

UMAction

Briefing

Gloomy Political Manifesto from the Bishops

The United Methodist Council of Bishops released a new political manifesto called “God’s Renewed Creation: Call to Hope and Action” that urges global warming activism and nuclear disarmament. It is supposed to be a successor to the bishops’ 1986 “In Defense of Creation,” which demanded that the U.S. renounce nuclear deterrence against the Soviet Union.

“God’s creation is in crisis,” the bishops declared in their new statement. “We... cannot remain silent while God’s people and God’s planet suffer.” The bishops complained about “pandemic poverty and disease,” “environmental degradation,” and the “proliferation of weapons and violence.” These ailments are not “isolated problems” but “related to one another” and demand a “comprehensive response.”

The bishops urged “environmental holiness” and challenged “those whose policies and practices neglect the poor, exploit the weak, hasten global warming, and produce more weapons.” They fretted that the U.S. “consumes more than its fair share of the world’s resources, generates the most waste, and produces the most weapons.” The bishops promised to “advocate for justice and peace in the halls of power in our respective nations and international organizations” and to reduce their own “carbon footprint” and “our collective exploitation of the planet.”

In their accompanying “foundation document,” the bishops warned that the “earth is heating up at an accelerating rate” after “several thousand years of a stable climate.” They opined: “Learned scientists and experts monitor the changes that impact our very survival” and “are clarifying the measures we must take immediately to save our forests, oceans, air, human and animal ecosystems.”

Despite these scientific exertions, the “storm builds as powerful forces swirl together.” This storm includes economic “systems built upon self-interest and fraud,” “the resource crisis as food, water and energy become scarce; the justice/poverty crisis as the gap between rich and poor continues to widen; the global health crisis as millions die of the preventable diseases of poverty like malaria, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis; and the refugee crisis as millions of people are displaced by violence, natural disaster, and loss of jobs.” There is also “the energy crisis as oil reserves run out within two or three decades; the climate crisis as increasing greenhouse gases threaten to scorch the earth and desertification erodes productive land, polar ice melts, fire seasons lengthen, and coastal floods and severe storms increase in number; the bio-diversity crisis as at least one-fifth of all plant and animal species face extinction by 2050.”

ACTION: Ask your bishop his or her thoughts about “God’s Renewed Creation: Call to Hope and Action.” And read an analysis of this declaration by UMAction’s Mark Tooley at www.theird.org. Florida Bishop Tim Whitaker responded to Mark Tooley’s article on his own blog at <http://www.flumc2.org/>.



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Bishops Fear Storms Everywhere!
(A Severe Storm off the Coast of California,
NASA/GSFC, MODIS Rapid Response)

Bishop Willimon: Only Jesus Saves

Earlier this month, over 800 United Methodists met in New Orleans for the Congress on Evangelism. An apt host city for a conference entitled “Restore, Rebuild, Renew,” New Orleans repeatedly served as an example for speakers. Cosponsored by the Council on Evangelism and the General Board of Discipleship, the annual event aims to “provide an area for dialogue and exchange of ideas, identify grass roots concerns and need for supporting resources, focus on issues that concern the evangelist, [and] create an atmosphere receptive to the Spirit of God for the motivation and guidance needed for mission.”

This year’s Bible studies were led by Bishop Will Willimon. Currently serving as the episcopal leader for the North Alabama Conference, Bishop Willimon previously served as the Dean of the Chapel and Professor of Christian Ministry at Duke Divinity School. The author of over 60 books, Willimon’s latest project was the Wesley Study Bible.

The theme of Bishop Willimon’s talks, delivered over the three days of the conference, was “Jesus Saves.” In his introductory message, the Bishop clarified the nature of evangelism and the role humans play. “Evangelism begins in the heart of God,” he said. “Evangelism is first what God does and then we tag along afterwards with it. It is from heaven. Jesus saves, and only Jesus can save.”

