

Western North Carolina Conference School of Christian Mission Featured in July 11, 2008 Issue of *United Methodist Reporter*

Check it out! Our conference **School of Christian Mission** is featured in an article in the July 11th issue of the *United Methodist Reporter*. Our Dean, Sara Williams, was interviewed for the article, and several photos from our 2007 School of Christian Mission are included. All of the photos were taken by our own Jane Norman from the Charlotte District. It is a great article...written by *United Methodist Reporter* staff writer Mary Jacobs. Read, enjoy, and share with members of your local unit!

The article is shown below. It is also posted on the *United Methodist Reporter* website at:

<http://www.umportal.org/article.asp?id=3765>

Living the Sacred: Schools of Christian Mission educate laity on world issues

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Photos by Jane Norman

Sara Williams remembers studying about Africa when she was 10 years old, at the first School of Christian Mission she ever attended. She's participated in many since then: as a study leader, as a planning committee member, and in 2007 and 2008, as dean of the Western North Carolina Conference's School of Christian Mission.

Why does she stay involved year after year?



Dr. Sandra Williamson was a study leader for the globalization study at the 2007 School of Christian Mission.



Participants head across campus after a Spiritual Growth study session in the Hanna Brown Finch Memorial Chapel at Greensboro College, to attend other mission study classes in Proctor Hall.

"I think it's the best education that the laity of the United Methodist Church has," Ms. Williams said. "We learn about topics relevant to the mission of Christ, and we learn ways to use that education in society."

Schools of Christian Mission, organized by United Methodist Women, are gatherings of lay and clergy-men and women-who devote four days to intensive study of three areas: a spiritual growth topic, a geographic area and an issue affecting society.

Every year more than 20,000 people-including children and youth-participate in the schools. Anyone with a desire to learn may attend.

"Schools of Christian Mission have been in existence since the 1930s, and they are one of the key programs of United Methodist Women," said Cheryl Trent, UMW director of mission education. "The studies give particular attention to the responsibilities of women in mission, and help to strengthen the leadership and membership of United Methodist Women."

This year's theme is "Living the Sacred," and participants are being challenged to deepen their understanding of and commitment to the sacredness of life, creation and faith.

Five regional Schools of Christian Mission were held in June. These were "train the trainer" events where study leaders learned the material and prepared to teach it at their local Schools of Christian Mission.

Study leaders are selected in the fall, and their preparation is intensive. Most will attend a regional school to learn about their topics or will follow an individual study course leading to certification. Most leaders read at least six books on the topic to prepare.

In June and July, most annual conferences will host a School; many offer Schools for youth and children at the same time. Some conferences or local UMW groups will offer shorter, similar mission education events.

In 2008, the three study areas are:

Spiritual Growth study: "I Believe in Jesus"

A look at the gift of faith in Jesus Christ and what it means in a post-modern world. Participants are studying the Wesleyan Quadrilateral as a means for understanding "who Jesus is for us and the world."



A class studies the issues surrounding Israel and Palestine.



North Wilkesboro hostess district members (From left: RoAnn Cox, Jane DeVane and Joy Prim) participate in the opening plenary session for the 2007 Western North Carolina Conference's School of Christian Mission in the Finch Memorial Chapel at Greensboro College.

Issue study: "Giving Our Hearts Away"-Native American Survival

The study examines key issues affecting the Native Americans in the United States and their root causes of these issues. Participants are learning about the "Give Away" culture of the Native Americans in the areas of spirituality, ecology, language, story-telling and food.

Mission study: Israel/Palestine

Participants are learning about the history and complexities of relationships between Israel and Palestine. Participants are exploring the concepts of security and freedom that dominate the lives of these peoples.

Each year, the study topics are selected by teams

within the staff and directors of the Women's Division, with input from UMW membership.

"Suggestions come from all over the church," said Ms. Trent. "It's an extensive process that goes into the selection of topics and materials."

"The topics are relevant to today, and the study materials give us a lot of current information," said Ms. Williams.

In fact, the topics are so relevant that one recently stirred up a bit of controversy. Early in 2008, the New York-based organization Fair Witness on the Middle East charged that the study materials on Israel and Palestine were biased against Israel.



Edward Peurifoy teaches a one-day overview class on Israel/Palestine.

Bishop Felton May, interim chief executive of the General Board of Global Ministries, and Harriet Olson, deputy general secretary of the Women's Division, responded in a written statement, saying the charges were untrue, and that "the mission study's perspective is in keeping with the thoughtful, informed and consistent position of the United Methodist Church on Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories."

School of Christian Mission participants don't just gain information; they also put it into practice. Every year, each School of Christian Mission program includes an action component with suggestions for ways that participants can turn what they've learned into concrete actions.

"We study each mission topic from an historical perspective, an issue perspective an action perspective," said Ms. Trent. "We look at: 'What's the issue? What does it mean? And can we do about it?'"



Kris Peurifoy was a study leader for the Music and Mission one-day overview classes.

A 2007 study on globalization spurred Ms. Williams and other participants to give up bottled water as a way to improve the environment.

"We learned how plastic bottles end up in the Pacific Ocean and litter the beaches with trash," Ms. Williams said. "And we learned how water is quickly becoming privatized and is no longer a public source."

Similarly, a study on public education led many of those who attended the Western North Carolina Conference event to get involved.

"Women went back and adopted schools, became volunteers and donated materials to schools that the teachers needed," said Ms. Williams.

That's the way it's supposed to work, added Ms. Trent.

"Our hope is that participants in Schools of Christian Mission will go back and lead the studies in their own churches, and that they would be transformed into action, to make a difference in their communities and in the world," she said.