Are you thinking it would be challenging, exciting, or rewarding to go to General Conference as a volunteer? You are absolutely right! General Conference is like no other event you have ever attended! It will make some of your most treasured memories and hold some of your deepest heart-felt times, but it is worth every moment!

Your days can be as full as you want ... there are several areas in which volunteers are needed: witness, hospitality, pastoral care, legislation and media. See the Love Your Neighbor Coalition (LYNC) website for all the specifics and the registration form (www.lynccoalition.org). Once you register, you will be sent information about housing. You can stay at the hotels reserved for volunteers or you can go to one of your own choosing. It’s up to you. Food will be available for low cost in the volunteer space and Portland has a great food truck culture. More details will be sent as they are finalized.

Once you are in Portland you will be able to check in with Faith Geer or Mittie Quinn, LYNC Volunteer Coordinators, for your assignment. We are working with 12 groups. Each day will be different depending upon what is needed. So if you decide to come, just be flexible and ready jump in where needed!

What can you do to prepare for General Conference?

- Pray, please.
- If you are able to support the coalition financially, please give what you can. (see article about the Betty Dorr Fund)
- Talk about the issues with your congregation.
- Read the on-line blogs and “friend” the RMN and PRN Facebook pages so you can stay in touch with issues.

Together we can make a difference. We sure hope you’ll come to Portland! It’s guaranteed to be a rewarding challenge full of excitement! Written by Faith Geer, PRN Co-Chair
Meet New Members of the PRN Steering Committee

Both 62 years old, Eric retired as a Senior Civil Engineer with the San Diego County Department of Public Works for 35 years, and Rexanna worked as a first grade teacher in the Chula Vista Elementary School District for 26 years. Eric was raised in Phoenix, Arizona, and attended Cross Roads United Methodist Church as a child and youth. He graduated with a BS from the University of Washington (Seattle) and earned an MS in Civil Engineering from Arizona State University.

Rexanna was born in Andrews, Texas. Her father was a two-charge Methodist pastor while in college in Texas. Rexanna received her BA in History from Arizona State University (Tempe) and her master’s in Education from National University.

Rexanna and Eric met at ASU and have been married nearly 40 years. They have two daughters, Courtney and Hilary, and a daughter-in-law (Courtney’s wife). Courtney and her wife have twin grandchildren, Quinn and Carter, 17 months old. They are quite active at First UMC Chula Vista (CA), and strongly support the Biblical Obedience stance that Bishop Talbert has so eloquently described.

As they said in San Antonio, “Y’all means all!”

Parents Steering Committee

The following members of the Parents Steering Committee direct the activities of the Parents Reconciling Network (PRN), an extension ministry of Reconciling Ministries Network. If you would like to contribute to this work, please contact Faith Geer or Carol Waymack.

Email addresses for steering committee members are included. We encourage parents or family members to contact us by email if would like to connect with us to discuss the issues surrounding parenting LGBTQ children.

Steering Committee Members:
Blair Barbour, Euclid UMC, Oak Park, IL  blairbarbour22@gmail.com
Don Childers, North UMC, Indianapolis, IN  don@childerscounseling.com
Sue Childers, North UMC, Indianapolis, IN  don@childerscounseling.com
Beverly Cole, Trinity UMC, Salina, KS  bcole10@cox.net
Janet Duke, Bee Creek UMC, Austin TX  jdukeaustin@gmail.com
Faith Geer, St Paul’s UMC, Allison Park, PA—PRN SC Chair  faithgeer@gmail.com
Rev. Leigh Goodrich, Lexington UMC, Lexington, MA  LeighGoodrich@verizon.net
Dave Nuchols, Minnetonka, MN  dave.nuckols@gmail.com
Carolyn Pennington, Wesley UMC, Eugene, OR—Financial Secretary gc_pennington@comcast.net
Rev. Bonnie Parr Phillipson, First UMC of Albany, OR  revbonnie@hotmail.com
Rev. Jim Phillipson, First UMC of Albany, OR  revbonnie@hotmail.com
Eric Swanson, First UMC, Chula Vista, CA  rch040522@gmail.com
Rexanna Swanson, First UMC, Chula Vista, CA  rch4413@hotmail.com
Rev. James Waugh, Grove City Trinity UMC, Grove City, OH  jwaugh3@mac.com
Carol Waymack, Woodland Park UMC, Seattle, WA—Newsletter Editor, carolwaymack2@yahoo.com
Laura Young, Lubbock, TX—RMN Staff Member  laura@rmnetwork.org

