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From the Bishop

The view from my seat

Now home from Fort Worth, Texas, I share with you what the 2008 General Conference looked like from my seat. As you may already know, we bishops sit up front at General Conference, take turns presiding and preaching, but do not speak otherwise or vote. Mostly, we watch the process and the proceedings. Here is what I saw from my seat:

First, General Conference was positive, focused upon our mission of “making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world,” and eager to embrace the global nature of our church. The delegates gladly affirmed the direction we bishops and the denomination’s Connectional Table proposed, even building the bud-



Bishop Mike Coyner presides over General Conference the morning of April 28.

get around those four areas of focus:

- ◆ Developing principled Christian leaders;
- ◆ Creating new places for new people by starting new congregations and renewing existing ones;

- ◆ Engaging in ministries with the poor; and
- ◆ Improving global health, especially attacking the killer diseases of poverty.

“I left General Conference proud to be a United Methodist.”

- Bishop Coyner

Second, General Conference continues to struggle with the issue of homosexuality, and even though our current stance was maintained again as it has been since 1972, the debate this time was more caring, the discussion more theological and biblical, and the tone was more that of Christian conferencing. There is still much division and pain in our church over this issue, and as was stated by the Rev. Kim Reisman of North Indiana in her presentation of the majority report which carried the final vote, we are still waiting to see what God intends for our church to learn from this long and difficult debate.

Third, our United Methodist Church continues to become a more global church, and this presents us with many challenges and growing pains. Language interpretation was required at each session and in every committee. Awareness that we are not just a United States-based church is a new realization for some people, but the Conference seemed to grow into this awareness. There are many difficult decisions which will come as we attempt to be more global, including the decision to reduce the number of U.S. bishops in our UMC in 2012, so that we can expand the number of bishops in Africa to deal with the enormous growth of the church in that region.

Fourth, just like any local congregation, General Conference seemed to be at its best and to have its most clear identity during the wonderful services of worship. At times, it was actually a relief to move from business sessions into worship. Somehow we are at our best and most fully the church when we worship God together.

I am glad that General Conference is over. I am pleased to be back in Indiana to deal with our own issues and challenges. But I left General Conference proud to be a United Methodist, and I hope you are, too.

*Bishop Michael J. Coyner
Indiana Area of
The United Methodist Church
“Making a Difference in Indiana
and around the world”*