

UNITED NATIONS PHOTO

**BURUNDI—Refugees cross the Akanyaru River, which forms the border between the African countries of Rwanda and Burundi, fleeing months of tribal fighting. The civil war's fallout is straining the resources of United Methodists there.**

## Burundi civil war strains resources of United Methodists

By DENISE STOVALL  
Associate Editor

Four months' tribal fighting in the Central African country of Burundi, particularly in the capital of Bujumbura, has forced 50 people—including 24 children—to stay at the United Methodist Burundi Annual Conference guest house.

That and other emergency measures were described during a recent telephone briefing between the Rev. Julius Jefferson of the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries Africa Office and the Rev. Amos Niyizigama.

Mr. Niyizigama's duties with the Burundi conference include managing the guest house.

### Rooms are all full

"We have about eight or nine families in each room," said Mr. Niyizigama. "People are sleeping in each room. So all the rooms are very full."

Most are United Methodist pastors and their families who fled from nearby towns and villages during revenge killings by members of two African tribes.

Nightly clashes between Hutu and Tutsi tribal members followed appointment of the nation's agriculture minister, Cyprien Niyarumira, as a successor to the late President Melchior Ndadaye.

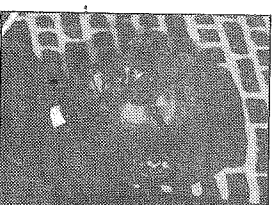
A member of the Hutu tribe, Mr. Ndadaye was Burundi's first

democratically elected president. He was murdered by renegade soldiers of the Tutsi tribe on Oct. 21 during an attempted coup.

Mr. Niyarumira, also a Hutu, was appointed by the Burundi parliament for the post.

Ethnic fighting began four months ago. Some estimate that deaths could exceed the 150,000 killed by the majority Tutsi tribe in 1972.

Since October, about 800,000 have fled from Burundi to overcrowded refugee camps in Rwanda, Tanzania and Zaire, where



people are dying of hunger and disease. Amos Niyizigama

Mr. Niyizigama said that at the Bujumbura parish, where he is the pastor, he has been able to hold regular prayer services. Despite sporadic fighting, some 80 people showed up for church one Sunday in January. The African pastor said the new task of Burundi United Methodists will be "to begin again all that we were doing" in mission.

In the town of Kayero, staff have abandoned a hospital and seminary supported by United Methodist funds. In Gitega, the conference printing press was destroyed, and the conference

**Mr. Ndadaye was Burundi's first democratically elected president. He was murdered by renegade soldiers.**

office was looted.

### Home stripped

Last Fall the home of United Methodist Bishop J. Alfred Nduricimpa in Gitega was stripped of everything, including the toilet. The bishop was on his way to the Council of Bishops meeting. He is still in the U.S., relaying human rights abuses for the Burundi Christian Council, of which he is president.

When asked what U.S. United Methodists can do to help their church members in Burundi, Mr. Niyizigama said support is needed for leaders in exile like the bishop.

Following the coup attempt, most annual conference leaders, including the bishop, district superintendents and their families, fled to Rwanda, Tanzania and Kenya.

"Even if the fighting stops, our problem is not finished," Mr. Niyizigama said. "Our big problem is that Christians who went outside the country left without food or medicine or clothes. They are suffering."

## UMW videotape responds to 'Sophia' critics

By DENISE JOHNSON STOVALL  
Associate Editor

A "video letter" mailed recently from the top two leaders of United Methodist Women defends the right of the General Board of Global Ministries Women Division to send representatives to ecumenical meetings.

This, the letter makes clear, includes the recent "Re-Imagining conference" with prayers, chants and a worship service dedicated to "Sophia" (see Review, Feb. 11).

### 'A message'

The video-letter effort to address concerns among 1.1 million United Methodist Women was considered unprecedented in Women's Division history. Some 60 copies of the 10-minute videotape were mailed to UMW presidents—70 at annual conference levels and 530 at district levels.

The tape, titled "A message to United Methodist Women from the Women's Division," features UMW national president Carolyn Johnson of West Lafayette, Ind., and Joyce Sohl, the Women's Division chief executive officer.

