

UMAction

briefing



UNITED METHODIST LOBBYIST DEMANDS BUSH IMPEACHMENT

“Impeach President Bush!” urged Jim Winkler, head of the Capitol Hill-based United Methodist Board of Church and Society. Winkler was speaking in March in Washington, D.C. to an “Ecumenical Advocacy Days” rally for liberal religious activists, organized by the National Council of Churches and Winkler’s agency, among others.

Winkler, ostensibly a spokesman for 8 million United Methodists, whose numbers include both Bush and Vice President Cheney, said impeachment is the correct response to an “illegal war of aggression” that was “sold on lies.” He also cited the NSA’s “spy program,” which he insisted is “unconstitutional.” He called the “war ON terror a war OF terror.”

“These are actions far more serious than a...sexual indiscretion with a White House intern,” Winkler said, comparing Bush to Clinton, whose impeachment was never urged by Winkler’s agency. Had the Iraq war been led by John Kerry or Al Gore, Winkler surmised, the “Limbaughs and Gingriches of the world would be screaming for their impeachment.”

Winkler insisted that Bush’s removal was a religious imperative: “When I speak it is my desire to bring about the transformation of people and systems in order to advance the Kingdom of God even when it is painful.” Well known for its liberal political lobbying, Winkler’s Board of Church and Society, sits prominently across the U.S. Capitol and U.S. Supreme Court. It has a \$5 million annual budget and two dozen staffers.

“Now, we are widely hated and despised,” Winkler noted about the United States. “Despite the President’s insistence he was placed in office by God for this moment, there was nothing Christian in his response to September 11.” Winkler derided the “many intelligence agencies” in the U.S. that are actually “the secret police.” He also urged an 80 percent cut in U.S. military spending and insisted on nuclear disarmament.

Winkler concluded his speech. “Jesus Christ, if not a pacifist himself, would certainly resemble Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King in terms of his political strategies,” Winkler declared. “Like Gandhi and King, Jesus understood power and like them he built a power base. That’s why the Romans executed him.”

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Jim Winkler, head of the United Methodist Board of Church and Society.



Spring 2006

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United Methodists Urge More Evangelism

United Methodism has lost 3 million members in the United States over 40 years. The church's seminars and agencies have often neglected evangelism. But nearly 1000 United Methodists gathered in Nashville in January to urge more attention to it.

"I am ashamed at our lack of leading children to Christ," the Rev. Gary Exman told the United Methodist Congress on Evangelism. "I wish that we were more like Baptists in that way." A United Methodist evangelist and former president of the Council on Evangelism, Exman urged: "Spend money on the youth. We need to recapture the vision of Wesley."

Bishop William Willimon of Birmingham also addressed the Congress. "Wesleyan preaching is always about change, a lot of mine is about maintenance," he said. "Our Methodist system is biased towards maintenance."

Willimon insisted that "evangelism must stand up to the relativism introduced by pluralism." Otherwise, he warned, "Christianity becomes a personal view of the world, not necessarily applicable to everyone else."

Methodist theologian Billy Abraham of Perkins Seminary in Dallas urged boldness: "We need the recovery of nerve," he said. "Don't worry about all that is going on. Do the work of preaching and teaching the Gospel. Only God can change the human mind."

Other speakers at the Congress included Bishop William Hutchinson of Louisiana and Kirbyjon Caldwell, pastor of 14,000



The United Methodist Congress on Evangelism. (UMNS/Linda Green)

member Windsor Village United Methodist Church outside Houston. 

Action: Contact the United Methodist Foundation on Evangelism for more information about winning disciples to Jesus Christ: www.evangelize.org; P.O. Box 985, Lake Junaluska, NC, 28745; 1-800-737-8333.

Church Court Re-Affirms Membership Ruling

The United Methodist Church's Judicial Council, at its April meeting, refused to reconsider its earlier ruling in favor of a local pastor who would not grant immediate church membership to an unrepentant active homosexual in his congregation.

