

Illinois Bishop Preaches Liberalism in D.C. Pulpit

United Methodist Bishop Sally Dyck gave a July 22 sermon called “The Meat of God’s Law” at Foundry United Methodist Church in Washington D.C. Dyck has been a bishop in Minnesota since 2004 and is the new bishop in the Northern Illinois Conference based in Chicago.



United Methodist Bishop Sally Dyck recently preached at Foundry United Methodist Church in Washington, D.C. (Photo: New York Annual Conference)

Bishop Dyck began her sermon with a quote from 19th century abolitionist and former slave Frederick Douglass: “You are all on fire at the mention of liberty for France or for Ireland; but are as cold as an iceberg at the thought of liberty for the enslaved of America... You can bare your bosom to the storm of British artillery to throw off a three-penny tax on tea; and yet wring the last hard earned farthing from the grasp of the black laborers of your country. You profess to believe ‘that, of one blood, God made all nations of men to dwell on the face of all the earth,’ and hath commanded all men, everywhere, to love one another; yet you notoriously hate all men whose skins are not colored like your own.”

Dyck immediately expanded this condemnation of the institution of slavery to the institution of traditional marriage. “We still have not granted full civil rights to our own LGBT communities,” she said. Bishop Dyck also applied Douglass’ rhetoric to illegal immigration: “We still don’t have immigration rights. We still hunt down people in our own boundaries.”

The bishop referenced “Global Weirding” during her story about a rain storm. “Weirding” has replaced “warming” as an environmental

concern. Dyck also said that the American taxation system works “to protect that 1%.... I think there’s 99% out there who continue to struggle.”

Bishop Dyck then argued that people are disillusioned about Christianity because of its “ineffectiveness.” No doubt she was referencing a loss of social and political influence for certain causes and positions. ✚

ACTION: Pray for Bishop Dyck and her leadership of the Northern Illinois Conference.

UM Bishops Oppose North Carolina Pro-Marriage Vote

Two United Methodist bishops in North Carolina joined with liberal clergy in publicly opposing Amendment One, a state constitutional amendment defining marriage as the union of man and woman. The names of Bishop Al Gwinn of the North Carolina Conference and Bishop Larry Goodpaster of the Western North Carolina Conference were highlighted in a full page anti-amendment newspaper ad in *The News and Observer* of Raleigh on May 6. They were joined by Episcopal Bishops Michael Curry, Clifton Daniel and Porter Taylor, two Presbyterian Church (USA) General Moderators, Douglas Oldenburg and Price Gwinn, the head of the North Carolina Council of Churches, plus officials from the Unity Fellowship Church Movement and the Progressive Pentecostal Church of the Triad.

“Amendment One is a wolf in sheep’s clothing,” the ad claimed. “As Christians, we have a responsibility to speak out and stop this Amendment before it can cause irreparable harm to the least of these—children, battered women, and widows—in North Carolina.” It continued: “Regardless of one’s position on marriage, we cannot allow children, battered women, and widows to pay the price for a sloppily written and rushed amendment. Any Amendment asking us to sacrifice the most vulnerable among us to supposedly protect religion and family doesn’t understand the point of either faith or family.”

North Carolina voters approved the amendment by more than 60 percent. The United Methodist Church also has a stance on civil marriage. Since 2000, the church’s Social Principles have said: “We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.” ✚

ACTION: Bishop Gwinn has retired. Urge Bishop Goodpaster to uphold United Methodism’s official stance affirming laws defining marriage as the union of man and woman. His e-mail: bishop@wncumc.org.

UMAction Briefing

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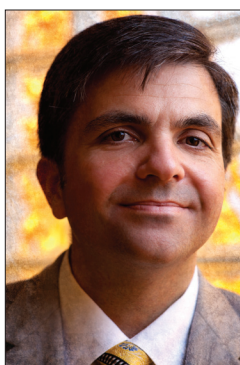
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UMAction Briefing

UMW: Denouncing Jihad Is ‘Hate Speech’

Responding to controversial New York subway ads denouncing “jihad,” the United Methodist Women’s organization is placing counter ads against “hate speech.” The ad from the American Freedom Defense Initiative declares: “In any war between the civilized man and the savage, support the civilized man. Support Israel. Defeat Jihad.” Its organizer insists the ad targets violently extreme Islamists, not Muslims. The critics insist it is an attack on Islam. Among those critics is the New York-based United Methodist Women, whose counter ad responds: “Hate speech is not civilized. Support peace in word and deed.” The head of the church women’s group joined other liberal religious groups at a press conference on the New York City Hall steps on September 24 to denounce the anti-jihad ads.