Addressing the vitality of Methodist churches, Willimon posed the question, what is the difference between churches that are dying and those that are growing? His answer was clear: “If I had to just

kind of put my finger on it, it’s the difference between inward and outward. Alas, we’ve got a generation of pastors who’ve been trained that the sole function of being a pastor is inward.” Willimon summarized the ministry of the Methodist church as a “sent ministry,”



Bishop William Willimon was also the key note speaker at the 2006 Congress on Evangelism, held in Nashville, Tenn (UMNS/Linda Green)

one that is intended “not just to keep house here, but for the whole world.” Against the notion that the work of the church is primarily internal, Willimon declared, “It is all outward. It is this push of God out into the world. God just doesn’t want these sweet people that are left over there, that don’t have anything else to do, that just show up – God wants it all.”

Too often, Willimon asserted, Methodists are pessimistic about God’s power. “I think we’ve limited our notions of the power of Jesus Christ, mainly to issues of contentment and complacency,” he lamented. Human shortcomings notwithstanding, he was quick to remind

the audience that, “With Jesus risen from the dead we don’t know what will happen next. All things are possible.” ✚

ACTION: *Contact United Methodist Director of Evangelism Ministries Kwasi Kena and ask what you can do to support greater evangelism in your church: The General Board of Discipleship, P.O. Box 340003, Nashville TN 37203-0003; toll-free phone: 1-877-899-2780, ext. 7049; e-mail: kkena@gbod.org.*

UM Lobby Urges Government-Funded Abortions

The United Methodist General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) sharply condemned efforts to prevent government funded abortions in any federal health care plan. “Our Christian faith and our Wesleyan heritage compels us to stand with those who struggle for wholeness and peace in their lives and believe that all people should have equal access to comprehensive medical care,” i.e. government-funded abortion, GBCS insisted after the U.S. House of Representatives voted against abortion coverage in November.

GBCS praised the House Speaker Nancy Pelosi-backed

Obamacare legislation in the House as a “major milestone.” But, GBCS lamented, “what should have been a celebratory moment for everyone” had been unpleasantly tarnished by “restrictive language” against abortion funding inserted at the “eleventh hour” that “politicized health care and posed the possibility of a tremendous setback for access to comprehensive reproduction health coverage.”

GBCS chief Jim Winkler condemned pro-life church leaders who opposed government funded abortions in Obamacare. “Let us admit that in this debate faith leaders of various stripes have placed their ideological and finan-

UM Support for Liberalized Immigration Law Continues

Phoenix-based United Methodist Bishop Minerva Carcaño has become United Methodism's most prominent advocate of liberalized immigration laws, sometimes earning her controversy.

"Every single time, every single time I open my mouth to speak the words of Scripture, not my own words but the very words of Scripture about how we are to treat the immigrant among us, I get blasted. Royally blasted," Bishop Carcaño told the annual United Methodist Congress on Evangelism, held in New Orleans in January. She complained of receiving "thousands of faxes from United Methodists condemning me for what I had said [at an immigration rally]...The consistent message to me from my good United Methodist brothers and sisters was, 'What kind of American are you?'"

Citing "thousands of immigrants [who] cross into the United States" out of "desperate desire to survive," Carcaño alleged that "we in this country are complicit in the circumstances that create the inhumane wandering through the desert of our immigrant brothers and sisters." She warned, "And as long as you and I, as long as we believe that our job, that our most important job is to support U.S. laws and U.S. economic agreements, we will consistently fail to be the builders of God's reign." Carcaño warned that there "are too many of us who believe that we are called to build a mighty U.S. Not the kingdom of God, but a nation-state that—as good as it may be, as good as it may ever be—will never compare to God's kingdom." She uncontroversially challenged her audience to minister "to the 12 million undocumented workers in this country, most of whom are Hispanic."

Although Carcaño did not specify her political support for open borders and liberalized immigration policies at the Congress on Evangelism, last year the Council of Bishops was

more explicit in endorsing open borders. The bishops' resolution endorsed "comprehensive immigration reform" (CIR) and affirmed "President Obama for his leadership in moving the immigration agenda to the forefront of public discourse and decision making." The bishops endorsed all the key points of CIR legislation, promoted by New York Democratic Senator Chuck Schumer, including a "pathway to citizenship," expanded family reunification provisions, more worker visas, more legal rights and collective bargaining for immigrants, including the "undocumented," and eliminating private detention centers. They reluctantly acknowledged that "all nations have the right to secure their borders," even while condemning U.S. efforts to enforce its immigration law as "militarization."

