

## Actor David Keith leads fight for child protection



David Keith

**NASHVILLE, Tenn. (UMNS)** — Actor David Keith wants United Methodists to be on the forefront of the struggle to protect children from abuse. Keith, who grew up as a United Methodist and is a member of First United Methodist Church in Knoxville, Tenn., is the campaign chairperson of Promise to Protect, a national organization dedicated to the protection of children

from abuse and neglect. The actor known for playing Richard Gere's buddy, Sid Whorley, in the movie "An Officer and A Gentleman" is committed to his role as a child advocate. "United Methodists are known for their love, they're not known for carrying a big stick. But I think it is time we showed people that we're as tough as any religion, and I want us to lead the way on this war," he said. The United Methodist Board of Church and Society, the denomination's social justice agency, endorsed the work of Promise to Protect after Keith addressed a board of directors meeting.

### Young clergy pray for church

**NASHVILLE, Tenn. (UMNS)** — The United Methodist Young Clergy Network is leading a 40-day prayer campaign for renewal, hope, and clarity of call for the church. In the campaign, which began May 18 on the organization's revamped web site, young United Methodist leaders from more than 20 annual conferences are asking God to guide them through the darkness of their times and to give them a vision for ministry and mission that brings honor to Jesus Christ. "Together, we will pray for the birth of new faith communities, the calling and development of new leaders within the denomination, the reduction

of global disease and our ministry with the poor," said Jennifer Smith, a certified candidate for ministry in the Alaska and Pacific-Northwest Conference.

### Demand for scholarships, loans skyrockets

**NASHVILLE, Tenn. (UMNS)** — More than twice as many college students applied for United Methodist scholarships this year as last year, and student loan requests poured in so quickly that the application site was closed in four days. The economy is one factor, but online applications and the "Five for Five" loan program probably were big factors in the increase, too, said Angella Current-Felder, executive director of the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry's Office of Loans and Scholarships. Scholarship application deadlines vary, but as of May 15, the last deadline, 8,892 applications had been received, compared to 3,675 the previous year. In 2008, 3,365 students were awarded about \$4.6 million in scholarships. The demand for loans increased dramatically in 2007 with the "Five for Five" program that doubled the amount students could borrow from \$2,500 to \$5,000 annually and dropped the interest rate to 5 percent. Demand increased again when online applications were started in May 2008. "We have more applications for both loans and scholarships than we have funds," Current-Felder said. And fewer funds are available because of the economy. "We suffered about a 20 percent loss in investments. For instance, we have one fund that had \$7 million, and now it has \$5.5 million," she said.

### Redeploy church resources, financial officers say

**NASHVILLE, Tenn. (UMNS)** — The United Methodist Church is rich in property and human resources, but its debts and obligations to health care are hurting the denomination's annual conferences. "We are starting to have a cash problem and we need a workout plan," said Barbara Boigegrain, top executive of the United Methodist Board of Pension and Health Benefits in a May 6 "state of the church" finance report to the Council of Bishops. The church needs to redeploy its resources, but creating a long-term plan calls for more information from annual conferences, she said. Boigegrain announced the formation of a Sustained Advisory Group from among conference treasurers, benefit officers and other actuarial officers to determine the fiscal health of the denomination's 62 U.S. annual conferences. According to Neil Alexander, top executive of the United Methodist Publishing House, church financial experts are working to discern the consequences of the global economic downturn, including the human and social costs.

### Hymnal revision stopped due to lack of funds

**NASHVILLE, Tenn. (UMNS)** — Work has been halted on a proposed new United Methodist Hymnal, making it the latest victim of the economic crisis. "The resources required to sustain a dedicated staff and pay for the planned activities are simply not available at this time," said Bishop Ernest S. Lyght, chairperson of the hymnal revision committee. The United Methodist Publishing House would have to invest at least \$2 million to develop a new hymnal and funding is not available from ongoing operations or from reserves, said Neil Alexander, president and publisher.

### Women still pioneers as senior pastors, survey shows

**NASHVILLE, Tenn. (UMNS)** — Women who lead large United Methodist churches are still pioneers, a new survey has found. Nine out of 10 lead women pastors at churches with more than 1,000 members are the first woman to lead those churches, according to a survey of 94 women and 300 men who are senior pastors of large congregations. The study, part of the Lead Women Pastors Project of the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry, also found that women have to work harder for acceptance and appear less likely than men to pursue appointments at large churches. But those women leading larger churches are building the foundation for greater changes in the status of women clergy, said project leaders who met recently in West Palm Beach, Fla.

### Uninsured may receive discount meds with PS Card

**NASHVILLE, Tenn. (UMNS)** — The United Methodist Association of Health and Welfare Ministries has joined forces with PS Card, a free prescription drug discount card that offers uninsured consumers access to discounted pricing for prescription drugs and diabetic strips, to offer economic assistance to many of the 32 million people served by the ministries annually. Free PS Card membership will be offered through more than 105 ministry-affiliated local outreach centers, including soup kitchens, job-training centers, and family service centers, as well as through the association's website ([www.umassociation.org](http://www.umassociation.org)) and many local congregations coast to coast. The card allows individuals with no prescription drug insurance to enjoy pricing discounts usually available only to members of benefit networks. ■