

# thee, faith & freedom

Reforming the Church's Social and Political Witness

Spring 2017

## Methodist Lesbian Bishop Comes Out Swinging

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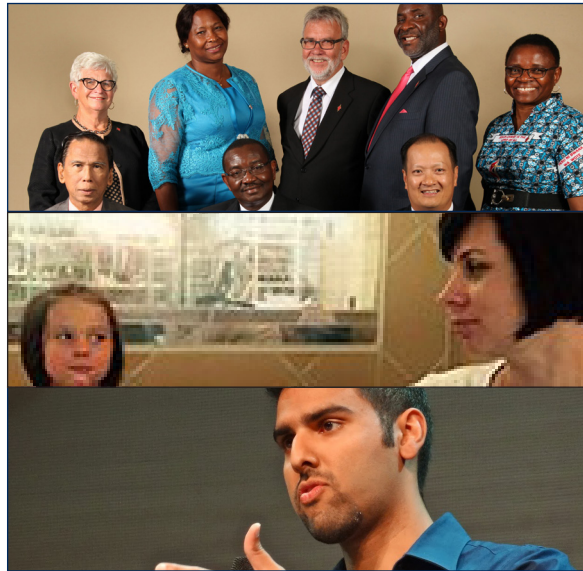
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Why is a Muslim woman in a Christian church singing a version from the Quran denying Jesus is the Son of God? See International Briefs on page 6 (Photo: YouTube/AnglicanTV)

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# faith & freedom

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Cover photo: The election of married lesbian pastor Karen Oliveto as a United Methodist bishop has ratcheted up tensions in the United Methodist church. (Photo: UMNS)



# 'Queering John Wesley'

On March 3–4 I attended the Wesleyan Theological Society's annual meeting, featuring scores of distinguished scholars, gathered this year at Asbury Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. It wonderfully highlighted the ongoing vitality of orthodox Wesleyan thought.

Interestingly, the more conservative scholars were United Methodists reacting against their denomination's liberalism by strongly affirming classical Wesleyan distinctives. The more liberal scholars were from conservative evangelical denominations against which they reacted by pressing theological boundaries.

The most provocative example was a breakout session presentation called "Queering Wesley, Queering the Church: Toward an Ecclesial Circumcision of the Heart." The author, **Keegan Osinski**, describes herself on Twitter as the "Church of the Nazarene's worst nightmare." Her denomination is from the Wesleyan holiness tradition, which in the late 19th century broke from Methodism's perceived worldliness. Further self-identified as a "budding librarian and theologian," she is a graduate student at Vanderbilt University, which has no current church affiliation.

Osinski offered "a queer reading of John Wesley's 1733 sermon 'The Circumcision of the Heart' in an effort to show that the perspectives of LGBTQ+ people have vital contributions to make within the holiness church that so often marginalizes them." Instead of "restrictive legalism," she suggested "reading John Wesley queerly" offers "an expansive openness to the grace of God."

Osinski explained "queer" means what "is not normative, particularly as relating to sex, gender, and sexuality." To "use 'queer' as a verb is to engage in the practice of problematizing normative narratives and assumptions—to f-ck with those givens that perpetuate power structures that baptize and uphold some norms while damning and marginalizing alternative ways of being." And finally, a "queer reading" is an attempt to queer—that is, "disrupt and interrogate the sex- gender- and sexuality-norms of—a text."

Queerness is like circumcision, which has often set the Jewish people apart "in the face of threat and ridicule." It ultimately, like circumcision, requires a "radical allegiance" and is a "specific grace and gifting of God." Spiritually circumcising the heart, as Wesley preached, is "similarly to be made queer in that it is a resistance to normative powers and expectations," Osinski said. Holiness is a matter of the heart, according to Wesley, and so too are "gender or sexuality," she insisted.

Responding to Wesley's call to humility, Osinski complained that "queer people" have been told they are "sinful" by the "normative hierarchy of cisheteropatriarchy—that is, the structure of society in which cisgendered, heterosexual men establish and maintain norms." The correction to this injustice may require the "embrace of a queer holiness" and the "humility of the heteronormative church." Wesley's call to "unselfish love and pleasure that points to God" is a "radical affirmation of all love and pleasure, perhaps even queer love and pleasure, inasmuch as it leads to God."

The church, Osinski said, in the spirit of Wesley's vision of hope, should reject the "impulse to require adherence to a strict code of conduct, but rather abiding in the queer hope that God works in hearts in an abundant diversity of ways, all leading toward Christian perfection, freedom, and holiness." Indeed, "all manner of pleasure might contribute to and bolster our holiness, inasmuch as it leads us to love the One who is the Creator of such love and pleasure." She urged the "inbreaking of the queer Kingdom of God."

Wesley of course would be very surprised by Osinski's "queer" interpretation of his sermon about circumcising the heart, which urges the follower of Christ to "take up his cross daily" and pursue a "constant and continued course of general self-denial." He called for "cutting off both the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life."

It's not clear how Osinski fits her celebration of "all manner of pleasure" with the Wesleyan and orthodox Christian call to constant self-denial. After her presentation, Osinski tweeted: "Ok my paper was really well received and no torch and pitchfork mob came after me so I'll post a link."

Anyone active in official United Methodism over the last 40 years would not be shocked by her attempt to reinterpret Christian faith through sexual identity politics. Fortunately, globalizing United Methodism is abandoning that phase of late 20th century USA liberal Protestantism for a return to orthodoxy.

But chunks of elite and academic opinion in once conservative evangelicalism, including traditionalist Wesleyan denominations, are now embracing fads that captivated liberal Protestantism decades ago, despite tragic consequences. Is there anything new under the sun?

Even as United Methodism rediscovers Wesleyan distinctives and Christian orthodoxy, I hope we can warn and teach our friends in evangelical denominations to avoid the thorny paths that nearly, but for divine grace, led to our demise. ✝



Mark Tooley



**Mark D. Tooley** is the President of the Institute on Religion and Democracy

## Diocese of South Carolina Votes to Join Anglican Church in North America

**A** diocese formerly affiliated with the Episcopal Church voted unanimously in March to pursue affiliation with the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA). The Diocese of South Carolina, one of the nine original founding dioceses of the Episcopal Church, severed its connection with that denomination in October 2012. It was the fifth diocese to do so.

The vote follows a period of discernment and question-and-answer sessions about diocesan affiliation around the low country of South Carolina during the past year.

