

**FROM THE COUNCIL OF BISHOPS OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
A SUMMARY REPORT OF THE NOVEMBER, 2011 MEETING OF THE COUNCIL**

To our sisters and brothers, disciples of Jesus Christ and members of The United Methodist Church around the world: Grace and peace to you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

More than 110 active and retired members of the Council of Bishops gathered at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina from Sunday, October 30 through Friday, November 4. The week was centered on our life together and our council leadership for the mission of the church, *to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world*. "Ecclesiology" was a theme that ran through much of the week as the bishops entered into conversation about the theology, nature, mission, and character of the church for the twenty-first century.

As is our custom, we began our week together with an inspiring service of worship at the First United Methodist Church in Waynesville, NC, remembering two bishops (Abel Muzorewa and Monk Bryan) and two spouses of bishops (Marion Clark and Milah McDavid) who have entered the Church Triumphant. The Memorial Service sets a holy context for a week of meetings and decision-making on behalf of the mission of the church. The Council always frames its work with worship and prayer, as we begin each day with prayer, praise, preaching, Scripture, Holy Communion, and covenant groups. Throughout each day there were moments of prayer as we lived out our role as spiritual and temporal leaders within the church and practiced worshipful work.

The primary agenda item for most of the first three days focused on the report and proposals of the Call to Action Interim Operations Team. Following a report from the team, members of the Council engaged in deep conversations about the proposed reconfiguring of the church in order to direct the flow of attention, energy and resources toward developing vital congregations. Concerns were expressed and questions raised and the dialog was frank and honest. The Council voted overwhelming, with only two negative votes, to affirm and embrace the recommendations from the Interim Operations Team.

In other actions and work of the week, the members of the Council:

- Were inspired and deeply moved by the personal faith stories and journeys from four bishops (Kammerer, Kulah, Job, and Sano) shared at two of our community dinners.
- After a process of spiritual discernment, elected the leadership team that will guide the Council into the next quadrennium: Bishops Rosemarie Wenner (President), Warner Brown (President-Designate), Robert Hayes (Secretary), Peter Weaver (Executive Secretary), and Mary Ann Swenson (Ecumenical Officer). The transition to this new leadership team will begin at the site of General Conference in April, 2012.
- Received consultant Fred Miller on Tuesday morning and were challenged by him to think about leadership for transformation.
- Decided to appoint a task force to bring a proposal for a new way of working together as a Council, in response to a healthy conversation, facilitated by Gil Rendle, regarding the roles and responsibilities of the active and retired bishops who make up the membership of the Council.
- Developed a pastoral response to the concerns raised by many people across the church in the United States related to same-sex unions, definitions of marriage, and covenant leadership. The response will be released soon to the whole church.
- Celebrated the work of the Four Areas of Focus with positive and exciting reports on progress in the fund raising efforts of the Global Health Initiative, leadership with and among young adults,

ministry with the poor, particularly among the Roma people and communities in Slovakia, and the number of new church plants around the world.

- Heard a report from the General Committee on Faith and Order (*The Book of Discipline*, Paragraphs 1907-1912), with presentations by Drs. Russell Richey and Randy Maddox and documents being developed around United Methodist ecclesiology.
- Received and responded to a draft of the Episcopal Address to be presented by Bishop Peter Weaver at the 2012 General Conference.

By the end of the week, and the closing worship service on Friday morning, the bishops were confident and hopeful about the future of the church under the guidance and empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. The bishops returned to their assignments renewed in their commitment to serve Christ and guide the church toward achieving the mission. The Council will next gather a few days before the start of the 2012 General Conference in Tampa, Florida, and will remain in prayer and fasting for the General Conference and for the many delegates and visitors who will make their journey to that gathering.