

UMAction

Briefing



United Methodist-Endorsed Coalition Defends Partial-Birth Abortion

The Washington-based Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) has denounced the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling upholding the U.S. law that prohibits partial-birth abortions. The United Methodist Women's Division and the United Methodist Board of Church and Society both belong to RCRC, even though The United Methodist Church officially opposes partial-birth abortion.

Delegates to the 2000 UM General Conference, by an overwhelming margin, voted to add this sentence to the *UM Social Principles*: "We oppose the use of late-term abortion known as dilation and extraction (partial-birth abortion) and call for the end of this practice except when the physical life of the mother is in danger and no other medical procedure is available, or in the case of severe fetal anomalies incompatible with life."

However, RCRC quickly denounced the Supreme Court's decision as "a devastating setback" and "the thing we've most feared." RCRC is comprised of liberal church agencies that support its extreme pro-abortion position. After lobbying against passage of the ban, RCRC filed a Supreme Court brief urging that the law be struck down.

In partial-birth abortion, premature labor is induced, and once the partially-born baby is just inches away from a complete birth, the baby's skull is pierced with scissors and its contents are vacuumed out. Many of these babies are capable of surviving outside the womb. One delegate at the 2000 General Conference explained that "it doesn't matter whether you're pro-abortion or anti-abortion, pro-life or pro-choice. This is about a procedure that should not go on in a humane society."

Many of RCRC's pronouncements have focused on the ban's lack of a broad "health" exception. However, the 2000 UM General Conference rejected an attempt by delegate Sally Dyck (now Bishop of Minnesota) to add such a "health" exception to the UMC position.

Another delegate, citing a statement from the American Medical Association, pointed out that this late-term procedure "according to the medical community, is not necessary at any time for the health of the mother" but that Dyck's vague "health" exception could be applied to emotional stress and

continued on page 6...

Dr. LeRoy Carhart, board member of the RCRC, and provider of late-term abortions. (KRT/Chuck Kennedy)



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Inside:

- GOOD NEWS: Bishop Calls United Methodists to Stronger Emphasis on Christian Doctrine 2
- UM Lobby Board Opposes Church Position on Marriage 2
- Church Official Condemns All Handguns . . 3
- Far-left Methodist Federation for Social Action Targets 2008 General Conference . . 3
- United Church of Christ Continues Membership Plunge by Abandoning Biblical Christianity and Supporting Same-Sex Unions 4
- United Methodist Membership Explodes in Africa 5

GOOD NEWS: Bishop Calls United Methodists to Stronger Emphasis on Christian Doctrine

Preaching during the United Methodist Congress on Evangelism, Bishop Scott Jones of Kansas declared that The United Methodist Church needs a stronger emphasis on Christian doctrine if it is to be successful in evangelism. The United Methodist Church in the United States has lost 3 million members over the last 40 years.

The church desperately needs to teach doctrine, particularly Christology, “because we are facing a culture that increasingly does not know or believe that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to his Son,” Bishop Jones said. To be capable of evangelism, “we must answer the question: who is Jesus?” He recalled John Wesley’s own evangelistic focus and famous instruction for Methodist preachers: “You have nothing to do but save souls.”

Bishop Jones urged United Methodists “to continually hone your preaching, your music, your worship, your youth group,” because “mediocrity is un-Christian.” “We must not simply entertain our congregations, but our sermons must engage the text and enable them to truly hear God’s Word,” he warned. The bishop extolled Wesley’s choosing to “submit to be more vile,” i.e., reaching out to regular people through evangelistic engagement beyond church walls. The bishop explained specific ways in which United Methodists today should be follow Wesley’s example in the context of technological advances, secularization, increased mobility, and greater cultural diversity.

The “moral revolution” of the late 20th century has led to “expressivism,” which Bishop Jones summarized as: “If I feel a certain

way, who are you to tell me that I can’t live my life that way?” Instead of accommodation to that philosophy, he recommended that the United Methodist response be: “We know a God who has a better way... We know a God who is offering you a chance to be more authentically and fully human in a different way.” And while the church should appropriately appreciate diversity, “We’ve got to offer the one thing that will unify all humanity, and that’s baptism into the church of Jesus Christ.”

Bishop Jones lamented, “In very few parts of the country has our denomination grown to match the population growth of its territory.” The church’s lack of missional focus has caused some to ask: “What’s the difference between you and the Rotary Club?”

Nevertheless, “the future belongs to the mainline,” the bishop predicted, “if we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit, if we once again reclaim our great Wesleyan heritage and allow God to figure out how God can use us to make the Gospel real in the 21st century.” ✝

ACTION: Find out more about the work of the United Methodist Foundation for Evangelism: P.O. Box 985, Lake Junaluska, NC, 28745 / www.evangelize.org



Bishop Scott Jones. (UMNS)

UM Lobby Office Opposes Church Position on Marriage

In October 2006, the directors of the Washington-based United Methodist General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) voted to call for the repeal of the United Methodist Church’s official stand to “support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.” They also voted to lobby the 2008 UM General Conference to delete our denomination’s opposition to homosexual practice from the *Social Principles*.