In a 5-4 ruling over the weekend outside Kansas City, the Judicial Council declined requests from the church's Council of Bishops and from the Bishop of Virginia to re-open the case involving the Rev. Ed Johnson of South Hill, Virginia. Johnson had been counseling a man in his congregation who was involved in an ongoing homosexual relationship. But the pastor would not grant immediate church membership because the denomination calls homosexual practice "incompatible with Christian teaching." Bishop Charlene Kammerer of Virginia placed Johnson on unpaid suspension when he would not change his decision in the matter. But last November, the Judicial Council returned Johnson to his pulpit with restoration of back pay, ruling that local pastors

have discretion about who is ready for church membership.

The Judicial Council did not rule then or now directly on the issue of homosexuality and church membership.

In her brief requesting reconsideration, Bishop Kammerer of Virginia claimed that the denomination's prohibition of discrimination based on "status" demands that membership cannot be denied based on "homosexual orientation or practice."

The brief from the Council of Bishops did not address the issue of homosexuality but insisted that local pastors cannot disobey a bishop's interpretation of church law.

United Methodism's *Book of Discipline* disapproves of homosexual practice, forbids ordination of active homosexuals, opposes same-sex unions, and affirms sex only within marriage. There is no specific language in the church law book about how homosexual practice might affect church membership. Applicants are

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Liberal United Methodists Rally Outside San Francisco

In January, about 200 church activists convened outside San Francisco for “Proclaiming the Whole Gospel,” which was advertised as “a gathering for progressive United Methodists.”

The United Methodist *Book of Discipline* prohibits the use of any annual conference funds “to promote the acceptance of homosexuality.” However, this event, which strongly promoted the acceptance of homosexuality, was organized by the California-Nevada Annual Conference’s Board of Church and Society and conference “Committee on Reconciliation.” Others co-sponsors were local chapters of the pro-homosexuality Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) and the Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA).

California-Nevada is one of United Methodism’s fastest declining regions in terms of membership and also one of its most liberal and “inclusive.” It has lost about 50 percent of its membership over the last 40 years.

Speakers included Jimmy Creech, who was defrocked for performing a same-sex union in 1999; Rev. Karen Oliveto, who performed numerous same-sex “weddings” in 2004; and Rev. Don Fado, who helped organize 67 of his fellow conference clergy to preside over a lesbian union in 1999. Many of Fado’s “Sacramento 68” clergy were present and received loud applause. Troy Plummer, Executive Director of RMN, led a workshop on how a church can affiliate with RMN.

In his remarks, Fado announced that over 50 retired clergy members of the California-Nevada Conference were now willing to “perform holy unions” for “same-gender couples,” in violation of the United Methodist prohibition on same-sex unions. A press release listing the names and locations of these clergy was distributed to conference participants.

Another speaker, Rev. Janet Wolf, praised these retired clergy for their “defiance of the church’s standards.” Wolf declared that opposing “homophobia” was at “the heart of the

Gospel” as well as at “the heart of our Wesleyan heritage.”

Oliveto thanked the audience for “seek[ing] justice for queer United Methodists.” Rev. Donna Fado Ivery, in her remarks, complained, “It is painful to be a member of the United Methodist Church as a progressive.” She promised help from a feminine deity, loosely borrowing language from the Gospel of John: “The world cannot accept Her, for it neither sees Her nor knows Her. But you know Her, for She lives with you and will be in you.”


Defrocked minister Jimmy Creech claimed, “There’s no basis in the Bible, in church history [or] in medical science” to oppose homosexual practice, ignoring scholarship to the contrary. Creech recalled the theological “universalism” that he acquired in his childhood. Having never heard about Hell in his church, he “figured everyone’s going to Heaven.” According to Creech, saving souls is not needed because “making the world a better place” is “a hell of a lot more important.” Creech reported that he was involved in actively lobbying America’s major gay rights groups “to get religion on their agenda.”

