

## Faith, Hope, Love in Action and Dancing All the Way Home

by Yvette Moore

More than 6,500 United Methodist Women members danced out of the closing service of their quadrennial Assembly prepared for new mission efforts in their local communities after days of action-packed worship, workshops and vigils in St. Louis, Mo., April 30-May 2.

The “Faith • Hope • Love in Action” Assembly day started early with 7 a.m. “affinity group” meetings allowing young women, new mothers, widows, cancer survivors, retirees and others with similar life experiences to meet and share. By mid-morning the women were off to a choice of more than 150 workshops on topics ranging from daily prayer life and growing a local United Methodist Women unit to immigration and health care reform. Workshops were also offered on human trafficking, prison ministries, how to pay for college, women in the military, the home foreclosure crisis, raising grandchildren, salsa dancing and more.

Assembly also included an Experience Hall featuring a display of more than 7,000 prayer shawls and baby blankets made by United Methodist



PHOTO BY CASSANDRA ZAMPINI

Women celebrate during closing worship service at United Methodist Women's Assembly.

Women members; classes on how to use the Internet's social networking sites; vendors selling books, music, clothes and crafts; and two stages for United Methodist Women members to share their performing talents, in addition to the “Late Night at Assembly” talent show.

Bishops Joaquina Nhanala of Mozambique and Robert Schnase of the Missouri Area, and Thomas Kemper, general secretary of the General Board of Global Ministries, presided over communion at the April 30 opening plenary, rich with thanksgiving for United Methodist Women's more than 140 years in Christian mission. Bishop Nhanala urged members to continue the legacy. “We are called to be the hands and feet of Christ in our communities,” she said. “Continue in prayer to connect with God, the source of power...and know it's God's will for us to act with faith, hope and love.”

May 1 was a day of action with more than 2,000 United Methodist Women members and people from the St. Louis community marching from the city's America's Center where Assembly convened to a downtown plaza in a demonstration

for immigrants human rights. Assembly participants who did not march held a prayer vigil in the Assembly arena. That evening Assembly swayed into a music festival when activist-singer Lila Downs sang and danced in aisles with United Methodist Women members, and Christian worship singer-songwriter Sheri Carr and award-winning gospel artist CeCe Winans performed stories in song.

Storytelling and dancing again took center stage Sunday morning in a hopeful, forward-looking closing worship experience. The Rev. Anita Phillips, executive director of the United Methodist Native American Comprehensive Plan, led Bible study and shared the story of the Cherokee people who were forced on a thousand-mile march, the Trail of Tears, hoping to survive.

Women's Division Deputy General Secretary Harriett Jane Olson also spoke, urging the women to tell their stories, “to move forward along the journey.” She asked United Methodist Women to continue to braid a prophetic vision into

## A Sisterhood of Grace at Assembly 2010

by Harriett Jane Olson

United Methodist Women members are still processing Assembly! We each loved different things. Some of us got a chance to tell a long-admired member or a singer or a writer how significant her work had been for us. Some of us were ‘host’ to a group of young women or Assembly first-timers or international sisters who needed occasional help with English. The energy in the workshops, the hallways and the Experience Hall was great! And people were taking notes.

I know of several workshop presenters already engaged in conversations about making changes based on what people learned — in state policies on immigration, in the church's use of fair trade coffee, in the way local unit meetings are organized, you name it. Your sisters attended Assembly with a focus on things that would connect to their local unit, conference and district. Some of that material to use at home is in the United Methodist Women Program Book. We have already noticed some of the Assembly liturgies being woven into other United Methodist Women meetings!

Share Assembly highlights with your unit. Go to [www.unitedmethodistwomen.org](http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org), and click on “See Highlights from Assembly 2010!” for a video montage of several of the

events at Assembly. Play the footage on a computer screen, or by downloading the clip to a DVD or drive that can be played on the equipment available where your unit meets.

I hope you will also take a moment to think about your own “ah-ha” moments at Assembly. Write them down — perhaps in the pages provided for notes about your spiritual journey in the new United Methodist Women edition of the Bible (New



Harriett Jane Olson

Revised Standard Version) released at Assembly. I participated in a session in which each of us was asked to introduce ourselves and describe the passion that keeps us going in our work. I learned as I prepared to respond to the question how my commitment to United Methodist Women is connected to my lifelong effort to live out the call of the Gospel, as well as to my work to help persons in congregations and United Methodist Women units find ways to deepen and express their faith. Who knew? All these changes I've made over almost 30 years of work actually do connect.

What did you learn at Assembly?

Harriett Jane Olson is deputy general secretary of the Women's Division of the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries.



PHOTO BY PAUL JEFFREY

Liturgical dancer-acrobat performs during the closing worship of Assembly.

# Love in Action at Ubuntu Day of Service

by Praveena Balasundaram, Mary Beth Coudal and Elliott Wright

Nearly 600 United Methodist Women members from around the country put legs, hands and hearts on Assembly's Faith • Hope • Love in Action theme during the pre-conference Ubuntu Day of Service in St. Louis, Mo., April 29.

Ubuntu volunteers arrived a day before Assembly officially began to work at 17 nonprofit organizations serving women, children, youth and families in the St. Louis area. Volunteers worked in community gardens; cleaned vacant lots and an African American graveyard; gave a hand at two United Methodist Women national mission institutions; and packed soaps, bandages and other hygienic items for health kits, birthing kits and border kits distributed by United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR).

