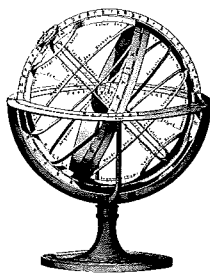


# NEWS



## *Bishops avoid firm statement about "Re-Imagining"*

*Scheduled to conduct theological analysis of "wisdom" concepts*

Responding to "doctrinal ferment" in the denomination, United Methodist bishops voted at their most recent meeting to conduct a "theological analysis of the concepts of wisdom" found in the Old and New Testaments, the intertestamental period, and Christian history. The action comes in the wake of the controversial "Re-Imagining" Conference held in Minneapolis in November. Liturgies and prayers during the conference were directed to Sophia, the Greek word usually translated as wisdom in English versions of the Bible. The recommendation from the council's Committee on Teaching Concerns made no mention of the Minnesota conference.

Leaders of Good News, the church's evangelical caucus, and others have objected to United Methodist participation in the ecumenical conference. In addition to references to Sophia, critics have objected to a "celebration" of lesbianism, bisexuality, and transsexualism; liturgies using sexual images to express the divine, and a speaker's rejection of the doctrine of the atonement.

Governing board members of Good News appealed to the bishops to repudiate "Sophia worship" and affirm United Methodism's "historic doctrines and teachings."

*Good News* magazine initiated a letter-writing campaign protesting the Women's Division of the Board of Global Ministries involvement in

the conference, which attracted more than 2,000 participants. The division paid expenses of 36 directors, 9 staff and 11 conference (regional) officers of United Methodist Women groups to attend the event.

Affirming their continued commitment to historic Christian faith and doctrinal standards of the church and to the teaching office of the episcopacy, the bishops agreed to engage in "ongoing efforts to interpret, disseminate and appropriate our doctrinal standards, and engage in responsible theological reflection, in the light of these historic standards."

Chairman of the teaching concerns committee, Bishop Sheldon

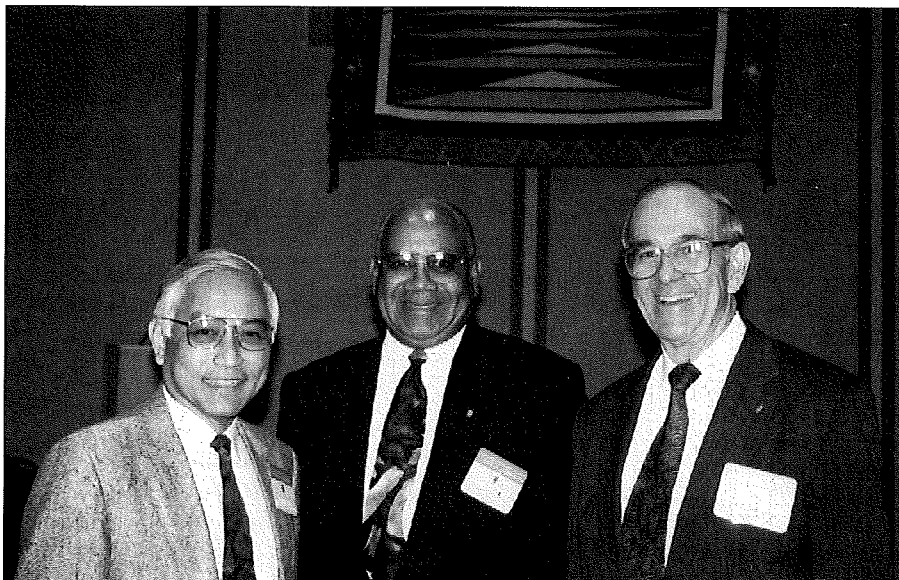
Duecker of Chicago, was authorized to appoint a task force of bishops to conduct the theological analysis. The report will be shared with the bishops at their next meeting October 29-November 4 at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina, and then with the church "as a part of the teaching role of the Council of Bishops."

The bishops asked church members to join them in "serious theological reflection and discourse in the atmosphere of the Wesleyan tradition that affirms, 'In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, freedom; and in all things, charity,'"

While the committee recommendation approved by the bishops did not specifically mention the "Re-Imagining" controversy, debate clearly did.

Retired Bishop William R. Cannon of Atlanta called the council action "inadequate," saying that "certain things emerged from that [Minneapolis] conference that we can't countenance...[and that] in light of Christian history and doctrine are...heresy, and, therefore, are not in keeping with doctrinal standards of the United Methodist Church."

