Protesting a “Culture of Silence” in Sierra Leone

Women of United Methodist Sierra Leone Annual Conference in Freetown protest growing violence against women and girls.

by Phileas Jusu

On July 27 the women, all dressed in black, marched from UMC House—the conference’s head office—to King Memorial United Methodist Church, where members of United Methodist Women were holding their Western District Annual Convention.

Carrying anti-violence and anti-rape placards, the women stopped at strategic locations in the city and prayed and spoke through a public-address system mounted on a truck against violence and rape, urging other women and girls to fight against gender-based violence. They appealed to government and law enforcement agencies to legislate and enforce more robust laws to punish those who commit crimes against women.

“We are today marching to break the culture of silence around rape and all forms of violence against women and the girl child,” said Ethel Sandy, coordinator for United Methodist Women, shortly before the women took to the streets.

Within the past few days, she noted, a five-year-old girl was raped in the Dworzack community, and a four-year-old girl was raped in the Lumley community. The violators, Sandy said, are almost always members of the victims’ extended family or in the immediate community.

Often, she explained, cases of rape are covered up due to cultural beliefs that it is bad to shame the perpetrators—usually respected men who command authority in their communities.

“It is a cultural taboo to speak about the sexual parts of the body in public, and people who do so are considered to be uncivilized,” Sandy explained. “Rape of a family member is looked upon as not only a crime, but also an offense against the family. So, even the police are finding it hard to arrest offenders because most of the victims are reluctant to prosecute.” Some families seek recompense through marriage between the perpetrator and the victim rather than endure the shame of going to court and have the family name dragged through the mud.

“Laws have been put in place and we want the laws to actually act upon these crimes,” Sandy said. “We are tired of long, drawn-out rape cases. They need to act and act fast to save our generation.”

She recalled the case of Hannah Bockarie, who was brutally raped, tortured and killed in 2015, and regretted the matter has not been concluded to this date. Sandy said United Methodist Women was working with law enforcement agencies and other pressure groups in the country to improve the situation.

(Continued on Page 2)
Protesting a “Culture of Silence” in Sierra Leone

(Continued from Page 1)

She cited a few stories of their successful advocacy, including a rape case involving a prominent man in the provinces. “Today he is in prison. He is suffering for what he did.”

As the women addressed the crowds along the streets, one opinion that prevailed among the onlooking men was that the advocates must address women and girls who wear miniskirts and other provocative attire.

Elmira Sellu, a regional missionary for United Methodist Women, speaking at King Memorial United Methodist Church, called the idea that such women were inviting rape “nonsense” and retorted, “What can the same men say about the babies in diapers who were raped?”

Edith Rogers, who chaired the opening ceremony of the Western District Annual Convention, said, “Today, we have made Sierra Leone know that we are fed up with violence against women in our country, which is in line with our conference theme, ‘Go and Tell of All You Have Seen and Heard—Luke 7:22.’”

Musu Kamoh, a representative of the International Rescue Committee, said it was time for action. “Violence against women is one of the least prosecuted crimes and so it has continued,” she declared. “Women and girls suffer most of the consequences of violence. Today, the IRC is very happy for this advocacy taken by The United Methodist Church women. The response to violence must be immediate if we want to stop it.”

Most of the women and girls who are violated are poor, she added, pointing out that the mother whose four-month-old baby was raped could not raise the sum of about $27 U.S. needed for the test at the Rainbow Center, which handles rape and other violence-related matters against women.

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A Partnership Built on Fair Trade

United Methodist Women is pleased to announce an exciting new partnership with Global Goods Partners (GGP), a not-for-profit social enterprise that creates market access for fair trade products handcrafted by women artisans around the world. GGP shares United Methodist Women’s commitment to advancing economic equity for women and supporting trade relationships that respect producers’ rights to receive fair living wages and to work in a safe and healthy environment. This partnership makes it easy for United Methodist Women members to shop with our organization at the same time.

Founded in 2005, GGP is dedicated to alleviating poverty and promoting social justice. Its overriding aim is to build sustainable artisan enterprises in marginalized communities in the Global South, enabling increasing numbers of women to join the global economy and reliably earn fair living wages. Working in partnership with more than 40 women-led producer groups throughout Asia, Africa and the Americas, GGP provides technical assistance, product development, operational expertise and small capacity-building and community development grants to its community-based partners.

GGP offers a wide selection of beautifully designed and crafted products, ranging from hand-knit children’s toys, silk scarves, woven natural grass baskets and bags to hand-felted home accents and beaded jewelry. For each order a United Methodist Women member places on the GGP website, United Methodist Women will receive a donation equal to 15 percent of the total purchase. GGP will also be the featured fair trade shop at our 2018 Assembly next May, where the same terms will apply.

