

An Open Letter to the RENEW Network

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General Board of Global Ministries**

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Greetings in the joy and confidence of our Risen Savior, Jesus Christ! I greet you as well as sisters in this great denomination, The United Methodist Church.

I write in my official capacity as the chief executive of the Women's Division to address questions conveyed to me by Katy Kiser, Press Representative, RENEW Network/Good News. I write an open letter rather than a private one due to the recent RENEW Newsletter (February 2005) that publicly raised concerns about the Women's Division and my leadership. I am relatively new to the position of Deputy General Secretary of the General Board of Global Ministries, having begun in August 2004. This correspondence will address both the newsletter and your questions.

I understand the RENEW Network to be one of a number of unofficial caucuses or interest groups in The United Methodist Church. The organization focuses on women and on the Women's Division in particular.

We in the Women's Division strive to be faithful servants of Jesus Christ, of the remarkable 136-year heritage of United Methodist Women, and of this great denomination, an institutional expression of the one beloved Body of Christ. We welcome every opportunity to hear, understand and respond to the concerns and perspectives of United Methodist Women. We also welcome the opportunity to interact with, respond to and learn from others in our denomination.

Thank you for your questions. I have appreciated the opportunity to meet and talk briefly with Ms. Kiser at the October 2004 Annual Meeting of the Women's Division, my first as Deputy General Secretary; to meet Ms. Liza Kittle at the March 2004 meeting of the Women's Division where I was elected; and to meet Ms. Faye Short at General Conference. Thank you, too, for your patience. Although I had promised and genuinely expected to get answers to you prior to the end of 2004, a series of health problems in late 2004 and early 2005 prevented a more timely response. I apologize again, as I have before, for these delays.

This letter consists of several parts. Your original list of questions takes up four pages, that is, six general questions followed in all but one case with multiple illustrations. I have asked staff to research the examples, some of which they indicate have been addressed in previous correspondence with you. I will address the basic questions, not the illustrations, in order to avoid investing enormous amounts of additional time probing our records and delaying my response.

Invitations

On the basis of my October 2004 speech to the Women's Division board of directors calling for the Women's Division and United Methodist Women "to cope with conflict, to transform it into productive, redemptive paths," Ms. Short has invited leaders of the Women's Division to meet with leaders of the RENEW Network. I wholeheartedly welcome this invitation and look forward to finding a mutually agreeable time, agenda and process to guide the meeting.

In turn, I would like to invite members of RENEW to consider anew the approach you take in raising your concerns to the Women's Division. For interaction over deeply held differences, our denomination provides a number of excellent resources. One is "Being the Church Amid Disagreement" in the United Methodist *Book of Resolutions* (Resolution #32). Another is "Guidelines for Civility in The United Methodist Church" developed by the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns out of a formal conversation on theological diversity in our denomination (www.gccuic.org, see section on Resources). I also recommend the guidelines for conflict transformation, *Engage Conflict Well*, published by JUSTPEACE, an important ministry of our church (www.justpeaceumc.org). In my inaugural speech as Deputy General Secretary, I commended the JUSTPEACE guidebook to all United Methodist Women. In January, staff of the Women's Division undertook training led by JUSTPEACE staff. For many years, I have been deeply and personally committed to following the kinds of techniques listed in these resources because I believe they seek to uphold our fellowship in Christ. As we in the Women's Division prepare for our meeting with you, we will review these materials to refresh our understanding of them. Furthermore, we welcome any resources you might suggest to us for our preparation.

The reason I recommend these materials to you is that, from our point of view, your criticisms of the Women's Division seem to distort our work and portray us as less than the conscientious Christians we all strive to be. We know that you disagree with some of what we do. We would not expect you to abandon your positions, perspective or critique of the Women's Division. From your point of view, however, do your disagreements with us make us any less committed to Jesus Christ than you are? We do not call into question or imply any doubt about the basic integrity of your faith commitment. We ask you to grant us the same courtesy and respect. We know and love Christ just as you do, yet at times we do not recognize your descriptions of our work as accurate portrayals of what we actually do. Let me give some recent examples.

- On your website, Dawn Marks invokes images of Satanism, witchcraft and blasphemy in her critique of our Reading Program. I feel that this description is a ploy more reflective of political attack ads than debate over heartfelt differences among those who follow Christ.
- The February 2005 RENEW Newsletter described only one third of my October 2004 inaugural speech to the Women's Division board of directors. You took it as a sign of the Women's Division being exclusively committed to social holiness at the expense of personal holiness. We are not, of course, as evidenced by a broad range of work. Two-thirds of my speech, however, called for healing and wholeness in the church and among women in the UMC, for listening to groups like RENEW that criticize the Women's Division, and for forging new partnerships across generations of women. One sentence in

your Newsletter makes vague reference to these parts of my speech where I indicate a desire for change and reconciliation, and this, I feel, is another illustration of distortion.

