

# UMAction

## Briefing



## Maxie Dunnam Opposes “Open Membership” Amendment

**A**sbury Seminary Chancellor Maxie Dunnam is opposing a church constitutional amendment on which annual conferences will vote this Spring that potentially would mandate automatic church membership to all applicants.

Amendment 1 is called “inclusiveness of the church” and declares that “all persons, upon taking vows declaring the Christian faith and relationship to Jesus Christ, shall be eligible to become professing members in any local church in the connection.” It further insists that “no conference or other organizational unit of the church shall be structured so as to exclude any member or any constituent body.”

Dunnam admitted that “at first blush it would seem impossible to be against such a gracious welcome to those seeking Christ and his church.” But he pointed out that United Methodism’s present membership policy is already very open.

“Why is this change being proposed?” Dunnam asked. He noted that the amendment originated with Texas gay advocacy group called Breaking the Silence that opposes United Methodism’s official stance affirming marriage and opposing homosexual practice. “We’re open to all persons, but not to all practices,” Dunnam said.

Having been repeatedly defeated legislatively, gay advocacy groups are trying a different tactic, Dunnam surmised. “This amendment is an attempt to change our position so that persons openly practicing a gay lifestyle and who have no desire to change would be allowed to join the church and continue in that lifestyle.”

Dunnam also warned that the amendment could ultimately require that practicing homosexuals could be ordained, which the church currently prohibits.

The amendment has other potential results, Dunnam further warned. It could prevent local churches from requiring membership classes. It also could mandate automatic church membership for a spouse abuser, a member of a hate group, or an unapologetic adulterer. “All a person has to be willing to do is say ‘yes’ to our vows, and the pastor and the church must receive such a person into full membership,” Dunnam concluded. ✚

**ACTION:** Please alert your church’s pastor and lay member to annual conference about the dangers posed by the “inclusiveness of the church” membership constitutional amendment.

## Spring 2009

### Inside:

Bishop Swenson Rallies the Teamsters Union .....2

UM Evangelist Opposes UM Global Segregation Plan .....2

Florida UM Bishop Defends Pro-Life Cause. ....3

United Methodist Officials Urge Liberalizing Immigration Laws .....4

UM Lobbyist Pushes U.S. Congress for Carbon Tax .....4

Transsexual United Methodist Minister Lobbies on Capitol Hill.....5



Asbury Seminary Chancellor Maxie Dunnam (IRD/Rebekah Sharpe)

## Bishop Swenson Rallies the Teamsters Union

United Methodist Bishop Mary Ann Swenson of Pasadena, California addressed a Teamsters rally in Washington, D.C. during the Lenten season -- to tell them that “the very purpose of Jesus’ coming” was to establish economic justice on earth.

“I welcome the opportunity to tell the truth about justice anywhere, anytime,” Bishop Swenson enthusiastically declared to hundreds of Teamster protesters.

The placard-waving demonstrators from the 1.4 million International Brotherhood of Teamsters snarled traffic outside the National Restaurant Association to protest the trade association’s “anti-worker and anti-union lobbying activity.” Teamster demonstrators were particularly targeting the restauranteurs for opposing an increased minimum wage and the Employee Free Choice Act, which would deny a secret ballot to laborers reluctant to join a union.

Bishop Swenson later told her fellow United Methodists of southern California that after she had addressed a labor rally in Los Angeles at Christmas time, she was invited to the Teamsters jamboree in Washington, D.C., during the Easter season. Since she was going to be in the nation’s capital “for another meeting anyway,” she eagerly adapted her Advent remarks from the Christmas labor rally to the Lenten-Easter season, she explained.

At the Washington Teamsters rally, Swenson claimed to represent all the United Methodist churches of southern California, Hawaii, Guam, and Saipan, “every one of them an outpost of support for the rights of workers to organize.”

“It has been my privilege to speak on behalf of striking hotel workers in L.A., of FedEx employees bargaining for just wages, and for Teamsters and dockworkers at the U.S. Port of

Long Beach,” Swenson boasted to the Teamsters rally. Admitting that union advocacy is especially controversial in a global economic downturn, she still insisted that “justice knows no season.” And “whether the Dow is falling, or springtime is blossoming, or elections are pending, whenever and wherever basic rights are threatened, that is the time to speak up and to act out -- and that time is now.”

Observing the pre-Easter season of Lent, Bishop Swenson asserted that “this is the very best time to speak truth to power, for that is central to the Easter story.” She told the Teamsters that Christ had confronted “Wall Street” in the Temple of Jerusalem. “Moral authority displaces economic authority, the object of faith is restored, and justice is served, for that is the very purpose of Jesus’ coming, not just into the city, but into our lives,” Bishop Swenson declared. ✚

**ACTION:** *Swenson’s California-Nevada Conference is among the fastest declining in United Methodism. Encourage Bishop Swenson to focus on evangelism and church growth rather than Washington, D.C. rallies: PO Box 6006, Pasadena, California 91102; phone: 800-244-8622 ext 312; email: [bishop@cal-pac.org](mailto:bishop@cal-pac.org)*



United Methodist Bishop Mary Ann Swenson (IRD/Rebekah Sharpe)

## UM Evangelist Opposes UM Global Segregation Plan

United Methodist Evangelist Eddie Fox is opposing the “global segregation plan” that would facilitate creation of a new U.S. only regional conference that excludes international delegates. Fox is a renowned Methodist preacher around the world.

