



SEPTEMBER 2011

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



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## AUGUST 2011 GCSRW BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

# ‘African women need this commission:’ bishop

## Anti-sexism advocacy is ‘very necessary’ in the worldwide church, women say

*by M. Garlinda Burton*

NASHVILLE—United Methodism’s first African woman bishop and a Congo-born laywoman from Iowa said that any attempt to restructure church agencies and to function as a worldwide Christian denomination must include firmly defined, effective ministries to combat sexism, address sexual violence and domestic abuse, and combat poverty and hunger, specifically as they impact women.

“Every issue that affects people in Africa is twice as hard on women,” declares Bishop Joaquina Nhanala, who oversees The United Methodist Church in Mozambique and South Africa.

In a presentation on Aug. 19 to the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, Nhanala explained that:

- » 2/3 of illiterate adults in Africa are women.
- » 70% of the world’s people living with HIV/AIDS reside in sub-Saharan Africa, and 58% percent of those are women.
- » Women produce 90% of Africa’s food, but 80% of women workers have no access to health care or other employee rights or benefits.
- » 1 in 13 African women die during pregnancy or in childbirth (compared with 1 in 4,100 in developed nations).
- » Women and girls are most likely to suffer violent attacks in regions rocked by civil war and battles over control of resources.

The Rev. Cerna Rand, pastor of Prince of Peace UMC in Elk Grove Village, Ill., was elected Aug. 19 as the new vice president of the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women. Rand, a member of the commission since 2008, will fill the post vacated by Chita Millan of Pangasinan, the Philippines. Millan, who was GCSRW’s first officer from outside the United States, resigned in June to become part of the newly formed, independent Philippine Methodist Church. Rand, along with GCSRW president Bishop Mary Virginia Taylor of South Carolina and secretary the Rev. Diane Kenaston of Waverly, W.Va., will serve through the end of 2012.



Nhanala and Betty Kiboko, an Iowa laywoman born in the Democratic Republic of Congo, urged members of the GCSRW to keep African women’s concerns, hopes, needs and voices before the United Methodist Church.

“The church at its best lifts up the people—all the people,” says Kiboko, who has served as an interpreter for Swahili/French-speaking delegates at General Conference and who is married to a Congo-American pastor.

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*“Our work is not done,” says layman Dennis “Corky” Fowler of Houston. “We won’t be done until women are 50% of the bishops and 50% of the pastors of large-membership churches. This church can’t move forward if we’re not willing to clean up the mess caused by past sexism and racism.”*



*Betty Kiboko, an Iowa laywoman born in the Democratic Republic of Congo, urged GCSRW members to keep African women’s concerns, hopes, needs and voices before the church.*



*Bishop Joaquina Nhanala, who oversees the United Methodist Church in Mozambique and South Africa, says the worldwide church must state clearly and maintain policies that eschew discrimination and violence against women.*

“There is a need for the work of this commission in Africa,” Kiboko asserts. “Women in Africa are suffering, women are dying and women need to be uplifted in the name of Jesus Christ.

“And the church must be there to challenge the sexism that keeps women down,” she adds.

The presentation by the two African women to the GCSRW came after commission members learned that a proposed restructure of **church agencies** may mean the dissolution of the women’s commission, although its “essential functions” supposedly would be parsed out among new agencies.

Nhanala (elected bishop in 2008) and Kiboko and other members of the 43-member commission agreed that, whatever structure the denomination adopts, the worldwide church must state clearly and maintain policies that eschew discrimination against women, protect women from sexual and domestic violence and foster empowerment of women and girls.

The two women also said that adding “gender” as a protected category in the church’s Constitution is essential. (GCSRW has tried for at least 20 years to make this happen.)

## **EDUCATION, CONTROL OF RESOURCES KEY**

Women, who make up 51% of the population across the 55 nations comprising Africa, have made tremendous strides in the post-colonial era. (The Democratic Republic of Congo gained freedom from Belgian rule in 1960; Mozambique was liberated from Portugal in 1975.)

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Still, Nhanala asserted that poverty, hunger, illiteracy, human rights' violations, the burden of eking out living from the land, and diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDS plague women and children at a must higher rate than men.

