

"I am setting a
plumb line in the
midst of my people..."

Amos 7:8



WITNESS

Oregon-Idaho Chapter, Methodist Federation for Social Action

February 29, 2016

Greetings!

We are getting ready to welcome the world and people have been working many, many hours 'behind the scenes' to get all ready!

Find links in this newsletter to offer time to volunteer and welcome our guests. It looks to me like there is something for all of us to do.

Learn how the *Love Your Neighbor Coalition* has helped in sending eight representatives to four General Conference briefing sessions and get a first-hand account from one of those sessions from Jan Nelson. There's also a personal testimony from a study tour to Israel and Palestine not to be missed.

Then there's Annual Conference—another place where you are invited to help by working on standing resolutions that are set to expire. Review the list below.

Peace and blessings,
Louise Kienzle, OR-ID MFSa Newsletter Editor



YOU ARE INVITED

to any of our regular MFSa Board meetings! We meet every other month, usually on the 2nd Wednesday, alternating between the Conference Center in Portland and Capitol Manor in Salem. Our meetings typically are from 10:30am-2:30pm and you may attend for any or all of the meeting. We begin our meetings with a program of up to an hour on topics relating to social justice. If YOU or your group has an idea for a program you would like to share please let us know!

Our next meeting will be in Portland on Wednesday at the Conference Center, **March 9**, from 10:30-2:30.

God is not a Christian; God is not a Jew, or a Muslim, or a Hindu,
or a Buddhist.

All of those are systems which human beings have created to help us walk into the mystery of God.

I honor my tradition. I walk through my tradition but I don't think my tradition defines God.

I think it only points me to God.

John Shelby Spong

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Have you renewed your MFSa membership yet? Did you know that you can now renew online at www.oimfsa.org?

Dates to Remember

March 9: OR/ID MFSa Executive Board meeting, Portland

May 10-20: General Conference, Oregon Convention Center, Portland

June 16-18: OR/ID Annual Conference, Salem Convention Center

FROM THE TREASURER

Rhoda Pittman Markus, Treasurer and Record Keeper

You should have received your annual appeal letter early in February. Of course, some of you may have escaped my address list! If you did not receive one you may find it on the website for OR-ID MFSA. There have been a good number of responses so far and I am making a healthy deposit today. Remember you can send me a check or you can pay on Paypal. PLEASE include your pertinent contact info with your check. I'm the one that has to search for it if you don't. I need, in addition to your name, your address, preferred telephone and an email address (please **print** clearly on that one!). If you are inclined to make an additional amount in support of MFSA work at General Conference you may do it in the same check – just be sure to tell me that's a designated donation.

Your MFSA Executive Committee will be looking for a replacement for me as treasurer soon. If you have a suggestion or would be interested yourself please let me or Jan know before March 9. I have been doing this for several years now and it's time for someone else. It requires 30-60 minutes a month most of the year to balance the checkbook, odds and ends of time for writing checks and making deposits. January through March take a bit more time with managing the annual appeal and filling out the non-profit financial report that needs to be sent to National.

I will be gone from March 16 – April 11 filling the pulpit in Dutch Harbor, Alaska, for 4 weeks. Any checks you send during that time will be safe and I will have mail held at the Post Office. Remember, there is no Spring Event as such so don't wait, expecting to make your donation then.

GENERAL CONFERENCE

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Karen Nelson

General Conference is barely two months away and people are busy getting ready to welcome close to 4,000 visitors to Portland. Volunteers are needed to greet delegates, agency staff, guests, bishops, and lots of others as they arrive at the airport. Volunteers are needed to ride MAX with people to their hotels, to invite international delegates into their homes for a home cooked meal and northwest hospitality. Volunteers are needed to help monitor legislation and hand out newsletters. Volunteers are needed to help with craft sales from international delegates bringing items to raise money for missions in their own communities.

You get the idea—we need as many volunteers as we have visitors.

