



The United Methodist Rural Fellowship
(Soon to be U. M. R. Advocates)
Bulletin

Strong Rural Churches Build Strong Rural Communities!

Welcome to Tampa!

Dear Delegates/Visitors to General Conference,

At the 1940 General Conference a group of concerned leaders from Methodist churches in Rural, Town and Country settings across the U.S. got together to discuss issues of concern to them. Out of that group grew the Methodist Rural Fellowship. MRF, and now UMRF, has been present at every General Conference since 1944, trying to represent the hopes and dreams of those who live in and serve in rural, town and country settings.

Once again, we have a team of dedicated, motivated, caring leaders, lay and clergy, from across the country who will be tracking legislation, answering questions, and providing information and a presence at Tampa. As an organization, we have chosen this year to weigh the legislation that is before the church against the values that we hold important. The starting point for UMRF is that "The health, vitality, and sustainability of each local congregation should be held as the primary value of the denominational structure. Healthy local churches make new disciples for Christ and the transformation of the world. Legislative changes should: first, do no harm. Second, do all the good possible for the local church." (Our complete value statement is included below.)

Each morning there will be volunteers around the convention center handing out copies of the "Bulletin". We hope that when offered that you will be able to find the time to look over our thoughts and consider them as you address the legislation before you.

One of the four Areas of Focus approved by the 2008 General Conference was the concern of being

in ministry with the poor. As a means of drawing attention to poverty here in the U.S., UMRF, and the Rural Urban Network (RUN) from GBGM, will be sponsoring 4 poverty simulations. They will be held at the convention center on the mornings of May 1, 2, 3, & 4. Each session will accommodate about 80 participants. We hope that you will be able to join us for one of these sessions for an opportunity to get a better sense of some of the issues that those in poverty live with on a daily basis.

We join with you in praying that our church will be strengthened for the future by our "holy conferencing" here in Tampa.

Sincerely, Roger L. Grace, President

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UMRF To Be UMRA

This 2012 General Conference will be the last General Conference that UMRF will be attending. When the church gathers again in 2016 in Portland, Oregon, UMRF will be known as UMRA, or United Methodist Rural Advocates.

We believe that advocacy more accurately represents what we are about as we speak to the concerns, hopes, and dreams of those living in rural, town and country settings around the world. We will still have fellowship, that's a given, but our focus is on impacting the church and world through our advocacy.

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Hospitality Center

Contact Info: 740-707-2901

Hours: 7 AM to 7 PM

(fellowship, light meals, snacks)

Office

Hours: 7 AM to 7 PM

(copies, computers)

Sheraton Riverwalk Hotel
200 North Ashley Drive

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A Different Approach: UMRF at General Conference 2012

The United Methodist Rural Fellowship is taking a different approach in its advocacy for rural/town and country churches and communities at the 2012 General Conference. Rather than focusing on a legislative agenda of petitions and resolutions to shepherd through the parliamentary process, UMRF has adopted a set of values by which to assess any and all proposals put before the Conference.

In the past, we have submitted as many as 120 petitions or resolutions on such matters as the structure of the local church, the rights and status of licensed ministers, cooperative ministries, and certified lay ministries. This quadrennium, there seems to be a broad array of large, complex issues being presented for consideration. These proposals, like the Call to Action, the restructuring of General Agencies, and the Study of the Ministry, could have extensive and profound impact on all local churches. Our concern this year, as it has been over the previous 65 years, is that people, churches and communities in rural places and small towns not be ignored, neglected or unintentionally harmed.

As we look at the proposed petitions and resolutions, we will be asking: **“How does this proposal address the following values?”**

1. The health, vitality, and sustainability of each local congregation should be held as the primary value of the denominational structure. **Healthy local churches make new disciples for Christ and the transformation of the world.** Legislative changes should: first, do no harm. Second, do all the good possible for the local church.

2. The global nature of the church must be recognized and respected.

3. We affirm the value of rural communities as a context for mission, ministry, **and the making of new disciples for Christ.**

4. We hold in high value the welfare of rural people worldwide, including access to adequate food, shelter, medical care, clear water, education, spiritual care, economic development, and systems of justice.

5. We are called to be faithful stewards of creation; environment, ecologies, and resources.

6. God’s call to ministry should be a foundational consideration for all Christians, lay and clergy.

7. Appropriate leadership and resources must be provided to rural congregations.

8. Congregations need a leader in a pastoral role.

Regarding the pastoral role, we value:

- The accessibility of sacraments
- Training and equipping for context
- The mutuality of ministries, Lay and Clergy
- Varieties of pastoral ministry: Certified Lay Ministers, Licensed (full and part-time), Ordained Deacons and Elders, Associate Members, Church and Community Workers, missionaries, etc.
- Longer tenure for pastors in effective ministries
- Consistency across the connection regarding standards, assessment, and judicatory intervention into ministries and local congregations
- Partnerships across ecumenical boundaries

9. Assessments (metrics) applied to local churches and/or their leadership must consider the demographic and contextual realities of ministry in that community and be fair to both large and small membership churches.

10. Local Church vitality is to be measured by growth in **individual** discipleship, **its collective witness**, and its transformative **relationship to its** community.

11. We stand against the structured inequities of racism, sexism, classism, ageism, and similar forms of discrimination.

12. Money is not God! We call this session of General Conference to be aware that in seeking institutional security, we may be acting in ways that betray our idolatry of financial goals and worldly status.

13. We value partnerships with others of common cause, including the ecumenical community, in the work of making disciples for Jesus Christ.

14. We do not require agreement to work together, whether within denominational processes, or with the poor, or for the transformation of our communities. We

value our partnership with people of differing opinions and of various faiths and with non-profits who do good and love justice.

We invite all who are in advocacy roles to examine prayerfully and carefully these values and consider utilizing them as guides for conversation and decision as the legislative process gets underway. If you have questions, look for the UMRF Legislative Advocates in the observers' section of your venue, or visit our GC headquarters at the Sheraton Riverwalk Hotel.