"United Methodist Women went to their Ubuntu assignments ready to serve and full of joy!" said Marva Usher-Kerr, Assembly planning team member and coordinator of the Ubuntu Day of Service. "Whether they were cleaning lots or assembling health kits, they really put their hearts into their work. They let Christ shine through them. It was a good day."

*Ubuntu* or "I am because we



PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE/UMWNS

Ubuntu Day volunteers Roena Littlejohn, left, of Bridgeport Conn., and Ruth Cleveland, right, of Medina, N.Y., mix salad for the "peace meal" at Kingdom House, a community organization in St. Louis.

are," is a Zulu word recognizing each person as an essential part of the community.

Two of the Ubuntu Day service sites were United Methodist Women national mission institutions — Epworth Children and Family Services and Lessie Bates Davis Neighborhood House, across the Mississippi River in East St. Louis, Ill. There women from Arizona, Kansas, New York and Michigan stacked school supplies, sorted clothing and weeded the garden.

"Reaching out to others is what United Methodist Women does," said the Rev. Anita Hahn of Six Lakes, Mich., who had brought her young daughter Lisa along, as she cleaned

a garden plot at Lessie Bates Davis Neighborhood House.

Ubuntu Day volunteer Beatrice Fofanah of West Africa Central Conference spent the day making border kits to send to Methodist Border Mission Network. "We are putting socks and other hygiene items in bags to comfort migrants who are sent back at the U.S.-Mexico border," Ms. Fofanah explained. "We do not know the people, but we put ourselves in their position. It is the love in action Jesus told us to have."

Working with St. Louis' Operation Brightside, United Methodist Women members stood at street corners and gave out litterbags to encourage people not to throw things out of car windows and picked up trash from the roadside.

"A lot of people stopped and thanked us for the bags. People were so accepting of us," said Mary Eva Johnson of Desert Southwest Conference. "We chatted with a few people also; it was like being part of the community."

Ubuntu Day of Service ended with reflection and worship. "God is already in the community," Ms. Usher-Kerr said. "God is inviting us to be there too."

Ms. Balasundaram is a writer, editor and United Methodist Women member based in New Hope, Pa. Ms. Coudal is senior writer for Global Ministries. Mr. Wright is a freelance religion news reporter and former communications officer for Global Ministries.



PHOTO BY CASSANDRA ZAMPINI

Ubuntu Day volunteers prepare birthing kits containing sanitary items needed by pregnant women giving birth in refugee camps and other crisis situations.

## MEMORIAL

# Former President Mai Gray dies at 88

by Yvette Moore

Mai Hutson Gray, 88, the first African American president of the Women's Division of the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Women's national administrative body, died May 6 in St. Louis University Hospital after falling ill at the organization's quadrennial Assembly in that city April 30-May 2.

Ms. Gray was preparing to help lead Assembly participants in a march for immigrant rights and just immigration policies similar to the protest for racial justice she led at the organization's 1978 Assembly in Louisville, Ky., when members of the organization filed out of a convention center into the street in a solemn vigil after a public reading of United Methodist Women's historic Charter for Racial Justice. Women's Division chief executive Harriett Jane Olson said Ms. Gray's determination to participate in the Assembly action on immigration was another example of her lifelong commitment to racial justice.

"When we invited Ms. Gray to participate and explained it echoed her leadership in 1978 Assembly, when women marched in silent vigil in Louisville, Ky., the place where the Methodist Episcopal Church had split over the issue of slavery more than 100 years earlier, she immediately responded that she intended to march," Ms. Olson said. "She committed a lifetime to racial justice."

Thomas Kemper, General Secretary of the General Board of Global Ministries, extended a personal note to the Gray family. "[Ms. Gray's] legacy within the Methodist connection is unsurpassed in dedication to mercy, justice and the humble walk with God," he said. "The United Methodist Church and the entire Christian family rejoice in the life of your mother, who embodied hope, faith, and love in action."

Ms. Gray served as a Women's Division director from 1972 to 1976 and as its president from 1976 to 1980. She served on



PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE/UMWNS

Mai Hutson Gray served as president of the Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries, the national policymaking body of United Methodist Women, from 1976-1980. She was the division's first African American president.

the historic "committee of 24" that drafted the Purpose statement and structure for the newly formed United Methodist Women, which transitioned women's mission groups of the Evangelical United Brethren and Methodist Church into a single organization in 1972. "As the second president of United Methodist Women in its combined 'new' structure following church merger, Ms. Gray played a significant role in shaping how the new organization would continue to engage with the conflicts of its time," Ms. Olson said. "Her grace and thoughtfulness set a high bar for the staff and directors, and represented the membership well at a critical time in our formation."

Ms. Gray, a member of St. Andrew United Methodist church in Kansas City, Mo., also played an active role in the wider church and Missouri community.

Ms. Gray was born Feb. 19, 1922 in Jackson, Tenn. She married the late Dr. C. Jarrett Gray Sr., and is survived by her three children: the Rev. C. Jarrett Gray, Jr., Dr. Frances L. Gray and Jon R. Gray, Esq.

Yvette Moore is editor of *United Methodist Women News*.

# Seminar Moves ‘Mission Forward’

by *Christie R. House*

*“The story of mission is forever being made. The story of mission, with its many layers, needs to be told. The story needs tellers, listeners, and eaves droppers.”*

— *Glory Dharmaraj, Mission Forward Symposium Coordinator*

Nearly 250 United Methodist Women members and friends celebrated lay-women mission workers and revisited the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh at the Mission Forward Symposium in St. Louis, Mo., April 29. Participants in the event preceding United Methodist Women’s quadrennial Assembly also examined the shift in the understanding of mission as demonstrated through the church’s sacred music.

