

UMMA UpDate #36, October 31, 2005
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United Methodist Missionary Association
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"Linking mission workers worldwide"

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- [1] **UMMA Gathering, Stamford**, October 9-11, 2005 by James Dwyer, chair

A stronger than usual group of UMMA members gathered at Stamford, Conn., this year at the familiar, but renamed, Hotel Amsterdam during GBGM directors' meetings. Again this year we enjoyed the hospitality of Pastor Douglas MacArthur and his staff at First UMC of Stamford, appropriately located on Cross Road.

For the first time, all UMMA officers are active missionaries: Jim Dwyer, chair, Cherie White, vice chair, Carol Seckel, secretary, with Jim Gulley continuing as treasurer and Fred Price as coordinator. Our group noted with sadness the terminal illness of first coordinator Gilbert Bascom and forwarded words of love and assurance of prayers to him and Maxine.

[A Sad Note: Since returning home, we have received word of Gil's death on the day after All Souls' Day, November 3, 2005. Maxine Bascom's address, if you wish to write her, is: 6229-B N. Parkway, Tacoma, WA 98407-2204.]

As the meeting ended the new slate of officers assumed their weighty responsibilities from their predecessors. Norma Kehrberg thus joins Howard Heiner in the exclusive fellowship of former chairpersons continuing to provide their insights and skills in assistance to the current leadership. As her successor I would like to express my strong admiration for Norma, for her style, her energy, her quick insights and efficiency about how to move and shake things into happening. Hers is a class act to follow. I have no hopes of bearing the mantle handed to her from Howard as well as she did, but will strive to make a contribution of my own kind. Thank you, Norma! We'll continue to expect to hear your clarion call and to respond to your leadership.

Jim Dwyer delivered a short paper on "apostolic mission service" drawing the continuity over the ages between modern international and cross-cultural missionaries and Jesus' sending of the 12, the 72 and the 300, as well as the Great Commission and the promise of the Holy Spirit at Jesus' ascension.

Lynda Byrd, from the GBGM Office of Development, encouraged us with news of a new pilot program to raise financial and moral support for missionaries and mission initiatives involving six annual conferences in all five U.S. jurisdictions, but currently not involving non-U.S. partners.

The Mission Personnel Unit (MPU) report to its directors did not allude to Lynda Byrd's efforts, but reported on minor changes in the Advance formulas, leaving only one level of support - \$5 per member per year - instead of three (\$3, \$4 or \$5).

Another class of missionaries was commissioned at the chapel at the Church Center for the United Nations, which is owned by the Women's Division. (UMMA representation could not be arranged, due to the location.) Issues of missionaries without Letters of Agreement were raised by directors, but not resolved in the meeting. Further steps were taken in unofficial conversations to resolve the issues.

New was the experience of having a director, the Rev. Wendy Rhodehamel, assigned by staff to liaison with UMMA. Pastor Rhodehamel was assigned for only one year, but the appropriate directors' committee has requested that her assignment be renewed to the end of the quadrennium. We noted at the MPU meeting and in conversations outside official meetings what a difference it makes when directors have direct contact with missionaries about issues important to both and to the mission outreach of the church.

As has become tradition, several UMMA officers met over lunch with MPU staff, the chair of the MPU directors' committee and Treasurer Roland Fernandes to address pension and related issues, among others. Those attending besides the treasurer were UMMA's outgoing chair and vice chair, Norma Kehrberg and Jim Dwyer, and coordinator Fred Price, MIR Bruce Griffith, head of MPU Edith Gleaves (who arranged the meeting), Associate General Secretary Stephen Goldstein, the director assigned to UMMA this year, Wendy Rhodehamel, as well as the chair of the MPU directors committee, John Peterson. This year's treasurer's report to the directors transparently noted the relationship between undistributed income to the Collins Pension Fund and liquidity problems of the Board. We were led to hope that clear statements of pension annuity levels and future expectations may be communicated to the retirees each year. Issues regarding the lack of reimbursement of Medicare B premiums for some missionaries were addressed and are expected to be resolved in the near future.

Further conversations on the Collins matters were held by some of those most knowledgeable in these matters.

At the opening plenary session Bishop Oystein Olsen of the Nordic and Baltic Area of the Northern European Central Conference presided in the absence of Board President Bishop Martinez. Bishop Olsen acknowledged the presence of 21 UMMA delegates representing 674 years of service in 24 countries with ability to speak 20 different languages. The directors applauded the presence of the group.

New forms for the Gathering are under consideration as early as next year. Look for details as they develop.

