

# UMAction

## Briefing



## United Methodist Women's Division Hosts Iran's Extremist President

### Winter 2007

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Iran's radical Islamist President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, spoke at the United Methodist Women's Division office at the United Nations in New York on September 26.

Ahmadinejad, known for his hostility to the United States and Israel, was at the United Methodist Church Center at the UN for "interfaith dialogue" with about 150 mostly liberal U.S. church officials. The *New York Times* called it "a friendly, even warm, exchange" with mainline church officials who oppose strong action against Iran's nuclear weapons program.

UM Women's Division chief Harriet Jane Olson explained, "This dialogue may help to de-escalate the language of hostility, which is a necessary part of building bridges."

Olson told Ahmadinejad about the history of the New York-based and politically active United Methodist Women and said "We stand with the women and children of Iraq ... Israel ... Palestine ... the United States."

While at the UM Women's Division office, Ahmadinejad avoided direct answers to questions about Iran's nuclear ambitions or his calls for Israel's destruction. Instead, he attacked the United States and the "Zionist regime," while talking effusively of the coming of the *Mahdi*, who is Shiite Islam's messiah.

Jewish leaders refused to attend the meeting at the United Methodist Women's facility. ✚

**ACTION:** Talk with friends in your church's United Methodist Women. Remind them that any undesignated giving to United Methodist Women can be used for political events like this, and each woman has the right to designate her gifts for specific Christian missions and ministries.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (Alfred/SIPA)



## Will New Jersey Force United Methodist Camp to Host Same-Sex Rites?

The state of New Jersey is investigating United Methodist Ocean Grove Camp Meeting Association for declining to host a homosexual union ceremony last Spring. Ocean Grove cited the *UM Book of Discipline's* prohibition of same-sex unions. The lesbian couple filed a civil rights complaint against the association, alleging a violation of New Jersey's new law against discrimination based on sexual orientation.

In September, even before the civil rights complaint had been adjudicated, the New Jersey Commissioner of Environmental Protection partially revoked the association's

tax-exempt status.

The association's counsel, Brian Raum, has condemned New Jersey's attempt to "force a private Christian organization to use its property in a way that would violate its own religious beliefs" as "a gross violation of the First Amendment." ❖

**ACTION:** Thank the Ocean Grove Camp Ground Association for their courageous faithfulness to United Methodist beliefs: 54 Pitman Avenue, Ocean Grove, NJ 07756. [www.ogcma.org](http://www.ogcma.org).

## Liberian UM Leader Urges Faithfulness to Bible in "Africa Declaration"

The Rev. Jerry Kulah, a United Methodist district superintendent in Liberia, with support from fellow Liberians, has released an "Africa Declaration" calling for Scriptural faithfulness within United Methodism.

The declaration says African United Methodists "are saddened that some United Methodist Churches of the Euro-Western world have questioned over and over again the United Methodist *Book of Discipline's* Biblical positions on such issues as homosexuality, abortion, and the authenticity of the Scriptures as the Word of God."

Kulah unveiled the declaration in Memphis on October 27 at the Renewal and Reform Conference for general and jurisdictional conference delegates. Every district superintendent in Liberia has endorsed the declaration, with support from the Liberian bishop. Other African United Methodist leaders are also endorsing it. Nearly one-third of United Methodists now live in Africa.

The *Africa Declaration* warns, "John Wesley entertained the fear that in decades to come the Methodist Church would not cease to exist but would exist merely as a dead sect, having the form of godliness but no power to live for and proclaim Christ, unless they held fast to the Doctrine, Discipline, and Spirit with which they first set out. We are painfully saddened that these current trends within the Euro-Western Church are, unfortunately, confirming the fears of John Wesley."

Besides affirming traditional Christianity, the *Africa Declaration* calls for church restructuring to ensure "fair, just and proportionate representation" in church leadership,



The Rev. Jerry Kulah (Rebekah Sharpe/IRD)

increased support for UM African seminaries, and "missional priorities" including "fighting deadly diseases," helping the poor, planting new churches, "making disciples of the nations," and "defending the sanctity of all vulnerable human life, including the poor, the elderly, the terminally ill, the disabled, and the unborn."

The declaration concludes, "When the Baby Jesus was threatened by a vengeful King Herod, the Holy Family fled to Africa for sanctuary (Matthew 2:14-15). Today, the Church in Africa offers itself as a sanctuary for God's Word for the renewing of his Church around the world." ❖

**ACTION:** Read (or listen to) the Africa declaration online at [www.cumcmemphis.org](http://www.cumcmemphis.org) under "MEDIA." Discuss it with your Sunday school class and your annual conference's delegates to the UM 2008 General Conference. Ask: Why is United Methodism growing in Africa while losing members in the United States?



