

UMAction

Briefing



UM Bishops Denounce Arizona Immigration Law as “Racist”

At the Spring Council of Bishops meeting, many bishops supported Arizona Bishop Minerva Carcaño’s strong opposition to Arizona’s new law that empowers local law enforcement to enforce federal immigration law.

According to Carcaño, Arizona’s new law “turns all people of color in Arizona, even legal immigrants and citizens, into criminal suspects.” Despite the law’s requiring immigration status checks to be incident to a “lawful stop, detention, or arrest,” Carcaño claimed, “The new law in Arizona requires police officers to stop and question anyone who *looks* like an illegal immigrant.”

Several bishops signed a poster calling for United Methodism “to recognize humane, comprehensive immigration reform as the faith issue that it is and hold our officials accountable.” As chair of the United Methodist Task Force on Immigration, Carcaño asked the bishops to assemble teams to “disseminate information about developments in the immigration debate and ways church members can respond.” The bishops’ discussion ended with a prayer by Iowa Bishop Julius Trimble, who prayed that Carcaño’s upcoming trip to Washington, DC to lobby for immigration legislation would be “covered with grace and mercy.”

Members of Carcaño’s task force urged bishops to “strongly oppose measures that legalize racism and criminalize acts of kindness, like sheltering fellow human beings in our sanctuaries.” Trimble implored: “We are asking that we not leave Bishop Carcaño to be standing alone.” In his own commentary, Trimble claimed the Arizona law “sets an alarming precedent for unreasoned legislative efforts that pander to fear, discrimination, and racial and ethnic profiling of Latinos and other immigrant persons of color in our communities” because it would “require police officers to serve as federal immigration enforcement agents and arrest those they suspect of being unlawfully present in this country.”

Meanwhile, retired Bishop Elias Galvan condemned Arizona for its “legalized racism.” Speaking on behalf of United Methodism’s Hispanic caucus, Galvan warned: “We need to remember that this law is a culmination of a process of hate that grew in Arizona.” Admitting that 60 percent of Arizonans support the law, Galvan lamented they had been “cultivated in this way.” ✚

ACTION: Review IRD Alan Wisdom’s suggested guidelines for approaching immigration that recently appeared on Christianity Today’s blog: www.TheIRD.org/CTWisdom.

Summer 2010

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(istockphoto.com/ Günay Mutlu)

United Methodist Seminary to Train Islamic Clergy

A United Methodist school in California is reportedly the first seminary in the United States to become multi-faith. Claremont School of Theology outside Los Angeles will begin clergy training for Muslims and Jews this fall, and hopes for future Buddhist and Hindu programs.

Concerned about the new direction, United Methodism's oversight agency for its 13 official seminaries initially cut off funding to Claremont early this year but in June restored the school's approximate \$800,000 annual grant from the United Methodist Church. The school says it has been offered \$10 million from private supporters for the interfaith initiative. About 70 of Claremont's 275 or so students are United Methodists.

Christians who feel they need to evangelize persons of other faiths have "an incorrect perception of what it means to follow Jesus," Claremont President Jerry Campbell told the *United Methodist Reporter*. "I think the correct perception is much more on side of learning to express love for God and love for your neighbor as yourself. Those are the fundamentals for me."

At a June press conference, Campbell officially unveiled the multi-faith plans, joined by Jewish and Muslim partners. "This is a very American approach. It's an expression of American religion and American religious attitude," enthused Jihad Turk, religion director for the Islamic Center of Southern California, which is partnering with Claremont. An imam who has studied in Iran and Saudi Arabia, Turk promised: "We promote a theology that is inclusive, that is cooperative, and that is pluralistic in tone and tenor." Citing "fanatics" who "promote theology of death," he asserted that Claremont's interfaith project is the "strongest counter argument" to "fear, hate and violence."

Claremont's first Muslim professor is a woman who declared at the press conference: "We are redefining what it means to be righteous in the 21st century." Najeeba Syeed-Miller insisted Claremont's goal was not to "dilute our faith but to be better Muslims, Jews, Catholics, Hindus, Protestants or whatever faith you bring." She urged a "theology of courage" focused on "collaborative action" on issues like homelessness and hunger.

