

UM Bishop Joins Same Sex Marriage Capitol Hill Rally

A chant to the “Buddha of infinite life and light” introduced the Human Rights Campaign’s “Clergy Call” May 24 press conference, ending a two day gathering of religious activists urging Congress to repeal the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA).

United Methodist Bishop Minerva Carcaño of the Desert Southwest Conference joined the Capitol Hill press conference. A chief focus was repealing the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) – which allows states to choose whether or not to recognize same-sex marriages from other states – and promoting the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), the Student Non-Discrimination Act and the Safe Schools Improvement Act.



Bishop Minerva Carcaño Addresses a Human Rights Campaign Press Conference on Capitol Hill (IRD/Eric LeMasters)

Clergy draped in exceptionally colorful vestments and umbrellas converged on the Upper Senate Park lawn after a morning of prep work for that afternoon’s lobby visits. The press conference began with an invocation from Hawaiian Buddhist clergy, who led the (mostly Christian) activists in an incantation to invite “all the Buddhas of the universe to be present” at the gathering.

HRC President Joe Solmonese kicked off the series of clergy statements at the press conference, rejoicing that larger and more influential denominations have supported gay membership and ordination – specifically citing the recent decision by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to revoke its sexual standards.

“Today, whole religious groups have dropped all barriers to membership and leadership,” Solmonese enthused. “The largest strains of Judaism in the United states, as well as Lutherans, Episcopal, UCC, MCC [Metropolitan

Community Churches] denominations, and just this month, the Presbyterian Church – they have opened up their doors to all people regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.” The mention of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) drew cheers from the crowd.

“Laws that create a civil society, that demand mutual respect and fairness in our public life, are foundational to the society that we as Christians are commanded to create,” Varghese said. “Discrimination on the basis of gender expression or sexual orientation are [sic] incompatible with the teachings of Scripture and the church, and make it impossible for us to live our religious and civic lives in harmony.”

Bishop Minerva Carcaño similarly spoke in the hope of a more “open” denomination. “Those of us who are United Methodists among you continue to believe that we United Methodists have open hearts and open minds. But you have fully given us the witness of what that means in all of its depth and all of its significance,” Carcaño told the crowd

“I have come to see the deep intersection of the work we must do together for justice for the LGBT [lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender] and the immigrant communities,” Carcaño explained.

of activists. “And so we United Methodists among you and so many other United Methodists covenant to work with you and work among ourselves until that day comes that our United Methodist doors are open as well.”

The United Methodist church officially holds homosexuality to be “incompatible with Christian teaching,” according to its *Social Principles*, and defines marriage in both church and civil society as the union of man and woman. Thanks to the church’s growing overseas African membership, United Methodism is unlikely to liberalize its sexual standards.

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“Our states and this country will find a way to build strong and healthy communities when we fully accept that in all our diversity of sexual orientation, economic status, race, culture and even immigration status, we are all persons of sacred worth,” Carcaño declared. Her Desert Southwest Conference is among the fastest declining areas of United Methodism.

Carcaño also is a prominent activist for liberalized immigration laws and open borders. She compared the plight of immigrants to homosexuals.

“I have come to see the deep intersection of the work we must do together for justice for the LGBT [lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender] and the immigrant communities,” Carcaño explained. “Those have for too long been the victims of hate and violence. Both the LGBT and immigrant communities

Will United Methodism Liberalize Sex Teachings?

This year, about 500 United Methodist clergy in Minnesota, Illinois, New York, and New England, many of them retired, announced their willingness to perform same-sex unions. The denomination has over 45,000 clergy in the U.S., of whom 24,000 pastor churches.

Four major Mainline Protestant denominations in the U.S. have now abandoned their traditional teachings about marriage. The United Methodist Church, with 7.7 million members in the U.S., has uniquely resisted the trend among liberal-led Mainline Protestants. Liberal Methodists hope next year’s governing General Conference will finally grant the prize.

It’s not likely. United Methodism has lost over three million members in the U.S., where most of its bishops and other elites are liberal. But it now has nearly four and a half million overseas, almost all in Africa, where Christianity is conservative.

About 40 percent of the delegates to next year’s convention will come from outside the U.S., up from just 30 percent four years earlier. United Methodist churches in Africa have gained nearly one million members in just four years, more than compensating for the U.S. church’s annual 60-70,000-member loss, and making United Methodism a growing church for the first time in over forty years.

struggle every single day for the right to employment without prejudice.”

“I am convinced, however – fully convinced – that together, we can overcome hate and discrimination of every kind and build communities of faith in the nation and the world that will one day value all of God’s people,” Carcaño concluded to applause.

The HRC banned IRD from attending the “Clergy Call,” except for the public press conference, citing IRD’s being “actively hostile to LGBT equality.”