Cannon warned that, by taking no specific action in response to criti-



*Bishop J. Woodrow Hearn of Houston (right) is the newly installed president of the United Methodist Council of Bishops. Elected to succeed Hearn in the spring of 1995 was Bishop Roy I. Sano (left). Secretary of the council for the 1993-96 quadrennium is Bishop Melvin G. Talbert Jr. (center).*

A UMMS Photo, by Tom McAnally

## *On a Wing and a Prayer*

Just a few weeks ago I was in an old, worn-out airplane as it began to descend onto to a cold, icy runway. We bumped, lifted, then suddenly sank as we flew through heavy clouds and snow for a landing in Karaganda, Kazakhstan—the second largest of the former Soviet states. The Mission Society for United Methodists (MSUM) began work here one year ago.

I was accompanied by an investment consultant, a leader in small business training, a video crew, a television reporter, doctors and missionaries—all of whom would be joining the team already at work. As I tightened my seat belt I wondered how many rivets were missing on the wing I could see outside my window.

At times like these, I write in my prayer diary. That day I wrote:

“God, when I consider how you have sent us on this journey to be with people who have been prisoners in this desolate place, who have been unable for so long to express their deepest thoughts, whose spirits have endured years of pain and quiet desperation, who are crying out to the world—and now, after 70 years, to God. I am humbled that you have sent us to answer their prayers.”

God had called us to leave sunny Georgia to travel to this place on the stark frontier of the world in 1994. There, where hundreds had been pushed out of railroad cars to die of cold, hunger, and despair; where those who survived worked in bleak coal mines—there, where there were none of the “trinkets of life” to divert our attention—we saw clearly the power of God at work.

In that city of nearly one million

people, we celebrated the baptism of the first 29 believers from the cell churches which had begun less than one year before. New Christians! Wearing white cotton robes, they sat in a long row on the bench beside the heated pool in a former Olympic training center. Around the edge of the pool were flowers. The testimonies of the new believers revealed the depth of their conviction and underlined how the work of the missionaries had influenced them.

One young man shared his testimony: “I want to tell you how I came to Jesus. My way was very alone and very difficult. I was an atheist. I believed that religion did harm to people. I believed only in man’s strength and power. People didn’t need the Lord. I thought religion tempted people to have wars. Once at the institute [MSUM’s Small Business Training Institute], I saw the Jesus film. I was greatly impressed by the movie, and I began to read the Bible out of curiosity. The more I read, the more I knew the power of God unites us. We were lucky to have the Spottswoods and the Wickeses come to our town to live. Now I am happy I will be baptized and can start a new life in Jesus.”

As they emerged from the water, I knew I was seeing the leaders who would be the instruments of God to rebuild their society, their city, and their country. In those moments of the sacrament of baptism I saw them become alive! Eyes that a year ago had been dull, sparkled; faces that



*Julia Williams*

had been lifeless were now animated and their voices held the passion of their belief.

The events in Karaganda are more than just the

“Karaganda story.” They give witness to the momentum of the power of God in today’s world. Our task is to dare to move with him. One of the medical doctors on the trip, Dr. Earl Stein, returned home, put his practice up for sale, and will return to Karaganda to organize the American Kazakh Hospital. What step of faith might he be asking of you?

The Mission Society offers many opportunities for you to give greater testimony with your own life to the power of God. Contact Julia McLean Williams or Dick McClain at The Mission Society for United Methodists, P.O. Box 1103, Decatur, GA 30031-1103, phone (404)378-8746.

***Take ten minutes each Tuesday to pray with and for us.***

· The Presbyterian Women’s Gathering will be held in Aimes, Iowa July 13-18, and the triennial meeting of the Episcopal Church Women will be held in Indianapolis, Indiana the end of August. Women in leadership in both of these denominations were involved in the Re-Imagining Conference. Pray for reaffirmation of commitment to Christian doctrine and for renewal at all levels.

· Pray for the upcoming Renew breakfast and a workshop to be held at the Good News Summer Celebration in Dallas, Texas July 21-23.

*The Evangelical Coalition for United Methodist Women (ECUMW) is a coalition between Good News, The Mission Society for United Methodists, and the Institute on Religion and Democracy. This coalition serves as a voice for evangelical United Methodist women, providing support, information, and program materials. Contributions for the work of the coalition may be sent to Good News, P.O. Box 150, Wilmore, KY 40390, earmarked for the ECUMW.*

cism of the conference, the bishops would be seen as "so broad-minded doctrinally that anything can take place and it is all right with them.... They're not willing to offend anybody."