Dr. Dana Robert, the Truman Collins Professor of World Christianity and History of Mission at Boston University School of Theology, led the event with stories about Protestant lay women’s role in planting seeds of Christianity’s global presence today. In 1910 Protestant women organized the largest women’s movement in the history of the United States — one that boasted 3 million dues-paying members. These mission societies, prevalent across multiple Protestant denominations, recruited and sent female workers to spread the love of Christ and improve the lives of women. Methodist women’s missionary groups were considered the strongest of these. While delegates were chosen to attend the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Protestant women conducted a yearlong jubilee that celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of mission engagement in the world.

Members of these mission societies based their work on the New Testament stories of women.

“Widows’ organizations described in the Bible really were the first women’s groups in the history of Christianity,” Dr. Robert said. “They refused to be helpless victims of fate. They sewed clothing to support themselves and their children. They were the most needy — and they were also the most faithful.”

## Called to Service

Dr. Robert told the stories of three courageous Methodist women who answered God’s call to mission service in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Two of the women, Grace Stevens and



PHOTOS BY CASSANDRA ZAMPINI

Clementina Butler, were among the few women who attended the 1910 World Missionary Conference. Grace Stevens, daughter of an Indian woman and a British officer, was able to form a bridge into the closely guarded lives of Indian women. She served the poor and the isolated daughters of the elite Brahman classes alike.

Clementina Butler, daughter of a U.S. mission family, did much to further Christian literature and Asian Christian art in her lifetime of service. Working through the U.S. office of the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society (WFMS), she founded the first school for summer mission study in Massachusetts and created the Committee on Christian Literature for children and teenagers.

A third woman, Martha Drummer, was one of the first African-American women sent by the WFMS to serve overseas. Inspired by women she encountered as part of the Women’s Jubilee celebration, she worked her way through what is now Clark-Atlanta University, earned a nursing degree, and traveled to Quessua Methodist mission station in Angola to serve in an orphanage. She itinerated through rural areas, treated people for malaria and other debilitating diseases, delivered babies, and ministered to people of 12 different nationalities. She was critical of the way girls were treated by men in Angola, and after imploring God to send her more resources, she contributed her own salary to the mission. “I got up to answer the prayer myself,” she confessed.

## Will You Change?

Harriett Jane Olson, deputy general secretary of the Women’s Division, challenged Mission Forward participants with a reading from 1 Samuel 7. “We are in a dynamic relationship with the God, who is calling us forward into relationships with others,” she said. “We are in process day by day. We are called today to speak differently about immigration

**ABOVE:** Women’s Division’s Harriett Olson, left, and Dr. Dana Robert, center, listen as Regional Missionary Elmira Sellu speaks during a panel presentation at the Mission Forward Symposium.

**BELOW:** Participants sing and worship during the Mission Forward Symposium.



because the world’s needs are different. I see differently, and because I see, I will act differently. Are you ready to change?”

The symposium included a unique hymn sing that paired hymns from the 1910 conference with modern songs from a global palette. “Singing,” said Jorge Lockward, director of Global Ministries’ Global Praise Program, “is a way to engage the ever-flowing river of mission understandings.”

Bishop Violet Fisher reminded the gathering of a time when women did not move in leadership positions. “If you felt that you had a call, it was to be a part of the Woman’s Society of Christian Service,” she said. “You could usher, you could teach children. Every now and then they included women in finance, but you could not preach. I felt called to be a preacher.”

Christie R. House is the editor of *New World Outlook* magazine.

# Deaconesses, Home Missioner Commissioned in Pre-Assembly Service

by *Elliott Wright*

“My reward is that I may serve,” a dozen women and one man said in chorus after being commissioned to respond to the needs of the world as deaconesses or home missioners of the United Methodist Church.

A solemn yet joyful service of commissioning took place at Centenary United Methodist Church in downtown St. Louis April 29, on the eve of United Methodist Women’s quadrennial Assembly in St. Louis April 30-May 2. The Office of Deaconess and Home Missioner is administered by the Women’s Division, the national policymaking body of United Methodist Women and a division of the General Board of Global Ministries, the denomination’s mission agency.

The forms and locations of the service of these lay persons range from rural communities to inner-city schools; from city-based low-income housing construction to general nursing. They serve in the name of Jesus Christ across the United States.

“The office of deaconess and home missioner traces its roots to New Testament times, to the recognition of the outstanding Christian service of Phoebe in Romans 16:1,” said Becky Louter, Women’s Division staff overseeing the lay service program. “Deaconesses were formally recognized within American Methodism in

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PHOTO BY CASSANDRA ZAMPINI

Rachel Harvey, right, is commissioned as a deaconess with the laying on of hands of Bishop Robert Schnase, Bishop Bruce Ough, Harriett Olson and Thomas Kemper.

# Experience Hall Educates, Entertains

by Shanta Bryant Gyan

United Methodist Women members walked into an array of interactive multimedia displays on pressing justice issues, more than 50 exhibitor booths, nearly 7,000 colorful prayer shawls, and live entertainment when they ventured into the Assembly Experience Hall.

The exhibits were grouped into four key areas: United Methodist Women initiatives; United Methodist agencies; universities; and organizations and other vendors whose mission is supported by United Methodist Women. The exhibit area also featured a solidarity marketplace of goods from around the world. Exhibitors included the National Network of Korean United Methodist Women, Crafts from Jerusalem, Mothers Acting Up, United Methodist Committee on Relief, Africa University and National Farm Worker Ministry.

