

Wesley Seminary Professor Discusses Obama Reelection

Wesley Theological Seminary Professor Shaun Casey, who was a religious outreach director for Barack Obama's 2008 campaign, prognosticated about the President's reelection challenges in a talk at Wesley's downtown Washington, D.C. campus on February 13. Casey described how religion could politically hurt Obama. "First of all, there would have to be a record turnout of conservative Protestants voting for the Republican nominee," he noted of what could defeat Obama. "Secondly, there would have to be a mediocre showing of Mainline Protestants and Catholics voting for Obama." Casey seemed unworried about conservative Protestants, since evangelicals have been divided during the Republican primaries over the choices of two Catholics, a Mormon, and a Baptist.

Casey did worry about Roman Catholic voters. Controversy exploded over the Obamacare mandate requiring religious schools, hospitals and charities to provide insurance covering contraceptives, abortifacients, and sterilizations. "It seems to me that the presumption was that, at least early on, the White House had mishandled this entire situation," he admitted. "I believe this is a disaster. I think it's a disaster for the Catholic church (though I don't actually have any standing in the Catholic church, so they're not calling me for advice), but it seems to me that when you reach a point where one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States is explicitly or thinking explicitly of opposing an administration,

that's not good for that church and that's certainly not good for that White House." Casey was perplexed that the administration could not negotiate better with the Catholic bishops. He described Cardinal-designate Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York as "a fixer, and not a bomb-thrower." And he said: "He's a guy that any White House ought to be able to deal with, whether Republican or Democrat."

Hailing the Obama Administration's overall religious initiative, Casey remarked, "The irony for me is that this White House has actually done more for faith-based outreach than perhaps the previous three administrations combined, and yet the growing narrative on the other side is the Obama war against religion." He further asserted, "The irony of this situation is that the Catholic Church has fared quite well under this administration with the funding they have received through federal block programs. They have received much more funding now than they would have four years ago, but we would not know that from the public discourse with the bombs being thrown back and forth."

Wesley Theological Seminary is one of United Methodism's 13 official seminaries, each of which receives about \$1 million annually from the church. ☒

ACTION: Learn more about Wesley Seminary at www.wesleyseminary.edu.

Bishop Willimon Addresses U.S. Marines at National Cathedral

United Methodist North Alabama Bishop Will Willimon, an outspoken pacifist, addressed the U. S. Marines in the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. this past Veterans Day, praising the warriors for their virtues.

Despite his pacifism, the North Alabama bishop spoke well of his military audience at the National Cathedral, which belongs to the Episcopal Church but often hosts pageants of civil religion. Preaching for Veterans Day, he acclaimed the U.S. Marines and their Commandant, General James Amos, for their "faithful resolve." He declared, "I live in a culture in which most of us are faithful—until something better comes along." For one example, Willimon observed, "Half the marriages I've performed in my ministry, end in divorce, usually because someone said, 'I intended to be faithful to you for better or worse, sickness or health' but then when something came up..." He added: "General Amos, when people join my church we ask before God and everybody: 'Will you be faithful to the UM Church by your

prayers, your gifts, your service, your witness?' About 20% of them that says, 'I will,' obey their promises..."

Willimon contrasted this duty-free attitude with the loyal sacrifices of soldiers. "I love it when that Marine answers laconically, 'It's my job. It's what we do,'" he exclaimed. The bishop continued, "We civilians expect the Marine to say, 'Patriotism! Freedom! Bi-cameral democracy!' or some other noble sentiment. Politicians talk like that when they're sending in the Marines, but not Marines. It's just, 'That's what we do.'" He wryly noticed, "Some of you are better human beings today, because back at boot camp someone taught you faithfulness and resolve that didn't come naturally."

