

UMAction

Briefing



California UM Clergywoman Performs Same-Sex Unions

After the court-ordered legalization of same-sex “marriage” in California, a United Methodist clergywoman has begun performing these so-called “marriages” for her congregants. Such unions defy the *Book of Discipline* (church law) of The United Methodist Church, which says homosexual behavior is “incompatible with Christian teaching” and bars pastors from performing same-sex union ceremonies or allowing them to take place in UM churches.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, Rev. Eileen Lindsay of Walnut Creek United Methodist Church performed “marriages” for three homosexual couples and signed their “wedding” licenses. She initially blessed the couples in her church sanctuary and then performed the ceremonies in a private backyard.

By violating the *Discipline*, Lindsay places herself at risk of disciplinary actions. However, church officials and juries for church trials in liberal-dominated UM regions such as California have been reluctant to act against violations of church law on homosexuality.

Both the California-Nevada and California-Pacific Annual Conferences applauded the California Supreme Court decision legalizing same-sex “marriage.” In California-Nevada, 80 retired United Methodist ministers declared their willingness to perform same-sex unions. However, retiring Bishop Beverly Shamana declared void an Annual Conference resolution commending these retired clergy for their willingness to defy the UM *Discipline*. ✚

ACTION: This is urgent. Talk with your pastor, your Bishop, and other church officials. Urge them to insist on keeping and strongly enforcing our UM church law on marriage and homosexuality. Urge them: Don’t let the homosexual activists split our church! Don’t repeat the Episcopal Church’s huge mistake!

Fall 2008

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Photo: Bishop Beverly Shamana (UMNS)



Drew Seminary Event Hosts Same-Sex Union Celebrant

United Methodism's Drew Theological School hosted radical San Francisco minister Karen Oliveto at its July 2008 "Prophetic Leadership" conference. Oliveto performed a same-sex union in San Francisco in 2004, in defiance of United Methodism's prohibition against same-sex unions. She also allowed her San Francisco church to become a distribution site for medicinal marijuana. "[These] were probably the two most faithful acts of the church community, and the ones that went deepest spiritually and transformed the congregation," she boasted to the Drew audience.

Following those controversies, Oliveto left church ministry to join the faculty at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California. She later returned to the pulpit as pastor at the theologically liberal Glide Memorial United Methodist Church in San Francisco.

The presence of Oliveto and the Drew event at the Ocean Grove Campground in New Jersey was ironic. The UM camp refuses to allow same-sex ceremonies. New Jersey officials have targeted

the camp for allegedly violating the state's prohibition against "discrimination" based on sexual orientation.

Oliveto urged political activism from the pulpit. "I believe that when we fail to give our opinion on controversial issues, we're not only failing to offer prophetic witness, but also we fail to offer our parishioners insight on how to wrestle theologically with the issues of our day," she opined.

These statements echo comments made during the controversy surrounding Oliveto's performance of same-sex unions. On February 19, 2004, the San Francisco Chronicle quoted Oliveto as saying, "We are in a whole new world, and the church better catch up." ❖



Julie Williamson (left) and Gloria Soliz recite their wedding vows before the Rev. Karen Oliveto, pastor of Bethany United Methodist Church.

ACTION: Contact Drew Theological School Dean Maxine Clarke Beach. Urge that Drew invite speakers who affirm and not defy Christian and United Methodist standards. E-mail: mbeach@drew.edu. Drew University, 36 Madison Avenue, Madison, NJ 07940.

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Garrett Seminary Speaker Urges Pacifism

Speaking at Garrett Seminary's March 2008 "Progressive and Evangelical Conference 2008" in Evanston, Illinois, theologian Bryan Stone promoted pacifism and criticized the church for serving the American "empire."

Stone, who teaches at Boston University School of Theology, claimed that the church too often waves the American flag and "is now free to be recruited by the empire into killing those that the empire counts as its enemies." The church's mission is "now compatible (if not identical) with the ambitions of empire."

Both the Boston University School of Theology and Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary are official United Methodist seminaries. But neither event fully acknowledged Methodism's historic "just war" teaching, which admits that "force of arms may regretfully be preferable to unchecked aggression, tyranny and genocide."

Mixing between church and state has led Christians to accept violence, Stone said. "Soldiers must be trained to believe in violence as useful and redemptive," he complained. "For persons of faith, this means coming to believe that God, the military, and the nation are inextricably linked and mutually supportive." Stone regretted that whether Christians should serve in

the military "hardly even comes up for most Christians today."