The ACNA Provincial Assembly, meeting June 26–29 in Wheaton, Illinois, will next take up the diocesan request to affiliate. South Carolina Bishop **Mark Lawrence** has participated in the ACNA

College of Bishops gatherings in recent years, and a delegation from South Carolina has participated as observers at the annual Provincial Council.

Affiliation by the Diocese of South Carolina will significantly grow the size of ACNA: the diocese counts nearly 23,000 members, which will increase ACNA's 114,000 existing members by 20 percent. South Carolina will be—by far—the largest diocese in ACNA.

Both ACNA and the Diocese of South Carolina have strong connections to the



Bishop Mark Lawrence and clergy prepare to process at an opening worship service for the diocesan convention at St. Paul's Church in Summerville, SC, on March 10. (Photo: Diocese of South Carolina)

Global Anglican Future Conference, a traditionalist reform movement within the worldwide Anglican Communion, and the Global South, a grouping of 24 Anglican Communion provinces (national churches) ministering among mostly developing nations in Africa, Asia, and South America. The vast majority of an estimated 85 million Anglican Christians worldwide are connected with the Global South.

During its final years as part of the Episcopal Church, South Carolina was one of few dioceses to regularly report growth in both membership and attendance.

The Diocese of South Carolina was founded in 1785 by the former Church of England parishes of the former South Carolina colony. The Diocese is one of the oldest religious districts in the United States and counts among its members several of the oldest operating churches in the nation. ✚

Clergy pray during a worship service held at St. Paul's Church in Summerville, SC, on March 10 as part of the 226th annual Convention of the Diocese of South Carolina (Photo: Diocese of South Carolina)





## Methodist Theologian Thomas Oden 1931–2016

**T**heologian **Thomas C. Oden**, one of Methodism's and American Christianity's most esteemed theologians, passed away at his home in Oklahoma in December.

An emeritus board member who chaired the board of the Institute on Religion & Democracy for six years, Oden was also professor emeritus at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey.

Oden remained a prolific writer in his final years. A scholar of the Early Church Fathers, he edited the 29-volume *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*. His most recent books explore early African Christianity and the social ethics of John Wesley; they include *Systematic Theology* and most recently *Turning Around the Mainline and How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*.

In a 2013 talk at the Evangelical Theological Society, Oden expressed gratitude

for his devout Nazarene grandmother who “prayed for me daily” while he had been spiritually “misguided.” She had a “high doctrine of Scripture,” while he grew up in a “liberal Methodist background.”

“We don’t read it without the work of the Holy Spirit,” Oden said of Bible reading. He also credited his eventual appreciation of Wesleyan orthodoxy and the “primal authority” of Scripture to theologian Albert Outler, the “premier teacher of Wesley the last 100 years.”

“Tom Oden was esteemed as a theologian of Methodism, a Christian ecumenist, and a scholar of the Early Church Fathers, who journeyed from mid-20th century liberal Protestantism to robust orthodoxy, for which he was an ardent champion,” commented IRD President **Mark Tooley**. “He was a dear friend and counselor, a brilliant and cheerful warrior for good causes, irreplaceable. Tom is



The Rev. Thomas C. Oden (Photo: InterVarsity Press)

now with the early saints whose lives and teachings he studied so closely. May God bless his memory and perpetuate the fruit of his labors.” ✝

## Episcopal Divinity School Pursues Union Merger

**T**wo more progressive seminaries have signed an agreement that will allow Episcopal Divinity School (EDS) to continue as an Episcopal seminary through a collaboration with Union at its campus in New York City beginning in the fall of 2018 following a financial shortfall and dropping enrollment at a historic Boston-area institution affiliated with the Episcopal Church.

The Board of Trustees of EDS voted in February to pursue an affiliation with Union Theological Seminary. According to an announcement from EDS, such a merger would create an EDS entity to provide Episcopal theological education at Union's New York City campus. The merger would entail the closure of the EDS campus in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and its programs. A corresponding vote was cast by Union trustees in support of the move.

The merger follows an announcement in 2016 that United Church of Christ-affiliated

Andover Newton Theological School would affiliate with Yale Divinity School, shuttering its Newton, Massachusetts, campus. Another tiny liberal Episcopal Church seminary, Bexley-Seabury, recently consolidated into a single presence at another UCC school, Chicago Theological Seminary.

One of ten seminaries educating students for ministry in the Episcopal Church, EDS announced in July that it will cease granting degrees at the conclusion of the current academic year, citing “unsustainable” levels of spending.

Union was one of

three finalists considered by a committee tasked with reviewing proposals for EDS's future. Both schools emphasize progressive political advocacy. EDS describes its students and staff as “leaders in educational programs that are enlivened by theologies of liberation, especially the many voices of feminist, congregational, ecumenical, and global studies.” ✝



Faculty and students participate in a service at St. John's Memorial Chapel, Episcopal Divinity School, in Cambridge, MA, in this undated photo. (Photo: Episcopal Divinity School)

# Top Evangelicals Denounce Refugee Ban

**M**ore than 100 prominent Evangelical leaders are denouncing President **Donald Trump's** moratorium on refugees from several predominantly Muslim countries. Although a federal judge has temporarily blocked the president's executive order, the proposed changes to America's refugee policies expose divisions within evangelicalism, with some leaders anxious over national security and others more worried about a lack of compassion.

The main force behind a full-page advertisement in *The Washington Post* appears to be World Relief, the Christian aid agency associated with the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). But not all Evangelicals agree with its organizers' approach to aiding refugees.

Evangelical pastors and authors among the ad's signatories include Pastor **Timothy Keller** of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York, Christian author **Ann Voskamp**, **Bill and Lynne Hybels**

of Willow Creek Community Church, preacher and author **Max Lucado**, Pastor **Eugene Cho** of Quest Church, and NAE President **Leith Anderson**.

The Evangelical signatories are "deeply concerned by the recently announced moratorium on refugee resettlement" whose protest to the refugee ban "is rooted in the call of Jesus to 'love our neighbor as we love ourselves.'"

"As Christians, we have a historic call expressed over two thousand years, to serve the suffering. We cannot abandon this call now. We live in a dangerous world and affirm the crucial role of government in protecting us from harm and in setting the terms on refugee admissions. However, compassion and security can coexist, as they have for decades," states the advertisement.

Missing from the advertisement are explanations of core reasons for the crisis. The refugees are seeking safe haven as some are encountering persecution in their

home countries because of their status as religious minorities. "For years, numerous organizations including the one I work for have been advocating for safe havens where ethnic and religious minorities would be safe from the ongoing sectarian wars," wrote **Luke Moon** of the Philos Project, a Christian non-profit promoting positive Christian engagement in the Middle East.