The church's Book of Discipline identifies the Women's Division as the national official policymaking body of United Methodist Women and designates the division's officers as the UMW's national officers.

According to Global Ministries spokeswoman Betty Thompson, the video letter was produced by the mission board to respond to growing criticism by United Methodist men as well as women—of Women's Division attendance at the "Re-Imagining" meeting last November in Minnesota.

### Ecumenical emphasis

The meeting was held in celebration of the midpoint of the "Ecumenical Decade: Churches in Solidarity with Women." The international observance is a programmatic emphasis by the World Council of Churches.

The Minnesota gathering prompted accusations of blasphemy and heresy from *Good News* magazine, published by the Kentucky-based Forum for Scriptural Christianity, and from *RENEW*, a newsletter of the Georgia-based Evangelical Coalition for United Methodist Women.

The Women's Division paid registration fees and travel to the conference for 36 elected directors and nine staff members. The division also awarded grants to 11 United Methodist Women's conference vice-presidents. Total division expenses related to the Minnesota gathering were \$22,000.

### 'Key' questions

In the video letter, Dr. Johnson identifies key questions she says United Methodist Women must ask:

✓ Aren't our faith and our God strong enough that they won't break in the midst of differences?

"I think the answer is 'Yes,'" she said.

"Our history of wanting to be in places where we want to share our story is so great. I trust that we have common ground—not just in our purpose—but that we have common sense," said the UMW national president.

"Four days in November, 96 hours, is not something that will totally change, eradicate, reshape, transform, throw away United Methodist Women as we know it."

In addressing the particular area of "wisdom literature" called Sophia and concerns about United Methodist Women who attended the event, Dr. Johnson said she trusts their ability to discern this diverse theology for themselves. "But more than that," she continued, "I trust that their involvement in United Methodist Women over the years and over the decades [will cause them not] to totally embrace something new without inquiry."

# Freedom to go to church really IS a big deal

It's Sunday morning.

You roll over in bed and look at the clock. Church worship service begins in an hour. But the chance to sleep in feels SO good. Why not just take a walk in the woods later instead of dressing up for church? Deciding, you go back to sleep.

No big deal, right?

Don't be so sure.

A clue about why it is a big deal comes from China.

An obscure news report stated recently that the Chinese government cracked down—again—on religious freedom in that country. The aim: Stop outsiders from converting Chinese people and starting religious education.

The report pointed out that the new restrictions are part of an ongoing pattern of limiting religious freedom even among indigenous-religious groups, Christian and non-Christian. The government "has cracked down harshly on all unofficial religious activities"—that is, all activities that the government doesn't approve.

Any such news about restrictions on religious freedom should concern all Christians.

What happened recently in China is far from isolated. In fundamentalist Islamic countries such as Iran, non-Muslims are actively persecuted. In countries with recent totalitarian histories, such as the former Russian republics and eastern European nations, newly acquired religious freedom remains fragile.

In short, when viewed from a global perspective, spiritual freedoms that we in the U.S. take for granted—open worship of God, unfettered participation in religious communities, and critique of secular society on religious grounds—are seen to be far from universal.

## Editorial

Furthermore, where a measure of religious freedom has been gained under conditions of repression, it tends to be valued more highly than typically is the case in the U.S. despite (and maybe because of) our 200-plus years' history of constitutionally protected religious freedom.