I pledge that we in the Women's Division will strive to continue our tradition of embracing you and others in the RENEW Network as sisters in Christ, not creating caricatures, misrepresentations or distortions of you and your work or anyone else. I invite you to do the same for us. Furthermore, I pledge that we will continue to extend hospitality to you at our board meetings, graciously and honestly treating you with the dignity and respect you deserve.

General Observations

In my responses to your questions below, I will provide the disciplinary bases for the actions taken by the Women's Division. Often when you take issue with our actions, I believe more fundamentally that your criticisms reflect your disagreement with the official positions and policies of The United Methodist Church itself. In all that we do, the Women's Division abides by the decisions of General Conference as recorded in the *Book of Discipline* and the *Book of Resolutions*. None of the Women's Division work ever contradicts these provisions of law and guidance.

Furthermore, our members elect women within a representative, connectional structure that ties local units to districts, to conferences and to the national level where we together seek to discern the will of God for United Methodist Women. Fifty women who represent the full diversity and passion of United Methodist Women all over the country gather twice a year as a full board of directors, and more frequently in smaller committees, to pray and praise God, to seek God's guidance for our work, to communicate the concerns and perspectives of local, district and conference UMW, and to make decisions. The staff of the Women's Division, drawn from a wide range of geographic areas and theological perspectives, implements programs and expends budgets only after receiving direction from our board. We embrace and welcome close scrutiny and evaluation of all that we do, a process institutionalized by the active oversight of the board.

We also welcome inquiries about and feedback on our work from any caucus or interest group like RENEW organized to pursue a particular theological and/or political agenda in the church. Everything we do is public. We have no concealed operations. Caucuses and interest groups such as RENEW, Good News, Methodist Federation for Social Action, Reconciling Congregations, those that represent racial/ethnic groups, and others, however, have considerably more freedom than we do. They function alongside and without accountability or disclosure to the General Conference or a representative board of directors elected through official United Methodist Church channels. Our priority in the Women's Division must remain focused on the clear authority, mandate and accountability provided by the General Conference and United Methodist Women rather than the pressures to which we are regularly subjected by interest groups and caucuses.

Most importantly, our priority as women organized for mission must remain on witnessing in proclamation and practice to the love, grace and salvation of Jesus Christ. For example, United Methodist Women support mission programs and mission personnel in nearly 120 countries around the world in over 400 programs. Through National Mission Institutions in the United

States, we minister directly to over 2,000,000 women, children and youth every year. We provide leadership training and Mission Education for nearly 20,000 United Methodist Women each year through Leadership Training Events and Schools of Christian Mission. We tell these and many other stories of mission on our website (<http://gbgm-umc.org/umw/>). For more than 135 years, our work has literally saved and served the lives of millions of women, children and youth and brought salvation to those who have not received the loving grace of Jesus Christ.

RENEW Questions

As I indicated earlier, I am responding to your basic questions.

1. RENEW Question: Ecumenism/Interfaith Pluralism

The ecumenical movement began in an effort to draw from all Christian denominations' theological strengths and to coalesce around core Christian beliefs. This effort, begun in part by the work of our own Albert Outler, has been applauded by Christians of all denominations. But at the same time, many women across the United Methodist Church have become concerned that the Women's Division has confused Christian ecumenism with an interfaith pluralism that equates all religions as equally valid ways to God.

Do you think it is right for the Women's Division to embrace a syncretistic view of religions, and what do you say to the women of the church who find this in conflict with the Great Commission and the claims of the supremacy of Jesus Christ found in Scripture?

My Reply:

The call to and search for Christian unity is distinct from the call to be neighbors with and witnesses to people of other faiths. The Women's Division strives to follow the Great Commission, to be an evangel of the grace and salvation we each know personally in Jesus Christ. One consequence is that we pray fervently and work tirelessly for the hope Christ expressed in his prayer, "that they may be one" (John 17:21). Christian ecumenism pervades our work, as required by the *Book of Discipline* (Para. 1318.9).