“We needed to be present with a counter voice, we need to stand for the work of peace, and to say that free speech should not be used recklessly or in an inflammatory or divisive way,” declared Harriett Olson, president of the once formidable United Methodist Women. Formerly the largest women’s group in America with well over 1 million members, the UMW is now closer to half a million and falling.

The anti-anti-jihad ad press conference was convened by the New York Interfaith Center to denounce the “anti-Muslim hate advertisements” as “harmfully provocative and inherently divisive.” The Interfaith Center’s chief, the Rev. Chloe Breyer, explained: “While legal, the ignorance, prejudice, and disrespect the ads display betray the American ideal of *E Pluribus Unum* (‘Out of Many, One’) and dishonor the efforts of New Yorkers who, after 9/11, overcame their religious differences and worked together to rebuild our great city.” A religious activist from Auburn Seminary involved with the press conference concurred: “These ads fuel anti-Muslim sentiment that aims to divide us, but we will always come together, louder and stronger, for respect and dignity.” A “progressive traditionalist” Muslim activist at the press conference complained, “When I ride the subway and see messages smeared that demean me, I am scared.”

In October the anti-jihad ads began to appear in Washington, D.C., subway ads, prompting the UMW again to respond with their own counter-ads. ✚

ACTION: Contact UMW President Harriett Olson with your thoughts on UMW money spent on these subways ads to counter anti-jihad statements: HOlson@unitedmethodistwomen.org.

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UMW Executive Secretary Harriett Olson holds a poster of the ad United Methodist Women sponsored in the New York subway in response to a pro-Israel ad at a September press conference (Photo: Leigh Rogers / United Methodist Women).

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Your Opinion, Please!

Do you believe United Methodist bishops and officials should publicly defend traditional marriage both within the church and in civil law?

■ **Yes.**

■ **No.**

■ **In church but NOT law.**

■ **Unsure.**

Jim Wallis, Tony Campolo Teaching at UM Seminary

At a lunch time gathering in the U.S. Capitol on June 11, staff and faculty from Wesley Theological Seminary introduced their “innovative, new Master of Arts program” to a small group of prospective students. Wesley Seminary in Washington, D.C., is one of 13 official United Methodist seminaries. According to the seminary’s website, the “program provides theological grounding for those who are curious and want to understand their faith more deeply and for those who are pursuing ministry in the world as part of either their vocation or avocation.”

One of the courses highlighted was “Christian Faith, Political Action and Public Policy,” which will be taught by Tony Campolo, Ron Sider, and Jim Wallis, who are three of the most prominent voices among the Evangelical Left. According to the informational flier, the course will be “an examination of the contours and intersections of public policy, political action, and Christian faith.” Specific issues will include: “immigration, poverty, the federal budget, a consistent life ethic, Israel and Palestine, civility in public discourse, ecumenical and inter-faith cooperation, organizing a campaign, and running for political office.”

Shaun Casey, a professor of Christian Ethics at Wesley and a director of religious outreach in President Obama’s 2008 election campaign, explained how younger students who do not want to enroll in a traditional graduate program “have a passion for social justice.” And “many are interested in the intersection of religion and public policy, many people want to go into NGOs or continue into political work,” Casey added.

For those who want to “work in political theology and in public theology,” Casey explained, “Wesley offers you a wealth

of resources that, frankly, you cannot get in any other seminary or divinity school in the United States because of our location here in D.C.”

Casey also told the prospective students about a course he teaches every spring that would give them the opportunity to “look at a number of very specific public policy issues depending on what the mood is, what some of the current topics are here on the Hill, and learn to think theologically about how to approach and interact with those issues.” He reported: “We see [this program] as trying to respond to the call of the Holy Spirit. We are now hearing from students your age that they really feel called to be in public life, to serve the kingdom of God, not necessarily by being ordained, not necessarily by getting a Ph.D., but to find to find a vocation somewhere in public life here in Washington D.C.”

