

Futuring & Strategy Task Force and bylaws reports to the 2011 UMAC meeting

By Dan Gangler, chairperson of the Futuring and Strategy Task Force

During the 2010 UMAC meeting in San Francisco, I was asked by UMAC President Sandra Brands to chair a Futuring and Strategy Task Force which would also review bylaw proposals that were tabled during that meeting. Other members of the task force included:

- **Maidstone Mulenga**, Upper New York Conference, Northeast Jurisdiction;
- **Don Wood**, Macon, Ga., Southeast Jurisdiction;
- **Kathryn Witte**, Director of Communications for the Nebraska Conference, South Central Jurisdiction;
- **Greg Nelson**, Director of Communications for the Oregon-Idaho Conference, Western Jurisdiction;
- **Tafadzwa Mudambanuki**, Director of Central Conference Communications for United Methodist Communications.
- President **Sandra Brands**
- **Erik Alsgaard**, pastor of St. Ignace United Methodist Church, Mich., and chair of the Bylaws Committee,
- **Victoria Rebeck**, Director of Communication, Minnesota Conference
- **Lisa Diehl**, Director or Communication, Kansas Area
- **Kay Panovec**, UM Communications
- **Royya James**, UM Communications

I divide this report into two segments: One, **Futuring and Strategy**, and two, **bylaws revisions**.

Futuring and Strategy

I believe this is a pivotal year in the life of the organization. Changes to the organization during the past three years have been difficult for the life of the organization. We are grateful that United Methodist Communications came to UMAC's rescue following the Providence, Rhode Island meeting in 2008 that left UMAC deeply in debt. To analyze what went wrong is somewhat counterproductive at this point. Simply, UMAC overextended itself to provide a quality meeting that was extremely under-funded. We are now paying that loan and will probably be able to pay off that loan at the close of this meeting. At least, that's the intentions of UMAC's leaders, whom I have been meeting with on a regular basis during this past year.

During these past couple of years of crisis, a number of organizational issues have arisen, which have been addressed as we approach our meeting in Albuquerque. Those have included the term officers serve, the quality of the UMAC Awards program, the difficulty by treasurers to gain access to funds, the entrance and exit of members of the executive committee due to the restructuring of annual conferences and general agencies of the church, the diminishing number of communicators in the church, the inability of the organization to revise its bylaws, as well as members being elected or appointed with little knowledge and/or experience of the organization and its traditions. I believe another factor that contributed to the group's financial crisis was the hiring of a meeting planner. I believe UMAC is too small of an organization for such paid services when the organization has only one meeting during the year.

Despite its recent rocky past, UMAC is a small manageable organization and there is little reason current practices cannot be changed or modified immediately to strengthen the organization for its yet-to-be determined future. Part of those practices is determined by the bylaws of the organization. The other part is determined by the culture and traditions of the group. It's the later part of an organization's culture and traditions that give spirit and vitality to the organizations. For example, my first UMAC meeting was as an annual conference host of the 1978 UMAC meeting in Lincoln, Nebraska. At that time, I was a pastor and chair of the conference communications committee. I became a member of the UMAC in 1983 and attended my first meeting of the organization as a member in January 1984 as the church prepared for its bicentennial General Conference in Baltimore, Maryland.

That was "a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away." UMAC has since expanded to include local church communicators and any United Methodists involved in communications as a profession. UMAC, with United Methodist Communications, has offered certification for Christian communicators. UMAC also has offered scholarships for young adults answering a call to religion communications. From the beginning, the UMAC Awards program has been a highlight of the annual meeting. Communications has evolved from a primarily print organization with many workshops on writing and editing at our annual meetings, to an organization of members that also includes multi-media with websites, text messaging and social networking. Our role as United Methodist communicators continues to expand with each new communication product. We have learned to become mobile and engaging in our service.

Now is the time to reassess who we are, affirm our being and plan for the ever-expanding future of multi-media communication in the life of the church.

Having interviewed leaders and members (both in person and online), reviewed a survey of members and observed the organization at its leadership level, we ask that new practices be enacted and older practices be reviewed, strengthened or discontinued. With these following suggestions, we in no way infer the current executive committee has been amiss in its duties and responsibilities. Just the opposite is true. We have found them to have engaged themselves completely during a difficult time to bring this organization to a renewed place. On behalf of the task force, we make the following suggestions.

