

UMAction

briefing



Judeo-Christian Standard for Lake Junaluska is Rejected

A proposal that the United Methodist Lake Junaluska Conference and Retreat Center rent only to groups upholding “Judeo-Christian ideals” has been rejected.

This decision was made in November by the Connectional Table of the United Methodist Southeast Jurisdiction, with Bishop Charlene Kammerer of Virginia presiding. The Table oversees agencies of the Southeast Jurisdiction, United Methodism’s largest region.

Over Labor Day weekend, Lake Junaluska hosted “Hearts on Fire,” a rally for pro-homosexuality activists campaigning against The United Methodist Church’s teaching that sex is only for marriage.

The United Methodist Church calls homosexual behavior “incompatible with Christian teaching.” “Hearts on Fire” used the Lake Junaluska facility for a rally against that standard and ignited great controversy. Some UM groups are reconsidering whether to hold future meetings at Lake Junaluska.

In response, the Property and Services Committee of the Connectional Table recommended that Lake Junaluska reserve “the right to refuse or cancel any group, even after they have begun, if their program and/or philosophy is inconsistent with the Judeo-Christian ideals inherent in this purpose.”

But the Connectional Table voted to delete “Judeo-Christian ideals” from the proposal and instead merely say that renting groups must be consistent with the “mission, vision and purpose” of Lake Junaluska.

Lake Junaluska staff, in consultation with the Connectional Table and its Executive Committee, will decide which rental applicants qualify. These same officials approved “Hearts on Fire.”

Lake Junaluska already had a policy that “groups using our facilities should have a mission compatible with Lake Junaluska Assembly and The United Methodist Church, its Discipline and Social Principles.” The new policy does not appear to change the old policy.

Earl Peacock, a North Carolina

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Bishops address the “Hearts on Fire” gathering last fall. (courtesy Western North Carolina Conference/Dawn Hand)

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UM Judicial Council Was Correct

Commentary by Brenda Menzies

The United Methodist Judicial Council recently ruled in the case of the Rev. Ed Johnson of Virginia, a pastor who was disciplined by his bishop for not admitting a self-avowed, practicing homosexual into church membership.

In overturning the bishop's actions, the court upheld existing church law, as determined by many General Conferences. There was nothing new in the decisions. Yet, there has been a flurry of debate and interpretations in the church.

"The 2004 Discipline invests discretion in the pastor-in-charge to make the determination of a person's readiness to affirm the vows of membership (¶217)," the Judicial Council said. "Paragraphs 214 and 225 are permissive and do not mandate receipt into membership of all persons regardless of their willingness to affirm membership vows."

We all recognize the need to reach out to our homosexual brothers and sisters in hospitality and ministry, and to be loving and affirming in the faith. That is exactly what Rev. Johnson was doing. A process of ministry was taking place. The individual whom he was counseling was not the one who brought the complaint and was actively participating in the life of the church.

The historical position and law of the church, set by General Conference, is that the "practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching." We are an inclusive church. All are invited to participate in the

Bishop Charlene Kammerer. (UMNS)



Brenda Menzies. (UMNS)

means of grace, which can transform and instill in our hearts a desire to live daily lives under the influence of our vows of membership.

We would not expect our ordained clergy to knowingly receive into membership someone who is in breach of the very church vows that he or she is proclaiming. Thankfully, the checks and balances in the United Methodist Church resulted in the Judicial Council upholding church law as determined by General Conference.

Hopefully, the clarity brought to the Virginia Annual Conference by the Judicial Council will enable Bishop Charlene Kammerer, the annual conference, the Rev. Ed Johnson, and his congregation at South Hill (VA) United Methodist Church to move forward in the unity of proclaiming the grace of Jesus Christ, being true to the Book of Discipline and to The United Methodist Church's written recognition of the authority of Scripture. ✝

ACTION: Please thank Brenda Menzies for this commentary she wrote for United Methodist News Service: brenamen@bellsouth.net. She serves on the UMAction Steering Committee.

THE ISSUE: INTEGRITY OF OUR MEMBERSHIP VOWS

UMAction supports the UMC Judicial Council's wise decision affirming the pastor's responsibility and authority to determine who is ready to become a member of the Church. This is long-standing Methodist law and tradition. See Riley Case's historic review at www.ird-renew.org.

The issue is integrity of membership and baptismal vows. We all are sinners in need of repentance and God's forgiveness and grace. Our UM baptismal vows include: "Do you ... repent of your sin?" Our UM confirmation vows include: "Do you truly and earnestly repent of your sins?" (UM Hymnal, Baptismal Covenant, pp. 34, 40, 46.) A person who replies "I do," knowing the vow is false, is dishonest. A church that knowingly accepts that false vow lacks integrity.