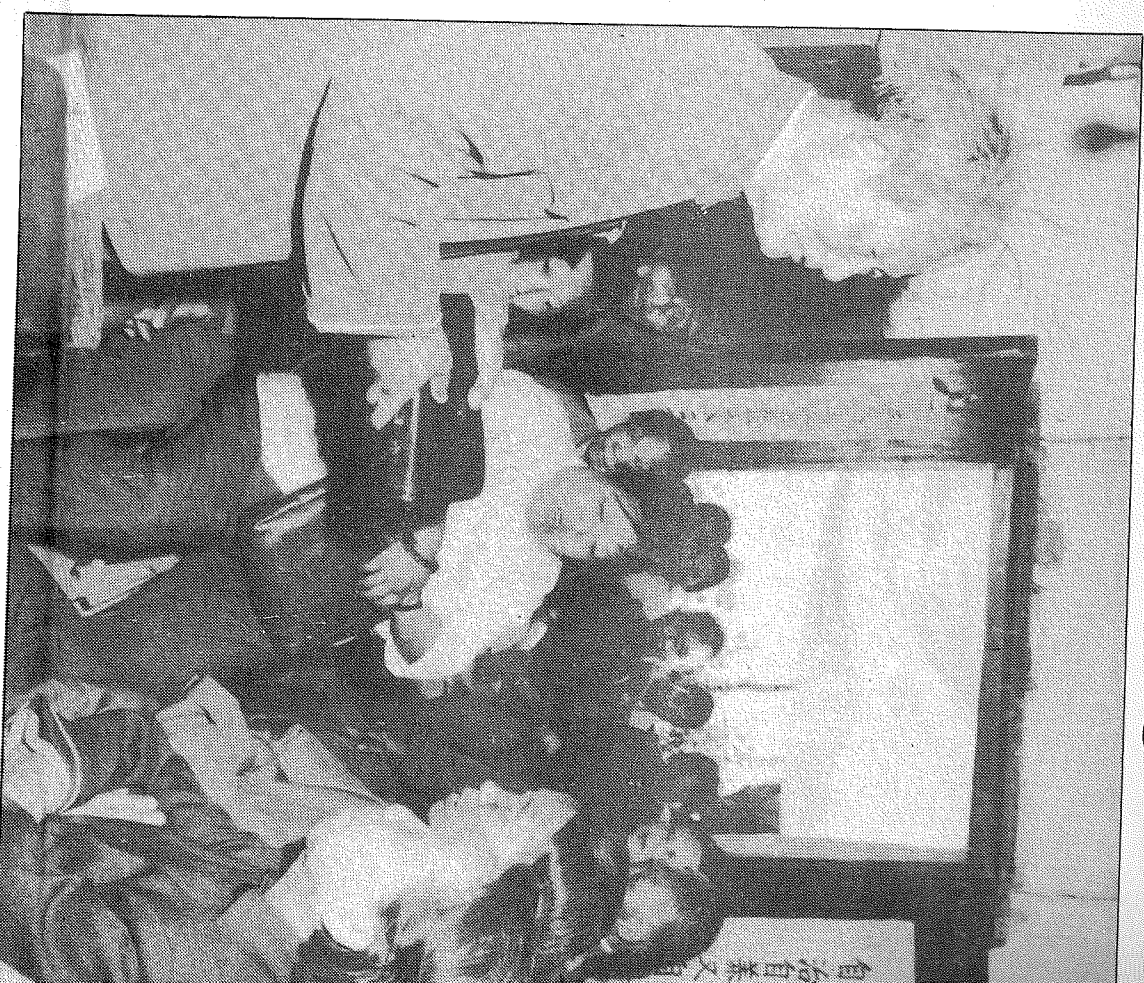
The message: Your opportunity to roll out of bed on any given Sunday and go to church is a big deal. It is a chance to do what countless people throughout the world would love to do but cannot: Freely engage in open expressions of their religious faith.

Those include expressions that may, and occasionally must, prophetically challenge the temporal "principalities and powers" which powerfully shape our daily lives.

Hence, as you consider sleeping in some Sunday, remind yourself that sisters and brothers in China and elsewhere regularly get out of bed and risk their daily lives to express their religious beliefs.

As a wake-up exercise for Sunday school and other church study groups on this issue, try this: Over a period of several weeks or months, monitor and discuss news related to religious freedom around the world, such as recent developments in China.

Doing so can be an effective reminder of our own precious freedom. At the same time, it can provide an informed basis for opposing religious repression and supporting religious liberty worldwide—all in the name of the One who "for freedom has set us free" (Galatians 5:1).



REVIEW FILE PHOTO  
"House church" meetings like this Chinese gathering are among religious expressions threatened by new government policies in China. American Christians who take their freedom of religion for granted should note how many places worldwide restrict the practice of faith (see editorial at left).

