

Finance agency experiences range of 'firsts'

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UMNS photo by Stan Sutton

Service Project:

Jack Dockery (left) and Reuben Wilbur roll up a play rug at Wesley Center in Savannah, Ga., during a service project by the United Methodist Church's financial agency.

ST. SIMONS ISLAND, Ga. (UMNS) - The 2001 meeting of the United Methodist Church's financial agency included a series of firsts.

During its Nov. 15-19 session, the General Council on Administration and Finance (GCFA) experienced its first mission service program, its first session with a representative from one of the Pan-Methodist denominations and – perhaps most unusual – its first situation in which non-GCFA staff representatives asked for a freeze on salary ranges for the highest level church agency executives.

Meeting prior to GCFA, the church's Committee on Personnel Policies and Practices decided to hold the executive pay range at 2002 levels for 2003.

The committee is an interagency working group that includes a representative from each of the denomination's churchwide agencies that receive general church funds. Not included are the United Methodist Publishing House and the Board of Pension and Health Benefits.

GCFA staff had recommended a 3.6 percent increase in salary ranges for 2003 based on an established formula tied to changes in the denominational average compensation for clergy. However, an agency representative suggested rejecting the upward movement and instead proposed freezing the 2003 executive salary ranges at 2002 levels. The proposal was unanimously accepted.

"I heard the committee say it wanted to make a statement to the church in the midst of the current economic conditions," said Jay Brim,

chairman of the committee and a member of GCFA. "The agency representatives unanimously felt it was important to demonstrate action reflecting good stewardship of the United Methodist denominational financial resources."

GCFA subsequently approved the recommendation. As enacted, this limit only applies to the highest five salary levels of agency executives. And it only affects those people who are at the maximum in 2002 of the salary range that correlates with the churchwide factoring of their jobs.

Salary Freeze "There are other executives below this range," noted Sandra Kelley Lackore, GCFA general secretary, "and how the decision affects them is determined by each agency."

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She explained that each agency makes its own decisions about compensation within the parameters established by the committee and GCFA.

The plan will not affect hourly wage employees, nor does it affect people in those highest levels who have not, in 2002, reached the top of their salary range.

For its first voluntary mission project, 16 GCFA members performed a variety of tasks at Wesley Center in Savannah, Ga. Together with seven spouses, three GCFA staff members and two people from a GCFA-affiliated organization, they spent a day

helping at the 50-year-old mission center that provides day care for about 60 children. Family services include nutrition classes, a clothes closet and referrals to community agencies.

At its opening business session, GCFA took an offering among all its members, staff and guests that netted \$1,200 for Wesley Center, which draws support from the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, the South Georgia Annual (regional) Conference of the church, United Way and other funding sources.

In another first-time experience, the council welcomed Estelle Brooks from the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church as an official council observer. Brooks will have voice without vote.

Brooks was named by the Commission on Pan-Methodism Cooperation and Union in response to an invitation from GCFA, which decided that since other churchwide agencies were required to add representation from one or more of these sister denominations, GCFA would benefit from similar input.

The General Council on Ministries (GCOM) requested additional funds for the World Service Contingency Fund that GCOM administers, in light of the number and size of grant petitions the agency has already received. In addition to the \$200,000 a year authorized for 2001 and 2002, GCFA voted to provide a one-time extra \$100,000 in 2002, and it committed to \$300,000 for 2003 and \$100,000 for 2004. ■

a central district location on Dec. 14. (Visit www.holston.org or call 865-690-4080 or your district office for drop-off points.) On Dec. 15, conference staff will transport shoes to locations where Stop Hunger Now trucks will pick them up and begin shipment to Central Asia. Supplies should arrive in Afghanistan by February, Buchanan said.

Members choosing to donate money instead of shoes should make checks out to their own churches or to the Holston Conference with "Advance Special #982795-6" designated on the memo line. (Checks may be mailed directly to Holston Conference, P.O. Box 2506, Johnson City, TN 37605.)

Bishop Chamberlain said he hopes Holston members will be "both generous and creative in asking people outside of their congregations to participate in this appeal." TV stations and newspapers began promoting the mission in late November.

Buchanan expressed gratitude to the Holston Conference for its willingness to help.

"This is what Christmas is all about – when a church can look beyond the stained glass and reach out to people in need," he said. "This is discipleship in action."

► **For more information** about Stop Hunger Now, visit www.stophungernow.org or call (919) 839-0689. For more information about Holston's shoe drive, call (865) 690-4080 and ask for Anne Travis or Kevin Slimp.

Holston treasurer to close books on January 9

In about four weeks, the conference treasurer's office will close the financial books on 2001.

The official cut-off time is noon on Jan. 9, 2002. "All funds must be in hand to be credited for 2001," Conference Treasurer Ron Matthews said. "We will not accept postmark dates."

For many Holston churches, the cut-off date signals the last chance to meet requirements for "Five Star Church" status. During 2000, 378 of the conference's 935 churches – 40 percent – achieved this missions-oriented honor.

To qualify, Holston churches must pay their apportionments in full and give any amount of money to each of these four Advance Special categories: International, United States, United Methodist Committee on Relief, and Conference-Initiated Specials.

Advance Specials are official

United Methodist channels for giving to select ministries. Initiated by the conference Missions Team, the Five-Star distinction provides incentive for churches to give to designated Advance Special missions – such as the Ishe Anesu project in Zimbabwe and Hispanic ministries in Holston.

Holston churches should submit their final "2001 Church Remittance Forms" along with checks by Jan. 9 to qualify for Five Star status. To see if your church has yet qualified for "starring" recognition in 2001, call Darlene King in the conference treasurer's office (423-928-2156). In years past, Holston churches have arranged to wire money or use overnight mail to meet the deadline, King said.

Qualifying congregations will receive Five Star certificates followed by recognition during Annual Conference in June 2002.