sufficient reason to mistrust Board leadership in their use of funds received from the beneficence of the Collins family. A gift in the form of Collins family forest lands had, after some reflection by the family and Board leadership, at some point been funneled to missionary pensions for the World Division and to other purposes through a separate fund in the National Division. Funds were appearing to be used for ongoing expenses or new programs of GBGM while provision was not being made for increases in pension benefits to meet inflation for already retired missionaries. In a subtle peripheral move, the then General Secretary Dr. Randolph Nugent spoke out publicly against increased compensation for missionaries. UMMA stuck to its guns in claiming that the Forest monies should be used for missionary pensions.

These positions led to an impasse. Global Ministries demonstrated with legal evidence that pensions was only one purpose for which the money could have been used, while not acceding to the claim of the missionaries. Howard Heiner was allegedly defined as persona non grata by the General Secretary, who is alleged to have instructed his staff that no one was to communicate with him. The new General Treasurer, Roland Fernandes, increasingly emphasized that Global Ministries' commitment to missionary pensions had to be independent of any designated gifts. He repeatedly asserted Global Ministries had a responsibility to care for its missionaries whether it owned forests or not and moved more clearly year by year to define that "unfunded liability" in his financial statements, acknowledging that this had not been adequately represented in bookkeeping of earlier years. Most recently, this liability booked against the assets of the Board was increased dramatically to allow for a regular 2% annual increase in the pension rate for years of service for those retired or who have served long enough to be "grandfathered-in" to the previous Defined Benefit program.

While the 2% increase may not relate favorably to current increases in cost of living for retirees, the fact that it is now policy that an annual increase will occur which may be adjusted upward or downward by specific action of the Directors is a great improvement over the previous system where UMMA had to fight each year for a reconsideration of the pension rate, leaving everyone on an unpredictable income roller-coaster.

Newer missionaries have regular monthly contributions made into their retirement fund, which is now a Defined Contribution program which does not accumulate increasing liability for the Board, since that liability is met in full each and every month. In this regard, UMMA played a significant role in moving the Board from a rather unhelpful initial position of a 7 or 8% contribution as proposed by the General Board of Pensions and Health Benefits to the graduated scale which starts at 12% and moves to 13, then 14, then 15% above and beyond salary for increasing years of

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service. (In a helpful, but less significant, move, the Service Grant paid at end of service per month of service for those who have served 15 years or more was increased by 40% to \$25 for month of service.) For me, it is most significant that these numbers are now seen as amounts which can actually be negotiated and changed by cooperative conversation between representatives of the missionary community, directors and elected staff, a principle not allowed for in any way 20 years ago, and only gradually opened prior to Thomas Kemper's arrival as General Secretary.

Throughout these negotiations, UMMA representatives constantly pointed out that a pension built on a percentage of an inadequate salary can never be adequate. Despite getting the pension-cart before the salary-horse, GBGM did move almost simultaneously to the pension changes to increase base pay for missionaries by nearly 40%. At the same time the manner in which cost of living adjustments might create an increase or decrease in net pay was refined. (Pension contributions are independent of CoLA, but are figured on an average of compensation of all missionaries.) The verdict is still out on whether missionaries think this change is working well. Whereas the new pension plan went into effect in 2014, the new salaries were not being paid out until January of this year. To compensate for the discrepancy in pension contributions between the old salary and the new, a 5% additional contribution was made in 2014 in response to UMMA's calls that an inadequate salary cannot be the basis for an adequate pension.

I think we can proudly claim that without our presence at this table of conversation on pensions and salaries, changes less favorable to missionaries would have been allowed to be introduced. While the process began in animosity and confrontation, the best advocacy for missionaries proved over time to be more diplomatic and less strident, something which was perhaps witnessed in our temporary and contentious return to a stridency in our April conversations with staff.

To give credit where credit is due, the pension committee discussion which finally reviewed higher benefits was significantly impacted by the pleas of Nan McCurdy who amazed many of us by staying up all night to crunch the numbers provided by GBoPHB to demonstrate how the proposed plan of a 7 or 8% defined pension contribution would substantially disadvantage missionaries compared to the previous plan. Even after the fact, these changes have proven a source of great controversy and may still motivate opposition from many older missionaries. Missionary distrust of our elected church leadership may not have any current basis, but it lives on with cause in the memories of many.

We also need to acknowledge Scott Atnip, an elected Global Ministries Director from Texas, who has served alongside Rev. Daniel Mhone, Malawi, as a liaison to UMMA. It was our good fortune that Scott also served on the Board's finance committee and was a willing representative of missionary concerns whose motions to the committee substantially altered the content of the pension provisions in a most helpful way.

(At the time of UMMA's founding, the official flow of information between staff, directors and missionaries was strictly controlled by the office of the General Secretary. Staff were discouraged from speaking to directors, except when explicitly permitted to

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bring a report. Missionaries had no structured opportunity to speak to missionary concerns at all, but had to identify and lobby directors on the fringes of formal meetings or via mail in advance of meetings. The presence of missionaries at Board meetings was not acknowledged. My own tenure with UMMA includes “open” board committee meetings where we were required to stand around the edge of the room and hope that some board member or another might ask the chair of the meeting to recognize one or another of us for strictly limited input, after requesting that of a director in advance. Later chairs were added but input was still limited. These days we are seated among the directors in committee meetings, although occasionally in the second row of a circle, and may be recognized to speak (though, of course, without vote) as the discretion of the presider. Those missionaries registered with the General Secretary’s office in advance of the Board meeting receive name-tags and information packets. Even the electronic versions of reports to the Board are made available to the UMMA chair and may be distributed to others who may be attending, despite the fact that Board members must log in to a special server — “Ezra” — to download their copies.)

I have spent much time describing the atmospheric change and those which affect our compensation.

However, there have been many points of contact where UMMA has challenged — and that may well be the correct operative word — the staff and directors of Global Ministries to take time to reflect on the meaning and practice of mission. Norma Kehrberg twice organized Mission Forums. The first, in the Chapel of the Unnamed Faithful at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, focussed on the growing popularity of “mission tourism” and the need for a structured relationship between long-term missionary service and United Methodist Volunteer in Mission programs and similar efforts, as well as training and reflection for participants to understand the problematics of their endeavor and the best approaches for intercultural understanding. A second followed at Scarritt Bennett Center in Nashville focussed on the 100th anniversary of the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 and the changes in mission celebrated at the followup conference in 2010.

Various other smaller roundtables and conversations have been initiated by UMMA and organized in cooperation with GBGM staff and leadership which have, among other things, informed the search for successive General Secretaries culminating in the appointment of Thomas Kemper. In the brief time that my missionary assignment was to staff-duties in New York and Helen was MIR, we experienced a total of five elected, acting or interim General Secretaries. Dr. Randy Day’s tenure was quite short; ex-Bishop Ed Paup was diagnosed with a brain tumor and had to resign; Bishops Felton May and Joel Martinez served as interims; and Roland Fernandes was Acting General Secretary — all these in the interim between Dr. Randolph Nugent’s retirement and the arrival of our current General Secretary Thomas Kemper in 2010.

—James A. Dwyer. October 2015