

Independent Panel for Review of Child Abuse in Mission Settings
The United Methodist Church
48 Mound Street, Dayton, OH 45402

Bulletin from the Independent Panel

March 2006

The General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church (GBGM) established the **Independent Panel for the Review of Child Abuse in Mission Settings** in October 2004. The charge given to the Panel was “to focus primarily on the allegations of abuse of children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire) for the period 1945 – 1978.”

The Scope and Function of the work of the Panel is to:

1. *Receive allegations of child abuse, including physical and/or sexual abuse, where either a) the accused was commissioned and/or employed by the General Board of Global Ministries or its predecessors in a mission setting, or under the direct supervision of the above; or, b) the abused individual was in the mission setting under the care and direct supervision of any person listed above,*
2. *Inquire into allegations and assess the nature and extend of the reported abuse,*
3. *Convey its findings to the appropriate church officials,*
4. *Engage the survivors in exploring possibilities by which healing and wholeness can be pursued, and*
5. *Report, at least annually, to the Board of Directors of the General Board of Global Ministries. This report will discuss generally the work of the Panel, the number of allegations it has received, how it has processed those allegations, and any recommended changes necessary to complete its work.*

In addition, The Independent Panel is fact-finding, consultative, and primarily pastoral in nature, being neither a judicial commission nor a governing body. It is advisory to and yet independent of the General Board of Global Ministries so that there is no conflict of interest, no adversarial role, and no prejudgment. It will not reach conclusion about civil legal liability. The work of the Panel does not in any way displace the Disciplinary authority related to ministerial misconduct. The work of the Panel will be fully consistent with The Book of Discipline. The Independent Panel conducts all of its activities in strict confidence.

In its initial investigations of physical and sexual abuse primarily in the Congo between 1945 and 1978, the Panel has accomplished the following tasks:

- Sent outreach letters, introducing the members of the Panel and explaining the purpose of the Panel, to over 1200 missionary personnel and children of missionaries.
- Received approximately 30 responses to the mailings or other public announcements from individuals who wanted to meet with the Panel or who had information to share. These responses are being processed.
- Met in-person with witnesses in May 2005 in New York, and in September 2005 in Chicago.
- Reviewed over 100 documents, including historical and archival records, reports and notes.
- Created a database for use by the Panel to record information and expedite mailings.

- Prepared and submitted its first annual report to the Executive Committee of GBGM in October 2005.
- Requested an increase in funding for the work of the Panel from GBGM. The request was granted.
- Scheduled additional meetings of the Panel for the spring and fall of 2006.

Since the names of the members of the Panel were first announced, several people have inquired about their backgrounds and expertise.

James Evinger, a Presbyterian minister and professor of nursing, has consulted with numerous presbyteries and congregations on investigations of clergy sexual misconduct. He is the author of "Let Justice Roll Down: due Process Rights, Sexual Abusers, and Victims," published in *Perspectives, A Journal of Reformed Thought*; and, "Investigating and Prosecuting Clergy Sexual Abuse: A Research Case Study," and "Investigation and Disposition of Formal Ecclesiastical Cases of Pastoral Misconduct Involving Sexual Abuse: A Quantitative Study," both published in the *Journal of Religion and Abuse: Advocacy, Pastoral Care, And Prevention*. Jim maintains an annotated bibliography of resources on clergy sexual abuse for Advocate Web. Also, he served as a member of the *Independent Committee of Inquiry*, Presbyterian Church (USA).

Edith Fresh, PhD, is Associate Professor, Departments of Family Medicine and Psychiatry, Morehouse School of Medicine, Atlanta, GA.

Marshall L. Meadors, Jr., Bishop (retired), The United Methodist Church, is chair of the Panel. While an active Bishop serving the Mississippi Area, he served as chairman of the Initiative on Children and Poverty of the Council of Bishops. In retirement, he serves as and Bishop-in-Residence at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, where he regularly teaches a course on "The Church's Mission with Disadvantaged Children and Their Families."

Cecelia Long, Social Worker and Executive Director of *Mercy Manor*, a transitional home for female ex-offenders, serves as resource person to the Panel. She is a diaconal minister in the Northern Illinois Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church. She has worked on issues of clergy misconduct and has trained to be a mediator to resolve conflicts in church settings.

The Panel is eager to communicate with all children of missionaries who were serving in the Congo, 1945-1978. If you have contact information and are free to share it, please send it to Lauri B. Bracey. Also, please pass on this Bulletin to your contact lists.

The Panel will meet in North American locales over the next 24 months, with times and places determined by need. If you wish to appear before the Panel, contact Lauri B. Bracey

Persons who wish to convey information to the independent panel should contact Ms. Bracey by letter or email:

Lauri B. Bracey
P.O. Box 1375
Roswell, GA 30077
Telephone/fax: 770-641-0134.
Email: panelcoordinator@hotmail.com

*The contact information that was in this document when it was first published was updated in December 2006 to reflect a change in staff person.