Start shopping today at globalgoodspartners.org. Once you select the products you want to purchase on the website, enter “UMW” on the checkout page in the box below the message “Is this a gift? Add a gift message OR enter affiliation.” Perfect for birthday presents, teacher gifts or a special thank-you. And, with the holidays not far off, bookmark GGP for all your holiday shopping.

A girl from the United Methodist Girls Secondary School in central Freetown, Sierra Leone, carries a placard on her back saying she is not a bride.

A collective of weavers in Peru are one of several international women artisan groups making items for sale through Global Goods Partners.
Maternal and Child Health Is the Focus of A Call to Prayer and Self-Denial

by Julia Chance

Healthcare for women and children has been at the heart of United Methodist Women since its founding. Our foremothers sent missionaries to build hospitals and clinics in areas where medical care was unattainable, and trained women and girls to become doctors and nurses to serve communities in need. By doing so, they chose to save and enrich women’s lives. Maternal and child mortality remains a significant challenge here and abroad. Nearly a quarter of a million women die worldwide each year from preventable causes relating to pregnancy and childbirth. Approximately 19,000 children die every day from treatable diseases such as diarrhea and tuberculosis. The women and children’s health Millennium Development Goals, a United Nations Foundation initiative, saw the least progress in the past 15 years.

Maternal and child health is a priority issue for United Methodist Women. It became, therefore, the focus of A Call to Prayer and Self-Denial, an annual observance during which members study and reflect on a chosen issue and make an offering to mission that supports it. All offerings collected from this year’s observance support partners that provide programs and advocate for the health of mothers and their children — prenatal and postpartum care, medical care access, reproductive health and family planning, health education for at-risk teens, child protection, and trauma and mental health counseling.

Several United Methodist Women National Mission Institutions and international partners and projects are recipients of past Call to Prayer and Self-Denial funds. One of them, Community Development for All People, based in Columbus, Ohio, received $20,000 for building upgrades. The institution addresses the high prevalence of infant mortality on the south side of Columbus and partnered with Nationwide Children’s Hospital to focus on maternal and child health needs. They also sponsor quarterly First Birthday celebrations for pregnant women and mothers who have babies up to 15 months old, where social service agencies are brought in to help meet the needs of families as part of the children’s birthday celebrations.

In Africa, Mutare Hospital in Zimbabwe, a United Methodist Church health institution, received $22,000 for solar panels in its maternity wards to be used as backup during the frequent power outages. Another benefit of using solar power is that patients and staff do not have to endure the noise and dangerous gas emissions of diesel generators, and women are more motivated to come and wait for delivery at the hospital, reducing the number of home deliveries and maternal complications.

In 2015, United Methodist Women of Epworth United Methodist Church in Durham, North Carolina, partnered with Days for Girls, an international project that provides girls in poor regions with sustainable sanitary pads so that they would not have to miss school when they are menstruating. It is estimated that a girl can miss up to two months of school a year due to a lack of quality feminine hygiene supplies. Girls who stay in school are less likely to marry early or die in childbirth; they are more likely to train or educate their families.

Members of Epworth United Methodist Women met regularly to sew kits containing washable sanitary pads. By last February, the group met their goal of making at least 50 kits for distribution in the rural mountain villages of Delatte, Fond Doux and Planton, Haiti. This project and others supported by United Methodist Women address maternal and child health and are changing the lives of girls and women globally.

Julia Chance is co-editor of United Methodist Women News.
United Methodist Women Board Convenes Annual Meeting in New York City

General Secretary Harriett Olson and President Shannon Priddy addressed board directors during their annual meeting in New York.

by Yvette Moore

United Methodist Women’s board of directors adopted a 2018 budget of $18.6 million, including more than $10 million for national mission institutions and programs, international ministries and scholarships, and membership development programs during its fall annual meeting in New York City, Oct. 6-8.

The board allocated $301,963 in grants for international and national emerging ministries and emergencies, property improvements at national mission institutions and scholarships. Prior to the meeting more than $30,000 in emergency grants were given to mission institutions damaged by and/or serving communities hit by hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria.

The board affirmed the establishment of a supplementary project for donations designated for hurricane relief for national mission institutions. These funds will be earmarked to support grants that assist in direct service to the communities, as well as property grants to repair the buildings as needed. The link to donate to the new project is on the United Methodist Women donation page, where you can designate your gift to the Hurricane Relief Fund.