The sponsoring congressman for the Wesley lunch was Kentucky Republican Rep. Edward Whitfield (R-KY). Mike McCurry, former press secretary to President Bill Clinton, offered an endorsing blurb. “My studies have made me more committed to reflecting my own faith in those things I do to change the course of our nation,” wrote McCurry, who is an active United Methodist layman in Maryland. “Wesley is where faith, public affairs, and action come together as one.” Currently a partner at Public Strategies Washington, Inc., McCurry affirmed: “At Wesley Theological Seminary, you can dig deeper into what it means to be a Christian while attempting to serve the public good.”

ACTION: Suggest to Wesley Seminary President David McAllister-Wilson that Wesley Theological Seminary inclusively include some non-liberal Christians to teach public policy. His e-mail: president@wesleysem.edu

Pastor Ed Robb Preaches at Lake Junaluska

The Rev. Ed Robb, III, addressed an audience at Lake Junaluska’s Summer Worship series in August. Robb is the founding pastor of The Woodlands United Methodist Church in Texas, one of the fastest growing congregations within United Methodism with more than 8,400 members and an average worship attendance of 4,200. He is also a former IRD board member. His father, Ed Robb, Jr., helped found the formation of the IRD.

After thanking his hosts and praising Lake Junaluska as “renowned for all the right reasons,” Robb examined the Llectionary reading of the Good Samaritan. He described how stories capture the imagination and memory; a parable of Jesus is but “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.” Robb then tried to understand the thought process of the Pharisee and the Levite in the famous narrative: “I often tell myself that there will be

someone better equipped to come along.” What is more, human beings dread the possible inconvenience of helping others. “I dare say the biggest enemy of compassion in our lives is busyness,” the pastor asserted.

Robb warned against the great excuse of “they.” “They should improve this highway . . . They should care for this person,” he exclaimed. “Who are they anyway?” He added, “It is so easy for us to ask someone else to help instead of accepting responsibility ourselves . . . Often when we see a problem without an easy solution, it’s someone else who ought to have responsibility to solve it.” Robb described how even Christians wrongly expect spouses to do good works, teachers to teach children to behave better, or “the government [to] solve all these problems for us . . . It’s so easy to avoid responsibility, isn’t it?” Robb asked.

Retired Bishop Melvin Talbert Plans Same-Sex Unions

The California-Pacific Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church met in June. Retired Bishop Melvin Talbert, who made a statement on behalf of the pro-GLBTQ “Love Your Neighbor” Coalition at the 2012 General Conference, gave the message at the ordination ceremony in which he urged

clergy to join him in defying the *Book of Discipline* by performing same-sex marriages.

Talbert got his start in the Southern California conference and he gave due deference to the opportunities given to him 49 years prior. “The time and the people were different,” he said. Of the bishops then, he said: “We were all male with four persons of color.” The theme of his message to those being commissioned and ordained was “Do the Right Thing.” He exhorted them to follow the commands in Micah 6:6-8 and Jesus’ First Commandment in Luke 10. He invoked

John Wesley—one of the founders of Methodism—and his three simple rules for faith: “Do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God.” Talbert summed it up this way: “Our goal in life should be to become perfect in becoming perfect.”



Retired Bishop Melvin Talbert (right) prays with a delegate during General Conference. The bishop’s rainbow-colored prayer stole signifies his support for homosexual activists within the United Methodist Church. (Photo: Mike DuBose / UMNS)

Talbert turned to problems facing the United Methodist Church, largely blaming the clergy. He lamented the lack of joy and enthusiasm among Methodist laity and their lack of invitations to church. Lest those in attendance think he was too negative, he claimed: “If I don’t share this candid assessment of current reality, I fail you by not making clear what is expected of you.”

Talbert then connected membership decline to the history of American Methodism in light of the church’s embrace and subsequent rejection of racial segregation and slavery. As part of this narrative, Talbert claimed that the church “experienced another valley in 1972 when the General Conference placed the ‘incompatibility with Christian teaching’ language in our Social Principles regarding gay and lesbian people.” He expressed sadness at the succeeding General Conferences in adding more “derogatory language” that has prevented clergy from presiding over same-sex unions. He linked these decisions to membership loss “across all five jurisdictions” in U.S. United Methodism.