## Aldersgate Renewal Ministries Promote UM Revival

A high view of Scripture, the importance of Scriptural holiness, and the urgency of faith in Jesus Christ as “the hope of everyone around you” were main themes of the yearly conference of Aldersgate Renewal Ministries (ARM), an affiliate of the General Board of Discipleship. More than 1,000 United Methodists attended the July event. ARM was organized in 1978, according to one speaker, to assure “people that you can be a born-again, Spirit-filled Christian, and remain a United Methodist.”

Along with Scripture-based preaching and lively worship, the conference featured small-group workshops on topics including congregational ministries to the sexually broken (led by UMAction Steering Committee member Karen Booth), Christian intellectual engagement with postmodern culture, and the history of charismatic manifestations among American Methodists. There were also programs for children, youth, and young adults. ❖

**ACTION:** Find out more about Aldersgate Renewal Ministries: 121 East Avenue, Goodlettsville, TN 37072. (877) 857-9372. [www.aldersgaterenewal.org](http://www.aldersgaterenewal.org).



Youth praying at the conference. (Courtesy ARM)

## How Much Does the UMC Give to the National Council of Churches?

United Methodists give about one-third of the income that the National Council of Churches (NCC) receives from member denominations, even though United Methodists are less than 18 percent of the 44 million who belong to NCC-affiliated churches.

The NCC receives more than 60 percent of its denominational income from just two of its 35 member denominations: the UMC and the Presbyterian Church USA. Only about 25 percent of U.S. Christian church members belong to denominations in the declining NCC.

Overall giving by denominations to the left-leaning NCC continues to fall as the NCC relies more on secular, political foundations. ❖

**ACTION:** For more on the NCC, visit [www.ird-renew.org/yokefellows](http://www.ird-renew.org/yokefellows). Discuss this stewardship of your congregation’s apportionments with members of your church finance committee and with delegates to the UM 2008 General Conference.

| United Methodist Church Funding of the National Council of Churches (2001–2007) |             |   |
|---|-------------|---|
| Fiscal Year   | UMC Funding | Percent of NCC Denominational Funding Coming from the UMC |
| 2001–2  | \$844,148   | 34.7  |
| 2002–3  | 597,123     | 32.6  |
| 2003–4  | 566,459     | 31.4  |
| 2004–5  | 596,233     | 34.1  |
| 2005–6  | 656,118     | 35.6  |
| 2006–7  | 465,600     | 29.9  |

## Are UMC 9-11 Resources Morally Unclear?

Several resources from the United Methodist General Board of Discipleship (GBOD) about remembering the tragedy of September 11 have aroused concerns among United Methodists. Some materials imply support for pacifism, imply criticism of the U.S. response to the 9-11 attacks, and avoid any direct criticism of al Qaeda. The materials seem to avoid clear moral distinctions between terrorism and its victims.

A 2006 reflection by a GBOD staffer warns: “No amount of blaming will deliver us, no assignment of guilt, no exactment of justice will heal the psyche of our land.” A worship guide produced for the 2002 anniversary includes a prayer asking forgiveness for “want[ing] security or the illusion of it” and “want[ing] our enemies to be annihilated.” Both avoid any suggestion that the U.S. Government might have a moral obligation to punish terrorists.

A study guide produced by the Council of Bishops shortly after the attacks and still promoted by GBOD ([www.gbod.org](http://www.gbod.org)) impartially denounces “violence in all of its forms and expressions” as “contrary to God’s purpose for the world.” It asks: “If terrorism is (or is perceived to be) a reaction against oppression, will oppressing (or killing) terrorists adequately solve the conflict?” ❖

**ACTION:** Contact GBOD Director of Worship Resources Taylor Burton-Edwards. Respectfully urge that 9-11 resources offer greater moral clarity. General Board of Discipleship, [tburtonedwards@gbod.org](mailto:tburtonedwards@gbod.org).

## UM Lobby Office Urges Anti-Israel Divestment of Caterpillar Stock

The September directors’ meeting of the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society (GBCS), in response to two Palestinian activists, endorsed United Methodist divestment of Caterpillar, Inc. stock because the company’s products are used by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF).

GBCS will ask the UM 2008 General Conference to endorse divestment from Caterpillar. The UM Board of Pensions owns about \$5 million in Caterpillar stock out of \$15 billion in assets.

GBCS asserted that the IDF uses Caterpillar equipment to construct Israel’s security fence and perform “illegal destructions of Palestinian homes.”

In response, Caterpillar declared that it “fully complies with all local, U.S. and international laws and policies governing sales of our products around the world” and it “clearly has neither the legal right nor the tangible ability to regulate how customers use their machines.”

Last year, the Presbyterian Church USA revoked its policy of divesting from companies doing business with Israel. Other mainline denominations have declined to endorse divestment. ❖

**ACTION:** Go to [www.ird-renew.org](http://www.ird-renew.org) and sign a petition opposing any United Methodist divestment that singles out Israel. This petition will be shared with delegates to the UMC 2008 General Conference.

