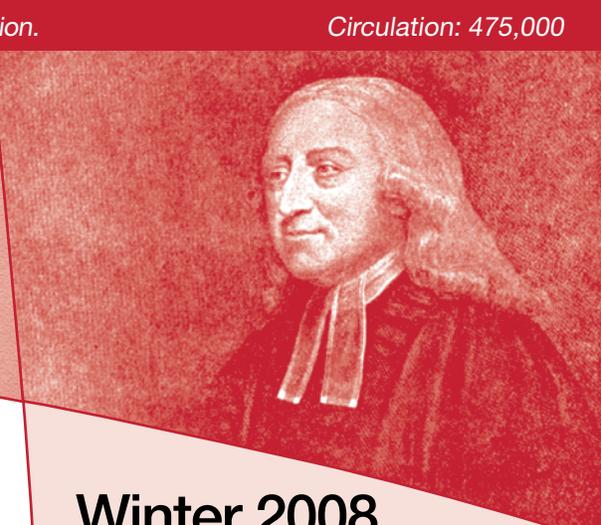


UMAction

Briefing



UM Bishops Hail Obama's Election

Meeting during the week of November 1-7, the United Methodist Council of Bishops responded with enthusiasm to Barack Obama's election. Singing what is often called the "Black National Anthem" or "Lift Every Voice and Sing," the bishops rejoiced with tears and smiles. Some shouted Obama's campaign slogan, "Yes, we can!" The bishops were meeting at St. Simon's Island, Georgia.

Among the rejoicers was retired Bishop William Boyd Grove. He noted that while we "find that the glaciers melting...children in Zimbabwe are starving... the heavenly mountains of Appalachia [being] blasted to hell [by mining]... and the Iraq War continues" there is yet hope. "What a gift to be here together when an age ended and a new age began. That is the hope that is in me," said Grove. For those who might question his conflation of politics and religion, the bishop added, "This isn't about politics. This is about [the] gospel."

Bishop Linda Lee of Wisconsin, in a prayer, thanked God for "the privilege of this day, standing on the precipice of a new age. We give You thanksgiving for the way the people of this country have spoken." She reminded the bishops that in the face of racism, "Obama says that we have a chance to change! We invite you to think about what that means... try to receive the change that we have a chance to make right now!"

With equal enthusiasm, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung of Chicago declared, "The part of the faith that I had in America which was lost has now been restored." He recalled that, growing up in Korea and then coming to the United States, "We believed in what America meant to the world." However, he said, "My faith in America began to crack as I learned, noticed and experienced racism and other kinds of injustice all around me, and it was shaken when the war in Iraq started, and it was crushed when I found out that my government practiced and legitimized torture."

But following the election, Jung said, "I believe in America again." He further explained, "When I see so many people on TV with tears of jubilation in different parts, I hear them saying in their hearts, 'Yes, we believe in America again!' Indeed, hope was renewed. That's the reason for the hope I have in me." He closed his comments by modifying the Obama campaign slogan, shouting, "Yes, God can!"

Before the election results, the bishops prepared an official letter congratulating the yet-to-be-determined president-elect, and requested a meeting with him once he takes office. Two Bibles, signed by the bishops, will be sent with the letter to President-elect Obama and his wife, which is a tradition for the bishops and new presidents. On Wednesday, they added a small sentence, expressing their hope that God "will be with you as you shoulder the mantle of presidential leadership as the first African-American." ✚

ACTION: Find a full report about the bishops' November meeting at www.theird.org. Pray for President Obama and for the United Methodist Council of Bishops.

Winter 2008

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Bishop Gregory Palmer, president of the United Methodist Council of Bishops, signs an episcopal letter to Barack Obama following his election Nov. 4 as the 44th president of the United States. (UMNS/Linda Green)

Retired Bishops Ordain Lesbian Minister for Dissident Group

Retired United Methodist Bishops Susan Morrison and Jesse Dewitt presided over the “ordination” of a lesbian United Methodist as a minister within the “Church Within A Church (CWAC)” movement at a Baltimore United Methodist church in October. They also ordained a heterosexual woman who said she had been denied a United Methodist ordination because of her liberal views on homosexuality.

The United Methodist Church officially prohibits the ordination of practicing homosexuals into the ministry. CWAC is supposed to be a pro-homosexuality alternative for United Methodists. The ordinations were also endorsed by the Reconciling Ministries Network.