Action: Ask Council of Bishops President Larry Goodpaster to come to Washington, D.C. to share United Methodism’s official support for “laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.” Address: 3400 Shamrock Dr, Charlotte, NC 28215 Email: bishop@wnccumc.org

Despite the defiance over the years, United Methodism’s General Conference keeps reaffirming the prohibitions. In 2008, delegates rejected same-sex marriage by 66-34 percent. Presumably that margin will increase next year, after a nearly 100-delegate shift (out of nearly 1,000) away from the U.S. and towards Africa.

The openly lesbian Rev. Amy DeLong’s Wisconsin will have only six delegates, while the Democratic Republic of the Congo will have about 124.

Although United Methodism in the mid-western U.S. has lost over 40 percent of its members, the African church multiplied by 10 fold.

United Methodism in the relatively conservative Southeast U.S. also has grown slightly, while the very liberal West Coast area has lost nearly half its members. Angola now has more United Methodists than California.

ACTION: Contact delegates elected to General Conference from your local conference and encourage them to uphold the church’s biblical teaching

“Prayers” Against Federal Budget Limits at UM Building

While President Obama and the Congress debate limits on federal spending prior to raising the federal debt cap, the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) was praying against any limits on social welfare spending.

GBCS joined the Capitol Hill lobby offices of the United Church of Christ, the Church of the Brethren, the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Islamic Society of North America in “prayers for a just and compassionate federal budget.” The interfaith prayer events were spread across two weeks in July on the grounds of the United Methodist Building, which is across the street from the U.S. Capitol.

Calling themselves the Washington Interfaith Staff Community (WISC), they promised an exhibition of interfaith activism in anticipation of a “Heads of Communion press conference on July 19 and planned meetings with President Obama and Congressional Leadership.”

One commenter noted on the event’s Facebook page, “I am proud of the UMC GB of Church and Society responding in this way. This is one way not to take sides and be involved in politics.” But the WISC “prayer” campaign was hardly neutral.

The first day of prayer included a litany imploring: “To eliminate vital domestic and international programs that respond to the needs of poor people and our planet is wrong.” It also mentioned, “We cannot leave our children a legacy of rising debt, nor can we leave them a legacy of rising poverty.” The prayer insisted that budget limits must not affect Social Security, Medicare,

As usual, the prayer repeatedly cited “justice” and “protection,” even though they really meant “spending” and “provision.”

entitlements allow America “to act justly and to protect our most vulnerable brothers and sisters, here and around the world.” As usual, the prayer repeatedly cited “justice” and “protection,” even though they really meant “spending” and “provision.”

Medicaid, unemployment assistance, SNAP, TANF, SSI, and Pell grants. Such



The United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill hosts the lobbying offices of several religious groups, many of whom share politically liberal policy positions. (GBCS)

On the following day, July 12, the Islamic Society of North America arranged the order of service, incorporating the Koran into its litany against any federal budget limits on social welfare spending.

ACTION: Contact GBCS General Secretary Jim Winkler and respectfully ask that future prayer events at the United Methodist Building be less politically partisan. His E-mail: jwinkler@umc-gbcs.org. Letters can be sent to GBCS, 100 Maryland Ave, NE, Washington, DC 20002-5611.

UM Bishop Criticizes Killing Osama Bin Laden

East Pennsylvania Bishop Peggy Johnson, echoing the pacifism popular among United Methodist officials, criticized the U.S. military for having killed 9-11 terror mastermind Osama Bin Laden in May. She called his death a "sad day with sadder times to come."

"The assassination of Osama Bin Laden is contrary to Christian teaching," Bishop Johnson declared in her blog. "He was our enemy. Did we pray for him? Was the act of killing him a sign of love? Obviously this is a very difficult position to take as it is radical. Christianity is radical, self-sacrificing and counter cultural. Acting like Jesus is not popular. Osama Bin Laden committed terrible crimes against humanity. He should have been tried by an international court."



Bishop Peggy Johnson (Right) of East Pennsylvania (Photo: Peninsula-Delaware Annual Conference)

Johnson warned that Bin Laden's "assassination" would "spur on a whole new wave of terrorism," because "violence breeds more violence and the cycle of death and revenge will continue indefinitely." She pointed at "how many innocent people have died in Iraq and Afghanistan since 9/11."

The Bishop prayed for a "day when we know in our hearts the futility of violence and the necessity of peace-making as our best Christian witness." She did not acknowledge historic Christian teaching that civil government is ordained to wield force against evil doers in defense of the innocent and in pursuit of justice. ✚

ACTION: Pray that Bishop Johnson and other United Methodist officials will stop pretending that United Methodism is a pacifist church.

Desert Southwest Annual Conference Denounces IRD

At its 2011 Annual Conference, the small and fast declining Desert Southwest Conference approved a long resolution denouncing IRD for being "disruptive to the ministries of our denomination," and promising to keep all its local churches fully informed about IRD.

