



February 2012

Morningside Messenger

Easter is coming! But, it doesn't come easily. Easter is the pivotal high holy day of our Christian tradition, a time when we celebrate the resurrection truth that death is not the end, and that Christ came to give us Life Abundant. But, this joyful celebration is preceded by the season of Lent, a 40 day period of self-examination and spiritual discipline. The purpose of Lent is to deepen our awareness of God, to grow in our faith, and to express God's claim on our lives through concrete acts of justice and reconciliation.

The three traditional pillars of Lenten observance are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Each of these spiritual disciplines offers us the opportunity to grow in our faith, deepen our spiritual practice, and express the biblical mandate to *"love justice, do mercy, and walk humbly with God."* [Micah 6:8]

Prayer: Anything we want to do well takes practice, so I encourage you to practice your faith during Lent. Begin a discipline of starting the day with devotional reading; take time for silent meditation; set a personal goal for yourself and write it in a prayer journal. If you are able, spend time outdoors; go for a quiet prayer walk. Pray for yourself and your loved ones. Pray for the poor and the oppressed. Pray for the world and those in positions of leadership. Pray for our country, our nation, our city and your neighborhood. Pray for our church, that we might all grow in our faith and good works.

Fasting: Fasting is one of the most ancient practices linked to Lent. It doesn't have to be radical or extended, but you should feel it! Fasting is more than a means of developing self-control. It can deepen our prayer life, as

the pangs of hunger remind us of our hunger for God. And, it's not just a personal thing!

Fasting has social and political implications. The prophet Isaiah insists that fasting without changing our behavior is not pleasing to God. *"This, rather, is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own."* [Isaiah 58:6-7]

Fasting reminds us of those who are forced to fast by their poverty, those who suffer from the injustices of our economic and political structures. Fasting can help us realize the suffering that so many people in our world experience every day, and it should lead us to greater efforts to alleviate that suffering.

Almsgiving: The third traditional pillar, giving to the poor, is rooted in our concern for those in need and is an expression of our gratitude for all that God has given to us. Benevolent giving and the promotion of justice are integral elements of what it means to practice growing in our faith, and I have been so impressed and grateful for the generous spirit of our Morningside Church family as we have contributed in so many ways to those who are in need.

Lent is a wonderful season. I look forward to sharing it with you, in worship, in fellowship, and in deed. May Christ be your shalom,

Michael

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Helen Daugherty
Lay Leader:
Kathleen Johnson
Webmaster:
Mike Johnson

Notes from the Finance Team

We are in process of reporting the year end statistics to the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference. You may already know one of the ways the information from the reports is used by the Annual Conference is to calculate apportionments.

But you may not be aware that The General Board of Global Ministries use the year end reports is to help annual conferences, districts, and local churches plan how to more effectively minister within their own communities. The United Methodist Publishing House uses them to assist in planning resources and marketing. The General Commission of the Status and Role of Women and the General Commission of Religion and Race use them to assist in monitoring and raising consciousness of gender and racial/ethnic inclusiveness in the United Methodist Church.

JANUARY FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Income:	Actual \$29,061.13	Budget \$28,155
Expenses:	Actual \$27,358.97	Budget \$29,531



Morningside Crab Feed Tickets on Sale Now!

\$25 per person

Children 7-12 - \$8

Children 6 and under free!

**February 11, 2012 6:00 p.m. at the Scottish Rite
Center**

Enjoy a casual evening out with friends and dine on the most delicious fresh crab the Pacific Ocean can deliver.

Feast on Dungeness crab, salad or coleslaw, baked beans, French bread, dessert and beverages. If you are not a shellfish eater, you may order a chicken entre instead of crab.

Enjoy your after dinner coffee and dessert as Arlen Hollinshead auctions off several wonderful coast vacation weekends, Portland Trailblazer tickets plus an air excursion with pilot, George Adkins. Don't miss the evening! It will be great fun! Bring your friends. Call the church today to order your tickets! 503-364-5013.

Proceeds from the evening support the general budget of Morningside UM Church.



