

Summary of Petitions Submitted to General Conference 2008 by RENEW Network Members

Our Identity and Motivation

The RENEW Network is a network (not a separate organization) for evangelical, theologically conservative United Methodist W(w)omen across the United Methodist Church. The majority of women who are a part of the network are active in the organization of United Methodist Women.

The purpose of the network is to, first of all, encourage revitalization at the local level; and, second, to call for accountability on the part of the Women's Division. Petitions submitted to General Conference by network members reflect these two objectives.

In support of our petitions, recent statistics for the North Georgia, South Georgia and South Carolina conferences (considered some of the stronger UMW conferences) show an average of 14.7%, out of the total female membership of the churches in these three conferences, as members of United Methodist Women. That leaves 85% of women within the UMC in these conferences who either are being ministered to through other women's ministries (within and outside of the denomination), or could be reached with such ministries. These are the women for whom much of our legislation is concerned.

Petitions to General Conference

Petitions submitted by RENEW Network members have been strongly opposed by the Women's Division at various UMW events and at previous General Conferences. However, as mentioned, statistics showing loss of funding and loss of membership by the organization of United Methodist Women is indicative of the fact that many women want change and desire choice.

Petition #81365-LC, ¶256.5, pg. 1344, DCA, Volume 2, Section 2, "Make UMW Optional" is the major piece of legislation that speaks to the local membership issue. This legislation petitions General Conference to allow for a United Methodist Women's organization, as well as for supplemental (nurturing) women's ministries, both with official status. In truth, this legislation recognizes what already exists, and supports choice in ministries for the women of the church.

A Bit of History

This request was first put forward at General Conference 1996 by an individual, Janet Johnston, from Pottsboro, Texas. Janet was not connected in any way with the RENEW Network. She was a faithful, local UMW member who recognized that many of the women of her church did not want to join UMW, and, therefore, she felt supplemental ministries were needed. The vote in committee for her legislation was 41 for and 35 against. On the floor of General Conference the vote was 407 yes, 477 no. The Women's Division was shocked by this close vote.

At General Conference 2000, Janet again submitted her petition, which was soundly defeated because the element of surprise was missing and the Women's Division had lobbied strongly against it.

At General Conference 2004, members of the RENEW Network took up this legislation, only to have it so hotly opposed that some members of the Local Church Committee apologized to us for the heavy-handed manner in which the legislation was handled. One of the primary opposing arguments was that nurturing ministries were possible, even without official sanction. However several nurturing ministries that have been attempted have been strongly opposed by the Women's Division and by district and conference UMW officers.

Therefore, we are asking one more time for delegates to sanction and encourage supplemental women's ministries in order to give the official sanction of the church to those effective women's ministries that already exist within our churches, and to encourage the formation of new women's ministries—in order that the 85% cited above may be reached for Christ.

Petition #81366-LC, ¶256.5, pg. 1345, DCA, Volume 2, Section 2, “UMW and Local Church” addresses our concern that separate lines of accountability, program and policy maintain a sense (and a *Disciplinary* reality) that United Methodist Women (UMW) is separate from the local church and operating independently of it. While all other program ministries of the local church come under the church council, local UMW groups report directly to the Women's Division through the district and conference UMW structure, and are not an integral part of the local church program.

This structural arrangement does not foster cooperation in mission and ministry within the local church. This legislation asserts that a unique and specialized ministry to women can be retained, with connection to the Women's Division, while functioning as an integral part of the local church ministry under the auspices of the local church council.

Contrary to claims, this petition does not call for the funds of the local United Methodist Women's organization to come under the church council or the church's financial program. The current UMW Financial Handbook, gives the local UMW group the authority to determine how it will disburse its funds, including how much will be sent to the Women's Division as “Mission Giving.”

Petition #81375-GM-¶1323, pg. 1083, DCA, Volume 2, Section 2, “Financial Accountability” addresses our concern that The General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) has financial oversight for all church agencies, except the Women's Division. In light of the chronic overspending on the part of the Women's Division that continued without internal self-restraint over several years, this legislative proposal is timely and provides a safeguard to assure future accountability. It also provides a means of assuring that funds which are spent for various programs and dispersed as grants will be in accordance with *The Book of Discipline*.

Petition #81018-GM, pg. 1146, Volume 2, Section 2, “End Exploitation by United Nations Personnel” is offered in light of the fact that several of our boards and agencies have put forward legislation in support of the United Nations, and, in fact, rely upon United Nations' documents and treaties to define much of their program activities.

Yet, for years, reports of sexual and other exploitation by United Nations peacekeeping forces of the people they are charged to protect have received widespread press coverage in major news services in the US and abroad. Some reports allege that girls as young as 8 years of age have been forced to have sex with United Nations officials.

Several bi-partisan studies have acknowledged the abuse and called for the reform measures necessary to hold United Nations officials accountable. Although the UN has passed resolutions calling for a zero tolerance policy, the fact remains that the UN has taken no substantive steps other than rhetoric to enforce their policy or hold offenders accountable.

The most pressing crisis confronting the United Nations is the need for reform. Reform is particularly needed in the area of peacekeeping and effective humanitarian aid distribution. UN officials are charged with the care and protection of displaced persons, particularly women, children and youth. Refugees and other displaced persons should not have to endure suffering from those charged with their care. The United Methodist Church should pass this resolution in order to bring reform that will enable the United Nations to discharge its tasks with renewed integrity.

Petition #81353-C2-¶161D, p. 321, DCA, Volume 2, Section 1, “Divorce” identifies our concern about the negative effects of no-fault divorce. No-fault divorce statutes weaken societal respect for marriage as a permanent relationship, often favoring the spouse seeking divorce, and can tempt couples facing temporary problems with an ultimately devastating “easy out” over counseling to save the marriage. Reform should be sensitive to legitimate concerns about abusive marriages.

Additional Legislative Pieces

The above petitions were the primary ones submitted by RENEW Network members. While we do not know all of the petitions our network members submitted, below are some they endorsed:

- Teen Sexual Identity and Suicide Risk, Amendment to Resolution #158
(See related piece in this packet on this seriously problematic resolution.)
- Calling for an End to Female Genital Mutilation, New Resolution
- Ministry to Victims of Prostitution, New Resolution
- Late Term Abortions, ¶161J
- Gender-Selective Abortions, New Resolution
- Ministry Response to Sexual Exploitation, New Resolution
- Support for Ethical Sex Education, ¶161G
- Women’s Division Funding Policies, ¶1319.4c
- Women’s Rights in the Islamic World, New Resolution

Our Appeal to You—Our Prayer for You

Please read our petitions and give them a fair review. Prayerfully vote your conscience, endeavoring to be faithful to Christ and to the views of those you represent.

May God bless you as you fulfill this important responsibility. May God’s will be done.