

‘BIBLICAL [DIS]OBEDIENCE’ UPDATE: New York Bishop Declares Independence from UMC

A vocal minority of United Methodists continue seeking to overwhelm our accountability structures with brazen violations of church policies aligned with biblical standards of sexual self-control.

Rev. Thomas Ogletree, former dean of Yale Divinity School, faced a formal complaint for performing a same-sex union.



Bishop Martin McLee. (Photo: Adam Cunningham/UMNS)

New York Bishop Martin McLee appointed the Rev. Timothy Riss as counsel for the church and retired Bishop Clifton Ives to preside over a church trial. Riss is a current board member and Ives is the recent co-president of the liberal, pro-homosexual-ity Methodist Federation for Social Action.

McLee, Riss, Ives, Ogletree, and Ogletree’s counsel decided on a “just resolution” while completely cutting the two evangelical ministers who had filed the complaint out of the process. Liberal United Methodists cheered this trial-avoiding resolution as a complete “victory” for their side, since it involved no penalty for Ogletree and let him announce his willingness to do additional same-sex unions. Bishop McLee followed the pattern of Bishop Grant Hagiya of the Greater Northwest Area, who had recently used a similar accountability-avoiding gimmick to give empty slaps on the wrists to two of his clergy who performed such sin-blessing ceremonies.

But Bishop McLee went even farther by declaring his commitment to “a cessation of church trials for conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions.” This amounts to a green light for other New York metro-area clergy to violate church law. Bishop McLee effectively declared that he will operate the New York Conference as independent from the doctrines and standards of the rest of the denomination, except for which-ever parts he unilaterally decides are still worth following.

Another complaint was filed against the secularly employed Rev. Sara Thompson Tweedy for being very openly homosexually active, in violation of UMC standards. In late April, Bishop McLee sent a letter “notifying her that he was dropping the complaint, thereby declining to pursue formal disciplinary charges,” according to the conference Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) chapter.

Meanwhile, on March 13 it was announced that formal complaints have (finally!) been filed against retired Bishop Melvin Talbert for performing a publicity-stunt homosexual

wedding in northern Alabama against the public protests of the resident bishop and the leadership of the Council of Bishops. This follows a vote from the Council of Bishops last November for charges to be filed against Talbert for performing the ceremony and undermining a colleague bishop’s ministry, both of which are chargeable offenses in United Methodist Church law. Yet the initial, confidential supervisory process could take as long as 360 days, with several more lengthy steps to be taken before Talbert could face any formal penalty. Since the complaints are being handled within the radicalized Western Jurisdiction, few expect any real accountability to result.

The May meeting of our denomination’s active bishops from around the world was closed to the public. A statement reported that “[d]isagreements about human sexuality threaten to divide the church” and that our bishops “had conversations about how they could carry out the Book of Discipline and lead during this time” without reaching any decisions. ✚

FOR REFLECTION: Psalm 111:10; Isaiah 5:20–21.

ACTION: Contact your bishop and respectfully but firmly ask what s/he will to do to actually teach the church’s faith on marriage, insist on accountability for fellow bishops, and publicly challenge the schismatic actions of Bishops Hagiya and McLee. To find contact information for your bishop, ask your congregation’s staff or go online to www.umc.org, clicking “Directory” at the top of the screen, and then selecting “Bishops.”



Bishop Martin D. McLee of the New York Area reads a statement during the press conference announcing a “just resolution” in the case of the Rev. Thomas W. Ogletree. From left are McLee: the Rev. William Shillady, trial secretary; and Ogletree in the New York Conference Center, White Plains, N.Y. (Photo: Joanne Utley/UMNS)



The Rev. Thomas Ogletree speaks at a press conference at the New York Conference Center in White Plains, N.Y. (See “Biblical [Dis]Obedience Update” on page 5.) Looking on from left are the Rev. Tim Riss, counsel for the church; New York Area Bishop Martin McLee; retired Bishop S. Clifton Ives, the presiding officer, or equivalent of a judge, in the case. (Photo: Joanne Utley/UMNS)

‘Radical Sexual Liberationist’ protesters Take Over UMC Leadership Table

continued from page 1

other CT members, to formally commit the CT to “affirm parallel paths through dialogue and e-mendment of the Discipline to fully include LGBTQ persons in the life and ministry of the church.” Given the CT’s very unrepresentative composition, it unsurprisingly passed overwhelmingly.

