

UMAction

Briefing



UM Lobbyist Pushes Obamacare

“Ambushes at town hall meetings, negative advertising campaigns, and right-wing radio and TV talk shows have been part of a campaign against health-care reform,” complained Jim Winkler, who heads the Capital Hill-based United Methodist Board of Church and Society. “A larger phenomena is at work here, though: Vietnam, Watergate, Iraq, decades of covert operations and government-sponsored assassinations and coups d’ etats, and secrecy and lies, and oppression and imperialism have left our people confused and angry and jaded and distrustful where Uncle Sam is involved.”

Winkler also cited “white supremacy, male superiority and American exceptionalism” as obstacles to his agency’s “progressive” agenda. His agency, which is the official lobby office for United Methodism, is waging a “John 10:10” campaign for government controlled health care based on Jesus’ words: “I came that they may have life and life more abundantly,” evidently equating government-controlled health insurance with Christ’s promise of “abundant life.”

The United Methodist lobby office joined other liberal church agencies in a meeting with the office of Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-MA) in early April to strategize about joint lobbying for government-controlled health insurance. They joined together into the “Believe Together: Health Care for All” advocacy network comprised of more than 40 faith groups who are “encouraging our nation’s leaders to pass comprehensive and compassionate health care reform legislation this year.” The central component of their advocacy was a June 24th “Interfaith Service of Witness and Prayer for Health Care for All.”

About 1,000 activists sat in the afternoon heat for two hours in Washington, D.C.’s Freedom Plaza as Winkler and other liberal religious lobbyists touted a socialized medical system that is “inclusive, accessible, affordable, and accountable.” Before the rally, Winkler’s agency, along with the United Methodist Women’s Division, invited activists for preliminary guided prayer for government health care in the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill. The United Methodist lobby also provided a room with advocacy resources for health care activists coming to and from meetings with Senators’ and Representatives’ offices throughout the day’s lobbying activities.

At the rally, Winkler, helped officiate, declaring that health care availability “only for those who can afford it breaks the covenant between a government and its people.” He also insisted: “We reject the notion that [the United States] can afford to carry on two wars but cannot afford to provide health care for our people... that tax cuts for the wealthy can be made permanent at the expense of health care for our people. People of faith insist the financial resources exist.” For Winkler, the health care debate could be easily summarized: “The needs of the poor take priority over wants of the rich.” ✚

ACTION: Contact Jim Winkler and respectfully share your views about his lobbying for Obamacare on behalf of The United Methodist Church; email: jwinkler@umc-gbcs.org; 100 Maryland Ave, NE, Washington, DC 20002.

Summer 2009

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Jim Winkler speaks at the June 24th “Interfaith Service of Witness and Prayer for Health Care for All” (IRD/Rebekah Sharpe)

Liberalized Church Membership and Global Segregation Amendments Defeated

Proposed constitutional amendments for The United Methodist Church that would have liberalized membership standards and separated the U.S. church from overseas United Methodists seemingly have been defeated. The amendments needed two thirds of all votes in the 2009 annual conferences for passage. With about 88 percent of the total U.S. annual conferences votes publicly available, the liberalized membership amendment is getting only about 50 percent of the votes. The global segregation amendments are getting only about 37 percent of the vote. U.S. conferences account for over 80 percent of the total likely vote.

Overseas conferences are still voting. But preliminary results from Congolese annual conferences, where over 1 million United Methodists reside, show the amendments being defeated by over 95 percent. At this point, these amendments could not attain the needed two thirds, even if all remaining votes around the global church favored them.

Amendment I declared that “all persons” are eligible for membership in any United Methodist church, “upon taking vows declaring the Christian faith and relationship in Jesus Christ.” Effectively, local pastors would have no discretion about who is ready for church membership.

Liberal groups advocated the change to secure guaranteed church membership for active homosexual and other sexual non-traditionalists.

Twenty-three other proposed amendments would have facilitated the creation of a new U.S.-only regional conference excluding overseas United Methodists. African United Methodists, who are now one third of church membership, have blocked liberal efforts to accept homosexual practice at the international General Conference. Liberals hoped that a U.S.-only governing body could approve liberal initiatives.

The church membership and global segregation amendments were backed by the Council of Bishops and liberal lobby groups, with approval from the 2008 General Conference. Their overwhelming defeat illustrates a powerful grassroots backlash against these proposals from the top. Over 40,000 United Methodist clergy and lay members of annual conferences have so far voted. ✚

ACTION: *Ask your pastor and church's lay member how they voted on these amendments at Annual Conference. Did they represent your church?*

Methodist Missionaries Agitate for Deposed Honduras President

Three dozen United Methodist missionaries currently or previously in Latin America have demanded the return to power of the ousted leftist president of Honduras who was aligned with communist Cuba and Venezuelan strongman Hugo Chavez.