# We chose redemption after church was vandalized

By ED DEWESE

Imagine my surprise when I entered the church office one morning to behold a glorious mess.

Black toner from the copy machine was on the floor and all over the tables and furniture. The copy machine was open, pieces on the floor. Graffiti covered the walls.

I entered my adjacent office. The desk drawer was open, papers scattered over the floor. Some jewelry that had belonged to my late father was missing.

Faced with this disappointing development, I reflected and prayed before acting. But when I discovered my late father's watch and lapel pin were gone, I wept.

The law officers found no clues at first. Our youth director found a sheet of paper with two names written on it. The sheriff's office ran a check and discovered they were two male youths, ages 12 and 14 from a neighboring



The Rev. Ed DeWese is pastor of Greensburg (La.) United Methodist Church (Louisiana Annual Conference)

## My witness

town about 30 miles away.

The law officers asked, "What do you want us to do?"

"What are the options?" I responded. "We can arrest them," he replied.

I sought other options from our youth director, who is a law student and from the chairman of our board, who is a doctor. Someone suggested we meet with the boys, their parents, the law officer, and officials of the church. We agreed.

We began our meeting with a prayer for the Holy Spirit's guidance. I began to

realize the chief purpose of the meeting was not just repairing the church equipment or recovering the stolen goods, but assisting these two boys to come to know Christ and to re-direct their lives.

It was quite painful for them, but each of the boys admitted the vandalism and theft.

After much discussion it was decided that they would come to the church on six consecutive Saturday mornings and rake leaves, wash windows, etc. Their parents agreed to reimburse the church for damages. My father's watch had been destroyed. I forgave that.

How has it turned out? Four straight Saturdays one of the boys has come and fulfilled his agreement. The other has not.

We are now inviting the responsive boy to youth fellowship. We have turned the other boy back over to the law. After prayer and thought we reasoned it would be unfair to the responding family to ignore the lack of response by the other

Out of this experience we have learned there are no winners in crime. But we hope that the church has been an agent of God's redemptive process.

family.

But even more importantly, as a church, we recognize the Christian principle of taking responsibility for our actions. We believe that in the long run a better opportunity exists for reclamation and redemption if accountability is exercised than if it is ignored.

Out of this experience we have learned there are no winners in crime. But we hope that even in this difficult experience the church has been an agent of God's redemptive process. What would you do?



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John A. Lovelace

UMR Editor

Cynthia B. Astle

UMR Faith Forum Editor



# Are we to pretend that 'Sophia' is Christian?

Reading the coverage in the Feb. 11 Review on the Re-Imagining Conference, I am moved to reflect that the Nag Hammadi texts have been available to the Christian community since the late '40s. Every first-year seminarian knows of the struggles of the canonical community with Gnosticism.

None of this is new, nor are these ideas of any more authority today than they were 30 years ago. Their sole creative function has been to throw light occasionally on canonical Scripture and to enhance our knowledge of history.

Are we to pretend then that, because it suits some folks' needs now, such materials can be picked up, cobbled together and used in any sense authentically Christian?

We have an authenticating touchstone in the theology/theologies of Scripture. What doesn't accord, at least broadly, with that can have no more claim to authority within the Christian community than any of the other philosophies with which the history of ideas is replete.

Philip M. Niblack  
St. Louis, Missouri

## Seek more balance

What hyperbolas (see Review, Feb. 11).

Prayers using 'Sophia' as a way to address God, ... are sending shockwaves across the UMC." Neither *Good News* nor *RENEW* represents the whole of United Methodism.

You would do your readers more service by attempting to help folks understand issues rather than "tabloid sensationalism." You might seek a more balanced perspective.

Floyd McKeithen  
Independence, California

## I want a woman's opinion

It appears from the Review's Feb. 11 editorials on the "Re-Imagining" conference that it is the men in The United Methodist Church who are in an uproar over this event.

There has been only one article of significance from a woman's perspective about the conference. The article featuring Mary Edlund as a participant at the conference was well-written and informative. But where are the other articles from the woman's perspective or con't! I for one would like a man's opinion for a change.