Another consequence of receiving the gift of salvation is to love our neighbors, as Jesus taught us, seeking to live in community with them. These neighbors, in our towns, cities and across the world, include people of other faith traditions. In a time of increasing inter-religious conflict, I would hope that, as United Methodist Women and other members of UMC congregations come to know these neighbors, we will meet one another at the deeper level of sharing our faith stories.

Building productive interfaith relations provides unique challenges. The most difficult issue is that of living in the tension of two key foundations of our faith: proclaiming the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ, and our incomplete grasp of the mystery of God's sovereignty over all creation and its people. I like the way Tony Campolo, the popular preacher and evangelical theologian, states the tension (http://www.beliefnet.com/story/150/story_15052_3.html):

I don't know of any other way of salvation, except through Jesus Christ. Now, if you were going to ask me, "Are only Christians going to get to heaven?" I can't answer that question...I do not claim to be able to read the mind of God and when evangelicals make these statements, I have some very serious concerns.

For instance, they say unless a person accepts Jesus as his personal savior or her personal savior, that person is doomed forever to live apart from God. Well, what about the many, many children every year who die in infancy or the many children who die almost in childbirth and what about people who are suffering from intellectual disabilities? Is there not some grace from God towards such people? Are evangelical brothers and sisters of mine really suggesting that these people will burn in hell forever?

And I would have to say what about all the people in the Old Testament days? They didn't have a chance to accept Jesus.

I don't know how far the grace of God does expand and I'm sure that what the 25th chapter of Matthew says is correct--that there will be a lot of surprises on Judgment Day as to who receives eternal life and who doesn't. But ... I try to make the case that we have to stop our exclusivistic, judgmental mentality. Let us preach Christ, let us be faithful to proclaiming the Gospel, but let's leave judgment in the hands of God.

John Wesley made a similar statement in his sermon, "On Living Without God." He wrote, "I have no authority from the Word of God 'to judge those that are without' ...It is far better to leave them to him that made them and who is 'the Father of the spirits of all flesh'" (quoted in R. Marston Speight, *Creating Interfaith Community*, p.50).

Like most Christians, the Women's Division will live creatively in the tension of proclaiming God's gift of salvation in Jesus Christ and our belief that God is Lord of the entire universe. There's nothing syncretistic about understanding that all of humanity belongs to God.

2. RENEW Question: Mission of the Church

The Women's Division has a long history of reaching out to the dispossessed and oppressed of the world. Evangelical women are totally supportive of this and have long been engaged in social justice ministries. At the same time, evangelical women believe the sharing of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in an effort to win the peoples of the world to Christ is an imperative part of missions. Many United Methodist Women are concerned that the Women's Division defines the gospel in mere terms of global social justice and consequently seeks to advance a partisan political solution to domestic and world problems, excluding the offer of Jesus Christ as the (personal) Lord and Savior of the world. How do you define the mission of the Church?

My reply:

In mission work, we witness to our experience and belief that in Jesus Christ there is abundant life for all. The description of the responsibilities of the General Board of Global Ministries is

found in *The Book of Discipline* (Para.1301), which defines the Church in mission as “a sign of God’s presence in the world.” The text continues,

By the authority of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church: 1. Joins God’s mission to reclaim, restore, and redeem the life of all creation to its divine intention; 2. Confesses by word and deed the redeeming activity of God in Christ among the whole human family; 3. Seeks to embody and realize the potential of new life in Christ among all human beings; and 4. Looks forward in faith and hope for the fulfillment of God’s reign and completion of God’s mission.

Paragraph 1317 defines the purpose of the Women’s Division in three parts, as follows:

With continuing awareness of the concerns and responsibilities of the Church in today’s world, the Women’s Division shall be an advocate for the oppressed and dispossessed with special attention to the needs of women and children; shall work to build a supportive community among women; and shall engage in activities that foster growth in the Christian faith, mission education, and Christian social involvement throughout the organization.

The Women’s Division policy statement on giving, “Mission: Responding to God’s Grace,” states:

United Methodist Women has taken the ethical mandate summarized in Micah 6:8 very seriously. “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” God is a God of justice, the One who loves the poor and hears the cries of the oppressed, the One who protects the victim and welcomes the stranger. It is God’s will that all people share in the feast of God. And by God’s grace, all shall.

These statements orient the work of the Women’s Division and my leadership in it. In my October 2004 speech, I indicated my own convictions that,

We don't want to be Democratic Party Christians or Republican Party Christians. We want to be Christian Christians in the tradition of John Wesley and his mother, Susanna, as well as the women who worked with him like Eliza Bennis, Jane Cooper, Mary Bosanquet, and others. We want to be faithful to the great cloud of witnesses of our particular predecessors like Isbella Thoburn, Clara Swain, Mary Sato Takamine, Thelma Stevens, Mai Gray and others. As loyal members of United Methodist Women, we want to center our lives in Christ, creatively, energetically and practically bearing witness to Christ's love through hands-on mission work.

