

# UMAction


## Briefing



## United Methodist General Conference, April 23–May 2: Which Way?

The General Conference is The United Methodist Church's global legislative body, meets every four years, has nearly 1,000 delegates, and will meet April 23–May 2 in Fort Worth, Texas.

This 2008 General Conference faces big decisions for the future of our United Methodist Church:

- Will our UMC build unity by reaffirming our Christ-centered, Biblical, Wesleyan beliefs or will our church follow the Episcopal Church, which is now splitting over its election of an openly homosexual bishop?
- Will the UMC learn from the experience of our fast-growing UM churches in Africa (and many U.S. local churches) which preach and live the traditional Christian Gospel—and the theologically and politically liberal churches which are losing members and dying?
- Will the UMC remain a united global church—or will we partially segregate our U.S. church from the growing, faithful United Methodism in Africa and the world?
- When the General Conference elects members of the Judicial Council (United Methodism's supreme court), will it elect persons who will respect and enforce our *UM Book of Discipline*, or elect judicial activists who will undermine and rewrite our *Discipline*?
- Will United Methodist membership vows continue to have meaning and integrity, or will the UMC slide into “anything goes” membership?
- Will this General Conference adopt divisive political resolutions, or will it unite our church with Biblical Christian stands on clearly key issues—and refuse to allow any faction to use the UMC as its political party? 

**ACTION:** Please pray daily for the General Conference and for God's will to be done. Read or listen to the Africa Declaration by the Rev. Jerry Kulah (District Superintendent in Liberia) at [www.cumcmemphis.org](http://www.cumcmemphis.org) by selecting “MEDIA” and then “2007 Renewal & Reform.” Follow General Conference action on our website: [www.TheIRD.org](http://www.TheIRD.org).

UM delegates will gather in Fort Worth, TX, for the 2008 United Methodist General Conference.

## Spring 2008

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## UM Evangelist Warns Against Segregation Plan for UMC

The United Methodist Council of Bishops and Connec-tional Table is asking the 2008 General Conference to set up a new U.S.-only “regional conference” that would exclude overseas United Methodists.

United Methodist evangelist Eddie Fox of the World Methodist Council warned against that plan when speaking to an orientation for General Conference delegates in January.

“Why do we not want the church around the world for decisions we think only touch the U.S. church?” Fox asked. “Now is not the time for developing national entities,” he urged, stressing the importance of a fully global church.

One-third of United Methodists now live outside the United States, mostly in Africa. Nearly 300 of the 990 General Conference delegates will be from overseas. Most international delegates affirm traditional Christian beliefs and reject theological liberalism.

“Why now, when the church has become more global?” Fox wondered about the plan, which would allow a U.S. regional conference to establish policies for the U.S. church, prior

to an international General Conference. United Methodism in the United States has been losing members for 44 years, while the church is growing rapidly in Africa.

South Carolina District Superintendent Tim McClendon also warned against the plan. “If we approve the proposal we will be a less connected church and more fragmented,” he said. “We will lose the voices of the overseas church. It will lead to schism.” He pointed to the Anglican Communion, which is fracturing because the U.S. Episcopal Church is accepting homosexual clergy and same-sex unions while the great majority of Anglicans around the world uphold traditional Christian teachings.



**ACTION:** Thank the Rev. Eddie Fox for his witness and work of evangelism around the world: *World Evangelism, World Methodist Council, Scarritt-Bennett Center, 1008 19th Avenue South, Nashville, TN, 37212. E-mail: [worldevangelism@scarrittbennett.org](mailto:worldevangelism@scarrittbennett.org).*

## GOOD NEWS: Bishop William Willimon Gives Pro-Life Message

Bishop William Willimon praised the pro-life work of Lifewatch in a January 22 sermon. The Bishop of Northern Alabama preached for the unofficial United Methodist group’s worship service held in conjunction with the “March for Life” in Washington, DC.

“For twenty years Lifewatch has witnessed against the sin of abortion,” Willimon said.

The Lifewatch service convenes annually in the chapel of the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. This building is owned and occupied by the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, which lobbies for abortion rights and largely neglects the UMC’s stand against partial-birth abortions and abortions for birth control or gender selection.

A former professor at Duke Divinity School, Willimon recalled a student who researched reasons why local women chose abortion and found that the “number one reason given ... was, ‘I had no other alternative given my situation.’” The student commented, “Ironically, we call this freedom to choose.”