The advertisement acknowledges that religious minorities are coming from predominantly Muslim nations. No similar advertisement was organized by World Relief denouncing the State Department's virtual exclusion of Christian refugees during the height of ISIS' religious genocide.

In 2015 IRD religious Liberty Director **Faith McDonnell** reported the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration admitted to officials at the Barnabas Fund, a Christian relief agency: "There is no way that Christians will be supported because of their religious affiliation." ✚

## Muslim Refutes Jesus' Divinity in Scottish Church during Epiphany

**A**n invitation from a church in Scotland for a Muslim woman to perform a song during a worship service intended to celebrate Epiphany has caused a stir in the United Kingdom. The content of the song—based in the Quran—explicitly rejects a doctrine fundamental to the Christian faith.

**Tyler O'Neil** at PJ Media reported that Muslim singer **Madinah Javed** sang a portion of Surah 19—including a section which flatly states that Jesus is not the Son of God—during a Eucharistic service at St. Mary's Episcopal [Anglican] Cathedral in Glasgow. A post on the cathedral's Facebook page (now removed) described the service as a "wonderful event," hailing the Muslim portion specifically.

At the service, the Muslim singer concluded with verse 35—"It befiteth not (the Majesty of) Allah that He should take unto Himself a son. Glory be to Him!"

The Feast of Epiphany celebrates the revelation of God's incarnation to the gentiles, based upon the biblical story of the visitation by the magi who came to worship the young Jesus.

According to the BBC, cathedral Provost **Kelvin Holdsworth** defended the incongruity of Quranic readings that negate Jesus' divinity in the cathedral as necessary efforts to build relationships between Christians and Muslims in Glasgow. Holdsworth deemphasized the incident by claiming, "Such readings have happened a number of times in the past in this and in other churches and have led to deepening friendships locally," rationalizing that "dialogues" increase awareness with

respect to religious commonalities and differences.

No word on whether mosques in Scotland have invited members of St. Mary's Cathedral under the same interfaith enthusiasm to read biblical passages that undermine the Quran and the importance of its prophet—particularly during the commemoration of one of its holy days. ✚



A Quran verse denying Jesus is the Son of God is sung in St. Mary's Cathedral in Glasgow, Scotland. (Photo: YouTube/AnglicanTV)



# Lesbian Bishop Election Bringing Financial Stress to Western UMC Congregations

by Jeff Walton

The election of a partnered lesbian as a bishop in the United Methodist Church's liberal Western Jurisdiction has resulted in significant fallout in the Denver-based Mountain Sky Episcopal Area. Reports from multiple congregations indicate that membership and financial contributions have decreased since the election, placing some in a precarious position.

The United Methodist Judicial Council, the church's top court, recently ruled against the consecration of Bishop **Karen Oliveto** (see page 8). In a seeming confirmation of troubles, the Rocky Mountain and Yellowstone Annual Conferences have launched a "sustentation fund" to compensate for financial "stress." The fundraising appeal is being promoted on multiple liberal United Methodist websites.

Then pastor Oliveto of San Francisco, California, was elected to the episcopacy by delegates to the Western Jurisdictional Conference July 15, 2016, in Scottsdale, Arizona. The former pastor of Glide Memorial Methodist Church was consecrated as a bishop the following day and later appointed to oversee the Rocky Mountain and Yellowstone Annual Conferences. Oliveto's election is being challenged as a defiance of church law against partnered gay clergy.

United Methodist congregations in the region have been struggling for many years, and the Western Jurisdiction is by far the church's smallest. This recent spate of losses is worse than the rate of decline that was already occurring prior to the election of Oliveto. The dual announcements of the sustentation fund have been characterized by the urgency of their language.

"This fund is especially needed where a pastor's compensation is at risk," the announcement reads. "Allocated funds for equitable compensation support will be exhausted before the need is met. And, importantly, by *Discipline*, equitable

compensation funds cannot be used for part-time pastors in the same situation."

While the announcement does not specifically cite Oliveto's election as the cause of membership and giving declines, it prominently leads with her election, consecration, and appointment, indicating that the two are connected. The statement subsequently reports: "As we crossed the threshold, there has been stress in some of our most theologically diverse congregations."

IRD has heard directly from multiple sources within the local conferences about how the recent accelerated rate of decline is a direct result of the moves to impose Oliveto as their bishop. Negative reports from churches in the region are numerous:

- One congregation has lost 20 percent of its membership in the brief time since Oliveto's election.
- A member from one church reported that so many of their members had left, and the last key donor had gone, that they could no longer afford a pastor after the first of the year.
- Members from another church said they were planning on going non-denominational and planned to discuss costs involved for purchasing their facilities from their annual conference.
- Members from two churches indicated that they were "hand-to-mouth-ing" bills and were not sure how much longer they could stay open.
- Members from several other churches have indicated that their yearly tithing commitments ended up falling short, some by a large amount.
- One church in a large town reported that it had exhausted its reserves in December.

The extent of discontent with Oliveto's election and assignment there has come as a surprise to the Mountain Sky



Dr. Karen Oliveto (then pastor of Glide Memorial United Methodist Church in San Francisco) poses with a sign as part of a protest campaign on Twitter in December 2015. (Photo: Twitter)

Area's liberal leadership. One person related a conversation with a delegate who voted for the new bishop in which the delegate said, "I was caught totally off guard by the amount of resistance to Bishop Karen's election."

Another delegate, explaining their vote for the new bishop, experienced so much push back that the delegate looked "shell shocked" in a church meeting.

Officials in the Rocky Mountain and Yellowstone Annual Conferences were apparently operating within a bubble or echo-chamber in which they assumed United Methodism in their area was monolithically liberal, not expecting resistance at the local level. Attempts by Oliveto to demonstrate enthusiasm from every congregation—and taking names of those who are not—are not faring well in the region. The bishop has described United Methodists displeased with her election as "the bad churches" and denounced them as a "destabilizing factor" in the region.

Calls for greater "inclusion" do not appear to have resulted in the including of more people in the life of local United Methodist congregations: There is no corresponding evidence that financial losses brought about by departing traditionalists are being offset by liberal gains. ✚



Jeffrey H. Walton is the Communications Manager and Anglican Program Director at the Institute on Religion & Democracy.