Learning for a Lifetime

The 2018 Call to Prayer and Self-Denial offering theme of “Learning for a Lifetime” was announced during the meeting. The offering supports national and international programs that develop leaders of all ages. Funds from the offering will go to national and international partners for child development, after-school, and General Education Diploma and English as a Second Language programs.

The meeting included a worship service honoring the ongoing Acts of Repentance and reconciliation journey of The United Methodist Church with Native American peoples. In her greeting to the board, Cynthia Kent, chair of the Greater New Jersey Conference Committee on Native American Ministries, said the General Conference 2012 Acts of Repentance had to be more than a service during the church’s quadrennial legislative meeting.

“If that’s all it was going to be, we didn’t want that,” Ms. Kent said, noting that every conference is charged with doing the work of reconciliations with Native American communities. “United Methodist Women, you did ‘Giving Our Hearts Away,’ a study that helped lead the church, and you have continued in this work.”

Board members received “Environmental Justice with Indigenous Peoples,” a resource from Creation Justice Ministries that United Methodist Women helped to fund.

Commission on a Way Forward

Board members also heard from representatives of the Commission on a Way Forward and its work concerning LGBTQ inclusion in the denomination. Commission members Dr. Scott Johnson and Myungrae Kim Lee, a United Methodist Women member and past board member, said the Commission will design a way for being a church that maximizes the denomination’s witness in as many places and contexts as possible, and that balances different theological understandings of human sexuality with a desire for as much unity as possible.

“We should consider new ways of being in relationship across cultures and jurisdictions, in understanding of episcopacy, in contextual definitions of autonomy for annual conferences,” Ms. Lee said. “The United Methodist Church is not just in the United States.”

In her address to the board, President Shannon Priddy urged the directors to strengthen and cherish the value of being a part of a connectional organization within a connectional church.

“It takes work to create and maintain connections. It takes a little risk to ask for help or work with someone new. But the rewards make it worth the risk,” Ms. Priddy said. “The rewards make the world a little less scary, a little more manageable. We have districts and conferences doing great work with other conferences needing a little help. This is the work, this is the roll up the sleeves and have the conversations work. Our local units and churches need the information, and we are the messengers.”

Yvette Moore is director of communications for United Methodist Women.

Members of the Board of Directors gathered for an opening worship service before a day of meetings and presentations.
In Focus: Clara Ester

A commitment to service

Clara Ester, who belongs to the Alabama-West Florida Conference, addresses the 2016 United Methodist General Conference in Portland, Ore.

by Michelle Bearden

C lara Ester, vice president of the United Methodist Women board of directors, can reel off countless reasons why she has devoted her life to service.

There’s the memory of two Methodist deaconesses who ran the Bethlehem Center in Memphis, Tennessee, where her mother worked as a housekeeper and cook. They were white; the Esters were black and beneficiaries of a ministry that introduced young Ester to art, pottery, etiquette, music, drama and dance.

“They were kind and committed in an era before the Civil Rights Movement was underway,” recalls Ester, 68, today a member of Toulminville-Warren Street United Methodist Church in Mobile, Alabama. “The races didn’t mix back then, but they didn’t care,” she says. “They saw Christ in everyone.”

And then there’s the memory of the event that changed everything in an instant. In 1968 the country was changing, and 19-year-old Ester was part of it. As a student organizer, she would finish her college studies and then hurry down to Clayborn Temple in Memphis so she could participate in marches, picket lines and sit-ins.

“I was on both sides of it. The prayer meetings and the activist meetings,” she says. “I remember my pastor, James Morris Lawson, telling me ‘You know what you’re doing and God knows what you’re doing.’ So I knew if there was to be justice, I had to work for it, not sit back and expect it to just happen.”

On April 4, Ester left Clayborn Temple and headed to the Lorraine Motel in Memphis to attend a fish fry. Just as she arrived in the parking lot, she caught a glimpse of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. on the balcony.

As he turned away to go back inside the room to get a coat, she heard a blast that sounded like a truck backfiring. It was a gunshot. Ester looked up in horror, watching as the Rev. King was thrown into the air and back down again. She and a friend took off running up the stairs, reaching him in seconds.

“His eyes were open and he was breathing heavy. There was a pool of blood by the side of his head and neck,” Ester recalled. “Because he had just been involved in a pleasant conversation, he actually had a relaxed, comfortable expression on his face. I will never forget that.”

King died at the hospital that night. Ester and her fellow activists, as well as the rest of the city, were put on a lockdown. Tensions, already on edge, got worse as the National Guard arrived.

“I was never the same person after that. King was our hope and our future. But I came to realize that I would have to live my life addressing injustice in the same nonviolent way he preached,” Ester says. “Not just for black folks, but for all—immigrants, gays, the poor, children.”

