

UMMA UpDate #46, October 24, 2006
e-bulletin of the
United Methodist Missionary Association
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"Linking mission workers worldwide and moving forward"

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[1] A STATEMENT OF CONCERN

We, members of the United Methodist Missionary Association and missionaries sent by the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries to serve in many lands meeting in Stamford, CT, in October 2006, wish to share our concern for the state of our world today.

As disciples of Christ sent to show God’s love to all peoples in the example of Christ, our hearts are troubled by the arrogance we see manifested in our U.S. government’s policies and use of power, including:

- the war against and occupation of Iraq, the killing of tens of thousands of civilians, the self-deception used to gain support to go to war in 2003, and the current lack of a plan to get us out of Iraq;
- the allocation of many times more money for war than for addressing the suffering, hunger, and lack of health care and education of more than four billion of our brothers and sisters in the world;
- failure to take strong leadership in the world to address global climate destabilization – a crisis that is affecting all life on earth;
- laws that legalize torture and strip detainees of the fundamental right to go before a judge and hear both why they are being detained and real evidence for their detention. (Historically, those societies without the right to a writ of habeas corpus can be expected to become police states.)

These policies do not show reverence and support for God’s children which the gospel expects of us; they inhibit God’s will for abundant life for all from coming to pass, especially for people of the global south and people of color. Such policies treat these people as sub-human.

May God forgive our perceived silence as members of the church in allowing injustice, and our inaction in not relentlessly pursuing peace with justice.

We commit ourselves to speak out, to become active and to urge our church to lead in acting and advocating for change.

We urgently call the body of Christ and its leadership to speak prophetically to power and to make clear the cost of discipleship and the consequences of following the Christ who was crucified for his opposition to violence, oppression and injustice.

[2] *UMMA Fall Gathering - Excerpts from Chair's Report by James Dwyer*

As we mark another year of the life of the United Methodist Missionary Association, it is my first report as chair to the annual meeting.

Many efforts have been undertaken this year by many members for the improvement of our Association and for a more vital understanding of mission in The United Methodist Church. It has been obvious for months that our former chair Norma Kehrberg and her committee were running rings around the current officers in preparation for our Mission Forum and Gathering at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary (G-ETS) on the campus of Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, scheduled in lieu of the UMMA Gathering in October. Note that G-ETS is not far from O'Hare or even the Milwaukee airport, if you don't mind the 75 mile drive.

But not only the 2007 Mission Forum and Gathering Task Force has been active. Richard Vreeland, who assumed leadership of the Collins Task Force last year from Howard Heiner has had quiet contacts with our GBGM staff. At the April 2006 GBGM directors' meeting, the decision was made to give a pay raise to missionaries retroactive to January 1, 2006, corresponding with the pay raise granted staff from January 1, 2006, according to an earlier decision of the directors last October. We can only greet the acknowledgement that missionaries as well as staff can benefit from occasional salary increases.

Obviously, we operated on different pay scales and assumptions about calling and being sent forth, but it is refreshing to experience this solidarity, especially since it required a special step after-the-fact and involved retroactive pay increases.

...Although it is often hard to see cause and effect, we know the comparison of clergy benefits and missionary annuity rates and a transparency in the use of the Collins Funds have been a strong emphasis of UMMA and the Collins Task Force since their inception. After the Board meeting we can report that GBGM Treasurer Roland Fernandes recommended, and the Directors approved, an increase in annuity rates for standard support missionaries of \$25 for year of service from the current \$420 to \$445 effective January 1, 2007. This compares to UMMA's figures of \$540.81 for 2007 as 1% of the "Denominational Average Compensation."

...A nagging ("gnawing") concern plagues many returning from lands where dental and medical care may have been dirt cheap, but in part for good reason, to the expensive medical and dental costs in the U.S.A.... The costs of bringing dental problems in order through remedial treatment on the meager dental (as well as hearing or vision) allowances in our medical benefits program continues to be a matter of concern for which UMMA should continue to raise its voice, toothless though we may be! *For the full unabridged report click <http://www.umma-global.org> and then Reports.*

[3] COORDINATOR'S REPORT by Fred Price

I have come to appreciate that the Coordinator's job consists in maintaining lists. Lists of all members – ever. Current members. Voting lists. Lists of votes tallied, etc.

In light of the lists mentioned, allow me to report the following Steering Committee elections: in Europe/North Africa: James Dwyer through 2007 and Carol Seckel through 2009; in Sub-Saharan Africa: Jeff Hoover through 2009; in East Asia/Pacific: Sonia Strawn through 2009; in South America: R Stephen Newnum through 2009; in Mexico-Central America: Nan McCurdy through 2007 and Cherie White through 2009. At the Gathering itself, it was determined we would avoid a "run-off" ballot by electing both Dr. Hugh Frazer and Hugh Johnson as retired members of the Steering Committee, increasing the number of retirees on the Committee for this term of office only.

