

Judicial ruling,

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Judicial Council meets twice yearly, whereas the General Conference, the denomination's top legislative assembly, won't meet until 2004.

The Parents Reconciling Network, representing United Methodist parents of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, expressed "cautious support" for the ruling. "The decision, though narrow, appropriately focused on process and not on the validity of Discipline statements regarding the church's stance on homosexuality," the group said. The network "believes this action is a step in the right direction because it honors the directive in the Discipline that gives the duty of determining the gifts and graces of clergy to annual conferences," said Jamie Stroud of Philadelphia, national coordinator. The decision outlines the review process for annual conferences and rules out summary action without due process, she said. "This process

Gay Clergy should offer a measure of protection to gay and lesbian clergy."

The Parents Reconciling Network and the Chicago-based Reconciling Ministries Network took aim at the United Methodist Church's advertising campaign and its theme of "Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors. The people of the United Methodist Church."

"The Judicial Council ruling sounds more like closed minds and closed closets," said Marilyn Alexander, Reconciling Ministries Network executive director. Heterosexual and "closeted" gay and lesbian clergy members will not have their sexual behavior scrutinized, but openly gay or lesbian clergy members will be held to different standards, the group said. Reconciling Ministries advocates full inclusion of gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people in the church.

United Methodists of Color for a Fully Inclusive Church also was critical, comparing the decision to the church's "earlier failures to grapple with issues of social justice and civil rights." ■

who said that?

“While it would be wonderful if every time we encountered evil, God would just lift his magical staff to split the sea and slay our foes, that is apparently not his plan for our Modern Pharaoh, Osama bin Laden. For there are some seas that only men must split.”

► **Rabbi Marvin Hier**, dean and founder of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, in a letter to President Bush urging him to continue military strikes on Afghanistan throughout the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.



NEWS BRIEFS

Ministry board adopts Hispanic theological education plan

■ **NASHVILLE, Tenn. (UMNS)** - The denomination's Division of Ordained Ministry has adopted a national strategic plan to increase the number of seminary-trained pastors in the Hispanic community.

More than 40 million Hispanics live in the United States, and they represent the fastest-growing segment of the population, according to the plan.

Latino/Hispanic United Methodist Seminarian Retreat; awarding grants to United Methodist seminaries to develop training opportunities and resources for ministry with Hispanic students; and supporting the Hispanic Summer program sponsored by 40 seminaries and universities, including nine of the 13 United Methodist seminaries.

More than 40 million Hispanics live in the United States, and they represent the fastest-growing segment of the population, according to the plan. In 2000, the church had 59 Hispanic seminarians, 42 of them enrolled in one of the 13 United Methodist-related seminaries. Only two United Methodist Hispanics with doctoral degrees are teaching in those seminaries or other theological schools approved by the denomination's University Senate, which determines whether schools meet the criteria for affiliating with the church. None of the schools has United Methodist Hispanic women with doctoral degrees in any field of religion.

"It is imperative that the United Methodist Church develop a strong cadre of leaders who can help Latino/a/Hispanic and other congregations face the difficult challenges, and who will also help the church at large realize the joy and promise of the Latino/a/Hispanic presence among us," said the Rev. Justo González of Atlanta, the primary author of "Called Into Joy! An Initiative on Latino/a/Hispanic Theological Education."

For more information on the Hispanic plan for theological education, contact the Section of Deacons and Diaconal Ministries at sddm@gbhem.org or (615) 340-7375, or visit www.gbhem.org online. ■

British Methodists call for gambling restrictions

By the Methodist Church Media Office

■ The British Methodist Church is calling for strong safeguards to protect young people from the dangers of gambling.

In response to recommendations that the gaming industry be deregulated, the Methodist Church said it welcomes plans to increase the age limit on certain forms of gambling but stresses that "18 should be the minimum age for

all gambling."

"Britain is alone in Western Europe and the (United States) in allowing under-18s to gamble," said Rachel Lampard, Methodist Secretary for Parliamentary and Political Affairs. "Research suggests that the earlier a young person starts gambling, the more likely they are to develop problems as young adults."

A statement sent to the British government calls for raising the age restriction for slot machines to 18 years. The minimum age for playing the National Lottery should be set to 18 also, according to the church.

Lampard advocates taking social responsibility beyond the level of companies providing money to care for problem gamblers. She suggests developing business practices that help to prevent addictive behavior as well as fund research, through a voluntary or statutory levy.

Positive measures might include "training for staff, corporate policies or testing that new games do not appeal disproportionately to vulnerable people."

The United Methodist Church officially considers gambling "a menace to society, deadly to the best interests of moral, social, economic and spiritual life, and destructive of good government." The denomination and its annual conferences, including Holston, have actively opposed gambling initiatives in the United States. ■

Bishops: Church ratifies constitutional amendments

■ **LAKE JUNALUSKA, N.C. (UMNS)** - All 11 amendments to the constitution of the United Methodist Church, approved by the 2000 General Conference, have been ratified by the required aggregate two-thirds vote of the 177 annual (regional) conferences in the United States, Europe, Africa and the Philippines.

The church's Council of Bishops made the announcement Nov. 8, during their weeklong meeting at Lake Junaluska.

Only Amendment IV relating to baptism and church membership caused much debate across the church prior to the voting by regional units this year.

The amendment makes it clear that upon baptism all individuals are considered "baptized members" of the church. Once vows are taken declaring their Christian faith, they become "professing members." Heretofore, baptized infants have been considered "preparatory members" until they are old enough to profess their own faith. This is usually done at the age of 11 or 12 in a service of confirmation.

The amendment brings the denomination's baptism ritual, "By Water and the Spirit," and the Book of Discipline into agreement regarding membership. ■

► Full text of "News Briefs" may be viewed at <http://umns.umc.org/>.



Terrorism,

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tial security issues and make appropriate changes, said the Rev. Ron Matthews, conference director of finance and administration. As supervisor of the conference's Johnson City office, Matthews recently had a mirror installed to improve the receptionist's ability to see the entrance.

"Every congregation needs to be more sensitive to security," he said. "You never know when someone will do something unrelated to the terrorist attacks."

"Bomb & Disease Threat Management Procedures" is available at www.gcfa.org or by contacting Anne Travis at (865) 690-4080. In the meantime, Holston members and staff should not succumb to panic, but continue to go about the business of reaching people for Christ.

"We need to have the spirit of faith that God is going to take care of us," said Lynice Broyles, president of the Holston Conference Secretaries Association and administrative assistant at Sulphur Springs UMC. "Our faith will carry us through." ■

Design for Ministry,

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The Holston Conference was represented in Nashville by the Rev. Gary Grogg, Ministry Design Team chair; Jean Henderson, Discipleship Team chair; and Jay Garrison, Chancellor.

By restructuring, Holston leaders hoped to make the conference's decision-making process more efficient, facilitating more discussion among leadership groups and enabling ministry at the local church level without lengthy approval processes.

The Judicial Council's rigorous acceptance process forced Holston to alter some of its proposals, reducing the impact of anticipated sweeping changes, conference leaders said.

"We've made a lot of concessions," Grogg said.

For example, following the Ministry Design Team's most recent presentation, the Judicial Council ordered Holston to return the responsibility of leadership development to the Board of Ordained Ministry. Originally, the Ministry Design Team planned to have the Board interact with the conference Nurture Team.

Following this change and two others, the Ministry Design Team will ask the 2002 Holston Annual Conference for acceptance and send acknowledgment of changes to the Judicial Council, sealing the approval.

"We're glad we've been able to make the modifications and move forward," Grogg said. "We're very proud that we're the first Annual Conference to have our restructure approved."

After years of effort by Holston leaders to shape a new organization, Chancellor Garrison expressed appreciation for the Judicial Council ruling.

"So much time was spent by the [Ministry Design Team] to examine the discipline and requirements to do the new things they wanted to do," he said. "I felt like we had the best chance to have our restructuring approved." ■