There are two ways you can help:

→ **Go to [Go Volunteer](#) and sign up to volunteer with the local host team.** You will find a list of jobs still needing volunteers.

→ **Go to [LYNC](#) to volunteer with the Love Your Neighbor Coalition.** This coalition is a partnership of 13 groups including MFSA and Reconciling Ministries Network, United Methodist Ethnic caucuses and others. LYNC will provide hospitality and a progressive voice for General Conference, and you have an opportunity to be a part of this work.



WARM WELCOME PROJECT

Claudia Roberts, OR-ID Peace with Justice Coordinator

We are well on our way to have having hats and/or scarves for all of our delegates coming to General Conference in May. If the weather is cool and wet, as it often is in Portland at that time, these gifts from the hearts of Oregon-Idaho United Methodists will be much appreciated.

Currently we have received about 300 hats and scarves and our goal is 1000. If your church, prayer shawl group or others have been making hats and scarves, it is time to think about getting them to us. If you want to mail them, please send them to Claudia Roberts c/o Fremont United Methodist Church, 2620 NE Fremont St., Portland, OR 97212. If you want to drop them off at the church, the normal office hours are 11:00 am- 5:00 pm on Monday through Thursday. It is a good idea to call ahead to let them know you will be stopping by. If you need to make other arrangements, please contact me at clarobb@juno.com or 503-407-6005.

We hope to have them all here by April 20th so we can plan the distribution. Should there be hats and scarves left over, they will be distributed to shelters and clothing banks. Thank you to everyone who has enthusiastically endorsed this project. It is not too late to make some hats or scarves. I have a simple pattern for a hat that takes about 2 hrs to knit so contact me if you want a copy.

YOUR OUTREACH TO AFRICA AND THE PHILIPPINES

Jan Nelson

If you have made a financial contribution to the Love Your Neighbor Coalition, then you were part of the team present at four pre-General Conference briefings that took place this month in the central conferences. Supported by the LYNC budget (contributions from people like you) and a grant from the Collins Foundation to the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference, a team of two or three people attended each of the briefings. The briefings were similar to the one in January in Portland. Heads of delegations and other delegates learned about the logistics of the conference and heard from the heads of general boards and agencies about some of the legislation that delegates will be considering.

The purpose of the LYNC teams was to meet delegates, provide a face for our justice movement, and to make individual connections as much as possible with potential allies. Our teams were welcomed by the organizers from the boards and agencies and UM Communications, as long as they did not do overt lobbying of delegates on particular issues.

The briefing in Manila was held February 5 – 8, followed immediately by a "Forum on Human Sexuality", which you can read about here: [Philippine Sexuality Dialogue](#). The briefing in Harare, Zimbabwe, was the following week. Oregon-Idaho's Greg Nelson was part of the team there. The following week was the briefing in Kinshasa, DR Congo, with Jan Nelson as part of the team. The briefing in Abijan, Ivory Coast, is about to begin as this article is written.

If the United Methodist Church is to keep working to be a global church, those of us who believe that God's love and justice are our highest calling must continue to reach out to the whole church, not just the United States part of it. This work is expensive in money and energy, but it is critical.

If you would like to contribute to the effort to make this General Conference one where love and justice prevail, donate on line at [LYNC](#).

ACTION FROM OUR ANNUAL CONFERENCE

LEGISLATION UPDATES

Dee Poujade

In reviewing the 2015 Conference *Journal*, MFSA has found 13 Standing Resolutions that will “sunset” in 2016. All of these resolutions were sponsored by MFSA, either alone, or in conjunction with other individuals or entities.