Members of the 2016–2020 Judicial Council. (From left) Front: Ruben T. Reyes, N. Oswald Tweh Sr., the Rev. Luan-Vu Tran. Back row: Deanell Reece Tacha, Lídia Romão Gulele, the Rev. Øyvind Helliesen, the Rev. Dennis Blackwell, and the Rev. J. Kabamba Kiboko. (Not pictured, Beth Capen) (Photo: Kathleen Barry/United Methodist Communications)

## Per Oliveto, Methodist Court Strengthens Biblical Standards for Who Can Be Clergy, Bishops

by John Lomperis

**A**t its April session, the United Methodist Church's Judicial Council, our denomination's "supreme court," delivered key victories for biblical accountability by making clear that openly homosexually active individuals like Mountain Sky Episcopal Area Bishop **Karen Oliveto** cannot be ordained or made bishop in our denomination.

It is essential to understand the wider context: For decades, traditionalist United Methodists have worked hard to make clear in our denomination's church law

that openly homosexually active individuals, and others involved in unrepentant sexual immorality, cannot become (or if already ordained, remain) United Methodist clergy. This struggle involved hard-fought efforts to make multiple key changes to our denomination's governing *Book of Discipline* and other church-law endeavors during the time between General Conferences. Finally, by 2004, church law at last stated clearly that because of our church's strong belief that "[t]he practice of homosexuality is incompatible with

Christian teaching," being found to be a "self-avowed practicing homosexual" was sufficient grounds for denying ordination or removal from ministry.

But the catch was that the main—and in some cases the only—way to prove that a minister was a "self-avowed practicing homosexual" was for that person to explicitly confess to church officials to being regularly engaged in "genital sexual activity with a person of the same gender."

*Continued on page 9*



And several liberal churches' officials took advantage of this HUGE loophole, so that as long as relevant church officials avoided asking awkward questions about clergy's "genital sexual activity" or gay (even openly gay and partnered) clergy refused to answer such questions, they would continue as United Methodist ministers.

So for many years, liberal United Methodist bishops in a few areas, especially the low-membership U.S. Western Jurisdiction, have been ordaining and effectively preventing any accountability for openly gay clergy who are unwilling to commit to biblical standards for sexual self-control. The move last summer by the Western Jurisdiction to elect partnered lesbian activist Dr. **Karen Oliveto** as bishop grew out

of this rebellion, which is widespread in that region. Oliveto has a well-documented history of radicalism, from promoting America's largest abortion provider to rebuking some of Jesus Christ's red-letter teachings to arguing that Paul was wrong to cast a demon out of a slave girl (as reported in Acts 16) to unlovingly demonizing what she has called "the bad churches" who have been unhappy to have her imposed as their bishop, for now.

Thanks to a motion made by delegate and UMAction Steering Committee member **Dixie Brewster**, the 2016 South Central Jurisdiction voted to respond to Oliveto's election by asking the Judicial Council to rule on several basic questions related to minimum standards for bishops and other clergy.

In a complex, closely watched 6-3 ruling, the Judicial Council brought us a new day of clarity for our biblical ordination standards. It rejected the laughable arguments presented and unanimously endorsed by active and retired bishops of the Western Jurisdiction that the UMC *Discipline's* aforementioned language about "self-avowed practicing homosexuals" did not forbid clergy from being in same-sex "marriages." Instead, our highest

church court closed the major loophole in enforcement that depended on explicitly confessed "genital sexual activity." This ruling now offers two alternative ways clergy can be found guilty of violating this

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These landmark rulings are binding on the whole denomination. It would be hard to overstate how major they are for strengthening our denomination's standards and mechanisms for holding clergy accountable to biblical standards for sexual self-control.

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biblical standard of our denomination, with no need for awkward direct questions about genitals. If a United Methodist minister is found to be in a legal same-sex "marriage," that is enough to prove that he or she is a "self-avowed practicing homosexual" and so cannot be ordained, appointed, or made bishop—unless he or she can somehow prove that theirs is a sexless "marriage." Alternatively, the Council ruled more sweepingly that "a partnered homosexual clergy person ... does not meet the minimum standards" for UMC clergy (regardless of whether or not anyone calls the partnership a "marriage").

As expected, the Judicial Council did not immediately remove Oliveto from the bishop's office without further process to review the facts. (Although UMAction Director **John Lomperis** submitted extensive legal briefs urging the Judicial Council, among other things, to immediately nullify Oliveto's election, and two of the nine Judicial Council members issued separate opinions indicating their willingness to do this). Because of the strongly established processes in our church law for protecting the rights of the accused, processes that also protect faithful clergy from mistreatment by liberal

bishops, the Judicial Council called for a review of Karen Oliveto's standing within the Western Jurisdiction. But the Council made clear that she **MUST** be subjected to this accountability process, and that if

this process finds that she is living in a homosexual relationship (as she already publicly admits) she would fail to meet the minimum standards for UMC clergy, let alone bishop.

In two separate cases, the Judicial Council ruled that boards of ordained ministry (the groups in every annual conference that screen ordination candidates) must "conduct a careful and thorough examination and investigation" of ordination candidates to determine their commitment to abstaining from homosexuality or other non-marital sexual

activity, and that this can include "reading social media postings of candidates." These boards may not ignore any statements they find by candidates "who avowed their homosexuality" or otherwise admitted to "any action that violates any portion of church law." These two rulings effectively nullify and replace the statements recently adopted within the New York, Northern Illinois, and other liberal conferences to openly welcome gay ordination candidates.

These landmark rulings are binding on the whole denomination. It would be hard to overstate how major they are for strengthening our denomination's standards and mechanisms for holding clergy accountable to biblical standards for sexual self-control.

In the months ahead, UMAction is committed to doing the long, hard work of ensuring that these standards are followed and enforced. ✚



**John Lomperis** directs the UMAction program at the Institute on Religion & Democracy.

# Oliveto Comes Out Swinging Against 'the Bad Churches' of the UMC

by John Lomperis

**P**artnered lesbian United Methodist activist **Karen Oliveto** visited Chicago in January to deliver public talks.

At one point, she revealed, "One of the things I really love is boxing." She pulled

## Moving Methodism beyond Wesleyanism

She spent much time across the weekend passionately railing against the United Methodist Church's ongoing adherence to orthodox Christian teaching on sexuality. But her arguments showed little evidence of serious engagement with Scripture, Methodist theology, or the latter's central concern of personal Christian holiness.

She devoted much of her lecture at Garrett-Theological Seminary in suburban Evanston, Illinois, to uncovering a supposedly hidden history of our tradition's "role models" for homosexually active United Methodists. The evidence she presented was far from conclusive, and blatantly ignored serious scholarship undermining her agenda-

driven historical revisionism.