According to the missionaries, Zelaya's “overthrow was carried out in violation of Honduran law,” and “those who today control the de facto government of Honduras have no legitimate right to do so.” Conspiratorially, they implored President Obama to investigate “any involvement of U.S. government-related agencies, including the International Republican Institute, in encouraging or preparing the rupture of the democratic process in Honduras.”

Zelaya was removed from power by the Honduran army, at the request of the Honduran Supreme Court, with support from the Honduras Congress, for having violated the

Honduran constitution by seeking another term in office. But the missionaries insisted Zelaya regain power. “Given the long record of the U.S. government in subverting genuine democracy throughout the region, it is important that your commitment to justice and democracy be reflected by the entire U.S. government,” the Methodists told Obama. They insisted he “take whatever diplomatic and economic steps are necessary” to restore Zelaya to power.

Four of the 36 missionaries previously served in Nicaragua in the 1980's, where they vigorously defended the Sandinista Cuba-backed Marxist regime, despite its persecution of Christians. In 1985, missionaries Paul Jeffrey, Lyda Pierce, Howard and Peggy Heiner wrote the United Methodist bishops, decrying U.S. “aggression” against the Sandinista regime, and claimed: “We witness no general repression of religion in Nicaragua today.”

Lesbian Testimony Excites Mississippi United Methodists

Mississippi United Methodist Bishop Hope Morgan Ward ignited controversy after hosting a testimony by a lesbian couple who celebrated their same-sex relationship at the Mississippi Annual Conference on June 12.

"The witness was not a challenge to the law of the church in any way," Ward claimed to a newspaper. "But it was an invitation for us to live faithfully and lovingly with all people with whom our lives are intertwined, ... people who may be different from ourselves."

In a worship service celebrating "diversity," with Bishop Ward presiding, Renee Sappington, age 38, and Connie Campbell, age 43, shared how they had met at church and became romantically involved after both had "realized we were gay."

"Over the course of a year, we knew we wanted to spend our lives together," Campbell told the annual conference. "So we wrote our vows and we went to the church. But since the denomination of which we were members does not condone same-sex unions, we did not go in. Instead we remained in the parking lot. And there, outside the doors of our church, but no less in the presence of God, Renee and I vowed to

love, honor and cherish each other till death we do part."

Sappington said she did not know "how many [church] members realize we are gay." Campbell responded with laughter: "They do now!" Sappington enthused that their Sunday school class "truly treats us as a married couple."

She regretted that "some doors remain closed" and that "we realize that at some churches in this denomination that we would be denied membership. And we also know that were we to say our vows today, we would also be standing outside closed doors."

Despite the lesbian testimony, the Mississippi Annual Conference rejected the constitutional proposal to liberalize church membership by 72 to 28 percent.

"We have no doubt that God embraces who we are and blesses our relationship, that God's doors are open even when the churches' doors sometimes aren't," Campbell insisted. Afterwards, in the face of controversy, Bishop Ward noted her "responsibility" to "uphold the doctrine, discipline and polity of The United Methodist Church," and that the "Mississippi Conference has consistently supported the positions on homosexuality stated in The Discipline of The United Methodist Church." ✚

ACTION: *Respectfully urge Bishop Ward to uphold the church's teaching that marriage is between man and woman; email: bishop@mississippi-umc.org; P. O. Box 931, Jackson, MS 39205-0931.*



Bishop Hope Morgan Ward of the Mississippi Area preaches at the 2008 United Methodist General Conference (UMNS/Mike Dubose)

In 1990, when the global collapse of communism compelled the Sandinistas to allow free elections, they were defeated. Wilson Boots, who signed the recent letter about Honduras, in 1990 faulted the Sandinista electoral defeat on the "aggressive U.S. policy of armed intervention by mercenary soldiers – the contras – and the economic embargo." His wife Nora Boots, another signer of the Honduran letter, was director of United Methodism's Latin American missions in the 1980's and infamously declared that the "press is much freer in Cuba" than in the U.S. ✚

ACTION: *Contact United Methodist Board of Global Ministries chief Edward Paup and ask that our church's missionaries proclaim the Gospel, not radical politics; email: epaup@gm-gm-umc.org; 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115.*

UM Theologian Billy Abraham Denounces “Open” Membership at Virginia Annual Conference

Rish Methodist theologian Billy Abraham of United Methodist Perkins School of Theology in Dallas vigorously denounced a proposed “open” membership initiative before an audience of evangelical United Methodists in the Virginia Annual Conference at Norfolk, Virginia, on June 13.

Fifty-two percent of the Virginia Annual Conference evidently agreed with Abraham and voted against proposed constitutional Amendment I, which would have barred virtually any restrictions on membership in a United Methodist congregation.

Ironically, the “membership” controversy began in the Virginia Conference, when Bishop Charlene Kammerer removed the Rev. Ed Johnson from his pulpit in 2005 for refusing to grant immediate membership to an actively homosexual man who attended his church. The United Methodist Judicial Council restored Johnson to his church, ruling that local pastors have discretion over church membership. Amendment I’s expectation of automatic church membership was approved at last year’s General Conference.

Mandating that church membership be granted automatically to anyone “declaring faith in Jesus Christ and relationship in Jesus Christ” will mean that “all the other material on membership [in the United Methodist *Book of Discipline*] is going to have to be rethought or dumped,” Abraham warned his audience at a luncheon for Virginia Annual Conference evangelicals.

Abraham noted that “the folk who were in favor of the change of the amendment saw this as simply an open door policy; that there will be no serious conditions for membership. That we will simply ‘open minds, open doors, open hearts,’ it will be wide open and then it will run through the whole of the units of the church, from the bottom, right through to the top. And what that would mean then, is effectively any standards of membership that we currently have would be eviscerated virtually immediately.”

The Virginia Annual Conference, like the rest of U.S. United Methodism, also rejected the U.S. “regional conference” concept by a nearly 2 to 1 margin. In his speech,

Abraham noted that “regional conference” proponent Bishop Scott Jones of Kansas has promised that the plan would still leave to the General Conference “decisions on ordination, on discipline, on mission, on doctrine.” But Jones “is in no position whatsoever to give that assurance,” Abraham said. He also warned that the plan, because of its impact on how the church deals with homosexuality, could “end up splitting the church,” as it has the Episcopal Church.

“Here’s the great virtue of our church,” Abraham surmised. “Our canon law has turned out to be extraordinarily healthy and good. And we have a universal canon law that works right across the face of the church. The Anglicans and the Episcopalians do not have that, and that has cost them dearly in dealing with the whole debate about homosexuality.”

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Abraham said he’s “worried that the new group of bishops [who originated the ‘regional conference’ plan] are overreaching. I think it’s a matter not of command and control but of command and manipulate.” Abraham worried that the church’s Connectional Table is “very weak, it’s inexperienced, I think the bishops will call the shots, and the bishops want to fill up the vacuum that’s been left because of the lack of credibility developing in the agencies. We put those together in the 1970s, we sent our money to New York, we had our Vatican in Nashville, they did all the work for us. The whole thing is shifting, the credibility of that is shaking to the foundations, the bishops are stepping into this vacuum.”

Abraham concluded: “I think we’ve got to absolutely watch the power of the bishops. I think they are dangerous. I think the possibilities of self-deception - I think they are real.” ✚

ACTION: Thank Billy Abraham for his defense of United Methodism; email: wabraham@smu.edu; Perkins School of Theology, PO Box 750133, Dallas, TX 75275-0133.

Theology of the Body for the Good of the Methodist Soul

A professor from United Methodist Duke Divinity School is urging a “theology of the body” emphasizing not just sexual morality but also greater appreciation for the complimentary role of the two genders in God’s creation.

The teaching might apply not just to United Methodist debates about homosexuality but also to transsexuality and sex change procedures.

Addressing lay and clergy United Methodists in New Bern, North Carolina, Dr. Paul Griffiths of Duke Divinity School discussed Pope John Paul II’s Theology of the Body (TOB). Churches have “tended to address issues of sexuality” by focusing on “acceptable” and unacceptable conduct, he said. In contrast, Griffiths said, “The driving force behind all of John Paul II’s thought was to develop for the church an understanding of what it means to be a human person.”

The TOB Seminar was sponsored by the New Bern District of the North Carolina Annual Conference, Lifewatch (a pro-life United Methodist ministry) and Transforming Congregations (a United Methodist ministry for sexual brokenness).

Griffiths emphasized that TOB understands the body as essential as the soul and criticized as unbiblical the “idea of the heavenly life [as] a disembodied life.” He also stressed that the body can never be an “instrument” but is a reflection of God

and is always intended to be “other-directed.”

All human bodies are “sexed” as either male or female, Griffiths said. “This doesn’t mean that every human being is supposed to have sex, but it does mean that every human being has its body sexed. This is not a negotiable fact,” he said.

Due to humanity’s fall, as recorded in Genesis, the body “wishes to establish dominion over what is desired... to seek the kind of control” that only God should have, Griffiths said. Fallen human sexuality is “deranged” because it has been “removed from its proper range” and “can seek any object at all.” TOB says: “We have been given a radically excessive desire that can be satisfied finally only by God.”

In response to disordered sexuality (anything outside marriage or celibacy), TOB stresses “the instruction or formation of [sexual] desire,” which is also called the “ethicization of the erotic.” Sex should be “potentially procreative, and always unitive,” Griffiths said. TOB also corrects past errors of Christian teaching that opposed sexual pleasure, even within marriage. Griffiths warned that pornography is “aimed at objectifying the body and separating it from the possibility of self-gift” that is essential to its spousal nature. ✚

ACTION: For more information about TOB, contact Lifewatch at www.lifewatch.org or Transforming Congregations at www.transcong.org.

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United Methodist Lobbyist
Jim Winkler is Pushing Obamacare
in the church’s name.

Do you approve?

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☐ No

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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)

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