However, that motion passed by a narrow four-vote margin. Previous GBCS Boards of Directors approved similar motions by a nearly 2-1 margin in 2003 and by a 3-1 margin in 1999. The 2004 and 2008 General Conferences overwhelmingly rejected these appeals from the Board of Church and Society.

GBCS General Secretary Jim Winkler is an outspoken opponent of our denomination’s Christian teachings on marriage and sex. In a speech shortly after the 2004 General Conference, he denounced “Central Conference delegates, particularly those from

Africa” for voting with American “[h]ard-liners” on homosexuality. GBCS is United Methodism’s official lobby office on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., and routinely lobbies for liberal political causes before the U.S. Congress.

The United Methodist Church, in its *Book of Discipline*, officially disapproves of homosexual practice, along with all non-marital sex, as “incompatible with Christian teaching.” Clergy are expected to be celibate if single and monogamous if married. ✝

ACTION: Respectfully urge the bishops who help lead the Board of Church and Society to defend our church’s historic teachings on marriage and sex: William Hutchinson (enixmore@bellsouth.net), Deborah Lieder Kiesey (debkiesey@juno.com), Jane Allen Middleton (bishop@cpcumc.org), Jose Quipungo (jquipungo@snet.co.ao), Beverly Shamana (bishop@calneumc.org), James Swanson (bishop@holston.org).

Far-left Methodist Federation for Social Action Targets 2008 UM General Conference

Hundreds of liberal United Methodist activists gathered in Washington, D.C., in April to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA). This 2,800-member caucus is dedicated to advancing “progressive” theology, including acceptance of homosexual behavior, and urging United Methodist agencies to back liberal political causes.

MFSA chief Kathryn Johnson, retired Bishop Clifton Ives, and others urged the 2008 UM General Conference to remove all disapproval of homosexual practice from official United Methodist positions. Johnson said, “We are calling for all discriminatory language to be removed from the [United Methodist] *Discipline*.... The discrimination which now riddles our *Discipline* is almost all ... related to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons.... That’s what we’re talking about that needs to be removed!”

Ives also called on the General Conference to defend a



The Rev. Kathryn Johnson. (UMNS)

broad “doctrinal openness.” Four years ago, MFSA and allied caucuses produced a “Common Witness” declaration that called on the church to be completely “doctrinally open” and repudiated evangelism to Muslims

One MFSA work-shop equated Israeli policies with those of apartheid South Africa and encouraged a United Methodist “divestment” campaign against companies doing business with Israel. Other featured political causes included promoting pacifism, liberalized immigration policies, dramatic government-imposed wealth redistribution, and opposing alleged “enormous cuts in child healthcare,” “the racist, sexist policy” of federally-supported programs to promote healthy marriages in low-income communities, the Iraq war, and the U.S. “empire.”

The Rev. Richard Bentley of California explained that he and others are “working quietly” to engineer the election of five “progressive” Judicial Council members who would rule favorably to MFSA’s agenda, in contrast to the current majority that has upheld the church’s historic and democratically confirmed teachings. The Judicial Council is United Methodism’s highest court, and it has upheld the church’s disapproval of homosexual practice, to the consternation of MFSA.

Other MFSA speakers included Bishop Minerva Carcaño of Phoenix, retired Bishop William Dew, and Board of Church and Society chief Jim Winkler. ❖

ACTION: Talk to your annual conference’s delegates to the 2008 UM General Conference about the need for our church to remain faithful to historic Christian teaching and not be sidetracked by divisive political agendas that lack a clear biblical mandate. To get the names of your annual conference’s delegates, contact your annual conference office or visit their website.

Church Official Condemns All Handguns

In the wake of the murders at Virginia Tech, United Methodist lobbyist Jim Winkler issued a quick news release urging a complete ban on all handguns.

“We once again call on the Congress to ban all handguns and assault weapons so that our communities will be safer and so that this endless cycle of violence can be ended,” declared Jim Winkler, general secretary of the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society in Washington, D.C.

Winkler referred to the United Methodist *Book of Resolutions*, which “call[s] upon all governments of the world in which there is a United Methodist presence to establish national bans on ownership by the general public of handguns....”

In his news release, Winkler said, “It must be stated that had this ban been in place this shooting might have been prevented since one of the guns used by the assailant was a 9 mm handgun.” Winkler did not mention that the Virginia Tech killer had already violated several other gun restriction laws. ❖

ACTION: Read the UMC’s *Book of Resolutions*. Are you surprised? Ask your annual conference’s delegates to the 2008 UM General Conference to repeal all resolutions that take sides on political issues where there is no clear biblical mandate and Christians can honestly disagree.