A brief word concerning membership. It is up for the year. It was 372 as of October 7, 2006. Of these 17 were new, 24 returned after two years absence, 23 after three years and 17 after four years. There are 17 members who have paid through 2007. I hope we will be able to exceed 400 total members for the year. I will be offering a two-for-one deal for those who have not already sent in their membership. With one membership fee, they will cover 2006 and 2007. ***Come join The 400 Club!***

Editorial note: Just make your check to "UMMA" for \$25.00 and mail to: Rev. Fred Price, 165 Grandview Ave, Pitman, NJ 08071 For the full unabridged report click <http://www.umma-global.org> and then ...Reports.

[4] Evanston 2007 Mission Gathering and Forum by Norma Kehrberg

With the theme: "***Bridges of Hope***" plans are moving forward for the Mission Gathering and Forum at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary from August 5-8, 2007. Featured speakers include: Bishop Roy Sano; Dr. R. Randy Day, General Secretary of the GBGM; Ruth Daugherty, former President of UMW; Dr. Steven Ybarrola, Professor of Anthropology at Asbury seminary and Dr. Robert Hunt, former missionary and currently at Perkins School of Theology among others who have been invited. Roundtable discussions are being planned with missionary leaders including Nan McCurdy, Miguel Mairena, Dr. Hugh Frazer among others being contacted. Each evening is planned to conclude with a mission witness.

The active North Central Short Term Volunteer in Mission Program has joined as a participating group and will lead roundtable discussions on short term volunteers. Musicians from Naperville Community United Methodist Church will open the Gathering and Forum at 7:00 PM on Sunday evening, August 5, 2007.

The Gathering is for everyone: local church members; local and district church mission leaders; volunteers in mission; deaconesses, home missionaries and home missionaries; church and community workers; former, active and retired missionaries; and all who want to be inspired and energized for mission in the United Methodist Church.

Plan now to join the three-day Mission Gathering and Forum from August 5-8, 2007 at the Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary near the shores of Lake Michigan. Come prepared to be inspired and to inspire others with your story and song. Allow time afterwards to visit the Millennium Park and other cultural places in metro Chicago area. Registration details will be available in mid-November with a \$35.00 registration fee. See the next issue of UMMA UpDate for details. See you there!

[5] "The Christian Struggle" by Ronald R. Ray

As members of UMMA we would like to think that the decision to invite Ron and Diane to be present at the Board meeting, October 10, 2006 at Stamford, CT. and to speak is an outgrowth of our often reiterated request for more input and more "presence" of standard support and other missionaries in deliberations of the directors. Our thanks to Ron for his words and his service with UMMA. He recently retired as a member of the UMMA Steering Committee.

On behalf of us "recent graduates" I would like to thank the Board and staff for caring so much as to invite us to this Fall Board meeting. We would also like to thank the Board and staff for your dedicated work in witness to Christ and in helping others in mission to serve here and abroad.

Though Diane and I must speak from our own perspectives, we hope that our words will remind you of the joys and struggles of your service. Perhaps at this early point I might be allowed to mention a housekeeping item. We graduates much appreciate the generous retirement package provided by the Collins Health Care Plan, though the allowance for dental care needs to be improved. I must, however, candidly point out that a GBGM pension is significantly lower than what our Church provides for regular clergy. I served as a parish minister for less than a quarter of the time that I served as a GBGM standard support missionary. My pension for only 7 years of parish ministry is larger than my GBGM one for over 28 years of service. I would encourage this Board to consider raising mission pensions toward the average of those received by parish ministers. When we began GBGM service we were told that full support missionary salaries were to equal the average of parish ministers' salaries. Yet for most of our years of service missionary salaries remained stagnant. Today the discrepancy with pastors' salaries is astonishing. So, even as salaries are beginning to be raised – thank you very much – pensions also need to be considerably raised. Now for the other matters.

When itinerating in churches we have often been asked concerning what we have accomplished in our years of mission service. Some friends have even joked that after we have been in a country it appears to be worse than when we arrived. Nigeria is still noted for corruption, and Kenya runs close competition. I wonder why my friends don't joke about the U.S. since I also served here and things are not going so well here.