Like Carcaño, the bishops blamed the U.S. for ostensibly forcing immigrants to relocate to the U.S. "U.S. immigration policy must take into consideration the fact that today many immigrants are forced to leave their homes due to economic and foreign policies of the United States," they asserted. "In addition, the growing militarism along the border with Mexico further aggravates the suffering of immigrants and border communities as it exposes immigrants and communities to greater violence and mistreatment. Because of all these circumstances immigrants are forced to live in the shadows of society to avoid being exploited thus living lives of constant fear and insecurity." ❖

ACTION: *Does Christian compassion and ministry necessarily mandate open borders and liberalized immigration policies? Respectfully share your thoughts with Bishop Minerva Carcaño: 1550 East Meadowbrook Ave, Ste 200, Phoenix, AZ 85014-4040; fax: 602-279-1355; email: bishopmc@desertsw.org.*

cial agendas ahead of the needs of the American people," he complained at a December press conference with Democratic Senators Debbie Stabenow (MI) and Ben Cardin (MD). "These faith leaders have attempted to roll back the rights of women to determine their own reproductive health. This is not acceptable."

At a December Obamacare rally on Capitol Hill sponsored by GBCS and Moveon.org, among others, Winkler insisted, "The Senate bill should be abortion-neutral," by which he meant it should not restrict abortion funding. "American families should have the opportunity to choose health cov-

erage that reflects their own values and medical needs," he added, "a principle that should not be sacrificed in service of any political agenda." ❖

ACTION: *Respectfully urge GBCS General Secretary Jim Winkler to end GBCS support for government funded abortion: 100 Maryland Ave, NE, Washington, DC 2002; fax: 202-488-5619; jwinkler@umc-gbcs.org.*

UM Bishop Scott Jones Defends Sanctity of Life

Kansas United Methodist Bishop Scott Jones defended the sanctity of life at the annual pro-life service of the unofficial Taskforce of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality in January. He specifically criticized proposed government funding of abortion through a federal health care plan, sharply differing with United Methodism's official Washington, D.C. lobby office, the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS). GBCS, which governs the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill where Jones spoke, has strongly urged that Obamacare include abortion funding.

"We need to recognize that access to an abortion is not a right," Bishop Jones said. "While we believe that persons have the right to health care, abortion is not normally a health care issue. Rather it is a sinful behavior." He warned: "Proposals in the recent health-care debate to provide tax funding for abortions are very misguided. What you fund with tax dollars will increase." Bishop Jones urged, "We should be subsidizing positive alternatives to abortion that provide life-giving options that enhance personal and social holiness."

Jones summarized United Methodism's *Social Principles* as teaching that "abortion should be legal and rare." He explained, "The fundamental teaching of our church on this issue is that human life is sacred, and the sanctity of life extends to the fetus...Therefore, anything that intentionally ends a pregnancy is wrong. Abortion is a sin." Although unmentioned by Jones, GBCS and the United Methodist Women's Division belong to the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, which opposes any legal restrictions on abortion.

Suggesting that returning to a "1950's world where abortion did not happen legally" was unlikely, Bishop Jones observed that "living in a society that values individual freedom inevitably leads to more sinful behavior than we would prefer." He reiterated United Methodism's stance against partial-birth abortion. "We need to strengthen our laws against late-term abortions except in well-defined circumstances, because our courts have concluded that viability outside the womb is in fact a value that is sufficiently widely held that it can be sustained



Pictured left to right: Rev. Paul T. Stallsworth, Bishop Jones, Rev. Paul R. Crikelair (IRD/Connor Ewing)

in law." And he emphasized, "We also need to be clear that reducing the number of abortions is a goal."

Jones ended his message on a hopeful note, saying, "Once we realize that women in crisis pregnancies are among the least of these, and that our commitment to the sanctity of human life means we should do all in our power to welcome new life rather than end it prematurely, helping create communities of love for the unborn will come much more easily. The early Christians did it in a hostile society. We can do the same in our time and place."