United Church of Christ Continues Membership Plunge by Abandoning Biblical Christianity and Supporting Same-Sex Unions

In 2005, the United Church of Christ (UCC) became the first mainline Protestant denomination officially to endorse same-sex “marriage.”

Since then, the denomination has been roiled by the exodus of at least 228 congregations, and a greatly accelerated overall membership decline. According to official UCC reports, the financial giving of the remaining churches has suffered a “precipitous decline.” UCC President John Thomas has admitted that this decline has been largely driven by the “marriage vote,” as a result of which “pastors have felt themselves under siege,” regional church leaders “have spent long days responding to bitter, angry, bewildered, and confused congregations and the toll in some places on these colleagues is profound.”

UCC officials have responded to the controversy by condemning UCC members who oppose their “progressive” stands. Thomas has denounced faithful Christian UCC leaders as “serpents in our midst.” The United Church of Christ is one of America’s fastest-declining denominations, having lost nearly half its members over the last 40 years.

Since the UCC endorsed same-sex “marriage,” the denomination has been roiled by the exodus of at least 228 congregations, and a greatly accelerated overall membership decline.

Meanwhile, UCC officials have strengthened ties with the Unitarian Universalist Association and the predominantly homosexual Metropolitan Community Churches. This year, the denomination received a grant for new church development from the pro-homosexuality E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, which is largely focused on supporting pro-homosexuality groups such as Soulforce and the “Reconciling” caucus in the UMC.

The Episcopal Church USA is now moving down the same self-destructive road as the UCC, and has already lost many thousands of members and more than 100 congregations. See Spring 2007 *UMAction Briefing*, page 2. ❖

ACTION: Please speak or write to all of you annual conference’s delegates to the 2008 UM General Conference. Ask them to prevent our United Methodist Church from making the disastrous mistakes of the United Church of Christ and the Episcopal Church. Ask them to defend strongly our United Methodist stand for traditional Christian beliefs and sexual morality.



The Rev. John Thomas (right), president of the UCC, once demonstrated the “tolerance” of his denomination by accepting a meeting with cartoon character SpongeBob SquarePants (left). (UCC)

United Methodist Membership Explodes in Africa

The United Methodist Church in Nigeria has a new bishop, the Rev. Kefas Kane Mavula, 40, who was elected on March 3. Mavula's election comes amid rapid growth over the past decade. Mavula replaces Bishop Done Peter Dabale, the first United Methodist bishop of Nigeria.

Africans now constitute about 25 percent of the 11-million member United Methodist Church. With this membership shift to theologically faithful churches in the Global South, United Methodism is slowly moving away from 20th century liberal Protestantism, which resulted in plunging membership for all of America's mainline denominations.

Bishop Mavula now leads one of the fastest growing UMC conferences in the world. In 1992, there were 10,000 Nigerian Methodists. There are now over 400,000.

A strong emphasis on biblical teaching and Christ-centered evangelism has fueled rapid church growth in Africa, in sharp

contrast to United Methodism in the United States, which has declined from 11 million to fewer than 8 million members in 40 years. Every year, The United Methodist Church in the United States has a net loss of more than 50,000 members.

In addition to rapid growth in Nigeria, United Methodism elsewhere in Africa is growing quickly. There are 1 million United Methodists in the Congo. There are over 600,000 United Methodists in the Ivory Coast. The increasing Africanization of United Methodism is shifting the denomination in a more faithfully Christian direction. Meanwhile, mainline denominations with U.S.-only memberships are becoming more liberal and suffer accelerating membership declines (see page 4).

Many United Methodists believe that God is renewing our church through the growth of the African churches. In the not distant future, a majority of United Methodists will be outside the United States. 

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YOUR OPINION, PLEASE!

United Methodist chief lobbyist Jim Winkler has demanded a complete ban on all handguns. Do you agree?

- 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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therefore could allow any partial-birth abortion.

With only two minutes allowed for plenary debate, the 2004 UM General Conference narrowly voted to continue United Methodist support for RCRC—but only after Jo Ann Fukumoto of the California Pacific Conference and Beth Capen of New York respectively assured fellow delegates that RCRC was “not a pro-abortion or pro-choice group” and that it “does not do or advocate for anything which is inconsistent with” United Methodist positions. 

ACTION: For more information, read “Holy Abortion? A Theological Critique of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice,” available online at <http://www.nprcouncil.org/read.htm> or by contacting Lifewatch: P.O. Box 306, Cottleville, MO 63338; 636-294-2344. Ask your annual conference's delegates to the 2008 UM General Conference to prohibit all UMC boards and agencies from supporting or participating in the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC), because its extreme pro-abortion position conflicts with our church's official stand in our Book of Discipline.

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