Stone proclaimed, "Our loyalty to nation and our attachment to the economic wealth and liberties secured by it are frequently idolatrous and therefore false objects of worship that require our violence for their protection."



Bryan Stone, Boston University School of Theology lecturer at Garrett Seminary.

Barry Bryant, who teaches at Garrett, responded to Stone's lecture by agreeing with his pacifist stance. Eric Sapp, a senior partner of Common Good Strategies, a consulting firm that works with the Democratic Party, warned of the cost of absolute pacifism. "I think that to be a true pacifist, what you have to be willing to do is say . . . we have the power to stop genocide, we have the power to stop rapes, we have the power to stop killings, and are we willing to say that our pacifism is going to look those people in the eye and say we did not stop the raping and genocide because of Christ."



ACTION: Urge Garrett Seminary President Phil Amerson to ensure that future Garrett events are more balanced and take into account the UM stand on just war. E-mail: philip.amerson@garrett.edu. Garrett Evangelical Seminary, 2121 Sheridan Road, Evanston IL 60201.

UM Ethicist Defends Just War Teachings

United Methodist ethicist James Thobaben, speaking at the April 2008 Wesley Colloquium in Myerstown, Pennsylvania, highlighted the difficulties for Christians serving in government in a "fallen world." But he insisted that God wants Christians to participate in the world, and that Methodist founder John Wesley would support coercive force to institute justice among lawless nations.

The colloquium on "Wesleyan Social Justice for the 21st Century" took place at Evangelical Seminary. Affiliated with the small Evangelical Church denomination, the seminary has 50 United Methodist students. Thobaben, a Professor of Church in Society at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, warned that Christians must tread carefully in public service. "If you are in the government in any form, you are saying you are willing to participate in the use of coercive power, including violence. You can't hold a political office and not be willing to use violence."

Thobaben said Wesley would argue "that as a splendid vice .

. . . we can hold states accountable for using proper just coercion theory, and acting upon and responding to other injustices inside their boundaries first of all, but also outside of their boundaries." He added, "I think Wesley would say, if he were here today, it is appropriate for certain nation-states — including specifically the United States because of its strength and because of its self-correction — to act as a policing authority under certain circumstances."

Thobaben urged, "Participate in the machinery of the world as a splendid vice, because that's what God has told us to do, to restrain evil the best we can in this fallen world. But you should always do it with one step back and ready to go out the door, because the world wants to use the church, and the church should not be used by the world."

ACTION: For more information about this event, go to www.theird.org for the July 1, 2008 report by Joshua Calo.

United Methodists Celebrate the Holy Spirit

The Aldersgate Renewal Ministries' annual convention attracted over 1,100 United Methodists, including many who worship charismatically. Meeting in July in Columbus, Ohio, the Aldersgate jamboree called upon the Holy Spirit to revive United Methodism, which has lost over 3 million members in the United States during the last 40 years.

Holston Conference Bishop James Swanson empathized with the many who "go to churches where you feel you are the only one who believes that God can still bring water out of a dry well." However, Swanson said, "I do believe that God is telling us in the midst of those dead and dry situations, 'Don't lose hope!'"

Swanson preached from Ezekiel 27, where God brings Ezekiel to the valley of dry bones. The Bishop said the "formula" for renewal is that God diagnoses the problem and we, like Ezekiel, admit the limits of our understanding. "Ezekiel at least had the sense to scratch his head and said, 'You know what, I really don't know.'" Swanson continued, "I really wish that we Bishops sometimes had the sense to say, 'You know what? We don't know.'"

God instructed Ezekiel to "prophesy" to the bones, Swanson observed, because "As Ezekiel goes to preaching the bones get organized . . . the bones begin to understand their place in the Kingdom of God. The Word gets them organized and they at least begin to look like they can function as a live being."

"We're trying to have a church without the spirit of Almighty God," Swanson declared. "The purpose of the church is to bring people into saving relationship with Jesus, but you and I can't do that. People can hear about Jesus from you, but . . . [if] a man or a woman doesn't know God, they can't react. It is only by the Spirit of God that a dead person . . . comes alive!"

While Swanson lamented United Methodist lethargy, Charisma magazine editor J. Lee Grady pointed to spiritual forces undermining Methodism's witness. "Folks, we are in a war," he warned. "It's not against flesh and blood; it's not against people. We have enemies in the spiritual realm." He joked, "I have to apologize for the militant imagery . . . I know there are those in the church today who want us to just put away all our weapons." But Grady insisted, "God gave us spiritual gifts for spiritual war. This is not a time to be sweet."