Anne Y. Hollis  
Electra, Texas

*Note: Unsigned editorials which appear on the Faith Forum page are the copy of the newspaper and the cooperation of UMR's editorial board, which concurred unanimously in the Feb. 11 editorials, is contained in our laywomen, one layman and layman, all of whom are United*

## Drives me crazy

Reading the Feb. 11 Review I am trying to understand what the meant when he said "The drives me crazy." The carries the report of a to explain why it was OK in an ancient heresy (wor-

## Letters to the Editor

ship of Sophia) and another page gives us a "theologian" proclaiming "being a Christian has nothing to do with worship" who ends his lecture growing "Now let's fight."

Perhaps next issue we shall be favored with a review of Stanley Hauerwas' new book decrying the practice of reading the Bible in America.

If the history of Christianity is a chain of resurrections (John Calvin?) a resurrection time must be nearing. After all, how dead can we get?

Robert A. Mulligan  
Savoy, Illinois

## I nearly laughed

I read your account of the "Sophia" cult (see Review, Feb. 11) and then remembered my mythology. Lo, the Great Goddess, the Mother Goddess, the Earth Goddess, Ceres, and Cybele returneth. She is worshipped with libations as of old. Will the next General Conference be opened by a study of chicken entrails?

I nearly laughed at all this, but I didn't. Instead, I thought of how our church for decades has permitted its paid employees to disregard the Articles of Religion and the decisions of the General Conference. And I thought of my own attempts to increase giving to my church, and it hurt. I hope I will live long enough to see the General Conference set up an executive committee, made up of bishops and lay persons, to oversee the church's work between sessions of the General Conference. Give the committee the right to fire or pull the credentials of those who embarrass us and maybe God by their social hang-ups. This must be fixed, once and for all.

Homer T. Fort  
Midland, Texas

## It's symbolic

Language is symbolic representation of our individual perceptions of reality. Language, therefore, also shapes our perceptions of reality and can be uplifting or damaging to the self-respect or sensibilities of the hearer.

We must not, however, equate language with reality itself. The outrage expressed by the Good News folks over the use of the name Sophia for God (see Review, Jan. 28) indicates to me they fear their God is too weak to survive being called by a different name.

If, by using the name Sophia, a person can come to understand the One clearer or more deeply then no harm is

done to me or to Christianity and certainly not to God.

Edward C. Martin  
Atascadero, California

## We need more like him

I refer to the letter "shaming" Bishop Earl Hunt for speaking out against the Sophia heresy (see Review, Feb. 11).

I say, God bless Bishop Hunt! At least somebody in our United Methodist leadership spoke out against this perversion of the apostolic faith they are supposed to guard.

The silence of our sitting bishops is deafening. We need more episcopal leaders like Bishop Hunt.

Ron Stelzleni  
Gilmanton, Wisconsin

## Dead theology

I don't know if I'm in a rage or in deep depression because of two classic examples of "dead theology" offered recently by two United Methodist leaders.

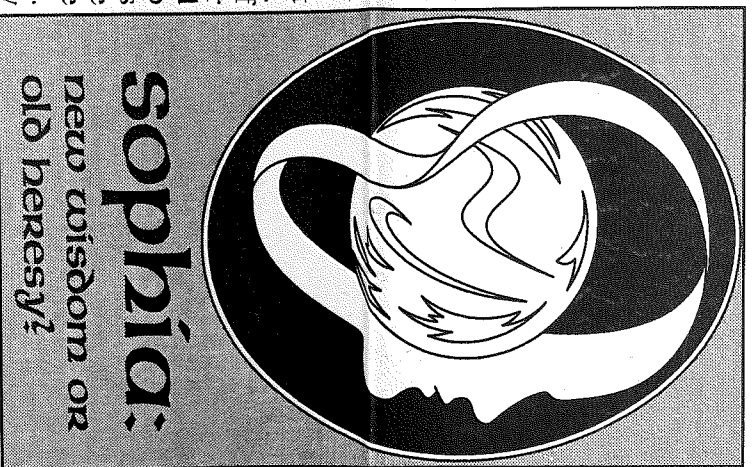
The Rev. James V. Heidinger II says, "*Good News* carries the most disturbing news story we've ever published." And he insists upon "some action of theological oversight by our bishops."