The Passions of Morningside United Methodist Church

Inclusive ministry

Passion #1 Inclusive Ministry - a

belief that God is calling Morningside to be intentional about strengthening its commitment and witness as an inclusive, safe and welcoming church where every person can experience the gift of God's love for them.

Senior Connections will meet Thursday, February 2 at 1:30 p.m. in the fellowship hall. All are invited for a time of fellowship, laughter, singing, puzzles, and bingo. Refreshments are always yummy!



Do you need a blood pressure measurement? Julia Nyberg will be available to take readings on Thursday afternoon just before Senior Connections.



Fun for Seniors



United Methodist Men will meet on Monday, February 6 at 10 a.m. in the Fireside Room. The program will be presented by Hale Thornburgh sharing about his trip to the Islands of Greece. Refreshments will be available.

Keystones Circle will meet February 6 at 1:00 p.m. in the Fireside Room. Meredith Carr will share the program. Refreshments will be served.

Christian Education Connection

Our Christian Education team has some new faces. We would like to thank past members for their valuable contribution and welcome new members. Our leadership team for 2012 is Mary Ellen Eichelberger, Chair and acting Sunday School Superintendant. Mary Ellen comes to us with many years of experience working in Christian Education and Youth Ministries. Welcome, Mary Ellen.



Our team also includes: Brandi Cortes, Deb Freels, Betty Funk, Donna Gross, Karna Johnson Margie Lowe, Michele O'Leary, Lynda Sloan, Jocelyn Smiley and Phyllis Tarter.

When you pass by these leaders, please welcome and thank them for the tremendous job they are doing bringing God's Word to the children and families at Morningside. We welcome your input and suggestions.

Youth happenings in February

Mark your calendars: On February 22nd, Ash Wednesday, plan on coming to worship service an hour early at 6 p.m. for dinner sponsored by B.R.E.A.D. You can find a signup sheet in the narthex. This dinner is presented by our youth as a free-will offering to support their mission trip this summer. They will be taking on the challenge of an urban-plunge. If you are wondering what an urban-plunge is then you are not alone. We will be going to a nearby city, possibly Seattle or Portland, and offering our help in children's centers, soup kitchens, homeless shelters and other ministries as identified by the leadership team. Please join us on February 22 as we continue to work toward the goal of helping others while learning about the many gifts God has given us.

Thank-You

The youth have asked to express heart-felt thanks to everyone who ordered poinsettias. Every fundraiser means we are a step closer to making our mission trip happen.

GET A JUMP ON YOUR SPRING CLEANING. DECLUTTER YOUR HOME TODAY!

If you suffer from pack-ratitis; it's time for a cold-turkey closet cleanup.

And by cleanup, we mean clean it out!



First step: Empty it. No kidding. Take everything out of your closet: clothes, shoes, belts, ties, Christmas gifts that have been hiding there since 1982. Remove shelves, shoe racks and furniture. Take a look at your empty closet - perhaps for the first time since you moved into your home.

Now the work really starts.

- Divide your closet contents into three piles: haven't worn in two years or never liked, seriously out of style and love more than chocolate.
- Root through the first two piles for items that are in good shape and might be useful to someone else. It's true that one person's trash is another's treasure. Donate the first two piles of gently used clothing and household items to the UMW Rummage Sale, March 2 & 3. More people than ever need help right now.
- Throw away anything that is worn out. One person's trash also can be another's trash.
- Make your way through the house and do the same for every closet. Don't forget the kitchen pantry, linen closet, vanity cabinet and under-the-sink cupboards that we all use as catch-alls. **FREE UP CLOSET SPACE! SHAPE UP YOUR ROOMS. HAVE MORE CALM AND LESS STUFF IN YOUR LIFE.** Donate your clutter to the UMW Rummage Sale.



**The United Methodist Women remind you of the
upcoming Rummage Sale
Friday and Saturday, March 2 & 3. Bring your donations
to the church beginning after worship on Sunday,
February 27.**

**No TV's please!
No deliveries after noon on Thursday, March 1.**



Social Principles class to be offered in February

Do you agree with everything in the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church? That would be a hard question for most of us to answer, because we don't really know what they say. Join us in

February to dig into this important document of the church, how it is written and re-written, and what it means to agree or disagree. The class will be most interesting if there are a lot of participants with a wide range of opinions on social issues. No one will be told they are wrong!