Kiboko and Nhanala explained that few Africans benefit financially from the richness of the continent's natural resources, including minerals like copper, diamonds, gas, coal and titanium and coltan (used to make batteries in cell phones and computers; 70% of the world's coltan is found in Congo). Control of these resources are still in the hands of nations outside of Africa and warring among Africans themselves allow outside corporations to maintain control and get rich.

But Africans are steadily claiming their power and the resources of their nations, the women say. For instance, most African governments have made education of the populace as a top priority.

"One of the key weapons our colonizers used against Africans was to ban education for us. For most Mozambicans my age, if you were educated beyond the 4th grade, you were educated by missionaries," says Bishop Nhanala, who was the first United Methodist clergy woman from Mozambique to earn a master's degree.

As a result, there are not enough schools and teachers for the Mozambican population. However, the bishop has instated a bold project. Starting last year, United Methodist seminarians in Mozambique who are seeking ordination are now required to learn how to teach and lead literacy programs in their churches.

## RAISING UP WOMEN: ORGANIZING

"We are working with a program called Alpha-Lit to educate people in churches, particularly women," Nhanala says. "If you want to be a pastor in Mozambique, you are expected to teach literacy or to train someone to teach literacy in your church."

Both were educated thanks to The United Methodist Church and United Methodist Women, Nhanala and Kiboko say education of African women equals better lives for African families, as women are expected to provide the majority of food for their homes. "Women grow the vegetables, grain and fruit in our tradition; men hunt for the meat."

Teaching women to read and write allows for better dissemination of prenatal care information and education on staving off HIV and malaria, Kiboko says.

Literacy education, combined with more widespread organizing by women in church and society, is helping improve the lives of African women, the two presenters explain. International attention to the concerns of

## Support initiatives of African women

GCSRW is calling on all annual conference Commissions and friends to support initiatives to empower African lay and clergywomen. You can:

1. Donate \$25 each to purchase sheets, towels and blankets to the homes for displaced widows in Mozambique. Join GCSRW's "Shower of Blessings" for these women, by sending your check to **GCSRW** and note Advance No. 14507. Or give directly via the Advance site.
2. Help launch gender-justice ministries in annual conferences outside the United States, by giving \$4, \$40 or \$400 (or any other amount ) to the **Advocacy for Women Endowment Fund**, in honor of GCSRW's 40th anniversary in 2012.
3. Educate a United Methodist clergywoman-in-training in Africa University's Faculty of Theology. To learn more, contact **James H. Salley**, associate vice chancellor for Institutional Advancement of Africa University.

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*Meelie Tankler, GCSRW member and president of the Baltic Methodist Seminary in Tallinn, Estonia.*



*Yvette Richards, laywoman and GCSRW member from Kansas City, Mo.*



*Members of the commission discuss proposed changes to the structure of church agencies and their potential impact of the ministries of GCSRW.*

African women has resulted in more women in government, including the first woman head-of-state, United Methodist laywoman Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, elected in 2006 as president of Liberia. In the nations of Rwanda and Cape Verde, respectively, women comprise more than half of the members of parliament and 80% of cabinet members, Kiboko explains.

The church, too, has pushed changes that are addressing the concerns of women. Next February, Nhanala will host an all-African consultations for United Methodist clergywomen from across the continent. With the help of partners in Missouri, the Mozambican church has built homes to shelter older women and widows rejected by their families and communities because they are suspected of being witches.

However, while the church for many is an agent of positive change and development, even Christian women are vulnerable to domestic and sexual violence, the bishop says. And even as women are growing in influence and voice in the church, clergywomen still face oppositions from women and men in local congregations.

“Polygamy and prostitution are often the only choices women have...they must sell their bodies or accept a practice that is not Christian to put food on their table,” Nhanala says. “And when clergy speak against exploiting women, particularly clergywomen, they are dismissed and targeted.”

Nhanala has championed clergywomen, appointing women pastors and superintendents in Mozambique and South Africa where none have been before. She appointed South Africa’s first-ever woman superintendent, Maureen Fyglund, whom the bishop says, “is building up the church and bringing people to Christ, even more than I could have hoped.”