Bishop Willimon urged the church to support “alternatives we could not have come up with if we looked only at the alternatives the world gives us.” He said abortion in the United

States has largely been driven by a “lack of imagination that leads to accommodation.” He warned against appealing to majority opinion in arguments about abortion, as Christians are to be concerned with what is true rather than what is popular or “useful.”

“Christians are those who are remarkably unconcerned about what eight out of ten Americans can swallow without choking. Christians are those who [appeal to divine] revelation ... a truth we did not make up.”

Linda Bales of the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) criticized Willimon for “categorizing abortion as sin.” She is on the Council of Governors of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC), which works with the GBCS to promote unlimited abortion rights.

The 2008 General Conference will decide whether GBCS and the United Methodist Women’s Division will remain as members of RCRC.



**ACTION:** Tell your General Conference delegates where you stand on this issue. To read all of Bishop Willimon’s sermon and to learn more about the pro-life witness within our United Methodist Church, contact Lifewatch, PO Box 306, Cottleville, MO, 63338. [www.lifewatch.org](http://www.lifewatch.org).

## Methodist Officials Defend Transsexual Clergy Cause

Officials with the United Methodist General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) urged United Methodism's supreme court to affirm the ministry of a transsexual pastor. GBHEM officials Robert Kohler and Sharon Rubey filed a brief with the Judicial Council defending the good standing of Baltimore minister Ann Gordon from challenge. Gordon recently had a sex change procedure to become the Rev. Drew Phoenix.

In its fall 2007 meeting, the Judicial Council did not rule on the overall permissibility of transsexual clergy. It declined to take any direct action against Phoenix because no formal complaint had been filed at the time of Phoenix's reappointment to a church.

Kohler and Ruby minimized the relevance of their agency's own "Behavioral Health Guidelines" for clergy. These standards had been cited by opponents of the Gordon/Phoenix appointment, but the GBHEM officials argued that they "are but guidelines."

**ACTION:** Respectfully remind Robert Kohler and Sharon Rubey that they are called to serve the church, not to promote transsexualism. General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 1001 Nineteenth Ave, South, PO Box 340007, Nashville, TN, 37203. FAX: 615-340-7048. E-mail: [bkohler@gbhem.org](mailto:bkohler@gbhem.org), [srubey@gbhem.org](mailto:srubey@gbhem.org).

## Pro-homosexuality Lobbyists Target UMC General Conference

Pro-homosexuality groups from within and without United Methodism are organizing to pressure the 2008 General Conference (April 23–May 2) to overturn the church's biblical stands on sexual morality.

The main pro-homosexuality United Methodist caucus is the Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN), which opposes the church's current disapproval of homosexual behavior and other non-marital sex. RMN gets partial funding from secular foundations. The secular National Gay and Lesbian Task Force now runs the "Institute for Welcoming Resources," whose express purpose is providing training, resources, and targeted funding to RMN and similar caucuses in other denominations.

At the last two General Conferences, RMN worked closely with Soulforce, an activist group funded by various liberal foundations and "corporate sponsors," to disrupt the conference with demonstrations and acts of flamboyant "civil disobedience." Soulforce has publicly vowed to take similar "direct action" at the 2008 General Conference in Fort Worth.

**ACTION:** Pray for the General Conference delegates. Ask the delegates from your Annual Conference to uphold our church's Biblical beliefs about human sexuality.

## UM Agency Touts Prayer to "Sassy Sister-Savior"

For Advent 2007, Neal Christie, an official with the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society (GBCS), composed a prayer to the Virgin Mary, which was posted on the GBCS Website. Addressing Mary as "Sassy sister-savior," Christie's prayer treated Christ's mother primarily as an activist for leftist politics.

GBCS is United Methodism's lobby office in Washington, DC. It promotes many liberal political causes in the church's name.

Christie's prayer was a tirade against current U.S. domestic and foreign policy. He bewailed "bloated Herods" who are making "the White House and Congress a backroom playhouse" for their corrupt and militaristic desires while they "financ[e] the Empire's client-state dictators." In Christie's bleak description

of America, "today's Herods retreat in glee" while "domestic lynching passes as state sanctioned torture," "the growing poor are siphoned through waste management systems," and "backstabbing of immigrants becomes national sport."

