

# **The 2008 Book of Resolutions The Voice of the United Methodist Church?**

**By Liza Kittle**

What is the purpose of *The Book of Resolutions*? This book, published by the United Methodist Publishing House, is a collection of “all current and official social policies and other resolutions adopted by the General Conference of the United Methodist Church.”<sup>1</sup>

These resolutions are used as: 1) official policy statements that guide the work and ministry of the UMC on 200 subjects; 2) educational resources for the UMC on many issues; 3) guides and models for Methodists to “relate a lively biblical faith to action in daily life; and 4) resource materials for persons “preparing public statements about United Methodist concerns on current social issues.”<sup>2</sup>

The policies and resolutions in this 1009-page volume originate as petitions sent to General Conference every four years by general agencies, annual conferences, local churches, church-related groups and individual members. These petitions are worked on by delegates in legislative committees (i.e. accepted, rejected or amended), who then report their recommendations to the General Conference plenary for a final vote.

One would think that this massive book would be representative of a diverse cross-section of the entire church. Analysis of the origination of each resolution included in the 2008 volume paints a very different picture. Our Wesleyan heritage was founded on the tenets of personal and social holiness and involvement in social action has always been an important component of that history. Over the years, however, much has changed with regard to the social witness agenda of the church.

This change has come about because the majority of the resolutions which ultimately are included in *The Book of Resolutions*, and which drive United Methodist policies and social action, originate from a handful of boards and agencies within the Church. These groups, in turn, use the resolutions to advocate political and social agendas which are extremely partisan and do not reflect the diversity of beliefs present among United Methodist Church members. These agendas not only permeate all other areas of Church polity and bureaucracy, but also represent the face of the United Methodist Church in the national and international public square.

There are 352 resolutions in the 2008 *Book of Resolutions*. The resolutions are broken into five main categories: (1) The Natural World; (2) The Nurturing Community; (3) The Social Community; (4) The Economic Community; and (5) The World Community. The following chart shows where resolutions originate, how many resolutions within the volume come from a given source and the percentage of the whole volume of *The Book of Resolutions* these figures represent. The numbers reveal some interesting facts.

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<sup>1</sup> 2008 *Book of Resolutions*, User’s Guide.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<b><u>Board or Group</u></b>	<b><u>Number of Resolutions</u></b>	<b><u>Percentage</u></b>
General Board of Church & Society (GBCS)	111	31.5
General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM)	97	27.6
Women's Division (WD)	38	10.8
Annual Conferences	26	7.4
Individuals	26	7.4
General Commission on Christian Unity & Interreligious Concerns (GCCUIC)	23	6.5
General Board of Discipleship (GBOD)	13	5.8
General Commission on Religion & Race (GCRR)	10	2.8
Commission on the Status & Role of Women (COSROW)	9	2.6
Methodist Associated for Rights and Concerns Of Hispanic Americans (MARCHA)	9	2.6
GBOD for Global Young People's Convocation	7	2.0
United Methodist Rural Fellowship (UMRF)	7	2.0
Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA)	6	1.7
General Board on Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM)	5	1.4
National Cooperative on Parish Ministries (NCPM)	2	0.6
General Commission on Ministry (GCOM)	1	0.3
United Methodist Churches	1	0.3
General Commission on Conferences (GCOC)	1	0.3
General Comm. on United Meth. Men(GCUMM)	1	0.3
United Methodist Women Groups	1	0.3
National Federation of Asian Americans (NFAA)	1	0.3
Methodists United for Peace & Justice (MUPJ)	1	0.3
Rural Chaplains Association (RCA)	1	0.3

## **Research Findings**

The top three agencies listed in the chart, (the General Board of Church & Society (GBCS), the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) and the Women's Division (WD) originated 69.9 % of the entire volume of resolutions. These three groups work closely together and many times are co-authors of the same resolution. The policies and programs of these boards and agencies tend to be politically, theologically and socially partisan and liberal. Other groups which work closely with these three main contributors include the General Commission on Christian Unity and Inter-religious Concerns (GCCUIR), the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (COSROW) and the General Commission on Religion and Race (GCCR), also share many of the same political, social and theological emphases. When these groups are added, the percentage of total resolutions jumps to 81.8 %!

It is evident from this research that *The Book of Resolutions* has become a mouthpiece for a few of the boards and agencies within the church and several caucus groups and are not representative of the United Methodist Church as a whole.

How have these few groups managed to be so successful at getting their legislation passed at General Conference? The answer is strategic planning, powerful positioning and unlimited access to delegates. When legislation is divided into subcommittees, groups of delegates are assigned particular groups of petitions to work on. Although the bar of the conference is meticulously maintained and monitored, staff persons and directors from these boards and agencies are allowed to sit directly behind these groups of delegates and give their input as "experts" on their own legislation. These groups of delegates could number 3 to 20 persons and the boards and agencies strategically place their lobbyists on the peripheries of each group dealing with their petitions. This practice gives these boards and agencies an unfair advantage in the passage of their legislation.

Part 2 of this report gives a summary of approximately a third of the resolutions included in the 2008 *Book of Resolutions* and lists their originators. They are included to show the partisan political language and liberal social agenda of these boards and agencies.

It is also important to note in reviewing these resolutions that there is an almost no evangelistic component included in these legislative pieces. The lack of emphasis on Christ-centered ministry in the midst of 200 subjects, 352 resolutions and over 1000 pages is staggering.

