

Divestment proposals die, ELCA communion OK'd: Decisions at the General Conference

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Debates on homosexuality may have captured the bulk of attention, but that's not all that United Methodists did at their General Conference in Fort Worth, Texas.

They also heard addresses from President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia and the father of Microsoft founder Bill Gates. Almost 1,000 lay and ordained delegates and their committees sifted through more than 1,500 proposed resolutions.

Among other actions taken, delegates:

- Voted down petitions seeking selective divestment of church funds from companies that profit from products or services that "cause harm" to Israelis and Palestinians or support "Israeli occupation of Palestinian land." A week before the meeting began, the United Methodist Board of Church and Society withdrew its petition calling for divestment from Caterpillar inasmuch as the company has denounced immoral use of its equipment and agreed to continue dialogues.
- Approved narrowly (416 to 384) continuation of its 35-year membership in the interfaith Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice.
- Overwhelmingly approved (864-19) a resolution to establish full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America that involves recognition of each other's ministries and other types of cooperation. The relationship will be realized if the same proposal is adopted by the ELCA in August 2009 in Minneapolis.
- Elected clergywoman Susan Henry-Crowe as the first female president of the Judicial Council, the church's top court. She and four others joining her on the nine-member court were on a slate of moderate candidates backed by the United Methodist Council of Bishops. A controversy erupted before the election after cell phones were given out at a luncheon by a conservative coalition, along with a list of

its preferred candidates for the council.

- Approved plans to reduce the number of bishops in four of the five geographic jurisdictions in the U.S. by 2012. Delegates also raised the mandatory retirement age for bishops from 66 to 68. The change reflects trends indicating that many people are living and working longer.
- Approved a \$462 million budget for the next four years.