Yes, there is room for more on this committee. Interested? Email one of us.
The General Conference (GC) of the United Methodist Church will be meeting May 10 - 20, 2016 at the Oregon Convention Center in Portland, OR. The GC is the only body that speaks officially for the United Methodist Church. The conference is held once every four years (or every quadrennium).

It is at this quadrennial gathering of United Methodists that changes are offered to the United Methodist Book of Discipline (BOD). "The Discipline" (or BOD) as it is commonly known is the rule book of the United Methodist Church. The BOD contains such things as standards for clergy, a description of the basic organization for the United Methodist Church (UMC) from the local church through general church agencies. The Discipline also contains a section on the historical rules and the foundational doctrines of the UMC as well as a section called the "Social Principles."

Delegates, half clergy and half lay, are elected to serve, often a year ahead of GC, by their Annual Conferences. In 2016, 864 delegates will gather from around the globe. There will be many others at GC as well--non-delegates--coming as visitors, observers, volunteers, hosts, press and members of UM Agencies. As part of the Reconciling movement, most of us will attend as volunteers with the Love Your Neighbor Coalition (LYNC).

Prior to general conference, individuals, local churches, annual conferences, and general agencies submit proposed changes to the Discipline. These proposed changes are called "petitions." Thousands are sent in before each general conference. Consideration of these petitions becomes the primary focus of the first week of the GC.

Delegates select a legislative committee on which to serve. Petitions are assigned to the legislative committees based on the subject that is being addressed in the petition.

These legislative committees (comprised of 80 to 100 delegates) debate, amend, and vote on the petitions assigned to them. Their votes are recommendations to the full body of the GC -- the plenary session. At the plenary session, delegates may amend the various petitions that come before them, after which a vote is held. A simple majority is enough to pass the petition into church law. These actions result in revisions of the Discipline or the Book of Resolutions (policies of the denomination on current social issues, considered advisory and for information).

If you want to know more about GC, UM Communications offers an ongoing online course, available at www.umcom.org/learn/exploring-general-conference. The course is free and takes about 30 minutes to complete.

Of course for many of us Reconciling United Methodists changes to the Social Principles of the BOD are of great interest. Historically, focus has been on those parts that declare "homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching" and the sections of the Discipline that prohibit the ordination of LGBT persons and the prohibition on clergy performing weddings for same gender couples. It is only at the GC that official changes to the Discipline can be made.

If you decide to go to GC, here are some things you should know:

- Expect long hours. The GC begins sessions early each morning and concludes late at night. There are meetings of the coalition team before and following the GC sessions.
- There may be a lot of walking. The headquarters for the LYNC and your housing will be off site. Fortunately, Portland has an excellent mass transit system that should help. However, just making your way around a large convention center takes a lot of walking.
- Expect spiritual and emotional highs and lows. Many of the worship services at GC and those put on by the coalition partners are very uplifting. However, the events and activities of GC can also put folks on an emotional and spiritual roller coaster of ups and downs depending on the flow of the business and the decisions that are made. As you approach the GC, please give time to your prayer life and focus on your own spiritual life.
- You will likely have life changing experiences. At this ten day gathering, you will have the opportunity to meet and talk with many people from across the US and around the world. You will never see the United Methodist Church in the same way after you have witnessed GC.
Justice and General Conference  

Written by Beverly Cole

My favorite scripture is Micah 6:6-8—“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.”