**CHURCHWIDE WOMEN’S ADVOCACY NEEDED**

Nhanala, Kiboko and other members of the commission—including other members with roots beyond the United States—insist that future expressions of a “global” United Methodist Church must include a visible, worldwide agency that addresses sexism and the full participation of women.

Currently, there is no requirement of regions outside the United States that annual conferences have

a Commission on the Status and Role of Women or equivalent structure. Nhanala started conference commissions in Mozambique South, Mozambique North and the South Africa Provisional Conference. And at least one region in the Philippines United Methodist Church has started such a ministry.

“It is needed,” Kiboko says. “Discrimination against clergywomen, sexual harassment, violence and gender bias are all issues facing women across Africa. We need the church to address these issues in our contexts.”

GCSRW members have spent much of the quadrennium learning about the advances made and challenges still faced by United Methodist and other women in Africa, Europe and the Philippines. While most members stopped short of opposing the proposed restructure, they agreed that the work of advocacy, monitoring for gender inclusion, and challenging sexism and sexual misconduct are unfinished agendas for the church around the world.

“Our work is not done,” says layman Dennis “Corky” Fowler of Houston. “We won’t be done until women are 50% of the bishops and 50% of the pastors of large-membership churches. This church can’t move forward if we’re not willing to clean up the mess caused by past sexism and racism.”

“What we’ve heard is that advocacy for God’s women is still a need in the global church,” says Yvette Richard, a laywoman from Kansas City, Mo., who chairs the commission’s global issues committee.

Another board member, Filipino-American clergywomen Blessing Yap of Oklahoma agrees. “I know that the issue of sexual abuse by pastors in the Philippines and discrimination against women clergy is one that the global church must address,” she says. “We must stay the course.”

*M. Garlinda Burton is general secretary of the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women.*

## AUGUST 2011 GCSRW BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

# Commission seeks to add ‘sexual ethics’ to its mandated work

### Want to solidify coordination of prevention and justice-making regarding misconduct

NASHVILLE—Lots of people ask why a women’s advocacy commission has taken the lead in preventing, educating clergy about, and assuring just resolution and healing in the aftermath of sexual misconduct by ministerial leaders.

The answer is simple: No one else dared to take it on. And so, to make the church a more just, welcoming and secure place for all, the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (GCSRW) wants to concretize the work we’ve already done for more than 30 years.

At their last full board meeting of the 2009-2012, members of the Commission agreed to ask the 2012 General Conference to include coordination of the denomination’s sexual misconduct prevention work in the agency’s official mandates.

“I think we need to claim the work we’ve been doing and own this as part of our story,” says commission member Darryl Fairchild, a pastor in the West Ohio Annual Conference.

“This is something we’ve done that no one else in the church has been willing to do, and we need to claim this,” he adds.

Like other United Methodist agencies, regional judicatories, congregations and individual members across the globe, the commission is racing to submit proposed changes in church law, policies and procedures, and to recommend statements on pressing social and moral issues for consideration by delegates to the 2012 General Conference, which convenes next April in Tampa.

General Conference establishes agencies and gives them their marching orders. In 1972, the GCSRW was established to help the denomination address institutional sexism and bring women into full and equal participation and leadership in The United Methodist Church.

Although women have made much progress, commission members pointed to work still to be done. Women are more than half of United Methodist membership and half the world’s population. Still,

» Women comprise 80% of all complainants of sexual harassment and sexual misconduct in church and society.

» Women account for less than one-fourth of United Methodist clergy around the world, and some regions have not one clergywoman.



*“We need to claim the work we’ve been doing and own this as part of our story,” says commission member Darryl Fairchild, a pastor in the West Ohio Annual Conference.*



*Tyler Schwaller, a doctoral student at Harvard Divinity School, leads GCSRW’s legislative committee.*

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- » Women are underrepresented in regional judicatories as bishops and superintendents, directors of connectional ministry, chancellors and annual conference treasurers.
- » Women raise and produce 50% of the world’s food, but own less than 1% of the world’s wealth.
- » Women in Africa are the fastest-growing population contracting HIV.
- » Women and their children are more likely than men to live in poverty.