## Attacking United Methodist Congregations

Oliveto aimed some of her most notable rhetorical blows against some of the very United Methodist congregations she is assigned (for now) to oversee. Since beginning to act as bishop, Oliveto and her lesbian partner, **Robin Ridenour**, have embarked on a series of tours, apparently seeking to at least make an appearance at every one of the Mountain Sky Area's United Methodist congregations, stopping by as many as 12 in a day.

Yet at a liberal seminary hundreds of miles away from her suburban Denver headquarters, Oliveto lashed out at four United Methodist congregations she visited that were "not as enthusiastic" about her becoming their bishop. She rather self-centeredly complained of the "soul damage" she says she suffered from this unhappiness of a small minority of those being

placed under her power. She actually used the words "the bad churches" (that quote is clear in the audio recording) to describe these United Methodists and denounced them as a "destabilizing factor" in the region. (She did quickly re-characterize "the bad churches" as "the hard churches," but expressed no regret at the first characterization.) Most of the rest of the congregations had been rather supportive, she found, as United Methodism in the region is generally branded as a more liberal alternative to other types of Christianity. She also declared her judgment that these few orthodox congregations were not legitimately United Methodist (in apparent contrast to liberal congregations whose theology is closer to Unitarian Universalism), and "really haven't been United Methodist in a really long time."

Apparently, Ms. Oliveto has no problem taking it upon herself to sit in public judgment over who in our denomination is or is not truly United Methodist, and does not see her own rejection of the *Book of Discipline* that literally defines United Methodism or her own record of promoting a bizarre, Jesus-criticizing, demon-defending theology as undermining her qualifications to sit in this judgment seat.

While several bishops have spoken out against her election, Oliveto gushed about how the Western Jurisdiction bishops have been "tremendously welcoming." She also recounted her pleasant surprise at how she was accepted at last fall's meeting of our global Council of Bishops, at which her lesbian partner was even welcome to join a gathering for bishops' spouses. And Northern Illinois Bishop **Sally Dyck** could hardly have been more enthusiastic in introducing Oliveto to preach at an area congregation that Sunday.

Bishop Dyck spun Oliveto's whirlwind tours of congregations as an impressive story of how "she went to the margins ... to meet the people." But the actual record



Bishop Karen Oliveto of the United Methodist Church Mountain Sky Episcopal Area (Photo: Drew Theological School)

few punches in attacking her denomination's adherence to biblical, ecumenical disapproval of homosexual practice—to the point of denouncing "bad" orthodox United Methodists, likening her experience to antebellum American slaves, and suggesting that several prominent figures in United Methodist history were secretly lesbians.

A self-described "lightning rod," Dr. Oliveto has come to the center of the United Methodist Church's controversies due to its Western Jurisdiction taking action last summer to elect her to become a bishop, in open defiance of our denomination's ban on "self-avowed practicing homosexual" clergy, and to assign her to be the bishop of the Mountain Sky Area (Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and part of Idaho). Her election is being challenged through the UMC's notoriously slow accountability mechanisms, but in the meantime she is acting as the bishop of this area.

*Continued on page 15*



# 'Mexit' for United Methodist Sexual/Theological Dissenters?

by Mark Tooley

A distinguished United Methodist theologian has suggested a "Mexit" for orderly departure from the denomination for dissenters from official church teaching affirming marriage as male-female.

**William Abraham** of Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University in Dallas proposed Mexit at a March conference of 28 theologians addressing United Methodism's debates over sexuality.

Abraham does not think church unity possible with dissenters openly defying church teaching and law, including last year's election by the church's small Western Jurisdiction of an openly lesbian bishop.

"I think that the way ahead lies with an exit plan for those who cannot accept the canonical teaching and practice of the church rather than a plan for division," Abraham announced, coining the term "Mexit" for this Methodist departure.

Abraham suggested "those who disagree with the teachings and practices of the church should follow through on their own convictions and recognize the moral obligation of exiting The United Methodist Church."

The over 12 million member global United Methodist Church affirms sex only within male-female marriage, prohibits celebration of same sex rites, and ordains single persons who are celibate or monogamous participants in male-female marriage. This teaching has been debated at the denomination's quadrennial governing General Conference every four years since 1972. The traditional understanding has always prevailed.

Due to the denomination's growing membership in Africa, where over 40% of the church lives and where the church is conservative, United Methodism has not followed other USA Mainline Protestant bodies in liberalizing its teaching about sex. As United Methodism continues its 50-year decline in America, ongoing church growth in Africa almost ensures

the denomination will retain its orthodox teaching.

"The relevant point is that the debate is now over," Abraham said. "The United Methodist Church has stood firm across the years; there is not going to be a change of mind and heart. So the time has come to recognize the moral obligation to allow The United Methodist Church to abide by and implement its decisions."

Abraham warned against a general denomination-wide split for United Methodists:

*If we are driven to explicit division then we all know that the consequences will be radical and long-lasting. Think for a moment of what it might mean for our seminaries, colleges, and universities. A whole raft of legal and ecclesial changes would ensue that would be abruptly out of control. Or think of the impact on a host of local churches. Many would be torn apart at the seams if decisions have to be made on what group to join.*

Instead of such a split, Abraham said "it is time for progressives to be given their own space to follow the will of God as determined by their own best judgments rather than mine or by those represented in the decisions of the General Conference." He further explained:

*Clearly this way of moving forward would be preferable to the disruption caused by formal division where votes would have to be taken across the whole denomination. In case of exit we work with the default position of keeping as much as possible the way it is for now. Those exiting would be treated fairly as far as property and assets are concerned.*

In advocating a "Mexit," Abraham said:

*Those who have already decided to walk alone should be given the opportunity and freedom to follow their convictions in their new edition of*



Professor William Abraham, Albert Outler Chair of Methodist Studies at Southern Methodist University, delivers the annual Diane Knippers Memorial Lecture on October 7, 2013 in Washington, D.C. (Photo: IRD)

*Methodism. Equally, those who support the canonical teaching of The United Methodist Church should be given the freedom to uphold and implement their convictions. As we move forward we should seek to be as least disruptive as possible.*

Abraham urged that the "only way to avoid the option of more permissiveness and antinomianism is to develop the canon law that sets relevant standards for sexual morality for membership and ordination." And he further warned: "If we do not take up the option of an orderly exit for those who reject the teaching and practices of the church, then we are headed for division."