Retired Bishop Earl Hunt says, "...a heresy that staggers the religious mind and must be eliminated." (His words are eerily similar to statements from the Third Reich in the 1930s).

Both refer to reports they heard concerning the Re-Imagining Conference. What I heard the conference was about was God, Jesus, Holy Spirit and the church.

Someone recently defined for me the difference between "dead" theology and "live" theology. "Dead" theology talks about God and stops there. "Live" theology talks with neighbor and preaches Good News to the poor, sets free those in bondage, heals, loves with a love that never ends and proclaims, "the Kingdom has come near you."

Bruce K. Quinn  
Minneapolis, Minnesota



**sophia:**  
new wisdom or  
old heresy?

beyond that (if you're talking about God or about the Holy Spirit) I feel it is an open question, if for no other reason than that placing a gender label on a god-figure is a particularly human thing to do. In so doing, we attempt to couch the unfathomable entity that is God in humanly understandable terms.

As a Christian, I will not allow myself to be roped in, but will do my best to remain a receptive vessel, with Jesus Christ's teachings being my only guide. I comment the Women's Division on their stand, and only hope that they will continue to do just that: Stand up to thinly veiled attempts to restrain feminist theological thought.

Deborah A. Vardiman  
Waco, Texas

## Divinity's dimensions

We could create a less adversarial climate of discussion if we set the dialogue about Sophia in the context of Creation rather than Salvation.

This idea came to me as I struggled with Stephen Hawkins' answer to the question: Is a Creator necessary in the matter of the survival of the universe? It seemed to me that he understandably had accepted the idea of Divinity as being thoroughly masculine. Given that pre-supposition, his negative answers can be seen as inevitable.

What would his final decision have been if he had started with the pre-supposition that Divinity is both masculine and feminine? I can't know. However, for me the thought that Divinity, in the act of creation, is both Creator and Creatrix offers me a theological paradigm that is compatible with both the biblical faith and the teachings of modern science about the nature and destiny of the universe.

It would be a wondrous event if we could re-Imagine Divinity without a verbal shoot-out at the OK Corral.

Howard Wynne  
Limeridge, Wisconsin

## Sophias are dying

As I was reading the articles on the "Sophia" controversy I heard news of the death of a 16-year-old woman. She was shot while seated in a parked car at a site about a mile from my home and a mile from the Re-Imagining Conference site. Her first name was Sophia.

When the Sophias of the world are dying in parking lots, by what right do we fill the pages of the religious press with this kind of empty debate?

Our call from Christ is to make sure the hungry are fed, the thirsty are given good water to drink, the naked are clothed, the sick and those in prison are visited and the stranger is welcomed. Let us put barren rhetoric aside and join together in the love and service of Christ.

Larry C. Nielsen  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

The Review welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be original, typed and double-spaced and must bear the full address and signature of the writer. Address letters to the United Methodist Review, P.O. Box 660275, Dallas, TX 75266-0275 or fax letters to 214-630-0079.

# Missionary brings God's joy through her music

By DENISE JOHNSON STOVALL  
 Associate Editor

CARDONA, Rizal, Philippines—Kihwa Jin says her friends back home in New York City think she's crazy to give up a budding opera career to be a United Methodist missionary.

Ms. Jin contends she still has a music career. But this time, it's teaching others to "claim God's victory through song."

"I want to show God's concern for the poor and the homeless by bringing joy to them through music," she says.

## Choir director since 1989:

Ms. Jin has been serving in the Philippines since 1989 as choir director and teacher of voice and music at United Methodist-related Harris Memorial College, in the Philippine town of Taytay, Rizal.

Harris College trains United Methodist deaconesses for ministries in education and music.

A native of Seoul, Korea, Ms. Jin is an alumna of that country's Methodist-related Ewha University. She studied at the Juilliard School of Music in New York City and was offered a chance to audition for the Metropolitan Opera. Ms. Jin also performed at Carnegie Hall in New York.