**‘ADAPTIVE CHALLENGE’ REVISITED**

GCSRW members agreed that, whatever structural changes happen in the denomination, the work of undoing sexism and gender bias and of tackling sexual violence, abuse and misconduct, must be continued to reflect the true life and nature of Christ’s church.

Board members further said whatever form the church structure takes, it will not be The United Methodist Church of Jesus Christ unless it functions explicitly for full inclusion of women everywhere.

With that in mind, members agreed to ask the 2012 General Conference:

- » To add “gender” as a category protected from discrimination in the church’s Constitution.
- » To reaffirm the global United Methodist Church’s commitment to eradicating sexism.
- » To add, “addressing the problem of sexual misconduct” to the official mandate of the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women. (GCSRW already convenes an interagency, interdisciplinary Sexual Ethics Task Force on behalf of the denomination.)
- » To include sexual ethics and healthy sexuality as part of the required training for clergy.
- » To retain the definition of “pornography” in the resolution that GCSRW proposed in 2008 in order to assist bishops and other judicatory leaders in getting help for and dealing with pastors and other ministerial leaders accused



*The Rev. Anna Guillozet of Columbus, Ohio, urges other GCSRW members to stay the course of challenging sexism and empowering women.*



*Members of the Commission discuss proposed legislation from GCSRW to the 2012 General Conference.*

of using pornography.

- » To encourage bishops to create and make use of annual conference Crisis Response Teams to assist in healing and reconciliation in the wake of traumatic events in the life of congregations, including allegations of misconduct by clergy.

(The full text of GCSRW’s proposed legislation to General Conference will be available here September 2.)

In July, the Connectional Table—which coordinates mission and ministry for the denomination-wide structure—forwarded a plan to restructure the churchwide agencies. The plan calls for merging

11 agencies into five program and administrative agencies. The commission's "essential functions" would be parsed out among at least two of the agencies.

The plan is part of a Call to Action for The United Methodist Church, challenging the denomination to embrace an "adaptive challenge" to foster congregational growth and vitality, raise up excellent leaders in all areas of the church, address poverty and champion global health.

The question, though, for GCSRW members was, "Where are the specific attentions to women, who should figure prominently in all aspects of the "adaptive challenge?"

"We know from experience that if the mandate to deal with sexism and sexual misconduct are not explicit in our structure, then the issue is ignored," says Dennis "Corky" Fowler, a layman from Houston.

"We need to work against the things that harm women—everywhere—or we're not being the church."

Although most GCSRW members did not reject the notion of a restructure to better serve the global church, they did express concern about the absence of a specific agency mandated to address institutional sexism in the global church, help church leaders prevent and bring healing in the aftermath of ministerial misconduct of a sexual nature and to champion full participation of women in every place where The United Methodist Church is found.

"GCSRW is not defunct, and our work is not nearly over," says Fay Flanary, a laywoman from Belchertown, Mass. We must stand for what we believe in."

"Equity and justice for women are not yet a reality in the church," adds the Rev. Blessing Yap of Oklahoma.

## ETHICS RULES, GUIDANCE CRITICAL

In hailing the historical and ongoing work of GCSRW, several board members who supervise clergy urged the commission to stay the course on addressing ministerial misconduct and urging the church toward more open conversation about healthy sexuality and healthy boundaries for leaders.

"I am grateful that GCSRW has taken responsibility for addressing pornography," says Bishop Peggy Johnson, a member of the commission since 2008. Johnson oversees the Eastern Pennsylvania and Peninsula-Delaware conferences.

"I see case after case involving pornography, and we as a church are reluctant to talk about it. But addiction to it is a problem for many of our clergy and we need help to address it," Johnson adds.

The Rev. I. Mark Conner, a district superintendent in the West Virginia Conference, agrees. "For the sake of the church, we have got to take the risk and address pornography and other forms of sexual misconduct," he says.

"If not this commission, then who?" he asks.