The prayer also appeared to attack Republican opposition to expanding government healthcare programs to higher-income families.

GBCS's \$5 million budget is largely funded by apportionment dollars from local churches plus "Peace with Justice Sunday" offerings.

**ACTION:** Visit the GBCS website ([www.umc-gbcs.org](http://www.umc-gbcs.org)) to learn more about its political lobbying in the church's name.



## United Methodist Officials Consider Anti-Israel Divestment

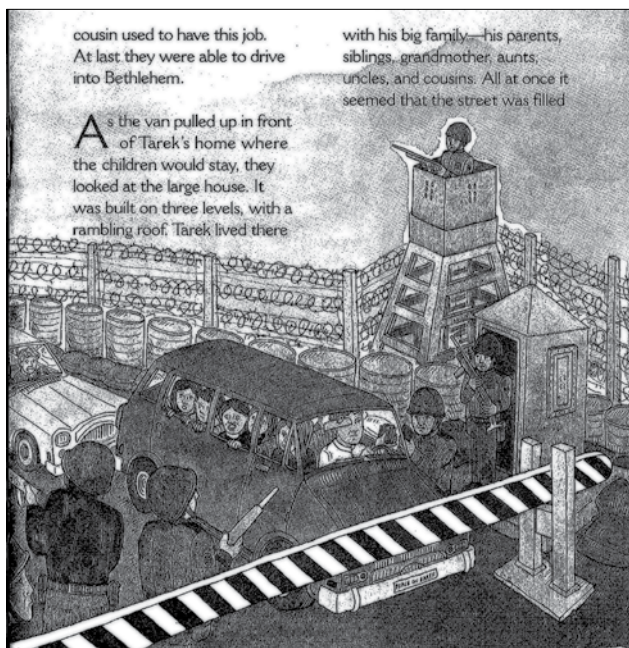
United Methodist officials promoted an anti-Israel divestment proposal from the UMC General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) at a January 24–26 briefing for delegates to the General Conference (April 23–May 2). The proposal would force all of our denomination’s “general agencies, annual conferences, local churches, Conference Boards of Pensions, United Methodist Foundations, and all others who invest United Methodist funds to divest of all equity and debt holdings of Caterpillar, Inc.” It also encourages similar action by individuals, due to the company’s “role in the occupation” of Palestinian land. The resolution blames the suffering of Palestinians solely on “the Israeli occupation.”

The Rev. Steve Sprecher of Oregon, a GBCS director, condemned the use of Caterpillar bulldozers to demolish Palestinian homes, but did not mention that such houses were targeted because they were used for terrorist activities or weapons depots. Susanne Hoder of the New England Conference asserted that

United Methodist investments in Caterpillar help “sustain the occupation” and cautioned against the influence of “powerful Israeli lobby groups.”

The General Conference is the UMC’s legislative body and will consider the GBCS proposal along with other proposals to divest from firms doing business with Israel. GBCS has also advocated divestment against the Islamist dictatorship of Sudan, but The United Methodist Church currently does not have any assets in firms doing business with Sudan.

In 2006, the Church of England’s Ethical Investment Advisory Group unanimously rejected pressure to divest from Caterpillar, citing among other things “no compelling evidence that Caterpillar is or has been complicit in human rights abuses.”



Picture of Israeli soldiers frightening children in a book published by the UM Women’s Division. The bumper sticker on the Palestinian car reads, “Peace on Earth.”

**ACTION:** Urge your General Conference delegates to oppose the GBCS resolution and other unbalanced and overly simplistic Israel divestment proposals.

## Famous UM Church to Celebrate Same-Sex Unions

Foundry United Methodist Church in Washington, DC, famous as the church that Bill and Hillary Clinton attended in the 1990’s, has announced it will “recognize” the commitments of homosexual relationships.

“Starting February 1 [2008], gay and lesbian couples in a committed relationship can have their relationships and their love recognized and honored at Foundry,” Foundry’s newsletter declared. Pastor Dean Snyder explained that that same-sex couples will convene their initial commitment services off-site, where the pastor may be present but will not preside. An appointed lay person may preside.

United Methodism’s *Book of Discipline* (paragraph 341.6) prohibits “ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions” from being “conducted by our ministers and ... in our churches.”

Foundry seems to claim it will not violate the letter of

church policy by convening the initial “commitment” ceremonies off-site. But the *Discipline*’s prohibition does not reference “commitment” rites but simply “ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions.”

