



# UMAAction

## BRIEFING

Winter 2004-5

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## CHURCH JURY FINDS HOMOSEXUAL METHODIST MINISTER GUILTY OF VIOLATING CHURCH LAW

**A** United Methodist Church trial jury found Beth Stroud, an ordained UM minister in Philadelphia, guilty of violating the church's prohibition against homosexual behavior. She was convicted of "engaging in practices declared by The United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teachings."

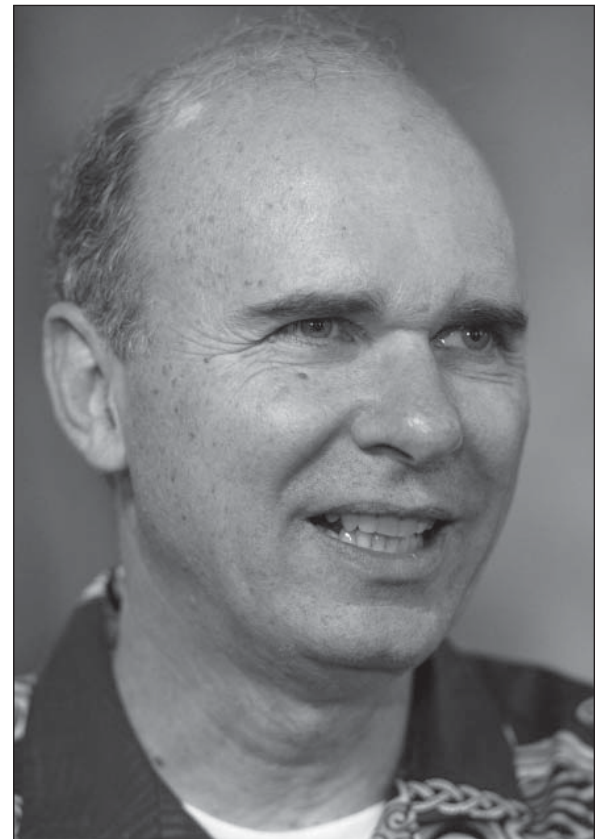
Stroud had publicly announced in 2003 that she was sexually involved with another woman. In her testimony she admitted a continuing sexual relationship with her female partner, who sat behind Stroud during the trial.

By 12-1 vote, the jury of United Methodist clergy from the East Pennsylvania Conference found Stroud guilty. Only nine votes were needed for conviction. By 7-6, they voted to remove her ministerial credentials. The two-day trial was held in December 2004 near Philadelphia.

Stroud became only the second United Methodist minister in 17 years to be defrocked by a church trial for being a practicing homosexual.

Stroud is appealing her verdict to the Northeast Jurisdiction's Appeals Committee. Meanwhile, she continues to receive pay from her Germantown United Methodist Church in Philadelphia as a lay employee. Her appeal does not appear likely to restore her ministerial ordination. The Judicial Council, United Methodism's supreme court, ruled last year that any clergy person found by a church court to be a practicing homosexual cannot receive an appointment by any Bishop.

The United Methodist *Book of Discipline* requires all UM clergy to "agree to exercise responsible self-control by ... fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness ..." and states: "The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed prac-



*Bishop Peter Weaver asked Stroud to live chastely, but she refused. (UMNS/Mike DuBose)*

...ticing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church." (Pars. 304.2 and 304.3.)

The prosecuting counsel for the church was the Rev. Tom Hall, who reminded the 13 jurors that they were not called to debate the issue of homosexuality. The church's policy on that

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## IN MEMORIAM: ED ROBB, COURAGEOUS REFORM LEADER

The Rev. Dr. Edmund Robb, Jr., noted United Methodist evangelist and co-founder of The Institute on Religion & Democracy and its United Methodist *Action* Committee, died in December.

Robb helped to found the ecumenical IRD in 1981 to emphasize the link between Christianity and democracy, to advocate for persecuted religious believers around the world, and to reform the social witness of U.S. mainline Protestant denominations that had become sympathetic to Marxist movements hostile to democracy and Christianity.

Robb was born in 1926. He served in the U.S. Navy during World War II and made a profession of Christian faith shortly after the war.

He was ordained a United Methodist minister and preached the Gospel for over 50 years as both a Pastor and an evangelist. He was a leader in many United Methodist renewal movements, including Good News, the Mission Society for United Methodists, the Confessing Movement, the Foundation for Theological Education, and IRD's United Methodist *Action*.


