



OCTOBER 2011

General Commission on the Status and Role of Women
in The United Methodist Church



To honor the Commission's work and ministries toward full participation of

women throughout The United Methodist Church, GCSRW offers our commemorative pin. To purchase, please send your name, mailing address and a \$25 check payable to GCSRW, 77 W. Washington Street, Suite 1009, Chicago, IL 60602.

Give now to the
Advocacy for Women
ENDOWMENT FUND

You can make a donation to the Advocacy for Women Endowment Fund to fund antisexism ministries around the world, a permanent GCSRW internship, and research about women. Click [HERE](#) for more information.



The people of the United
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We're celebrating 40 years of ministry

GCSRW turns 40 in 2012, and we're planning a yearlong celebration

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GCSRW 40TH ANNIVERSARY

We're celebrating 40 years of ministry

The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (GCSRW) turns 40 in 2012, and we're planning a yearlong celebration, from a commemorative video to testimonials to a Sunday, April 29, worship celebration at General Conference in Tampa, to a series of articles and worship resources for local churches to be launched starting in January.



Created in 1972 by The United Methodist Church, the commission's central ministries are:

1. Advocacy for and empowerment of women who are members of and served by The United Methodist Church.
2. Challenging institutional sexism so that the denomination becomes a more authentic reflection of Christian community.
3. Confronting sexual abuse and misconduct in church settings.
4. Engaging and nurturing lay and clergy women into leadership and decision-making in the global life of our church.

You can join our anniversary celebration by becoming a partner in ministry through your congregation, district, seminary or college, conference or agency. Gather a group of women and men in your ministry setting or get involved in your conference Commission on the Status and Role of Women (or equivalent) and:

- » Subscribe to our free, online newsletter--**THE FLYER**
- » Invite your annual conference commission chairperson to meet with women from your church (or a cluster of churches) to discuss issues you believe the church should be addressing with regard to empowering women, addressing sexism and battling sexual misconduct/abuse.
- » Remind your conference that the commission has asked for time during the 2012 session to mark the 40th anniversary, including showing a five-minute video, which will be ready in April 2012.
- » Sponsor a bulletin board in your church or office to help people learn about the work of the commission. Call 312.346.4900 or email gcsrw@gcsrw.org to get brochures and other materials for your display or bulletin board.
- » Write a commentary for the commission's website (500 word maximum, submit by **email**) and/or blog on your own church websites about what the ministries of the commission have meant in your own life and ministries.
- » Invite testimonials for women--and men--who understand and embrace the notion of a church in

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ministry for Jesus Christ, living authentically beyond sexism and combining social justice and piety.

- » Get to know the delegates from your annual conference to General Conference and express your support of GCSRW—and why you believe the ministries of GCSRW should be maintained by the church.
- » Encourage women in your delegation to plan to attend our Orientation for Women Delegates on Monday, April 24 and our special worship event on Sunday, April 29 (10 a.m.)
- » Join our Facebook group **General Commission on the Status and Role of Women.**
- » Pray for our work, that we stay faithful to God’s call in our lives as a team and to God’s call to speak justice and equity in our denomination.

GENERAL CONFERENCE

Women and the ‘Call to Action’

How proposed changes in churchwide structure, focus could impact women

By Lesley A. Carter*

The Council of Bishops and the Connectional Table have issued a “Call to Action” to the entire United Methodist Church, and have set specific goals and measured aims at reinvigorating denomination-wide growth, vitality, mission and leadership.

The first recommendations for the **Call to Action** have been forwarded to the 2012 General Conference, and relate to restructuring churchwide agencies. However, as far-reaching and potentially radical for the denomination are other recommendations to meet what is being termed the “adaptive challenge,” which is:

To redirect the flow of attention, energy and resources to an intense concentration on fostering and sustaining an increase in the number of vital congregations effective in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Specific recommendations from the Council of Bishops and the Connectional Table to help the church meet this challenge include:

- » Establishing and enforcing metrics for United Methodist congregations, pastors, bishops and annual conferences related to mission, congregational growth and vitality, new church starts, and fostering excellence in leadership.
- » Engaging and equipping United Methodist laypersons more fully as partners in evangelism, Christian education, discipleship and Christian social action.
- » Support and partnership with United Methodists in Africa, Europe and the Philippines, specifically around theological education.
- » Revamping the apportionment system and how best to collect and use funds for connectional ministries.

Editor’s Note: General Conference, the top law-making body of The United Methodist Church, convenes April 24-May 4, 2012, in Tampa, Fla. The FLYER is offering a series of articles to inform, prepare and urge delegates and all church members to consider how actions will hurt or hinder lay or clergy women. A powerpoint presentation on the Call to Action proposals and the potential impact on the ministries of GCSRW is available on our website



Sally Dyck

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- » Nurturing pastors under age 35 by helping them offset seminary debt and offering other incentives to bring younger people into ministerial leadership.