Annual conferences this spring will vote on the constitutional amendments permitting a new U.S. only regional conference. Currently the United Methodist Church is governed by an international General Conference meeting every 4 years, followed by jurisdictional gatherings. This new proposal would add one more convention to the mix.

“We are connected together with our brothers and sisters around the world,” Fox implored. “To have a national church would set us on a path that would be divisive I believe in our communion.”

About one third of United Methodists now live outside. African United Methodism especially is growing, while the U.S. has lost members continuously for 45 years.

“There are those who would argue that it is important for us to have a regional or central conference in order to deal with issues that impact only the church in North America,” Fox said. “The truth is that most of the decisions that we

## Florida UM Bishop Defends Pro-Life Cause

United Methodist agencies like the General Board of Church and Society and the United Methodist Women's Division defend unrestricted abortion rights. But Florida Bishop Timothy Whitaker has been a notable proponent of the pro-life cause.

"We often hear the truism that it is foolish to become obsessed with a single issue, such as abortion," Whitaker wrote in February. "Of course, it is a mistake to single out one moral concern to the practical exclusion of others in our daily discourse, ethical reflection and political attention. Nevertheless, the fact that a few would be so foolish is no excuse for the rest of us avoiding being engaged in an issue."

Bishop Whitaker acknowledged the importance of other issues besides abortion. "Other issues must be addressed as profound moral concerns and urgent practical problems," he wrote. "Yet their rightful demand for our attention is no excuse for failing to be concerned about abortion. We are capable of dealing with more than one, or several, moral concerns at the same time."

Calling it a "vexing" issue, Whitaker attributed the pro-choice stance to America's "social environment shaped by the value of individual freedom." But he urged remembered that the "freedom we exercise in the case of an abortion is more than the liberty to live where we desire or to hold whatever religious or political opinions we choose, since the exercise of this freedom results in the extermination of another human being."

Whitaker contended, "There is one fact that will continue to affect public debate and personal moral reasoning, and that is the reality that a human life begins with conception." The Florida bishop recognized that biological realities do

not always translate well into specific policy fixes, and "there are sometimes complex political reasons why a particular government refuses to fully enact in civil law a moral rule." Whitaker noted that the example of the early church shows that Christians have always opposed abortion.

"The Christian community distinguished itself in its very beginning by opposing infanticide and abortion, both of which were commonplace in the Roman Empire," Whitaker recalled. "For Christians in the American context, finding our way to this historic Christian perspective has not been easy."

Whitaker admitted difficulties surrounding abortion regulations: "Christians who are citizens of the United States will always have somewhat different political judgments — as citizens — about what is possible and acceptable regarding the legal solution to the moral problem of abortion." He suggested: "As Christians, we should continue to move toward a distinctly Christian perspective and practice," regardless of the surrounding culture or limitations of government morality.

Among United Methodists, Whitaker remarked: "The movement of the General Conference over time to strengthen The United Methodist Church's pastoral guidance and witness about abortion is encouraging. As we embrace more fully the larger historic and ecumenical Christian witness about abortion, we shall grow in our ability to develop a distinctive Christian identity in a pluralistic society and a secular government." ❖

**ACTION:** *Thank Bishop Timothy Whitaker for his willingness to speak out: 1122 E. McDonald St, Lakeland, FL 33801; fax: 863-687-0568; email: bishop@flumc.org.*

make, most of that which comes before us, has a global nature or an international dimension to that decision."

Fox pointed out that 40 years ago 92% of United Methodists were in the U.S. Today, it is only 64%. And soon, he predicted, half or more of the church will be overseas. Fox asked: "So I would ask why would we create a central or regional conference now, when we're becoming a truly global church?"

The evangelist also pointed out that a new U.S. regional conference would add "another layer of bureaucracy" between the local church and the General Conference, with added costs and time.

Fox recalled: "In the Appalachian Mountains where I grew up, we had a saying: 'Do not open the gate until you know what is coming through the gate.'" He urged further study before adoption of a constitutional amendment leading to a new U.S. only regional conference. ❖

**ACTION:** *Please encourage your pastor and lay member to annual conference to vote "no" on the constitutional amendments about creating a new U.S. only regional conference.*



## United Methodist Officials Urge Liberalizing Immigration Laws

United Methodist Bishops and agencies are aggressively pushing for liberalized U.S. immigration laws. In recent months, Bishop Minerva Carcaño of the Desert Southwest Annual Conference joined a protest against a local sheriff's arrests and treatment of illegal immigrants in Phoenix. And the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) organized United Methodist congregations into a series of interfaith prayer vigils for immigration liberalization.

