

UMAction

Briefing



Holston United Methodists Help Besieged Christians of Southern Sudan

Sudan's Darfur region, where African Muslims suffer under rule by Sudan's Islamist and Arabist regime, gets more publicity. But the Christians of southern Sudan, whose civil war killed 2 million, are often ignored.

Even United Methodist News Service inaccurately confused Darfur with southern Sudan when reporting on a conference about southern Sudan hosted by United Methodism's Holston Conference. But United Methodists in Holston itself are not confused, and over 100 church members from Holston and elsewhere, including Holston's Bishop James Swanson, gathered in Kingsport, Tennessee on March 11-12 to discuss Holston's extensive ministries in southern Sudan.

In his address, Bishop Swanson explained the dynamic of the Holston-Sudan relationship. "We're not going to Sudan because they need us," he said. "We're going to Sudan because we need the Sudanese. And we need the Sudanese to show us how blessed we are."

Rev. Boo Hankins and his wife Rev. Phyllis Hankins, Holston clergy currently serving in Yei, southern Sudan, were able to address the summit through a Skype discussion. Boo Hankins is serving as a transitional district superintendent for United Methodism in Yei. During his Skype call he was joined by Sudanese in Yei who explained political tensions between Islamist northern Sudan and mostly Christian southern Sudan. In January, southern Sudan will vote on whether to become independent from Sudan. Many question whether Sudan's Islamist regime will allow southern Sudan's peaceful departure from its control, especially because of southern Sudan's oil.

Sudan's largest churches are Anglican and Roman Catholic. United Methodists have a small presence, operating under the East Africa Conference of Bishop Daniel Wandabula. Holston Conference's involvement in southern Sudan began in early 2006, when Bishop Swanson was handed a picture of a young Sudanese boy crawling to a feeding station. Perched behind the child were waiting vultures. Moved by what he saw, Swanson challenged his staff to think of ways that Holston could help the southern Sudanese. Holston sent a three-person fact-finding mission to Yei, Sudan in April 2006.

It was the first of 8 trips by Holston missions teams to southern Sudan, with a ninth currently planned. The Holston teams, totaling over 70 people, have provided medical services to 3,000 Sudanese and over 125 hours of clergy leadership training. In early 2008, Bishop Swanson joined East Africa's Bishop Daniel Wandabula in signing a "Covenant Agreement between East Africa Annual Conference and Holston Conference," promising ongoing medical support and leadership training for clergy. ✚

ACTION: *Thank Bishop James Swanson for Holston Conference's ministry with beleaguered southern Sudan: P. O. Box 850, Alcoa, TN 37701-0850; fax: 865-690-7112; email: bishop@holston.org.*

Spring 2010

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Bishop Swanson speaks at the Thursday evening worship service (IRD/Connor Ewing)

United Methodist Lobbyist Attacks Tea Party Movement

Chief United Methodist Lobbyist Jim Winkler harshly attacked anti-Obamacare demonstrators, accusing them of hatred and racism. “This past weekend’s appalling display by protesters in Washington, D.C., demonstrates the overtly racist message of too many of the so-called ‘Tea Party’ members,” Winkler alleged in a public statement.

Winkler uncritically accepted claims by some Democratic congressmen that a few demonstrators had used racial epithets and that one demonstrator had spat at a congressman. Despite numerous videos of the alleged altercations, no evidence of racist language has been produced. A video of the alleged spitting incident seems to show an effusion of spittle from shouting, not intentional spitting. A congressman referred to the ostensible spitter as the man “who allowed saliva to hit my face.”

The *United Methodist News Service* even issued a special bulletin that rehashed unproven allegations that anti-Obamacare demonstrators shouted “racial epithets” at black congressmen and a sexual orientation slur at openly homosexual Congressman Barney Frank.

“It saddens me, the acrimonious debate both in Congress and in the public at large,” bemoaned United Methodist Bishop Gregory Palmer, president of the Council of Bishops. “We have failed to carry on serious debate without personal attacks and name-calling.”

The head of the United Methodist Commission on Religion & Race, Erin Hawkins, referred to the Tea Party protesters as “so-

bering examples that show racial- and gender-based hate remain active ingredients in U.S. social life.” The *United Methodist News Service* also quoted activist Gil Caldwell, a retired United Methodist minister, who proclaimed: “It ought to be obvious now to most persons, that even as all Americans have the right and responsibility to critique presidents and members of Congress, some few people have allowed their un-reconstructed racism to come forth as they exercise their right to protest.”

