

# UMAction

briefing



## Will United Methodists Learn From Episcopal Church's Implosion?

In 2003 the Episcopal Church USA elected its first openly homosexual Bishop and approved a local option for the "blessing" of same-sex unions in local churches.

This year the Episcopal Church elected a new Presiding Bishop who supports active homosexual clergy and same-sex unions.

The results? Tens of thousands of Episcopalians have left their denomination. Approximately 100 congregations have departed, with many more set to follow. Many congregations and several whole dioceses have requested alternative oversight, sometimes from faithful Anglican Bishops outside the United States.

More than one-third of local parishes (37 percent) reported in a national 2005 survey that they experienced "very serious conflict" among their members.

In a recent survey in the Diocese of Texas, 71 percent of leaders (both lay and ordained) said that "the direction of [the Episcopal Church] was not consistent with their personal Christian beliefs." Consequently, only one-third of the respondents (both lay and ordained) wanted to remain within the Episcopal Church.

Traditional Episcopalians hope that out of the chaos a new faithful Anglican church in the United States will arise, with help from overseas Bishops.

The Episcopal Church's upheaval is worsening as the denomination moves away from traditional Christian teachings.

Unlike the Episcopal Church, The United Methodist Church has biblical positions on marriage and sexual ethics. United Methodism affirms marriage only between husband and wife, calls homosexual practice "incompatible with Christian teaching," affirms "the importance of both fathers and mothers for all children," and supports "laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman" (*Book of Discipline*, pars. 161A, 161C, 161G).

United Methodist candidates for ordained clergy must commit to "fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness." "Self-avowed practicing homosexuals" cannot be ordained, and same-sex unions are prohibited (*Book of Discipline*, pars. 304.2, 304.3, 311.3f, 341.6, 2702.1).

Many bishops, clergy, church agency staff and seminary faculty are lobbying the United Methodist Church to follow The Episcopal Church's course in affirming homosexual behavior. ✚

**ACTION:** Please tell your pastor and your local church's lay member of the Annual Conference that United Methodism must NOT follow the Episcopal Church's destructive path. Ask them to defend United Methodist teachings about sexual ethics help elect delegates to the UMC 2008 General Conference who will uphold this stand. Your Annual Conference will elect its General Conference delegates in the Spring of 2007.

## Fall/Winter 2006

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Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop, The Most Rev. Katherine Jefferts Schori. (Courtesy AAC)



## UM Bishop Approves of Same-sex Unions

United Methodist Bishop Ann Sherer of Nebraska has approved a Nebraska church's plan to evade the United Methodist Church's prohibition against same-sex unions by UM clergy and churches.

Sherer hailed the church's evasion as an "inclusive gesture" and told the Omaha newspaper that she "rejoiced" over the church's new policy of following the letter of church law while violating its spirit.

Under the plan by First United Methodist Church in Omaha, the church will offer counseling to same-sex couples, whose union ceremony will be officiated by a lay person at a location outside the church. Then a worship service with the same-sex couple will be celebrated in the church.

"What First United has done is stay within the discipline of The United Methodist Church and honor what the church has asked of them, and I'm deeply appreciative of that," Bishop

Sherer told a reporter.

In 1997 the Rev. Jimmy Creech conducted a same-sex ceremony at the same church, in violation of the United Methodist *Book of Discipline*. He was removed from the church and was eventually defrocked after conducting a second same-sex ceremony elsewhere. Hundreds of members left First UM Church in protest against Creech's action and many of them started a new United Methodist congregation that upholds traditional United Methodist and Biblical beliefs. ✚

**ACTION:** Please respectfully ask Bishop Ann Sherer to uphold the clear United Methodist and Christian stand opposing same-sex unions and affirming marriage as a union of one man and one woman. Nebraska United Methodist Conference, 2641 N. 49th Street, Lincoln, NE 68504. [bishopsherer@umcneb.org](mailto:bishopsherer@umcneb.org). Fax: 402-466-7931.

## Bishop Willimon Criticizes Conservatives and Liberals

United Methodist Bishop Will Willimon took aim at many targets, including both liberals and conservatives, in his recent speech for *Christian Century* magazine in Chicago.