Jennifer McCallum, Women's Division staff and Assembly Experience Hall coordinator, said the exhibit areas were designed to be a welcoming space where United Methodist Women members could learn about some of the critical issues impacting women, children and youth worldwide, and then take action in their local communities.

"The exhibits in Experience Hall raised awareness about many of the issues that United Methodist Women work on, so we hope participants will go home with an idea for action," said Ms. McCallum, a designer for United Methodist Women's seminar program at the Church Center for the United Nations.

An interactive educational display on the hot-button issue of immigration highlighted the "Top 10 Myths about Immigration" and outlined ways for members to advocate and get involved in the issue. A computer station with an online survey captured information on how immigration is playing out in local communities.

Margaret Harris of Archer United Methodist Church in Philadelphia, Pa., said the immigration display would be helpful in her church's work on the issue, particularly in advocating for legislation assisting undocumented youth. "I hope to take back ways for more people to get involved in working for immigrant rights," Ms. Harris said.

The Chlorine Free Products Association exhibit booth complemented a nearby display on United Methodist Women's Green Team initiative by offering resources on products to clean everyday household items without



The Rev. Paul Jeffrey, a photojournalist and United Methodist missionary, signs copies of his book *Where Mercy Fails: Darfur's Struggle to Survive* in the Assembly Experience Hall.

using chlorine. Other United Methodist Women-related educational displays focused on health care, economic justice and globalization.

An exhibit booth by Global Ministries' Special Program on Substance Abuse and Related Violence (SPSARV) initiative featured resources on education and training, networking opportunities and support for individuals and families in local congregations and communities as they deal with substance abuse-related issues. "We think it's important for women to know how the church is addressing substance abuse and to let them know that there's support out there for them," said Kevin Nelson, SPSARV's program associate.

And, back by popular demand from the 2006 Assembly, some 7,000 handwoven prayer shawls made by local United Methodist Women members were displayed in the Experience Hall. Sandra Griffith's local United Methodist Women unit at Bethany United Methodist Church in Brooklyn, N.Y., contributed six baby shawls to the display. "I had to go over to see the shawls because a

group of us made a donation of baby shawls," Ms. Griffith said. "I was amazed to see what hands can do, especially with such little time to make them!"

The Experience Hall also offered a series of computer classes throughout the day to give Assembly participants an opportunity to find out more about the United Methodist Women's Online Community, participate in hands-on learning on how to use social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter as well as gain insight into cyber-safety for parents. Assembly participants could also sign up to use the Internet Café.

Two stage areas in the Experience Hall featured a wide range of vibrant, soul-stirring performing artists such as the Sunshine African Dance troupe, the St. Louis-based Perfect Image performers, and The DisAbility Project, a group of artists who use skits, songs and hip hop culture to entertain while educating audiences about living with disabilities.

Shanta Bryant Gyan is a freelance writer based in New York City and frequent contributor to United Methodist Women publications.



Members of the Community Performance Ensemble of Lessie Bates Davis Neighborhood House, a United Methodist Women national mission institution, dance in the Experience Hall at Assembly.

## Elders Leads Town Hall On Health Care Reform

by Yvette Moore

Former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Joycelyn Elders urged United Methodist Women to use its influence to make health care available to all in the United States during an April 30 town hall-style workshop at the organization's Assembly in St. Louis, Mo., April 30-May 2. Nearly 1,000 United Methodist Women members filled the hall in one of more than 150 workshops offered at the "Faith • Hope • Love in

Action" Assembly.

"I'm thrilled to death that in 2010 at least we have a start and something to work from, but it's going to take more than passing a law to reform health care," Dr. Elders said.

"You need three things to make change: you've got to have a crisis



Dr. Joycelyn Elders

— we have a health care crisis; you've got to have a leader — we seem to have a leader; and you've got to have consensus. We have to educate ourselves on health care reform so we can develop a consensus."

After months of misinformation, even some people who want health care for all have been convinced it's unaffordable, she said, but added, "We paid for the war in Iraq. We paid for the war in Afghanistan. Surely we can afford to

pay to provide access to health care for our people."

Dr. Elders encouraged the women to talk with their friends, family and neighbors to create a consensus that health care for all is not only necessary but also possible.

"United Methodist Women can play a very large role," she said. "We care enough, and we know enough — but

■ REFORM *Continued on page 7*

# Lila Downs: Celebrating Life Through Music

by Praveena Balasundaram

Renowned Mexican American singer Lila Downs stirred United Methodist Women members at the Assembly music festival in St. Louis, May 1. Women clapped and sway as Ms. Downs' music and songs moved them.

"For me, music is a very important conduit that brings people together," Ms. Downs said in an interview prior to the Assembly. "When people listen to music, barriers are somewhat broken." Her musical vision embodies this unity.

On stage and in her life, Ms. Downs has crossed many borders. Born to a Mixtec mother and Scottish/English-U.S. father, Ms. Downs grew up in Oaxaca, Mexico; California; and in Minnesota listening to Mexican, pop, American jazz and classical music. She earned degrees in voice and anthropology from the University of Minnesota in 1991. Her music weaves these cultures, languages and musical influences and her arranger-husband Paul Cohen's band, La Misteriosa, accompanies her. Ms. Downs' versatile talents have won her roles and awards. She played a role in the Salma Hayek film about the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo. She sang "Burn it Blue," an Oscar nominated song, and won a Latin Grammy Award for "Une Sangre" in 2004. She is also the first Mexican artist to perform on the Academy Awards telecast. In 2008 she received a Grammy nomination for "Shake Away" in the Best Contemporary Music Album category. "The songs choose us to convey them," she reflected.