[2] **MEDICARE B Premium Payment, Important NOTICE** by Howard Heiner

First, are you a retired GBGM missionary enrolled in the Collins pension and health benefit plans? **Second**, are you also enrolled in Medicare Part A & B of Social Security?

If you can answer **yes** to both of the above questions you could be eligible to have the Medicare Part B premium (presently \$78.20 per month per individual) reimbursed to you under a GBGM policy. Some retirees who are eligible for this benefit did not know of the GBGM reimbursement policy, thus have missed this benefit for years.

You can determine whether or not you receive the benefit by checking your monthly electronic deposit notification from the Bank of New York. Below the individual monthly retirement amount should be an additional \$78.20 added to your deposit notification. If you receive a notification as a couple, then the amount should be \$156.40.

To correct this oversight Christine Lee, Assistant General Secretary, Special Assignment, Administrative Services, has sent all those missionaries who might qualify, a letter/questionnaire. If you answered **YES** to Questions # 1 & 2 in her Questionnaire, then furnish her with the data needed to enroll the retiree for reimbursement from the present into the future.

Questions #2, 3, 4, & 5 are needed to determine the total retroactive payment due from the time of retirement until the present.

It is important that you provide the information to Christine Lee by the deadline of November 15th. If you have not received her questionnaire, please contact her directly in New York.

UMMA has been assured by staff that when the information for each individual is received by Christine Lee all qualified retirees will be enrolled to receive both future and retroactive Medicare Part B premium reimbursement.

[3] **SPIRITUAL NURTURE NOTE** presented at the Gathering by Richard Vreeland

I would like to tell about events in Russia which help me to understand better our role as Christians in the world. Shortly after the Iron Curtain came down, a delegation from the GBGM went to Russia to plan a response to the fall of communism. Russian Christians met to share in the planning for an effective ministry in the new circumstances. After the day's meeting, the Russians sang a hymn to the visitors and then asked them to sing. Knowing several lines of many hymns, but maybe not all of any of them, the group decided to sing *Kum Ba Yah*. At the end of the singing the Russians expressed appreciation for the hymn and asked what it meant. They were told that it was a plea for God to "**Come By Here.**"

Later in the visit, the vehicle carrying U.S. visitors and their hosts stopped in a very desolate part of Russia. Nothing was growing or alive anywhere. The hosts asked the delegation to look around at the scenery. When the visitors asked what there was to see, they were informed that it was "ground zero" where atomic bombs had been tested and nothing had survived. And then came the challenge: "Sing your song here" that God might renew even such desolation as this.

Several years later I was part of another delegation of conference mission secretaries which visited Russia and other east European countries in order to better represent them in our home conferences. Before leaving Moscow we visited the seminary which consisted of three rooms on the second floor of a building – one for the bishop's office, one a classroom and the third for snacks and fellowship with the students.

We arrived at dusk where a class of about 30 lay persons was crowded into their room studying. Many would have two hours on public transportation to reach their homes after the class was completed. We stood around the room waiting until the session ended and we were introduced. Suddenly the lights went out, but the meeting continued as if nothing had happened. I will never forget the moment when, after our leader had conveyed our greetings, one of the students stood in the twilight with only the light from a streetlamp coming through the window, and with tears streaming down her face, declared, "We never should have not loved you." God had already "**come by here**" and had touched us all with His presence. *Kum Ba Yah!*

[4] Apostolic Mission Service as a Vocation - Relic of the Past or Critical to the Future of the UMC by Dr. James Dwyer, chair

The title grows out of Norma Kehrberg's recent conversations and consultations with missiologists. I would like to limit my comments today to a very few, mostly of a historical nature, in the hope that knowing one aspect of our history, however fleetingly and incompletely and lacking in scholarly depth, may give us some impetus to deal with our present and future in mission.

I have, however, lived it out for the past 21 years in three different assignments. They were in three Annual Conferences and two Central Conferences of the United Methodist Church in Europe. A major part of my ministry involved ministry in German to German-speaking people.

We all know who the first apostles were – or assume we do. The smaller circle of the 12 disciples was sent out by Jesus to spread the good news. They are also commonly called the 12 Apostles. Paul adds himself to their number, as one late-born to be equally called by Christ himself.

But Jesus also sent 70 or 72 out two-by-two to go into the villages where he had not himself gone. They were to go dependent upon the goodwill of these unknown towns toward two foreigners arriving from an unknown departure point, and to make no provisions for their own livelihood while there. Jesus admonished them not to move from house to house, but to leave when their welcome wore out in their first lodging.