Elizabeth Brick, chairwoman of the Conference Committee on Reconciliation, denied the conference violated *The Discipline*. She explained “we aren’t about promoting homosexuality so much as we are about promoting the Gospel and ministry together with all persons regardless of sexual orientation; so if that’s a promotion of homosexuality—I don’t see it that way, and maybe other people will.”

Action: Contact Bishop Beverly Shamana of the California-Nevada Conference of the United Methodist Church and respectfully urge her to uphold *The Discipline*. E-mail: bishop@calnevumc.org. Address: Bishop Beverly Shamana, PO Box 980250; West Sacramento, CA 95798; Phone: 916 374-1510; Fax: 916 372-9062.

Demanding Bush’s Impeachment...

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Later, after igniting controversy, Winkler publicly “regretted” his impeachment call. But he said he did not “disavow it” but only was sorry that it had “distracted” from the overall anti-war cause. 

Action: A full text of Winkler’s speech can be found at www.umd-gbcs.org/timeline. Winkler’s email is: jwinkler@umd-gbcs.org. His address is Jim Winkler, General Secretary, United Methodist General Board of Church and Society, 100 Maryland Ave., NE, Washington, DC 20002.

Have you visited the IRD website recently?

For all the latest news and commentary on what is going on in the United Methodist Church, visit:

www.ird-renew.org

Church Lobby Agency Defends Iran From United States

The United Methodist Board of Church and Society is opposing any U.S. action against Iran's nuclear weapons program.

"I don't know about you, but I am astonished at the reports of a possible United States attack on Iran," declared Jim Winkler, general secretary of the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, at a speech in Washington, D.C. at its directors meeting in April.

Winkler found good reasons why the Iranian Islamist theocracy should not disarm. "As bad as the Iranian regime is, imagine what they must think when they see that the country to their east, Afghanistan, and the country to their west, Iraq, has been invaded and conquered by their archenemy, the United States," Winkler explained. "If Canada and Mexico had been taken over by a more powerful country than the United States, I figure we would be frantically trying to develop some kind of super weapon right now no matter how much the rest of the world protested."

"Let me say up front that I am no fan of the present regime in power in Teheran," Winkler said, citing the Iranian president's threats against Israel and denial of the Holocaust. "I don't want Iran to have nuclear weapons. In fact, I don't want any country or group any where to have nuclear weapons or weapons of mass destruction. At the very least, I support a nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East."

Chillingly to Winkler, the U.S. is now "saber-rattling," and "polls indicate a majority of Americans favor a military confrontation" with Iran, despite their having "now turned against the stupid and disastrous war in Iraq." He sarcastically surmised that "the only scriptural warrant I can find for carrying out a preventive attack on Iran is if you desire to hasten the 'end times,' because surely this leads us in that direction."

A resolution approved by directors of Winkler's agency supported the thrust of Winkler's comments. It impartially urges the "governments of the U.S. and Iran to moderate their language and begin constructive conversation about a peaceable future," without making any moral distinction between the Iranian theocracy and U.S. democracy. The resolution urges a "nuclear-free zone," in the Middle East, which would disarm Israel. There was no mention in the resolution about the Iranian regime's suppression of human rights, including Islamic laws that target women and the country's small Christian minority. ✚

Action: *In contrast to political church agencies like the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, Iranian Christians International, based in Colorado Springs, Colorado, focuses on offering the Gospel to Iranians, both in Iran, and outside their country. Check out their website: www.iranchristians.org.*

Church Council Faults "Da Vinci Code" For Not Being Liberal Enough

Many Christians have challenged *The Da Vinci Code* for proposing that Christianity is a hoax perpetrated on the world for nearly 2000 years. The liberal National Council of Churches (NCC) is also concerned about the new movie, because it overlooks Jesus' supposed endorsement of its left-leaning political themes.

"Real-life scenarios are present daily that contradict the Gospel of Jesus Christ," the NCC announced in a special Da Vinci news release. "Too often it is those issues that have far-reaching affects on people's lives, and their faith, but they go without any word of protest or rebuttal—issues like war, poverty, racial and economic injustice, the devastation experienced after hurricanes and tsunamis and the negative impact of global climate change, to name a few."

