

2009 Legislative Priorities

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The United Methodist General Board of Church & Society (GBCS) has set its legislative priorities for the 111th Congress. The six priorities address issues as sweeping as overcoming global poverty to as specific as increasing spending for international family planning. Systemic reform, however, stands out as the lynchpin holding all of the priorities together.

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The priorities support actions taken last year by the denomination's highest policy-making body, General Conference. Meeting every four years, General Conference approves the denomination's "Social Principles" and *Book of Resolutions*, which sets forth United Methodist stances on many issues.

GBCS's legislative priorities are set by the social action agency's work area directors in consultation with its top executive, Jim Winkler. He said the priorities all represent areas that the faith community can bring a unique voice to the legislative process by focusing on justice and, increasingly, stewardship of creation.

The six legislative priorities for 2009 are reform of the U.S. health-care system; just, humane immigration reform; strengthening the social safety net; investing in a "green-energy" future; overcoming global poverty; and increasing levels of U.S. spending for international family planning.

Reform of U.S. health-care system

Reform of the U.S. health-care system is the priority of GBCS's work area on Alcohol, Other Addictions, and Health Care. The health of people throughout the U.S. is jeopardized every day by lack of access or huge gaps in access to health care, according to the Rev. Cynthia Abrams, director of the work area. She said 45.7 million people are uninsured in the United States, and a mounting number is underinsured or has expensive and inadequate health care.

United Methodist position on health care has heavily influenced this process.

"Major health reform efforts are underway in Congress and with the new administration," said Abrams. She added that it isn't clear yet what the legislative package will look like.

“Faith groups have worked together to develop a solid foundation of principles to guide legislative efforts,” Abrams said, adding that the United Methodist position on health care has heavily influenced this process.

“A society where each person is afforded health, wholeness and human dignity expresses God’s intention for abundant life,” Abrams stated. “An inclusive, accessible, affordable and accountable health-care system lives out God’s intention.”

For more information about health-care reform, contact [Abrams](#) at (203) 488-5636.

Just, humane immigration reform

GBCS’s Civil and Human Rights work area has set “just, humane immigration reform” as its priority this year. “Common sense tells us that the immigration system is badly in need of reform,” said Bill Mefford, director of the work area.

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According to Mefford, effective reform must be comprehensive in nature. He said this reform must entail a path to citizenship for all undocumented immigrants, protection of the rights of workers and reunification of families.

“Scripture calls us as people of faith to welcome the Sojourner,” Mefford emphasized.

For more details, contact [Mefford](#) at (202) 488-5657.

Strengthen Social Safety Net

John Hill, director of GBCS’s work area on Economic and Environmental Justice, pointed to the uncertainty in the economy as a reason for strengthening the social safety net. “As economic uncertainty grows,” he said, “we must protect those living on the economic margins, particularly children.” For example, he said GBCS will work to strengthen and expand programs to ensure every child has access to proper nutrition.

For more information on this priority, contact [Hill](#) at (202) 488-5654.

Invest in Green-Energy Future

Pushing for legislation that mandates investing in a “green-energy” future is a response to the call to be faithful stewards of God’s creation, according to Hill. “GBCS supports a transition to green, low-carbon energy alternatives,” he said. “Adopting a new energy policy with a strong federal investment in clean alternative energy sources will reduce global warming pollution, generate jobs and lead us toward a sustainable future.”

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For more information on this priority, contact [Hill](#) at (202) 488-5654.

End Global Poverty

GBCS supports legislation that helps to end global poverty, said Mark Harrison, director of the agency's Peace with Justice work area. He said foreign aid reform, fair trade, debt cancellation and major reform of international financial institutions, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, are instrumental ways the United States can lead to end poverty on God's world.

For more information, contact [Harrison](#) at (202) 488-5645 or [the Rev. Liberato Bautista](#), assistant general secretary, United Nations and International Ministry, at (212) 682-3633 ext.3112.

Increase Funding for International Family Planning

Linda Bales, director of the Louise and Hugh Moore Population Project at GBCS, has a 2009 priority of increasing funding for international family planning. She said the purpose is to ensure access to the full range of health services, including family planning.

Increased spending on international family planning should include support for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), according to Bales. UNFPA estimates that one in three deaths related to pregnancy and childbirth could be avoided if all women had access to contraceptive services.

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"That means some 175,000 women each year could be saved," Bales said, "and many more could avoid severe or long-lasting injuries."

Bales said that in many countries, though, funding for family planning has been curtailed. "GBCS will work with various population/reproductive health groups to secure additional funding for family planning services around the globe," she said, "because the potential life-saving benefits are so immense." She said greater access to family planning can reduce the spread of AIDS, allow couples to space their children, reduce abortions and child and maternal mortality.

"As followers of Christ we are called to bring health and wholeness to all God's people," Bales stated. "United Methodism's founder, John Wesley had a burning passion for health and the desire to see people have access to goods and services needed to live life abundantly as well as faithfully."

Bales said that speaking out in the public square on behalf of the marginalized and those who lack services is one way to achieve a world of justice and freedom from pain and suffering.

For more information, contact [Bales](#) at (202) 488-5649.

In addition to these six priorities, each work area also selected three other areas of legislative importance this year. All priorities are available in .pdf format by clicking on [2009 Legislative Priorities](#).

The General Board of Church and Society is one of four international general program boards of The United Methodist Church, which has more than 11 million members worldwide. The board's primary areas of ministry are Advocacy, Education and Leadership

Formation, United Nations and International Affairs, and resourcing these areas for the nearly 35,000 local churches of the denomination. It has offices on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., and at the Church Center at the United Nations.

Action Networks

GBCS's program staff sponsors Action Networks that provide information on these and other advocacy issues. The networks are free. They include legislative updates, advocacy resources and identify opportunities to take action.

Action Networks address:

- Alcohol and Other Addictions
- Civil and Human Rights Health and Wholeness
- HIV & AIDS
- Mental Health
- Peace with Justice
- United Methodists Against the Death Penalty
- Isaiah Circle (U.N. and International Affairs Advocacy) and
- Women and Population

Information is distributed via e-mail. You can subscribe to any or all of the networks.

You can join a network the following ways: by mail to General Board of Church & Society, 100 Maryland Ave. NE, Washington, DC 20002; by fax to (202) 488-5639; or online at [UM Power](#) or www.umc-gbcs.org>>My GBCS.

For more information, go to My GBCS on the GBCS Web site, or contact [Donna Brandyberry](#) at (202) 488-5641.