Jesus' impact on the world was and is qualitatively greater than that of Christians, but even He offered only signs of the Kingdom. He could not heal everyone, for he did not meet everyone. For the same reason He could not preach forgiveness and repentance to everyone. Nor has this world become heavenly for His having been here. But the Spirit of the Risen Christ can empower Christians to struggle to offer faithful witness on the behalf of Christ. What non-Christians and nominal Christians require from us are lives and words that reflect loyalty to the God revealed in Christ, so that genuine Christian Faith can become a live option. *(Please continue on the last two pages).*

[6] MISSIONARY MILESTONES

Gladys E. Gipe, age 88, passed away July 16th. With a Masters Degree in Christian Education, she served in China, the Philippines and Redbird Mission. She was an artist who loved to paint and make crafts with her grandchildren. She was active in the UM Church where she was an active member involved in many circles. Condolences to her

daughter, Divina (Gipe) Spies, 3301 Dibrell Drive, Plano, TX 75023 or via: www.keller-ochs-kochfuneralhome.com

Mary Fitzpatrick Zambrano Clasper died on October 15 in the Health Services Center at Pilgrim Place, Claremont, CA. She served in Mexico, first going as a short-termer and then continuing as a regular missionary until she married Dr. Ariel Zambrano. Though diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in August, she was still active until suffering a stroke on October 4. She and Paul Clasper, whom she married on Feb. 17, 2006 had a marvelous family reunion in Mary's home area of Tennessee. The day after they returned, Mary suffered a stroke, affecting her right side and the ability to speak. She was preceded in death by her first husband Ariel Zambrano in 2005.

[7] OUR READERS WRITE

Dear Richard, Thanks for sharing. Does UMMA have any committee working with those at the Board who deal with our needs? They put a ceiling for dental work at \$1000. I am having two crowns this year at \$800 each. As we grow older I at least have more dental work to be done. Someone should pursue this problem. Sincerely, Frances Bray

Dear Dr. Schwenk: Greetings from the Philippines, and from Fairview Park UMC. Please extend my best personal regards to Dr. L. Elbert Wethington, one of my former professors at Union Theological Seminary in the early 60's. I am happy to know that he is still very active in his ministry. God bless. Sincerely yours, Rev. Anacleto G. Guerrero

Thanks, Ric, for this excellent issue of UMMA Update. You do a great job! Hope you'll have a productive and enjoyable UMMA Gathering at Stamford in October. It was good to be with you and Caring at the reunion. Glad to have Elbert's sermon. - Pat Brockman

Correction: Re: the story she told at the Philippine Reunion at Lake Junaluska, Claudia Webster wrote: *I am a **Chickasaw**, not Cherokee. We were on Cherokee land though when I told the brief story of the "Trail of Tears" which was experienced by the "Five Civilized Tribes" Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Creek and Seminole. All were removed from their ancestral lands east of the Mississippi River to "Indian Territory" which became Oklahoma. - Claudia Webster*

Thank you very much for keeping me informed on the UMMA activities. Blessings for your work. - Thomas Kemper, United Methodist Church in Germany, German Central Conference, Board of Mission and International Church Cooperation, Wuppertal, Germany

Dear Manong Rick, Thank you very much for recommending the UMNS commentary on water as a must read. Another one I recommend is in the current issue of our Perspectives newsletter which is about UMs in the fight against HIV and AIDS. Please urge your readers to take a look at this important aspect of our health and healing ministry. Two missionaries – Cherian and Kalinda Thomas of GBGM – have articles in this newsletter which is attached. Regards to Manang Caring. – Levi Bautista

Marion Kline, UMMA member, retired from the Philippines, has just published a book: **Decisions, Decisions, Decisions, Decisions**, available through Cokesbury, Barnes and Noble and on-line book stores. Cost \$20.95 + tax.

“The Christian Struggle” by Ronald R. Ray (continued from page 4).

One of our Kenyan staff colleagues recently completed his Kenyan Ph.D. research with a study year in Britain. Toward the end of his period away he wrote that he was missing much our lively staff discussions of the problems of our institution and of Kenya. We also miss those discussions and struggles. Yes, our institution still has a considerably authoritarian principal and yes, our college’s Board is still largely passive and tends uncritically to accept the big man’s word. But over the years that we served at St. Paul’s United Theological College, Kenyan staff members have become more vigorous in insisting on their own rights. There was a time when only the expatriates argued that the Board should raise Kenyan staff salaries. At that time the Kenyan staff members were too fearful to stand up. Now the Kenyan staff is the most active in addressing that justice issue. When we arrived there were few women training for the ordained ministry. Now 60 of the theological students are women. That achievement is due primarily to a courageous and talented Kenyan Academic Dean of the female gender. But in recent years most of the staff have been actively engaged in justice issues, and have also supported the Academic Dean in her struggles with the Principal.

It is foolish for Christians to expect this world to become like heaven, for we live between the times and this world remains sinful. If we are motivated by the hope that this world will become heavenly, we will likely soon become disappointed and discouraged. What we should look for and then share in are the struggles of God’s Kingship in this world, that we may cooperate with God’s Kingly endeavors.

