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Division Directors to Explore New Relationship with General Board of Global Ministries

by YVETTE MOORE

Women's Division directors voted to explore a new model of partnership with the General Board of Global Ministries that would transfer oversight of United Methodist Women-supported national mission institutions, relationships with international partners and regional missionaries to the Women's Division.

The Women's Division would assume the responsibility for the administration and funding of the Office of Deaconess and Home Missioner and commit to grow and extend these opportunities. The 43-2 vote came as directors wrapped up their spring board meeting in Stamford, Conn., April 24-27.

United Methodist women have not had direct oversight of work they support since 1964 when, during the church merger process, the then Board of Missions was restructured and Woman's Division of Christian Service's home and foreign field operations were transferred to the board's national and world mission divisions.

The plan will also be discussed at the Global Ministries board meeting later this week. To move forward, Women's Division and Global Ministries staff would present a plan detailing how the proposed changes could be implemented when the directors convene for their annual meeting in October.

The action culminated a meeting focused on long-range strategic planning for the division and United Methodist Women. While long-range strategic planning is an ongoing process in the division.

The executive cabinets of both the Women's Division and Global Ministries endorsed the proposed board structure changes now being explored.

"In 1963-64 when these structures were put into place, the staff was larger, the needs of people we serve were different and the world was different," said Women's Division chief executive Harriett Jane Olson. "The Agreements of '64 were important in their time for their vision of

working together as a whole church while protecting the interests of women. We have inherited both their vision and their limitations.”

Ms. Olson said direct oversight of United Methodist Women-supported mission would strengthen connections between local women and mission partners.

“I am firmly convinced that if we are to continue meeting, and perhaps exceeding, our Pledge to Mission, we will need to be clearer and clearer that our giving makes a difference in people’s lives,” Ms. Olson said. “We have always carefully allocated these funds.... However, the level of complexity and detail has grown to the point that it can obscure our purpose rather than illuminate it. We end up talking about small amounts of money given through a variety of different persons, partners and places, rather than focusing on the education being offered to women in Africa, or leadership development accomplishments in the Philippines, or women and children fed at the Bethlehem Center in Nashville.”

Ms. Olson explained that Women’s Division and Global Ministries would continue to share administrative costs and work together on mission initiatives. Prior to the vote, Ms. Olson fielded questions from directors concerning the financial responsibilities associated with the proposed changes and the nature of a revised relationship with mission institutions.

Division directors were cautiously optimistic about the possibility of closer ties linking United Methodist Women and mission institutions and partners.

“This has been a very difficult question for me,” said Women’s Division Director Maggie Jackson, head of the division’s Christian Social Action section. “I have prayed about it, thought about it and talked with people about it. But this morning I’ve heard comments that have moved me to a comfort level. We have a responsibility to care for the people we serve. Getting direct information will help us better care for the conditions of our national mission institutions.”

Women’s Division Director Joyce Miller was also encouraged by the possibility of more direct contact with mission institutions.

“I remember when I was on jurisdictional core planning group, and we talked about the two feet of mission: charity and justice,” Ms. Miller said. “By bringing the mission institutions back to us, we have a better feel for the charity part of our work, not to say mission institutions are not also working on the justice part. I think it will bring more back to us in direct knowledge that we can pass on to United Methodist Women members.”