Having struggled with financial solvency and even its accreditation in recent years, Claremont seems to see the multi-faith project as its redemption. Founded in 1885 as a Methodist seminary, in the 20th century it followed most other mainline Protestant seminaries into theological liberalism, which morphed into radicalism in the 1960s.

"We are redefining what it means to be righteous in the 21st century."

-Claremont Professor
Najeeba Syeed-Miller

Claremont became especially renowned for Professor John Cobb, one of the architects of Process Theology, which asserts that God is constantly evolving and mutating rather than immutably sovereign. In the early 1970s, Cobb founded the Center for Process Studies at Claremont, partnering with Professor David Ray Griffin, who is now a leading 9/11 conspiracy theorist. Griffin, who now heads the center and remains at Claremont as professor emeritus, believes the Bush administration exploded the World Trade Center to justify its imperialist wars. Process theology, with its notion that God is incomplete, is especially susceptible to vast and dark conspiracy theories, since it rejects orthodox Christianity's confidence that a sovereign God ultimately defeats all evil.

Under Claremont's influence, United Methodism has lost about half its membership in California and elsewhere on the West Coast over the last 40 years. Less than 4 percent of all United Methodists are now on the West Coast or in Rocky Mountain states. ✚

ACTION: Please encourage the United Methodist University Senate once again to halt church funding for Claremont until it upholds the centrality of Jesus Christ. Send your comments to: Gerald Lord, Associate General Secretary of Division of Higher Education, 1001 19th Ave South, P.O. Box 34007, Nashville, TN 37203-0007; Email: glord@gbhem.org.

Defeat of Global Segregation Amendments Confirmed

At their May 2010 meeting in Columbus, Ohio, the United Methodist Council of Bishops officially announced the defeat of church constitutional amendments they had supported creating a new U.S. only regional conference. And an amendment virtually mandating an open church membership policy was also defeated.

“In rejecting the amendments related to the worldwide nature of the United Methodist Church, we believe members of annual conferences around the world are sending a strong message that this specific vehicle for change was flawed,” admitted Kansas Area Bishop Scott Jones, speaking on behalf of the Committee to Study the Worldwide Nature of the United Methodist Church, which drafted the proposals.

Constitutional amendments in United Methodism must receive a two thirds vote at the General Conference and then ratification from two thirds of voters at local annual conferences around the world. The global church amendments, which critics called “global segregation,” gained only about 38 percent of 49,000 annual conference voters around the world. Critics warned that a new U.S. only regional conference that excluded Africans and other internationals could ultimately facilitate liberalizing the church’s stance on homosexuality.

Reading the statement of his committee, Bishop Jones identified the reservations that may have contributed to the failed attempts to segregate the UMC into regional bodies. “It was unclear how the changes, if approved, would have been implemented,” he said. “To some, the proposals were theologically suspect. To others the process seemed overly complicated.”

Global church amendment supporters claimed segregating the church’s structure by region would empower growing United Methodist churches in Africa. But the African churches voted nearly 95 percent against these amendments. In contrast, there was widespread support for the failed amendments in the very small European conferences and predictably liberal U.S. Western Jurisdiction.

Some liberal bishops complained about alleged interference by evangelical groups in the amendment voting, Virginia Bishop Charlene Kammerer said. “I honestly believe that these constitutional amendments and the process around them became tainted along the way... What happened in our setting along the way was that there were people from outside of our conference, representing caucus groups, who appeared at annual conference, who found a way to speak unauthorized at some of our conference events. And I discovered after the conference that there

were ballots distributed of how one should vote...I feel like the process was tainted for the whole church.”

Albany Bishop Susan Hassinger complained about the defeat of the “inclusivity” open church membership amendment, which critics warned might mandate church approval of homosexuality: “As a follower of Jesus in the Wesleyan tradition, I cannot support the vote, which was only 2,000 – less than 2,000 – difference. And so I want to commit to you, my brothers and sisters, that I will continue preaching and teaching the good news; that there is wideness in God’s mercy and [it is] not narrowed by any specific issue – there’s a wideness in God’s mercy; that a faithful church will proclaim that God’s grace and mercy are available to

all; and that a faithful church will seek to make ministry available to all.”