The more “moderately” liberal CT members mostly demonstrated their unwillingness to do much more than ultimately reward the bullying tactics of LP. The apportionment-funded CT chose to let LP set the sexual liberalization of the church as their #1 agenda, measured by the distribution of meeting time. But some will claim that this is completely unrelated to the decisions the same LP-pandering CT members made at this meeting to revive discussions of creating a U.S.-only structure (in which more orthodox UMC members would have no voice) and to fund a years-long project to revise our denomination’s Social Principles. ✚

ACTION: Protest the choice by the CT leadership to sacrifice the trust of the non-liberal majority of the church rather than stand up to LP’s hijacking. You can e-mail the CT itself at connectionaltable@umc.org or write to Bishop Bruce Ough / Dakotas-Minnesota Area Office / 122 W. Franklin Avenue, Suite 200 / Minneapolis, MN 55404. Even in righteous outrage, let’s be sure to NOT mirror the shrill tone of LP!

UMAction Briefing

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UMAction Briefing

‘Radical Sexual Liberationist’ Protesters Take Over UMC Leadership Table

Love Prevails (LP) is a self-described “radical sexual liberationist” group consisting of professional protester Amy DeLong and a few followers.

Rev. DeLong’s relationship with The United Methodist Church is an ever-worsening cycle of her taking outrageously harmful actions against the church, UMC leaders weakly responding, and her becoming emboldened to push further. In 2011, a church jury in Wisconsin refused to discipline her for her admitted lesbian partnership and gave her what amounted to a slap on the wrist for officiating at a same-sex union. At the 2012 General Conference, she physically prevented business from

resuming, ultimately bullying our sadly pliable Council of Bishops into submitting to several demands, including preventing consideration of mandatory minimum penalties for clergy who bless same-sex unions. She then declared her intention to again

shut down the conference if it even considered a committee-endorsed proposal supported by pro-life United Methodists. Last November, LP interrupted and forcibly took over the UMC Connectional Table (CT) meeting to protest the UMC’s affirmation of biblical standards for sexual self-control.

The Connectional Table is the supreme leadership gathering of United Methodism, including representatives from every other major leadership body (the Council of Bishops, the general agencies, the U.S. regional jurisdictions, American non-white constituencies, and overseas central conferences). At its April meeting, LP protesters (who had come with placards with slogans like “DIVEST FROM THIS ABUSIVE #UMC”) were repeatedly allowed to interrupt to interject their agenda. To appease them, the CT had agreed to reorder its agenda for the next several meetings for homosexuality dialogues. This meeting’s discussion panel featured one supporter of biblical standards for sexual self-control and two strong opponents.

But LP complained that the dialogue had still not pandered to them enough. LP activist Julie Todd gave an emotional speech she later summarized in a YouTube video as lamenting CT members’ insufficiently vocal liberalism and telling them: “I want to hear conversation, I want to hear action, and I want to hear it NOW!”

Bishop Ough of the Dakotas-Minnesota Conference, the CT chair, dutifully invited members to respond. So another couple hours of business were pushed aside for debate over a motion, urged by Bishops Minerva Carcaño of Los Angeles, Hope Morgan Ward of North Carolina, and Sally Dyck of Chicago, along with

continued on page 6

Summer 2014

Inside:

UMW Hosts Hillary Clinton While Alienating Most UM Women 2

UMC Apportionments Support Non-Marital Cohabitation 2

Radicalized Western Jurisdiction Continues Withholding Apportionments 3

Liberal UMC Caucus Celebrates Teenage Prostitution as ‘Liberation’ 3

HOPEFUL NEWS: A New Network for Faithful United Methodists 4

Your Opinion, Please! 4

‘BIBLICAL [DIS]OBEDIENCE’ UPDATE: New York Bishop Declares Independence from UMC 5



Amy DeLong watches a Connectional Table increasingly bending itself to her will. (Photo credit: John Lomperis/IRD)

UMW Hosts Hillary Clinton While Alienating Most UM Women

Reflecting their long history of narrow political partisanship, on April 26, the national leadership of United Methodist Women (UMW) hosted former First Lady and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton as the keynote speaker at its quadrennial assembly in Louisville, Kentucky.

