

# Town Hall Meeting, April 17, 2007

## ***Remarks by Ms. Sandra Lackore, General Secretary of the General Council on Finance and Administration***

### **SANDRA LACKORE:**

Good afternoon. I am pleased to be with you as the General Council on Finance and Administration of The United Methodist Church releases today our most recent report of membership, attendance, and giving trends. This report is titled, "This is Our Story." It reports the story of a faithful, generous people in dozens of nations who continue to make a difference in the lives of people around the world. It is the story we tell through the millions of data elements we have shared and collected about ourselves for over 200 years. It is a story about our Church in our time.

You can find the full report on our website, but let me tell you about some of the more interesting findings that both give us hope and challenge us to find new ways of responding to God's call for us in the world.

- We are a large and growing denomination. We have 13.7 million members in over 50 countries. United Methodists in the United States gave over 5.86 billion dollars in 2005. Globally our churches report nearly 1.9 million more professing members than they did 10 years ago. When we look at the whole picture, United Methodism is big and getting bigger.
- At the same time, we do have some challenges, and we need to be realistic about these challenges.
- The good news is about 35% of our churches in the U.S. grew in 2005.
- However, over 41% of our churches did not report a single profession of faith in 2005.
- All of that is said in a context that 50% of the population in the U.S. has no ongoing relationship with any faith community.
- Big aggregate statistics can be a little overwhelming so one of the things we've tried to do here is to dig down a little deeper, to show some of the stories behind our numbers. What we know is that every church has stories of holy living, vital ministry, relevant mission, and faithful witness. We've included in this report stories that aren't necessarily the biggest churches or the fastest growing churches; they are simply a few of the many congregations who are working to change lives and change communities.

We all have stories to tell from our faith communities. In this document, we want to encourage others to think about their stories, and how, together, we will intentionally write the next chapter of our ongoing story.

There is a sense that God is leading The United Methodist Church to do something different. The leadership of our bishops has caused new things to happen. Responding to our bishops, the Connectional Table, the General Council on Finance and Administration, and our general boards and agencies, are outlining a new chapter of a new story. The foundation for this new chapter will be highlighted in conversations that will follow. But the real work of our denomination, and the places where lives are changed, remains in the hands of our churches and the faithful people who call them home. The future for our church depends upon our leadership at all levels capturing this vision and being willing to work hard—each of us—lay and clergy.

I truly believe that the spirit of God is moving through us and within us, creating change—a transformational change that inspires us as the people of The United Methodist Church to move forward into a future with hope. This is our story.