

# Action

February 1984

AN IRD BULLETIN FOR UNITED METHODISTS

## **Bishops' Committee Meets in Closed Session**

The special UM bishops' committee, established to investigate public criticisms of some of the policy advocacy and funding patterns of our UM church, the NCC, and the WCC, met January 17 to 19 in New York City and interviewed personnel from the UM Board of Global Ministries, UM Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, and the National Council of Churches. Two agency staff members who are assisting the bishops will go to Geneva, Switzerland later this month to meet with World Council officials. The committee meets again in mid-February in Chicago, IL, and has invited IRD representatives to attend and discuss their concerns. The committee intends to give its report to the full Council of Bishops before General Conference meets this spring.

Unfortunately, the bishops' investigative committee has taken a step away from the openness so desperately needed by the church in closing its meetings to the press. The decision to close the meeting clearly violates the intention of the 1980 General Conference "Open Meetings" resolution and verifies the need to include legis-

Last month, you received a letter from Ed Robb and Diane Knippers, outlining the financial needs of IRD's new UM committee as we approach the May General Conference. Many members responded generously. If you are one who has already made a donation, thank you!

If you haven't contributed to this effort, why not make out that check today? We are still far short of reaching our goal of \$25,000.

IRD has captured the attention of the United Methodist Church in the last year. This General Conference presents an unprecedented opportunity to demand some of the changes so urgently needed in the church. It would be tragic to cut back -- or even stop -- our efforts now. We need your generous help.

lation requiring "open meetings" in the Discipline, our church law.

This decision is most dismaying because this particular committee embodies the hope of many, many United Methodists for substantive steps toward reforming UM mission and social action. In our last UM Action bulletin, we argued, "**The committee's greatest service would be to determine how the continuing debate can be conducted constructively.**" A first, and obvious, step is open and public discussion and debate.

## **New IRD Committee Prepares for General Conference**

United Methodists in IRD are gearing up for General Conference. To help you catch up on our plans -- and to enlist your help -- we offer the following:

### **What is the first priority of United Methodists for Religious Liberty and Human Rights in its General Conference effort?**

Our first priority is to work for the revision of our Social Principles to increase the emphasis on religious liberty and human rights (see the draft petitions on page 2). Of course, we will also be working on behalf of resolutions and legislation that promote "democracy" in the church, as well as democratic values and human rights around the world. We are in the process of working on these ideas and we are certainly open to suggestions!

### **Why are the Social Principles the first focus of concern?**

The Social Principles matter to United Methodists. First, the general boards are supposed to operate their programs in a manner consistent with these principles (Discipline para. 1006.14). Annual conference and general church investments are also to be evaluated against the Social Principles. The Social Principles are frequently cited as justification for more specific public policy resolutions, legal actions, educational

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# UMs for Religious Liberty Propose Petitions for General Conference

The following three petitions are our recommendations to the 1984 General Conference. New sections are underlined; sections to be deleted are in parenthesis. An alternate method of preparing petitions is to double underline new portions and single underline deletions.

Petitions should be mailed to Newell Knudson, P.O. Box 28809, San Jose, CA 95159. The petition **deadline is March 1, 1984**. You must mail **two copies** of each petition or resolution and treat only one subject or disciplinary paragraph in each petition. Petitions must be signed by the sender and include the sender's address, name of local church, and (for clergy) annual conference membership. If the petition is from a group (such as a charge conference, district council on ministries, etc.) indicate the number that voted for, against, and that abstained.

## Petition on Religious Freedom

To the members of the 1984 General Conference of The United Methodist Church:

I (we) petition that Paragraph 72 (B) be amended as follows:

(Rights of Religious Minorities) Right of Freedom of Religion and Conscience. -- Freedom of conscience is the cornerstone of human rights. Tragically, religious persecution has been common in the history of civilization. We urge politics and practices that ensure the right of every religious group to exercise its faith free from legal, political, or economic restrictions. Free exercise of faith includes the following freedoms: to worship or assemble in connection with a religion or belief, and to establish and maintain places for these purposes; to establish and maintain appropriate charitable or humanitarian institutions; to make, to acquire and to use to an adequate extent the necessary articles and materials related to the rites or customs of a religion or belief; to write, to publish and to disseminate relevant publications in these areas; to teach a religion or belief in places suitable for these purposes; to solicit and receive voluntary financial and other contributions from individuals and institutions; to train, to appoint, to elect or

to designate by succession appropriate leaders called for by the requirements and standards of any religion or belief; to observe days of rest and to celebrate holidays and ceremonies in accordance with the precepts of one's religion or belief; to establish and maintain communications with individuals and communities in matters of religion and belief at the national and international levels. The right of children to have access to education in the matter of religion or belief in accordance with the wishes of their parents is to be protected. In particular, we condemn anti-Semitism in both its overt and covert forms. (,and assert the right of all religions and their adherents to freedom from legal, economic, and social discrimination.) We acknowledge the particular responsibilities of Christians who enjoy freedom of conscience to speak forcefully on the behalf of those who are denied those freedoms and who cannot speak for themselves; this is our first social and political responsibility because this is the primary juncture of the Church and society, upon which all other interaction depends.

Paragraph 72 (B) as amended would then read:

**Here you should retype the entire passage as you finally want it to appear.**

## Petition on Democratic Values

To the members of the 1984 General Conference of The United Methodist Church:

I (we) petition that Paragraph 74 be amended as follows:

While our allegiance to God takes precedence over our allegiance to any state, we acknowledge the vital function of government as a principal vehicle to be responsible to God for social and political life, we declare the following relative to governments:

Basic Freedoms: -- We hold governments responsible for the protection of the rights of the people to the freedoms of speech, religion, assembly, and communications media; to the right to privacy; and to the guarantee of the rights to adequate food, clothing, shelter, education, and health care. However, we reject the

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idea that these latter "economic and social rights" take precedence over individual, communal, and democratic rights. We believe that the best guarantee that people will ultimately achieve economic and social betterment is a system that protects their freedom to organize for these purposes. We believe that persons have the right to live their lives free from fear of torture, cruel and degrading psychological and physical punishment, arbitrary arrest and imprisonment without trial, invasion of the home, forcible separation of family members, enforced starvation, denial of emigration and employment, forced labor, acts of terrorism, racial discrimination, and all other violations of the integrity of the person. (The use of detention and imprisonment for the harrassment and elimination of political opponents or other dissidents violates fundamental human rights.) Furthermore, the mistreatment or torture of persons by governments or other groups for any purpose violates Christian teaching and must be condemned and/or opposed by Christians and Churches wherever and whenever it occurs. We unalterably oppose all governmental systems which deny human rights to the people within their borders, including fascism, communism, apartheid, and all forms of military and authoritarian dictatorship, including those systems which, in addition to internal repression, seek to impose their tyrannies beyond their borders by means of military force, terror, and subversion.

B. Political Responsibility. -- The strength of a political system depends upon the full and willing participation of its citizens. We believe that people have the right to choose their own government through democratic, competitive elections, free from internal or external coercion. Countries that respect these democratic rights are much more likely to respect the integrity of individual and communal rights as well. We believe the Church and the state are God-ordained institutions which should be independent of control by the other, but which may appropriately interact. (We believe that the state should not attempt to control the church, nor should the church seek to dominate the state. "Separation of church and state" means no organic union of the two, but does permit interaction.) The Church should continually exert a strong ethical influence upon the state, supporting policies and programs deemed to be just and compassionate and opposing policies and programs which are not.

(Continue Paragraph 74 as in 1980 Discipline)

New Paragraph 74 would then read: **(Here you should retype the entire passage as you finally want it to appear.)**

### Petition on the Social Creed

To the members of the 1984 General Conference of The United Methodist Church:

I (we) petition that Paragraph 76, the Social Creed, be amended as follows:

We believe in God, Creator of the world and of humankind in his image; and in Jesus Christ the Redeemer of all creation. We believe in the Holy Spirit, through whom we acknowledge God's gift and we repent of our sin in misusing these gifts to idolatrous ends.

We affirm the natural world as God's handiwork and dedicate ourselves to its preservation, enhancement, and faithful use by humankind.

We joyfully receive, for ourselves and others, the blessings of community, sexuality, marriage, and the family.