Willimon criticized Episcopal New Age mystic Marcus Borg's "list of vague principles supposedly at the heart of Christianity," the Episcopal Church's new Presiding Bishop's description of "Jesus as a vehicle," the Jesus Seminar's denial of the Bible's truthfulness, and Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong's denials of Christ's miracles. Willimon said they all miss the Gospel's point. "There is no 'progressive' Christianity" because "Jesus is the end of history," he said.

Because of the Trinitarian nature of God, Willimon questioned President Bush's statement that "Muslims worship the same God" and the way in which others speak generically of the "three Abrahamic faiths." Willimon acknowledged that the triune God "can work in the lives of even those who don't believe in Him." But he observed that "Muhammad said things Jesus never would have said."



Bishop Will Willimon. (file photo)

Willimon said he had "no interest" in recent books by liberal Columbia University Professor Randall Balmer and National Council of Churches (NCC) General Secretary Bob Edgar that warn against the alleged danger of "evangelicals taking over the country." The Bishop opined that evangelical Christians are simply speaking out now where their voices had previously been excluded, just as women have gained their voice after earlier exclusions.

The United Methodist Church "has excluded two generations from our membership," Willimon lamented about ongoing membership decline. Recalling his experience as a campus minister, Willimon noted that young people "flee mainline Protestantism like the plague." But they like the adventure of "getting jerked around" by the active, unpredictable Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. ✚

**ACTION:** Go to [www.ird-renew.org](http://www.ird-renew.org) and get the more complete report of Bishop Willimon's speech. Discuss it with your Sunday School class or Bible study group.

## UM Lobby Agency Funds Pacifist Event

Several United Methodist theologians, bishops, pastors, and peace activists recently argued that Christians should reject military force in all circumstances. They made this claim at a conference titled “Building a Wesleyan Theology of Peace for the 21st Century,” held this Fall in San Francisco.

The United Methodist *Social Principles* reject “war as an instrument of national foreign policy” but also say that war should “be employed only as a last resort in the prevention of such evils as genocide, brutal suppression of human rights, and unprovoked international aggression” (*Book of Discipline*, par. 165C). However, nearly all the speakers at this conference suggested that war was unacceptable in all circumstances—ignoring or rejecting the second half of the UMC position.

The conference was sponsored by Methodists United for Peace with Justice and was funded in part with \$2,500 from the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society.

Retired UM Bishops Dale White, Roy Sano, and Forrest Stith preached resistance to all war for any reason.

“War is not reasonable. It is an ultimate illustration of evil, so why do we continue to blunder into war?” Bishop White asked.

Bishop Sano admitted that Methodism’s founder John Wesley believed in traditional Christian just war teaching. But Sano asserted that “When we continue to appeal to John Wesley we are appealing to a certain ethnicity. Part of his appeal is he represents a theology and part of that theology comes from a white world and a male.” Sano said Wesley rationalized it was right for Americans to revolt against England, and Sano implied Wesley’s alleged belief was wrong.

“We are now being led by the Roman gods of iron and fire,” Sano said.

Dr. Richard Hays, a New Testament Professor at UMDuke Divinity School, also rejected war. But he admitted that governments may have a role in punishing “evildoers.” He said “deciding the role of authority, whether

Christians are to participate in exercising that power of punishing evildoers, is an enormously difficult problem.”

In a later interview, Hays said some conference presentations were “problematical.” “I thought [some of the presentations] may have underestimated the authority of Scripture for Wesley,” he said. ✚



Retired Bishop Roy Sano. (UMNS)

**ACTION:** Respectfully ask Bishop Roy Sano why the UM General Board of Church and Society funded a conference that promoted one half of the UMC’s position on war but ignored the other half. Bishop Roy Sano, 100 Maryland Ave., NE, Washington, DC 20002; fax: 202-547-6272; [bishopsano@umc-cob.org](mailto:bishopsano@umc-cob.org).