Bishop Bruce Blake of Dallas, secretary of the teaching concerns committee, said bishops and other United Methodists often attend events where positions or conversations do not fall within the guidelines of United Methodist doctrine and theology.

"It is not the role of the Council of Bishops to monitor all conferences or to critique specific conferences called to the attention of the church by other groups or by coverage in the media," he said. The bishops' role, he added, is one of teaching, "not of responding to a particular conference."

Retired Bishop Ole Borgen of Norway criticized the council's "evading the issue" and said issues raised at the "Re-Imagining"

Conference do not belong to the "non-essentials" of Wesleyan tradition.

Bishop Richard C. Looney of Macon, Georgia, proposed an amendment to the statement that the council "commits itself anew" to doctrinal standards of the church. The proposed change lost in a 32-24 vote.

Bishop William Boyd Grove of Albany, New York, objected to the proposed amendment, which, he said, seemed to be a "loyalty oath" suggesting that the bishops are not committed to the church's doctrinal standards.

Bishop David Lawson of Springfield, Illinois, agreed, saying he learned early in his ministry "never [to] give anyone permission to bring your faith into question."

"This proposal [for theological analysis] seeks to broaden discussion that desperately needs to be broadened," he said.

He encouraged discussion and

exploration of theological matters without "motivation that is political, power-seeking, money raising,...[but with] motivation that is thoughtful and deliberate. Let's do it graciously, not stridently, so the church will be wiser and better informed."

A later amendment by Bishop Joseph H. Yeakel of Silver Spring, Maryland, was approved. Instead of saying the council "is clear that" doctrinal standards are faithful to Christian Scripture, the amended version says the council "continues its commitment" to those standards.

The international council includes 50 active bishops from the United States and 17 from Europe, Africa and the Philippines, and about 50 retired bishops. Retired bishops may speak to issues during business sessions but may not vote. Presiding over sessions here was Bishop C. P. Minnick Jr., Raleigh, North Carolina.

*Adapted from United Methodist News Service*

## Episcopal statement

*What follows is the full text of the document released by the bishops:*

*The Book of Discipline*, 1992 states, "United Methodists profess the historic Christian faith in God, incarnate in Jesus Christ for our salvation and ever at work in human history in the Holy Spirit" (page 40).

The Council of Bishops continues its commitment to "Our Doctrinal Standards and General Rules" (paragraph 67 *The Book of Discipline*, 1992) and "Our Theological Task" (paragraph 68 *The Book of Discipline*, 1992) as faithful to Christian Scripture and worthy of our fullest support.

We commit ourselves to the teaching office of the episcopacy by engaging in our ongoing efforts to interpret, disseminate, and appropriate our doctrinal standards; and engage in responsible theological reflection, in the light of these historic standards.

As another expression of this commitment we request the Council of Bishops to authorize the Chair of the Committee on Teaching Concerns to appoint a task force of bishops to conduct a careful theological analysis of the concepts of wisdom in the Old and New Testaments, the intertestamental period, and in Christian history and that the results be reported to The Council of Bishops at its 1994 fall meeting. Upon approval, the results will be shared with the church as a part of the teaching role of The Council of Bishops.

The Council of Bishops calls upon its members and all segments of the church to devote ourselves to serious theological reflection and discourse in the atmosphere of the Wesleyan tradition that affirms, "In essentials unity, in non-essentials freedom, and in all things charity."

**"GOD SPEAKS  
MY LANGUAGE  
ALSO!"**

**NEW TESTAMENT  
ON CASSETTE**

**Over 100 Languages**

**Why Audio Scriptures?**

**"Faith comes by hearing"**  
*...Romans 10:17*

The United States and Canada have become vast mission fields of diverse people with different languages, cultures and religions.

What better gift can be given than God's precious saving word in one's own language? Many who do not read can still benefit greatly by listening to God's Word on cassette.

**Send or call today for your**

**free catalog**

**Audio Scriptures International  
P.O. Box 28417  
San Diego, CA 92198-8417  
Tel (619) 673-0867 Fax (619) 673-8030**

# Drums, weavings characterize UMW Assembly

Drumbeats and weavings were auditory and visual threads running through the recent United Methodist Women's (UMW) Assembly in Cincinnati. Weaving them together—from the opening communion, with its traditional Korean drumming, to the closing, marked by drumbeats of West Africa—were singing and interpretive dancing. A variety of rhythms called the 11,300 women to prayer, reflection, and discussion and, ultimately, to action. Interwoven in the multiracial, multicultural gathering was a celebration of the lives of these women and their foremothers.

