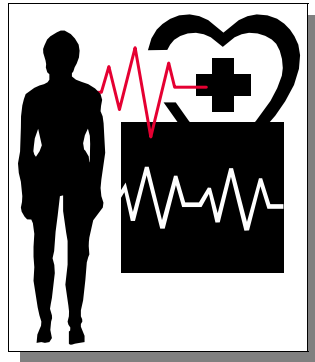




Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries has launched "Campaign for Children Phase III,"



Leadership: online training for church leaders

Age-Level & Family Ministries

Ninety percent of U.S. children attend public schools. From funding to technological needs to standardized testing and teacher quality, public education is featured regularly in local and national news. With a new education bill being passed just over a year ago, education seems to be of great public concern.

To address this concern, the Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries has launched "Campaign for Children Phase III," the new phase of the organization's 15-year-old Campaign for Children.

The public education resolution passed by General Conference in 2000 is at the heart of the campaign. The resolution is an effort to bring United Methodists into personal involvement in their local schools.

Questions to explore in the campaign include:

- Are our children receiving an education that will serve them well for the rest of their lives?
- How are public school needs funded? Is there a shortfall in financial resources required for quality education?
- Are local schools in good repair, adequately equipped and conducive to learning?

Do they meet environmental standards?

- Is standardized testing used to determine student achievement levels? Does it provide a clear, accurate picture of student abilities?
- Are teachers knowledgeable in the courses they teach? Is their pay reasonable for their level of education, years of teaching, training and ability?
- Are provisions made for physical, mental and emotional considerations, and are there opportunities for those who excel to be challenged further?

- Do weapons, gangs or substance abuse pose threats? Are there provisions in the community for before- and after-school programs for children?

United Methodist Women are working now to visit local schools and do their "homework." Much of this campaign will be formed by what women discover on these visits. Training, awareness events and publications will follow as well as a focus in the 2004-2005 issue study for mission education.

The Women's Division has published two resources to use in the campaign. *Let's Go Back to*

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forced retirement

Calling forced retirement at age 70 "antiquated and ageist," the United Methodist Committee on Older Adult Ministries finalized proposed legislation that would relax the church's rules on mandatory retirement for lay employees and clergy. Meeting March 25-27 in Nashville, Tenn., the committee forwarded the resolutions to the church's Board of Discipleship for submission to the 2004 General Conference. "God does not take away God's blessing, including opportunity to serve in full capacity, simply because someone has reached the age of 70 years or older," the resolutions state.



What is the No. 1 barrier to training for church leaders?" If you answered time, you're right. These busy individuals have appointment-packed calendars and stress-filled lives. Like the rest of society, they have grown accustomed to lots of choices, activities and flexibility, and they expect no less when it comes to leader training and continuing education.

Churches and religious organizations are responding to these training needs in a variety of ways. Rather than the traditional all-day, once-a-year training model, many now offer innovative alternatives, such as two- to four-hour workshops offered several times throughout the year, team teaching and mentoring class opportunities, self-study options and online learning courses. Although each option has its merits, online learning may offer the most promise.

The online learning concept has been embraced at all levels of the education community. Ads for colleges and universities now routinely feature distance or online learning options, meaning that individuals no longer are required to relocate to pursue knowledge. Online education ef-

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Age-Level & Family Ministries

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School explains what the campaign is about, and United Methodist Women's Campaign for Children—Phase III provides guidelines for visiting local schools and getting in public education advocacy. Both are available at (800) 305-9857.

For more information, contact your local unit, conference office, or contact Julie Taylor, Women's Division executive secretary for children, youth and family advocacy, 100 Maryland Avenue, NE, Room 530, Washington, D.C. 20002; (202) 488-5660; jtaylor@gbgm-umc.org

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body-mind-spirit

A study by empty tomb inc. revealed that in 2000, U.S. charitable giving to benevolences as a portion of income hit the lowest point in the 1968-2000 period.

Located in Champaign, Ill., empty tomb is a Christian service and research organization that provides financial discipleship strategy and data about church-giving patterns on a national level.

The study also revealed that while benevolent giving decreased, church members gave more to internal operations of their congregations that benefit current members.

Since benevolences support the broader mission of the church, "These numbers suggest that churches are not transforming people, but rather servicing them," says Sylvia Ronsvalle, who with her husband, John Ronsvalle, co-authored the study.

The study, "The State of Church Giving through 2000," was released at the Association of Christian Foundations Conference in October 2002. For more results of the study, go to www.emptytomb.org

Leadership: online training for church leaders

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fectively lets people learn at their own pace.

Religious organizations have been slower to respond, but several are now venturing into this new field.

The Fisher's Net, www.fishersnet.net an organization with ties to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, offers degree courses and lifelong-learning courses. Offerings include "New Testament Greek," "Introduction to Christian Ethics" and "Issues in Lutheran Theology Today."

The Southeastern Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church offers online learning opportunities through

www.sejacademy.org

Courses include "The Kingdom of God Is Like..." and "Planning for Effective Ministry." For years the United Methodist Publishing House has been a provider of books, Bibles, videos and other resources for church leaders. The company's use of technology as a means of delivering resources to congregations has evolved with the electronic medium, in the form of Web offerings grouped around its online store,

www.cokesbury.com

Recent upgrades to the site have dramatically improved its convenience and usability.

New features include: a curriculum finder that recommends study resources for all age levels; free downloadable sample

lessons; yearly study plans based on age levels and themes; and an improved search function.

One of the most exciting uses of new technology at the publishing house is the launch of

www.cokesburyacademy.com where online courses and training are offered for pastors, Christian educators, teachers and lay leaders.