As for involvement in worthwhile struggles, long-term cross-cultural missionaries may find themselves culturally caught in the middle. Seeing things from a broader world perspective, they may become more critical of both the society from which they are sent and also the one to which they are sent. They may find that though they are somewhat at home in both, they are not entirely at home in either place. But are such feelings so bad? Perhaps such missionaries can remind the Church that all Christians are to be “in but not *of* the world.” Paul said, “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2). We are to appreciate God’s good creation, but without comfortably settling in or dropping our critical guard. Cross-cultural missionaries in particular should remember that they are not sent as representative specimens of the particular nation and culture from which they come. They are sent as representatives of the world Church in her concern to witness concerning Jesus Christ. The Christian ethical argument can never be that such and such is just the way things are commonly done in America or is the way things are done in Kenya or some other nation. There and here we must always ask the harder and more Christian question, how Christ would have us live.

Diane and I have worked under Nigerian and then Kenyan administrators and had little direct power. But on each issue that arose we spoke freely on behalf of policies that we thought consistent with justice, that is with the Golden Rule, and criticized those we thought inconsistent with the same. In both Nigeria and Kenya we tried to challenge corruption, the “big man” mentality, male chauvinism, tribalism, and polygamy. We did so because like other United Methodists we do not think that Christian Faith has only to do with a belief in Christ and experiences of religious emotion. The Bible’s essential core bears witness to culture-challenging and culture-transforming moral traditions revealed in Christ.

We found that we could criticize as long as we retained a sense of humor, exhibited openness and self-criticism, and also criticized the U.S. and in West. In the places we have served – including the U.S. – we have sometimes had to pay the price of such Christian freedom. Amid such struggles we have been sustained by the God who goes with Christians who strive to be faithful. Paul spoke of being the children of God, but insisted that the proviso is that we suffer with Christ (Rom. 8:17).

When I told our Kenyan principal that we would be retiring he could hardly keep himself from smiling, at least concerning my own departure. Diane was somewhat more acceptable in his eyes. Many principals we have served under have exhibited the big man mentality that has been strangling Africa. Africans need liberation from such oppression, and Christian missionaries need to participate in the struggle against such oppression.

When visiting U.S. churches many Christians indicate that they regard Africa as a hopeless continent, though many still seem to think of Africa as a nation, rather than a continent. Sure, Africa has extreme problems, as did California in early gold rush days. Nationhood and democracy are very new to Africa. Educational levels are still low; poverty is rampant; and the HIV-AIDS pandemic is lowering life expectancy, blocking economic progress and destroying family life. But Christians are struggling against these and other problems, and such opposition struggles are a sign of hope.

What about this country? Since 9-11 we have had dark times not primarily because of the terrorist attack, but because of the response of the current administration, the uncritical support of the administration by the congress, and the equally uncritical acceptance of the government's rhetoric and decisions by many citizens. Some Americans seem to care most about their own comfort. Many, even most, seem to have little idea of what is really occurring in this nation, let alone in the broader world. Many do not read serious news sources so as to be able to critically assess policies. The eternal vigilance required for democracy's working seems widely lacking. We not only have much sound bite theology but much sound bite politics. Many seem to operate from an ideological slant and do not want to be bothered by hard factual information that flies in the face of prior assumptions. For example, our nation's security agencies recently concluded that the war in Iraq has increased world terrorism, not diminished it, as our President keeps repeating. Our President insists that the report is incorrect, but offers no evidence to sustain his view. We are supposed to accept his conclusion on authority. This, however, is how authoritarian governments work, not democracies. And why impugn the patriotism of those who disagree with the Administration? This also is not the way democracies should work.

Those working abroad know firsthand how far America's standing in the world has fallen. Our democracy has been eroded in the name of defending it. Our government says that it wants to promote freedom and democracy abroad, but at the same time it curtails freedom and democracy at home. Many of our leaders have used the fig leaf of pious Christian talk to cover their injustice, pursuing policies of welfare for the rich, while trying to propagandize the rest of us into thinking that the Administration represents Christian values. Our leaders may not take the name of the Lord in vain, that is they may not try to manipulate the divine, but they do use God's name to try to manipulate us.

To tie together the African and American challenges to which I have referred, I would conclude that this world is indeed a treacherous place. Jesus so warned us when He said, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Mt. 10:16). Granted this world's sinfulness, faithful disciples must continually struggle to be "wise as serpents," always striving to understand reality as it truly is, rather than as we wish it were. But granted the nature of our Christian calling, we must even more be "innocent as doves," always struggling to serve the Lord faithfully, and having no price by which we can be bought.