

## United Methodists in the Philippines Move Toward Autonomy

UMs in the Philippines have reelected three episcopal leaders and moved closer to setting up an autonomous Methodist Church in the island nation. The Philippines Central Conference, made up of clergy and lay delegates from 19 annual conferences, met in late November and reelected and reassigned to their current posts Bishop Benjamin A. Justo (Baguio Area), Bishop Solito Kuramin Toquero (Manila Area), and Bishop Leo A. Soriano (Davao Area). Each presides over several annual conferences. All three bishops were initially elected four years ago, and all support an autonomous, affiliated relationship with the UMC. The Philippines church is now an organic part of the denomination.

UM bishops in the Philippines serve a "term episcopacy" requiring an election every four years at central conference meetings. Convened in Manila, the 2004 Philippines Central Conference took no definitive action on the autonomy issue, which has been under consideration for many years. However, a procedure was laid out and **plans made for the conference to meet in 2006 to consider the issue.** "The sentiment for autonomy was very strong," said Bishop Warner H. Brown Jr. (Denver Area), who presided at the central conference on behalf of the Council of Bishops.

Methodism was introduced in the Philippines by persons from the United States more than a century ago. The church today has a membership of more than 600,000 and serves a constituency of about one million people. "The church in the Philippines is an integral part of our global mission network," said R. Randy Day, general secretary of the General Board of Global Ministries. "Our mission partnership will remain vibrant whatever structures exist in the future."

Support for autonomy has increased in recent years. The process of becoming autonomous is guided by the *Discipline* and rulings of the Judicial Council. This year, **16 of 19 annual conferences presented petitions for autonomy** to the central conference. Nine were accepted, and seven were ruled out of order on technical grounds, according to Brown. **Two new annual conferences were created this year.** Delegates decided to hold an "adjourned session" of the central conference in 2006 to consider autonomy. This will provide time to correct the technical flaws of the "out of order" petitions and to let the other annual conferences vote on the autonomy question. — *Elliott Wright, GBGM*

## Churches Respond as Typhoons, Floods Pound Philippines

Churches and relief organizations are responding as typhoons, floods, and landslides have resulted in death and destruction in the Philippines. **The UM Committee on Relief sent grants to two of the episcopal areas** in the Philippines in response to recovery efforts from typhoons earlier this season. As of Dec. 8, the agency was waiting for information from UMs there regarding response to **the latest storm, which occurred Nov. 29,** according to David Sadoo, UMCOR field staff for emergency services. "These latest ones are probably the worst," he said. "We're continuing to respond to requests made by the conferences."

**More than 1,750 people are dead or missing** as a result of the storms, according to a Dec. 9 report from Reuters news agency. The U.S. government dispatched Marine and Navy personnel on Dec. 7

***A concise, late-deadline report compiled and edited by the staff  
of The United Methodist Publishing House***

from nearby Okinawa to the Philippines to assist residents in the flood-ravaged areas. Sadoo noted that Action by Churches Together (ACT), a coalition of interfaith relief organizations, including UMCOR, has issued an alert on the Philippines in preparation for formulating a bigger plan of response. "As soon as ACT issues an appeal, we will send some funds to them," he added (**Advance #240235, Philippines Emergency**). According to ACT, the four typhoons spawned over a period of three weeks have caused damage in at least five regions of the Philippines. In addition to the fatalities, thousands are homeless. Extensive damage has been reported to property and agriculture, as well as to major roads and communication and power lines. — *Linda Bloom (UMNS)*

## UM-Related College Challenges Accreditation Removal

A UM-related college plans to appeal a pending decision to remove its accreditation. **Hiwassee College**, a two-year, liberal arts institution in Madisonville, Tenn., **received notification of a decision by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to remove the college from membership**. The association took its action on Dec. 6, but the college is not expected to receive official notification until January. "When official notification is received, the college will appeal the decision through the official SACS appeal process and take any other actions necessary," said James Noseworthy, Hiwassee College president. "We have made tremendous progress as an institution over the last several years and believe the SACS action is unjust."

The Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools is the accrediting body for institutions of higher education that award associate, baccalaureate, master's, or doctoral degrees in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. Because Hiwassee is appealing the decision, any SACS action will be suspended until the appeals process is completed in March 2005. According to Noseworthy, **the SACS action is in response to fiscal concerns first raised by the association in 2000**, when the college was placed on warning. Since then, college officials have worked extensively with SACS officials to address these concerns, meeting financial goals and developing long-term fiscal strategies.

