

Evangelism Professor Likens United Methodists to Sterile Mules

Speaking to the annual United Methodist Congress on Evangelism in January 2011, Professor George Hunter of Asbury Seminary offered a searing critique of The United Methodist Church.

"The people called United Methodists cannot recall who they are, if indeed most of our present members ever knew," Hunter lamented. "They are no longer rooted in scripture or in any recognizable version of Methodism's theological vision."

Hunter quipped: "Thousands of our churches are analogous to mules – which are creatures that are so genetically compromised that they are incapable of reproduction." And he warned: "Don't expect much vitality, much less reproduction. There is not much vitality or reproduction anywhere the gospel is in absentia."

The Congress, sponsored by the United Methodist Council on Evangelism under the General Board of Discipleship, along with the Foundation on Evangelism, was convened in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Over 400 United Methodists attended.

Hunter delivered the annual Henry Denman Lectures at the Congress. The Congress hopes to reverse United Methodism's loss of 3 million members in the U.S. over the last 45 years.

Hunter further regretted about United Methodism: "The religion that inhabits the minds of our attendees is now about as likely to be deism, or pantheism, or middle class moralism, or civil religion, or even astrology or luck, as any recognizable form of the faith once delivered to the saints." He remarked: "What is now called Methodism, in many places, has retained the form of religion but without the power."

Responding to the Council of Bishops' 2010 "Call to Action" report for increased accountability within United Methodism, Hunter commented: "You would never know from the ... proposals that church health or strength or

vitality has anything to do with theology – or that there could possibly be anything sub-Christian, dysfunctional, heretical, or eccentric about anyone's theology."

Recalling John Wesley's famous admonition, "The world is our parish," Hunter opined: "The 'Call to Action' reflects the quiet, but enormous, shift in focus that United Methodism has experienced more recently, and that shift can be stated in seven words: 'We now regard our parish as our world.'" He asked: "Do these proposals, if implemented, stand a fair chance of actually revitalizing many mainline churches?"



Pictured here: Professor George Hunter of Asbury Seminary spoke at the 2011 United Methodist Congress on Evangelism. (Photo courtesy of Asbury Theological Seminary)

Describing a United Methodist church in Illinois that never contacted visitors, Hunter warned: "Read my lips: If a church does not even respond to its visitors, it is declining." He noted that United Methodist churches in the Northern Illinois conference unsurprisingly have less than half the membership they had in 1965. "Without serious intervention, more and more churches in measurable time will turn out the lights."

Hunter noted that China will soon have more active Christians than does the U.S. He described successful Christianity in China as a lay movement. "Are there any reasons to believe that we have in fact improved on Christianity according to the Wesleys?" Hunter asked, remembering that early Methodism was also a lay movement. "Why not recover and run with a version of classical Methodism that is appropriate for our time and our context? Do we have anything better to do?"

Action: Contact the Council on Evangelism and find out how you can help share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. E-mail: kkena@gbod.org; Address: Evangelism Ministries Director Kwasi Kwena, GBOD, 1909 Grand Ave, POB 340003, Nashville, TN 37203-0003.

UM Seminary Professor Touts Pacifism

Theologian Stanley Hauerwas of United Methodism's Duke Seminary, recently speaking at Indiana Wesleyan University, urged students to embrace pacifism, even if it does increase violence.

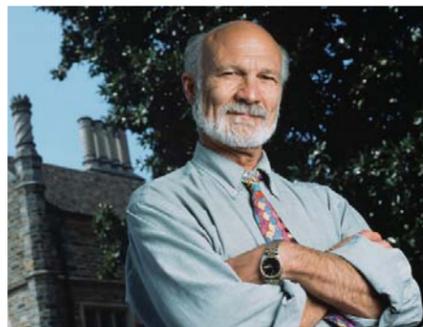
"Christians are called to be nonviolent, not because we believe our nonviolence is a strategy to rid the world of war," Hauerwas said, "But [because] in a world of war, as faithful followers of Christ, we cannot imagine being anything other than nonviolent."

Hauerwas admitted this stance may entail having to "endure a more violent world," insisting, "If you're committed to truthful nonviolence, you better be ready to know how to endure."

A vocal critic of America and its wars, Hauerwas has been hailed as America's "best theologian" by *Time* magazine. He is successful in persuading many young clergy across denominations to adopt pacifism.

Hauerwas cited a piece he wrote for *Time* opposing the Iraq War, while condemning President George W. Bush's calling Saddam Hussein "evil" to justify war. "Bush's use of the word evil comes close to being evil – to the extent that it gives this war a religious justification (which Christians should resist)," he wrote. "It's presumptuous for humans to assume that our task is to do what only God can do." Hauerwas further pleaded that "we free our imaginations from the presumption that the only alternative [to Saddam's dictatorship] is capitulation or war."

"The identification of cross and flag after Sept. 11 needs to be called what it is: idolatry," Hauerwas added in his article.



Pictured here: Stanley Hauerwas, a United Methodist professor at Duke University in Durham, N.C., has been named "America's Best Theologian" by *Time* magazine. (UMNS/Chris Hildreth)

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Hauerwas wrote.