These “ordinations” took place October 19 at historic Mount Vernon Place United Methodist Church in Baltimore, site of the 1784 Christmas conference where Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke helped found American Methodism. The candidates for ordination were Annie Britton and Jenna Zirbel. Britton is pursuing her doctoral studies at United Methodism’s Boston University School of Theology, and she is pursuing “ministry opportunities” in Rhode Island. She said she was married to her partner three years ago in Massachusetts. Zirbel, who is a “married, straight woman with two children,” said the Iowa Conference would not ordain her because of her “support for gay rights” and “commitment to all marginalized people.” She currently works for an AIDS Council in northeastern New York.



Annie Britton, one ordinand, receiving her stole. (IRD/Rebekah Sharpe)

At its November meeting, the United Methodist Council of Bishops declined to criticize their colleagues for their unofficial ordinations for CWAC. The council’s statement admitted that an ordination of a “self-avowed practicing homosexual” did take place, and reiterated that “The United Methodist Church is clear that it does not ordain self-avowed practicing homosexuals.” It declared that the Baltimore ordinations had “no effect within the United Methodist Church and was not approved by any annual conference, or by any Board of Ordained Ministry, or by any cabinet.” It concluded: “We believe these ordinations belong to the Church within a Church

and therefore have no official status within our denomination and will not qualify individuals for appointment within the UMC.”

Besides retired Bishops Morrison and DeWitt, who were present at the Baltimore ordination, retired Bishops Judith Craig and Leontine Kelly sent public letters of support. The council did not acknowledge its members’ role in that service. ✚

ACTION: *Contact Council of Bishops President Gregory Palmer, Bishop of Iowa, and urge him to show leadership in upholding United Methodism’s standards on marriage, ordination and Christian sexual ethics. Email: bishop.palmer@iaumc.org. Address: 2301 Rittenhouse St, Des Moines, IA 50321-3101. Tell the bishop you are praying for him and all the bishops.*

Church Agency Spends \$1.4 Million On Litigation

In his October 2008 report to the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) directors meeting in Washington, D.C., General Secretary Jim Winkler revealed that GBCS has spent about \$1.4 million on litigation to defend its use of the Methodist Building Trust to fund its political lobbying and other programs not specified by the Trust. The majority has been spent in the past two years. Created in 1965 with assets dating to the church’s Old Temperance Board, the Trust document specifies that its assets shall be devoted exclusively to alcohol and temperance ministries. But for nearly 40 years GBCS has spent millions of dollars from the Trust on political lobbying not related to alcohol issues.

Realizing its legal vulnerability, GBCS has asked Washington, D.C. Superior Court to validate its use of the Trust.

GBCS Trustees Chairman Fred Brewington also spoke to GBCS directors about the case, for which the trial was held in October. Brewington said GBCS initiated the legal action because it did not wish for the situation to “continue to percolate and fester; to bring some closure where there was a lot of gossip and a lot of misinformation” being spread about the church. GBCS wants the court to validate its wide interpretation of the Trust’s obligations, claiming that the 1965 Trust document did not represent the true intent of the Board of Temperance’s

United Methodism's Lobby Takes Liberal Stances

Following his unanimous re-election as the General-Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) by its directors at their October meeting, Jim Winkler remarked in his report that, "The present [U.S. federal government] budget values war over peace, the rich over the poor, polluters over" the environmentally responsible, and that "these policies are incompatible with the teachings of Jesus Christ."

GBCS is United Methodism's official \$5 million lobby office on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. and takes liberal positions on dozens of political issues before the U.S. Congress every year.

Winkler cited a Christological mandate for his political advocacy, saying, "Jesus said he was here to bring release to captives," and the GBCS advocates "restorative justice rather than retributive." Christ said that he came to bring "sight to the blind," and so United Methodists support "not only hospitals, but advocate for [government sponsored] healthcare for all people," said Winkler.

Winkler concluded, "An end to war, poverty, and racism is possible; if I did not believe that I would not be a follower of Jesus Christ." He suggested that as Christians, "We are excellent at feeding the hungry...[but] freeing the oppressed and confronting systems that perpetuate hunger and violence is always the hard part." He recommended widening programs of political witness, "education, and action," to close this gap. In contrast, he announced that at the GBCS, "Believing that work

should keep you out of poverty, not keep you in it, we succeeded in the U.S. at raising the minimum wage. We worked and will continue to work with the U.S. Congress to stress that the federal budget is a moral document."