The "Great Commission" broadens the sense of Jesus' sending of persons into Apostolic Mission Service rather dramatically, coming as it does at the moment of his ascension to glory with the Father. Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will prepare his hearers to work in "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the world." They were given both the assignment and the empowerment to join in apostolic mission on his behalf. Matt. 28:18-20 reads: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

The Lucan equivalent is found in Acts 1:8-9: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The evidences of that power are demonstrated after the spring harvest of Pentecost when thousands join the movement and become themselves lay-apostles in missionary service.

Back when BEA (British European Airlines) still existed, I was always captivated by their modern, commercial rendition of this idea of movement out from the center, as in their slogan “Britain! Europe! The World!”

Perhaps the skill of commerce to take over a sense of mission and evangelism for commercial purposes is part of our problem today as missionaries and as a church. We are reluctant to reclaim the zeal which was once properly ours because Apple Computer’s evangelists are more effective than our own, and the mission statements of large corporations are both clearer, more convincing, and more effective than our own — and backed by better structures and stronger finances.

It was not always so. In the early middle ages, Irish monks tended to go out in groups of twelve to distant shores where they found a hospitable sponsor. They went with a dual motivation, much like the ubiquitous Mormon missionaries of today. On the one hand they were responding to the Great Commission; on the other hand, they were undertaking *peregrinatio* — a pilgrimage — with the idea of becoming more holy in their own personal life by monastic living in a strange and distant territory, separated intentionally from all the comforts — or discomforts — of home on the British Isles of that time.

Many of these Irish and Scottish monks — the Iona monastic settlement on the Isle of Hy was one result of their travels — were later canonized as Roman Catholic missionary saints. The church historian Philip Schaaf dryly notes that the activity of the Irish monks seems to have suddenly stopped, however, when their home communities were subjugated to the Roman Church and no longer a part of an independent Celtic Christian church-form with little central structure, but with a high sense of zeal for the gospel as they understood it.

The idea of Apostolic Mission Service and the so-called Evangelical Counsels of obedience, poverty and chastity, derived by the monastic masterminds from Jesus’ sending out of the 72, were closely allied for centuries. Monks, whether Irish or Catholic or Orthodox, did much to explore, settle and develop the vast wastelands and swamplands of Europe, Asia Minor and North Africa and to further learning and culture in various forms, despite long periods of apparent spiritual and cultural draught and deprivation — even depravity — among them.

Skipping over a few hundred years and all the great mendicant and preaching orders of pre- and post-Reformation eras, we discover John Wesley in the midst of the 18th century riding his horse to distant outposts of England, Wales and Ireland, or traveling in an ill-starred missionary endeavor to Georgia. For Methodist piety and practice, itineration took the place of *peregrination* or pilgrimage, and a modern manner of organizing and structuring replaced monasticism with classes, bands and societies, circuits and “The Conference.”

At the same time Francis Asbury was underway through the swamps and forests of North America, setting himself unrealistic travel goals, falling short and falling ill, taking up residence for weeks at a time with some unsuspecting family who happened to open the door when he came to a halt with exhaustion.

Thomas Coke, the man Wesley “ordained” to be superintendent over North American Methodists, like the lay preacher Asbury whom he in turn ordained, became one of the first Methodist bishops, but used his office only to keep traveling from island to continent to spread a Methodist vision of the good news and personal holiness until he died on his way to India.

Wave after wave of Methodist and other missionaries were sent out, motivated certainly both by a keen sense of call, by appeals from people who knew the needs of the world, and by a readiness for adventure and the chastening those new challenges for the Lord might bring. In many fields – we might say “points of assignment” today, even though most defined their own assignments after they arrived — European and North American missionaries could survive the prevailing local conditions only a few months or a few years, and fell ill and returned home or died where they were. New persons were repeatedly ready to follow them, often suffering the same end, until health and living conditions could be improved both for missionaries and for those they intended to reach.

Even in the living generation of missionaries of our church there are such stories. One of our own, Carolyn Belshe Cowen, gave all she could muster for orphans in Mozambique, became ill, and found herself unable to function as she would have liked and would have needed to do to continue in Apostolic Mission Service. Word recently reached the UMMA membership that an orphanage she helped found has been renamed the Carolina Belshe Orphanage in her honor. A seminary classmate of mine shared the tale of losing his first wife to complications of pregnancy which could not be dealt with because they were living in Santiago, Chile, at the coincidence of her medical emergency and the U.S.-sponsored overthrow of Salvador Allende. As an American with still limited Spanish, confused and anxious in the upheaval there, he found no one to turn to for help. Of course, others of us have lived at loggerheads with local church or political authorities whose views of justice and peace and the application of the gospel message or the use of funds given for specific purposes could not be reconciled easily or rationally with our own. Sometimes it has even been the sending agency itself that has provided the necessity for such confrontation.