Urging consideration of God, Willimon preached: "[I]f any of you want to live your life on the basis of faithful resolve, you better believe in God. As I have admitted, there are just too many normal, natural aspects of being human that mitigate against the practice of fidelity and resolution. Please do not set

United Methodist Pro-Lifers Recall Roe v. Wade

On a cold rainy January morning, a band of pro-life activists convened for worship in the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill, across the street from the U.S. Capitol. The participants, all supporters of United Methodism's unofficial pro-life caucus "Lifewatch," met to mourn the 39th anniversary of the Roe v. Wade, the U.S. Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion in the U.S. The communion service featured a sermon by the Rev. Dr. James Heidegger, the former long-time head of United Methodism's evangelical caucus, "Good News."



Rev. James Heidegger preached at the January Lifewatch service marking the 39th anniversary of the Roe v. Wade decision. (Photo: Good News)

The United Methodist Church officially and controversially affirms abortion rights. Its agencies, including the General Board of Church and Society that owns and occupies the United Methodist Building, belong to the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, which opposes all legal restrictions on abortion. Lifewatch's annual service in the United Methodist Building is a rare pro-life witness at that locale.

Heidegger declared: "We now have a generation of United Methodists, and of Americans as well, who have known nothing except the culture of abortion brought about by Roe v. Wade.

out to be faithful and resolute if you don't believe in a God who helps you be better than you would be if left to your own devices, a God whose gracious power enables you to be who you couldn't be on your own. Above all do not attempt faithful resolve if you do not believe in a God who forgives those times when faith fails and resolve crumbles."

In an age when many liberal United Methodist clergy condemn all aspects of the military, Willimon preached to the U.S. Marines: "[T]hose for whom we give thanks to God this day, are proof that God can give you the grace not only to say but to be *semper fidelis*." ☒

ACTION: Thank Bishop Willimon for his sermon to the U.S. Marines: 898 Arkadelphia Rd, Birmingham, AL 35204-5011 email: wwillimon@northalabamaumc.org

Many of them may not be aware that it was not always this way." He pointed out that the decision itself has been "sharply criticized by respected ethicists, legal scholars, and Christian theologians." Heidegger observed that Roe v. Wade (alongside Doe v. Bolton) demanded "the removal of all meaningful limits on abortion throughout the entire nine months of pregnancy," overturning anti-abortion laws in nearly all of the states.

"This was not a benign decision reflecting a gradual liberalizing trend in America about abortion. It was a radical departure from the present practice in America at the time," Heidegger exclaimed. He illustrated that the decision fell afoul of many legal theorists "as seriously flawed jurisprudence." But he commented, "A reversal of Roe would not be at all unprecedented in terms of the Court's history."

Heidegger also highlighted the late United Methodist ethicist and Princeton professor Dr. Paul Ramsey. Ramsey authored a clause for the 1972 United Methodist *Book of Discipline* that included a belief "in the sanctity of unborn human life." But liberals at the 1972 General Conference added a "schizoid" amendment declaring: "[W]e support the legal option of abortion under proper medical procedures."

Both young and old United Methodists will develop a stronger, bolder view of unborn human life in the years to come, Heidegger hoped. And he concluded: "I am so grateful for the faithful ministry of Lifewatch and of others who have helped to give us a United Methodist position on abortion in our Discipline that is far more affirming of life—and it's a position which opposes the reasons usually given for probably 95 percent of all abortions." ☒

ACTION: Find out more about Lifewatch at www.lifewatch.org.

UM Officers Lobby on Capitol Hill

Council of Bishops Executive Secretary Neil Irons joined other ecumenical heads to propose a "faithful budget" for Congress, which seeks to protect federal entitlement programs while cutting military expenditures. "We believe that God assesses the value of a nation by the way in which it cares for the marginal – for those people who cannot care for themselves," Irons explained at a March press conference at the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill. He was joined by other liberal religious officials, including one from the Islamic Society of North America.