Such division, Abraham noted, would entail "massive constitutional changes, potential votes all the way down into local churches, and ongoing litigation in the courts." It would be less disruptive to "implement an exit for those who cannot accept the teachings and practices of The United Methodist Church on matters related to human sexuality." ✚



**Mark D. Tooley** is the President of the Institute on Religion and Democracy

# Seven Rising Evangelical Stars to Watch in 2017

by Chelsen Vicari

**T**hey may not yet be household names, but these rising Evangelical figures should certainly be on your radar this year. The Institute on Religion and Democracy has identified seven increasingly influential men and women we predict will impact Evangelicalism for good in 2017.

Some are wordsmiths and theologians. Others orators, homeschool moms, and policy advocates whose passion is connecting with people in and outside of the Church. In no particular order, we introduce you to them here.



Michael Wear

## #1 Michael Wear

During President Barack Obama's first term, **Michael Wear** served in the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. Wear then directed all faith-based outreach during President Obama's successful 2012 re-election campaign. Whether or not you agree with Wear's politics, his rapidly growing influence within Evangelicalism is undeniable.

Wear is theologically conservative on issues like abortion and marriage and has spoken out about some antagonistic

attitudes towards conservative Christians within the Obama Administration. His anticipated book *Reclaiming Hope: Lessons Learned in the Obama White House About the Future of Faith in America* hit shelves January 17 and has garnered praise from a wide range of Evangelical figures including **Timothy Keller**, **Louie Giglio**, and **Russell Moore**. Wear is slated to speak at the upcoming Evangelicals for Life conference in Washington, D.C., and his commentary on faith and culture has appeared in *Christianity Today*, *The Atlantic*, *USA Today*, and *Relevant Magazine*.

## #2 Anne Carlson Kennedy

In addition to being a minister, a minister's wife, and homeschool mom to six children, **Anne Kennedy** hosts *Preventing Grace*, one of the most popular blogs on the Evangelical Channel at *Patheos.com*. Although many Anglicans already recognize her name, Kennedy is reaching a broader audience within Evangelicalism.

Kennedy delivers humorous and practical writings on theology, politics, culture, and family. I increasingly find myself floating back to Kennedy's blog in thirst of her sensible commentary on the latest religion news story. On any given day, you will nearly always find Kennedy's blog posts under the "Editor's Pick" or "Most Popular" sections of Patheos Evangelicals' homepage. In fact, as I write, her



Anne Carlson Kennedy

latest post is listed under the "Trending" section. Kennedy is also the author of the new book *Nailed It: 365 Sarcastic Devotions for Angry or Worn-Out People*.



Travis Wussow

## #3 Travis Wussow

**Travis Wussow** was appointed the new vice president for public policy and general counsel for the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) in September 2016. Wussow is no stranger to the ERLC, having formerly served the public policy arm of the SBC as the first Director of International Justice and Religious Liberty in Jerusalem. Prior to joining the ERLC, Wussow served as executive pastor for the Austin Stone Community Church in Austin, Texas, and as an International Justice Mission Fellow.

## #4 Trillia Newbell

**Trillia Newbell** is another mom who isn't slowing down in her ministry. She's the author of *Fear and Faith: Finding the Peace Your Heart Craves*, *United: Captured by God's Vision for Diversity* and *Enjoy: Finding the Freedom to Delight Daily in God's Good Gifts*.

She is the Director of Community Outreach for the SBC's ERLC, a contributor to *Christianity Today*, *The Gospel Coalition*, and more. Newbell's observations on theology, womanhood, racial

*Continued on next page*





Trillia Newbell

diversity, and family are increasingly heard at Christian conferences and colleges including True Woman, The Gospel Coalition Women's conference, the ERLC's National Leadership Summit, and Southeastern Theological Seminary. She is also a scheduled guest speaker at the 2017 Evangelicals for Life Conference in Washington, D.C. You can learn more about Newbell's work on her website: <http://www.trillianewbell.com/meet-trillia/>

### #5 Chelsea Patterson

Her day job has her running the halls of the U.S. House of Representatives working on foster care and adoption policy—two policy concerns that **Chelsea Patterson** happily takes home with her at night. Adopted as a newborn from Bucharest, Romania, by Evangelical parents in North Carolina, Patterson has an extraordinary testimony to tell. Moody Publishers thinks so, too.



Chelsea Patterson

Patterson is currently working on her first book, set for publication in 2018. In the meantime, the young Southern Baptist contributes regularly to the Gospel Coalition, 9 Marks, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission's blog, and Patheos' Evangelical channel on issues ranging from culture and current events to suffering and grief. She has also shared her story at Liberty University's commencement ceremony, local churches, and joined several radio programs. Patterson and I previously worked together at the pro-life organization, Concerned Women for America. You can visit her website [chelseacpatterson.com](http://chelseacpatterson.com) or follow her on Twitter @Chelspat.



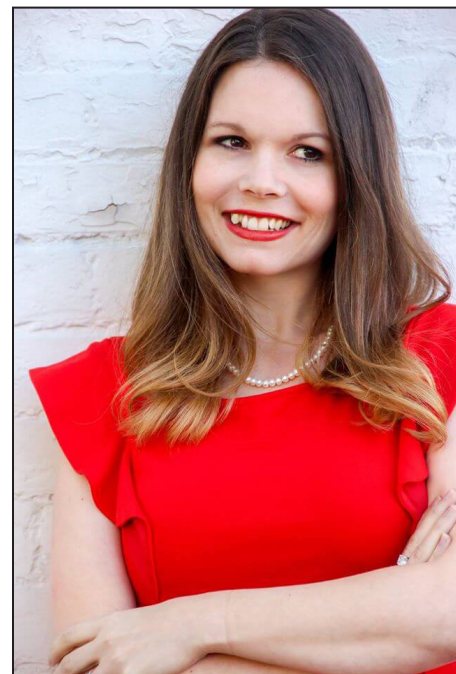
Garrett Kell

### #6 Garrett Kell

Pastor **Garrett Kell** is not "brand new" on the Evangelical scene, but his influence is certainly on the rise. Kell previously told the Institute on Religion and Democracy that he "grew up in a United Methodist church but didn't care much about God." That was until college, when, after helping a former girlfriend choose abortion he encountered grace through Jesus Christ soon afterward.

Kell now serves as the pastor of Del Ray Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia. In 2016, Kell recounted his testimony at the Evangelicals for Life conference in Washington, D.C. He also tackles tough theology and culture questions including

abortion, adultery, transgenderism, pornography, and racial reconciliation. You can find his commentary on The Gospel Coalition, The ERLC blog, and his own website [garrettkell.com](http://garrettkell.com).