Betty Kiboko, a laywoman from the Iowa Conference, encouraged the commission to see that culturally relevant resources and training on sexual ethics be made available for clergy and lay members in her home country of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Earlier this year, GCSRW assisted a Congo-born clergy couple in conducting such training in North Katanga, and the response was overwhelmingly positive, Kiboko says.

"Everyone said, 'We need more.' So, we must do more of this work, not just in the United States but among our churches in Central Conferences [regional United Methodist judicatories in Africa, Europe and the Philippines]," Kiboko says.

## 2012 GENERAL CONFERENCE AND YOU

# Proposed changes to church structure may significantly cut the budgets of general agencies

*Next spring the church's top lawmaking body will take up proposals, including one that consolidates 10 of the denomination's 13 general agencies into five offices*

*by Heather Hahn*

Talk to denominational leaders, and many will tell you that after decades of declining U.S. membership and financial giving, The United Methodist Church must change particularly at the top.

So when General Conference meets next spring, the denomination's top lawmaking body will take up proposals that would alter The United Methodist Church's structure and significantly cut the budgets of its general agencies.

The **proposed changes** (approved by the Connectional Table in July) include consolidating 10 of the denomination's 13 general agencies into five offices that will be part of a new United Methodist Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry. The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (GCSRW) is among the agencies that would be subsumed under the new center, with most of the commission's "essential functions" assigned to a proposed Office of Justice and Reconciliation.

Also on the table is a recommended budget of \$603 million for the 2013-2016 operations of the denomination's general agencies. That figure is a 6.04% reduction from the previous four years and marks the first time since The United Methodist Church was formed in 1968 that a smaller budget will go before General Conference for approval.

So what impact will these proposed cuts and structural changes have on GCSRW and its work for gender equality and sexual ethics?

"My hope is that the church will stay the course in dealing with issues of justice and institutional bias," says M. Garlinda Burton, the commission's top executive,

**Editor's Note:** *General Conference, the top lawmaking 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.*

## What you can do

- ✓ Invite your Sunday school class, General Conference delegation, women's groups, etc., to study as a group the restructure proposals. (Compare to current church structure, available at [umc.org](http://umc.org).)
- ✓ Discuss the benefits versus the pitfalls of these proposals. Ask, "Which groups of people will benefit?" and "Which groups will be harmed?" "How will this help the church make disciples of Jesus Christ and reflect the gospel imperatives of justice, reconciliation?"
- ✓ Review your congregational/conference budget and ministry priorities. How does the current general church structure support and inform those priorities? How may the proposed structure support and inform those priorities?
- ✓ Discuss possible ways that clergywomen, laywomen in leadership, young women, women of color, women beyond the United States and women with disabilities are engaged as disciples of Christ and church leaders in church structures.

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“and that we also will be able to expand our work so that we have a global understanding of [inclusion] and we’re dealing with it as a whole church rather than in isolation.”

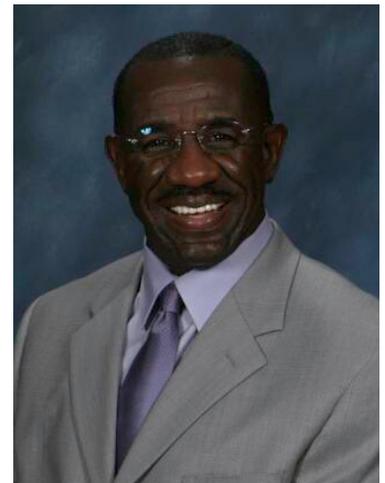
Still, she acknowledges it’s too early to tell the full implications of the recommendations.

**RETAINS ‘ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS’**

Under the proposed legislation, the newly created Office of Justice and Reconciliation will encompass the essential functions of the GCSRW, the General Board of Church and Society, and the General Commission on Religion and Race.

There also will be:

- » An Office of Congregational Vitality with the essential functions of the United Methodist Board of Discipleship and multicultural ministries;
- » An Office of Leadership Excellence, encompassing what is now done by the Board of Higher Education and Ministry;
- » An Office of Missional Engagement responsible for global health and much of the work now done by the Board of Global Ministries.