The worship service was sponsored by Lifewatch, also known as the Taskforce of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality (TUMAS). The organization was founded in 1987 and seeks to provide a unified voice defending women and their unborn children by promoting "Biblical and Wesleyan moral responsibility in the United Methodist Church and American society." The service coincided with the annual March for Life, an event that draws thousands of abortion opponents to Washington, D.C. to memorialize the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade*. ❖

ACTION: *Thank Bishop Scott Jones for speaking out: 9940 East Boston, #160, Wichita, KS 67207-3600; fax: 316/684-0044; email: kansasbishop@kswestumc.org.*

Some Bishops Urge U.S. Withdrawal from Afghanistan

Nearly half of United Methodism's bishops have demanded that the U.S. withdraw from Afghanistan this year. "We believe there is no path to military victory in Afghanistan," the bishops told President Obama in their November letter, implicitly disapproving of the President's eventual decision to send additional troops to Afghanistan. We "are deeply concerned about the escalating war in Afghanistan," they declared. Urging Obama to "set a timetable for the withdrawal of all coalition forces by the end of 2010," the bishops lamented that the war in Afghanistan has "no end in sight," as they cited U.S., coalition, and Afghan casualty figures.

The bishops promised that their "vision is a world in which people live together in peace and with mutual respect." They did not outline how such peace and mutual respect would arise in a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. "We believe that human values must outweigh military claims as governments determine their priorities," they proclaimed.

"We wanted to get this to Obama before he made his decision on sending more troops to Afghanistan," explained retired Bishop Marshall L. Meadors, who drafted the Afghanistan decree. "I have struggled with the war in Iraq," he said. "I held public prayer services when the 3,000th and

4,000th soldier was killed in Iraq." United Methodism's Social Principles say "war is incompatible with the teachings of Christ," which the bishops often quote. But the United Methodist Church also acknowledges that "many Christians believe that, when peaceful alternatives have failed, the force of arms may regrettably be preferable to unchecked aggression, tyranny and genocide."

Florida United Methodist Bishop Tim Whitaker did not sign the withdrawal letter. "I am not in favor of brief statements on complex subjects, especially statement[s] which deal basically with strategies on which clergy leaders are not well educated or informed," he explained. "There are occasions when clergy leaders should dare to discuss strategies, such as when there is virtually no public discussion of them. I do not think that there is a lack of critical scrutiny in the media and public square of President Obama's strategy in Afghanistan." ✚

ACTION: *Thank Bishop Tim Whitaker for not signing the Afghanistan withdrawal letter to President Obama: 1122 E. McDonald St, Lakeland, FL 33801; fax: 863-687-0568; email: bishop@flumc.org.*

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YOUR OPINION, PLEASE!

Should UM Bishops Routinely
Issue Political Statements?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not sure?

Submit a Resolution

Consider submitting a resolution calling for an end to United Methodist General Board of Church and Society's (GBCS) lobbying for government funded abortion and its membership with the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC). Contact your local Annual Conference office about details of submission. Please act quickly! Some deadlines for this year's Annual Conferences are approaching quickly. A few deadlines have already passed. If that is true for your Annual Conference, consider submitting this resolution to the 2011 Annual Conference. Or you could even submit the resolution to your local church's administrative board for their approval. Let us know if we can be helpful to you in this process.

Sample Resolution:

Resolution on the United Methodist Lobby Office and Government Funded Abortion

Whereas, the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. is our church's official political lobby and routinely advocates many political stances to Congress and others; and

Whereas, the GBCS has vigorously lobbied for federal government funding of abortion in any new federal health care legislation; and

Whereas, the GBCS continues to belong to the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC), which also lobbies for government-funded abortion and opposes all legal restrictions on abortion; and

Whereas, the United Methodist Church's Social Principles support some restrictions on abortion, such as partial-birth abortion;

Therefore, we strongly urge GBCS to end its lobbying for government-funded abortion and to withdraw from RCRC.

UMAction

Briefing

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