As proposals for sweeping changes are being considered by delegates to the **2012 General Conference**, the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women is asking about the potential impact on laywomen and clergywomen, on unchurched women and young women, on low-income women and Central Conference women. Among our questions:



Erin Hawkins

- » How will these changes improve the denomination’s outreach to women?
- » Which women have been included as architects of these proposed changes?
- » Where in the new proposals are evidence of the denomination’s ongoing commitment to dismantling institutional sexism and gender bias across the worldwide church?
- » How will life in the church improve for those women who may still feel disenfranchised?
- » In what ways will these changes assist the church in reaching, empowering, and bringing into church participation and membership more U.S. racial-ethnic women, young women, older women, poor women and other groups traditionally underrepresented and underserved in The United Methodist Church?

POSSIBLE GAINS FOR WOMEN

Bishop Sally Dyck of the Minnesota Annual Conference says, “The Call to Action can potentially help laity to understand what it means to be in ministry as opposed to being on a committee.”

With respect to women in particular, Erin Hawkins, general secretary of the **General Commission on Religion and Race (GCRR)**, adds, “The cultivation and rotation of lay leadership can give women access and a boost throughout our connectional system, and ultimately help women be leaders everywhere.”

Even as the church fosters lay leadership, many are concerned about the possible elimination of some boards and agencies that historically have given women a voice and a seat at the tables of power. [The agency restructure proposals would reduce 10 agencies into five agencies, and would set apart the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (GCSRW) and GCRR.]

Mary Brooke Casad, executive secretary of the Connectional Table, emphasizes the importance of vigilance, “With fewer voices [at churchwide leadership tables], it will be incumbent on us to ensure the leaders represent a cross-section of our church. It is critical for our success.”

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The Rev. Cynthia Moore of the Baltimore-Washington Conference who is implementing the conference Call to Action initiative, agrees but points out that minimizing the church's structure can also have a positive impact: "I'm hopeful that by streamlining and eliminating some overhead, the church can ultimately do greater things."

ON GUARANTEED APPOINTMENTS

Another issue that has generated a large amount of conversation and concern is the proposed elimination of guaranteed appointments, especially given Call to Action's "re-visioning" of what vital pastoral ministry should look like.

Bishop Dyck points out, "The church doesn't exist for clergy - clergy exist for the church. We need clergy who can give their attention and their heart to their communities. If their ministry is primarily about taking care of people, then Call to Action will be a challenge for them."

Adds Moore, "The leadership skills that are needed are contrary to what has been nurtured so far in our denomination. This will be a really different ball game!"

GENDER, CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

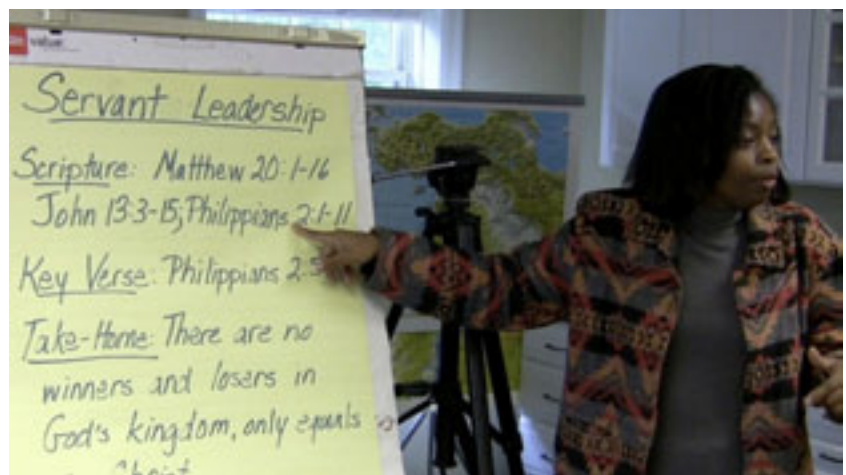
Standards of accountability, however, should be applied equally across the board, says Hawkins, especially for those women who find themselves appointed to churches where they are unwelcome and unsupported. Moore agrees: "Any time there is a group that has historically been oppressed, there's bound to be concern.

"We need to ensure that accountability measures are standard and that any consequences are uniform across gender," she says. And if the time comes for some clergy to exit the ministry, says Casad, "We need to find just and compassionate ways for them to do that."

Although the Call to Action's focus on metrics is intended to identify where clergy and churches need to broaden their scope, not every aspect of church life can be measured accurately, Dyck admits. "We need to look at how the church really addresses the hard issues of life; doing that well can strengthen the church's vitality, especially with the possibilities for small groups and lay leadership," she adds.

Cultural, racial and ethnic issues must also be considered. "The church is changing at a much slower rate than the world. That has a direct correlation to vitality," Hawkins says.

