

United Methodist Bishops Meet to Prepare for 2008 General Conference

LAKE JUNALUSKA, N.C. – United Methodist bishops from around the world will meet Nov. 4-9 at the Lake Junaluska Conference & Retreat Center in North Carolina's Smoky Mountains.

This will be the Council of Bishops final meeting prior to gathering at the site of the 2008 General Conference in Fort Worth, Texas in late April 2008. Held every four years, the General Conference is United Methodism's highest legislative body.

"We have a lot to accomplish as we get ready for General Conference," said Bishop Janice Riggle Huie of Houston, president of the council. "This council is engaged with the church and the world, building new partnerships and collaborating as we seek ways to make disciples for Jesus Christ."

Huie said the 2004 General Conference in Pittsburgh raised the expectation bar for bishops and church agencies, with both groups focusing on developing new capacities for ministry and collaboration.

"The message from 2004 was very clear. We listened. We are moving forward in many new ways. We are committed to making disciples and transforming the world," Huie said.

The meeting will begin on Sunday, Nov. 4, with the traditional 4 p.m. memorial service at the nearby Waynesville First United Methodist Church. It will conclude with worship at 11 a.m. on Friday, Nov. 9. In between, the council will:

- Elect a new president, who will take office during the General Conference. The council president serves a two-year team.
- Elect an active bishop as secretary, and retired bishop as executive secretary.
- Elect an ecumenical officer for the 2009-2012 quadrennium.
- Consider a report from a special task force that has been focusing on unity within the church.
- Receive an update on the Bishops' special appeal for funds to rebuild churches and church facilities destroyed by Hurricane Katrina in 2005.
- Discuss the State of the Church report that was issued after the council's spring 2007 meeting in Myrtle Beach, S.C.

A significant part of the preparation for General Conference will be an opportunity for the council to hear the General Conference episcopal address in a closed-door executive session. Bishop Sharon Brown Christopher of Springfield, Ill. will deliver the 2008 address. The traditional address is one of the first events of the General Conference. It outlines the council's vision for the church, and the expectations of bishops for themselves and the church during the coming four years.

Bishops will also review plans for General Conference worship.

Bishops at the meeting represent more than 11 million United Methodists in the United States, Africa, Europe, and the Philippines. More than 100 active and retired bishops are expected to attend the meeting.

Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church