Far short of the two-thirds required for passage, the open church membership amendment was defeated by about 52 to 48 percent. The amendment essentially originated with the 2005 controversy over Virginia pastor Ed Johnson, who declined to grant immediate church membership to an openly active homosexual. Retired Bishop Melvin Talbert echoed Bishop Hassinger: “Like my sister, I cannot stop preaching about the inclusiveness of our church for all people – no matter who they are, from whence they came...I will not intentionally violate what the *Book of Discipline* says, but I *don’t* have to agree with it.” ✝

ACTION: Please say a prayer of thanks to the Lord that these divisive amendments were soundly defeated by annual conference voters around the world!



Pictured here: Bishop Charlene Kammerer presiding at the 2008 United Methodist General Conference in Fort Worth, Texas. After the amendments defeat this year, Kammerer expressed frustration over what she saw as a tainted process (UMNS/ Maile Bradfield)

Only 15% of UM Churches Highly “Vital”

The Call to Action (CTA) committee organized by the Council of Bishops to propose a church reorganization released the “Congregational Vitality Research” study showing that only about 5,000 of United Methodism’s over 30,000 congregations are highly vital. The committee is spending \$500,000, much of it on New York-based consulting firm Towers Watson. This report was released at the committee’s third meeting, which was in June in Nashville.

About 15 percent of United Methodist churches were deemed highly vital based on the number of small groups and children’s programs, length of pastoral appointments, lay leadership involvement, diversity of worship, worship attendance and professions of faith, annual giving, and benevolences beyond the local church. About half were deemed somewhat vital and over one third deemed not vital.

“There’s a big curve in the system; it’s a relative study,” responded CTA member, Jorge Acevedo, somewhat skeptically. “If we had 5,000 vital congregations I’m not sure we’d be here.”

Indiana pastor Kent Millard observed: “We close churches and say [some] churches can’t thrive. But then the Assemblies of God opens up a church and thrives. Every church has potential.” Besides Millard and Acevedo, the committee has 14 other members, including 5 bishops.

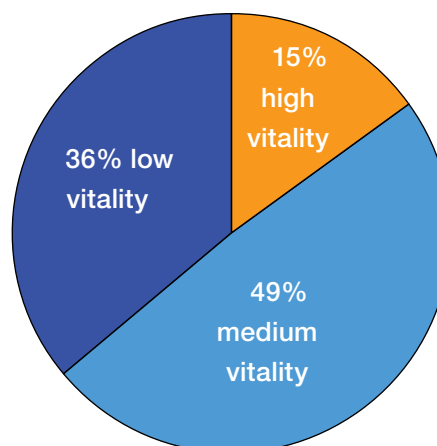
In a separate “Operational Assessment of the Connectional Church” study, Towers Watson also interviewed hundreds of church officials and found a “culture of bureaucracy and mediocrity.” It also discerned a “lack of trust in the way [church] agencies deal with one another.”

Illinois Area Bishop Gregory Palmer, who chairs CTA, observed: “So many of us have been managing decline that we are suspicious of success.” CTA was formed partly in reaction to United Methodism’s 45 years of membership decline in the U.S., totaling over 3 million lost members.

The Towers Watson consultants, in their “Operational Assessment” report, told CTA that the church confronts a “creeping crisis” of relevancy that is partly but not mostly financial. “General lack of trust within the Church was a pervasive and recurring theme in the majority of interviews,” said the report, and is a “root cause for under-functioning structures and processes of the Church.” The church lacks a “culture of accountability,” many interviewees told the consultants.

Many interviewees also complained that church agencies “dictate rather than serve” and are sometimes unsuccessful because they are based on their own “portfolio” rather than the church’s own needs. The process of ordination was described by many as too long and deterring young people from entering the ministry. And most also favored eliminating guaranteed appointments for clergy.