Meanwhile, United Methodist lobbyist Winkler, as head of the Board of Church and Society, hailed a Democratic congressman’s “deep faith and love for humanity” for not having pressed charges against the alleged spitter. “As Congress has debated and deliberated health-insurance reform legislation, I have been deeply disturbed by the lack of basic decency and common courtesy among people who have disagreements about public policy,” Winkler declared. But he aimed his condemnation only at alleged incidents by Tea Party activists while ignoring similarly incendiary incidents such as demonstrators at a D.C. anti war demonstration that same weekend who wore t-shirts praising the Soviet Union and Che Guevara. ❖

ACTION: *Respectfully urge Jim Winkler to be more judicious in his public condemnations. 100 Maryland Ave, NE, Washington, DC 20002; jwinkler@umc-gbcs.org. Remember, please be courteous.*

UM Backed Group Attacks Israel for Lent

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) in Washington, D.C. exploited Lent in 2010 as an organizing tool for rallying U.S. Christians against Israel. CMEP released a series of Lenten devotionals for local churches, with nearly every devotional critiquing modern Israel or urging solidarity with Palestinians.

Members of CMEP include the National Council of Churches and the lobby offices of Mainline Protestant denominations, including the United Methodist Board of Church and Society. CMEP partners with Friends of Sabeel, an American support group for Palestinian Christian liberationists who specialize in organizing U.S. Christians behind pro-Palestinian causes.

One Lenten devotional from a CMEP member, who is a United Methodist deacon, cited St. Paul’s affirmation of “our citizen-

ship in heaven,” contrasting it with the importance of “national citizenship” in lobbying Congress for “improving US policy to affect peace in the Holy Land.” More explicitly in his devotional, a United Church of Christ missions executive complained about “Israeli settlements, the separation barrier, conditions of refugees, and myriad aspects of occupation—as well as destabilizing and debilitating violence.” He implored that “we, as North American Christians, who have deep ties with Palestinian Christians, respond” by demanding an end to “violence and occupation.”

An official from the Maryknoll order of liberal Catholics was even more detailed in his devotional: “As People of Faith and Justice, and citizens of a Nation supportive of Israel, are we not being called upon to speak out about the continuing siege and blockade of Gaza; about the thousands of homes there which

Speaker Nancy Pelosi Applauds United Methodist Support for Obamacare

Speaker Nancy Pelosi thanked The United Methodist Church for supporting Obamacare before the fateful vote in the U.S. House of Representatives in March.

“That is why we’re proud and also humbled today to act with the support of millions of Americans who recognize the urgency of passing health care reform,” she declared from the House floor before a national television audience. “And more than 350 organizations, representing Americans of every age, every background, every part of the country, who have endorsed this legislation.” She specifically cited the Catholic Health Association and the United Methodist Church for having lobbied Congress to “Say yes to health care reform.”

Pelosi’s website lists all the major pro-Obamacare groups to which special thanks are due. It’s mostly labor unions but also lists the National Council of Churches, the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, and a coalition called Faithful Reform in Health Care that includes Church and Society and the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries.

United Methodist Bishop Gregory Palmer, President of the Council of Bishops, also signed a March 18 letter organized by Faithful Reform in Health Care to President Obama and Congress urging Obamacare’s passage.

Of course, chief United Methodist lobbyist Jim Winkler was pleased by the Obamacare vote. “We are not finished,” he ex-

plained. “There is more work to be done in the weeks, months and years ahead to fulfill the need for health care around the globe.”

Winkler’s Board of Church and Society supported a more direct government take-over of U.S. health care rather than Obamacare’s preservation of private health insurance. But Winkler saw Obamacare as a first-step towards socialized medicine.

“Jesus’ ministry serves as an example and a call to serve the least and the last among us,” Winkler explained of his support for Obamacare. “He asked us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves — setting forth a faith grounded in God’s abundance, generosity and a capacity for love that knows no bounds.”

According to the United Methodist Church’s official Social Principles: “We believe it is a governmental responsibility to provide all citizens with health care.” They further declare: “Like police and fire protection, health care is best funded through the government’s ability to tax each person equitably and directly fund the provider entities.”

Health Care Resolution 3201, approved by United Methodism’s 2008 General Conference, declares: “We call for swift passage of legislation which will entitle all persons within the borders of the U.S. to the provision of health care services, the cost of such services to be equally shared by American taxpayers, and the government to distribute the funds to providers in a coordinated and comprehensive manner. This concept, known as single-payer, would extend health care to all persons in the U.S.” It goes on: “We cannot wait to overcome the current barriers to a single payer plan, and therefore support all initiatives that move segments of our population closer to a single system.”