### **Why does it matter?**

Many people within our denomination say that *The Book of Resolutions* doesn't really matter—they are just guidelines and are not legally binding under church law, as is *The Book of Discipline*. Delegates to General Conference and members of the United Methodist Church need to understand that these resolutions absolutely DO MATTER.

They matter every time a church member turns on the television or picks up a newspaper and sees some church official speaking about political or social issues in the name of the United Methodist Church, often quoting or reading from *The Book of Resolutions*. (See photos 1 & 2.)



**Jim Winkler (left), Sally Jo Snyder and John Copenhaver join marchers in Washington in a demonstration calling for an end to the war in Iraq. A UMNS photo by Jay Mallin.**



**Former Women's Division President Kyung Za Yim, second from right on front row, participates in a rally to end the Israeli "occupation" of Palestinian lands on the Washington, D.C. mall. .**

They matter every time a board or agency spokesperson ascends the steps of Congress and lobbies legislation in the name of the United Methodist Church. (See photos 3 & 4.)



**GBCS General Secretary Jim Winkler speaking in the name of the United Methodist Church.**



**Former Women's Division President Kyung Za Yim participates in a rally on the Washington, D.C. mall.**

They matter when United Methodist pastors defy the laws of our country and provide sanctuary for illegal persons, emboldened by documents found in the Book of Resolutions. (See photo 5.)



**A UMNS photo by Linda S. Rhodes  
In a June file photo, Elvira Arellano receives support from the Rev. Oscar Carrasco of the Northern Illinois Conference before going on a hunger strike against U.S. immigration policies.**

They matter every time a letter or petition is sent to the President of the United States, U.S. Congressmen and Senators, or other elected officials, advocating partisan political views in the name of the United Methodist Church. (See insert 6, taken from the GBCS website).

<a href="#">Legislative Priorities</a>	<a href="#">Bills</a>	<a href="#">Votes</a>	<a href="#">Results</a>	<a href="#">Elected Officials</a>	<a href="#">Media</a>
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## The General Board of Church and Society

Have you registered with the GBCS Action Center before?  
Or just skip down to the letter and take action now by following the instructions.

### Votes

<a href="#">Vote Title</a>	<a href="#">Congress</a>	<a href="#">Our Position</a>	<a href="#">Results</a>
<a href="#">To amend the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 to provide assistance for orphans and other vulnerable children in developing countries, and for other purposes. Take Action</a>	109th, 1st Session	AGREE	Passed
<a href="#">Reauthorize the Patriot Act Take Action</a>	109th, 1st Session	DISAGREE	Passed
<a href="#">REAL ID Act of 2005 Take Action</a>	109th, 1st Session	DISAGREE	Passed
<a href="#">To amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to strengthen enforcement of the immigration laws, to enhance border security, and for other purposes. Take Action</a>	109th, 1st Session	DISAGREE	Passed
<a href="#">Amendment Banning Cuba Travel Restrictions Take Action</a>	108th, 2nd Session	AGREE	Agreed to
<a href="#">Energy Policy Act of 2005 Take Action</a>	109th, 1st Session	DISAGREE	Passed
<a href="#">To ensure jobs for our future with secure, affordable, and reliable energy.</a>	109th, 1st Session	DISAGREE	Conference Report Agreed to
<a href="#">Making appropriations for energy and water development for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2007, and for other purposes. Take Action</a>	109th, 2nd Session	AGREE	Passed
<a href="#">To prevent the use of certain payment instruments, credit cards, and fund transfers for unlawful Internet gambling, and for other purposes. Take Action</a>	109th, 2nd Session	AGREE	Passed
<a href="#">To amend the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Take Action</a>	109th, 2nd Session	NO POSITION	Passed
<a href="#">Disapproving of the decision of the President announced on January 10, 2007, to deploy more than 20,000 additional United States combat troops to Iraq. Take Action</a>	110th, 2nd Session	AGREE	Passed

The General Board of Church and Society website: [umc-gbcs.org](http://umc-gbcs.org)

They matter every time rogue leaders meet for “dialogue” or radical groups hold conferences at the Church Center for the United Nations, which the Women’s Division owns, operates and also provides hospitality with monies raised from United Methodist Women. (See photo 7.)



*Religious leaders from the United States and Canada meet in New York City with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the Tillman Interfaith Chapel of the Church Center for the United Nations.  
— Photo by Melissa Engle/MCC*

They matter when a visitor walks into the Tillman chapel at the Church Center and sees the banners of all the world’s major religions prominently displayed above the altar while the wooden cross hangs off to the side. (See photo 8 & 9.)



*The Church Center for the United Nations (owned & operated by the Women’s Division).*



*The altar of the Tillman Chapel at the Church Center for the United Nations.*

And they especially matter every time another church member walks out of the door, leaving the United Methodist Church—fed up with the radical theology, massive bureaucracy and partisan politics of a handful of boards and agencies who dominate General Conference and formulate the social witness of the Church. The members we are losing by the thousands every year are among those who long for Christ-centered ministry and a return to the Wesleyan doctrinal integrity of our denomination. It is often programs, policies and actions stemming from the authorization given by *The Book of Resolutions* that drives them away from the United Methodist Church.

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