That hasn’t always been my favorite scripture. I used to like the verses in Proverbs 31 about the perfect wife. She’s the one who keeps the house in order and the family clothed in fine linen cloth. So what changed?

In 1985 I found out that my seventeen year old son, Eric, was gay. One of the things that disturbed me most was that he didn’t think he could be gay and Christian. In my heart I knew he could. In the meantime, the United Methodist Church would be there to reinforce Eric’s notion with its statement that homosexuality was incompatible with Christian teaching. Eric eventually found out that he could be gay and Christian, but in the Metropolitan Community Church, not the United Methodist Church.

A number of years later I found out about the Parents Reconciling Ministries organization. This group’s purpose:

- to educate the public, and especially the Church, about sexual orientation and gender identity issues,
- to support the families of LGBTQ persons, and
- to advocate for those folks in our churches and society.

Eventually, I became active in that organization and gave up the idea of the perfect wife and mother.

It was here that my favorite scripture became Micah 6 and that I was destined to have experiences I had never dreamed I would have. It was at GCs in 2008 and 2012 that my scripture began to flesh out. I learned how I could put those three requirements together to do the work prescribed by this scripture.

The first was to “do Justice.” Doing justice at GC is best accomplished by making a point through a direct and sometimes symbolic action. Never in a million years did I think I’d be part of a coalition that would call attention to the injustices done to the LGBTQ community by the Church, but at GC I was. Here are a couple of examples of what that looked like.

At one Conference the group formed a line that the delegates had to walk by to leave a session. Along the line, every fourth person or so lay on the floor as if dead. We called this a “die-in” to illustrate how the church was killing already wounded LGBTQ Christians by its hateful language and exclusion from full participation in the life of that church.

On another occasion, we marched onto the conference floor and began covering the communion table with black net shrouds to show that the United Methodist Church is excluding folks from the table. A piece was read from the floor shaming the Church for its policies that were hurtful and unjust. Bishop Melvin Talbert compared the exclusion of LGBTQ community with the exclusion of his African American community in earlier church history.

What about “loving kindness”? At GC2008 in Fort Worth, it was typically scorching Texas weather. The delegates had to walk to and from the Conference Center for meals. Our group was at the doors greeting them with kind words and a bottle of cold water.

So what about “walking humbly” with our God? Jesus told his disciples to love the Lord their God with all their hearts and minds and their neighbors as themselves. As faithful United Methodists and Disciples of Christ, folks in the Reconciling Movement strive to live this out every day in their local congregations and even at General Conference. There are many ways to witness our faith and we will continue to be a presence at GC2016 until All are included in the full life of the United Methodist Church. So be it.
Recollections from General Conferences written by Bob Dorr, First UMC, Omaha,

What I remember most about past GCs is jumping into protest demonstrations organized when things didn’t go our way, which was most of the time. We marched, we sang, we prayed. We wanted GC delegates and anyone else who would listen to know that we are passionate in believing that all God’s children should have equal rights in the United Methodist Church.

My late wife, Betty, and I went together to three GCs. Betty, who died March 14, went to two earlier GCs by herself before I retired and could go with her. The first was in Denver in 1996. There, Betty joined UMC pastor David Aslesen in sneaking down hotel hallways in the middle of the night at the hotel where most conference delegates stayed. Outside each door, Betty and David left an “Open the Doors” mat.

In Pittsburgh, the first GC that Betty and I attended together, we joined other Reconciling people in kneeling and praying as GC delegates passed by. We were happily surprised when some delegates stopped and said they agreed with us.

In Fort Worth, we attended a beautiful wedding in a small park near GC. There, underneath a gorgeous sky, with some GC delegates in the audience, Sue Laurie and Julie Bruno recited vows of love, fidelity and devotion. The reception following the wedding was prepared by members of Parents Reconciling Network. No, same-gender marriage wasn’t yet legal in Texas or most other states. But in time it would be, some correctly predicted.

