



**Daily**

# Social Questions Bulletin

*An Independent Voice for Justice in The United Methodist Church*

9

METHODIST  
FEDERATION  
FOR SOCIAL  
ACTION

May 7, 2004

## Legislative Successes

We celebrate these decisions on petitions of interest to MFSA:

### Major victories:

- Rejected all war as an instrument of national policy.
- Strengthened UM opposition to the death penalty.

### Defeated:

- attempts to reduce UM presence on boards of Trustees of colleges and seminaries.
- an attempt to require the Board of Discipleship to produce materials in line with the philosophy of the Transforming Congregation movement.
- attempts to impose rigid doctrinal standards on clergy, bishops and agency staff.
- attempts to restructure the University Senate.
- efforts to give equal status with the UMW to other women's organizations in the local church.
- efforts to adopt more restrictive language on abortion.
- attempts to make UMW optional in the local church.
- repeated attempts to take the Methodist Building and its endowment from the General Board of Church and Society.

### Other victories:

- Renewed UM support for the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice.
- Turned back attempts to limit academic freedom and freedom of the pulpit.

- Elected three candidates nominated by the bishops to the Judicial Council.
- Achieved a closer vote on homosexuality issues than four years ago. One vote was lost by only 30 votes.
- Resourced progressive delegates in Faith and Order, General Administration, Church and Society, Discipleship, and Financial Administration legislative committees.
- Authorized and funded a study on the causes and prevention of teen suicide focusing on sexual identity crises.
- Passed a Church and Society petition urging government oversight of embryonic stem cell research
- Passed a petition urging the US government to end occupation of Palestinian territories and work for peace in the Middle East

## Win Some, Lose Some

Not everything went the way MFSA had hoped at this year's General Conference, as you can see:

- Failed to soften UM condemnation of homosexuality.
- General Conference adopted a formula for general boards and agencies which will drastically reduce representation from the Western jurisdiction and increase it from jurisdictions where conservatives are strongest.
- Lost our flagship effort to add the phrase "faithful Christians disagree" to many areas of the discipline.

## Schism?

Rumors flew around the Convention Center yesterday. Those who had attended the UM Decision 2004 breakfast reported that the Rev. Bill Hinson, president of the Confessing Movement, had spoken of the inevitability of schism within the church. Reports followed that later in the morning there had been a press conference where conservative leaders further enunciated plans for a parting of ways within the church.

It was unclear who originated which reports and whether there would be proposed action on the floor of GC. Reporters picked up the story before delegates and immediately — before any kind of response could be considered — the news was being spread in the secular press that the United Methodist Church was considering schism. It was not clear then, nor is it clear this morning, exactly what is being proposed by whom. Parishioners back home read stories all day yesterday about the possibility that our church would split when the truth is that the GC has not even considered the matter.

What is clear is that several conservative church leaders currently hold the view that we cannot move into the future as a united church. MFSA does not share this perspective. We acknowledge deep divisions within the church that need to be bridged, but we are committed to working out those differences in the context of the covenant that binds us together as United Methodists.

We believe that talk of schism is

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## Coming Events

Friday, 7 a.m. & 2 p.m.	Prayer Witness at the Convention Center
Daily, 7-8 a.m.	MFS A Breakfast and Legislative Briefing for Delegates at Smithfield Church
Daily, Noon - 2 p.m.	Common Witness Delicious and Affordable Lunches at Smithfield Church
Friday latenight (after adjournment)	Common Witness volunteer, delegate, and visitor celebration at Holiday Inn Express (20 S. 10th St.)

## Schism?

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inappropriate and premature. MFS A has been connected to Methodism since 1907. We have weathered all sorts of difficult and painful times. Over the years, stands our organization has taken for justice have often brought us into conflict with others in the church. But we never considered leaving. We are convicted by a Wesleyan vision of personal piety and social holiness. We are drawn to the open-mindedness and warm-heartedness of our Methodist tradition. And we firmly believe that it is in the midst of diversity that we find our greatest blessing.

We are saddened that this small group of leaders has taken this position.

**MFS A**

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## Do Not Be Afraid

Matthew 28:5

### River of Life Witness

Soulforce joined Common Witness at General Conference on Thursday. With drum and candle, signs and streamers, we entered the Convention Center hall singing just after the morning break.

We were welcomed as guests with great Methodist grace by Bishop Janice Riggle Huie. The march was joined by many supporters of MFS A, RMN, Affirmation, MOSAIC, and other groups, and by many delegates and bishops who stood at their seats.

The crowd circled the hall, went into the delegate seating area, left the water of their baptisms in the

bishops' font and their candle on the altar. They left smiles and tears and hope behind as they marched on to their own gathering of celebration and hope.

MFS A would like to extend our appreciation and thanks to all who participated. We are particularly grateful for:

- The willingness of Soulforce leaders to consult with progressive groups within the UMC in shaping the witness.
- All of the delegates who stood, sang or joined in the procession.
- The courage of those delegates who stood alone in otherwise un supportive delegations.
- The presence of the Holy Spirit flowing throughout the room.
- Those who hold a different perspective than those who marched but listened respectfully to our voices.

## Dr. Forbes Speaks

The Rev. Dr. James A. Forbes, Thursday's MFS A lunch speaker, had his audience in the palm of his hand from beginning to end. He rapped, he sang, he preached, and — before it was over — he was wearing one of the PRN's rainbow stoles.

"If we divide our minds, we will not think well," said the senior minister of the Riverside Church in New York City. In his rap, the repeated response of the people was "This is no time for foolishness."

The powerful words of Dr. Forbes refreshed those who had come to Smithfield Church to hear him speak. Acknowledging that we sometimes get knocked down and beat up as we struggle for justice, Forbes was clear that God gives us sufficient strength for the journey.

## Voices of Faith

March 31—April 1, 2005

Los Angeles, California

**Progressive United Methodists will gather again to be "the Church" together and create the future.**

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