Each participant had been asked to bring a piece of cloth representing her heritage. Draped over the women's left shoulders at times during the service, many of the cloths were embroidered, appliquéd or quilted with scenes or symbols from that woman's history; some were of *kente* cloth.

United Methodist Hillary Rodham Clinton, appearing via videotape, greeted the women and urged them to work for health-care reform. The participants were given blank post cards and asked to write to their U.S. Senators in support of universal access to affordable health care. Completed cards were collected for hand delivery to the Senate.

During one evening program, Women's Division president Carolyn Johnson spoke to both assembly participants and women linked via satellite at 110 locations across the United States. As they reflect on what it means to be "100 years and counting, 1 million strong and growing," United Methodist Women need to tell "kindling" stories to light the fires of mission, Johnson said. "We have to reaffirm that we are available to Christ and one of the ways to do that is to reaffirm that we are available to be presence to children and to youth."

In keeping with the theme "Count Me In!" Joyce Sohl, chief executive of the Women's Division, called the women to be "passionate seekers of justice." Saying that foot washing—the symbolic act of service—is also an act of love, Sohl told the women that love must extend beyond those who are liked to those who are different and those who are outcasts. "In offering us friendship, Jesus is also calling us to mission—to love as he loved," Sohl said.

Throughout the assembly, speakers told personal stories and made efforts to inform their audience and move the women to advocacy and action. Participants in the assembly were able to choose two workshops from among 65 topics offered.

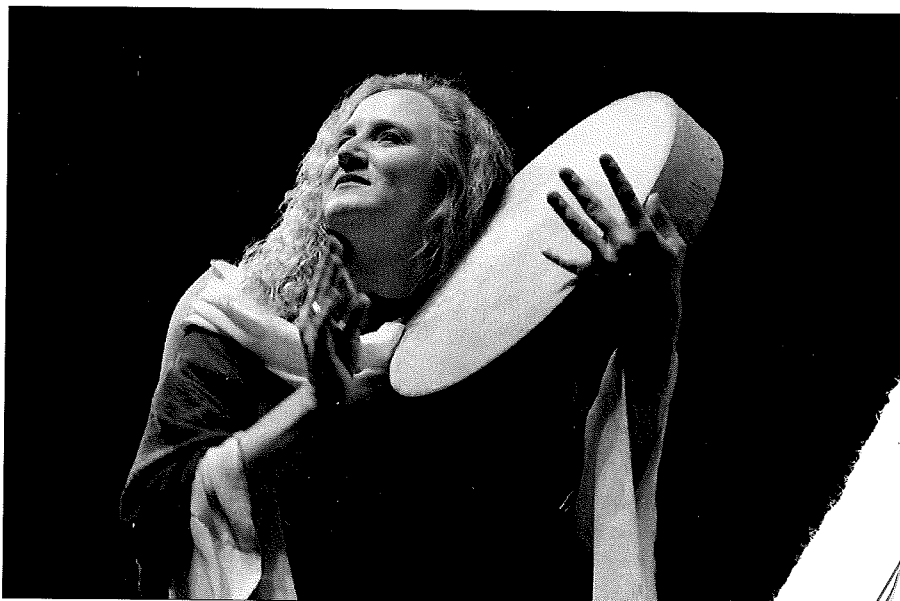
There was no mention of the controversial "Re-Imagining" Conference or "Sophia" during the plenary sessions of the assembly. In at least two of the workshops, however, these topics were discussed. In one seminar on "The Ecumenical Decade:

Churches in Solidarity with Women," the Rev. Jeanne Audrey Powers expressed her support for "Re-Imagining" and allowed one participant to give a glowing report of this event. Other participants were not allowed to comment or ask questions. Powers served on the Steering Committee of the "Re-Imagining" Conference.

In an interview with *The Cincinnati Enquirer* which was published during the assembly, Powers denied that there was any heresy, paganism, or blasphemy at the "Re-Imagining" event: "It was grounded in Christian Scriptures. It was not New Age. It was not goddess."

Powers accused critics of "witch-hunting" and told the newspaper that "Re-Imagining" was not a love fest of radicals. "It was too conservative for them. They wouldn't be caught dead in that." She conceded that the conference used more erotic texts and was less sexually closeted than usual denominational gatherings. But "this is what is being talked about in seminaries," she told the *Enquirer*.

In another seminar, "Creative Liturgy and Ritual," the Rev. Beryl Ingram-Ward distributed and recollected the milk and honey Sophia-



Marcia McFee of Kansas City, Missouri, performs a liturgical dance at the United Methodist Women's Assembly. As "movement director" she also led participants in movements during the ser-