Indeed, a song is more than a melody for Ms. Downs. "It is very important to find something meaningful in a song," she said. That inspired her to write her own songs, "I was concerned about saying things."

Ms. Downs has been writing songs since her childhood, but it was not until she translated death certificates for families in Oaxaca that she put music to words. "I wrote 'Ofrenda' [Offering], a song to honor the boys who had crossed into the United States from Mexico in search of work and had died," she said. "Their bodies were shipped back and the families



PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE/UMNS

Lila Downs offers a musical blend of cultures, languages and a call for justice in her performance at Assembly.

wanted to know how they had died."

Ms. Downs said there are many messages to sing about, and that she seeks to open people's heart through songs. Two issues particularly close to her heart are immigration and identity. "We have a painful and beautiful relationship with immigration," Ms. Downs said. "Historically, our ancestors were immigrants who worked jobs for stability. It is important for people to remember. We forget."

She expresses this sentiment in her immigration song, "When did you come to America?/ This Land Is Your Land." Likewise, her song "Minimum Wage" used powerful images to tell the story of immigrant workers. The great yearning for identity was heard in the lyrics of her song "Blue Sand": *I am not African or Mexican or American. I am only a butterfly.* Ms. Downs often sings in Native languages, promoting Native American pride.

Ms. Downs often uses humor to connect people when addressing controversial topics. "When it [an issue] is too painful, I like to sing about it in a sarcastic or ironic way," she said. "Hopefully, it passes borders when the tone is humorous."

Her concern for social justice

goes further than a song. Following her performance at the Assembly, Ms. Downs was off to Mexico to do a benefit concert in support of an excellence in education tutorial-mentoring program for young Native women.

"We are together on these issues," Ms. Downs said of United Methodist Women. "It is wonderful to come together with like-minded women who are healing with faith and hope — the work they are doing is so necessary. They are taking positive energy to communities and raising consciousness."

Ms. Downs ended her inspiring Assembly performance with a special message to United Methodist Women members: "Thank you for the wonderful work you are doing. ... I truly believe we can change the world."

In the coming months, Ms. Downs will be releasing a CD of her live performance in Paris, writing music for Public Theater's stage presentation of "Like Water for Chocolate," and doing concert tours in Mexico, South America, Europe and United States.

Praveena Balasundaram is a freelance writer based in New Hope, Pa., and frequent contributor to United Methodist Women publications.

# A Family of Support For President Inelda González

by Mary Beth Coudal

Assembly was like a family reunion for Inelda González, president of United Methodist Women's national policymaking body, the Women's Division of the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries. Not only was it a time to reconnect with longtime United Methodist Women sister-friends, her daughter, husband and sister also attended the event.

Ilda Vásquez, Ms. González's sister, is South Central Jurisdiction President of United Methodist Women. "I'm extremely proud of her," Ms. Vásquez said. "Of the three sisters, she's always been the quiet one, but deep in her faith."

"We celebrated when we found out that she was going to be president," Ms. Vasquez said. How did they celebrate? "With a dinner, as we always do!" laughed the proud older sister.

"We were a migrant family," Ms. Vasquez said. "Our mother is Methodist. Our daddy was Catholic but became a Methodist. He died at a young age, 59, but he instilled in the family a work ethic — a desire to learn, to be educated. In our family, there was never a question — you were going to go to college. And all of us went." Ms. Vasquez tears up talking about how proud their mother is of her children.

Ms. González's husband, Salvador González, smiled when asked if he ever regretted that his wife had to spend so much time traveling on behalf of United Methodist Women. "Be honest," laughed Ms. González, teasing her husband.

"Yes," Mr. González said slowly. "I'd like to have her at home, but I know her work is important. It's mission and that's what we're all about."

Ms. González chimed in, "Before I married him, I told him, 'I'm very involved in United Methodist Women.'" That was 1980, and she warned him.

"When the three children were little, she worked more

locally," Mr. González said.

Twenty-five-year-old Laura Inelda Lea González, called Lil, joined her family at Assembly. Young Ms. González said of her mother, "She's the best. She knows exactly what to do."

"She's the first Hispanic president," Lil said. "She's made her family very proud."

While this is the second Assembly for young Ms. González, it is the sixth for the president.

"I love Assemblies," she said, "They're so inspiring. You get to meet so many women who are so enthusiastic, who love to serve. It's like seeing an old friend. It's like going to a family reunion. This has been the best ride of my life — being involved in United Methodist Women!"

When giving advice to young women in United Methodist Women, Ms. González said, "I tell them whenever they're asked to serve in whatever capacity, they should always say yes! They're going to get support from their counterparts at the district and conference level. And tell your stories. Women think that their history isn't that important. It is."

Mary Beth Coudal is the staff writer for the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries.



PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE/UMNS

Inelda González, president of the Women's Division of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, shares her faith story at Assembly.

# 2,000 March for Immigrants' Human Rights at Assembly

by Elliott Wright

United Methodist Women's "Faith • Hope • Love in Action" Assembly theme moved from the page to the pavement when participants in the quadrennial event marched and stood vigil for immigrants' rights in downtown St. Louis May 1.

Two thousand people, about 95 percent from the Assembly, gathered in Kiener Plaza to demand just and fair federal immigration reform legislation. It was one of a dozen of such rallies across the country, most scheduled weeks ago and made more dramatic by the recent passage of a tough anti-immigrant law in Arizona.