Members of the MFSA Executive Council were asked to review the resolutions on this list (which are set forth in Volume 2 of the *2015 Journal*) and to notify others on the council if there are any that they wish to work on. Likewise, any interested party who would like to work on these resolutions is asked to contact MFSA President Jan Nelson. The resolutions are:

3. Bring US Government Drone Missile Strikes under Congressional Oversight
4. Call for Civility
5. Call to Support Labeling of GMO Foods and “Food Products” (*Newman UMC*)
6. Children of Same Gender Relationships (*Reconciling United Methodists*)
9. Community Based Corrections
10. Comprehensive Nuclear Weapons Free World
11. Confronting Heterosexism (*Reconciling United Methodists*)
17. Middle East Conflicts
19. National Health Care Reform
21. Oppose Gun Violence for the Protection of All, Especially Children & Youth
22. Oppose the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) Free-Trade Agreement
28. Seeking Peace and Justice in the Holy Land
31. Support Comprehensive Immigration Reform

MFSA is also considering the introduction of an Action Request to re-work the way that the current Legislative Assembly process works.

The deadline for submitting legislation petitions is March 13.

OPPORTUNITIES AND ACTION BEYOND OUR CONFERENCE

A STEP IN SUPPORT OF DIVESTMENT

Dee Poujade

The United Methodist Board of Pensions started the new year off by making an announcement that was considered “startling,” not only within the denomination, but across the spectrum of those following the issue of BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) as related to the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

In early January, the Board announced that it had placed Israel’s five largest banks “off limits” for investments, and had divested from the two of those banks in which it was already invested. While United Methodist Kairos Response (UMKR), and others who have been encouraging that the church divest from all investments which support the Occupation, were pleased with this announcement, it is viewed as a “first step,” with much more work being needed on this issue. ([UMC divests Israeli Banks](#)).

Our own OR/ID Annual Conference voted last June to divest from Caterpillar, Motorola Solutions and Hewlett Packard, and a group comprised of representatives from Conference financial entities and members of the Holy Land Task Force is working on implementation. Other Annual Conferences have also voted for divestment from these and other companies, and implementation is in various stages.

A number of divestment resolutions have been submitted to General Conference by UMKR ([Divestment Resolutions for GC 2016](#)), the General Board of Church and Society and a number of individual Annual Conferences (including OR/ID). Since 2009, Kairos Palestine has been asking churches to initiate BDS as a means to gain justice in the land we all call holy ([Kairos Document](#)). This is an issue that has been before the United Methodist Church for more than a decade. The Presbyterians, the UCC, Quakers and others have already taken this step – we pray that the United Methodists will be next!



Demolition of shop in Hassan Village near Bethlehem.

STUDY TOUR IN ISRAEL AND PALESTINE, A PERSONAL TESTIMONY

Joshua Hauser

Returning from my two week study tour in Israel and Palestine, I was emotionally exhausted. I was there with a group of twelve United Methodists from around the country with the mission of learning about what has been happening in the most holy of places for the three major monotheistic religions. The experience was very interesting and I learned a lot about the people, the conflict, and what groups are doing about it. Being a college student, I am daily lectured at and filled with information, but it was no preparation for what I experienced while immersing myself in this culture. It was information and culture overload. Returning to school after this was a walk in the park.

A fair amount of the trip was focused on talking with people involved in Palestinian justice in the area. They all had many powerful stories, almost all from personal experience, about what life is like in the area. Some talked about their experience with discrimination or oppression, while others expressed disappointment in their own nation for the treatment of others.

On a trip through eastern Jerusalem, we came to a part of the separation wall dividing Israel from the West Bank. The wall is massive, huge, made of concrete stretching 25 ft in the air, but what struck me most was not the barbed wire, or the massive size, but a quote spray painted on the wall in simple black lettering saying "If we build walls to solve our problems, we make a labyrinth of the whole world." For a moment, after reading that quote, it was no longer about the politics or the occupation or the history of war. For a moment, it was not about the rhetoric a politician spews to be elected, or the ever growing fight of he said, they did. It was a plea, from a person who will never be known, begging for their people to be whole.