The Foundry newsletter explained that the proposal “is designed to stay within rules outlined in the UMC *Book of Discipline*. But it admitted: “There is some chance that charges could be brought against Snyder by those who object to Foundry’s program.”

**ACTION:** Please contact Baltimore–Washington Conference Bishop John Schol and urge him to help Foundry be faithful to United Methodism’s *Discipline*: 100 Maryland Avenue, NE, Suite 510, Washington, DC. E-mail: [bishopchol@bwcumc.org](mailto:bishopchol@bwcumc.org).

## "Take it Back!" Says Tooley

After years of research, *Taking Back the United Methodist Church* by UMAction Executive Director Mark Tooley has been published by Bristol House.

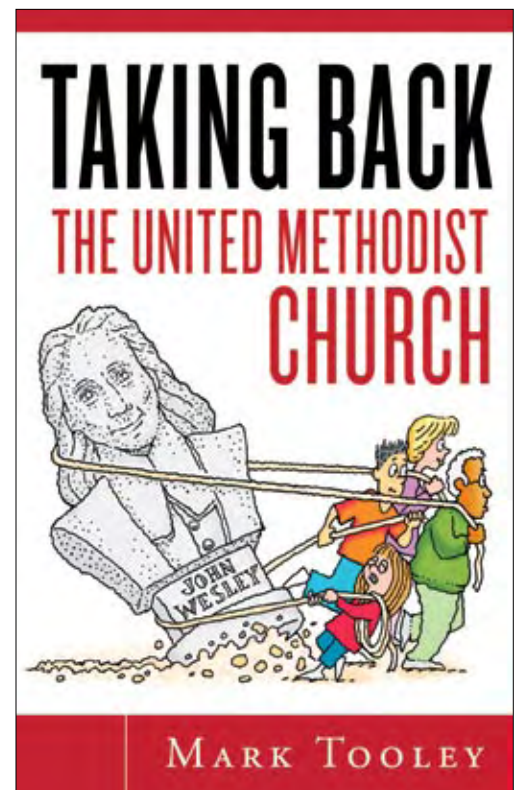
Tooley chronicles nearly 20 years of struggle to restore the United Methodist church to traditional Christian beliefs.

Tooley walks the reader through how church bureaucrats channeled missions dollars to pro-Marxist groups, how bishops have promoted homosexuality, how the church's lobby office promotes radical political causes in the nation's capital, and how some seminary professors have denied even Christ's full deity. Tooley's book gives the story BEHIND the story.

You can read how the Holy Spirit is taking back United Methodism, restoring it to what John Wesley first envisioned.

We are pleased to be able to offer UMAction readers a special opportunity; with a donation to UMAction of at least \$50, we will ship *Taking Back the United Methodist Church* to you right away. This is the book that every United Methodist needs to read. Please either call the UMAction office at 202-682-4131 or sign on [www.TheIRD.org](http://www.TheIRD.org) to take advantage of this special offer. ❖

*"Mark Tooley has been one of the significant players in the renewal movement in The United Methodist Church. In this book he gives a clear overview of his work and the work of UMAction to restore United Methodism to its historic role as an Apostolic Church. Taking back The United Methodist Church is one of the markers in the Renewal Movement."* – Dr. Ira Gallaway, former General Secretary of the Board of Evangelism



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United Methodist Women's Division Hosts Ira

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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

Spring 2008

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## Liberal Political Activist Preaches at Wesley Seminary

**M**arian Wright Edelman, President of the Children's Defense Fund, preached February 5 at United Methodistism's Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC. Edelman is a long-time advocate for an expanded welfare state, and her sermon focused almost exclusively on political themes.

Wright urged "universal [government healthcare] coverage for everybody" that would end "means-tested," limited government healthcare for poor children in favor of an "automatic enrollment at birth" taxpayer-funded plan.

Edelman asserted that America is trapped in "the prison of violence," citing the size of the U.S. defense budget. "This new budget from our president is just morally obscene!" Edelman exclaimed.



**ACTION:** Respectfully urge Wesley Seminary President David McAllister-Wilson to ensure that chapel services emphasize Biblical preaching rather than divisive politics. 4500 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC, 20016. E-mail: [president@wesleysem.edu](mailto:president@wesleysem.edu).

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