## UM Seminary Event Touts Liberal Politics

Less than a month before the November election, United Methodist-affiliated Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta hosted a “Faith, Politics, and Policy” conference that mostly espoused liberal political themes.

Candler receives about \$1 million a year from The United Methodist Church.

Speakers included liberal religious activist Jim Wallis, former Atlanta mayor Andrew Young, United Methodist Bishop Minerva Carcaño of Phoenix, Atlanta newspaper editorialist Cynthia Tucker, and New York Riverside Church Pastor James Forbes.

Bishop Carcaño denounced Arizona’s Proposition 200, which would require the state to withhold benefits from illegal aliens and verify the citizenship of voters. She claimed it “fostered an extreme racism in Arizona” and “brought fear to tiny

little Latino children.”

American economic policy creates a “consumerism of a global economy gone mad,” Carcaño claimed. Too often citizens and governments are overly concerned with borders and self-interest, she complained. Carcaño has been outspoken against proposed crack-downs on illegal immigration.

Jim Wallis complained, “Politics is failing to solve the biggest issues of our time,” which Wallis identified as hunger, poverty, and the strife in Sudan’s Darfur region. He accused the Bush Administration of ignoring these issues in favor of war.

Andrew Young, former Atlanta Mayor and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, said he was “intellectually suckered” into not opposing President Bush at the outset of military action in

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## UM Missions Board Appoints “Missions” Person To Abortion Group

The New York-based United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) has appointed a “missions” person to work for Planned Parenthood, the largest abortion provider in the USA.

Susan Burgess, according to GBGM’s website, is commissioned by the GBGM deaconess program as an administrative assistant at a Northern California affiliate of Planned Parenthood.

Planned Parenthood supports unrestricted abortion on demand, directly provides abortion services, and promotes other political causes.

Like its parent body, Planned Parenthood-Shasta Diablo (where Burgess works) is deeply involved in far-left political activism. Last year it lobbied in favor of a bill to “legalize

same-sex marriage.” It also defends partial-birth abortion, which the United Methodist *Social Principles* condemns (*Book of Discipline*, pars. 161C and 161J). Other political activities of Burgess’s employer include maintaining an “Action Fund” to help elect politicians who oppose any restriction on abortion and working against a ballot initiative that would have required its clinics to notify the parents of minor girls before performing abortions on them. ✚

**ACTION:** Respectfully ask GBGM General Secretary Randy Day why his agency has commissioned a Planned Parenthood employee as a “missionary.” GBGM, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115. [rday@gbgm-umc.org](mailto:rday@gbgm-umc.org). Fax: 212-870-3748.

## Church Council Uses UM Dollars for Left-Leaning Politics

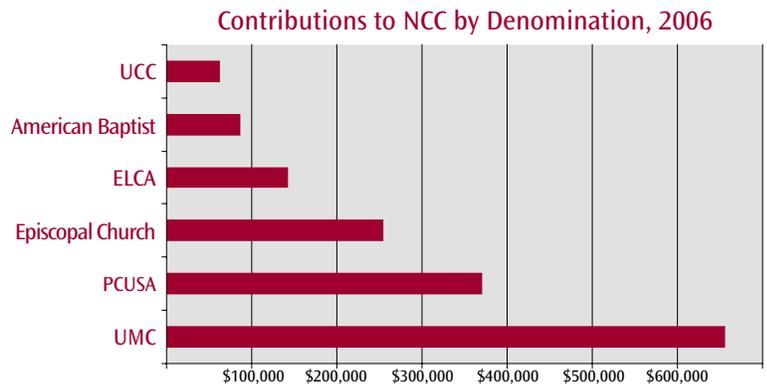
The United Methodist Church is the largest church contributor to the National Council of Churches (NCC) this year, giving over \$600,000.

In its Fall meeting the NCC Board condemned Wal-Mart for business practices it says run counter to labor, women’s rights, international justice, and environmental protection. The NCC board also adopted a global warming statement calling for the United States to support “mandatory measures that reduce the absolute amount of greenhouse gas emissions.”