This resolution was submitted by Winkler’s Board of Church and Society and was approved by delegates almost unanimously after minimal discussion. ❖

ACTION: *Inform your local church that its apportionment dollars helped fund lobbying of the U.S. Congress for Obamacare, earning the thanks of Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Work to elect delegates to the UM 2012 General Conference who will listen to the great majority of United Methodists, and repeal our church’s far-left position on health care.*

cannot be rebuilt?” The Maryknoller also lamented “dispossessed Palestinian families in East Jerusalem,” the “continued growth of the older Israeli settlements,” and “building restrictions” on West Bank Palestinians. “Are we not being called upon,” he concluded, “to speak out about collective punishment, and the continued construction of the Wall of Separation?”

In the final CMEP devotional for Easter, a Mennonite contrasted St. Peter’s call for “impartiality” with how “Western Christians have too often promoted the view that there is a chosen people in the Middle East and have used that belief to support unjust policies.” ❖

ACTION: *Read IRD’s Twenty-One Theses to Guide Christian Engagement With the Middle East on our website or email for a copy at cewing@their.org.*

United Methodist Bishop Helps Lead D.C. March for Liberalized Immigration

On Sunday March 21, while the U.S. House of Representatives prepared for the final health care vote, tens of thousands of people gathered on the National Mall to demand “comprehensive immigration reform” (CIR). (CIR is legislative shorthand for liberal immigration policies that include a pathway to citizenship for illegal immigrants, increased visa quotas, a robust guest worker program, and an emphasis on family reunification.) The United Methodist Board of Church and Society, at the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill, served as a staging area for the marching immigration activists. Phoenix-area United Methodist Bishop Minerva Carcaño helped lead the demonstration.

Carcaño and many other religious activists were organized in part by the annual Ecumenical Advocacy Days (EAD) conference. EAD was sponsored by the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, the United Methodist Women’s Division, and the National Council of Churches, of which United Methodism is a member. About 700 church activists attended. This year’s EAD, themed “A Place to Call Home – Immigrants, Refugees, and Displaced Persons,” was intended to equip participants with the resources and knowledge to lobby for CIR.

The keynote speaker on EAD’s opening night was Bishop Carcaño, a familiar face in CIR circles. Bishop Carcaño is an outspoken advocate for liberalized immigration, speaking at rallies and events across the country. Her well-received talk focused on the story of Postville, Iowa, where, in May of 2008, federal agents raided the Agriprocessors plant and arrested 389 immigrants on charges ranging from aggravated identity theft to document falsification. Invoking anecdote after anecdote, Carcaño sought to convince the audience that comprehensive reform is the only solution to our “broken system.”

In its current form, she argued, immigration policy has at least two serious flaws. Primarily, it focuses too heavily on the rule of law. Citing a woman’s experience in the Postville episode, Carcaño said, “We saw the integrity of law enforced, but the integrity of individuals and persons forgotten.” The second flaw of American immigration policy is the use of the fence on the U.S.-Mexico border, which she calls “that despicable wall.” Carcaño said that the wall “has brought a shadow upon this country as dark as night.” Recounting the recent news of the halt in construction on the border fence, Carcaño declared victoriously, “As people of faith, we knew it was coming because the God we serve won’t let walls of oppression and separation stand.”



Tens of thousands of people gathered on the National Mall to demand “comprehensive immigration reform” (IRD/Connor Ewing)

Carcaño also explained how the pillars of the border fence that had been erected in coastal waters were recently toppled by waves. “The sea had refused to let those pillars stand. And then it came to me,” she said. “If the waters of the sea could do that to the pillars, what could we Christians do if we let the waters of our baptism ... topple the pillars of injustice?” In case her belief in divine sanction for her cause wasn’t clear, Carcaño concluded her talk by saying that opponents of comprehensive reform are opposing “the reign of God.”

EAD participants, many of them United Methodist activists, also lobbied Congress while in town. Other EAD topics, besides immigration, included “Who Owes Whom: Climate Debt,” “Ending Torture at Home and Abroad,” and “Nuclear Weapons-Free World.” ❖

ACTION: Please courteously and respectfully ask Bishop Carcaño to show restraint in her open borders activism. 1550 East Meadowbrook Ave, Ste 200, Phoenix, AZ 85014-4040; fax: 602-279-1355; email: bishopmc@desertsw.org.