Jan Nelson will be the leader. The class will be three sessions on Sunday evenings, February 5, 12, and 19. Each class will begin at 7:00 and last 1 1/2 hours or less. It is possible to come to only one or two sessions, but the whole thing will make more sense if you attend all three. The third session will include a focus on the upcoming General Conference and changes to the Social Principles that will come before that body for consideration. There will be a sign-up sheet posted so that we can order enough copies of the Social Principles book

ASH WEDNESDAY WORSHIP FEBRUARY 22, 7 p.m.



Last year's Ash Wednesday service, white drapery accentuated with indirect lighting, and the choir singing Taize songs, was one of the most beautiful and memorable worship experiences of the year. After seeing it on the video, many shared that they wished they'd have known how special it was going to be. So, our

Worship Team unanimously felt that we should repeat the basic theme, with a similar atmosphere of beautiful drapery and quiet music.

The youth will be offering a meal at 6 p.m., which will be a fundraiser for this year's local mission trip. Come for dinner, and stay for worship. You will be blessed!

“Why? Making Sense of God’s Will” by Adam Hamilton

When the ground shakes, and a poor nation’s economy is destroyed; when the waters rise, washing away a community’s hopes and dreams; when a child suffers neglect and abuse; when violence tears apart nations; where is God? If God is all powerful, and if each one of us is a beloved child of God, then how can God allow tragedy and suffering to infest his creation?

When we lift our prayers to God, and no answer seems to come; when we earnestly seek to know the will of God for our lives, yet can’t seem to discern it; when God seems far away; where is God? If God counts the hairs on our head, and knows every sparrow that falls, why is finding and understanding God’s will so difficult at times?

In *Why? Making Sense of God’s Will* best-selling author Adam Hamilton brings fresh insight to the age-old question of how to understand the will of God. Rejecting simplistic answers and unexamined assumptions, Hamilton addresses how we can comprehend God’s plan for the world and ourselves. Chapters include:

1. *Why Do the Innocent Suffer?* 2. *Why Do My Prayers Go Unanswered?* 3. *Why Can’t I See God’s Will for My Life?* 4. *Why God’s Love Prevails*

“When it comes to the weightiest problems for our faith, like suffering and unanswered prayers and God’s will, philosophers don’t get the job done for me. But thoughtful pastors do. For me, the one thoughtful pastor who offers wisdom for our deepest questions is Adam Hamilton. This book is a rare gift and the kind of book that needs to be close at hand for all Christians. This book proves theology has to be done by pastors.” –Scot McKnight, author of *A Community Called Atonement*

“As someone for whom the ‘Christian answers’ I grew up with failed to satisfy the troubling questions of my adulthood, I deeply appreciate Adam Hamilton’s thoughtful book *Why?* I recommend this book to anyone who longs to leave behind simplistic answers and discover a God who invites them into a collaborative process of bringing redemption, love and hope to a world in desperate need.” –Lynne Hybels, author of *Nice Girls Don’t Change the World*

“Unlike many Christian writers these days, Adam Hamilton does actually make sense of God’s will. This is a profoundly satisfying treatment of common misconceptions about God. Everyone who asks ‘Why?’ when confronted with evil, innocent suffering, unanswered prayers, and failure to perceive God’s will should read this book.” –Roger Olson, author of *Questions to All Your Answers*

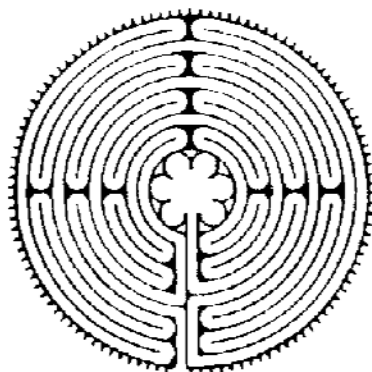
Small Groups are forming now to read and discuss the Adam Hamilton book, “Why? Making Sense of God’s Will.” This four chapter book is accompanied by an excellent video. The book is powerful. Pastor Michael has used this book for the Transformation Prayer Retreat last fall, and they liked it very much. The book has been requested for this year’s Lenten study by one of our own members. Book study groups have been enthusiastic and lively, participants are eager to begin a new study.

Please join us by signing up for a study group. There are several options for the four week series beginning March, 6 and 7, each class lasting about one hour. The cost of the book is \$8.00 and now available in the church office.

- Tuesdays at 9:30 a.m. Leader: Kathy Kleen
- Tuesdays at noon Leader: Pastor Michael
- Wednesdays at 1 p.m. Leader: Deb Freels

REST RELAX RENEW REFLECT REPENT REFRESH REMIND

“For you shall go out in joy, and be led forth in peace.” Isaiah 55: 12



The labyrinth is a divine archetype found in all religious traditions in various forms around the world. By walking a replica of the Chartres Labyrinth, laid in the floor of Chartres Cathedral, France, in 1201, we are discovering a long-forgotten mystical tradition that is being reborn. The Labyrinth has only one path so there are no dead ends. The path spirals around and becomes a mirror for where we are in our lives. It touches our sorrows and releases our joys. We walk with an open mind and an open heart. There are three stages to the walk.

Purgation: As we move into the center there is a releasing, a letting go of the details of our lives. We find in the act of shedding our thoughts and emotions our minds become more empty and quiet. Our breathing grows more rhythmic.

Illumination: As we reach the center we receive what is there for us to receive. We stay as long as we like, drawn more closely into prayer and personal centering. We meditate and allow our breath to be a physical response to God's infilling love.

Union: We take the insights, the illuminations or quietness we found in the center back out into the world.

Guidelines: Take a breath. Allow your body to find its own readiness and center. You may pass people or they may step around you, whichever is easiest. The path is two ways, and those going in will pass those going out. Do whatever feels natural.

(Adapted from the Veriditas Project, Grace Cathedral)

“Many of us are shy when it comes to movement. But in the container of the labyrinth there is support for moving spontaneously as our body wishes. The structured nature of the path seems to encourage this.”

“Based on the circle, the universal symbol for unity and wholeness, the labyrinth sparks the human imagination and introduces it to a kaleidoscopic patterning that builds a sense of relationship: one person to another, to another, to many people, to creation of the whole. It enlivens the intuitive part of our nature and stirs within the human heart the longing for connectedness and the remembrance of our purpose for living.”

Dr. Lauren Artress, Walking a Sacred Path.

The Labyrinth Walk has empowered many who find and do their soul work as they trace and retrace the circles. We pray for a renewed sense of spirit and Spirit in our world. As the chanting song repeats: “I am a Circle, I am healing you. You are a Circle, you are healing me.”

“I will make a way for you.” Isaiah 43:19

RELEASE RETURN REASSURE RECONNECT

LABYRINTH WALK IMMERSION

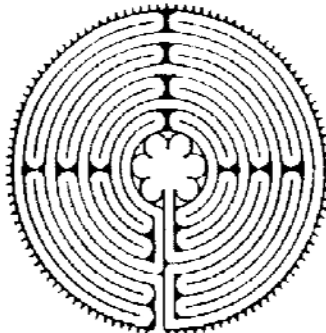
A SEVEN WEEK JOURNEY INTO LOCAL LABYRINTHS

Wednesday	February 22	Morningside UMC Fireside Room – Introductory Experience	
Wednesday	February 29	Shalom Prayer Center – Mt. Angel	(Leap Day)
Wednesday	March 7	United Methodist Church, Corvallis	
Wednesday	March 14	Unity Church, Salem, and TBA	
*Monday	March 19	*Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, leave at 5 p.m. for Portland*	
Wednesday	March 21	Parkview Ministry Center, McMinnville	(Equinox)
Wednesday	March 28	Portland Options: Sunnyside/The Grotto/Franciscan Center	
Wednesday *Optional	April 4	Private Garden in Salem	(Holy Week)

Our group will meet at the church each Wednesday morning at 9 a.m. and travel by private cars to these locations. We will be done by noon for most of these sessions, but we may also wish to couple our longer treks with lunch in a restaurant together. We will work with the weather – wearing umbrellas or shawls if it is rainy. Some of these are indoors, and we will be asked to bring either soft socks or slippers on occasion. We will be carpooling, so each passenger will be asked each week to contribute \$1 to \$4 toward gas, depending upon the distance. At two of these labyrinths we will be asking for a very small donation for the rental and/or upkeep of the place.

A signup sheet is posted on the bulletin board in the lobby. You are invited even if you are unable to attend every Wednesday. We will need to know our numbers for carpooling, so please sign up, leave you phone number and your approximate schedule!

For information please call Anni Powell: 503-371-6913.





Passion #2 Community Connection - a belief that God is calling Morningside to become increasingly more vested in our neighborhood and local community.

Bellies, Babies, & Beyond is the largest resale event of its kind in the mid valley area. Over 65 vendors offer gently used maternity, infant, and children's items. Clothes, furniture, toys, books, equipment, and maternity wear can be purchased at garage sale prices all under one roof. Admission is \$2 for adults. Children 12 and under are free. Cash sales only. Free parking. Snack bar available.

Saturday, February 25, 2012 - 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Blanchet Catholic School Gym, 4373 Market St. NE, Salem 97301

Bellies, Babies, & Beyond has been held twice a year (spring & fall) since 2007. With the current economic downturn, now, more than ever, families are looking for ways to stretch their dollar. This event enables families to turn their unused items into cash while offering other families a bargain on items they may need.

Stayton's St. Mary School is proud to offer such a valuable community service. Booth rentals and admission support St. Mary School programs and activities.

Parent's Night Out

February 10 ~ 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.

A time of fun, activity and of meeting new friends for all kids through the 5th grade. This supervised activity time with nursery care for the little ones, games, crafts, story time and snacks offers parents a time of respite. Parent's Night Out is open to all children from the neighborhood. There is no charge.

If you would like to volunteer to help, please sign up for part or all of the evening. A signup sheet is posted in the lobby.



Passion #3 Progressive Christianity – a belief that God is calling Morningside to provide a setting conducive to lively exploration, questions, and conversation regarding current biblical scholarship and emerging theological trends.

Lenten study by Lane McGaughy

“Who Was the Real Paul?”

There are at least four different portraits of the Apostle Paul in early Christianity: (1) The non-authoritarian pastoral leader of the "great letters" of Paul (Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, Galatians); (2) the authoritarian and misogynist Paul of the Pastoral Epistles (1-2 Timothy, Titus); (3) the anti-worldly Paul of Marcion and the Gnostics; and (4) the heroic missionary to the Gentiles, though still an observant Jew, in the Acts of the Apostles. The battle over which of these four portraits of Paul is the real Paul continues to divide Christians and alienate Jews. This series will explore the historical, theological, and literary issues that must be addressed in solving the quest for the historical Paul. It is based on the recent book by Art Dewey, Roy Hoover, Lane McGaughy, and Daryl Schmidt, *The Authentic Letters of Paul* (Polebridge Press, 2010).

- February 26: Which letters did Paul actually write and how do we identify interpolations in his letters? (A discussion of literary and rhetorical criteria)
- March 4: Has the meaning of Paul's authentic letters been accurately translated into English? (A discussion of the new Scholars Version translation of Paul's letters)
- March 11: What was the message of the real Paul? (A discussion of Paul's basic theological insight and its implications for peoples of faith today)

These Sunday evening Lenten study series will be held at
Morningside United Methodist Church, at 6:30 p.m.
All are welcome! Bring a friend.

In Our Prayers

Florence Engstrom (Tierra Rose)
Rose Marie Kuenzli (Capital Manor)
Sandy Nelson (Tierra Rose)
Virginia Pettengill (Redwoods)
Evelyn Riggins (Willson House)
Betsy Stuller
Phyllis Boston
Dawn Eckert
Glenda Melton
Mary Jo Gilson
Teresa Stewart
Vergie Olson
Jeff Christenson
Ruth Dunn
Vern Haugen

If you would like to be added or add someone to the prayer list, the birthday or anniversary list please let us know by contacting the church office, 503-364-5013 or kathypressler@msn.com.

Happy Birthday!

Karen Bey February 2

Kathleen Johnson February 8

LaVelle Lasher February 13

Dean Adkins February 13

Chuck Leierer February 27

Richard Guernsey February 28



News from General Conference



Preview to church restructuring debate Months before the 2012 General Conference, delegates to The United Methodist Church's top lawmaking body got a hint of the debate to come regarding restructuring the denomination.

More than 300 delegates, communicators and agency staff gathered Jan. 19-21 for the Pre-General Conference News Briefing at the Tampa Convention Center, where discussions of the proposed changes dominated conversation.

The main piece of legislation — the result of the multiyear Call to Action process — would consolidate nine of the church's 13 general agencies into a new United Methodist Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry under a 15-member board.

The board would be appointed by and accountable to a 45-member advisory board called the General Council for Strategy and Oversight, which would replace the Connectional Table that presently coordinates the denomination's mission, ministry and resources.

Essentially, the proposal would reduce agency boards now governed by more than 500 people to a group of 60. The legislation would also allow the board of the newly created center to redistribute up to \$60 million toward funding theological education, recruiting young clergy and fostering vital congregations — about 10 percent of the amount presently budgeted for general church operations. Delegates heard both an overview of restructuring legislation and concerns that the plan would damage the denomination's connectionalism, give too much power to the bishops and eliminate the denomination's historic "separation of powers" between bishops and General Conference. An overarching question for many at the briefing: Will the reorganization achieve its goal of promoting more vital congregations or have the opposite effect?

Harmonizing a 'cacophony'

The Council of Bishops and Connectional Table initiated the Call to Action to reorder the life of the church in the wake of the 2008 global economic crisis and after decades of declining U.S. membership. The Call to Action Interim Operations Team devised the recommended changes, and the Connectional Table drafted the legislation.

"We do not presume that what we are presenting is perfect by any means," said Jay Brim, who chairs the Connectional Table's legislative committee. "It is a proposal to move us toward change, and these changes, we hope, will be a significant step forward for the church."

He said the proposal does not really address general church staff. "It's about the governance of the general church," he said.

Brim, lay leader of the Southwest Texas Annual (regional) Conference, said the denomination's 13 current general boards are "in a constant push to make sure that local churches and annual conferences know who they are, what they have to offer and how to get it from them."

"What we're trying to create out of this cacophony is a simple structure that everybody can identify without removing anything we currently have," he said. "Our hope is that we can find a better way to offer our services at the

Concerns about connectionalism

The Council of Bishops endorsed the restructuring at its November meeting, but the vote was not unanimous. Phoenix Area Bishop Minerva G. Carcaño shared her concerns about the plan during a presentation. "Studies have shown that there is duplication and even competition among our general agencies that does not benefit the mission and ministry that God is calling us to be about," Carcaño said.

“Yet, general agencies have served a vital function for resourcing the church and enabling us to act connectionally, and we should not lose these essential functions. There are things even our strongest local churches cannot do alone, and some things they will not do.”

In some ways, she suggested, the proposed restructuring of the agencies does not go far enough. She noted that the Connectional Table legislation just puts agency work in new categories and leaves unanswered what agency functions might be dropped or added to better serve a global denomination. In addition, she and others at the Pre-General Conference News Briefing echoed concerns raised by the denomination’s ethnic caucuses that the smaller governance boards would severely limit the contributions of people of color. “In the U.S., a church that does not reach out to people of color is a church that will die,” Carcaño said.

Concerns about bishops’ power

The Rev. Tim McClendon, a Connectional Table member and the Columbia (S.C.) District superintendent, explained his worry that the Connectional Table legislation would give too much power to the denomination’s bishops.

At the coming General Conference, delegates also will take up a proposed amendment to the denomination’s constitution to create a bishop without the usual responsibility of overseeing a geographical area. That bishop would be elected by the Council of Bishops and would have — among other duties — the authority to serve as the denomination’s chief ecumenical officer, help align the strategic direction of the church and focus on growing vital congregations.

The Connectional Table endorsed this change, and under the proposed restructuring legislation, the “set-aside” bishop would be chair of the General Council for Strategy and Oversight and ex-officio member of the board of the Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry.

Five of the voting members of the proposed Council for Strategy and Oversight would be bishops. The Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry would make its financial decisions in consultation with the Council of Bishops.

“The power dynamic isn’t equal no matter how someone does the math,” said McClendon, who is a candidate for the episcopacy. “There is no way for the 15 persons, who are unpaid volunteers, no matter how great they are in all that they do, ... to make these (financial) decisions. It also seems to me that the set-aside bishop is where the real power is in the proposed structure.”

Concerns about separation of powers

The Rev. Thomas E. Frank, a historian of Methodism and professor at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C., urged the delegates to keep the denomination’s historic “principles” of governance in mind when evaluating restructuring proposals.

He noted that the denomination and all but one of its predecessor bodies have maintained a “separation of powers” between General Conference and bishops.

Methodism also historically has separated the authority over programming from authority over money, he said.

“Separation of the two prevents consolidation of power and advances accountability and participation,” Frank said. “The United Methodist Church is hardly alone in this principle. It’s basic to the functioning of any nonprofit corporation or nongovernmental organization.”

Group proposes alternative restructure

WASHINGTON D.C. — Uneasy with the Call to Action’s proposed restructuring, leaders of one special-interest group have submitted an alternative reorganization for The United Methodist Church’s top lawmaking body to consider. The Methodist Federation for Social Action, an unofficial progressive caucus, is the only one of the denomination’s unofficial progressive and evangelical caucuses to submit

legislation regarding restructuring.

Uneasy with the Call to Action's proposed restructuring, leaders of one special-interest group have submitted an alternative reorganization for The United Methodist Church's top lawmaking body to consider.

The Methodist Federation for Social Action, an unofficial progressive caucus, has submitted legislation for a proposal titled "A New UM Administrative Order." The group is the only one of the denomination's unofficial progressive and evangelical caucuses to submit legislation regarding restructuring to the 2012 General Conference, which will meet April 24-May 4 in Tampa, Fla. Such caucuses are special-interest groups that have no official ties to The United Methodist Church. They will be out in force at General Conference to advocate their points of view.

The Methodist Federation for Social Action says its mission is "to mobilize, lead and sustain a progressive United Methodist movement, energizing people to be agents of God's justice, peace and reconciliation."

The federation drafted its reorganization in response to legislation that would consolidate nine of the church's 13 general agencies into a new United Methodist Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry under a 15-member board. Under the legislation, the 15-member board would be accountable to a 45-member advisory board called the General Council for Strategy and Oversight. The proposed consolidation is the result of the multiyear Call to Action process, initiated by the Council of Bishops and Connectional Table to "reorder the life of the church" in the wake of the 2008 global economic crisis and after decades of declining U.S. membership.

The Call to Action Interim Operations Team brought forward the proposals, and the Connectional Table, which coordinates the denomination's mission, ministry and resources, drafted the legislation. The Council of Bishops affirmed the changes at its fall meeting last year.

By merging agencies, Call to Action leaders say, their plan will help the denomination improve its alignment and meet "the adaptive challenge" of fostering more vital congregations. However, federation leaders say the Call to Action plan's governance structure fails to represent the denomination's diversity both in and outside the United States and would damage programs that help the church grow.

"Centralizing decision-making tends to result in less effectiveness, less transparency, less accountability and less flexibility to meet the needs of our stakeholders," said Jill A. Warren, the federation's executive director. "And for us as a church, our stakeholders are our members, those to whom we do outreach and those who need to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world."

*Hahn is a multimedia news reporter for United Methodist News Service.

News media contact: Heather Hahn, Nashville, Tenn., (615) 742-5470 or newsdesk@umcom.org.

We will keep you up to date on General Conference news.

Check the bulletin board in Herrmann Hall.