The pastor has authority to defer membership and help the person become ready for membership. The church should and does minister to non-members. Ministering includes help in acknowledging sin and overcoming sinful behavior. If the pastor's authority were taken away, United Methodist membership vows would be meaningless. The church and pastor would be forced to bestow membership upon an unrepentant person who advocates Satanism, belongs to the Ku Klux Klan, is a pedophile or engaged in any other disturbing possibilities.

When you hear someone attack the Judicial Council's decision, consider: How will United Methodism survive if our membership vows have no integrity?



UM Lobbyist Attacks President Bush


Chief United Methodist lobbyist Jim Winkler again lashed out at President Bush in a speech to a new United Methodist liberal group in Louisville, Kentucky in November. He also attacked Christian conservatives and equated them with radical Islamists.

“High crimes have been committed against the people of the United States and Iraq,” Winkler alleged. He charged, “The Bush White House systematically ignored the highest levels of Iraqi intelligence.” He opined, “As bad as Saddam Hussein was, he was not threatening.”

He sarcastically said, “We have United Methodist members who have started wars, and they have not been kicked out of the church,” an obvious attack on President

Bush and Vice President Cheney.

Winkler argued, “If you want to fight terrorism, we can by meeting basic needs and access to health care to the people of the region.”

Winkler is General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society, United Methodism’s official lobby office in Washington, D.C. 

ACTION: Check out the website of Winkler’s General Board of Church and Society: <http://www.umc-gbcs.org>. Express your opinion of how they are using your apportionment dollars for political lobbying.

Missions Agency Defends Secular Political Grants

Staffers of the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries responded to IRD’s complaints about the missions board’s grants to liberal political groups.

UMAction, a program of the Institute on Religion and Democracy, had e-mailed GBGM Directors about GBGM grants to “very divisive secular political organizations.” In response at the October directors’ meeting in Stamford CT, GBGM Deputy General Secretary Sam Dixon was unapologetic about these political grants.

In a sheet that Dixon distributed, the GBGM staff defended GBGM grants to various organizations that:


- Advocated removing “under God” from the Pledge of Allegiance.
- Advocated government-funded abortions.
- Opposed “heterosexist family values.”
- Called for President Bush to be voted out of office in 2004.
- Opposed free trade agreements.
- Gave money to the American Civil Liberties Union and a pro-homosexuality group.
- Advocated amnesty for some illegal immigrants.
- Opposed “a U.S. military response” to the 9-11 terrorist attacks.

GBGM directors were not given an opportunity to respond to the staff memo.

The UMAction message said several GBGM grants appear to violate the UMC *Book of Discipline*, par. 806.9, which prohibits use of “any United Methodist funds” “to promote the acceptance of homosexuality.”

UMAction said most of the other political causes supported by these grants are issues on which Christians are free to disagree. “However, given the great diversity of opinion on such matters within our United Methodist Church, it is extremely disrespectful to millions of fellow United Methodists to use their sacrificial apportionments for such grants, thereby forcing them to unwillingly pay for secular political causes that they do not agree with.”

GBGM’s total assets at the most recent fiscal year-end were nearly \$300 million. GBGM’s annual income is over \$140 million.

As of late 2005, GBGM was supporting only 242 full-time career missionaries, a number that continues to decline. Several directors were distressed about this decline but offered few solutions. 

ACTION: Share your thoughts about GBGM’s grants to secular political groups. Contact your own bishop and GBGM officials Randy Day (rday@gbgm-umc.org) and Sam Dixon (sdixon@gbgm-umc.org).

Wesley Professor Addresses Pro-Life Service

United Methodist theologian R. Kendall Soulen of Wesley Theological Seminary addressed the annual service of Lifewatch, a movement of pro-life United Methodists.

"I'm not an evangelical, a Republican, or particularly conservative on many issues," Soulen said. He declared that the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion violated America's belief that "all men are created equal."


Soulen spoke on January 23 in the chapel of the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill. The building is owned by the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, the denomination's official lobby office, which supports unlimited abortion rights. The board belongs to the "Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice," as does the United Methodist Women's Division.

Christians know that God is especially zealous on behalf of the ostensibly "unfit, unwanted, and undesirable,"

Soulen said. A society tolerant of routine abortion will become ever more "disfigured," he warned.

Soulen said *Roe v. Wade* denies that the unborn child is part of the human family, and conflicts with growing scientific evidence about the "biological continuity of every human life from conception to birth and beyond."

A new legal framework to replace *Roe v. Wade* should extend constitutional protections to every "member of the human family, regardless of stage of biological development, from conception onward," Soulen affirmed.

Such a framework would be "truer to the soul of the American experiment and to the theological convictions that most United Methodists share on the topic of abortion, because of our common conviction that all parties involved in every abortion are jealously loved by a righteous God," Soulen concluded. 