Hauerwas also revisited an article he wrote in the early 1990s called "Why Gays (as a Group) Are Morally Superior to Christians (as a Group)," in which he coyly wondered why Christians should not also be banned from the U.S. military.

"As a Christian you should never lie, even to the enemy – so you have to tell the enemy the truth," said Hauerwas. "And as Christians you're always obligated to pray for your enemy and even would like to be reconciled with your enemy – none of this sounds like good military strategy, does it?"

Hauerwas said he presented this analogy to indirectly comment on how Christians should approach the morality of homosexuality.

"Ask yourself: if Christians were seen as problematic enough to get ourselves banned from the military as a group, what would the arguments about gays look like?" he said. "We could say to gay people as we say to ourselves, 'Look, we're not interested in your sexual fulfillment. We Christians have a much headier task ahead of us, because we're trying to make war less likely. If Christians were trying to make war less likely we don't have time to worry about your sexual fulfillment. We're going to give you something to do that's far more interesting than what you do or do not do with your genitals.'"

Action: Do you agree with Stanley Hauerwas that all Christians must be pacifist? For an alternative resource, order Rev. Bill Bouknight's "Should Christians Always Oppose War," available from Bristol House at <http://www.bristolhousetd.com> or phone: 1-800-451-7323.

Pro-Life UM's Worship on Capitol Hill

The United Methodist Church has not done enough to counter the bloody legacy of Roe v. Wade, according to a retired United Methodist medical ethicist and civil rights activist on the 38th anniversary of the Supreme Court's sweeping legalization of all abortion.

Retired Mississippi United Methodist clergy Edwin King, speaking at a pro-life meeting at the United Methodist Building in Washington D.C., criticized the complacency of United Methodist leadership about abortion, even though the UMC is, at least in word, a "pro-life church."

"We refer [in the United Methodist Book of Discipline] to 'the sanctity of the unborn human life' and 'the sacredness and well-being of the mother and the unborn child,'" King said. "Yet our church agencies, our local churches, and too many of us as individual Christians do little to nothing to make deeds of our words – to incarnate them in our lives and our witness."

King, who is retired from the University of Mississippi Medical Center, was speaking to the annual "Lifewatch" service of the Taskforce of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality (TUMAS). The pro-life service ironically convenes every year in the United Methodist Building, which headquarters several pro-abortion rights religious groups, including the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society (GBCS), which owns the building. With a smile, King briefly alluded to the lobbying stance of the building's residents. GBCS General Secretary Jim Winkler attended the service.



Pictured here: Lifewatch board member John Juergensmeyer (L) and IRD President Mark Tooley (C) listen to Edwin King (R). (IRD/Eric LeMasters)

Edwin King paralleled the current fight to preserve the rights of unborn children with his experience as an activist with Martin Luther King, Jr. during the Civil Rights Movement.

United Methodism's *Book of Resolutions* supports the "legal right to abortion as established by the 1973 Supreme Court decision." The church's Social Principles oppose abortion "as an acceptable means of birth control" and gender selection, while also opposing partial-birth abortion. GBCS and the United Methodist Women's Division belong to the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, which opposes all legal restrictions on abortion, and which supports Obamacare funding of abortion.

Expressing hope for an eventual more strongly pro-life stance for the denomination, King lauded the United Methodist Church's past ability to "move from words and songs to individual and institutional and agency action," particularly in its fight to end slavery and racial segregation in the South. He paralleled the current fight to preserve the rights of unborn children with his experience as an activist with Martin Luther King, Jr. during the Civil Rights Movement.

King recalled the pro-life views of his friend the late Mississippi civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer, who warned that unrestricted abortion would disproportionately destroy racial minority unborn babies. "Mrs. Hamer was the first person to make me start thinking," he recounted. "She quickly realized that... this new so-called 'right to abortion' was wrong for everybody, black and white. She was a new prophetic voice telling me and others that abortion is murder."

King cited "dreadful statistics," noting that a "black child in the womb is twice as likely to be killed as a white child."

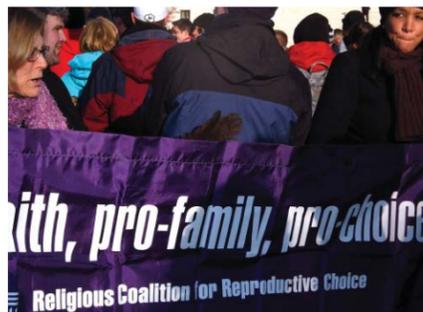
ACTION: Thank Lifewatch for its annual pro-life witness. E-mail: lifewatch@charter.net; Address: P. O. Box 306, Cottleville, MO 63338.

UM-Backed Church Coalition Wants Obamacare Abortion

In time for the 38th anniversary of Roe v. Wade, the Washington-based Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) pledged to bring its "moral force to bear" to ensure "full coverage of abortion services" through Obamacare's tax-funded state insurance exchanges set to begin in 2014.

