

## Holy Conferencing gave hopeful tone to the church

The 10-day marathon we United Methodists know as General Conference has concluded in Fort Worth. As a reporter of several such conferences, I felt the move toward “holy conferencing,” a more gracious Christian way of doing business. It diminished the political and emotional aspects of this gathering of 992 delegates from around the world, including Indiana Area’s 22 voting delegates, reserves and visitors.

I felt the African and other Central Conference delegates were no longer observers of floor action, but entered the body with voice, vote and a lively participation in many legislative discussions. The global dimensions of the church were present. Liberia President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf made history as she addressed the delegates asking for their support as partners in eradicating poverty. The hall was ecstatic when she thanked the church “as a daughter of the church.”

The main barrier to equal participation by all delegates continues to be the eight languages spoken by delegates and the cumbersome Robert’s Rules of Order, which pits seasoned church politicians against newcomers to a foreign decision making process. Even bishops at times became entangled by parliamentary procedures.

As a church, we are moving

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forward in meeting the needs of our world in new and effective partnerships. Our alliance with the United Nations Foundation, NBA, WNBA, *Sports Illustrated* and the Gates Foundation gives us new momentum in conquering malaria across the continent of Africa one \$10 bed net at a time. Unfortunately, our enthusiasm for conquering HIV/AIDS on the same continent waned by several millions of dollars since the church last met as a General Conference in 2004. We have accepted the challenges of world health, now we need to deliver.

For the fifth decade running, General Conference continues to debate by the hour the status of homosexual members in the life of the church. A 55 percent majority of delegates did not budge on the church’s stance on the ordination of homosexuals or on same-sex union rituals in our churches or by our pastors. During this debate delegates discussed the possibility of changing judgmental language, and to openly say that as “faithful and thoughtful people who have grappled with this issue deeply disagree with one another; yet all seek

a faithful witness,” but voted to maintain the status quo and retain the current language stating that homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.

This action was met with a 15-minute recess during which time more than 200 supporters (including 16 bishops) of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community within the life of the church draped black cloths over the communion table placed at the crossing of the two main aisles on the floor of the conference.

Progress was made with a \$642-million four-year budget, giving priority to the four strategic goals of the church:

- ♦ 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 (like malaria).

This General Conference focused the church on growth with a goal of one new congregation per

day and the revitalization of existing congregations. This goal goes hand-in-hand with our own proposed uniting of the North Indiana and South Indiana Annual Conferences with a focus on growth. Even though it would be a new structure with an emphasis upon congregational vitality, professions of faith would continue to be dependent upon congregations inviting and welcoming un-churched Hoosiers.

To accomplish a goal of making new disciples of Jesus Christ, congregational life must look outward and not inward. We know people will not automatically walk through our doors. Today church buildings culturally are viewed as private places. We must change from within to make them public places for public gatherings, self-help groups and associations needing a place to meet. Our worship needs to be lively, available beyond Sunday morning, beyond our buildings and pertinent to the spiritual and emotional needs of the greater communities in which we live. Each congregation also needs to be a volunteer-in-mission sending center to meet the needs of our communities and world.

In all our doing, we also must remember to invite and welcome

others to join us as members in the body of Christ.

Hopefully, the 22 Hoosier delegates and their reserves will be able to impart their excitement and the goals of the General Conference during each of the respective annual conference sessions this spring in West Lafayette and Bloomington.



As United Methodists, we know what divides us as a people. We need to concentrate and work on what unites us as we continue to become The UNITED Methodist Church.

I felt more hope than despair at the close of this General Conference compared to the two previous General Conferences held this decade. We need to express more unity among our growing diversity, more hope for our future and partnerships with other congregations and pastors as we remember that making disciples of Jesus Christ is only the means for redeeming and transforming God’s creation. Such actions are attainable if we follow in Christ’s way rather than our own way. The reign of God continues to be within our reach, if only we place our trust in God’s Spirit working in and through us.

*Daniel R. Gangler*

## Indiana Schools of Christian Mission to be held in July

The North Indiana Conference and South Indiana Conference Schools of Christian Mission will be held respectively at North Manchester College in North Manchester and the University of Indianapolis during July. Both will offer a one-day school as well as a four-day school. Here is information for both schools. More information is available online.