Bishop Minerva Carcaño, a United Methodist prelate whose area includes Arizona, was a main speaker at the St. Louis event. She called the state measure, which in effect criminalizes undocumented persons, not only anti-immigrant but also "anti-humanitarian, anti-civil rights and anti-Judeo-Christian."

While organized as an activity of United Methodist Women's Assembly, the rally was coordinated with human rights and immigrant organizations in St. Louis. Representatives of Roman Catholic, Jewish and Muslim communities participated.

Assembly participants marched five blocks from the America's Center where Assembly was held to the amphitheater at Kiener Plaza in the heart of downtown.

While the rally was taking place outside, a prayer vigil was taking place inside the America Center's Ferrara Theatre. Several hundred women, some with canes or in wheelchairs who could not manage the march, supported the action of their sisters with their thoughts and prayers.

They prayed for the marchers and the people on the street who would encounter them; but mostly, they prayed for the immigrants who face ever-increasing hardships in the United States. Some prayed by name for those who waited in jail cells for deportation. Some prayed for the families they would leave behind in the United States. Others prayed for the children of these families who come home to find an empty house when their parents are rounded up in arbitrary raids. Compassion was requested for police and immigration officers, and strength for many in the United States who work tirelessly to bring comfort, reassurance, and security to immigrants who are vulnerable in a land that is foreign to them.

## "Because we believe, we act ..."

Many marchers carried signs saying, "Because we believe, we act for immigration rights," a phrase repeated frequently in the worship and speechmaking in the plaza. The cadence of the march was set by the hymn, "We Are Marching in the Light of God."

A group of 14 Roman Catholic Sisters of Mercy, seven young Jesuit priests and a group from Women's Voices Raised for Social Justice, a St. Louis civil organization, were among the local people who waited for Assembly marchers in the plaza.

Hundreds of people filled out postcards, addressed to Janet Napolitano, the U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security, requesting swift action to avoid the separation of families, detention and deportation currently allowed in federal immigration law. Such practices were loudly denounced as violations of the sense of justice guaranteed by democratic government and sanctioned by religious ethics.

These cards will be personally delivered to Ms. Napolitano by Inelda González, president of the Women's Division of the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Women's national policymaking body; and Harriett Jane Olson, chief executive of the Women's Division.

Ms. González and Ms. Olson both spoke at the rally, recalling the historical commitment of United Methodist Women and its predecessors to human and civil rights. "When powerful forces trample people, we of faith but stand up for them in the name of justice," Ms. Olson declared, saying of the new Arizona law, "This is not right."

"This is not right," the crowd chanted back. "This is not right ... This is not right."

"We must stand up until there is justice," said Ms. González, who is from Harlingen, Texas, near the border with Mexico. She brought laughter when, referring to her ancestors, she said, "My family did not cross the border, the border crossed us."

Large puppets in the march procession to the plaza dramatized the experience of immigrants to the United States, including the welcoming spirit represented by the Statue of Liberty but also episodes of exclusion, incarceration and economic injustice.

## Interfaith prayers

Among those offering prayers at the rally were Msgr. Jack Schuler of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. Louis, Rabbi Susan Talve of the Central



ABOVE: United Methodist Women members march out of the Assembly Hall in support of immigrant rights.

BELOW: Women's Division President Inelda González, left, and Deputy General Secretary Harriett Jane Olson speak at the immigration rally in downtown St. Louis.



Reform Congregation (Jewish) and Imam Muhamed Hasic of the local Islamic community.

Local perspectives on immigrant rights were presented by three speakers, Gedlu Metaferia, the African Mutual Assistance Association of Missouri, who came to the United States as an immigrant from Ethiopia; Jelena Aleksic of the Language Access Media Project of the local Bosnian community; and Jamala Rogers, a newspaper columnist and founder of the Organization for Black Struggle.

"Nothing is more refreshing than following enlightened women," Ms. Rogers said of the organizing efforts of United Meth-

odist Women on behalf of immigrants.

Several local organizations assisted in planning the march and rally. These included Missouri Immigrant and Refugee Advocates, St. Louis Inter-faith Committee on Latin America, the National Farm Worker Ministry and Human Rights Action.

Bishop Carcaño also expressed appreciation to the City of St. Louis for its cooperation in making the event possible.

Elliott Wright is a freelance religion news reporter and former communications officer for the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries.

\*Mary Beth Coudal contributed to this story.

# The Millennial Generation: Active, Engaged and Connected

by Shanta Bryant Gyan

The “millennial generation” — 18 to 29 year olds — are often discounted as being apathetic, self-indulgent and hostile to civic institutions, but that couldn’t be further from the truth, said veteran broadcast journalist Judy Woodruff and activist/commentator Erica Williams in their onstage dialog about today’s youth during the morning plenary of United Methodist Women’s Assembly in St. Louis, Mo., May 1.

With some 50 million “millennials” nationwide, a recent Pew Research Center national study found people under 30 to be more active, engaged and connected than any other generation in history.

Ms. Woodruff, a senior correspondent for “The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer,” produced two hour-long documentaries exploring the views of U.S. youth called “Generation Next: Speak Up. Be Heard” in 1997.

The women’s eye-opening Assembly plenary dialog touched on a range of issues that impact and define young people of this generation. First, millennials are the most diverse generation in U.S. history, Ms. Woodruff said. A Pew Research Center study found 19 percent are Hispanic, 14 percent are black, and a significant number identify themselves as mixed race. Ms. Williams noted that by 2050 there will be no single majority ethnic group in the United States. “Millennials value differences and celebrate them,” said Ms. Williams, deputy director of Campus Progress.