Robb served as IRD's Board Chairman for more than a decade. He and IRD challenged the political pronouncements of mainline church officials in the 1980s which were often harshly critical of the United States and its allies, while barely mentioning or even denying abuses

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**ACTION:** Please pray for Ed's wife, Martha Robb, for his son and UMAction Steering Committee member Rev. Edmund Robb III, and for the whole Robb family.

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in the former Soviet bloc. Robb was interviewed on national television programs, met with then-President Reagan, spoke around the world, and authored several books. His *Betrayal of the Church* exposed church support and funding for anti-democratic and often totalitarian movements.

"Many will feel his loss deeply—even as we rejoice in his Homecoming," said IRD President Diane Knippers. 

## GOOD NEWS: BISHOP'S WISE ADVICE ON MAKING DISCIPLES AND CHURCH GROWTH

Bishop Lindsey Davis, whose leadership has helped the North Georgia Conference to be one of the few growing areas for United Methodists in the U.S., spoke on church growth and Christian priorities during the United Methodist Congress on Evangelism in January.

Davis led a workshop for District Superintendents at the annual Congress in Atlanta. It was sponsored by the United Methodist Council on Evangelism and the General Board of Discipleship.

Even while United Methodism in the U.S. continues to lose about 50,000 members every year, Davis' Annual Conference has been gaining about 5,000-6,000 members a year.

"I want to be about the primary task of the church [evangelism], not things that are peripheral," Davis said. He said his recent experience

with cancer has made him focus on the "important things in life."

"I constantly remind the Annual Conference that the primary goal is making disciples and reaching people with God's love," Davis said. "The primary task is not to feed the hungry and clothe the naked." He stressed that "if we make disciples," they will do the work of helping the needy.

"We got our focus mixed up in The United Methodist Church," Davis warned. "We need to be passionate about the lost. I used to think that was a given. But we have a lot of people who don't care that much, both clergy and laity."

Davis said "most" Pastors do not know how to share Jesus Christ with the lost, and the church needs to teach them how to be evangelistic. "All kinds of people are out there

with deep questions about life" and 40 percent of Georgians are "un-churched."

"I don't think we're called to save The United Methodist Church," Davis said. "I think we're called to save the world."

Noting that he is taking his entire Cabinet of District Superintendents on a mission trip to Venezuela, Davis said, "The movement of God's spirit is happening in dramatic ways south of the equator. I want to be part of that."

Davis said new Christians in the Global South will "come back and minister to us and teach us not to be caught up in our affluence and decadence." They are a "wonderful corrective to the excesses in our culture."

*continued on page 3...*

## CHURCH COUNCIL CHIEF PROMOTES PARTISAN POLITICS

**N**ational Council of Churches (NCC) General Secretary Robert Edgar expressed sadness over President Bush's re-election and praised Democrats for their "liberal principles," while speaking at a post-election symposium in Washington, D.C., sponsored by the Center for American Progress, a liberal advocacy group.

"I hope we moderates and progressives are not too disheartened," Edgar said. He stressed that the switch of 70,000 votes in Ohio would have given a more favorable result.

Citing the fact that Senator John Kerry received more votes than Al Gore did four years earlier, Edgar said, "I have a great deal of hope coming out of this election."

Edgar (who is a former Democratic member of the U.S. Congress and an ordained United Methodist minister) said the Democrats need to "not waffle" about their liberal principles. He expressed hope that

moderate voters would turn against the Republican Party during the second Bush term.

The NCC that Edgar heads includes over 30 mostly Protestant denominations, whose memberships total nearly 45 million Americans. In recent decades the NCC has become more and more politically liberal. But respected polls consistently show that active members of NCC denominations are more likely to vote Republican than Democrat.

All mainline Protestant denominations have been losing members since the mid-1960s. Critics of the NCC say that partisan and liberal political activism by their church leaders has contributed to the exodus of more conservative church members.

Edgar enthused that over the last two years "progressive" religious leaders have been getting better organized politically in response to the war in Iraq. He boasted that liberal religious groups registered more than two million voters for the 2004 Presi-



*NCC's Edgar lamented Bush victory (UMNS).*

dential election. He specifically cited the work of his own NCC.

The United Methodist Church is the NCC's largest member denomination and gives the NCC nearly half a million dollars a year. ✚

### UMAction Comment

*The church and its leaders, including the NCC, should stay out of partisan politics. They should not endorse or oppose political candidates or a political party. The church must not allow itself to be used by any political faction—left-wing, right-wing, Socialist, Democrat, Republican, or any other. The church should make its social witness more effective by taking stands on political issues only when most Christians agree there is a clear Christian Scriptural position. This will help unite the church and stop dividing it.*

**ACTION:** Send Bob Edgar your courteous comments. While he is an official of the National Council of Churches, which includes The United Methodist Church, should he be speaking for or against Presidential candidates and political parties? 475 Riverside Drive, Room 880, New York, NY 10115. Fax: 212-870-2817.