*The Rev. Elijah Stansell,  
treasurer of the Texas  
Annual Conference*

The proposed offices are designed with the denomination’s Four Areas of Focus in mind. Those areas, approved by the 2008 General Conference, are church growth, leadership development, global health and ministry with the poor. In the suggested restructure, all agency boards of directors would be disbanded and a single, 15-member board of directors would govern all five new agencies.

“Restructuring is not aimed at any particular group,” says the Rev. Elijah Stansell, treasurer of the Texas Annual Conference and a board member of the General Council on Finance and Administration.

“It’s trying to align the dollars with the new focuses that we’ve said are going to be the emphasis for this denomination.”

A fifth office in the new center would deal with shared administrative services that support the work of the other four including the functions of finance, communications, archives and history and information technology.

If the recommendation gains General Conference approval in 2012, the plan calls for the transition to be conducted in two phases over a period of about two years.

**‘CALL TO ACTION’ SPURS CHANGE**

The recommended structural changes come out of the multiyear **Call to Action** process, which has identified a great “perceived distance” between general agencies, annual conferences and local congregations. Changing

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the structure is aimed at reducing that sense of distance and strengthening the connection. Also, although the agency budgets represent only 2.5% of each apportioned dollar spent by a congregation, proponents say the current structure is too expensive and inefficient to maintain.

GCSRW relies on nearly 100 percent on the denomination’s World Service Fund, one of seven general apportionments that support the activities of the general church.

Already GCSRW receives the smallest allocation of any World Service Fund-supported agency. The agency’s 2011 budget is about \$875,000. Under the recommended budget of General Council on Finance and Administration, that amount is likely to shrink even further. The World Service Fund alone is facing a 6.53 percent reduction over the next four years.

The Rev. Debbie Pitney is the treasurer of GCSRW’s board and passionately supports the agency’s mission and ministry. Still, as a pastor of First United Methodist Church in Eugene, Ore., she acknowledges that her congregation’s work also weighs on her budget considerations.



*The Rev. Debbie Pitney,  
GCSRW’s finance chair*

“We have cut staff to enable the support of apportionments but can no longer cut without greatly challenging the ministry in which we are involved,” she says.

“I don’t operate from an imperative to ‘save money’ if that means stock-piling money for some future time. Seeking God’s justice for the world must be at the core of all our ministries and our financial resources must be creatively used to support these ministries,” she says.

“But we all know that we are functioning with less money as congregations and conferences are struggling to pay apportionments so we must make difficult decisions.”

Lisa King, the Wisconsin Conference’s treasurer and its lead lay delegate to the 2012 General Conference, says she has never personally experienced sexism in her conference (which received its first woman bishop when King was in high school). Still, she sees a need for GCSRW’s work as the denomination moves forward.



*Lisa King, Wisconsin  
Conference’s treasurer*

“God is not done with The United Methodist Church,” she says. “God has called us to a specific place within the Christian church at this time. And our church has some very specific values and attributes that may not be as present in other denominations. It’s not an easy time to be part of The United Methodist Church ... but it’s what we’re called to do.”

*Heather Hahn is a news writer for United Methodist Communications.*

## WOMEN BY THE NUMBERS

# Why are fewer women attending church?

By Julie Kathleen Schubring

Some of our readers might have seen the August 2 Huffington Post article - "Women Show Deep Drop in Church Attendance." Both surveys mentioned in the article were conducted by the Barna Group – the first in 1991 and the second in 2011. The article tells us that the percentage of women attending church has decreased by 11 percentage points to 44 percent. The percentage of women teaching Sunday school and volunteering has also decreased, while there has been a 17 percentage point increase in the number of women who have become "unchurched."

As of August 5, I have read through the almost 900 comments posted. If we subtract the usual ranting and raving about separation of church and state as well as the debate over worldwide decline or increase in religious institutions, the comments can be simply summarized as:

Women have become better educated and women have become more aware of their right to walk away from the imposed understandings of the role of women in the institutional church.

Much of the comments look at Christianity as "one" theology that treats women in a "lesser" position than men. It is unfortunate that the general population doesn't see Christianity (as well as other faith traditions) as comprising a spectrum of thoughts. Religion on mass media is often displayed as ultra conservative. The assumption that all women who go to church believe in the traditional views taught by the faith traditions is not true.