The United Methodist General Board of Church and Society and the United Methodist Women's Division are both RCRC members. In 2008, the United Methodist General Conference narrowly failed to mandate withdrawal from RCRC.

As part of last year's deal with pro-life congressional Democrats, President Obama signed an executive order that his administration claims will prevent federal funding of abortions. At the time, RCRC denounced that "unconscionable deal" for offering any potential impediment to government facilitated abortion. Pro-life skeptics doubt the executive order ultimately will have much legal force. And pro-abortion rights groups like RCRC will determinedly push against it.



Pictured here: Two activists from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) counter-protest before the Supreme Court on January 20 at the March for Life. (IRD/Jeff Walton)

Mostly Mainline Protestant groups founded RCRC (originally less euphemistically called the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights) in 1973 in the immediate wake of Roe v. Wade to ensure widespread religious backing for the U.S. Supreme Court's overthrow of state restrictions on abortion. For years RCRC was based in the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill, which is the headquarters for most Mainline Protestant lobbies. The primary author of Roe v. Wade was Justice Harry Blackmun, himself an active United Methodist. RCRC in its early years got funding from the Playboy Foundation and later from philanthropies like the Ford Foundation.

Action: Contact General Board of Church and Society chief Jim Winkler and Women's Division chief Harriet Olson and urge their quitting RCRC. Please be respectful. Winkler's e-mail: jwinkler@umc-gbcs.org; address: GBGS, 100 Maryland Ave, NE, Washington, DC 20002. Olson's e-mail: holson@gbgm-umc.org; address: GBGM, 475 Riverside Dr, New York, NY 10115

International Delegates to Be 40 percent of General Conference 2012

Non U.S. delegates will account for almost 40 percent of the 2012 General Conference, up from just under 30 percent in 2008. The dramatic shift is due to a nearly 1 million member membership gain in Africa over 4 years, compared to a 320,000 membership drop in the U.S. church during the same period.

Delegates from overseas are overwhelmingly conservative, while U.S. delegates are typically more liberal.

As of 2009, 4.2 million United Methodists were in Africa, and 7.7 million were in the U.S. Under current trends, Africans could become a church majority within 12 years. Membership is also declining in Europe, with 65,000 members, and the Philippines, with 147,000. At the 2012 General Conference, Europe will have 42 delegates, and the Philippines will have 48. Africa will have 282 delegates, compared to 196 in 2008. The U.S. will have 606 delegates, compared to 704 in 2008.

The fastest declining U.S. jurisdiction is the Western, which lost nearly 8 percent and, with 397,000 members, now accounts for 3.2 percent of the total church. Every Western annual conference lost members. The North Central Jurisdiction lost 7.7 percent, and the Northeastern lost 7.1 percent. The South Central lost 2 percent, and all of its annual conferences lost membership except for Texas and Central Texas. The Southeastern lost 1.2 percent, and 4 of its annual conferences grew. North Georgia Conference gained over 14,000 members.

Twenty five percent of all United Methodists are in the Southeastern Jurisdiction. Over 28 percent are in Africa. The fastest growing annual conference is North Katanga in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which gained over 279,000 members.

Action: Praise God for United Methodism's phenomenal growth in Africa. Pray for fast declining and ultra-liberal regions, especially the Western Jurisdiction.

UMAction Briefing

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UMAction Briefing

Retired UM Bishops Demand Homosexual Clergy

Thirty-three retired United Methodist bishops have released a statement calling on The United Methodist Church to remove its ban on actively homosexual clergy.

Signers include bishops such as Ken Carder, Robert Morgan, Neil Irons, Lawrence McCleskey and Marshall Meadors who had not previously disclosed their views so publicly.

United Methodism officially affirms sex only within heterosexual marriage and calls clergy to monogamy if married and celibacy if single. But these retired bishops tried to paint this historic Christian stance as equal to racism.

"Our United Methodist Church, ashamed and repentant in the past, ended official and unofficial restrictions on candidacy, ordination and appointment for reason of race, gender and ethnicity," the retired bishops declared in their "Statement of Counsel to the Church - 2011." "We believe the God we know in Jesus is leading us to issue this counsel and call — a call to transform our church life and our world."

Nearly 40 percent of the denomination's 85 retired bishops signed the statement. The United Methodist Book of Discipline declares "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church."

Homosexuality has been debated at every United Methodist General Conference since 1972. Delegates consistently have voted to keep the restriction, most recently thanks to the growing number of African delegates, who are overwhelmingly conservative.

At the 1996 General Conference in Denver, 15 bishops declared their opposition to the church's disapproval of homosexual practice. The most recent statement calls for a new church stance towards "gay, lesbian and transgendered persons."

Action: Urge your bishop to speak out for the biblical and historic Christian stance affirming marriage and sexual morality.



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Pictured here: UM Bishops Susan Morrison (center) and Joseph Sprague are arrested after blocking a session of the 2000 General Conference. Morrison and Sprague were among the retired bishops who signed a statement calling for an end to the ban on actively homosexual clergy. (UMNS/Mike DuBose)