An NCC resolution on Iraq calls for the U.S. to “immediately begin to develop a plan for the phased withdrawal of American and coalition forces from Iraq, which should include a timetable for an expeditious final troop withdrawal.” The resolution insists that the justifications for the war were “false or ill-considered.”

Church World Service, the NCC’s relief arm, updated the NCC board on its campaigns to lift U.S. travel and export restrictions to Cuba and to work with the Cuban Council of Churches. The United States is proposing to bar organizations from offering any support to Cuban government-directed groups except for in-kind donations of food or medicine

Besides promoting political and social causes, the NCC Board also examined its budget. The NCC now gets more funding from liberal foundations than from church denominations.



Its largest church contributor so far this year is The United Methodist Church (\$656,118), followed by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (\$370,574), Episcopal Church (\$254,526), Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (\$143,025), American Baptist Church (\$86,000), and United Church of Christ (\$62,800).

All of these mainline denominations are losing members dramatically. But an NCC strategic plan for the future made no mention of evangelism. In response, the Rev. Rothang Chhange of the American Baptist Church expressed concern that some believe the “NCC doesn’t care about evangelism.” ✚

**ACTION:** Ask your local church’s Administrative Board or Church Council to discuss and take a stand on whether The United Methodist Church should continue giving money to the National Council of Churches.

## Good News: African United Methodism is Growing

**A**frican bishops told the United Methodist Council of Bishops about unprecedented growth among African churches. Meeting in Mozambique, it was the first Council of United Methodist Bishops meeting ever held outside the United States.

United Methodism has spread like wildfire across Africa, the bishops said.

The West Angola Conference had 152,000 members last year and now has 166,000, West Angolan Bishop Gaspar Joao Domingos said in an interview.

United Methodist membership in Mozambique has jumped from 23,000 in 1988 to 180,000 in 2006, said Bishop Joao Machado.

There has been 60 percent growth in United Methodist membership in North Katanga since he became bishop 10 years ago, said Bishop Ntambo, adding that growth began about 20 years ago.

“Last year in my annual conference there were 54 new churches planted, bringing a total to 900 churches and 700,000 members,” he said.

Most African bishops interviewed for this story said they do not fully understand why their churches are growing at such a fast rate, although Liberian Bishop John Innis said his church is growing “at leaps and bounds because of the love of Jesus.”

“All you need to do is continue improving lives,” to encourage church growth, he said.

In contrast to the African churches, United Methodism in the United States has lost 3 million members and is currently declining at about 70,000 members per year. 

**Action:** please pray for continued blessing on our African brothers and sisters in the United Methodist Church.

Be sure to visit [WWW.IRD-RENEW.ORG/UMACTION](http://WWW.IRD-RENEW.ORG/UMACTION) for the latest news!

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### YOUR OPINION, PLEASE!

Should United Methodism follow the Episcopal Church in approving of active homosexual clergy and same-sex unions?

- Yes! Let's follow the Episcopalians.
- No! Let's be faithful to our traditional biblical beliefs.
- 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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*briefing*

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The Institute on Religion & Democracy  
1023 15th Street NW, Suite 601  
Washington, DC 20005-2601

(202) 682-4131  
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Iraq in 2003 because he had always pondered what the world would have looked like had Adolf Hitler been stopped before 1939. "Bush is dangerous because you like him, you want him to be right, you want him to succeed," Young asserted. He charged, "Bush and that crowd are seductive."

Young said that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad made him "hopeful" because they allegedly speak for the voiceless in their countries.

University of Alabama Professor Susan Pace Hamill condemned the Bush Administration's tax policies. "People are too greedy to pay their fair share on their own accord," she said. Supporters of tax cuts, she declared, "sold out for a few pieces of silver."

The Rev. Dr. James Forbes, Jr. of famously liberal Riverside Church in New York City said: "The war is about oil and influence in the region." 

**ACTION:** Ask Candler School of Theology Dean Russell Richey why this conference was so one-sided. Candler School of Theology, 202 Bishops Hall, Atlanta, GA 30322. [rrichey@emory.edu](mailto:rrichey@emory.edu). Fax: 404-727-3182.

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