### North Indiana School

The North Indiana Conference United Methodist Women announces the 2008 School of Christian Mission to be held Wednesday, July 9 for the Drive-In Day

and Wednesday evening, July 9, through Saturday, July 12 at Manchester College.

The 2008 theme is “Living the Sacred: Psalm 21:1” including these studies and leaders: “I Believe in Jesus Spiritual Growth” with the Rev. Dr. Derek Weber; “Israel and Palestine” with Dr. James Dwyer, Dona Lou Imler, Robert Epps and Nancy Myers; “Giving Our Hearts Away - Native American Survival” with Susan Jennys and the Rev. Evelyn Taylor-Haney, the Rev. Jon Walters, and La Donna Weber. Other leaders include: Chi-Mi-Ca (Children’s Program) with Mary

Margaret Willbanks and Joan Schell; and Yo-Pe-Mi-Ca (Youth Program) with the Rev. Jeanine L. Walker.

More information for the North Indiana School can be found by logging on to: [www.gbgm-umc.org/nicumw/scminformation.html](http://www.gbgm-umc.org/nicumw/scminformation.html) To register for the NIC School of Christian Mission or NIC Drive-In Day, contact Barbara McCoy, e-mail address [barb.mccoy@verizon.net](mailto:barb.mccoy@verizon.net).

### South Indiana School

The South Indiana Conference School of Christian Mission will be held on the campus of the Uni-

versity of Indianapolis, July 26-Super Saturday Session or July 27-30 Weekday School. The 2008 Theme is “Living the Sacred.”

Studies this year include: Spiritual Growth Study, “I Believe in Jesus” with Bishop Michael Coyner; Geographic Study: “Israel-Palestine” with the Rev. Mary Wilder Cartwright and the Rev. James Dwyer; Current Issue Study: “Giving Our Hearts Away: Native American Survival” with the Revs. Dr. P.T. Wilson and Billie Nowabbi; Young Women’s Study: “Giving Our Hearts Away: Native American Survival” with Rita Gaither-Gant. Youth Study: “Walk-

ing in These White Man Shoes” with Kathy White and children’s study: “Creator Sang a Welcoming Song” with and Barbara King.

This school is designed for mission committee members, lay leaders, pastors, United Methodist Women members, young women, youth and children. Activities will include: Mission studies, worship, music, UMW officer update, mission update, mission education resources, videos, a hands-on mission project, fellowship and a banquet.

For more information check out the *Southwind* newsletter by logging onto: [www.gbgm-umc.org/sicumw/](http://www.gbgm-umc.org/sicumw/).

## Governor honors Bill and Gloria Gaither with state’s highest award



INDIANAPOLIS – Indiana’s Governor Mitch Daniels honored gospel music singing and songwriting pioneers Bill and Gloria Gaither of Alexandria, Ind., on April 2 with the 2008 Sachem Award, the state’s highest honor.

“With all the success they have achieved, the Gaithers still live with us: in the house in which

Gospel songwriters, singers Bill and Gloria Gaither receive the Sachem award from Governor Mitch Daniels in ceremonies at the Indiana State Museum in Indianapolis.

they raised their children, in the way in which they raised those children, in the way in which they and their music have spoken to us and to the better angels of our nature now for 50 plus years,” said Daniels.

The Sachem is given annually by the Governor of Indiana to recognize a lifetime of excellence and moral virtue that has brought credit and honor to Indiana.

The Gaithers, a favorite of many United Methodists nationwide, have collaborated on more than 700 popular gospel songs,

winning eight Grammy Awards and more than two dozen Dove Awards from The Gospel Music Association (GMA). *The Indianapolis Star* named “He Touched Me” (#367 in *The United Methodist Hymnal*) among the top 10 songs of the 20th century written by a Hoosier. *The UM Hymnal* also has three other Gaither songs.

Bill Gaither told *Together* that the three leading users of their music are Southern Baptists, Roman Catholics and United Methodists.