"Hiwassee College has dealt with fiscal challenges for several years," he said. "There is no easily identifiable single event which led to our current challenge. All of my predecessors endeavored to do what they believed was best for the college," he said. Hiwassee officials report that during the past two years, the college has strengthened its academic programs, created a campus-wide computer network, enhanced classrooms, become a member of the Appalachian College Association, kept a balanced budget, increased annual support, and developed strategies for continued growth. **"We are better off financially than we have ever been in many years.** In the past year alone, we increased our endowment by \$1.5 million and improved our operating assets by \$200,000. We have the grounds to build a very strong appeals case," Noseworthy said.

Offering support in the appeal is the Division of Higher Education of the UM General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. Ken Yamada, associate general secretary, expressed "deep regret and disappointment" over the decision of SACS to lift the college's membership. "The division will provide President Noseworthy and Hiwassee College all assistance necessary in the appeal and join him in exploring viable options," he said.

**Editor:** Andrew J. Schleicher  
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NEWSCOPE, P.O. Box 801, Nashville, TN 37202; ISSN 1073-4910.  
For subscription concerns, call 1-800-672-1789.  
To place a Positions Available announcement, send the information via e-mail to: [umnewscope@umpublishing.org](mailto:umnewscope@umpublishing.org) or fax: 615-749-6512.  
For editorial matters, call: 615-749-6320; fax: 615-749-6512; e-mail: [umnewscope@umpublishing.org](mailto:umnewscope@umpublishing.org); web page: <http://www.umph.com>.

NEWSCOPE © 2004 (USPS 961-360) is supported by subscription income and published by The United Methodist Publishing House. It is issued weekly except for the last two weeks in December.  
**Subscription:** \$22.00 (periodical class), \$28.00 (first class), \$38.00 (foreign), or \$16.00 (electronic mail) a year. Single copy: 50 cents.  
**Permission to quote** granted to newsletters and media of The United Methodist Church, with credit. Periodical postage paid at Nashville, Tenn.  
**POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to: United Methodist NEWSCOPE, P.O. Box 801, Nashville, TN 37202.

**The college will issue an update about the appeal no later than March 2005**, Noseworthy said. The college is also “exploring some promising options for accreditation partnerships. No matter what, we will do all within our power to ensure there will always be a place for the special mission Hiwassee College has faithfully served since 1849,” he said. — *Linda Green (UMNS)*

## Short Takes

- The Philippines Central Conference approved the creation of a National Council on Youth Ministry last month. The council will serve as a forum for the issues and concerns of the National UM Youth Fellowship and the National UM Young Adult Fellowship, which covers youth and young adults ages 12–40 in the Philippines. A National Youth Desk was also approved to ensure the implementation of the national youth ministry council, monitor the programs of the two organizations, assist in planning joint programs, and ensure budget allocation for the council. — *UMNS*
- UM-related Africa University in Zimbabwe dedicated its new Faculty of Health Sciences building on Dec. 1. Diplomats, government officials, and local church leaders joined students and staff for the event. R. Randy Day, general secretary of the General Board of Global Ministries, was the preacher for the opening worship. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) supported construction of the building with a grant of \$1 million from its American Schools and Hospitals Abroad program. The \$1.8 million Faculty of Health Sciences facility is the fourth building on the campus to be constructed with funds from USAID.  
— *Andra Stevens, Africa University (UMNS)*
- The UMC’s InterEthnic Strategy Development Group, during its annual meeting Dec. 3–4, voted to support the call of the denomination’s Hispanic caucus for the reinstatement of David Maldonado as president of Iliff School of Theology. IESDG, comprised of executive directors and chairpersons of the five recognized racial and ethnic caucuses, voted to support efforts of Methodists Associated to Represent the Cause of Hispanic Americans (MARCHA) and urged a quick resolution to the situation. IESDG also elected Chester Aumua (Pacific Islander National Caucus), Tacoma, Wash., as chairperson and Alvin Deer (Native American International Caucus), Oklahoma City, Okla., as vice chairperson. — *UMNS*
- The Mount Sequoyah Conference and Retreat Center of the South Central Jurisdiction, Fayetteville, Ark., last month made an offer to purchase adjoining property and the home of the superintendent for Arkansas’s Northwest District. Elected as chair at the board meeting was Bishop D. Max Whitfield (Northwest Texas–New Mexico Area).
- In recognition of U.S. military personnel who are returning home, the city of Cookeville, Tenn., holds a parade in each person’s honor. This is the brainstorm of Lisa Bishop, a UM and president of the Putnam County Soldier Support Group. As of Dec. 1, she has organized 17 parades, the first being on July 4, 2003, for her son Lance Cpl. Mathew Bishop. Last month, flanked by his wife and child, Pfc. George McCready sat atop a city fire engine acting as grand marshal in a parade held just for him. Inspired by Bishop, her pastor, Gerald Taylor, has begun placing local soldiers’ pictures on Friendship UMC’s altar each Sunday, encouraging persons to approach and pray for their safe return. — *Lindsay Ferrier (UMNS)*
- Joining the latest group of 15 ecumenical companions sent to Israel and Palestine by the World Council of Churches is a Jewish woman from Britain, organizers say. The ecumenical companions will spend the next three months working with Palestinian communities as well as Israeli organizations sympathetic to the plight of Palestinians. Munib Younan, the Lutheran bishop in Jerusalem, said he was particularly pleased to have “a Jewish participant in the EAPPI who joins in the human chain working for peace and justice in the Holy Land.” — *ENI*