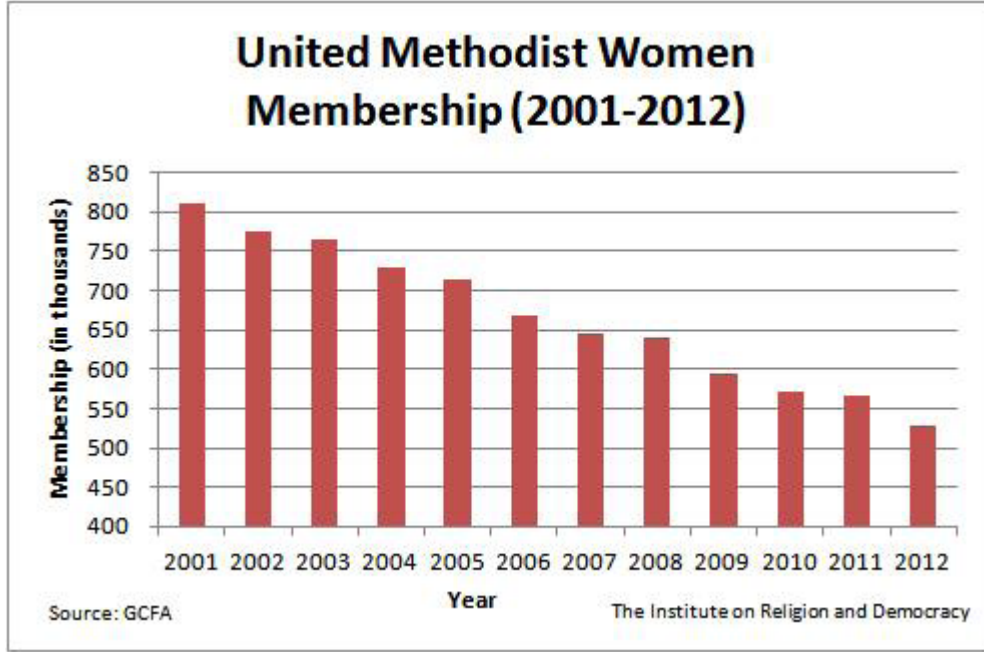
The Associated Press described the invitation as an opportunity for the prominent Democrat’s political ambitions, as it “offer[ed] Clinton a chance to talk about her faith in a personal way to women from across the country as she prepares for a possible run for president in 2016.”

National UMW leaders have long used the “mission giving” sent by (often unsuspecting) congregational UMW units to fund



Hillary Rodham Clinton (left) speaks backstage with Yvette Richards and Harriett Olson before addressing the Assembly. Richards is president of UMW, and Olson is top executive of the organization. Clinton is a lifelong UMW member. (Photo: Paul Jeffrey/UMW)

United Methodist women are losing their appeal. Between 2001 and 2012, national UMW membership declined by 35 percent,



divisive political agendas that are often to the left of even Mrs. Clinton. For example, one workshop at this gathering called for targeting Israel with a comprehensive campaign of boycotts, divestment, and sanctions. Within the past year, national UMW leaders have also mobilized against the Keystone XL pipeline, rallied for non-enforcement of U.S. immigration laws, and supported the efforts of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) to oppose any restriction or disapproval of elective abortion.

But such disregard for the concerns and political diversity of the bulk of United Methodist women are losing their appeal. Between 2001 and 2012, national UMW membership declined by 35 percent, to just 528,156 members, a fraction of all American women who are United Methodists. In this same period, overall U.S. membership in our denomination declined by only 10 percent. At its height in 1974, UMW had 1.36 million members. When adjusted for inflation, the record shows a drop of 37 percent in “mission giving” to UMW between 2003 and 2012.

ACTION: Talk to UMW members in your church about redirecting their giving to recipients more concerned with spreading the Gospel of Christ than national UMW’s far-left political agendas. Be prepared for resistance.

UMC Apportionments Support Non-Marital Cohabitation

The directors of The United Methodist Church’s General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) recently decided, non-unanimously, to redefine “spouse” for the comprehensive spousal-benefits packages for employees of UMC denominational agencies to now include “all legally recognized marriages, civil unions, and comprehensive domestic partnerships.” This decision, cheered by liberal caucuses, encompasses both homosexual partnerships and heterosexual but non-marital

cohabitation relationships, which are legally recognized in some states. In April, the UMC “supreme court,” the Judicial Council, ruled that it was up to the GCFA to determine whether or not this dramatic shift violated our denomination’s standards. The 21-member GCFA board includes one token member from Africa, where one-third of our global denomination lives.

There is little evidence that GCFA spent much time addressing the moral or communal problems of taking apportionments from our offering plates to support unmarried church agency employees shacking up with their romantic partners. One GCFA leader said not offering such benefits “would put our denomination at risk for lawsuits alleging discrimination.” But in response

Radicalized Western Jurisdiction Continues Withholding Apportionments

Some liberal United Methodists have been withholding significant chunks of their assigned denominational apportionment payments, and leaving it up to the rest of us to cover their slack.

The United Methodist Church’s Western Jurisdiction (Colorado and all states further west) has long been notorious for its exclusivist theological radicalism, and its resultant status as the jurisdiction with the fastest membership decline.

At its 2012 conference, that jurisdiction officially denounced our denomination’s continued disapproval of homosexual practice, devoted regional church funds for newspaper ads apologizing for the UMC’s biblical position, invited bishops to be allowed to violate relevant UMC policies, and called for regional UMC leaders to ignore our denomination’s entire statement on sexual morality. At that same gathering, Bishop Minerva Carcaño declared “unequivocally” that the region’s bishops “are of one mind” in their liberalism on homosexuality.