Some 42% of women interviewed "strongly believe the Bible is accurate in all it teaches," which means more than half the women do not. And 70% "view God as 'the all-knowing, all-powerful and perfect Creator of the universe who still rules the world

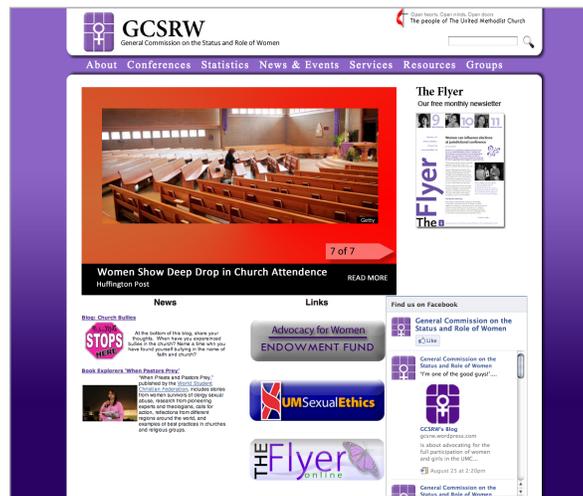
today.'" Look closely at this last statement; there are no claims that God is male; which is striking since most of the commentators focused on women moving out of the church due to our increased education, which pushes us to move beyond a male God.

Yet this *Huffington Post* is just a snapshot of the larger Barna Group study, which realized that in order to understand the overall trends, more questions need to be asked. The original study included six distinct yet interconnected sections. These sections have been posted between July 26 and August 4 and they examine 14 religious factors between 1991 and 2011. The *Huffington Post* article is one-half of the Barna section on gender and faith. The other five sections round out the larger picture, which helps us to better grasp the shifts found amongst women. These sections include general trends, generational trends, racial/ethnic differences, regional faith and faith

"tribes." For more information go to [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org).

Does a decline in church attendance also reflect a decline in spirituality? Is there a relationship between church attendance and spirituality? According to several religious studies, there is a fast-growing percentage of individuals claiming they are spiritual and not religious. What is it that women are looking for in spirituality? What is the church NOT doing to help women find spirituality?

*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

## Challenges to Response Team practice

By Sally Dolch

An episode of clergy sexual misconduct in a congregation presents challenges for judicatory leaders, the congregation, and the community where it occurs. The work Response Teams do with congregations is often complicated by all the groups who have a stake in the investigation, mediating interventions and their outcomes. It is not surprising therefore, that tension and misunderstanding may arise between conflicting objectives and perceptions of judicatory leaders and responders. A closer look at the challenges identified by current United Methodist Response Teams may be helpful in planning for future practice.

**JUDICATORY CHALLENGES:**

- » Conference mergers and financial restructuring distract judicatory leaders from congregational response.
- » A perception that there are no sexual ethics problems when sexual ethics policies are inaccessible and reporting processes are unclear.
- » Misunderstandings between confidentiality, secret-keeping and the healing impact of honesty.
- » Use of “geographic therapy” to deal with an offending pastor, which undermines confidence in judicatory leaders and clergy accountability.
- » Misunderstanding Response Team interventions with a congregation vis-a-vis the authority and restoration work of the board of ordained ministry.
- » Information management issues with the congregation, Response Team, community, other congregations and conference clergy.
- » Trust of a Response Team when one member steps beyond their role.

**RESPONSE TEAM CHALLENGES:**

- » Perception of being ignored by judicatory leaders and resistance by district superintendents to deploy or collaborate with Response Teams.
- » Delayed calls for intervention, which negatively impacts a congregation.
- » Limited communication by judicatory officials on the progress of a congregation and the need for further assistance from a Response Team.
- » Encounter with a congregation whose successor pastor is in place and does not welcome the “intrusion” of the Response Team.
- » Ensuring time for Response Team trust building, debriefing and self-care.
- » Keeping up with the literature and training needs of the Response Team.
- » Recruitment of diverse Response Team membership and relieving a member who is unavailable or ineffective.