And while Winkler stressed that it was "critical that we have dialogue across ideological and theological lines," affirming abortion rights seems to remain a high priority for GBCS. The Council of Bishops have provided their "Four Areas of Focus" to guide the church's mission through the next four years, and Winkler interpreted their calls for a concern for global health and ministry with the poor to include "family planning" advocacy, a frequent euphemism for abortion. He stated that globally, GBCS would seek "increased availability of reproductive services for men and women," and that through their domestic lobbying, the "United States [will be] encouraged to increase its commitment to family planning."

GBCS remains a member of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC), which opposes all restrictions on abortions.

United Methodism's governing General Conference meeting earlier this year, narrowly rejected withdrawing church agencies from RCRC.

The "Human Welfare Work Area," a GBCS committee led by Bishop Jane Middleton of Central Pennsylvania, received the board's approval of various action items related to RCRC and abortion rights. To extend GBCS' support for RCRC, the board approved sending, with all expenses paid, three of its representatives to RCRC meetings. One of the three is an RCRC critic. GBCS also will continue its role as the co-chair of RCRC's Council of Governors. And GBCS will promote the RCRC's work in "four articles during the year" to United Methodist readers of the GBCS e-newsletter, Faith in Action. Additionally, the board voted to join the National Coalition to Support Sexuality Education (NCSSE), an organization that lobbies against abstinence-based sexual education and supports abortion rights. ❖

ACTION: *Who co-chairs Church and Society in your local church? Is that person aware of GBCS's political lobbying for controversial liberal causes? Check out our website www.theird.org and GBCS's website at: www.umc-gbcs.org.*



Jim Winkler, Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS)

original donors. Brewington said that an adverse judicial ruling would not cause GBCS to "shut down, and shut our doors," but it could cause GBCS to rethink its advocacy. A ruling from the judge may not come until next year. ❖

ACTION: *Contact GBCS Trustees Chair Fred Brewington and urge that GBCS ends its litigation and abide by the Trust: Email: lawoffices.fkb@verizon.net; Address: 50 Clinton St., Ste. 502, Hempstead, NY 11550.*

UM Missions Agency Gives Political Grants

United Methodism's largest agency inaugurated its new chief, a former liberal bishop, and approved grants for left-wing political advocacy at its October 2008 meeting. The 90 directors met in Stamford, Connecticut.

The General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) has long been one of the church's most controversial agencies because of its political activism and frequent preference for humanitarianism over evangelism.

"Mission is not only about us..." but "for the sake of the planet, for the sake of peace, and for the sake of the poor," said Ed Paup, GBGM's recently elected general secretary. Just like Moses atop Mount Nebo, said Paup, it is fitting for the GBGM to, at the beginning of this new quadrennium, take stock of "where it is we've come from to where it is we're going."

Global Ministries is the United Methodist board responsible for overseeing and coordinating the church's global missionary (main GBGM body), women's ministry (Women's Division), and disaster relief efforts (UMCOR and GBGM Health & Relief). While the Board enables many United Methodists to carry out the mission of "Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world," its political causes still create distractions.

This year, the Women's Division reiterated its support for abortion rights and resolved to use its local membership to advocate socialized medicine, while GBGM continued to pursue one-sided advocacy in Middle East affairs that favored Palestinians over Israel, and rejected the legitimacy of the U.S. government's efforts to control immigration into the U.S. GBGM is United Methodism's largest agency, spending over \$140 million a year.

Paup left his position as bishop of the Oregon-Idaho Conference this year to become GBGM chief. He said he will tackle the "peril of planet earth...the cry for peace from all [people]... [and] not only address poverty, but eradicate poverty." Paup noted that there are "seven billion people on the planet; in 1930 there were 2 [billion]." Of those, he observed, "Fifty percent go to bed hungry every night." The church, he said, is "in need of a missional 'extreme makeover,' an extreme missional makeover for justice and peace for all of God's children." But Bishop Paup did not speak much about evangelism.

GBGM's Women's Division reaffirmed "strong support for reproductive health and freedom [access to abortion] for all women, both in the United States and around the world." And it approved, on behalf of United Methodist Women, "a

campaign...to educate and advocate on behalf of a single-payer health plan in the United States." The program will deploy grassroots lobbying in favor of socialized healthcare.

Meanwhile, GBGM approved \$10,000 for the Sabeel Youth Leadership Training Program, whose partner organization, Friends of Sabeel in North America (FOSNA), has sponsored speakers who declare Israel to be a "racist" state that implements "ethnic cleansing" and "apartheid" policies. Similarly, \$10,000 will go to the pro-Palestinian news outlet, the International Middle East Media Center, for its Palestinian Youth Media Training program. Another \$11,400 will support a staff person for the group over the next three years. The Media Center is an affiliate of the Palestinian Center for Rapprochement between People, an advocacy group exclusively by and for Palestinians that acknowledges only Israel's faults in the current Middle East conflict.