Depending on cultural contexts, some parts of The United Methodist Church might struggle with how they implement the Call to Action and respond to the adaptive challenge, given their specific cultural contexts. Moore admits, "It might be more challenging in those churches for women to take on traditionally male roles or



Cynthia Moore

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vice versa,” she says.

GCSRW asks women and men concerned about gender and racial-cultural inclusion to ask tough questions as changes are implemented, and to make sure that confronting sexism and racism are evident in changing structures and processes.

“No matter how many members a congregation gains or how powerful the preacher is, if they are not challenging injustice and exorcising the sins of racism and sexism through their discipleship training, worship and work, they are not serving Christ effectively,” says M. Garlinda Burton, general secretary.

“The commission favors any change that makes our denomination more vigorous, faithful, just and credible in our witness to the Gospel,” she adds. “We are hopeful that any changes will reflect that witness.”

Lesley Carter is webmaster of the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

WOMEN BY THE NUMBERS

What is a Vital Congregation?

by: Julie Kathleen Schubring

By now many may have heard of the Vital Congregations Project. Just what is it and why are numbers so important to gauging the vitality and health of United Methodist congregations?

The vision of Vital Congregations is “to fulfill the mission of The United Methodist Church by equipping and empowering congregations to become vital and healthy congregations in their communities and in our world.”¹ The Call to Action report lists four key areas that drive the vitality of a congregation, and these are consistent across all sizes of congregations. They are: small groups and programs, worship service, pastor and lay leadership.

Vital congregations make up about 15% of United Methodist congregations in the United States. These congregations stand out in their vitality because they have focused their ministries around the four key areas listed above that flow into 16 key ministry strategies. So what is a vital congregation? Information from both the Vital Congregations project and the Call to Action Report has this to say:

A vital congregation IS:

- » GROWING (Over the past five years has shown statistical data of growth in average worship attendance and professions of faith.)
- » ENGAGING PEOPLE (Over the past five years has shown congregational engagement in multiple ministries including small groups, mission and outreach.)
- » GENEROUS (Over the past five years has shown increases in stewardship and giving within and beyond the local church.)

A vital congregation HAS:

- » Inviting and inspiring worship
- » Engaged disciples in mission and outreach
- » Gifted, equipped and empowered lay leadership
- » Small groups that include children and youth designed to encourage, support and hold disciples accountable in their Christian walk.²

Over the Labor Day Weekend I had the opportunity to visit a United Methodist church in Illinois. My family and I were impressed with this congregation, and felt very welcomed even in the midst of personal grief. Since I had recently learned about the Vital Congregations Project for this article series, I mentally went through the

¹ Vital Congregations Website, www.UMCvitalcongregations.org, accessed August 29, 2011.

² Ibid.

checklist and found that this church could be labeled as an active vital congregation.

Before we delve into the “numbers” part of the Vital Congregation Project, we first need to understand what vital congregation means. With the above description of a vital congregation, how would you measure it? For example: Would you ask about attendance? Membership? Would you ask about small groups? Sunday School? Years of service of the pastor?

What type of questions do you have that does not require a “number” answer but an explanation? How would that be measured? We will explore this topic more fully in the November 2011 issue of the *FLYER*.

*A student at Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary, **Julie Kathleen Schubring** is currently serving as a summer intern at GCSRW. She is also a commissioned Bishop W.T. Handy Young Adult Missionary.*

SEXUAL ETHICS

Judicatory Training in Sexual Ethics

By Darryl W. Stephens

United Methodist bishops, district superintendents and other conference leaders who might be designated by the bishop to handle complaints against clergy are requesting specialized training in record numbers.

In a survey conducted in August, seven out of eight incoming district superintendents say they desire specialized training to handle complaints of sexual misconduct. This need was expressed by 88% of the 2011 incoming class, up from 66% for the 2010 incoming class of district superintendents.

The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (GCSRW) is working to address this need for judicatory training in sexual ethics by providing face-to-face workshops, printed resources and webinars.

FACE-TO-FACE WORKSHOPS

Last January, in conjunction with the Do No Harm event, held in Houston, Texas, GCSRW led a training for more than 70 judicatory leaders. This “Episcopal Best Practices” eight-hour, face-to-face workshop focused on the supervisory response to complaints of sexual misconduct. Coordinated by the women’s commission, the leadership included members of the Interagency Sexual Ethics Task Force and Bill Waddell, the chancellor to the Council of Bishops. This was the first national training on sexual ethics in recent memory for United Methodist district superintendents. In a follow-up evaluation, attendees unanimously agreed they would recommend the workshop to a colleague and overwhelmingly expressed a desire for further training themselves.