We commit ourselves to the rights of men, women, children, youth, young adults, the aging, and those with handicapping conditions; to improvement of the quality of life; and to the rights and dignity of racial and ethnic (, and religious) minorities. We are grateful for religious freedom and pledge ourselves to obtaining such freedom for others.

We believe in the right and duty of persons to work for the good of themselves and others, and in the protection of their welfare in so doing; in the rights to property as a trust from God, collective bargaining, and responsible consumption; and in the elimination of economic and social distress.

We dedicate ourselves to peace throughout the world, to freedom for all peoples, and to the rule of justice and law among nations.

We believe in the present and final triumph of God's Word in human affairs, and gladly accept our commission to manifest the life of the gospel in the world. Amen.

Paragraph 76 as amended would then read as follows: **(Here you should retype the entire passage as you finally want it to appear.)**

## Continued from page 1

materials, and other church programs. In fact, the UM Discipline instructs all members that "The standards of attitude and conduct set forth in the Social Principles shall be considered as an essential resource for guiding each member of the Church in being a servant of Christ on mission." So the Social Principles significantly influence everything from seminary education to worship, from how church money is spent to Sunday school literature.

### **What exactly are the revisions you are suggesting?**

For the most part, the new language comes from two sources: the 1980 General Conference resolution on "Democracy and Religious Freedom" and the United Nations declaration on religious belief. (The UN declaration, adopted in 1981 after 21 years of preparation, is an excellent step forward for that body and for the cause of liberty. IRD board member Michael Novak was the U.S. representative to the UN Human Rights Commission when this declaration was finally approved.)

We have suggested changing the title of the section "Rights of Religious Minorities" to "Right of Freedom of Religion and Conscience" in order to acknowledge that in many parts of the world it is not just the religious "minorities" who are repressed. The other deletions are suggested simply because these points seem to have been made, often with greater force and specificity, in the additions.

### **But isn't this all just words? What difference will it make at General Conference?**

These revisions introduce moral values which are not strongly emphasized in aspects of our church work. Often, liberty takes a back seat to other social action concerns. For example, the resolution on China, prepared by the General Board of Global Ministries for General Conference consideration, states,

Together, the Chinese government and people have brought about many improvements in basic physical needs.... Liberation from foreign domination has brought a renewed sense of pride and dignity in being Chinese. Growing self-reliance in overcoming seemingly insurmountable problems has underscored this feeling of self-respect and self-esteem.

Other than a brief acknowledgement that the church was officially closed in China during the Cultural Revolution, there is no mention in this

generally laudatory description of the brutal human rights abuses suffered by the Chinese people.

These proposed revisions will, we trust, help reshape the debate in the church over the nature of mission. They will help General Conference delegates think in terms not offered to them in legislation from boards and agencies. Just words? No, because Christians know that the ideas we believe have consequences in the world.

### **What can IRD members do to help?**

There are two important things you can do. First, study the petitions and submit them, either as an individual or with your church, to General Conference (instructions on page 2). Of course, you should feel free to make any changes you believe are necessary to improve them. Second, communicate your views to your delegates. (You may contact your pastor or IRD for their names and addresses.) Arrange an interview in person or, if possible, attend your annual conference delegation's information hearings.

### **Action Suggestions for United Methodists**

■ An important resource for General Conference delegates is "A Time for Candor," an analysis of church support to opponents of democracy on the Left published by IRD last spring. You can help provide each member of your annual conference delegation to General Conference with a copy of this 100-page study. Printing, postage, and handling costs for each book totals \$5.00. For information on how to order for delegates from your conference, contact Koby Miller, UMs for Religious Liberty and Human Rights, 1000 16th Street, N.W., Suite LL 50, Washington, D.C. 20036 (202/822-8627).

■ Democracy in action! John Hightower of the University UM Church in Huntsville, Alabama writes that his church is holding a specially called Church Conference early in February to consider petitions and resolutions for General Conference. The church is inviting each member of its annual conference delegation to General Conference, as well as its bishop, so that these leaders will know of the church's concern for the issues. Some of the many resolutions the conference will consider include a statement on human rights, and on allowing local churches to designate World Service funds.

There is still time for your church to act, if not through a Church or Charge Conference (presided over by your district superintendent), then through your administrative council.

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