In Tampa, Betty and I gathered with others in a large tent near the General Conference hall. Inside that Tabernacle, Reconciling leaders organized advocacy actions. Volunteers and others got their meals there and picked up Rainbow stoles to distribute. Those who wore the stoles identified themselves as supporters of our cause, and there were many. It felt good to be among like-minded people, and to be working for a cause that is right.

Well, Portland is next. What will happen there? I can’t wait to see.

The Betty Dorr Fund—Meet the “Mama Bear” And Send Betty’s Spirit and Voice Back to GC

The Betty Dorr Fund has been organized specifically for funding advocacy activities at General Conference.

Betty’s Story: Betty Dorr attended every general conference since 1996. Betty became an ally in the movement for full inclusion of LGBTQ people in the United Methodist Church after her son Michael shared with her that he was gay. Learning about the truth of God’s love for all people through her pastor, Jimmy Creech, she celebrated the integration of her faith and the truth she had always held in her heart based upon her unconditional love for her son.

Betty became a staunch advocate for the LGBTQ community. She and her husband Bob were very active in PFLAG and later with PRN. Even following the death of their beloved Michael, they continue to be faithful allies in the movement. According to Rev. David Aslesen, “She was the original UMC “Mama Bear” with love of all God’s children on her heart and the gospel of Jesus Christ as her ship sailing from the sand hills of her beloved Nebraska to the distant corners of the connection. “ This is what drove Betty to attend each General Conference and support the movement for full inclusion year after year.

Rev. Aslesen gives us this charge. “Who will take up the mantle of Betty Dorr? Will we love with the same generosity, gracefulness and glee? May we be faithful to her memory in the “shaping up” and shaking up of the church we love.

At this site, there will be a place to honor your own “Mama Bear”. 
Write a letter to your Bishop

Dear Bishop (Carcano):

Greetings and Peace from (First United Methodist Church of Chula Vista)!

Please allow us to introduce ourselves. We are (Eric and Rexanna Swanson, lay people at FUMCCV. We love our pastors Dr. Brian Parcel and Francisco Garcia, and thank you and the Cabinet for their appointments to our church.)

(We are both products of the United Methodist Church, with Rexanna being a Methodist since baptism 63 years ago and me 53 years ago. We have been members of FUMCCV for 51 and 38 years, respectively, and were married at FUMCCV 40 years ago. Our two grown daughters were baptized and confirmed as members at FUMCCV. One is heterosexual and one is lesbian, married, and is raising her and her wife’s 17 month old twins, our grandchildren. Our daughter, daughter in law and grandchildren are our delights in life! I have served at various times in our church, as lay representative to Annual Conference, Lay Leader, Chairs of the Admin Board, Church Council, Finance Committee and Council on Ministries, Evangelism, as a youth leader, as a church school teacher, and we both have been long-time choir members.)

(Our lesbian daughter, Courtney, “came out” to us 16 years ago at 19 while in college at UNLV. As we had both had gay friends for a long time before this event, we fully accepted and loved Courtney for who she is, regardless of her sexual orientation.)

Likewise, the global United Methodist Church needs to completely accept both its LGBT pastors and members bless same-sex couples who wish to be married by UMC pastors and within local United Methodist churches. The UMC Book of Discipline needs to be amended to discard the passages which prohibit fully accepting and loving all persons and there actions.

Though not elected delegates to the 2016 GC in Portland, Rexanna and I have already made our hotel reservations to attend. We plan to volunteer there on behalf of Reconciling Ministries Network, Parents Reconciling Network, and the Love Your Neighbor Coalition.