The report noted that United Methodism in the U.S. has declined 7 percent in membership and 9 percent in attendance between 1998 and 2008. The fastest decline was in the West and North. Sixty percent of U.S. United Methodists now live in the southern



Total Church Population Vitality Index

Data Source: UMC Call to Action: Vital Congregations Research Project, Findings Report for Steering Committee

jurisdictions. Ninety percent of the U.S. church is white, almost 6 percent is black, one percent is Asian, and less than one percent is Hispanic. The church is disproportionately old: 34 percent of U.S. United Methodists are age 65 and older, compared to 17 percent of the U.S. population. Professions of faith and baptisms declined by 25 percent and 31 percent, respectively. Ordained clergy declined by 2 percent while non-ordained local pastors increased by 54 percent. Eighty-eight percent of clergy are white and 76 percent are male. Almost 30 percent of clergy in the West are female, while fewer than 20 percent in the Southeast are female.

Adjusted for inflation, local church apportionment giving declined by 22 percent while other benevolence giving increased by 77 percent. Ninety-three percent of positive net funds for the denomination came from the southern jurisdictions. United Methodist churches collected over \$6.2 billion in 2008. The number of U.S. churches has declined from 36,000 to under 34,000.

Overseas churches in Africa and the Philippines continue to grow, and non-U.S. church members as of 2008 were almost 30 percent of total church membership. But overseas church members were not included in the “Operational Assessment” survey because of logistical challenges. On a related note, one consultant stated: “Overseas bishops don’t feel like equal partners when they come here.”

At its final meeting in August, CTA is supposed to agree on specific church-wide reforms for presentation to the fall Council of Bishops meeting and potentially for the 2012 General Conference. Few specific proposals have been discussed yet, but Acevedo suggested that bishops be elected by annual conferences rather than jurisdictions. “We might take the process more seriously if you have to serve under the bishop you elect,” he suggested. ✚

ACTION: Please tell Bishop Palmer that you are praying that Call to Action develops bold proposals for restoring accountability to United Methodism: Box 19215, Springfield, IL 62794-9215; email: gpalmer@igrc.org.

Chicago-Area UM's Attack Israel, Get Islamic Award

Chicago-area United Methodists in June voted to divest from companies doing business with Israel, including Caterpillar and General Electric. In July, the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), whose annual convention was outside Chicago, appreciatively gave the Northern Illinois Conference of United Methodism its Interfaith Unity Award.

“At the national level, the Islamic Society of North America has found a close ally in The United Methodist Church,” ISNA’s program declared. “Both working together in campaigning for social justice, peace and equity.” Apparently ISNA did not specifically cite the Chicago-area United Methodist stance against Israel. But presumably this policy only enhanced ISNA’s commendation for United Methodism’s “remarkable” solidarity.

No direct mention was made during the award ceremony of ISNA’s having been named in 2007 as an unindicted conspirator in the Holy Land terrorist financing case. According to the *Dallas Morning News*, court documents showed that ISNA was “an integral part of the [Muslim] Brotherhood’s efforts to wage jihad against America through non-violent means.”

Shortly before the award, the Northern Illinois Annual Conference for United Methodists approved anti-Israel divestment, ostensibly in response to a “plea by Palestinian Christians for action, not just words.” A news release explained that divesting from Caterpillar, General Electric, and others who supposedly profit from the “occupation” is merely a “nonvio-

lent form of economic protest long-used by churches and other shareholders to encourage companies to end unjust practices.” Church advocates of divestment want to target companies that are “involved with the physical settlements [by Jews on the West Bank], checkpoints and the separation wall, or support activities of the Israeli military in the occupied territories.” The proposal originated with the conference’s “End the Occupation Task Force.” And the anti-Israel divestment message will be disseminated to the regional body’s 400 local congregations and about 125,000 church members throughout northern Illinois.

The Chicago area United Methodists’ anti-Israel resolution was titled “Steadfast Support of Christians in the Holy Land.” But it does not support Christians anywhere else in the world, implying that Israel is the only supposed persecutor of Christians. Specifically the resolution cites Israel’s purported “war crimes” and “crimes against humanity,” while only briefly citing Hamas rockets from Gaza against Israel. ✚

ACTION: Respectfully urge Northern Illinois Bishop Hee-Soo Jung to treat Israel more fairly and to address the threat of radical Islam: 77 W. Washington St, Ste 1820, Chicago, IL 60602; email: hsjung@umcnic.org!

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BM1003

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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 -- or 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 Conferences 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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