ACTION: Check out the website of Lifewatch, which hosted Dr. Soulen's talk: www.lifewatch.org.

Bouknight Declares Bright Future for UMC

Bill Bouknight, pastor of Christ United Methodist Church in Memphis, declared that a "slow but sure, gradual reformation of the United Methodist Church" is taking place.

Bouknight, past president of the Confessing Movement, spoke to the National Association of United Methodist Evangelists in Nashville in January.

"The United Methodist Church...is growing where the preaching is evangelical and orthodox...and declining where it is not," Bouknight said. He compared the membership of the relatively evangelical North Georgia Conference with the liberal California-Nevada Conference, which were equal in size 40 years ago.

Bouknight pointed out that North Georgia has since grown over 50 percent in membership and California-Nevada has declined by over 50 percent. "God doesn't speak with a southern accent," he laughingly commented. North Georgia's growth can be attributed to orthodox preaching, he said.

"The (UM) convoy is tacking in an evangelical direction," Bouknight said. He pointed to the Judicial Council, which continues to enforce the church's Scriptural stand on homosexuality. "They are strict constructionists


when it comes to the *Book of Discipline*," he noted approvingly.

Bouknight said future General Conferences will more accurately represent UM population, because of recent changes in how many delegates are elected from where.

He cited Bishop Timothy Whitaker's public criticism of Bishop C. Joseph Sprague's denial of Christ's full deity. Previously, bishops had rarely if ever publicly challenged each other on theology.

Bouknight also pointed to A Foundation for Theological Education (AFTE), which funds the doctoral studies of theologically orthodox (future) seminary professors.

"I'm more optimistic about The United Methodist Church than ever before in my 40 years of ministry," Bouknight proclaimed. He thanked United Methodist renewal groups such as Good News, the Confessing Movement, and *UMAction*.

Bouknight commended the work of *UMAction* in the reform of the UMC. "I've never found anything [it's published] that is factually wrong," he said, likening *UMAction's* work to that of the Old Testament prophet Elijah, whom King Ahab called the "troubler of Israel." 

UM Evangelism Professor Describes Church Growth

George Morris, Senior Professor of World Evangelism of the World Methodist Council, described what makes churches grow while receiving the 2005 Distinguished Evangelist Award from The Foundation for Evangelism in October.

Growing churches are committed to the authority of Scripture and the centrality of Jesus Christ while being open to the power of the Holy Spirit, Morris said. Declining churches are usually deficient in these areas.


“We United Methodists must do everything possible to maintain our historic Wesleyan conviction regarding the authority and primacy of Scripture,” Morris urged. “When Scriptural authority is surrendered a slow erosive process sets in.”

Morris warned that “a predictable tragedy resulting from the loss of Scriptural authority is the debunking of

our Christ-centered faith.”

The world exalts the “autonomous individual as the supreme reality,” Morris noted. But the church must lift up Jesus as the Way “even at the risk of being labeled arrogant and imperialistic.”

“Christians who have held to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and the importance of evangelistic outreach have always had to face their gallery of critics and name-callers,” Morris noted.

Morris rejoiced in “irrefutable evidence” that a renewed emphasis on the Holy Spirit is “ushering in a new evangelical age” among Methodists around the world, especially in the Global South. 

ACTION: Contact *The Foundation for Evangelism* and ask how you can get involved: <http://www.evangelize.org>

Be sure to visit WWW.IRD-RENEW.ORG to sign up for our Online Community!

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YOUR OPINION, PLEASE!

Should United Methodist facilities rent to groups opposed to traditional Christian teachings, such as the pro-homosexuality “Hearts on Fire” conference at Lake Junaluska last year?

- Yes, our church facilities should rent to any group.
- No, our church facilities should uphold our church’s standards.
- Not sure.

**Don't Leave Our Church!
Stay and Work for
Reform!**

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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lawyer, argued against the "Judeo-Christian" language, insisting that it could place Lake Junaluska in "serious legal jeopardy."

John Sherrer of Alabama responded that United Methodists should look to a higher authority. "We need to turn to the Bible for inspiration and holy living instead of to man's laws for intimidation," he said. "There's a cost for remaining faithful, and an even greater cost for not being faithful."

Alabama clergy Lester Spencer warned, "We're opening ourselves up to spiritual darkness." He noted that the "Reconciling Ministries" sponsors of "Hearts on Fire," according to their website, promotes acceptance of homosexual, bisexual, and transgender behavior in the church. ✝

ACTION: Please contact your Bishop now and courteously share your thoughts about permitting pro-homosexuality promoters to rent Lake Junaluska Center to attack United Methodist teachings. Find contact info at www.umc.org. Please pray for wisdom and guidance for members of the SEJ Connectional Table. Their names are here: <http://www.lakejunaluska.com/sejac/links.cfm?id=55>.

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