For years, the Western Jurisdiction has lagged far behind the other four U.S. jurisdictions in the percentage paid in its assigned

share of denominational apportionments. Last year, the Western Jurisdiction paid only 83.1 percent of all of its assigned denominational apportionments, while the other four U.S. jurisdictions paid between 87.5 and 93.9 percent of their respective shares (the infamously radicalized California-Nevada Conference paid only 58 percent). In 2012 and 2013, the Western Jurisdiction paid only between 81.5 and 86.9 percent of its share of the Episcopal Fund (which pays for our bishops), while the other four jurisdictions consistently paid over 90 percent of theirs.

Even if it fully paid its assigned apportionments, the Western Jurisdiction would still have the dubious distinctions of being the only U.S. jurisdiction contributing nothing to support overseas UMC bishops and receiving subsidies for its own bishops from the rest of the country.



United Methodist Bishop Minerva Carcaño addresses the Western Jurisdictional Conference of The United Methodist Church during its meeting in San Diego. (Photo: Pacific Northwest Conference)

Liberal UMC Caucus Celebrates Teenage Prostitution as ‘Liberation’

In its message celebrating “Womyn’s Herstory Month,” the Church Within A Church Movement (CWACM), promoted the testimonial of a transsexual former “sex worker” (i.e., prostitute) Janet Mock, who laments as “shameful” the lack of mainstream acceptance of “underground economies like sex work.” CWACM is a semi-schismatic liberal caucus within The United Methodist Church with a central commitment to the LGBT liberationist cause.

While (only partially) acknowledging some of the terrible circumstances faced by human beings caught in prostitution, the CWACM-promoted essay portrays prostitution as ultimately far

more than just an unpleasant means of survival. Mock recalls “perceiv[ing] the sex trades as a rite of passage” for “a trans girl.” As a teenager in this sub-culture, Mock recalls how “[t]he majority of the women I idolized engaged in the sex trades at some time or another — some dabbled in video cam work and pornography, others chose street-based work and dancing at strip clubs.” The author claims to have been “empowered” by “witnessing the women . . . tak[ing] their lives into their own hands” by selling their bodies on the street. It was from this “sisterhood and community” that Mock “learned firsthand about body autonomy, about resilience and agency, about learning to do for yourself in a world that is hostile about your existence.” Mock recalls how these prostitute-mentors “enabled me when I was 16 to jump in a car with my first regular and choose a pathway to my survival and liberation.”

Taking the “how can any consensual sex be wrong?” argument to a logical extreme, CWACM responded to this pro-prostitution essay by telling its own network of United Methodist clergy and laity: “For Women/Womyn to be able to have full access to making choices about their person, body and way of being is still a revolutionary notion. We have much work to do.”

ACTION: International Justice Mission offers more redemptive ways of learning about and supporting victims of commercialized sex: <http://www.ijm.org/>

HOPEFUL NEWS: A New Network for Faithful United Methodists

Earlier this year, over 125 United Methodists gathered in Atlanta for the launch of the new Wesleyan Covenant Network (WCN).

Rev. Dr. Maxie Dunnam, the former President of Asbury Seminary, declared that “Schism has happened” already within The United Methodist Church. Those in the “biblical [dis]obedience” movement (see “UPDATE,” p. 5), have “sealed that fact” by declaring that they will not live in unity with the rest of the UMC. But while the accountability-rejecting actions of some have “strained to the breaking point” the UMC’s unity, our de facto schism “is not formal,” which leaves “two churches in one denomination.” Dunnam stressed that the orthodox wing of United Methodism “is not schismatic,” as we are not the ones breaking covenant.

Multiple speakers noted how biblical authority is at the heart of our division. Dunnam outlined how United Methodism

today is reaping the bitter fruit of a century of Protestant liberalism in our seminaries.

WCN will not be another caucus seeking structural reform of United Methodism, since “other groups are doing that quite effectively,” while WCN can attract wider support.

Rather, WCN will be a vehicle for biblically faithful United Methodists to band together in covenant for missional networking, accountability, mentoring new leaders, planting vital congregations, sharing resources, discussing best practices, and working together to better reach our neighbors for Christ. The WCN will demonstrate its commitment to the UMC by upholding the denomination’s Doctrinal Standards, pursuing the church’s mission, promoting spiritual disciplines, and prayer.

The WCN leaders are Dunnam along with Pastors Bryan Collier, Carolyn Moore, Allen Newton, and Shane Stanford.



(Photo credit: Wesley Covenant Network)

FOR REFLECTION: Mark 3:24–25.

ACTION: For more information on connecting in ministry with other faithful United Methodists, visit: www.wesleyancovenantnetwork.org

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Your Opinion, Please!

What should be done about the UMC’s present crisis of disunity?

- Those in the faithful majority should leave the UMC together.
- The minority who will not respect our biblical standards should leave.
- Things should continue as they are now.
- Other: _____