

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

**OPEN LETTER**

TO: The United Methodist Missionary Community

DATE: December 5, 2007

This past summer, August 3-5, the Rev. Jim Evinger and I attended the Sixth Congo Reunion at Lake Junaluska, NC. The Rev. Bill Harvey, chairperson of the Reunion Planning Team, introduced Jim and me during the opening session, and we gave a brief explanation of the purpose and work of the Panel. The following day, we were given a major block of agenda time during which we interpreted the Panel's scope and function.

Jim and I explained that our reason for attending the Reunion was to meet missionaries and their children who had served in the Congo and to listen. We invited them to talk with us and to tell us about their lives and experiences while on the mission field. If they had experienced any form of physical abuse or sexual abuse, or knew of someone who had, we encouraged them to speak with or contact us. We requested that they spread the word about the Panel to their siblings and classmates. We also suggested that missionary parents share their concerns with us.

Many of those attending the Reunion responded to our requests. Most everyone spoke to us. Over a dozen told us stories of life in their families and schools. Several persons spoke with us in confidence about their experiences of abuse or provided information regarding the alleged abuse that had occurred to others.

As previously reported, in 2005, the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM), United Methodist Church, convened 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 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 refers to 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.”

In September of this year, the Panel mailed to you an Open Letter. With it, we included the personal stories of three persons who reported that they had experienced abuse as children while they were in the Congo. We are including with this letter the written experience of a fourth survivor. These four persons decided to go public about their experiences in order to encourage others to also contact the Panel.

GBGM has charged the Panel to complete its work by December 31, 2008. It is, therefore, urgent that we meet with witnesses as soon as possible so we will have the opportunity to consider carefully the information given to us.

When witnesses meet with us, we invite them to bring a support person, at our expense. We ask witnesses to prepare a written statement, and we provide a guide for doing so. We ensure confidentiality, and we offer the opportunity to meet with a debriefer/counselor before and after the meeting. To arrange a meeting with the Panel, contact Panel Coordinator:

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

It was indeed a humbling experience to be in the presence of the Congo Reunion family. They and their families responded to the call of Christ to go into the world to proclaim by word and deed the gospel of God’s love. May the joy and peace of Christ be with them and with all of us during Advent and Christmas and throughout the New Year.

Marshall L. Meadors, Jr., *Bishop (retired)*  
*Chair of the Panel*  
Edith M. Fresh, Ph.D  
James S. Evinger, M.Div.  
Lauri B. 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).