"Our task is not simply to address the world of today, it is to see to it that those who come after us in this world will be advantaged by the abundance of this wonderful planet on which God has placed us," Irons explained. "Therefore, we call upon Congress to adopt a faithful budget which recognizes that security is something that all people have a right to, and not just a part, and that in the process of that we harbor our resources in order to give a gift to those who come after us on this planet."



Bishop Neil Irons (center) announces the release of a budget proposal at a press conference in front of the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill. (IRD/Jeff Walton)

In addition to cuts in defense such as "substantially" reducing the number of nuclear armed submarines and aircraft, the "Faithful Budget" proposal that Bishops Irons touted calls for cutting border patrol expenditures, funding for employment verification and "ceasing cooperation with the enforcement of state anti-immigrant laws." The budget proposal urges increases in social spending, public school improvements, home energy assistance, and a "substantial increase" in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (welfare) funding. It also calls for expanded entitlement spending and increased subsidies for "renewable energy research and development."

Following Bishop Irons' example, some United Methodist officials joined other liberal protestors to launch a series of

prayer vigils and other advocacy in support of Obamacare. Staged during arguments before the U.S. Supreme Court on Obamacare's constitutionality, the interfaith prayer vigil was based in the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill, which hosted a "radio row" for pro-Obamacare broadcasts by sympathetic radio hosts.

"It's the official position of the United Methodist Church that health care is a human right," announced United Methodist lobbyist Jim Winkler at a rally outside the court. He was surrounded by placards declaring: "People of Faith for Health Care." "It is a governmental responsibility to provide citizens with health care," Winkler insisted. Obamacare is "desperately needed by ordinary Americans," he said. "We believe the Supreme Court and the decision it makes is a reflection of the moral and ethical character of our people." Much of the pro-Obamacare prayer vigil occurred in the Methodist Building Simpson Chapel.

Recently, the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) opened the newly-refurbished Simpson Chapel with an interfaith ceremony. The renovation replaced the small chapel's red carpet with dark hardwood floors, pews with chairs, added a flat screen television, and a new communion table. To make it a "house of prayer for all people," the re-consecration service featured prayers and readings from a rabbi, an imam, and the national director of the Islamic Society of North America.

In a recent *Daily Christian Advocate*, the GBCS also boasted receiving \$35,000 from leftist philanthropist George Soros for "grassroots criminal justice advocacy." ☒

ACTION: For regular updates on United Methodism's political lobbying on Capitol Hill, enroll for IRD's United Methodist email updates at www.theird.org.

United Methodist Lobbyist Denounces VA Governor over Guns

On March 12, United Methodist General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) General Secretary Jim Winkler publicly condemned Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell for signing off on loosened gun laws. This measure had been a longtime stance for the governor and had been approved by the legislature. It repealed a 1993 "one handgun-per-week" act. Repeal proponents argued that preexisting loopholes and improvements in background-checking technology made the former law unnecessary.



UMC official Jim Winkler has pushed for more restrictive firearms legislation. (IRD/John Lomperis)

Using the weekly "Faith in Action" briefing, Winkler complained: "[O]ur governor put the agenda of a lobby ahead of the people he was elected to represent. He put the gun lobby's agenda ahead of protecting the residents of his state from the life-altering and life-ending horror of gun violence." Winkler chairs

the "Faiths United Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence," a coalition of liberal religious clergy that touts gun control. "Innocent lives will be lost, as a result," he claimed. "It is not only shameful that the governor did this, it is immoral."

United Methodism's *Book of Resolutions* officially supports "national bans on ownership by the general public of handguns, assault weapons, automatic weapon conversion kits and weapons that cannot be detected by traditionally used metal-detection devices." Most such political resolutions are initiated by GBCS and are approved at United Methodism's quadrennial governing General Conference with little or no debate.

ACTION: Contact United Methodist lobbyist Jim Winkler with your thoughts: GBCS, 110 Maryland Ave NE, Washington, DC 20002; email: jwinkler@gbcs-umc.org.