Jennifer Cannon-Murff

### #7 Jennifer Cannon-Murff

**Jennifer Cannon-Murff** is an adjunct professor at Regent University and the president of Millennials for Marriage, a faith-based non-profit working to change the younger generation's distorted perspectives on marriage. Murff's research and writings on marriage, education, motherhood, and family have been cited by the *Christian Post*, Christian Broadcasting Network, *Christian Today*, and the Institute for Family Studies. A homeschool mom of four young children, Murff also works to revive homeschooling among Millennial parents with plans to launch a new program "Homeschool Helpers" in 2017. ✚



**Chelsen Vicari** directs the Evangelical Action program at the Institute on Religion and Democracy.



# 'No God but One' by Nabeel Qureshi

by Joseph Rossell



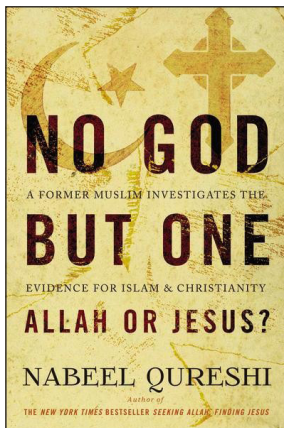
Author Nabeel Qureshi of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (Photo: Nabeel Qureshi)

**M**ost Muslims and Christians know their religions trace their origins back to the same Abrahamic roots but diverge widely in both theology and practice. However, beyond these basic facts, how many adherents of either faith have examined the beliefs of the opposite religion in detail?

Nabeel Qureshi seeks to remedy this dilemma in his latest book, *No God but One: Allah or Jesus*. Published last summer, the book serves as an essential resource to at least two groups: Christians who desire to share their faith with Muslims and Muslims interested in investigating the claims of Christianity.

"While sharing this message [the Gospel], I often come across two kinds of people: Christians who enjoy criticizing Islam,

and Muslims who want to argue but do not want to learn," Qureshi writes. "I am not writing this book for either of them." Instead, he intended for *No God but One* to reach those interested in discerning the truth about Christianity and Islam.



Qureshi deftly weaves together personal narrative and powerful real-life stories with apologetics and historical evidence to examine the case for Islam versus Christianity. Based on the evidence, he shows why an objective observer would choose Christianity over Islam.

Probably no other author qualifies better than Qureshi to write such a book. Growing up in a Muslim household, he con-

verted from Islam to Christianity at age 22 after studying the claims of both religions

in depth with a Christian friend during college. Qureshi detailed his conversion story in his first book, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*, published by Zondervan in 2014.

Now in his early thirties, he has since interacted with countless Muslims about their faith and debated top Muslim apologists on behalf of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries. He thus knows firsthand how to make a convincing case for Christianity to Muslims, and how to answer Muslims' most common objections to Christianity.

"For me, and millions of others like me, the subject of these pages is far more than information," Qureshi writes. "What I share is a summary of fifteen years of research that wrenched my heart and transformed my life."

Qureshi also brings formidable academic credentials to the topic. His degrees include a Master's in Christian apologetics

*Continued on next page*



from Biola University, a Master's in religion from Duke University, an MPhil in Judaism and Christianity from Oxford, and he is currently working on his PhD in New Testament studies at Oxford.

With years of study and experience at his disposal, Qureshi argues that while Islam and Christianity share some major similarities as Abrahamic monotheistic faiths, their differences set them fundamentally at odds. Qureshi appeals to an analogy from biology to illustrate the importance of the religions' doctrinal differences: "Humans and chimpanzees share 95 percent of their DNA, but the remaining 5 percent is incredibly important!"

Qureshi spends the first half of his book detailing the beliefs of Islam and Christianity. He dedicates several chapters each to contrasting Muhammed versus Jesus, the Quran versus the Bible, and Sharia versus the Gospel. He delves into the weighty discussion of what the two religions believe about the nature of God: Islam insists on Allah's total oneness

(*Tawhid*) while Christianity affirms the Trinity. In a bold move, Qureshi also tackles the differing historic contexts and origins between jihad and the Crusades.

The second half of *No God but One* compares the irreducible claims of each religion to determine which makes the more convincing case. Qureshi pitted the Islamic beliefs about Muhammed as Allah's prophet and the Quran as inspired truth against the Christian beliefs about the person of Jesus Christ, particularly his life, death, and resurrection.

Examining this evidence had already convinced Qureshi himself of Christianity's veracity. "After thoroughly investigating the truth claims of Islam and Christianity, even while a Muslim, there was no avoiding the obvious truth: The evidence in favor of Christianity was far, far stronger than the evidence for Islam," he writes.

Sadly, Qureshi announced via Facebook on August 30 that he had been diagnosed "with advanced stomach cancer," the same day *No God but One* was published.

He added that "the clinical prognosis is quite grim," but planned "to pursue healing aggressively," both through medical care and prayer. Qureshi recently shared test results he received showing that the cancer had spread, despite radiation treatment and previous success reducing his tumor. He remains determined to continue fighting the cancer, planning to explore more alternative and experimental treatments. "But my hope is still in the Lord," Qureshi says. May God heal Nabeel completely and preserve his unique Christian witness for years to come! And may God continue to use *No God but One* as a powerful means for reaching Muslims with the message of Jesus Christ. ✚



**Joseph Rossell** serves as Research Analyst at IRD.

## Oliveto Comes Out Swinging Against 'the Bad Churches'

*continued from page 10*

of her visit to one area shows that the overwhelming majority of her church visits were "selfie opportunities" described as "very short 'in-transit' stops ... provid[ing] just enough time to take a picture," and no time for Oliveto to actually get to know or hear from the people there. So given the immense, rather intimidating power the Western Jurisdiction is (for now) giving Oliveto to lord over pastors and congregations in this region, and understandable fears evangelical pastors may have of what she will do to them if she detects insufficient enthusiasm, such visits seem to largely serve the purpose of no congregation in the area being safe from being directly confronted with a lesbian activist bishop, or from being used for Oliveto's self-serving propaganda pictures.

Furthermore, across the weekend she showed little interest in accurately representing traditionalist believers. She claimed that orthodox United Methodists act like same-sex-attracted people "have nothing to offer," ignoring our support of "compassion without compromise" ministries and celebrating individuals who

live faithfully as same-sex-attracted but celibate Christians. For her part, Oliveto expressed support for structurally separating the U.S. wing of the denomination from its African-dominated overseas regions, as if the latter have nothing to offer to our US-centered sexuality debates. She also made a point of touting *The Handmaiden's Tale*—a dystopian novel of a totalitarian Christian theocracy taking power in America and reducing women to illiteracy and sexual slavery—as a fair portrayal of "the religious right [taking] their precepts to their natural conclusion."