Grady preached from 2 Kings 11, where King Ahab's daughter, Athaliah, seizes Judah's throne, killing most of David's descendants who could challenge her. "There is a spiritual Athaliah at work in your denomination," Grady warned. "Athaliah introduc-

es Baal worship to the House of Judah," he explained. "Anywhere Athaliah goes there is an agenda of abortion and infanticide . . . and I have a feeling there is an agenda of abortion in some of your top offices." Alluding to those who want to redefine marriage and the family, he observed, "Athaliah despises true holiness; she uses the temple items for Baal worship," and she "brings a spirit of Universalism."

Urging action, Grady challenged, "We cannot peacefully coexist with Baal or with his henchmen. When Athaliah is ruling in the king's house, there has to be a no-tolerance policy . . . make your own applications here as it applies to The United Methodist Church." He recommended, "pray and pray . . . and put your foot down in some places." Grady called clergy, Aldersgate staff, and Bishop Swanson forward for intercessory prayer. He held up Swanson's forefinger and prayed that God would use the Bishop to point out those who needed to be called to account for their wrongful leadership of God's church. ✚

ACTION: For more information, go to www.aldersgaterenewal.org. Thank Bishop Swanson at bishop@holston.org

and J. Lee Grady at charisma@strang.com for their strong messages.

WARNING: IF THE UMC WEAKENS ITS COMMITMENT TO CHRISTIAN SEXUAL MORALITY, OUR CHURCH WILL SPLIT — LIKE THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH'S DISASTROUS SPLIT.

UMAction asks you to take prompt action. If our United Methodist Church weakens its strong Biblical stand on sexual behavior and marriage, the UMC will split — there will be a huge exodus of faithful Christians. That disaster could be caused by changing church law, by an activist Judicial Council decision, by formally or informally allowing "local option" on same-sex "marriage," or simply by failing to enforce church law.

Can't we learn from the disaster of the Episcopal Church USA, which now allows same-sex unions and has an openly homosexual Bishop? The Episcopal Church is splitting apart and has already lost many of its churches and members. We urge every faithful United Methodist to stand up and speak out: Defend and enforce our strong UM stand on marriage and homosexual behavior! Don't let our church copy the Episcopal mistake! Don't split our church!



Bouknight Urges Cross-Centered UM Renewal

Retired Memphis UM megachurch pastor Bill Bouknight, past President of the Confessing Movement, declared that United Methodism's "fundamental problem is spiritual" while addressing the annual UM Congress on Evangelism early this year in Savannah.

United Methodism now receives only half as many new members by profession of faith as in the 1950s, Bouknight observed. "I believe that The United Methodist Church in North America is no longer sure what its 'good news' is," he suggested. "And when a denomination does not have clarity about its central message, it cannot declare it with confidence or conviction. Our bugle sounds more like retreat than reveille."

Bouknight urged United Methodists to overcome their "theological schizophrenia." The UMC advertising mantra — "Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors" — is "fine as long as 'open minds' does not imply that we're not sure what we believe."

Bouknight pointed to United Methodism's official logo — the cross and the flame of the Holy Spirit — as the "recipe for renewal."

The cross declares two messages simultaneously, Bouknight preached. "First, how awful is my sin, that it would require a cross to atone for it, and secondly, how awesome is God's love that He would agonize and die on a cross for sinners just like me." He said, "My prayer is that we will once again claim our cross-centered gospel and proclaim it boldly in the power of the Holy Spirit."

Bouknight warned about "hypocrisy" in United Methodism. He pointed to deploring homosexual activity but ignoring heterosexual sin, such as cohabitation. He also cited Bishops who emphasize helping children in society while remaining silent about abortion. Bouknight named the UM General Board of Church and Society, which often denounces the United States but remains silent about human rights abuses in most other nations.

"The Board of Church and Society should critique our nation and its policies from a Biblical, Christian perspective," Bouknight said. "But for goodness sake, let the Board be fair and balanced. The United States should not be held to a different standard than other nations of the world. A higher standard, yes, because of our blessings, but not a different standard. And it would be refreshing for the Board of Church and Society to acknowledge even once every quadrennium that freedom's best friend on earth is the United States of America."

After his sermon, the UM Congress on Evangelism gave Bouknight its annual award for outstanding leadership in evangelism. 

ACTION: Order Rev. Bouknight's latest book, *Should Christians Always Oppose War?*, Bristol House. www.bristolhouseltd.com. 1-800-451-7323.

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YOUR OPINION, PLEASE!

Do you agree with the Rev. Bill Bouknight that United Methodists need to rely more upon the Cross?

☐ Yes!

☐ No!

☐ Not sure.

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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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