

National Seminar Participants Take Part in Justice Actions

by YVETTE MOORE*

Nashville, Aug. 14, 2007 – United Methodist Women members stood alongside immigrants, homeless people and low-income workers in vigils promoting their rights around the city today. Nashville advocacy groups organized the vigils supported by United Methodist Women in town for its National Seminar: “For Christ Sake, Turn the World Upside Down,” a quadrennial justice-action training event at Scarritt-Bennett Center in Nashville, Aug. 11-16.

United Methodist Women attending the vigil at Vanderbilt University’s Benton Chapel joined with a broad coalition of union, faith, and civil and human rights groups celebrating the recently signed labor contract between the university and its lowest-paid workers, while pressing for continued action to secure fair wages, benefits and respect for the workers. Garlinda Burton, chief executive of the United Methodist Committee on the Role and Status of Women and a United Methodist Women member, read the United Methodist Church’s resolution supporting workers’ right to collective bargaining during the vigil attended by more than 150 people.

However, United Methodist Women members standing with homeless persons in 100 plus degree heat in Nashville’s Riverfront Park joined a more somber vigil protesting lack of housing as well as neglect and harassment of homeless. About 100 people attended the vigil called in memory Tara Cole, a homeless woman murdered and thrown into the river Aug. 11, 2006.



United Methodist Women members stand with homeless people at vigil in Nashville's Riverfront Park in memory of Tara Cole, a homeless woman murdered last year. Photo by David Rogers.

The women followed a procession down to the Cumberland River where the flowers were placed.

United Methodist Women joining the vigil at the Tennessee Capitol against immigration raids heard Bible readings, preaching, and moving testimonies documenting the fear and damaging impact of current public policy on immigrant families.

“One young woman told how her father was followed home by the sheriff in Columbia, Tenn.,” said National Seminar participant Anna Noble of California-Nevada Conference United Methodist Women. “The sheriff asked him for his papers. He had his driver’s license and car registration. But the sheriff then pressed him for his immigration papers. When he couldn’t produce them, he was arrested in front of his 9-year-old son and baby daughter.”

An immigrant from Barbados and a U.S. military veteran, Ms. Noble also saw the role of race in the nation’s current immigration violation enforcement.

“I think it’s interesting that the Hispanic community has become the face of undocumented persons in the United States,” Ms. Noble said. “The owner of the company I work for is Caucasian and he tells the story that after his grandmother came to the United States with a passport she sent the passport back so that her sister could use it to come here, who sent it back so another relative could come here. They kept recycling that passport. Even today there are people here undocumented from Ireland and other European countries, but they blend in. They aren’t pulled over and picked up.

“Most of the people trying to put the new immigrants out of the country can’t begin to understand why immigrants come here for low-wage jobs because those people never saw their children hungry.”

United Methodist Women is an organization of approximately 800,000 members within the United Methodist Church in the United States. Its purpose is to foster spiritual growth, develop leaders and advocate for justice. United Methodist Women members give more than \$20 million a year for programs and projects related to women, children and youth in the United States and around the world.