She has kept that pledge. She spent 36 years with Mobile’s Dumas Wesley Community Center, rising to the post of executive director. The center, one of United Methodist Women’s 93 national mission institutions, serves at-risk families and seniors in an impoverished area with education, recreation, housing for single mothers, after-school programs, food assistance and other outreach efforts.

Ester also kept that promise in her personal life. She fretted about the growing number of African-American children who lived in foster homes, unable to find a forever family. In 1982, as a single mom, she adopted a four-year-old. He lived with her for 14 years, until moving to a group home because of several medical conditions.

Retired since 2006 and with lingering health issues from a 1985 car accident, Ester continues to honor that commitment made after her hero was assassinated before her eyes. Besides her work with United Methodist Women, she also is a United Methodist deaconess—a lay order dedicated to service ministries—a board member at the Dumas Wesley Community Center and traveling speaker at churches. She also sings in her church’s mass choir.

The message she intends to convey in her national role: Think local. She views United Methodist Women as an established launching point to drive awareness. “Grassroots is where it all begins,” she says. “It should be our key priority. Be involved in your community, in your church. If we can nip problems and issues in the bud, maybe then they won’t escalate out of control. We have the power to make changes that seem impossible.”

Michelle Bearden is former religion reporter for The Tampa Tribune and WFLA-TV, and is now a freelance writer specializing in faith and values. She’s a two-time winner of the national Supple Religion Writer of the Year award from the Religion Newswriters Association.

United Methodist Women

Day of Giving
March 23

Each Day of Giving gift to the Legacy Fund will be matched dollar for dollar.

www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/150
A Glimpse Into Mission u Across Conferences

by Annette Spence

Thousands of United Methodist Women gathered in their annual conferences this summer to study and learn about covenant communities, climate justice and the organization’s missionary conferences.

The annual training event, known as Mission u, also offered other activities that participants said they look forward to each year. United Methodist Women and guests worshiped, sang, dined, watched illuminating documentaries, worked on mission projects, collected special offerings and made crafts with new and old friends. For many, Mission u was an opportunity for families and friends to share quality time.

“We always say Mission u is a family reunion,” said Peg Addington, registrar for the West Ohio Conference’s event in July. Addington first attended Mission u — formerly known as the School of Christian Mission — as a three-year-old holding her mother’s hand. She has participated in the annual event for most of her 60 years since, developing friendships with members from other towns.

“Over the years you get to know each other and you’re glad to see them again,” said Addington, a member at Grove City United Methodist Church in Ohio. Mission u allows participants an opportunity to deepen their walk with God and study current issues impacting society. Participants grow in understanding the mission of the church in the current world context and respond to God’s call to engage in service and advocacy.

“The education piece is huge, even if they only go back and educate their local churches or a few more people,” said United Methodist Women board director Lynn Baker, who attends Wesley United Methodist Church in Conway, Arkansas.

During a dramatic play presented at her conference event held in late July, Baker portrayed a headstrong Appalachian woman who, against all odds, started a clinic in rural Kentucky. “What we learn at Mission u can influence voting or, at least, our awareness of important issues,” said Baker.

This year’s geographic study featured the challenges and strengths of the Red Bird Missionary Conference, Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference and Alaska United Methodist Conference. The spiritual growth study was “Living in a Covenant Community.” The issue study was “Climate Justice.”

In Sandrea Williamson’s Climate Justice session, members of the Western North Carolina Conference shared actions they planned to take back home, in response to what they learned.

“I will be aware of the areas where I can reduce my carbon footprint, teach my husband and kids, and start a ‘lunch and learn’ at my church,” one member said.

“I want to start a recycling program at my church,” another member said. “We’ve started it three times already and we need to make it work this time.”

“These are not empty commitments, ladies,” said study leader Williamson of Bass Chapel United Methodist Church in Greensboro, North Carolina. “I need you to be caretakers and cheerleaders for the world.”

Lynice Broyles said she was more “cognizant of how I treat people” after participating in the Covenant Community study offered by Holston Conference United Methodist Women, of which she is president.

Broyles said, “I came home thinking of how I could be more connect ed to people by not being judgmental and trying to see their side of things.”

More than 10,000 members, including 600 youth and children, attended Mission u in 2016 according to Mary Cheng, United Methodist Women director of transformative education. A comparable number was expected this year. Conferences are already preparing for 2018 Mission u studies. For more information, contact your United Methodist Women conference office.

Gracious Acts

United Methodist Women Make Christmas Special for Children of Incarcerated Mothers

by Beryl Goldberg

The Christmas party at Salem United Methodist Church in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City is a joyous event for children of incarcerated women and others from the church community. Carefully wrapped presents are piled around the room for Santa Claus to hand out. A group of teenagers do face painting on younger children.