This month, GCSRW will lead an on-site training for the Holston Annual Conference bishop and cabinet. This three-hour workshop will focus on effective use of a Response Team when responding to an allegation of sexual misconduct by a ministerial leader. The cabinet training will be followed by a two-day workshop with the Holston Response Team.

PRINTED RESOURCES

GCSRW launched a new publication on judicatory response to sexual misconduct in 2011. *Handling Sexual Misconduct Complaints: A Handbook for United Methodist Bishops and Cabinets* is a **free, downloadable e-book** that provides the best writings available on this topic. The commission began providing one hardcopy of this handbook to every annual conference in the United States.

WEBINARS

The September Wednesday Webinar series provided free training for judicatory leaders and generated much interest. Co-sponsored by the United Methodist Insurance Company and GCSRW, this series of four, one-hour webinars focused on the supervisory response to complaints of clergy sexual misconduct. The series included a process overview by Rick Rettberg, General Counsel for GCFA; a session on working with the accused by Bishop Max Whitfield; a session on working with alleged victims by Garlinda Burton, general secretary of GCSRW; and a session on working with congregations and Response Teams by Darryl Stephens, assistant general secretary of GCSRW. Participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive: most attendees indicated they

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would recommend this series to colleagues and also expressed a desire for future offerings.

If your conference would like training on how to respond to complaints of sexual misconduct or if you have suggestions for future webinar topics, please contact **Darryl Stephens**.



WOMEN TO WATCH

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Dallas clergywoman supports other women in cancer battle

By Heather Peck Stahl

When the Rev. Sheron Patterson was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2006, she decided to turn her battle into a ministry.

A Dallas area columnist, popular pastor, and radio and television personality, Patterson used her position to “empower women with health problems to express their fears and face their situations with bravery,” she says.

“I am helping others because God has blessed me with life. I do not take my blessings for granted. The scriptures say, ‘unto whom much is given, much is required.’ That means I have a lot of helping to do. I have been blessed to be a blessing,” says Patterson, believed to be the first black woman to be ordained in the North Texas Conference.



Rev. Sheron Patterson

Now in her second year as the communications officer in the North Texas Annual Conference, Patterson began her effort to reduce the incidents of breast cancer by establishing the online “Patterson Pledge” in 2006. The **Methodist Health System**, a North Texas health care provider, supported her efforts.

The pledge encourages women to have a mammogram every year, eat healthy, exercise and stop negative thinking. In three years, some 2,000 women signed the pledge and each received a lapel pin, a link to Patterson’s podcast, a health magazine, and a health journal to record doctor visit notes.

While Patterson was recuperating from breast cancer surgery, she founded Brave Wellness, a health-and-wellness nonprofit group that led to the launch of “Breast Cancer Builds,” a program supported by Highland Park UMC that brought together about 50 breast cancer survivors and their families. These volunteers built two Habitat for Humanity houses between 2007 and 2009 and were encouraged to give a donation to “Mammograms for the Masses,” another program founded by Patterson.

In the past two years, Patterson has used the funds from Breast Cancer Builds—plus a partnership with two Dallas hospitals—for free mammograms to at least 200 low-income women.

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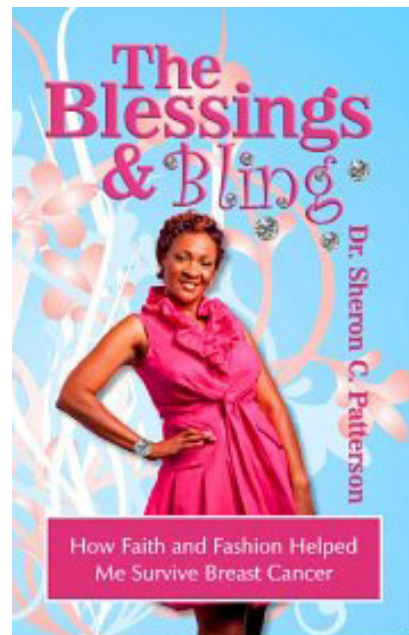
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In October, Patterson self-published *The Blessings and Bling: How Faith and Fashion Helped Me Survive Breast Cancer*. The book will be available from Amazon.com and ebooks.com. Patterson says proceeds from the book will be used to underwrite expenses for low-income women to receive mammograms and to also raise their awareness of better health-care practices.

For 10 years, Patterson was a relationship expert for “Good Morning Dallas” television show and a host for a Sunday morning Dallas Christian talk show. She was also a co-host for a syndicated gospel radio show that broadcast in 50 cities, a weekly op/ed columnist for the *Dallas Morning News*, and a relationship columnist for *Gospel Today* magazine.

She has been featured in *Ebony*, *Jet* and *Essence* magazines along with features on, CNN and BET television networks.

Patterson, who currently attends Saint Luke Community UMC in Dallas, has been senior pastor of four congregations. She has a doctorate from Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University in Dallas.



Heather Peck Stahl is editor of the FLYER.