“But for many we were devastated that the General Conference, after forty years of continuous struggle, failed to affirm GLBTQ people as full members of the United Methodist Church with all rights and privileges, including being ordained as clergy in our church,” Talbert said. He thought it was absurd, particularly because many partnered gays are ordained and consecrated already within United Methodism and yet cannot live openly. “My sisters and brothers,” he said, “that is wrong.”

Talbert “felt certain” that the denomination is declining because of its reticence to affirm GLBTQ people in their sexual choices. “I’m convinced that we will never see any significant growth within our denomination until we stop the hypocrisy and do what is right.” He reflected on the “Love Your Neighbor” Coalition at the General Conference and quoted himself denouncing the Conference’s “failure to do the right thing.”

The bishop declared: “As I stand before you today, I declare that God has already settled this matter. All human beings are created in the image of God. And there are no exceptions or exclusions. We belong to the family of God. At the same time, I

declare to you that the derogatory language and restrictive laws in our *Book of Discipline* are immoral and unjust and no longer deserve our loyalty and obedience. So in light of the action taken at our General Conference, I believe the time has come to call for and invite others to join in what I’m calling ‘an act of biblical obedience’ based on the two-fold commandment of love: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.’ You see those of us who call ourselves progressive, we too, have the Bible on our side.” He then called for clergy who defy the *Discipline* and pledge to perform same-sex marriages as “faithful to the Gospel.”

Talbert cited McKendree United Methodist Church in Nashville, which once was a willful participant in racial segregation

Texas Bishop Touts Summer Theological Reading List

On August 28 Bishop Mike Lowry of the Central Texas Conference blogged about his Summer reading list. “Thirty years the pastor of a local church, I lived out of the conviction that the pastor should be the resident theologian of his/her appointed community of faith (local faith),” Lowry wrote. “Being elected bishop has not in any way changed that conviction. To the contrary it has strengthened it.”

Lowry noted it’s easy to get lost reading about the “church and its life” while neglecting “cardinal theological insights and the deep, spiritually rich doctrines of the church,” consequently missing the “nourishment of the faith’s great teachings.” He likened it to eating lots of starches and contracting scurvy for lack of Vitamin C.

This Summer Bishop Lowry read orthodox British Anglican theologian Alister McGrath’s *Heresy: A History of Defending the Truth* and *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat’s *Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics*. Douthat is a traditional Catholic who transitioned earlier in life through Mainline Protestantism and evangelicalism. He is also the virtual token conservative on the *Times*’ op-ed page. A major theme of his book is the collapse of liberal Mainline Protestantism with no obvious successor for similar cultural hegemony. McGrath, formerly an atheist himself, is a Church of England priest and public intellectual who’s prominently critiqued the New Atheism.

Lowry is also reading an updated version of *Methodist Doctrine: The Essentials* by Professor Ted Campbell of Perkins School of Theology. “I am reminded again of those core convictions that led me to Methodism in the first place,” Lowry noted. “One of our major strategies for the transformation of the United Methodist Church in the Central Texas Conference is the recovery of a truly Wesleyan Theology and Spirituality.”

Campbell, who is orthodox and a former John Wesley Fellow, is leading a retreat for the bishop and his cabinet in September. “Whatever the future holds, we must live out of core

but now affirms homosexual behavior, as an example of such sanctioned disobedience. To applause, Talbert said that in his new position of Bishop-in-Presence in the church, he intends to marry same-sex couples because he intends to “do the right thing.” To the candidates for ordination, he said “There will be times you will be forced to choose between God and your church because your church will not always do the right thing.” Bishop Talbert received a standing ovation for his message.

Action: Politely and respectfully urge Bishop Talbert to uphold our church’s Discipline as he pledged to do when ordained as a pastor and consecrated as a bishop. His e-mail: bishop-mel@bellsouth.net.



Bishop Mike Lowry is the spiritual leader of 164,000 United Methodists in the Fort Worth area. (Photo: Central Texas Annual Conference)

convictions that lift high the gospel,” the bishop explained. He quoted St. Paul in Colossians 1:23: “But you need to remain well established and rooted in faith and not shift away from the hope given in the good news that you heard. This message has been preached throughout all creation under heaven. And I, Paul, became a servant of this good news.”

ACTION: Check out Bishop Lowry’s blog: <http://www.bishopmikelowry.com>.