

The National Federation of Asian American United Methodists (NFAAUM) met in convocation from July 29-31, 2010 in San Jose, California, its first national gathering in 11 years. The event was opened by a performance of San Jose Taiko, a world renowned drum group.



Over 200 representatives from the 10 sub-ethnic groups of the Federation: Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Formosan, Hmong, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, South Asian, and Vietnamese, gathered at Wesley United Methodist Church for the three day event. There were times for worship, celebration, study, networking, and visioning. NFAAUM is a recognized racial ethnic caucus in The United Methodist Church.

Several bishops, representing the Council of Bishops and Connectional Table, as well as staff of general boards and agencies also attended. Retired Bishop Elias Galvan brought a solidarity message from MARCHA, the Hispanic caucus. The General Board of Global Ministries, General Board of Church and Society, and the General Commission on Religion and Race provided financial support to enable so many to participate in the event.

As a highlight of the event, the Asian American bishops each delivered an update on the denomination and their frank assessment of the Asian American ministries in relation to the rest of the church.



Chicago Area's Bishop HeeSoo Jung reported the continuing loss of confidence in the primary church structures and their leaders. He added that after a lifetime commitment to the church, the people would not attend anymore, saying, "What's the point? What happens in those places is just disconnected from the realities of what people experience in their everyday lives." Bishop Jung noted that the general church had been looking into the matter with action plans such as the Ministry Study, the Rethink Church movement, and the Global Nature of UM study. The Call to Action Steering Committee study, an audit of the denomination authorized by the General Conference, is also underway. "We are

in this place of confusion where our maps no longer serve our needs not because of unsolvable world changes but that God of creation is calling us forth to imagine new things," Bishop Jung said. "We need to cultivate an environment of trust and expectation among people. As Asians, we need to be the relational presence in the dialogue, providing insight and guidance to the church. We need to be connected with other ethnic groups across the church. We need to attend to the whole UMC system, to join the vital movement of Christian witness to the world. We need to create new moments of dreaming about being God's people."

Bishop Grant Hagiya of the Seattle Area echoed Bishop Jung's remarks that there was a sense of urgency in the whole denomination to put a stop to the decline in membership and attendance. Bishop Hagiya discussed the environmental changes that led to internal changes in the denomination. Organizations reorganize as reaction out of fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. "Without the deep cultural understanding of changing situations, mere reorganization does not work," he said. Bishop Hagiya pointed out that as ethnic perspectives were assimilated in the dominant culture, the Asians were slowly losing their cultural identity and mission.



He praised the Asians' and Pacific Islanders' contribution to the denomination of their unique cultural values. "There is a need for a strong Asian American and Pacific Islander caucuses to be heard, to be there to advocate for their community, to be consulted when asked for direction and mission. We understand our cultural values, but we have to teach the general community what those are," he added.



Retired Bishop Roy Sano, the NFAAUM representative to the Connectional Table, gave update on the continuing discussion on the worldwide nature of the church. He also shared the joys and concerns around the table about the church. One joy is the gift to the church by Asian American congregations who by their culture and being bilingual are able to participate in the transformation of the world. "Bringing another language in the church is an apostolic gift," Bishop Sano reminded the convocation. The Convocation proposed an additional interpretation of The UMC logo (cross and flame), originally interpreted as two flames descending to a single point to celebrate the union of the Evangelical United Brethren and the Methodist Churches, one that would celebrate our mission rising into the future "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world with an ability to speak a language that is different than our own."

The convocation participants became engaged through Bible Study led by Rev. Mariellen Yoshino. They were reminded that they could spread God's love to others through making an extra effort to connect with others making a difference in the world. The convocation spent considerable plenary time educating the participants about the need for comprehensive immigration. The Rev. Bill Mefford of GBCS, Ms. Panravee Vongjaroenrat of UMCOR, and Ms. Bea Pangilinan of Asian Law Alliance, a local non-profit legal resource organization, talked about the ramifications of the current debate leading up to the proposed comprehensive immigration reform. They urged the church to be more engaged in the process and watching out for persons who would be trapped by the system.

Several convocation workshops focused on Ministries to the Younger Generation, Overcoming Cross-Racial/ Cross-Cultural Tensions in the Community, Mission initiatives in Asia, Justice and Vitality, Micro Financing, Pensions, Ordination and Ministry issues, Cross-Racial, Cross-Cultural Appointments, Homeownership Preservation, Peace with Justice Covenant Congregations, and Ways to Impact General and Jurisdictional Conference.

The convocation was also the culmination of several Asian American ministry meetings that were held earlier in the week including the Asian American Language Ministries Committee, the Asian American Pacific Islander Clergywomen Association, and the Western Jurisdiction Coordinating Committee on Asian American Ministries.

The convocation finally concluded with a banquet in honor of the Rev. Lloyd and Marion Wake. Also a pioneer in the Asian American Methodist movement and a stellar peace, justice and human rights advocate in behalf of the denomination, Rev. Wake, 88, has retired after 30 years as chair of the Asian American Endowment Fund Committee of NFAAUM. The Convocation also recognized Rev. Jungrea Chung, Mr. Jesse Chang, and Ms. Kathleen Thomas-Sano for their many years of dedicated and faithful service to the church and the Asian American community



Mr. Don Hayashi, of Vandalia, Ohio, is the current NFAAUM president.