The United Methodist Church is the NCC's biggest member denomination.

The real Jesus "cared for creation and called us to stand up for peace and justice in the world," according to the NCC. Its

latest causes include opposing the U.S. military presence in Iraq, demanding an increased minimum wage, opposing U.S. "torture" of war on terror detainees, and demanding U.S. compliance with the Kyoto accord. Apparently Da Vinci fails because it neglects to include Jesus' stance on these issues.

Of course, most Christian objections to *The Da Vinci Code* focus on its central thesis that the early church, coerced by the Emperor Constantine, took Jesus the man and turned him into Jesus the God. At the same time, according to *Da Vinci*, the church imposed the canon of Scripture, suppressing



Da Vinci Code...

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all the Gnostic gospels in favor of Matthew-Mark-Luke and John. The real Jesus, we are told, married and had children with Mary Magdalene. But the male-led church denied the existence of Mrs. Jesus, not wanting to acknowledge her mystical feminine powers and dilute its own preferred patriarchal emphasis.

According to *Da Vinci*, the church has kept all of this under wraps for centuries through coercion, blackmail, and murder, until *Da Vinci's* hero unravels it all.


Da Vinci denies Christianity's understanding of the deity of Christ, salvation, the church, and the Bible. But none of that is specifically mentioned in the NCC's public statement. "In the midst of the media frenzy, let us not forget that *The Da Vinci Code* is a work of fiction that does not accurately depict the life and ministry of Jesus or the traditions of the Church," the NCC noted. But the distortions that concern the NCC are that *Da Vinci* leaves out Jesus' supposed social justice advocacy.

"We pray that those who see this movie will want to know more about Jesus Christ," the NCC declared. "And, we call on our Christian brothers and sisters to uncover distortions of

biblical truths not only in entertainment but in policies and actions perpetuated in our society every day. Neither *The Da Vinci Code*, nor any other work of fiction, will alter the beliefs, mission or work of individual churches or the National Council of Churches. We will not be diverted from the gospel imperative to care for creation, do justice and work for peace regardless of what the distractions of current culture may offer."

The NCC did note with hope that *Da Vinci* will provide "an opportunity for all Christians to share their faith when friends ask what they think about the movie." And it referred to "true biblical teachings" without explaining what they are.

Vince Isner, who directs the NCC's Faithfulamerica.org political advocacy project, was openly dismissive about the traditional church doctrines that *Da Vinci* questions.

"When a novelist plays fast and loose with the facts it's called entertainment," Isner wrote. "When religion plays fast and loose with the facts it's called doctrine." 

Action: Check out the NCC's website at www.nccusa.org. Vince Isner's email is: visner@faithfulamerica.org. His address is: Faithful America, 110 Maryland Avenue NE, Suite 108, Washington, DC 20002; fax: 202 543-1297.

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YOUR OPINION, PLEASE!

Should United Methodism's chief lobbyist in Washington, D.C. advocate for the impeachment of President Bush?

Yes!

No!

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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Church Court...

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expected to "truly and earnestly repent of [their] sins."

The Virginia bishop asserts that church membership should be automatically available to any applicant willing to take the vows. Rev. Johnson subscribes to a more traditional Wesleyan view of "regenerated" membership in which church applicants are expected to show evidence of Christian belief and practice. Earlier this year, Johnson was informed that Bishop Kammerer would be relocating him to a different church in June, even though Johnson's church had requested that he remain.

"UMAction Chairman David Stanley responded to the controversy: "UMAction supports the 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." 

Action: Please thank the United Methodist Judicial Council for resisting great political pressure to reconsider the Johnson decision: Contact: Secretary Keith Boyette. Email: judicialcouncil@umc.org. Address: Rev. Keith Boyette, 10501 Plank Rd., Spotsylvania, VA 22553.

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