(We attended this summer’s Gather At The River convention in San Antonio and were, once again, proud of your bold statements and leadership at the meeting.) We would ask that you, along with other ally Bishops, volunteer to become General Session leaders to insure that session rules be applied fairly during critical legislation votes. It is important that these votes not be conducted by “show of hands” or voice votes, as many of the General Conference delegates, especially from Africa, the southern U.S., Korea, and the Philippines, may feel undo pressure from their peers to “toe the line”, versus possibly voting their “love your neighbor” personal conscience.

(Continued on page 7)
You have been a bold follower of Jesus Christ in recent years. (You invited Pastor Frank Schaefer to join CalPac Conference, showed strong support for immigration reform, and spoke out for peace and justice and love throughout the world.) Please be bold, again, at General Conference in Portland this coming May.

(If you have any questions or wish to discuss this letter further, my phone numbers are 619-829-0396 and 619-865-7877, and our e-mail addresses are rrch040522@gmail.com and rrch4413@hotmail.com.)

Thank you for time and attention! We’ll see you in Portland!

Love and Peace
Eric and Rexanna Swanson

The Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference will serve as the Volunteer Host Team for GC 2016 in Portland. As part of RMN and PRN, we, the Oregon-Idaho Reconciling United Methodists, would like to welcome you to join us in our mission to help our church become a more fully inclusive denomination.

This is your chance to help. Join us, with parents and allies the country over at the LYNC. We are United Methodists committed to the embodiment of God’s love and justice through the people and mission of our the United Methodist Church.

Our partners are:
- Affirmation,
- Black Methodists for Church Renewal,
- Love Prevails,
- Metodistas Asociados Representando la Causa Hispano-Americana,
- Methodist Federation for Social Action,
- National Federation of Asian American United Methodists,
- Native American International Caucus of United Methodists,
- Pacific Islanders Caucus of United Methodists,
- Reconciling Ministries Network,
- United Methodist Association of Ministers with Disabilities, and the
- Western Methodist Justice Movement.

We need lots of volunteers to make an impact at GC. GC is the top policy-making body of the UMC. It is held once every four years to consider revisions to church law, as well as to adopt resolutions on current moral, social, public policy, and economic issues. It also approves plans and budgets for church-wide programs for the next four years.

We don’t get this chance to help with change as often as we’d like. Our volunteers will organize a massive legislative and physical witness to all UMIs. Our witness is to continue to demonstrate the need for a church-wide approach to discipleship and mission that exemplifies both personal and social holiness, private and societal expressions of faithfulness; working interdependently and in complete harmony. Over the 10 days of GC, we will provide and support anywhere from 350-500+ volunteers with:
- low cost food and housing;
- support legislation;
- provide daily acts of witness;
- provide meal and educational opportunities for delegates to GC;
- produce daily writings and updates on how GC is going from the coalition’s perspective; and
- Inspire one another with worship and fellowship experiences that manifest church in the midst of politics and “business as usual” at GC.

WE NEED YOU and whatever gifts you can provide. You can find out more information on how to help and about our efforts at www.lyncoalition.org. Stay informed, donate, volunteer.

Thank you for all you will do to bring faith and justice to life in our United Methodist Church.

(Continued from page 6)
Parents Reconciling Network
An Extension Ministry of Reconciling Ministries Network
123 W Madison St, Suite 2150
Chicago, IL 60602-4511

Give a Gift of Love

The best gifts, the ones that speak love the loudest, are gifts from the heart. Here are some gift ideas:

1. Give someone you love 2-3 days lodging at General Conference
2. Give someone you love airfare or airline miles to General Conference
3. Give your child the knowledge that you love and support them so much you will use your time, even your vacation time, and your money to go to General Conference to advocate for them.
4. Give yourself a gift by accompanying someone you love to General Conference, then know this will be relationship-changing time together.

PARENTS RECONCILING NETWORK—OUR MISSION

Parents Reconciling Network unconditionally walks with the parents and families of persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities until all are fully accepted in their families, in their churches, and in society by advocating for acceptance, providing education, and promoting welcoming communities of faith.

www.facebook.com/reconcilingparents