And the millennial generation is less homophobic than previous generations. “Homosexuality is not a big deal to them,” Ms. Woodruff said.



Judy Woodruff, left, and Erica Williams present onstage dialog about the “millennial generation” during Assembly plenary.

Ms. Woodruff said young people of the millennial generation believe immigration makes the United States a richer country.

Members of the millennial generation are more likely to identify themselves politically as liberals than previous generations — even when compared to “baby boomers,” who came of age during the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War.

The willingness to serve is another characteristic of the millennial generation. “To make the world what we want it to be, we have to be involved,” Ms. Williams said.

The millennial generation is consider-



PHOTOS BY CASSANDRA ZAMPINI

ably less religious than older generations, the Pew Research Center study revealed. However, the study also found millennials have a strong spirituality and pray about as often as older generations did when they were young. While many are not affiliated with a particular faith or denomination, they recognize the importance of houses of worship in creating social change in communities, Ms. Woodruff said.

“This generation believes that places of worship speak to social and political issues,” Ms. Williams said.

Shanta Bryant Gyan is a freelance writer based in New York City and frequent contributor to United Methodist Women publications.

## “Water Walk Short” Wins Assembly Video Contest

by Yvette Moore

Ninth-grader Chloe Heidt of Canton, Ga., won United Methodist Women’s first Assembly video contest for her “Water Walk Short” documenting the daily treks taken by many Tanzanian girls to provide water for their families. Ms. Heidt will receive an all-expense paid trip to Brazil, Mexico or Russia in United Methodist Women’s Ubuntu Explorer international mission encounter program.



PHOTO BY CASSANDRA ZAMPINI

Chloe Heidt

The video contest challenged United Methodist Women members to have their say on the Assembly theme — and the organization’s new tagline of Faith • Hope • Love in Action — in videos exemplifying those words. Contestants posted their 30-second to 3-minute videos on United Methodist Women’s website, where viewers voted for their favorites.

Finalists were announced in February and received an all-expense paid trip to Assembly. They were Ms. Heidt, Paulette “Polly” Caudle of Clemmons, N.C.; Ann W. Farris, a deaconess from West Bend, Wis.; and Deaconess Becky Warnock with her son Jess Warnock of Toledo, Ohio.

### “Water Walk Short”

Ms. Heidt videotaped footage for her “Water Walk Short” during a June 2009 youth mission trip to Tanzania, where she got a taste of what young girls and women in that country do daily to provide water for their families.

“Girls in Tanzania walk four miles to get water and four miles to take it back to their homes,” Ms. Heidt explained. “We only walked back with the water; we rode there. We started out carrying the water on our heads, but we couldn’t do that. After a few minutes, we had to take it off. I don’t know how the women in Tanzania do it. It was pretty heavy — about five pounds of water in each container.”

Ms. Heidt said she made the video to spread awareness about the need for access to clean water in Tanzania and many other parts of the world. She has shown her video in her local church and community.

Yvette Moore is editor of *United Methodist Women News*.

### ■ ASSEMBLY *Continued from page 1*

the future. “Our history is a long rope which God holds. We are holding the line taut for more to cling on to.”

Throughout the Sunday morning service — and throughout the event — a band and vocal ensemble directed by Global Ministries’ Jorge Lockward led Assembly in song.

Liturgical dance rose to a new level when dancer-acrobats similar to those of the popular “Cirque de Soliel” interpreted the interconnections of humans, the rest of creation and the Creator. Assembly ended with a collective dance as the performers and musicians led the audience out of the Assembly hall into the streets of St. Louis.

Yvette Moore is editor of *United Methodist Women News*.

### ■ REFORM *Continued from page 4*

nobody cares how much we know until they know how much we care. You have the power, position and prestige to bring about change. We need it now.

“We’ve been talking about universal access to health care since 1912. We’ve spent 100 years saying we could not afford health care for our people. When we say we cannot afford health care, it’s women and children who suffer the most.”

“Our present reform is not perfect, but it’s a good place to start,” she said. “Health care should be a right, not a commodity, not a privilege. We all have a responsibility to our friends and neighbors. We can’t be the richest country in world, and the only industrialized nation that does not offer health care to its people.”

Yvette Moore is editor of *United Methodist Women News*.

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# Thankful in Every Direction

by Elliott Wright

One Sunday morning a generation or so ago, a young Cherokee mother in eastern Oklahoma took a side road in her rush to get her children to a Baptist church on time. She came upon a small cinder-block church and said, "Let's just go here," not even knowing the denomination.

Anita Phillips entered a warm, welcoming United Methodist church and spiritually never left. Her life's road has taken many turns, and on May 2 she led Bible study for the 6,500 people at United Methodist Women's "Faith • Hope • Love in Action" Assembly in St. Louis, Mo., April 30-May 2.

Ms. Phillips was baptized in that small Cherokee church, and after a career as a social worker, she entered seminary and became an ordained elder in the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference (OIMC) in 1995. Today, the Rev. Anita Phillips is director of the United Methodist Native American Comprehensive Plan.

The Assembly Bible study focused on six words from Col. 1:3: "We always thank God for you," one of the theme Scriptures for the event. She emphasized the inclusiveness of the Christian community.