For the first time, pastors and pastoral candidates in the Course of Study and Advanced Course of Study may take online correspondence courses offered in cooperation with the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. New online courses for Christian educators, teachers and leaders have also been developed in cooperation with the General Board of Discipleship. As more individuals, families and businesses gain faster and better access to the Internet, alternatives to traditional teaching methods and classroom settings will continue to mushroom. By eliminating the need for schedule rearrangement, travel or child-care, learning from a distance is creating a new wave of opportunities for education. These changes provide new options for Christian training as well, and church leaders are embracing them with new resolve.

Current events in Iraq and North Korea commanded attention when the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries met April 7-10 in Birmingham, Ala. Board directors also forwarded a raft of social resolutions to be considered by the denomination's top legislative body next year and decided to have a first-ever telethon to raise money for mission projects. As the war in Iraq continued, directors adopted a resolution affirming the belief that war is incompatible with the teachings of Christ but acknowledging "the divisions within the household of faith in time of war."

Resources for helping children and youth cope with issues of war are available from the camping and retreat ministry of the United Methodist Board of Discipleship. Go online to www.gbod.org/camping

--Cynthia Gadsden and Ron Kidd, United Methodist Publish-

United Methodist Men Want to Give Soldiers 1 Million Devotional Books; Eagle Scout's Project Inspires Revival of Tradition from World War II

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Keeping alive a tradition born in World War II, the United Methodist Church's men's organization is taking steps to serve those who serve the United States in times of war and crisis.

United Methodist Men, based in Nashville, Tenn., needs to raise \$3 million to distribute copies of a daily devotional book, *Strength for Service to God and Country*, to a million U.S. military personnel who serve around the world.

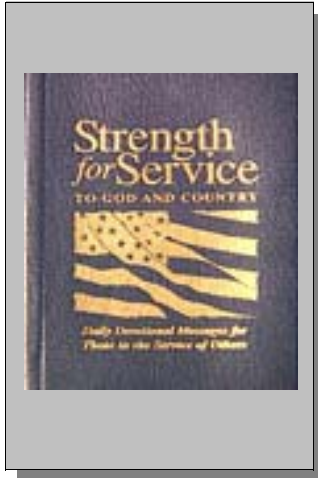
The renewed nondenominational effort continues work by United Methodist Men begun after Sept. 11, 2001, amid increased spirituality spawned by the terrorist attacks on the

United States. It was then that a project quietly undertaken by a Boy Scout to share the significance of *Strength for Service* became known.

Evan Hunsberger of Orange, Calif., had found his grandfather's tattered copy, first released in 1942, during World War II, and discontinued in 1953 after the Korean Conflict. The former Navy corpsman had kept it with him during both wars, reading from it to comrades as they lay dying. In fact, says his grandson, "He pretty much carried it his entire life."

Hunsberger had made the task of reissuing the book, originally published by The United Methodist Church under its Abingdon imprint, his Eagle project. He and fellow scouts from his troop eventually put more than 2,500 hours into the initial effort, which included editing computer-scanned copy and raising \$25,000 to cover publication expenses. United Methodist Men, which provides significant support to national scouting ministries on behalf of the church, sponsored the project.

(The story of the quest to reissue Strength for Service to God and Country is featured on UMTV video reports the week of April 9. It is available at the UMTV Web site www.umtv.org.)



"Virtually all Eagle Scout projects are worthy," says Larry W. Coppock, the United Methodist Church's national director of scouting ministries. "This one is really special. It has a strong spiritual

focus. It is an incredible gift and resource we need to give to every person in the armed services."

Hunsberger gained Abingdon's permission to update the book for the present generation. After requesting material from hundreds of the nation's top theologians, he supplemented the original 365 daily devotionals from Protestant clergy with 40 passages from current Protestant, Catholic, Islamic and Jewish leaders, women,

and people of color. United Methodist Bishop Ernest Lyght of White Plains, N.Y., an African-American, was among those who contributed.

The added diversity proved a selling point when United Methodist Men sought and gained permission from U.S. military leaders to distribute it. A print run of 30,000 copies with desert tan covers was completed recently, bringing the total to 50,000 in print.

"My only regret about this," Hunsberger says, is that "it's going to people that are in harm's way. But this is something that the people that are in harm's way need to have."

United Methodist Men honored Hunsberger in 2002 with its Good Samaritan Award for his tireless efforts in bringing the devotional collection to reality. A Roman Catholic, he is the second non-United Methodist to receive the award. Donations to the effort may be made to the Strength for Service Publication Fund, P.O. Box 340006, Nashville, TN 37203-0006. Additional information on the effort is available at <http://www.strengthforservice.org/>.

Online Chat

United Methodists will have an opportunity to chat online with the top executive of the church's missions agency May 15. The online conversation with the Rev. R. Randy Day, staff head of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, will begin at 8 p.m. Eastern time. People can participate by logging on to the denomination's online ministry. The chat is being produced by www.UMC.org an initiative of United Methodist Communications, in cooperation with the Board of Global Ministries. More details are available at the Web site.

Social Action Agency gives Grants

The United Methodist Church's social action agency has awarded almost \$150,000 in grants to 17 projects involving young people. Several of the projects use music, art and drama to teach about justice. The Board of Church and Society has made the grants with funds obtained through the denomination's Shared Mission Focus on Young People initiative. Of the \$149,050 total, \$39,000 will go to four projects in central conferences (outside the United States) and \$110,050 to 13 projects throughout the United States.