This is what I think we, as a planet, have forgotten; walls do not solve problems. They create separate cultures that may make us feel safe, but they close our minds to others, and allow us to not deal with our problems. This is most clear when you see the wall and meet the people who live in Israel/Palestine. What I came away with was that most people want peace. They do not want to fight. I am not saying that a equitable solution will be easy, on the contrary, if history is any indication finding an agreeable solution to one of the most contested pieces of land in human history will be very difficult but I think it can be done. But I do not think that this will happen until the international community decides to remove their personal interests from the region and leave the politics to the people there. The biggest inhibitor to the path to peace, is the world, and the United States

especially. In a conversation with a previous orthodox rabbi and our Palestinian guide, they both agree that if the world would leave them alone, they could find peace, they could find justice, together.

What is happening to the Palestinians in this area is depressing. No matter where you stand on the politics in the area, I do not think you can justify what is happening to the Palestinian people. They experience oppression, discrimination and fear on a daily basis. This is why we should stand with the Palestinian people; because they are the people without a voice. Without the power. One thing that was said in the group discussion on why we hearing so much more from the Palestinians rather than the Israelis was that right here,



Josh with Dee Poujade

right now they are the oppressed, and we should always stand with the oppressed. If this was the 1940's in Europe, we would be standing with the Jews; if this was Rwanda we would be standing by the Tutsis. But right now, the oppressed are the Palestinians, and our mission is to end oppression and suffering.

Our job in this area is to promote peace and justice. This being said, we were warned by Elias Chacour, a previous Archbishop in the Galilee area, to not become one sided. "If being on [the Palestinian's] side makes you accept everything we do as right," he said, "we do not need your friendship." And in speaking to others, he asked the question "why does being on the side of the Jews make you anti-Palestinian?"

This conflict is complicated. Both sides have suffered and both sides are guilty of causing suffering. These people are hurting, our only question should be, when is enough?

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

I have just returned from Africa and one of the pre-conference briefings presented by the United Methodist Church to help delegates prepare themselves to come to Oregon in May for General Conference. My time in Kinshasa was brief but instructive in some ways I didn't expect.

I got a whole new perspective on the importance of language differences. I knew it would be easy to tell people how eager we are to see them in Portland and that it would be hard to talk about substantive issues. The primary language in the Congo Central Conference is French, which I don't speak beyond "bonjour" and "merci". What I really didn't anticipate was the difficulty of understanding French-speaking presenters even with the help of great translators. It was my first experience using a headset as central conference delegates have done at every General Conference, and I found it surprisingly incomplete.



Beyond language, the differences in cultures are huge. Many of the delegates believe that the decline in the US church membership is because of acceptance of homosexuality, and I see that as a failure of theirs to understand American culture. But I'm sure I am equally ignorant of what is and is not true in the culture of DR Congo or other countries in Africa. It's more than just not sharing a language.

This gathering made me increasingly aware of the difficulties, but it was not at all a bad experience. I met friendly, highly educated people who are eager to come to Portland and who truly love the United Methodist Church. I came home with a few personal contacts I will try to use to increase my understanding and maybe to increase theirs, too.

Some people think it is impossible for us to stay together as one church. They may be right, but I'm not ready to give up. All people must somehow find a way to live together on this one planet. If people of faith can't lead the way, who can? There are not many global organizations that bring people from many cultures together face to face, and that is the very thing we need more of. I think we must continue to find a way to be the church together, whatever that structure looks like. There is no substitute for face-to-face conversation. We should all make the most of the opportunities we have for that in Portland in May.

I welcome your thoughts.

Jan



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If you are a Facebook user, be sure to like our page, "MFSA Oregon-Idaho". Also be sure to like the national page, "Methodist Federation for Social Action". Invite your friends to like us, too.

OREGON IDAHO MFSA ONLINE

Information about upcoming events and a link to join MFSA by online payment can be found at our website, www.oimfsa.org.



We have transitioned to an electronic newsletter. If you have email access, please make sure we have your current email address. If you do not have email access and wish to continue receiving a paper copy please let us know. Contact Jan Nelson at jannelson515@msn.com or Methodist Federation for Social Action, Oregon-Idaho Chapter, P.O. Box 134, Salem OR 97308.