## Transsexual UM Minister Keeps Pulpit, for Now

At its October meeting, the United Methodist Judicial Council declined to take any action against a Baltimore United Methodist minister who claims a gender identity change.

With support from Baltimore-Washington Conference Bishop John Schol, the Rev. Ann Gordon became the Rev. Drew Phoenix last year, in conjunction with ongoing medical procedures. Phoenix, with a new male identity, was given the same church appointment.

Clergy in the Baltimore-Washington Conference asked for guidance from the Judicial Council, the church’s top court. But the Judicial Council ruled that it could take no action against Phoenix at this time, since no formal complaint had been filed at the time of the annual conference.

The Judicial Council said it was not ruling on the

permissibility of transsexual clergy. A formal complaint against Phoenix has since been filed. The *UM Book of Discipline* does not specifically address sex-change procedures.

Transforming Congregations (a UM ministry offering healing for the sexually broken) and *UMAction* have submitted legislation to the 2008 General Conference that would oppose gender identity change procedures.

Liberal groups are asking the General Conference to affirm transsexuality. In a statement, Phoenix professed to be “elated” by the Judicial Council’s “historic” decision, calling it “a very important first step in opening the doors of our churches to the transgender community.” ❖

**ACTION:** Tell delegates to the UM 2008 General Conference what you think about this problem.

# United Methodists Discuss Church Membership Issue

The UM General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) hosted a discussion earlier this year about the UM membership controversy.

In 2005, Virginia Bishop Charlene Kammerer removed the Rev. Ed Johnson from his pulpit for refusing to accept into immediate church membership an unrepentant, actively homosexual man whom Johnson had been counseling.

In 2006, the United Methodist Judicial Council restored Johnson to his pulpit, declaring that local church pastors have discretion to discern when a person is ready for membership.

At the GBHEM event, the Rev. Gregory Stover of Cincinnati pointed out: "Persons to be received into membership in a local United Methodist congregation covenant together with God and the members of the local church to keep the vows, including the first: *To renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of the world, and repent of their sin.*"

The Rev. Dr. Leicester Longden of the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary observed: "Some critics of the Judicial Council's ruling in favor of the Virginia pastor portray reception into membership as a mere welcoming rite rather an

initiation into a life of discipleship in a covenant community." He said that in "the Methodist tradition, membership has never been an end to itself, an achieved status; it has always been seen as a participation in a journey of discipleship on the way of holiness."

The Rev. Dr. Billy Abraham of Perkins School of Theology in Dallas highlighted the irony of removing a faithful pastor in the name of inclusion: "Upholding inclusion at the level of membership required exclusion at the level of clergy. In one stroke the incoherence of inclusivism as an unconditional commitment of the UMC was exposed."

Other participants presented more liberal views, such as GBHEM official Ken Bedell, who equated disapproval of homosexual practice to racism. "I believe sexuality is a special gift by God," Bedell said.

**ACTION:** Ask delegates to the UM 2008 General Conference to protect the integrity of UM membership vows and maintain the pastor's responsibility to discern when a person is ready for church membership.

Be sure to visit [WWW.IRD-RENEW.ORG/REGISTER](http://WWW.IRD-RENEW.ORG/REGISTER) to sign up for E-mail updates!

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## YOUR OPINION, PLEASE!

Should the United Methodist Church approve of sexual identity change and transsexual clergy?

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)

# UMAction

## Briefing

Winter 2007

The Institute on Religion & Democracy  
1023 15th Street NW, Suite 601  
Washington, DC 20005-2620


202.682.4131  
[www.ird-renew.org/umaction](http://www.ird-renew.org/umaction)  
[umaction@ird-renew.org](mailto:umaction@ird-renew.org)

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## Episcopal Church Split Deepens

**O**n September 28, 13 active and retired bishops from the Episcopal Church and additional bishops from breakaway groups like the Anglican Mission in America announced they are establishing the "Common Cause Council of Bishops" as part of a "new ecclesiastical structure" for Biblically faithful Anglicans in the United States and Canada.

The U.S. Episcopal Church has been splintering since the 2003 election of its first openly homosexual Bishop. Many faithful Anglicans have left the Episcopal Church and are working for the eventual creation of a new Anglican church in North America.

Their announcement came shortly after the Episcopal Church's House of Bishops declined to comply fully with the international Anglican Communion's invitation to return to Christian Scriptural theology. 

**ACTION:** *Speak or write to all of your Annual Conference's delegates to the UM 2008 General Conference. Ask them to prevent our United Methodist Church from making the disastrous mistakes of the Episcopal Church. Ask them to defend our United Methodist stand for traditional Christian beliefs and sexual morality. For updates on the ongoing Episcopal Church melt-down, visit the Anglican Action section of IRD's website: [www.ird-renew.org/anglicanaction](http://www.ird-renew.org/anglicanaction).*

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