The party at Salem, an annual event over the past 15 years, is the result of a meeting of some very committed ladies. One of them is the Rev. Annie Bovian, who headed Women’s Advocate Ministry and served as a prison chaplain. She visited Village Church of Bayville, a United Methodist Church in Bayville, Long Island, to discuss her work in support of incarcerated women and their families.

Ann Albro, a longtime United Methodist Women member who was in attendance at Village Church, heard Bovian’s presentation and decided she wanted to support the women and their children. She and friend Kathy Falciano offered to help with the annual Christmas party. At first, it was a brief event where children were given a present and a snack. Together, the ladies decided the party would work better if they moved it from midtown Manhattan to Salem United Methodist Church in Harlem, nearer to where many of the children live. There, it grew into a day-long extravaganza.

Albro and Falciano have mobilized their community to support the event through toy and monetary donations collected months before.

Have an interesting story for Gracious Acts? Contact United Methodist Women News co-editor Julia Chance at jchance@unitedmethodistwomen.org.
A Host of Exciting Workshops Planned for Assembly 2018

by Jay Godfrey

Trust the process. This is a mantra the workshop planning team for United Methodist Women’s Assembly 2018 has learned to embrace. That’s because for the first time we embarked on a call-for-proposals process for creating the many exciting workshops we’ve planned for Assembly in May.

We put the word out to all our networks, asking members, partners, friends and staff to submit proposals for workshops to be offered at Assembly 2018. We then had to trust that the proposals would come in. And did they ever! We were truly overwhelmed at the quality, creativity and, yes, quantity of workshops proposed. At the end of the process we received more than 160 amazing proposals. We then had the unenviable task of narrowing that list down. After hours and hours of diligent work from staff, consultants and former and current board members, we now have an incredible list of 76 interactive workshops, nine film screenings and conversations, and four town hall meetings.

We are truly excited about these workshops. We heard our members’ request for more interaction with United Methodist Women National Office, so this year staff is leading workshops such as “Spiritual Integration: Social Action as Spiritual Practice” and “HerStory: Owning Your Story to Transform the World.” United Methodist Women Board and PAG members are leading workshops as well, including “A Call to Mission: The Personality of Your Spiritual Gifts” and “Creating Bold Partnerships with Missionaries in Our Midst: United Methodist Missionary Conferences.” The Assembly 2018 workshops are also benefiting from our efforts to develop new and younger leadership. For example, young women from United Methodist Women’s New Generations for Climate Justice will be offering creative and interactive workshops — “Understanding Climate Justice Through Theater” and “Climate Justice Simulation.”

Another exciting aspect of the upcoming workshops is how they integrate our priority justice issues—climate justice, the criminalization of communities of color and mass incarceration, economic inequality and maternal and child health—with our core commitments. We encouraged contributors to consider how one or more of these issues connect to the workshops they proposed, to weave together our work for justice with all aspects of United Methodist Women’s work, because we understand that the work for a more just society is intrinsic to our core commitments of service and advocacy, transformative education, spiritual growth and leadership development.

We trusted the process. Now we invite you to come witness and experience the fruits of this process. To register and learn more, visit https://umwassembly.org.

Jay Godfrey is United Methodist Women faith and justice education executive for the Seminar Program and workshop coordinator for Assembly.
Mission Study Books

Look to these United Methodist Women Mission Study selections—for adults, children and youth—for spiritual and social growth and understanding.

What About Our Money?
A Faith Response
By Susan Taylor
Study explores our relationship with money, the money choices available to us and how we individually and collectively respond to economic inequalities in light of our faith.

$10.00 Stock # M3310

Is It Just Money?
Our Dollars, God’s Economy:
A Youth Study
By Anna Burkett and Tom Burkett
Study is designed to engage youth in an exploration of money as it relates to faith and justice.

$10.00 Stock # M3311

Money Matters:
A Study for Children
By Denise Snyder
Study endeavors to teach children about the concept of money, the importance of generosity, and how God intends for us to use money as an expression of love for others.

$10.00 Stock # M3312

Embracing Wholeness
By Jessica Stonecypher
Study explores the ways God has called us to live in a covenantal relationship with all of creation and challenges readers to work toward stronger and healthier relationships with creation, their communities, themselves, and God.

$10.00 Stock # M3313  $13.00 Stock # M3316 Large Print

Prayer Calendar 2018
This beautiful planner offers a glimpse into United Methodist Women’s mission work in communities around the world while helping you to keep track of important dates.

$14.00 Stock # M3305

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