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"I shudder to think where our church would be without their delegates at General Conference," Davis observed, referring to the key role international delegates have played in protecting the church's teachings on marriage and sexual morality.

Davis said his North Georgia Conference spends \$2 million a year for new church development. "It's

the best money we invest. We want to be Kingdom multipliers."

Davis said they have learned the best way to start new churches is not from scratch but through

partnerships with existing large congregations. The biggest challenge is finding the right Pastors for new churches—"you have to have apostolic leaders with fire in their belly." ✚

**ACTION:** Thank Bishop Lindsey Davis for his strong leadership of the North Georgia Conference. 4511 Jones Bridge Circle, NW, Norcross, GA 30092-1406. Fax: 678-533-1361. E-mail: bishop@ngumc.org. Ask your Bishop how much of your Annual Conference budget is used for new church planting and for training in evangelism.



# CHURCH LOBBY CHIEF LASHES OUT; DECREES OFF-THE-RECORD WORSHIP SERVICES IN METHODIST BUILDING

General Secretary Jim Winkler of the UM General Board of Church and Society angrily responded to UMAction's recent news coverage of weekly worship services hosted by the GBCS in the United Methodist Building chapel on Capitol Hill. He ordered that future services are "off the record" and that "no one will be permitted to attend worship as a reporter."

UMAAction's coverage of two chapel services, one led by retired Bishop Roy Sano and one led by Bishop John Schol of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, is at [www.ird-renew.org](http://www.ird-renew.org). (Or contact IRD at 202-969-8430 for a copy of the articles if you do not have internet access.)

Winkler called UMAAction and our news coverage "disgraceful," "twisted," "nasty," "destructive," "shameful," "demeaning," and full of "malice and hate." In fact, the news articles that upset Winkler are brief and accurate reports of statements by the worship leaders.

One article quoted Bishop Sano's remark that the command in Romans 13:11-14 to refrain from such things as drunkenness, debauchery, and licentiousness "sounds too moralistic for us enlightened progressives" and noted that this elicited chuckles from his audience. The article then raised this question: "Sano's comment makes one wonder if the Wednesday GBCS services are exclusively for and by people who identify with the 'progressive' (i.e. liberal) theology and politics of the GBCS staff." An advance copy of our article had been shared

with Sano, and his suggested clarifying changes had been largely accepted.

Sano's sermon largely focused on the worldwide devastation of HIV/AIDS, especially in Africa. He said "progressive-minded people" are uncomfortable with moral crusades, but "moralistic" warnings do have a place. He cited crack-addicted babies who suffer because of irresponsible decisions by parents.

Bishop Schol noted that "some of us are discouraged" by the recent defrocking of homosexual United Methodist minister Beth Stroud and "some of us are discouraged because of the recent elections." An advance copy of UMAAction's news article was also shared with Schol, who declined to provide direct comment.

The list of worship leaders for the weekly services reveals that the persons invited to speak are overwhelmingly from the liberal-revisionist faction of the church, such as Sano and Schol. For example, Wesley Seminary's Admissions Director, who played a prominent role in the pro-homosexuality demonstrations at the last General Conference, was a recent worship speaker. No defenders of the church's teachings on marriage and sex can be readily identified on the list.



*Winkler declared services "off the record." (UMNS/Erik Alsgaard)*

Winkler objected to the reporter's not participating in the services. But John Lomperis, who wrote the articles, was there as a reporter, not a participant, quietly taking notes during public services that were advertised on the Board of Church and Society's Website as open to all. His articles quoted only the worship leaders, not any comments or prayer requests by any of the worshippers.

UMAAction will comply with Winkler's off-the-record decree, even though we believe this is one more example of the Board of Church and Society's lack of accountability to the whole church. ✚

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**ACTION:** Check out the General Board of Church and Society's Website: [www.umc-gbcs.org](http://www.umc-gbcs.org). Do you think the Board's lobbying and political activities are appropriate for a church agency? Share your opinions with your Pastor, District Superintendent, and Bishop.

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subject has been decided by its governing General Conference. Instead, the jurors were to decide whether Stroud was accountable to the “standards we agreed to live by when we accepted our vows.”

The presiding judge, retired Bishop Joseph Yeakel, did not permit the defense to offer testimony attacking and seeking to overturn church law stated in the *Book of Discipline*. He said the church court was not empowered to judge church law.