**PRACTICE GAP CHALLENGES:**

- » Absence of a clearly articulated theology of intervention.
- » Lack of clarity about the length and scope of congregational interventions.
- » Insufficient articulation of practice beyond the disclosure meeting.
- » Absence of a clear definition of what constitutes restoration or healing.
- » Sexual ethics training for staff parish relations committee members and congregational leaders.
- » Strategies for intervention with toxic or unhealed congregations who have experienced clergy misconduct in the past.
- » Limited information about how to measure the impact of congregational interventions.

*Sally B. Dolch, pastor of Salem and Bethany UMCs in Pocomoke, Md., completed her doctor of ministry thesis, “Healing the Breach: Response Team Intervention in United Methodist Congregations,” at Wesley Theological Seminary in 2010.*

# Invitations for Support

## *Three models for creating a freeing, restoring gathering of friends and colleagues*

*By S. Kim Coffing*

No matter your ministry calling, you need supportive relationships that are freeing, restoring and removed from as many of the “taking care of” trappings as possible. Establishing the kind of “space and time” you want can be done creatively and season a gathering of good friends with clear expectations.

Lynn Scott, an elder in the Wisconsin Annual Conference and founder/owner of Sabbathway Ministries LLC, shares two invitational “models” she’s used for get-away gatherings for clergywomen and church staff. I am sharing a model of a group I gather for support.

### **MODEL #1: THE LENTEN SEASON OF MY MINISTRY**

- ... when you stop to see your shut-ins and find that one is gone to the hairdresser, another is visiting her sister, and a third is playing golf. . .
- ... when you explain to the congregation how youth want to become involved in the church and then neither the acolyte nor the youth ushers show up for the service. . .
- ... when you begin the church council meeting with devotions concerning the need for social involvement, and the remainder of the evening is spent discussing the property committee report. . .
- ... when the couples club meets, and the men gravitate to one corner of the room and the women to another. . .
- ... when you preach an eloquent sermon on the importance of responsible and compassionate driving habits, and the next day you’re stopped for speeding. . .
- ... when the youth meeting for a clean-up campaign breaks up, and the floor of the room where the meeting was held is littered with candy and gum wrappers. . .
- ... when you present a program on the relevancy of the Gospel in today’s world and the only question you receive is whether or not you believe Jonah was swallowed by a whale. . .
- ... when you conclude the collect for the day with “one end, world without God...” . . .
- ... then it’s time to gather with friends and colleagues . . . (RSVP information follows...)

### **MODEL #2: EASTER MEANS “NEW LIFE”**

Have you ever said:

“No, I don’t want to eat with parishioners on Easter!”

“If Easter means ‘new life,’ why do I feel dead?”

“Sitting and staring at my four walls sounds exciting for an Easter afternoon.”

“Where should I go to find community and let my hair down?”

WHEN: Easter evening to Monday morning  
5:00/6:00 PM – Noon

WHERE: \_\_\_\_\_ home complete with fireplace, sound system and comfortable chairs/couches

WHY: If you have to ask, don’t come!

- WHO: Clergywomen, church staff and friends
- BRING: You and one of your favorite albums of music (we'll sit through yours if you sit through ours), sleeping bag, air mattress if you have one, towels, etc.
- FOOD: A meal on Sunday evening and late brunch on Monday morning  
(RSVP information follows...)

### MODEL #3: THE PEASANTS

Serving in a ministry that requires frequent travel, I realized a few years ago I needed to be more intentional in being with caring and supportive friends without leaving home! I invited five friends if they could commit to coming to my home about once every six weeks for an evening of conversation along with food I had prepared on one of my "recovery from traveling" days. Everything was to be simple with low stress/pressure. I called this gathering of friends, "The Peasants," setting expectations that they would come from work to an easy meal and meaningful conversation, and were responsible for asking me, "How is it with your soul, Kim?" Each gathering had a theme related to the kind of food I prepared: Italian, Greek, MyMama'sCooking, Mexican, Midwest Delight, Big Easy, etc.

The Peasants craved sitting around the table with a home cooked meal and candlelight as much as I did. And yes it was well with OUR souls!

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