On a related matter, you might be interested to know that we have invited First Lady Laura Bush, a United Methodist, to address the United Methodist Women’s Assembly in Anaheim in May 4-7, 2006, just as we invited her to address the previous Assembly in 2002. We very much hope she will accept the invitation this time.

3. RENEW Question: Left-leaning Political/Social Actions

The RENEW Network has sent press representatives to the Women's Division board meetings for many years. We are appreciative of the opportunity to attend these meetings, and by-in-large, have been received with courtesy and treated with respect. Two observations have been consistently made by our press representatives: (1) the left-leaning political and social bias in Women's Division policies; (2) the failure of Directors to speak out publicly or to vote against biased, narrowly defined social and political policies or programs, despite a wide range of public opinion on the issues being addressed.

As the new Deputy General Secretary of the Women's Division, will you seek to encourage a non-partisan political and social balance that more equitably respects and represents the varying political and social views of United Methodist Women at the local level?

My reply:

Before responding to your question, I want to comment on your observations of our meetings. The Women's Division board of directors seeks with great passion, skill and dedication to do God's will in mission to and with women, children and youth. As with any human institution, we may fail. Whether we succeed or fail, however, we cannot control the labels you or others attach to our work. We invite you to consider that the Women's Division directors earnestly pray for guidance and believe that God calls us to do what we do.

Regarding your comments on participation, I have now attended numerous committee meetings and one board meeting. I see no hesitancy or reticence overall on the part of Division directors to express their opinions - positive, negative or neutral - and to ensure that everyone is heard. The Division and United Methodist Women devote considerable time training women to be prepared for participation in making decisions. All of the recommendations that will come before our April 2005 board meeting have been created and discussed, often vigorously, in various committees by directors before they reach the plenary meetings. In the future, if I encounter any seeming hesitancy on the part of Directors in committees or at board meetings, I will make sure the meeting pauses to ensure that we have collected all the comments that any Director wants to make. I have repeatedly encouraged directors and other leaders of United Methodist Women to contribute actively to decisions, and in my experience, they do.

As indicated in my October 2004 speech, I am committed to listening carefully to the concerns, perspectives, and needs of all members of United Methodist Women. I am eager to know first hand how all these wonderful women, who carry out Christ's mission in their own place, understand the call "to know God and to experience freedom as whole persons through Jesus Christ; to develop a creative, supportive fellowship and to expand concepts of mission..." as our Purpose states. One of my priorities in 2005 is to be with United Methodist Women in their various locales and to listen carefully to members' concerns and perspectives. I very much look forward to engaging directly with them to find out how the Women's Division can respond to their needs and concerns and use their many gifts and talents creatively for the good of God's reign and the organization. United Methodist Women officers at all levels of the organization, whom I encounter regularly in a variety of settings, fulfill their duties by communicating the

concerns of members to the Division. As crucial as all this work is, however, I also have a fundamental responsibility to carry out the directives of the Women's Division board of directors.

I believe Christ calls the Women's Division and United Methodist Women to work to heal a wounded world, and I pray that God will give me strength and wisdom to provide leadership to answer this call. Growing up in an Alabama-West Florida parsonage in a family involved in civil rights work, I learned many lessons before I ever went to elementary school. One is that witnessing to the love and grace of Jesus Christ in situations of injustice can get you into considerable trouble and be dangerous, both in your community and in the church. Working for racial justice in Alabama inevitably meant wading into contentious politics as well as controversial religious work, even when we paid a high price for doing so. Working to alleviate the poverty that pervades the lives of so many women and children now is no different. Or working for peace, or any other area where Jesus tells us that "just as you did it to one of the least of these...., you did it to me" (Matthew 25: 40).

I get reminded periodically when old acquaintances express heartfelt appreciation for the work our family did in civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s that, although they may be grateful now, we did not get much support from them at the time. This will almost always be the case for some issues. Nonetheless, we follow Christ's call.

4. RENEW Question: The United Nations

The June issue of Response magazine extolled the work of the United Nations, linking the UN to the mission of the church -- that is, to spread the gospel to all the world. Why does the Women's Division rely so heavily upon, and support the programs of, this secular institution, particularly given the current scandal in the UN and its past failures in the area of peace keeping?