Such positive and negative experiences can only be part of a long-term, cross-cultural involvement by individuals who have a strong sense of call to mission, on the one hand, and a willingness, on the other, to live in the breach between cultures and to suffer for their efforts to understand and to be understood as they seek to respond to the Great Commission to be in ministry to “all nations” — and, therefore, not just to one’s own. We do this only because Jesus has been given authority and he has sent us out from our homes not for a short-term “missionary experience” but to make disciples, baptize and teach — and learn in our own persons what it means to serve in the name of Christ.

Although I may have been given a working title by our current chair which would lead you to expect me to answer the provocative question of whether Apostolic Mission Service is a concept to be relegated to the past — albeit a past covering a good 2,000 years — or whether it may provide a proper challenge for the future of the United Methodist Church in general and the General Board of Global Ministries in particular, I find myself unable to deal with that question directly.

I have, in fact, avoided addressing issues within the Board, because I think the Board has been both a victim and a perpetrator in the dissipation of the missionary energies of the United Methodist Church today. As an institution, it has tried to retain its claim to have a monopoly on missionary activity — a monopoly which was always only a pragmatic matter and never based on sound theological foundations. At the same time, it has sought to respond to and to accommodate the cries from various corners of the church for programs especially tailored to highly divergent groups of sponsors or clients. Both the one and the other have happened without carefully considering the unifying

theological rationale behind many of the demands and without maintaining a common standard for their fulfillment.

Many of us would have “songs to sing” – as the Germans say — about aspects of this diversification at the cost of focus and the role played by new initiatives in displacing older initiatives just as they begin to bear fruit. Admittedly, many vines seem to bear no more fruit and need to be pruned, while others bear fruit after long cycles of growth and harvest for which we have little patience in our age of instant gratification, sound bites, and photo opportunities.

The Board has also been subject both to faulty directives from the general church — i.e., divestment of reserves just before they might well have been needed; internal mismanagement in small and great matters of lesser and greater importance; and to a general withdrawal of funding support related inexorably to rising local church costs and decreasing local church memberships.

I would, however, contend that the idea of Apostolic Mission Service will certainly continue to find a place in the church for the foreseeable and the unforeseeable future, even “to the end of the age.” Matthew holds fast Jesus’ promise to us: “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Whether the current institutions of the church will be able to assist, facilitate and channel that apostolic missionary endeavor is another matter.

As important as it certainly is for mission volunteers and local church members to experience Christian faith, fellowship and service in another country, this is not the same as Apostolic Mission Service. The latter requires, in one form or another, a long-term submission of a person to the rigors and vicissitudes of living and witnessing in the midst of a strange and foreign culture. To “walk in another’s moccasins” cannot just be for a day or a week or a month. It requires walking in them till they need to be repaired or replaced and experiencing how other peoples deal with the exigencies of life. It requires the missionary to discover that Christ has gone on before to the foreign shore. And it behooves the missionary to perceive how other peoples receive and pass on the gospel and the word that Jesus is also present with them. Again, I remind us of Jesus’ promise: “Remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” – and the ends of the earth.

[5] **COORDINATOR’S CORNER** by Fred Price

As I write, two months remain to the year 2005. November brings the great American holiday, Thanksgiving and December brings the great Christian holy day, Christmas. The months and days bring to mind the themes of thankfulness and giving.

As UMMA's Coordinator I am thankful for what has been given. I am thankful to my predecessor, Gil Bascom, and the gift he gave all of us in his pioneering service as UMMA's first Coordinator. I am thankful to you, my sisters and brothers, for your service given to the world in the name of Jesus Christ. I am thankful to God for the greatest gift of all, Jesus Christ.

In my role as Coordinator, I have the privilege of hearing from many of you and the responsibility of receiving and recording membership dues. Allow me to say simply, yet heartily, "Thank you for your support of UMMA." If you have not already done so, you

can still send in your dues for 2005. In the next Update, I'll give a brief report on our membership numbers.

At the recently completed UMMA Gathering, it was suggested that we provide our UMMA family the opportunity of giving bequests in support of UMMA's work on behalf of the United Methodist Missionary community. A bequest given to UMMA would be a wonderful way to take year end themes such as thankfulness and giving and make them daily realities for years to come.

In the next Update, we will provide more details on the possibility of bequests. In the meantime, may I again say, "Thank you," for the gift of your lives given on a daily basis. May the year-end holiday and the year-end holy day combine to bring blessing to you and God's world.

If not paid, please send your 2005 Dues today so we can meet our budget.

Dues (\$25 each for Full (voting) Membership; \$15 each for Affiliate Membership) should be made payable to: "UMMA" and sent to:

**Fred Price, UMMA Coordinator
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