

January 29, 2010

Dear Conference Presidents:

In 1978 United Methodist Women processed from the Assembly Hall in Louisville, Ky., and moved into the streets to sign the Charter for Racial Justice. Today we are faced with another critical racial justice challenge -- that of the marginalization, demonization and criminalization of immigrants in our midst. I want to alert you to two important opportunities for us to lift up our voices for immigrant rights on May 1.

Assembly 2010, St. Louis: Following a time of worship, remembering and looking forward, Assembly participants will be invited to participate in one of two parallel **Actions for Immigrant Rights**. We will follow national leaders in processing out of the hall. Some will go to the Experience Hall for a time of prayer and witness for immigrant rights. Others will process out of the America's Center and into the streets where they will be joined by St. Louis community groups. They will march six blocks to Kiener Plaza near the Arch and participate in a public faith-based vigil for immigrant rights. Bishop Minerva Carcaño of the Desert Southwest Area, chair of the United Methodist Task Force on Immigration and author of our 2008 mission study *"I Believe in Jesus,"* will lead us in that public witness. Both the event in the America's Center and the event in downtown St. Louis will involve the presence of United Methodist leaders, bishops and musicians.

Public witness in your communities: We are inviting United Methodist Women to plan parallel actions across the country. We know that some of our members who would want to participate cannot be in St. Louis for Assembly -- but they can participate in action by organizing public witness events in their own communities. These might include a silent vigil at your church; a rally at an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention center in your area; a vigil at city hall; hosting an educational event or film screening open to the public, or other ideas that units and circles may generate. We want United Methodist Women to share local plans with us so we know how many actions are happening that day. Please contact Cindy Johnson, Yim Intern (cjohnson@gbgm-umc.org; 956-459-4006) and Carol Barton (cbarton@gbgm-umc.org; 212-682-3633) regarding your plans.

Hebrews 13: 1-3 tells us, "Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them..." *The United Methodist Church Book of Resolutions 2008* states, "to refuse to welcome migrants to this country and to stand by in silence while families are separated, individual freedoms are ignored, and the immigrant community in the United States is demonized...is complicity to sin" (Resolution No. 3281, "Welcoming the Migrant to the United States"). Since 2006, through our Immigrant and Civil Rights Initiative, United Methodist Women has been praying, studying and taking action -- from vigils at state capitols and detention centers; to material aid for families divided by detention; to advocacy for just immigration reform. May 1st United Methodist Women again take a visible stand challenging current policies of detention and deportation, supporting family unity, rights for

migrant workers, and calling for an end to racial profiling and violence against migrant women. We will continue to call for just immigration reform.

As you meet with your mission team to plan the year, I would appreciate your sharing these plans with the full mission team and seeking endorsement by the conference mission team. You may want to take some time at your mission team meeting to discuss the issue using "Immigration: Love as God Has Loved," page 23 in United Methodist Women's 2010 Program Book, as a resource for worship and reflection. Immigration can be a hard issue, without clear public consensus, and it is important to take time to explore the biblical, theological and ethical reasons United Methodist Women is engaged in this work. Please consider how you will disseminate the information to district and local units; how you will encourage women to participate; how you can track planned local activities; and how your conference can be visibly present in St. Louis. This is an opportunity to deepen our faith, reach out to new members, practice supportive community, and engage in action for justice; thus, all of the mission coordinators may have a role

In November I shared with new conference leaders at Leadership Training Event that countless United Methodist Women members have made history over the years by acting individually and collectively for mission to enhance the lives of women, youth and children. And now we are the ones to make history, the ones who will be remembered as those who stepped up boldly at a critical moment to be witnesses to God's love in the world. On May 1st we will again make history as United Methodist Women. We will continue in a tradition of foremothers determined "to attempt big things for God."

We are excited about working with you to plan for this day, and we pray that our witness will be another step in transforming unjust systems and making God's love visible in the world.

Sincerely,



Harriett Jane Olson
Deputy General Secretary