- The Society of St. Andrew, an ecumenical hunger relief agency, received a promotional spot on John Andretti's car #14 in the final race of NASCAR's Nextel Cup Series on Nov. 21. Greg Pollex, the owner of ppc Racing, which provided the space, encouraged all NASCAR fans to support the agency. Through its nationwide produce-salvage program, the society has increased its total pounds 21.4% in 2004 through November over the same period last year. Pounds saved through the Gleaning Network increased 41.1% in the recent 11-month period. Meanwhile, the number of volunteers increased 61.5% to a total of 37,004 persons.
- Methodists in Britain think they have found a way to mark the festive season that puts a brake on the practice of circulating one billion cards that end up as waste after Christmas, but their campaign might not be welcomed by all charities. The Methodist Relief and Development Fund is urging people not to send Christmas cards to those they meet frequently—work colleagues, fellow students, other church members—and to make or buy a single, huge card to be displayed where everyone can see it. — *ENI*
- With this issue, we bring 2004 to a close. The next issue will be Jan. 7, 2005. We at THE UNITED METHODIST NEWSCOPE and The United Methodist Publishing House would like to wish you the happiest of holidays. May the birth of Jesus Christ that we celebrate this month reawaken in you a spirit of peace and of holiness. As we enter a new year, let us go forth in God's love sharing the good news of Christ with the world full of need.

Andrew J. Schleicher, *Editor*

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## On the Record

"Early on, I posted the word 'commitment' on the refrigerator door. . . . There were so many times when we were struggling to put our marriage back together that we just had to focus on that one word. It reminded us that no matter what—we wanted to get through it. We wanted to stay together." — "Bob," *who almost 15 years later now describes himself as happily married (UMNS)*

"I think when couples hear our story and know how difficult it had to be for us to stay together, it gives them hope that the Lord can bring them through it, too." — "Charlotte," *Bob's wife, who with her husband is now mentoring other couples in tough times (UMNS)*

"I don't know where I'm going to go. I don't know what I'm going to do. I have faith in the Lord to let him lead me. As long as my family's with me, everything else will be OK." — *Lou Holtz, upon his retirement as coach of the University of South Carolina football team*

## Positions Available

Director of youth and student ministries. Contact: Search Committee at First UMC, 701 Calder, Beaumont, TX 77701; phone: 409-832-0295; fax: 409-832-9216; e-mail: spr\_chair@firstbeaumont.org.... Director of communication services and resources. Contact: Search Committee Chair, UM Conference Center, 500 East Court Ave., Suite C, Des Moines, IA 50309; phone: 515-283-1991; fax: 515-283-8672..... Director of Christian formation. Contact: Lynn Lindsey, Pulaski Heights UMC, 4823 Woodlawn, Little Rock, AR 72205; e-mail: llindsey@phumc.com.

## Personalia

**Clifford Lee**, 56, president of UM-related Lon Morris College, died Dec. 2 from an apparent heart attack at his home in Jacksonville, Texas.