My reply:

In my reading of the June issue of *Response*, I cannot locate a particular reference to the United Nations as an instrument "to spread the gospel to all the world." The magazine does, however, attempt to demonstrate the many life-affirming aspects of UN work. I also do not assume that a particular scandal should bring the good work of an entire institution into question.

The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church, as found in the *Book of Discipline* (Para. 165 D), endorses the United Nations and its related bodies

as the best instruments now in existence to achieve a world of justice and law. We commend the efforts of all people in all countries who pursue world peace through law. We endorse international aid and cooperation on all matters of need and conflict. We urge acceptance for membership in the United Nations of all nations who wish such membership and who accept United Nations responsibility. We urge the United Nations to take a more aggressive role in the development of international arbitration of disputes and actual conflicts among nations by developing binding third-party arbitration. Bilateral or multilateral efforts outside of the United Nations should work in concert with,

and not contrary to, its purposes. We reaffirm our historic concern for the world as our parish and seek for all persons and peoples full and equal membership in a truly world community.

This endorsement provides the foundation of and guidance for the Women's Division work related to the United Nations.

Like many human institutions, including the Church, the United Nations has remarkably high ideals that it sometimes fails to achieve. Some of its failures have been the inability to bring about peace in situations of protracted civil conflict, which are often fueled with the aid of outside parties, including, on occasion, nation-states that are members of the Security Council, the very group that authorizes peacekeeping missions. The consequences are deadly.

Yet, some of the UN successes, like many of those portrayed in *Response*, have saved millions of lives, including those of women, children and youth. Many people in the United States know little of the extraordinary achievements of the UN because its failures grab the headlines, as is fairly normal with secular media. Therefore, it is useful for publications like *Response* to seek to correct such imbalances, making basic information available to United Methodist Women. While teaching university courses in international relations for 24 years, I often found students to be surprised by and eager to investigate the total work the UN accomplishes, a reality often appreciated more in other parts of the world.

Some in the United States worry that the United Nations represents a move toward world government, an outcome none of us wants. With the basic membership of the organization built around sovereign nation-states, however, this cannot happen. Furthermore, with the United States government holding veto power over any basic changes to the organization, I feel confident that this will not happen, no matter who occupies the White House.

5. RENEW Question: Abortion

RENEW has received many complaints regarding the Women's Division's financial support of and participation in the "March for Women's Lives" this past spring. We continually hear from United Methodist Women who hold a pro-life perspective and view Biblical sexual purity and practice as very important. These women want to see the church seek solutions that lead to a culture of life and away from a culture of death through abortion on demand. In fact, those very concepts were expressed a year ago at this board gathering by two of the directors.

In light of the deeply held convictions of women on both sides of this issue would you encourage the Women's Division to participate again in such a march? And, secondly, do you think that the church should be giving young women the same answers as the secular society?

My reply:

I must comment on one statement in your question. The phrase “abortion on demand” gets used frequently by those who want to make all abortions illegal and is therefore loaded with political content. Otherwise, I do not know what it means.

As indicated on our website (<http://gbgm-umc.org/umw/>) Women’s Division directors prayerfully considered and discussed the issue before making their decision to use *specifically designated* funds to join in the April 2004 March. Directors did not want the government to determine what is in a woman’s best interest. Their vote responds to The United Methodist *Book of Resolutions* (Resolution #112) mandate to expand “health and wholeness public policy advocacy to include this critical issue of reproductive and end-of-life healthcare.”

United Methodist Women and other participants in the march did not want women going back to potentially lethal, self-induced or back-alley abortions. We do not want those who are from rural areas, who are poor, or who are of racial/ethnic backgrounds to have safe options closed to them. And we understand that The United Methodist Church, as mandated by General Conference, does not want this either. Participation in the March for Women's Lives represented a concern that first trimester abortion and birth control be kept safe, legal and accessible, as stated in our denominational mandate. And, it signaled a concern that reproductive health care must be available not only to the wealthiest women, but to all women, regardless of their race, creed, country or economic status. The Women's Division does not promote abortions in any way, and we support the Disciplinary opposition to the use of late-term abortion known as dilation and extraction (“partial-birth abortion”) “except when the physical life of the mother is in danger and no other medical procedure is available, or in the case of severe fetal anomalies incompatible with life” (Para. 161 J).

The Social Principles of our denomination also states (Para. 161 J): “Our belief in the sanctity of unborn human life makes us reluctant to approve abortion. But we are equally bound to respect the sacredness of the life and well-being of the mother, for whom devastating damage may result from an unacceptable pregnancy.” The principles go on to say that there are tragic conflicts in life that may justify abortion and that the Church supports legal options.

It is interesting to note that, according to a survey done by Lake, Snell, Perry and Associates, seventy percent of voters agree that the government should not intrude on a woman’s decision whether to have an abortion. Two-thirds say that while they may not choose to have an abortion, they would protect other women’s rights to make that choice. And, 61% of mainline Protestants and non-religious voters favor Roe versus Wade.

The Women’s Division will continue to uphold the position of The United Methodist Church on this issue through the means that our directors deem appropriate.

We will also continue to support The United Methodist Church’s position on human sexuality, which I will quote in part, from the *Book of Discipline* (Para. 161G):

We recognize that sexuality is God's good gift to all persons. We believe persons may be fully human only when that gift is acknowledged and affirmed by themselves, the church, and society. We call all persons to the disciplined, responsible fulfillment of themselves,

others, and society in the stewardship of this gift. We also recognize our limited understanding of this complex gift and encourage the medical, theological, and social science disciplines to combine in a determined effort to understand human sexuality more completely.

Although all persons are sexual beings whether or not they are married, sexual relations are only clearly affirmed in the marriage bond. Sex may become exploitative within as well as outside marriage. We reject all sexual expressions that damage or destroy the humanity God has given us as birthright, and we affirm only that sexual expression that enhances that same humanity. We believe that sexual relations where one or both partners are exploitative, abusive, or promiscuous are beyond the parameters of acceptable Christian behavior and are ultimately destructive to individuals, families, and the social order.

We deplore all forms of the commercialization and exploitation of sex, with their consequent cheapening and degradation of human personality. We call for strict global enforcement of laws prohibiting the sexual exploitation or use of children by adults and encourage efforts to hold perpetrators legally and financially responsible. We call for the establishment of adequate protective services, guidance, and counseling opportunities for children thus abused. We insist that all persons, regardless of age, gender, marital status, or sexual orientation, are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured.

We recognize the continuing need for full, positive, age-appropriate and factual sex education opportunities for children, young people, and adults. The Church offers a unique opportunity to give quality guidance and education in this area.

The Women's Division has many programs that implement these Social Principles, including teen pregnancy prevention programs, adoption services, family counseling, youth centers, shelters for families suffering from domestic violence, preventing trafficking in children, child care centers and more.

6. RENEW Question: Homosexual/Lesbian Practice

The issue of homosexual/lesbian practice is unquestionably the most divisive issue in the United Methodist Church. The current statement in the Book of Discipline, affirming the sacred worth of all persons and the legal rights of all persons, also states that homosexual practice is incompatible with Christian teaching.

Women's Division policy and program resources have repeatedly pushed the boundaries regarding homosexual/lesbian practice.

Is the Women's Division committed to upholding the position of the General Conference on the issue of homosexual/lesbian practice? Will the Women's Division assure that advocacy for the acceptance of homosexual/lesbian practice will not be a part of Women's Division programs, policies or spending? Would the Women's Division consider starting or supporting ministries of

transformation to homosexual/lesbian persons given the church's position that this lifestyle is incompatible with Christian teaching?

My reply:

Your second paragraph above makes an assertion with which I do not agree. The specific illustrations contained in your original text do not support the sweeping claim you make.

As with all the cases cited above, the Women's Division will uphold the official position of The United Methodist Church on this matter. Again, I cite the *Book of Discipline* (Para. 161G), one of the several places that makes reference to homosexuality:

Homosexual persons no less than heterosexual persons are individuals of sacred worth. All persons need the ministry and guidance of the church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self. The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. We affirm that God's grace is available to all, and we will seek to live together in Christian community. We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.

The Women's Division does not participate in either the Transforming Congregation program or Reconciling Ministries Network, both of which are supported by conscientious United Methodists but neither of which are endorsed by General Conference.

Conclusion

I hope these answers help you in understanding the Women's Division and my new leadership. There may be some matters on which we never agree. I believe, however, that there are many on which we do, as the Women's Division continues to join in God's mission of salvation, emphasizing women, children and youth. I look forward to meeting with you as leaders of the RENEW Network.

Distributed to:

The Board of Directors of the Women's Division and the General Board of Global Ministries
Conference Officers of United Methodist Women
District Presidents of United Methodist Women
The 2000-2004 Board of Directors of the Women's Division
The United Methodist Council of Bishops