Ms. Phillips asked the worshippers to turn in the four directions — north, south, east and west, an inclusive concept — and designated the four as: creatures and creation; the elements that sustain life, such as water and soil; those people who came before — the "cloud of witnesses"; and the generations to come.

Her scriptural exposition laid out Christian thanksgiving for these gifts from God, and three

global voices responded to her.

Deliberate, precise and clear in her presentation, Ms. Phillips learned her speaking skills as a pastor over a 10-year period, but it had started even before her ordination.

"As I got more deeply involved in the church, I decided I wanted to know more about theology and history," she said in an interview. "I hardly knew anything about the *Book of Discipline*. I decided to take some courses at Phillips Theological Seminary, and the first thing I knew I was being invited to speak in churches.

"I wasn't thinking about ordination; I was learning about Christianity and the church, but the district superintendent had a plan. You know how skillful a superintendent can be. He told me he had this small church that wouldn't have a pastor if it wasn't me. So..."

Ms. Phillips became a superintendent in OIMC shortly after her ordination. "We have a shortage of ordained elders in the conference," she said.

Four years ago, Ms. Phillips was tapped to lead the Native American Comprehensive Plan, which was authorized by the United Methodist General Conference of 1992 and has been continued every four years since as one of the racial/ethnic plans of the denomination. Some 18,000 Native Americans belong to The United Methodist Church.

The comprehensive plan provides consultative services to Native American congregations and clergy, develops curriculum specific to native communities, works with annual conferences, equips lay speakers and sponsors intergenerational events.

Strong links between the generations are a special characteristic of Native American tradition and one that Ms. Phillips and other church leaders do not want to lose.

Anita Phillips honors her native heritage and finds no problem in incorporating many aspects of native culture in her Christian faith journey. She looks at her ancestors and their ways and says, "We always thank God for you."

Elliott Wright is a religion news reporter and former communications officer for United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries.



PHOTO BY CASSANDRA ZAMPINI

The Rev. Anita Phillips leads Bible study during closing worship of Assembly.

# Late Night Assembly Showcases Talent of United Methodist Women Members

by Shanta Bryant Gyan

Who said United Methodist Women members don't have talent?

The creative talents of United Methodist Women members were on full display for late-night fun on Friday and Saturday nights from 9:30-11:00pm.

"Assembly's Got Talent," a talent show competition modeled after the popular reality show "America Idol," showcased performances from local United Methodist Women units.

Prior to the Assembly, participants planning to attend the gathering were asked if they would like to perform in the talent show, explained Marva D. Usher-Kerr, Women's Division's executive secretary for membership who organized the Assembly evening events.

For two nights, Assembly participants shared their talents before a cheering audience and a panel of judges. On Friday night, the judging panel voted on the talent show winners, and the next night the audience selected



PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE

Members of The DisAbility Project perform a skit about inclusion and accessibility issues on stage in the Assembly Experience Hall.

the winner.

Acts ranged from solo performers and dancers to singers and groups performing skits and musical selections. Comedic acts were interspersed between performances.

The Saturday night winner of "Assembly's Got Talent" was singer Joan Campbell of Warners Chapel United Methodist Church in Boonville, Ky. Ms. Campbell testified about her life growing up in

the Appalachian region and passionately sang Loretta Lynn's country hit, "Coal Miner's Daughter."

"I love to sing and sing for my Lord every time I get an opportunity," said Ms. Campbell after receiving the loudest applause from the audience. "The song is about faith, hope and love."

Shanta Bryant Gyan is a freelance writer based in New York City and frequent contributor to United Methodist Women publications.

## ■ COMMISSION *Continued from page 3*

1888 and home missionaries in 2004."

Bishop Bruce R. Ough of West Ohio, president of Global Ministries, presided at the commissioning, with the assistance of other officers and mission agency staff.

Harriett Jane Olson, who heads the Women's Division, delivered the sermon.

Each candidate was escorted by a United Methodist Women leader from his or her home regional conference. Commissioned in the service were:

**Lisa S. Bachman**, North Carolina, wellness and evangelism ministries;

**Amanda L. Caruso**, Missouri, Habitat for Humanity, Kansas City;

**Mary C. Gehrke**, Minnesota, food bank and mental health;

**Nancy K. Gordon**, Florida, hospital arts;

**Enock N. Gustave** (home

missioner), Haitian prison ministry;

**Rachel Harvey**, Northern Illinois, Reconciling Ministries Network;

**Mary Ellen Kilmer**, Nebraska, public school teacher;

**Mary Melvin**, Florida; school guidance counselor;

**Amanda Mountain**, New York, staff of the Advance, Global Ministries;

**M. Elaine Parrent**, Oklahoma, church administrator;

**Cheryl Robinson**, New York, children's services;

**Mary K. Webster**, Kansas, nurse;

**Sandra Wilson Wickberg**, North Texas, librarian/church assistance coordinator.

The faith journeys of the new deaconesses and the home missionaries vary dramatically. They share a desire to serve God by serving those in need, by alleviating suffering, eradicating the causes of injustice,

assisting in developing human potentials, and sharing in building global community through the church.

Bishop Robert Schnase of the Missouri Area presided at the service of Holy Communion following the commissioning. Both the commissioning and the communion worship were filled with hymns and prayers of trust in God and commitment in service.

There are currently 165 deaconesses and home missionaries, and they form the only office in the church for laity called to full-time servant ministries. They seek their own employment, which is approved by the bishop of their annual conferences, and deaconesses and home missionaries are lay members of annual conferences.

Elliott Wright is a religion news reporter and former communications officer for the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries.