

UMAction

Briefing



Pro-Homosexuality Caucus for United Methodists Touts Transsexual Ministers

Transsexual ministers who have had sex change operations were featured at the annual convocation for Reconciling Congregations, a caucus working to overturn United Methodism’s official disapproval of homosexuality. Among them was the Rev. Drew Phoenix, formerly female and now professing to be male.

United Methodism has no official policy on sex change operations, and at least two United Methodist ministers now profess to have had one.

“God spoke to me: ‘Listen, *man*. Listen, man, you can’t travel any farther away,’” recalled Phoenix. “Immediately, the question among questions arose in my mind: Who am I?” With this line, Phoenix, the first openly transsexual United Methodist minister, drew boisterous applause at the Sunday morning service of the Reconciling Ministries Network’s “Convocation 2009: Justice & Joy.” Phoenix explained the transition to life as a man after being a woman named Ann Gordon and presented this journey as an analogue to Jesus’ “baptismal coming out.”

Referring to God’s revelation to Moses in Genesis, Phoenix argued for a fluid concept of gender, asking, “How could we possibly fit ‘I am who I am’ into binaries?” Phoenix then declared, “God’s self-declaration to Moses became my declaration, and your declaration.” Aptly summarizing the sermon, Phoenix closed by leading the audience in declaring: “I was who I was. I am who I am. I will be who I will be. If you can become, then we can become. We will become who we will become; together the beloved community.”

Also speaking was Rev. David Weekley, who received Reconciling’s “Voice in the Wilderness” award for “taking risks, despite isolation in a wilderness, to proclaim the rightness of inclusion for all people in the church, and for standing against injustice despite that lack of support.” In late August, Weekley, an ordained United Methodist minister for over 27 years, came out to his bishop in Oregon as a transsexual more than 30 years after his sex change. In acceptance, Weekley said, “I decided to hide in the wilderness to be effective until God said it was okay to come out. And it’s good to come out. I’m really glad to be home.” ✚

ACTION: *Tell your pastor and local church leaders that the United Methodist Church needs an official policy that affirms God’s gift of gender and disapproves of sex change operations. Consider sending resolutions to your local annual conference.*

Fall 2009

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REV. DREW PHOENIX (UMNS/Maile Bradfield)

Overseas United Methodists Urged to Support Homosexuality

Overseas United Methodists, especially Africans, are typically very supportive of the church's biblical teachings about marriage and sex. But the recent Reconciling Ministries Network's (RMN) "Convocation 2009: Justice & Joy" featured several overseas church officials who shared RMN's pro-homosexuality perspective. About one third of United Methodists now live outside the U.S., and these growing churches have become the chief obstacle to RMN's hopes for liberalizing United Methodism.

Former United Methodist Commission on Christian Unity chief Bruce Robbins moderated the session with two Africans and one Filipino. He called the connection between RMN's agenda and the growing overseas church a "very dynamic tension," because the overseas churches "bring a more socially conservative perspective." He noted that the international contingent of United Methodism now means that up to 40 percent of delegates at the 2012 General Conference will be from outside the U.S.

The panel included retired Filipino Bishop David Arichea, currently teaching at Duke Divinity School, and Rev. Dr. Eunice Musa Iliya, director of the Directorate of Evangelism and Stewardship of the United Methodist Church in Nigeria.

"This will be my new title: Reconciling Bishop," Arichea said. He described his homosexual son's struggles to find an accept-

ing church home. Referring to the use of Scripture to condemn homosexuality, the bishop said he seeks to "turn texts of terror into texts of liberation."



Filipino Bishop David Arichea currently teaches at Duke Divinity School (UMNS/Mike Dubose)

Rev. Iliya was the only Nigerian delegate at the 2008 General Conference to vote to liberalize the church's teachings on sex. In her sermon, Iliya told how she felt pressured by conservative U.S. United Methodists to vote differently. Her remarks in the plenary concerned the patriarchal nature of the UMC in Africa and how this has complicated her pursuit of justice for the "lonely," the "oppressed," and the "voiceless" - all of which, she made clear, applied to homosexuals and other sexual minorities.

Iliya is a graduate of Claremont School of Theology in California and was formerly closely associated with the very liberal California-Nevada Conference.

Participants in the Reconciling gathering were frustrated that proposals to create a new U.S. only Regional Conference that excludes internationals was defeated in votes by the annual conferences earlier this year. Rev Robbins wistfully surmised: "I submit

that in 2008, if the U.S. United Methodists had an opportunity to vote, I think we would have seen for the first time movement toward full inclusion in the United Methodist church." ✚

ACTION: *Pray for overseas United Methodists and their continued fidelity to biblical standards. And pray that U.S. United Methodists will increasingly rediscover their own biblical heritage.*

United Methodist Bishops Urge Immigration Amnesty

Earlier this year, the United Methodist Council of Bishops urged an eventual amnesty for illegal immigrants as well as increased levels of legal immigration to the U.S.

The bishops' statement likened immigrants to biblical "sojourners" meriting "hospitality." They declared: "We believe that welcoming the sojourner is so vital to the expression of Christian faith that to engage in this form of hospitality is to participate in our own salvation." They also spoke of "redemptive liberation through relationships with migrants," regardless of "legal status."

Condemning "indiscriminate federal raids" and "deportations," the bishops alleged that "many immigrants are forced to leave their homes due to economic and foreign policies of the United States." They also complained of "growing militarism" along the U.S. border thanks to increased U.S. border enforcement.

The bishops reluctantly acknowledged that "all nations have the right to secure their borders," but insisted that Christians should focus on the "welfare of immigrants." They urged "comprehensive immigration reform," which entails support for federal legislation that would grant eventual amnesty to illegals and increased legal immigration.

Specifically, the bishops urged a "pathway to citizenship for immigrants," increased visas for "short-term workers," and greater "legal protection" for legal and illegal immigrants. ✚

ACTION: *Contact your bishop with your thoughts about endorsing liberalized immigration policies. You can find the bishops' contact info at www.umc.org.*

United Methodist Lobbyist Acclaims Obamacare and Global Warming Restrictions

Chief United Methodist lobbyist Jim Winkler touted government health care and climate change legislation, declaring that any church not supporting Obamacare should “be sued for malpractice.”

Addressing the Fall directors meeting of his United Methodist General Board of Church and Society (GBCS), gathered at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina, Winkler stated, “Today we’re in the midst of a ferocious battle to secure health care coverage for everyone in the United States.” Summarizing the position of the United Methodist Church (UMC), he said, “Everybody should have health care. It is as simple as that. As a church, we say we believe that health care is a human right.”

To counter claims that government-guaranteed universal health care would result in a lack of doctors and hospitals, Winkler argued, “I believe, frankly, that if we made it a priority to train more doctors and build more hospitals, we could do it - especially if vast sums are not being siphoned off for profits.” In a flourish aimed at solidifying support for change while simultaneously reproving dissenters, Winkler declared, “Now is the time to stand up and be counted. Any church that doesn’t seek health care for all of the uninsured should be sued for malpractice.”

“There is no value in enriching insurance companies,” Winkler insisted. “There is no value in fining people for not buying insurance. There is no value in denying care to undocumented immigrants.”

Winkler also urged legislation that ultimately would penalize U.S. industries that emit carbon and allegedly contribute to global warming. “We continue to urge Congress to pass strong clean energy legislation this year,” Winkler said, citing the controversial cap and trade legislation that passed in the U.S. House of Representatives but is stalled in the U.S. Senate. “It was a major victory to secure passage

of the House bill that would for the first time require the United States to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.”

Noting the “potentially catastrophic climate change the world is facing,” Winkler insisted the U.S. should push for an 80% reduction in emissions by 2020 at the upcoming international climate summit in Copenhagen. He admitted that people often claim that his lobby agency does not accurately represent United Methodists. His response was: “How do you know that?”

Although Winkler had previously insisted that his agency did not endorse specific health care legislation, on November 3 GBCS asked United Methodists to urge Congress to approve the Speaker Nancy Pelosi supported Obamacare legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives, called H.R. 3962. Winkler’s email to supporters claimed this plan for government health care would “make a life-saving difference to many people, we consider it an important improvement in U.S. health-care coverage to all.”

The GBCS “action alert” explained that “GBCS has been a strong supporter of the public option because it sets forth a principle within our position that it is a governmental responsibility for a country to provide its citizens [sic] with health care.” GBCS justified its support for the over \$1 trillion government health care bill by citing Deuteronomy 24:19-21, which speaks of caring for the “alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings.” Winkler did not explain how this Scripture mandated increased government direction over U.S. health care. ❖

ACTION: *Respectfully let Jim Winkler know if he represents your views: 100 Maryland Ave, NE, Washington, DC 20002; fax: 202-488-5619; email: jwinkler@umc-gbcs.org.*

UM Judicial Council Voids Pro-Gay Stance

The United Methodist Judicial Council overturned a Baltimore-Washington Conference resolution, upheld by Bishop John Schol, which had declared United Methodists “have been and remain divided regarding homosexual expressions of human sexuality.” United Methodism’s highest court cited the church’s *Book of Discipline*, which declares the church “does not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider[s] this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.” It also affirms that “sexual relations are affirmed only within the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage.”

In its ruling (Decision 1120), the Judicial Council wrote that the “effect of the Baltimore-Washington resolution is to negate the church’s clearly stated position.” Moreover, “the Baltimore-

Washington resolution attempts to articulate a new and different standard of church belief using language that has been specifically rejected by the General Conference.” The Council ruled that an annual conference “may not negate, ignore or violate” the *Book of Discipline*, “even when the disagreements are based upon conscientious objections.” Only one of the Judicial Council’s 9 members partially dissented from the ruling. ❖

ACTION: *Give thanks that the new members of the Judicial Council, elected at last year’s General Conference, will affirm the church’s official stances, as legislated by the General Conference.*

Lake Junaluska Hosts Liberal “Peace Conference”

Over 400 people convened at United Methodism’s Lake Junaluska Conference and Retreat Center in western North Carolina for its second annual “Peace Conference.” A Jewish, Christian, and Muslim speaker talked about the Middle East and interfaith dialogue. Criticism of Israel heavily outweighed that of any other government.

Rabbi Mordechai Liebling, of the liberal Shalom Center, stated that Israel will have to “forcibly remove” many “right wing settlers” who believe they possess a divine right to the land. He charged listeners to contact Congress to urge creation of a Palestinian state.

Liebling complained about pro-Israel groups like the American-Israel Political Action Committee (AIPAC) and the “Christian Zionist movement.” He warned: “I see the other side, who want more war and to block peace.” Overcoming these barriers will require “actively lobbying the [U.S.] government to take strong steps” for pressure against Israel, he said.

“We must have empathy for our Palestinian cousins, understand their pain, and honor their needs,” Liebling said. “Above all we must not oppress them. We must all learn the balance between peace and justice.” Liebling urged peace in Iraq and Afghanistan while also imploring listeners to “end the violence we are doing to the Earth and seek peace with the ecological system that sustains the life of all creatures.” He mentioned helping to organize “worldwide demonstrations to bring [down] the amount of Carbon in the atmosphere.”

Greek Catholic Archbishop of Galilee Elias Chacour also urged more pressure on Israel. “They are wrong when they deny the rights of the other,” he complained of Israel’s stance towards Palestinians. Introducing himself as a “Christian Palestinian Arab, and a citizen of Israel,” Chacour sought to explain the nature of the Middle East conflict. “It has never been a conflict of religion,” he asserted. “As long as we have the same God,” it will not be a religious conflict. He seemed to ignore the religiously motivated extremism of groups like Hamas and Hezbollah. Nor, he contended, is it a matter of racial difference. According to Chacour, unrest in the Middle East is the result of “identical claims to the same land.”

Sayyid M. Syeed of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) spoke about “bridge building” among religions. He



Rabbi Mordechai Liebling, of the liberal Shalom Center, speaks at the second annual “Peace Conference” hosted at the United Methodist Lake Junaluska Conference and Retreat Center (IRD/Connor Ewing)

stressed that America’s pluralistic environment was conducive to the thriving and prosperity of Muslim immigrants. Citing the success of Muslims in the U.S., he claimed that, “America’s strength is our diversity.”

ISNA gave six DVDs to all Peace Conference participants, ranging in topic from “Women in Islam” to “Islam: A Faith Hijacked,” and a book, *What’s Right with Islam is What’s Right with America*. No other group provided conference participants with such gifts or materials.

Next year’s Peace Conference speaker will be liberal activist Marian Wright Edelman of the Children’s Defense Fund. Sponsors of the Peace Conference include the United Methodist General Board of Church & Society, Duke Divinity School, World Methodist Council, Lake Junaluska Assembly, Southeastern Jurisdiction College of United Methodist Bishops, and the Candler School of Theology, Emory University. ❖

ACTION: Urge Lake Junaluska chief Jimmy Carr to host more balanced events. 400 N. Lakeshore Drive, P. O. Box 67, Lake Junaluska, NC 287845; fax: (828) 456-4040; email: jlcarr@lakejunaluska.com.

United Methodist Agency Briefly Endorses Censorship of Conservative Commentators

United Methodist Communication briefly endorsed an effort by liberal church groups to silence conservative commentators but withdrew the endorsement after unwelcomed publicity.

The “So We Might See” campaign was organized by the United Church of Christ (UCC) to pressure advertisers to stop supporting commentators like Glenn Beck, Lou Dobbs, and Rush Limbaugh. It also organized a letter to the Federal Communications Commission urging an investigation of conservative commentators espousing “hate speech.”

After exposure by *The American Spectator*, United Methodist Communications withdrew its endorsement of “So We Might See.” According to a UCC official, United Methodist Communications on October 20 (the date of the *Spectator’s* first report) requested “temporary removal of its name and logo from the coalition’s website until its board was given more time to consider the agency’s involvement.” Other members of “So We Might See” include the National

Council of Churches, the Islamic Society of North America, and the Presbyterian News Service.

The letter to the FCC by “So We Might See” accused Rush Limbaugh of “anti-immigrant hate speech” and specifically faulted him for the deaths of illegal immigrants because he has called for enforcement of U.S. immigration laws. The “So We Might See” campaign is indirectly funded by liberal financier George Soros’ Open Society Institute and the Ford Foundation. ❖

ACTION: Ask United Methodist Communications chief Larry Hollon to permanently remove United Methodist Communications from the “So We Might See” campaign and other efforts to silence free speech. Larry Hollon, 810 12th Ave South, Nashville, TN 37203-4744; fax: 615-742-5415; email: lhollon@umcom.org.

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YOUR OPINION, PLEASE!

Should Lake Junaluska host an annual liberal “Peace Conference” that excludes non-liberal voices?

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).

Fall 2009

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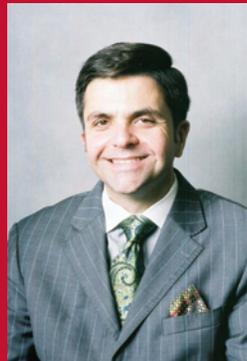
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