However, Stroud’s defense urged the jury to ignore United Methodist church law in favor of an alleged higher “moral issue.” Stroud’s defense counsel, the Rev. Dennis Williams, also argued for a “more nuanced” interpretation of the clear language in the *Book of Discipline*.

But prosecuting counsel Hall told the jury that Stroud had “stepped over the boundaries” and they were called to “define the sacred trust” and affirm the church’s “doctrinal standards.”

Defense counsel Williams complained that the church was “talking about homosexuality,

UMAction Comment

*This false claim is often made by those who attack Christian sexual morality. Jesus was deeply concerned about all sin, including sexual sin, and He died to save all sinners. In Matthew 15:19-20 and Mark 7:21-23, Jesus condemned “fornication” as “evil” and said fornication (and many other sins) “defile a person.” In the New Testament, the word translated as “fornication” includes every kind of sexual intercourse outside a marriage of one man and one woman. In Matthew 19:4-6 and Mark 10:6-9, Jesus strongly affirmed that God “made them male and female” and thus “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”*

about which Jesus was hardly concerned.” He asserted, “There is no evidence that Jesus said anything on this matter.”

Bishop Peter Weaver, formerly of Philadelphia and now of Boston, testified he had counseled Stroud to consider the possibility of celibacy or transfer to another denomination. She rejected both options in favor of a church trial and an open challenge to United Methodist doctrine on marriage and sexual ethics.

Williams cited the Methodist Articles of Religion, which declare that clergy are not required to be single. “Is a partnered relationship not an option?” he asked.

Bishop Weaver responded that The United Methodist Church understands marriage to be the union of man and woman and its teach-

ings about “sexual ethics” do not accept a “partnered relationship.” Single people are called to be celibate, and married people are called to be faithful, he said.

Defense witnesses included Alfred Day, Stroud’s current Senior Pastor, and newly-elected Bishop John Schol of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, who was previously Stroud’s Senior Pastor. Schol called Stroud a “person of great integrity” and said she had disclosed her lesbianism to him when she was his Associate Pastor, but she was not in a “committed relationship at that time.” When asked by Hall how he, as a Bishop, would now respond to Stroud’s public avowal of lesbianism, Schol seemed reluctant to answer. In response to Hall’s second request, Schol conceded that, “Bishops are responsible for holding people accountable.”

In his closing argument, prosecuting counsel Hall said, “A good and effective pastor has engaged in behavior that is not appropriate for United Methodist ministers.” He said the problem is “her decision to live outside the boundaries we’ve agreed to live within.”

**ACTION:** Thank Bishop Peter Weaver for upholding United Methodist doctrine on marriage and sexual morality. PO Box 249, Lawrence, MA 01842-0449. Fax: 978-682-9555. E-mail: [bishopsoffice@neumc.org](mailto:bishopsoffice@neumc.org).

UMAction Comment

*This verdict helps The United Methodist Church remain faithful to Christ and His teachings. For 2,000 years the Christian Church has taught that sex is for a marriage between one man and one woman. The worldwide Christian Church continues to teach and believe this truth, except for a handful of declining Western denominations. Stroud and her supporters want to conform the church and God’s Word to current secular culture. They seek to replace the Gospel, which emphasizes self-denial and love of others, with a secularized and Westernized pseudo-Gospel of self-affirmation and “anything goes.” As appealing as self-worship might seem, the worldwide growth of faithful Christian churches and the rapid decline of revisionist churches show that most churchgoers prefer to worship Someone higher and greater than themselves.*

# UMAction BRIEFING

Winter 2004-5

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We tell you the painful truth about what has gone wrong with The United Methodist Church: unfaithfulness and far-left partisan politics by too many high church officials. We don't enjoy bringing you bad news, but we must tell the truth.

The good news is the growing movement to restore Scriptural faithfulness in our church. More and more United Methodists are working together for reform and renewal.

Don't leave! Our great Methodist heritage is too valuable to be abandoned. Join with us to help the United Methodist Church return to its Wesleyan roots as a growing, evangelical, Christian church living Christ's Great Commission: "Go and make disciples of all nations." (Matthew 28:19)

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Yes, I (we) want to help UMAction inform one million United Methodists and their families about the urgent need for church reform and faithfulness. Enclosed is my tax-deductible gift of:

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### YOUR OPINION, PLEASE!

1. Do you agree with the United Methodist jury that defrocked homosexual minister Beth Stroud?

Yes    No

2. Do you agree with Bishop Lindsey Davis that United Methodism needs **MORE** emphasis on evangelism and church planting?

Yes    No

3. Should NCC leader Bob Edgar and other church officials stay out of partisan politics and refrain from endorsing political candidates or a political party?

Yes    No