The church officials claim the Department of Homeland Security is disregarding the rights of illegal immigrants with its deportation raids and other enforcement of immigration law. Many liberal United Methodist officials seem to advocate amnesty and free healthcare and welfare services for illegal immigrants. GBCS and United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries have signed onto the *Interfaith Statement on Immigration Concerns*, which cites scriptures such as Leviticus 19:33-34 to justify amnesty-based reforms of the immigration system.

Bishop Carcaño carried her message to a February 11th press conference at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. She insisted: "As people of faith, we cannot and will not stand by in silence while the immigrant community in the U.S. is treated unjustly

and inhumanely." GBCS official Bill Mefford reported in a recent conference call that members of the U.S. Congress would receive United Methodist packets of media coverage about the United Methodist prayer vigils for liberalized immigration laws. "We want to convey to our members of Congress all the ways your places of worship are good neighbors to immigrant communities," Mefford explained. "We want to be able to ask members of congress, 'How are you going to be a good neighbor to immigrants?'" ❖



Bishop Minerva Carcaño (UMNS/  
Kathy L. Gilbert)

**ACTION:** *Keep informed about what the United Methodist lobby office in Washington, D.C. is doing in YOUR name: [www.umc-gbcs.org](http://www.umc-gbcs.org).*

## UM Lobbyist Pushes U.S. Congress for Carbon Tax

United Methodist lobbyist John Hill Early urged the U.S. House Subcommittee on Energy and Commerce to support carbon taxes that supposedly would combat Global Warming.

"Rising sea levels, more intense storms, floods, droughts, and spreading disease vectors affect those living in poverty, communities of color and other vulnerable communities first and hardest," warned Hill, who works for the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society on Capitol Hill. "The Gulf Coast hurricanes of 2004 demonstrated all too painfully the devastating consequences that occur when storms of nature interact with the storms of poverty and racism that batter communities in the United States and around the world."

Speaking both for the United Methodist lobby office and for the National Council of Churches, Hill urged "mandatory emissions reduction targets in order to prevent catastrophic impacts for the people and planet we are called to serve."

Apparently none of the listening congressmen had any questions for Hill after his testimony. They were more interested in Steven Hayward from the American Enterprise Institute, who pointed out that proposals to reduce U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent by 2050 would involve returning to

levels of usage not seen since about 1875. He also noted that estimates about the potential cost of emissions trading range from about \$600 to \$1,500 per American household.

Michael Carey of the Ohio Coal Association told the committee that coal fuels 50 percent of America's electricity. By 2025, America's electricity needs will increase by 40 percent. "Some climate change legislative proposals would force us to limit the use of coal and yet, there is no source of power that can replace coal at the same cost," Carey said. "The same groups who oppose the use of coal also oppose the use of nuclear power." Natural gas is three times as expensive as coal. And renewable energy has "limited capability and high costs." He closed: "This is a human issue as well as an environmental one." ❖

**ACTION:** *Urge John Hill and the United Methodist Board of Church and Society to represent the whole church when they speak to the U.S. Congress and not just narrow political interests: 100 Maryland Ave NE, Washington, D.C. 20002; phone: 202.488.5654; email: [jhill@umc-gbcs.org](mailto:jhill@umc-gbcs.org).*

## Transsexual United Methodist Minister Lobbies on Capitol Hill



The Rev. Drew Phoenix (IRD/  
Loralei Coyle)

**T**he Rev. Drew Phoenix of St. John's United Methodist Church in Baltimore ignited controversy in 2007 by becoming the first pulpit filling United Methodist minister openly to have a sex change operation, going from female to male, with support from Bishop John Schol. In May Phoenix lobbied with the Human Rights Campaign for gay rights legislation before the U.S. Congress.

"What should have remained deeply intimate and personal became unnecessarily controversial and political," recalled Phoenix at the Capitol Hill rally about the reaction to the sex change procedure. "Defamatory statements were made against me, charges filed to discredit me, and several attempts made to end my

employment with the United Methodist Church."

America's largest gay rights group, the Human Rights Campaign is pushing for adding "sexual orientation" to hate crimes legislation and also making "sexual identity," i.e. transsexuality, protected in the work place. The United Methodist Board of Church and Society is supporting the hate crimes initiative.

Phoenix claimed that "tens of thousands" of transsexuals were subject to hate-motivated violence and job discrimination every day. "As religious leaders and people of faith, we cannot sit by while our transgender sisters and brothers, made in the image of the Divine, continue to be oppressed," Phoenix insisted. Phoenix has left the Baltimore church and now directs an environmental group in Anchorage, Alaska. ✚

**ACTION:** Check out [www.TheIRD.org](http://www.TheIRD.org) for continue updates on church lobbying for gay rights causes.

Be sure to visit [www.TheIRD.org](http://www.TheIRD.org) to sign up for E-mail updates!

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How should United Methodist  
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☐ Support

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avoid partisan  
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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

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