But a diagnosis of possible breast cancer soon gave her a detour on a road that would change her career destination and outlook on life.

"At first, I was angry with God," said Ms. Jin. "I said, 'God, you are so cruel. I want to sing. Why did you do this to me?' But then I remembered that it was



CARDONA, Philippines—United Methodist missionary Kihwa Jin introduces a children's choir which sang for visitors (see related story below).

God who made me, and he wanted me not just to sing on stage but for Him.

"So while I was in the hospital, I prayed to God and said, 'God, I'm only 29 years old. Please give me

another 10 years, and I will work for you."

## 'New song each day for the Lord'

That was 15 years ago. Today, Ms. Jin says she's in terrific health and "sings a new song each day for the Lord," cramming as much music ministry as she can for impoverished people of the Philippines.

Her voluntary work schedule includes:

- ✓Worship services at Cardona Bethel United Methodist Church early Sunday morning.
- ✓Choir director later that day at Manila Korea Union Church in the Manila suburb of Makati.
- ✓Teaching voice classes at Harris Memorial College in Taytay Monday through Friday.

- ✓Bible study classes at the new Bethel United Methodist Church in Cardona.

- ✓Community Bible study in the fishing village called "Cardona for Christ."

- ✓Private piano music lessons in the evening for United Methodist ministerial candidates.

- ✓Monthly Bethel Missionary training seminars in non-formal setting in Quezon City for church music leaders, conductors, soloists and pianists seeking careers in music ministry.

"When people back in the States hear about all the things I'm doing in the Philippines—and all of the personal money I'm spending on these programs—they say, 'Oh, my goodness! Kihwa is crazy! She'll get tired of all that. Now that she has her health, she will come back to the United States and sing for the opera again.'"

"But I say to them, 'If the Holy Spirit can change you like that, you can still sing. You can sing for the Lord and still have peace and joy.'"

## Filipino Bethels truly two 'houses of God'

By DENISE JOHNSON STOVALL  
 Associate Editor

CARDONA, Rizal, Philippines—When United Methodist missionary Kihwa Jin selected a name for the two mission churches she helped start in the Philippines, she quickly chose "Bethel."

Both congregations broke ground for new buildings, thanks to grants from her home church, Bethel United Methodist Church in the New York Annual Conference.

However, members of both Filipino Bethels quickly admit that the name suits their congregations. "Bethel" means "house of God."

The story of the new Bethel churches begins with Angono United Methodist Church about 25 miles southeast of Manila. Angono had an outreach ministry to residents of Cardona, 10 miles from there. Cardona is a fishing village near Laguna De Bay in the Philippine province of Rizal.