United Methodist U.S. Membership Plunges

In February, the United Methodist Church released its membership numbers for 2010. The figures reveal that, while it remains America's second largest Protestant body, its U.S. membership has posted perhaps its largest drop since the 1970s. The church's 2010 U.S. membership stands at 7,570,980, a drop of 108,870 persons from 2009. Though not as radical as some other denominations, this decrease reflects the dominant trend of most liberal led Mainline churches.

While U.S. United Methodism has shrunk by 3.5 million members since the 1960s, United Methodism in Africa has gained almost a million members in just 4 years. There are 4.5 million United Methodists outside the U.S. Nearly 40 percent of the delegates at the upcoming 2012 General Conference will come from overseas.

At a pre-General Conference January news briefing in Tampa, Minnesota Bishop Sally Dyck presided over a panel on "holy conferencing" about civil disagreement. But the panel ended with an angry lesbian activist in the audience complaining she had been denied ordination 3 times and insisting the time for dialogue was over. The time for action has begun, she promised. Such statements will jar many African delegates, who remain overwhelmingly conservative on theological and sexual issues.

With African representation growing, and the most liberal areas of the U.S. fast declining, the chances that this or any future General Conference will liberalize United Methodism's current biblical definition of marriage and church leadership is increasingly remote.

ACTION: Please pray for the 2012 General Conference, April 24 – May 4. Pray especially for the safety of African and other overseas delegates who will journey a long distance.

UMAction Briefing

The Institute on Religion & Democracy

1023 15th Street NW, Suite 601, Washington, DC 20005-2601
202.682.4131 • umaction@TheIRD.org
www.TheIRD.org

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UMAction Briefing



New Book: METHODISM & POLITICS IN THE 20TH CENTURY

IRD president Mark Tooley's new book was released in January. It is called *Methodism and Politics in the Twentieth Century: From William McKinley to 9/11*. "My new book is not itself political or even analytical," Tooley told *The Christian Post*. "It's just a straight forward history of what the church did and said politically across a hundred years. So I hope it will be helpful to conservatives and liberals and people in between."

Tooley added: "To my knowledge it's the first of its kind in terms of chronicling the political and social influence of Methodism in any century but certainly for the twentieth century." He also noted that the denomination has been losing members every year since 1964 and even before that was losing political influence. Tooley attributed the beginnings of the decline of Methodist political influence to a cause the church had actively and overwhelmingly supported: prohibition.

"In my book I surmise that Prohibition (of alcohol) was its greatest political success and ultimately its biggest failure," Tooley told *The Christian Post*. "And it really never regained political momentum after Prohibition's repeal." He alluded to temperance at his book launch part at the IRD office in February, which was attended by about 50 people. "I should note that most of the people I write about in this book would very much disapprove about us being here with wine and beer," he said, receiving laughter from the audience. "They would say the Catholics had won." Tooley noted after the 1930s the Methodist Church "never really had a consensus" on other issues "like it had had in the early part of the 20th century on issues like Prohibition."

In his favorable review of *Methodism and Politics*, historian Timothy Kidd of Baylor University wrote in *The United Methodist Reporter*: "Mr. Tooley demonstrates the perils of a church trying to maintain its prophetic edge through political advocacy. The church's primary business, of course, should never be contemporary politics. Confessing that Jesus is Lord has always had political ramifications, but aligning that confession too closely with specific powers of this world often leads to the church being exploited as a political tool and ultimately abandoned when the tool is no longer necessary."

ACTION: Order a copy of *Methodism and Politics* from Bristol House at 1-800-451-7323. Also available at Amazon.com, including for Kindle.

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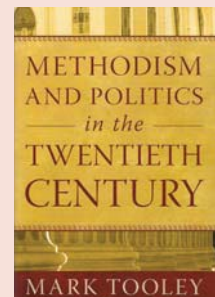
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Should the United Methodist Church divest from firms doing business with Israel?

- Yes.
- No.
- Unsure.