### Choosing to Stay in Slavery

As this was Martin Luther King Day weekend, Oliveto's Sunday sermon noted America's sad history with slavery, quickly moving to equate this with the "enslavement" of LGBTQ individuals like herself by the United Methodist Church, and accused our denomination of thus turning Christianity into "an enemy of the oppressed."

She showed little sign of self-awareness of the contrast to the freedoms she

enjoys—as a twenty-first-century American whose salary puts her in the top tenth of one percent of the richest people in the world—with the deprivations of the slaves whose struggles she equated with her own.

She did declare at one point that "there are going to be babies who are going to be born to Methodists who are going to turn out to be queer" to suggest she was staying to fight on their behalf.

But we cannot ignore some factors of more direct self-interest. Apart from her lavish salary as a bishop, at one point, Oliveto reported that many of her friends had switched to the extremely liberal United Church of Christ (UCC) denomination, but then were unable to find congregations. ✚



**John Lomperis** directs the UMAction program at the Institute on Religion & Democracy.

# Czech Heroes and a Fight for Freedom

by Faith J. H. McDonnell

**P**etr Jasek is free. The Czech missionary and humanitarian had been sentenced to life in prison in Sudan. He was charged with “spying against the state,” an eerie echo of the charge once used against Czechs and other Eastern Europeans behind the Iron Curtain.

But an international outcry coupled with the determination of the government of Jasek’s own Czech Republic persuaded the Khartoum regime to “pardon” him. After spending 446 days in a Sudanese cell, the 52 year old European Christian was released on February 26, 2017. He was accompanied home by Czech Foreign Minister **Lubomir Zaoralek**.

As I viewed the smiling photos of Foreign Minister Zaoralek and Jasek on board a Czech jet (selfies tweeted by Zaoralek!) it occurred to me that Jasek had followed in the footsteps of the Czech and Slovakian freedom fighters of the Velvet Revolution. He supported Sudanese Christians and others marginalized and deprived of freedom by the Islamist regime in Khartoum. And Zaoralek was sent to intercede for him. It is in the DNA of the Czech Republic to honor and aid those who hunger for freedom as they once did.

I thought about Czech and Slovakian heroes such as **Vaclav Havel** and **Jan Carnogursky**—on behalf of whom I remember writing letters to members of Congress when he was imprisoned. And I thought especially about two Czech freedom fighters who came to visit us at Church of the Apostles in Fairfax, Virginia, in the fall of 1990.

**Father Vojtech** and Father Filip, Dominican priests, were participants in the Velvet Revolution. And yes, it was all too tempting to call them “our wild and crazy brothers from Czechoslovakia”! But their wild and crazy-ness

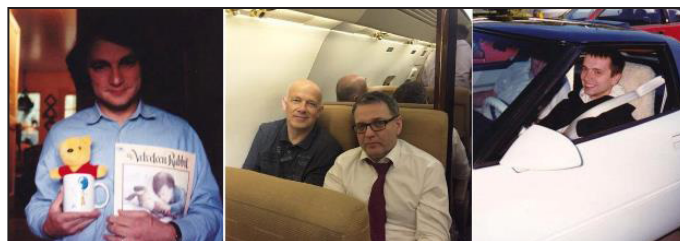
was found in their elegant acts of defiance against the Soviet State.

Vojtech became a priest during the Underground Church era. His very ordination was an act of defiance. He had been ordained secretly by a bishop who had in turn been secretly ordained. In the early years of his priesthood, he worked as a computer technician and risked imprisonment in a labor camp whenever he said Mass. He usually wore jeans and a leather jacket, and he loved Winnie the Pooh.

Filip, on the other hand, had been ordained after the advent of Perestroika. I don’t remember ever seeing him in anything other than his austere clerical garb. But he had a winsome fondness for sports cars, especially the white Corvette of one of our church members. He told us proudly how at his seminary graduation he had rigged a backdrop with an enormous picture of the Blessed Virgin to come down over the required photos of President **Gustav Husak** and the local Communist Party leader (Perestroika only goes so far!) that were hanging at the back of the platform.

Vojtech and Filip showed me what a blessing freedom is—a blessing that far too few of our brothers and sisters around the world enjoy. And they showed me with what courage far too many of our brothers and sisters must stand for their faith—whether in Communist Eastern Europe or in those regions dominated by Islamic supremacism, like Sudan.

Like Father Vojtech and Father Filip, Jasek made acts of defiant faithfulness. When he was arrested and imprisoned, he told Voice of the Martyrs that he “was inspired by years of serving Christians imprisoned for their faith” and therefore “felt honored to be able to serve God while himself the prisoner of a brutal Islamic regime.” Further, Jasek said that he “embraced his imprisonment as an



Left-Right: Fr. Vojtech (photo: Faith McDonnell); Petr Jasek and Ambassador Zaoralek (photo: Zaoralek Twitter); Fr. Filip (photo, Faith McDonnell)

opportunity to share the gospel with Sudanese, Eritreans, and radical Muslims who are normally inaccessible to missionaries.”

Petr Jasek is free. But he has not forgotten his brothers and sisters in Sudan who suffer for their faith. And he has not forgotten his two colleagues who remain in prison. Even as he was taken from the Prague airport to a hospital to recover from his ordeal, Jasek implored the media and the world community to help Reverend **Hassan Abdelrahim Tawor** and **Abdulmonem Abdumawla**.

Hassan, a Nuba pastor in the Sudanese Church of Christ (SCOC), and Abdulmonem, a Darfuri convert, were convicted for “assisting Jasek in the alleged espionage, causing hatred among communities and spreading false information.” They both received a 12-year sentence, and as Sudanese citizens they have not been pardoned. Their attorneys are appealing their sentences, and Sudanese Christians stand outside the courtroom where their case takes place singing hymns to encourage them.

I think again of the hymns that were sung in praise and petition by Christians in Czechoslovakia as the Velvet Revolution turned their captive Communist country into one of freedom. And I pray that as the songs of Sudanese Christians rise to God in the same manner, freedom will come for all in Sudan. ✝



**Faith J. H. McDonnell** is the Director of Religious Liberty Programs at the Institute on Religion & Democracy.



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