UM Seminary Sponsors Anti-War ‘Truth Commission’

United Methodist Drew Theological School endorsed and participated in an anti-war rally at New York City’s famously liberal Riverside Church in March. The event at Riverside Church largely ignored United Methodism’s official “just war” teachings. Called “Truth Commission on Conscience in War,” the event was sponsored by an array of left-wing activist groups and featured only speakers who were sharply condemning of the U.S. military in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The official purpose of the Truth Commission was to “launch conversations about just war, international law, and greater freedom of conscience for our nation’s service members.” Speakers focused on the alleged lack of rights for conscientious objectors within the U.S. military. One speaker bemoaned some soldiers’ “disillusionment about the truth with the Iraq misadventure, along with the orchestration of lies and excuses and patriotism, [which] leaves them no way out.”

Rev. Dr. Pamela Lightsey, of United Methodist Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary in Chicago, attempted to give a more philosophical critique of war. A self-professed expert in “queer theology” and “black and womanist theology,” Lightsey said that a war’s “just cause can include self defense, protection of the innocent, punishment for wrong doing, threat of aggression, or restoring property.” Shifting to her area of expertise, she added, “I found that intriguing, particularly since we as African Americans have been talking about reparations for quite some time.” Dr. Lightsey quickly moved on, leaving the impression that she finds at least a partial just war justification for aggression intended to “restor[e] property” to African Americans.

As the event neared its conclusion, speakers continued to wander from the core mission of the conference in favor of other agendas. For instance, Dr. Jonathan Shay, a clinical psy-

chiatrist and expert on post-traumatic stress disorder, opened his talk by asking a rhetorical question: “Are service members, particularly officers, slaves of the state?” Unsatisfied with the shock value of a single question, he sought to drive the point home, saying, “Are officers slaves of the state? And let that question settle in the pit of your stomach and curdle there.”

Another speaker was Chris Hedges, formerly of *The New York Times*. He alleged that aggression against the U.S. abroad is the consequence of past American violence. Referencing a famous Riverside Church sermon of 40 years ago, he called the U.S. the “greatest purveyor of violence in the world.”

“We speak almost exclusively to the rest of the world in the language of violence,” Hedges continued. “That language of violence is one that we taught the world to speak back to us. It is the language the hijackers on 9/11 spoke. Where else did they learn that huge explosions and death above a city skyline are a form of communication?”

Hedges ended by imploring those in attendance to look at war and its attendant costs from a global perspective. “The pain that was evident here, behind this podium – the pain of a mother who lost her child, the pain of veterans who must carry with them the weight of killing – is a pain that we have visited on Iraqis, Afghans, Palestinians [that] dwarfs any of our own pain,” he asserted. “And I ask tonight that when we leave we begin to see that the pain that we endure is the pain that they endure, and that our true brothers and sisters are those who carry this burden and with whom we must reach out ... to make solidarity with and to rebuild a broken world.” ❖

ACTION: *Respectfully, ask the Dean of Drew Theological School, Dr. Maxine Clarke Beach, why her school endorsed this conference. Her email: mbeach@drew.edu. Please be courteous!*

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BM1002

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UMAction c/o IRD, 1023 15th Street NW, Suite 601, Washington, DC 20005-2620

Help Elect Pro-Reform Lay Members of Your Annual Conference

SPECIAL ACTION: Help your local church elect a pro-reform Lay Member of your 2011 Annual Conference -- more than one, if your church elects more than one Lay Member. Help elect a pro-reform Alternate too. Please act now.

Key points:

- The 2011 Annual Conference will elect the delegates to the vitally important 2012 General Conference.
- Talk now with pro-reform friends. Select and work for a good candidate. Find out who is on your local church's Committee on Lay Leadership (nominations committee). Get the date of your annual Charge Conference (usually in the Fall).
- Promptly talk with Lay Leadership Committee members and recommend a respected church member. Plan for several pro-reform friends to do the same.
- If the Committee does not nominate your suggestion, you can make nominations during the Charge Conference. Request a secret ballot. Do not be discouraged by resistance or criticism. To continue United Methodism's return to Christian faithfulness, many more Biblically-minded, pro-reform Lay Members of each Annual Conference are urgently needed.
- Consider and pray: are YOU willing and able to serve as a Lay Member? If so, promptly tell the Lay Leadership Committee that you would like to serve. If the position has already been filled, offer to serve as the Alternate Lay Member. Also, contact your district office and offer to serve as a district at-large Lay Member of Annual Conference.

UMAction Briefing

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