

RENEW Network Preliminary General Conference Report

General Conference 2008 was arduous—physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Unlike early Methodist conferences where the Spirit of God moved upon the hearts of men and women—disrupting the conference for times of confession of sin and seeking of redemption—GC 2008 found those who disregard the teaching of Scripture accusing the Church of anti-gay policies that are “wrong and sinful in the sight of God.”

Here is a synopsis of our perspective on some of the General Conference decisions:

Regarding general legislation:

- We are troubled by the shift in the Judicial Council to a liberal body, thus creating concern for future rulings.
- We rejoice in the retention of our standards on most of the sexuality issues.
- We regret that the vote fell 30 short of severing our ties with the pro-abortion Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC).
- We are pleased the General Conference let stand language in *The Book of Discipline* regarding pastoral authority over church membership.
- We are concerned about the ongoing study regarding the formation of “Regional” conferences that would separate the current U.S. church from the Central Conferences.

Regarding “actions taken” by Soulforce, Affirmation, Reconciling Ministries Network and Methodist Federation for Social Action:

- We are grieved that a bishop of our Church found a loophole to once again allow advocates for the acceptance of homosexual practice onto the floor of General Conference without vote of the body.
- We lament with delegates who felt “dismayed, saddened, outraged and captive” as the protestors marched onto the floor.
- We decry the statement by retired bishop Melvin Talbert that the vote to retain the language on homosexuality in the *Discipline* was “wrong” and a “sin against God.”
- We concur with Bishop Lindsey Davis of North Georgia who said publicly, “I think the church is right. I think we are very much in sync with historic Christianity and very much in sync with 99.9 percent of Christians in the world. I make no apology for our position. It is biblical, and it is in keeping with 2,000 years of Christian tradition.”
- We were appalled at the blatant performance of a same-sex marriage ceremony just outside the Convention Center, and at the participation of a United Methodist clergy woman, Rev. Julie Todd, who blessed and consecrated communion elements that the couple served to their guests.

Regarding legislation that relates to United Methodist Women and the Women’s Division:

- We appreciate the delegates who spoke in behalf of choice in women's ministries as proposed by legislation submitted by RENEW Network members.
- We regret that this legislation did not pass, despite the fact that GCFA statistics show that only 16% of women who are members of the UMC are members of the UMW, leaving 84% whose ministries are unrecognized or non-existent.
- We are glad our petitions "Divorce" and "End Exploitation by United Nations Personnel" were adopted.
- We remain concerned that other petitions calling for accountability on the part of the Women's Division failed.
- We praise God that the legislation recommending "After the Fact..." a faulty study on Teen Suicide was rejected.
- We are deeply troubled by the passing of other resolutions relating to teen suicide that only focus on homosexual practice, not the top causes of teen suicide.
- We are alarmed that General Conference continues to pass Women's Division petitions that are politically and socially skewed, such as those endorsing radical United Nations' treaties and the International Criminal Court.

The RENEW luncheon was a success, with all 130 seats taken, and overflow guests besides. Major Mark Brown, Area Commander of the Salvation Army (and his wife, Susan), and Bishop Jack Iker, bishop of the Fort Worth Diocese of the Episcopal Church, were our guests. Bishop Iker gave a stirring address on homosexual practice and the church. *Reclaiming the Wesleyan Social Witness: Offering Christ* was showcased with a good response from those attending. The Living Praise Trio from Richmond, Virginia provided inspirational music.

Our eight bookmarks lifting up the Name of Jesus, the Cross of Christ, the Word of God and the Power of the Holy Spirit were well-received at General Conference, and, we believe, were the inspiration to delegates we intended them to be.

Our team is in the process of preparing a comprehensive Post General Conference Packet for our network members. Watch the mail and this site for availability.