1. That the UMAC executive committee writes or reviews its mission statement.
2. That the UMAC executive committee writes goals, objectives and courses of action for the organization.
3. That the UMAC Handbook for leaders be reviewed annually by each officer of the organization. This becomes a living document for those coming into leadership responsibilities.
4. That the UMAC Awards competition be reviewed following each annual competition and adjusted for the betterment of the awards program participants, the process for judging and year-round promotion of the awards and that at least one member of the UMAC Awards committee is familiar with the traditions of the awards.
5. That all plans for the annual meeting be finalized and promoted online during the month of July. The dates and location of each annual meeting will be made one to two years in advance of each annual meeting.
6. That a budget be drafted and maintained as soon as a location of the next annual meeting is announced.

7. That UMAC develop some financial accountability procedures to protect against overspending or other potential problems
8. That the registration fee of the meeting be set by February of the year of the fall meeting in order to allow communicators to budget for the upcoming meeting.
9. That UMAC continue to maintain a strong relationship with United Methodist Communications to continue certification of Christian communicators and a productive relationship with conference communicators for the purpose of news, education and networking information.
10. That UMAC encourage other relationships among congregational communicators, conference communicators and communicators of the agencies and related institutions of The United Methodist Church.
11. That UMAC maintain a balance between seasoned communicators and communicators under the age of 40 in leadership roles.

These recommendations are made in addition to the suggestion being made to the bylaws of the organization.

Bylaws revisions

The Futuring and Strategy Task Force was not asked to review the entire bylaws but selected part of the once again before us. Our charge was to review parts of the bylaws highlighted here.

1. The part of the bylaws dealing with non-profit section 501(c)(3) status of UMAC (Article VII Organization) This is permissive language which gives UMAC the right to be established as a 501(c)(3) tax exempt non-profit organization (corporation). Amendments to the By Laws – Article V, Section 2. The also may be amended by mail ballot, at the discretion of the Executive Committee. The amendment shall be adopted if approved by two-thirds of the vote cast and ratified by the General Commission of Communications of The United Methodist Church.
2. Executive Committee – Article III, Section 3. United Methodist Communications shall appoint an ex-officio (without vote) member of the UMAC's Executive Committee to serve as liaison between United Methodist Communications agency and UMAC the professional association. This person shall serve a term of no more than four consecutive years.
3. And also in the same Article III, Section 3. That the: The General Commission on Communications of The United Methodist Church shall approve or ratify all elected members of the Executive Committee.

Here are recommendations and explanations of each recommendation. For parliamentary reasons that have caused these bylaws to be tabled more than once, I first move that the question be divided into, at this point, four questions and that each one of these questions be discussed and voted on one-by-one. This does not include all the changes in the bylaws before us, but considers the part of the bylaws recommendations assigned to the Futuring and Strategy Task Force.

Let us now consider each:

1. The part of the bylaws dealing with non-profit section 501(c)(3) status of UMAC (Article VII Organization) This is permissive language which gives UMAC the right to be established as a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation.

During this past year, the UMAC treasurer, in setting up a bank account on behalf of the organization, discovered a bank could not be found that did not require the official status of the organization. Currently, legally, UMAC has no official status beyond the organization's relationship with United Methodist Communications. As an organization, it will be difficult or nearly impossible to set up a bank account because we are not officially a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. For this meeting, we are indebted to United Methodist Communication for doing our banking through an account of UM Communications. In reality, we deposited our funds into a UM Communications lock box in Nashville.

Furthermore, we will have difficulty in relating to hotels and other vendors because we don't have a 501(c)(3) or other federal number, which has become the norm for businesses. For these reasons alone, I move that the United Methodist Association of Communicators establish its own 501(c)(3) as outlined in the proposed amend to the bylaws in Article VI section 1 and include sections 2 and 3, which deal with practices common to a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. On behalf of the task force, I move acceptance of this proposal. The officers and executive committee members are unprotected against liability because UMAC has no liability insurance covering the organization and its meetings. With a 501(c)(3) status, UMAC can obtain liability insurance to protect its leaders.

2. Article V, Section 2. The also may be amended by mail ballot, at the discretion of the Executive Committee. The amendment shall be adopted if approved by two-thirds of the vote cast **and ratified by the General Commission of Communications of The United Methodist Church.**

Because we are in a partnership with United Methodist Communications, especially with our UMAC-United Methodist Communications certification of Christian communicators, I believe it is important to have our bylaws ratified by the General Commission of Communications to show our partnership and to give those who require certification for their ministry and calling a tie to the General Church through one of its agencies. As a separate 501(c)(3), it might not technically be necessary, however such a tie directly to the General Church (General Conference) and one of its agencies is a valued partnership. For this reason, on behalf of the task force, I move for including this statement in the bylaws of the organization.

- 3 Executive Committee – Article III, Section 3. United Methodist Communications shall appoint an ex-officio **(without vote)** member of **the** UMAC's Executive Committee to serve as liaison between United Methodist Communications agency and UMAC the professional association. This person shall serve a term of no more than four consecutive years.