This resolution is this conference's third official condemnation of IRD, having passed similar resolutions in 2003 and 2007. Part of the conference's complaint about IRD was that IRD supported legislation at the 2000 General Conference reduced the Desert Southwest's delegation size to future General Conferences. That legislation pegged delegation size more closely to conference membership, which fast declining areas disliked.

The Desert Southwest has lost over 17 percent of its members in just 10 years although Arizona is a fast growing state. In 2009, the conference was down to 38,961 members. Although Arizona's population is over 30 percent Hispanic, only 2 percent of the Desert Southwest Conference is Hispanic.

The conference's lack of membership has not deterred its political outspokenness. Its annual conference typically approves many political statements, and this year's included condemnation of the new George W. Bush Library at Southern Methodist University.

In its anti-IRD resolution, the Desert Southwest Annual Conference vowed to distribute "study materials to be used by all Desert Southwest Congregations" no later than Spring 2012 and to encourage all United Methodists to "consider withdrawing any support they may give to the IRD." They also asked the 2012 General Conference to denounce IRD. Copies of the Desert Southwest anti-IRD resolution are to be sent "all other United Methodist Annual Conferences, the Council of Bishops, the General Board of Church and Society, the General Council on Ministries, the Commission on the Status and Role of Women, the National Council of Churches of Christ, and the World Council of Churches."

The Desert Southwest Annual Conference forgot that the General Council on Ministries was abolished many years ago. ✚

ACTION: Inform the Desert Southwest Conference that your support for IRD's ministry of church reform will continue, despite their resolution. Address: 1550 E. Meadowbrook Ave, Phoenix, AZ 85014 Email: communications@desertsw.org

UMAction Briefing

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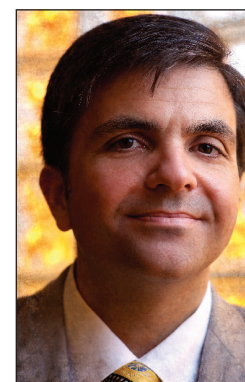
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UMAction Briefing

UM Lesbian Minister Briefly Suspended

United Methodist Church court in June sentenced a semi-openly professing lesbian minister to a 20-day "suspension" for having conducted a same-sex rite, defying the church's prohibition. The Rev Amy DeLong had announced her partnership with another woman and conducted a same-sex union in 2009.

The jury acquitted DeLong of violating the church's prohibition against actively homosexual clergy because she refused to testify as to whether she and her partner are sexually involved. But the jury unanimously convicted her for conducting the forbidden ceremony.

DeLong and her female companion registered together two years ago under Wisconsin's Domestic Partnership Law. In a communication to local church authorities, DeLong identified herself as a "self-avowed, practicing homosexual," placing the phrase in quotes, in reference to United Methodism's prohibition on actively homosexual clergy. But during the trial, the church's prosecutor reportedly ignited "audible gasps" from the audience when he asked DeLong if she had "genital contact" with her partner.

A previous United Methodist high court ruling had declared that "self-avowed" requires the defendant specifically to admit to sexual acts. The jury acquitted DeLong on the homosexuality charge but convicted on the same-sex marriage charge. Besides the 20-day symbolic suspension from pastoral duties that she largely does not have, DeLong was also sentenced to write a paper on upholding the clergy's accountability within the church.

Virtually any penalty for the Rev. Amy DeLong would be symbolic, as she does not work for any church, instead running her own small liberal advocacy group in Wisconsin called "Kairos CoMotion" for "progressive theological issues." DeLong and her allies almost certainly hoped that a jury of her clergy peers in relatively liberal Wisconsin would nullify church law.

In 1997, a Nebraska minister evaded penalty for a same-sex rite until he was defrocked in 1999 after a second ceremony. Also in 1999, 68 California United Methodist clergy presided at a nuptial for two prominent lay women, without penalty. But a Northern Illinois pastor was suspended in 199 for conducting a same-sex union. In 2004, a San Francisco United Methodist minister evaded penalty after wedding 14 same-sex couples during that city's "Summer of Love," before a court decreed that the city lacked authorization for same-sex marriage. ✚

ACTION: Thank Wisconsin Bishop Linda Lee for upholding church law. Address: PO Box 620 Sun Prairie, WI 53590 Email: episcopaloffice@wisconsinumc.org

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The Rev. Amy DeLong answers questions from reporters during a press conference in a Sunday school classroom in Kaukauna, Wis., following her United Methodist Church trial. (UMNS/Mike DuBose.)

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YOUR OPINION, PLEASE!

Should the United Methodist Lobby Office in Washington, DC be:

- Shut Down
- Reclaimed from partisan politics for more biblical causes
- Supported
- Don't Know