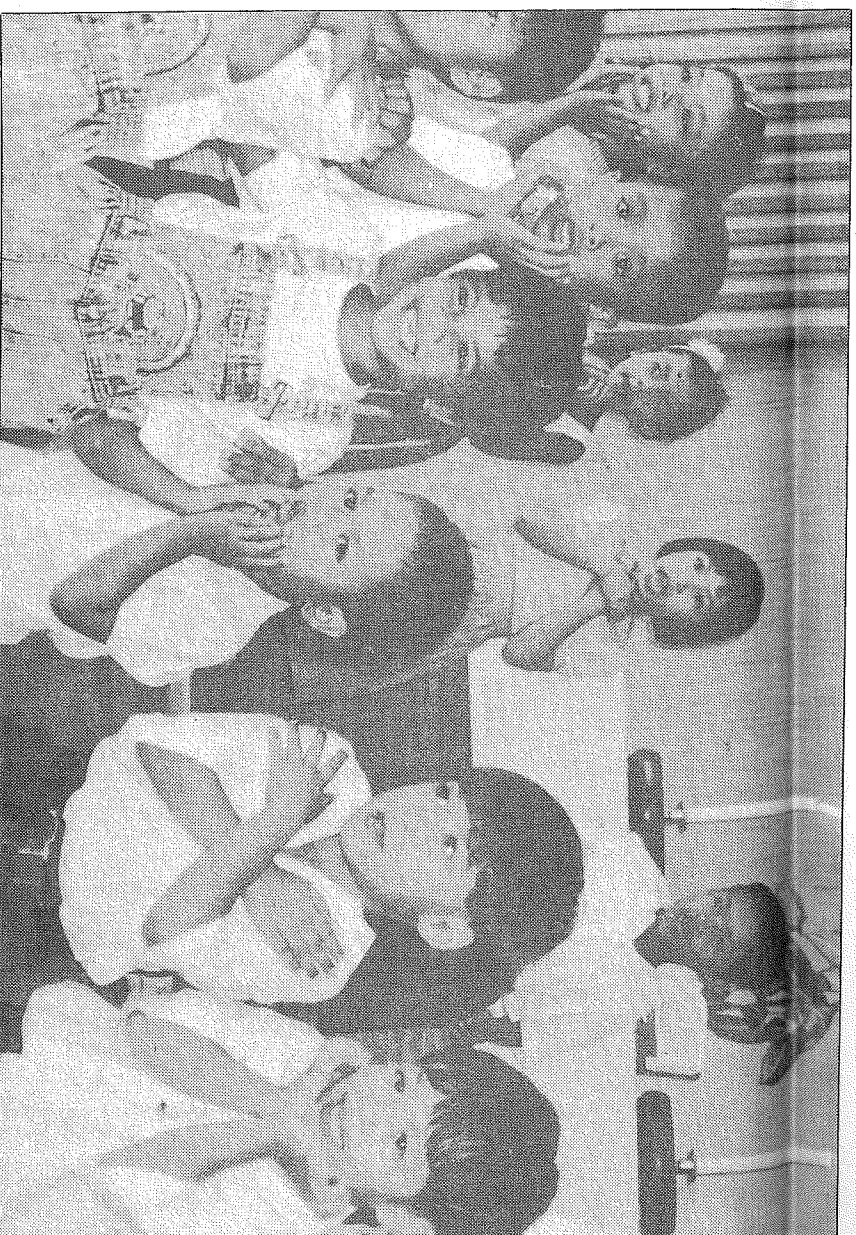
When Ms. Jin began attending Bible study at the Angono church, she offered to coordinate literacy and Bible study programs in Cardona along with other church members.

The missionary became so involved in the program that she enlisted her students at United Methodist-related Harris Memorial College, 15 miles southeast from Manila in Taytay, Rizal, to help.

Small groups of people young and old met in homes for study and worship. Vocational training programs like sewing classes were developed so the women could earn money to feed their

CARDONA, Philippines—A children's choir directed by

United Methodist missionary Kihwa Jin sings for visitors at Cardona Bethel United Methodist Church.



REVIEW STAFF PHOTO BY DENISE JOHNSON STOVALL

families.

The outreach ministry flourished, and in March 1991 United Methodist Bishop Emerito P. Nacpil (Manila Area) came to Cardona to baptize 54 adults and 38 children. Two months later, another Cardona group was baptized by the Rev. Som Jong Park of the "mother" Bethel church in New York.

In the summer of 1991, a small plot of land was chosen as the site for a church and community center. On that site, one year after the first Cardona group was baptized, Bishop Nacpil led a ground-breaking ceremony for Cardona Bethel, with only 18 percent of

the money needed for completion on hand.

Writing in the General Board of Global Ministries "Prayer Calendar," Ms. Jin explained, "We began construction just the same. After all, Jesus fed the 5,000 with only two fishes and five loaves of bread. I trust Him."

With gifts channeled to the Advance for Christ and His Church and other gifts from Methodists in Korea, that trust paid off. Now the church is nearly finished, with a children's center in the back and a parsonage on the second floor.

Cardona Bethel members took seri-

ously the "great commission" taught by their mother church and began an evangelism program in the barrio of Morong. The Morong fellowship caught the "Bethel vision" and held its first official worship service Jan. 23 in rented building.

"You come back to visit us in the Philippines," said Ato Mallicdem, charter member of the Morong Bethel, to members of the church's Advance Committee as they visited the mission site.

"You see what Cardona has done. Next time, we'll be doing the same thing."