For many years, United Methodist Communication has had a liaison employee to relate with this organization and to relate to the directors of communication of our annual conferences. In reality, this is making official something UMAC has done for many years already. This is an especially important role to keep annual conference communicators in partnership with United Methodist Communications. This is not to say or mean that UMAC is not in relationship to other agencies of the church. UMAC is composed of many members who are on the staff of other general agencies beyond United Methodist Communications as well as other communication organizations beyond the general church structure such as United Methodist Reporter and Good News Television. As communicators, we are all committed to

the same task as is the church of “making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” Therefore, on behalf of the task force, I move that United Methodist Communications appoint an ex-officio member (**with vote**) to UMAC’s executive committee. Yes, the proposed document originally read without vote, however we believe because of UMAC’s unique relationship with United Methodist Communication, especially in the support of conference communicators, the agency needs to have a role in the decision-making process of the organization.

3. And also in the same Article III, Section 3. That the: **The General Commission on Communications of The United Methodist Church shall approve or ratify all elected members of the Executive Committee.**

If the bylaws of the organization are **ratified by the General Commission of Communications of The United Methodist Church**, We don’t see any need for the General Commission of Communications to approve or ratify the election of Executive Committee members, especially if the organization is a separate legal entity with its own 501(c)(3) non-profit status. We believe this was proposed to the bylaws following the financially indebtedness incurred by the organization. If the above suggestions become the policy of the organization, we don’t see a need for the approval or ratification of elected officers by the General Commission on Communications. This seems to be overreaching. We believe a stronger relationship between the organization and United Methodist Communications can be maintained without such approval or ratification. Therefore, on behalf of the task force, I recommend that this sentence NOT be added to the bylaws.

Other revisions to the bylaws

Even though the Futuring and Strategy Task Force was not charged with any other reviews of the bylaws, the task force wishes to make the following comments for guidance in review the rest of the bylaw revisions proposals and has discussed these changes with the chair of the bylaws committee.

Article I Membership

Section 3. A quorum shall consist of **those members at least ten (10) percent of UMAC** membership ~~present and voting at any meeting~~, provided all members shall have received notice of the time and place of the meeting 30 days prior to that meeting.

We support this revision proposed by the Bylaw Committee and move its approval.

Executive Committee Article III

Section 3. The President and Secretary shall be elected in **odd-numbered** years for a two-year term. The Vice President and Treasurer/Membership Secretary shall be elected in **even-numbered** years for a two-year term.

This suggestion was made by the executive committee in order to begin the cycle this year (2011) with a new president following the resignation of the current president. On behalf of the task force, I move for the approval of these changes.

Article IV Standing Committees

Section 1. The following committees shall be standing committees of the Association: Nominating Committee, Bylaws Committee, Helping Hand Scholarship Committee, Committee on Certification in Christian Communication, Awards Committee and Finance Committee.

This does not necessarily dismiss the committees deleted; it just does not name them as standing committees. The officers and executive committee still have the power to organize these committees or any committees they deem necessary. This document just affirms the necessary organizational committees for the existence of the organization as a corporation. On behalf of the task force we support the recommendation of the Bylaws Committee and move for the approval of these changes.

Article VI Organization

Sections 1, 2 and 3

Since **Article VI Organization** was in the proposed bylaws, I have not copied it to this report because of the length of the article and its three sections. This article contains the legal language that is needed to establish a 501(c)(3) status and states the non-profit religious purpose of the organization, defines the restrictions of a 501(c)(3) exemption and gives the assets of the organization to United Methodist Communications if the organization (corporation) is dissolved.

This language is particularly necessary if UMAC decides to pursue the 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status. If the members decide they don't want to be a 501(c)(3) organization, this section would need to be returned to the Bylaws Committee for major revision. On behalf of the task force, I move for the approval of these additions.

In conclusion

Much ground has been covered in this report, however much of my work with the officers and executive committee this year was putting UMAC back on course. Even though directions have been determined for the future, we have not yet addressed the larger question: Where do we go from here? I found that difficult to determine with basic organizational questions unanswered. Therefore, on behalf of the task force, I ask the future officers and executive committee members continue this task force another year to set a course for renewed vitality. We also recommend that half the members named to such a task force be under the age of 40. This recommendation would give the experience of older members mixed with ideas of younger members assurance for the future of the organization. I thank the members of the task force for their guidance and the officers and executive committee members for their openness in allowing me to be part of their conversations. I also thank the members of UMAC for all the support you have given to me in both professionally and personally during the past 28 years. This concludes our report.

Respectfully submitted by,

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for the Indiana Annual Conference, North Central Jurisdiction

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