

## **Independent Panel for Review of Child Abuse in Mission Settings The United Methodist Church**

### **OPEN LETTER**

TO: The United Methodist Missionary Community

DATE: September 29, 2007

In 2005, the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM), United Methodist Church, appointed the Independent Panel for the Review of Child Abuse in Mission Settings “to focus primarily on allegations of abuse of children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire) for the period 1945–1978.”

The Independent Panel is specifically charged by GBGM to:

1. Receive allegations of child abuse, including physical and/or sexual abuse, where either
  - a.) the accused was commissioned and/ or employed by GBGM 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 extent of the reported abuse;
3. Convey its findings to the appropriate church officials;
4. Engage survivors in exploring possibilities by which healing and wholeness can be pursued; and
5. Report, at least annually, to the Board of Directors of GBGM.

Child abuse is defined as: “. . . *an act committed by a parent, caregiver or person in a position of trust (even though he/she may not care for the child on a daily basis), which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or a child's welfare.*”

The Panel has received direct allegations from former missionary children regarding the abuse of children in missionary settings. We have interviewed a variety of witnesses, including survivors and those with corroborating information. Family members, including siblings, have also communicated with us. In our pursuit of truth and justice for survivors, we have conducted in-person interviews with witnesses, examined the GBGM archival records, and received the permission and cooperation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to examine its archival records. We welcome and encourage the participation of anyone who may have information to assist the Panel in our mission as we continue to investigate the allegations of abuse against children.

During our investigatory journey, three courageous survivors appeared before the Panel as witnesses and former missionary children. They have requested that their stories be shared and distributed throughout the missionary community. These stories, written in their own words, are included as attachments to this Open Letter.

*Marshall L. Meadors, Jr., Bishop and Chair*

*James S. Evinger, M.Div.*

*Edith M. Fresh, Ph.D.*

*Lauri Bracey, Panel Coordinator*

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**Global Ministries: Connecting the Church in Mission**

This letter and other documents distributed by the Independent Panel for Review of Child Abuse in Mission Settings, The United Methodist Church, may be downloaded from the General Board of Global Ministries' web site at [gbgm-umc.org](http://gbgm-umc.org).