The political advocacy group, "US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation," has worked closely with the GBGM Women's Division for some time and received \$5,000. It rejects Israel's right to self-defense and supports "comprehensive divestment" in Israeli economic interests.

On immigration, GBGM staff informed new board members of the previous board's 2006 and 2007 resolutions demanding the demilitarization [presumably removing of the wall, checkpoints, and guards] along the US/Mexico border. In particular they "oppose the construction of further walls and other obstacles on the border that endanger lives of immigrants [who are attempting to cross illegally]." The GBGM memo declared the board was called to "respond in the name of Jesus Christ to government raids..." ❖

ACTION: Urge new GBGM General Secretary Ed Paup to affirm evangelism and aiding the poor rather than divisive political causes. Email: Epaup@gbgm-umc.org Address: 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115.

The General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) has long been one of the church's most controversial agencies because of its political activism and frequent preference for humanitarianism over evangelism. (IRD/Rebekah Sharpe)



Bishop Whitaker Defends The Creeds

In a November column, Florida United Methodist Bishop Timothy Whitaker lamented that most churches he attends do not recite the Apostles' or Nicene Creed.

"Liberals are wary [of the creed] because they fear recitation of a historic creed conditions Christians to formulate the meaning of the faith according to past rather than contemporary expressions," Whitaker noted. "Evangelicals are wary because they fear the use of the creed emphasizes ideas rather than experience of God."

By avoiding the creed, Christians miss opportunities to know Christ better, Whitaker implored. He noted that liberals who shun the creed present "Jesus as a figure in history to be emulated today, rather than as the Lord and Savior of the world." And evangelicals tend "to present him as a personal Savior whose work may be limited to only what happens in our own hearts."

By reciting the creed every Sunday, Whitaker said, "Christ who gave himself to the church in the beginning takes form for us and in us today through the eyes of our faith." The bishop criticized evangelist Tony Campolo, an "evangelical liberal" who is influenced by "the worst in both worlds" when he denounced the creeds as "rationalistic." Methodists should see the creed as "the narrative of God's action" and the "means of

giving our trust to the One who has acted on our behalf and is still acting for us." By reciting the creed on Sunday, it "gets into our bones," he said.

The creed does not speak about Jesus' teaching or example, Whitaker admitted. Instead, it speaks of His birth, suffering, crucifixion, resurrection from the dead, and ascension into Heaven. "The Christ of the creed is God entering into creation and human history to bring all of us and everything to God and to deliver us from the powers of sin, evil and death," he wrote. Until churches return the creed to the foreground, "we are depriving ourselves of a means of grace through which Jesus Christ presents himself to us and unites us to himself and his ministry in the world." ✚

ACTION: Please thank Bishop Whitaker for affirming the church's ancient creeds: Email: bishop@flumc.org; Address: 1122 E. McDonald St., Lakeland, FL 33801.

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Should United Methodist Agencies Routinely Make Controversial Political Statements?

Yes!

No!

Not sure.

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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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Annual Conferences to Vote on "Segregation" Amendments

Next Spring, all United Methodist annual conferences will vote on proposed constitutional amendments to enable the creation of a new, U.S. only Regional Conference that would meet every 4 years, before the international General Conference.

Critics call the amendments a "global segregation plan" that would exclude conservative African and Filipino delegates so as eventually to permit homosexual clergy and same-sex unions. At the 2008 General Conference, most U.S. delegates voted to liberalize the church's teachings about sexual ethics. But international delegates ensured the survival of biblical standards.

This new U.S. only Regional Conference would exclude the 30 percent of United Methodists who now live outside the U.S. Having originated with the Council of Bishops, these amendments were approved at the 2008 General Conference. Their ratification requires two thirds of the total of all voters at the 2009 annual conferences.

If approved, the 2012 General Conference could then create a new U.S. Regional Conference to deliberate over U.S. church issues. The plan's supporters assert that the church's ordination standards and prohibitions against same-sex unions would remain under the authority of the international General Conference. Critics warn that a future General Conference potentially could delegate these issues to the U.S. Regional Conference.

United Methodism in the U.S. is losing about 60,000 members every year. In Africa, where 3 million United Methodists now live, it is fast growing. 

ACTION: *Please urge your church's pastor and lay delegate to the 2009 annual conference to oppose the proposed amendments and support continued full integration with fellow United Methodists around the world.*

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