

## Rev. Dr. Jerry Kulah's Message from the UMC in Africa

In the American part of our global denomination, much attention and turmoil has surrounded certain actions this summer by a minority of liberal-dominated regions that are openly declaring their intention to act in "nonconformity" with the biblical standards on marriage and sex by which they are bound in our church law.

As of this writing, such regional attempts to break with the rest of United Methodism (and the rest of the ecumenical body of Christ), including the fast-declining Western Jurisdiction's proposed election of a lesbian activist bishop, are in the process of being challenged to the Judicial Council, our denomination's "supreme court."

In the meantime, however, these developments have caused great alarm among the 40 percent of our denomination that lives outside the United States.

Shortly after the conclusion of this summer's U.S. jurisdictional conferences, the Rev. Dr. **Jerry Kulah** offered a widely circulated Message to the Global UMC on behalf of

the UMC Africa Initiative, for which he serves as General Coordinator. The Africa Initiative is a self-described "movement of African Leaders, both clergy and laity, of the United Methodist Church committed to...cross-cultural evangelization and missions, discipleship, leadership development, prayer revivals, and resource mobilization." Kulah also serves as dean of our denomination's Gbarnga School of Theology in Liberia, West Africa.

Some excerpts:

*Over the past weeks we have been following the events and activities of the five jurisdictions of The United Methodist Church with mixed emotions and serious concerns about the future of our beloved church...*

*[The actions by some regional UMC leaders in the USA to disregard our denomination's biblical standards on marriage and sex, which the statement characterizes as "incompatible with fostering unity within global Methodism"] seem to confirm the fears of our founding father, John Wesley... "I am not afraid that the people called Methodist should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America [in Africa and the rest of the world]. But I am afraid, lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case, unless*

they hold fast both to the doctrine, spirit and discipline with which they first set out." *When we abandon the clear teaching of Scripture in favor of some philosophies and ideologies of contemporary society, we cease to exist within God's parameter of grace.*

...

*The Christian Church, bought and birthed with the blood of Jesus Christ (Isaiah 53:1-13; Matthew 27: 32-61; John 10:10-11; Hebrews 10:1-39) is not and cannot be a social club; it cannot be directed by any form of political activism that contradicts the teachings of Scripture...*

*It is time to return to the faith of our fathers and mothers (the Holy Scriptures) and be the church. In spite all that is going on, there is hope for the continued growth and development of the Church of Jesus Christ because Jesus is still the LORD of His Church. We will remain committed and determined to live in loyalty and obedience to the teachings of the Holy Scriptures, and to our Book of Discipline. We will also remain supportive of the unity of the global United Methodist Community as long as the Bible remains our primary authority for faith and Christian living. We shall remain loving of members of the UM Church who have chosen to tread the cultural path of contemporary society that is inimical to the teaching of Scripture, in the hope that we will reconcile our differences and submit to the Lordship of Christ... However, we shall not compromise our Christian faith on the altar of what seems to the minds of some to be "socially acceptable and politically correct" cultures and practices of contemporary society.*

...

*We must admit that global United Methodist Church is at the crossroads (Jeremiah 6:16). We have choices to make. On one hand, we can choose to obey God and His word, and thereby repent of the sin of gross disobedience and abandon the quest to be like the rest of the world. On the other hand, we can choose to continue in pursuit of what the cultural practices of the day dictate that denies God's sovereignty over God's creation and accepts what feels good, what seems politically acceptable to society, etc. The choice is ours.*

*...Let us be firmed and very courageous in prayer and in discerning God's will for the future of our church, always abounding in the Word of the Lord; for we know our labor in the Lord is not in vain (Joshua 1:4-6; 1 Corinthians 15:58). May God bless the people called United Methodist. ✝*

**ACTION: Share this important Message from Africa with members of your congregation. The full statement can be read at [www.juicyecumenism.com/author/umvoices/](http://www.juicyecumenism.com/author/umvoices/)**

## Mixed Results on Ordination Disobedience

Consistent with the clear teaching of Scripture and 2,000 years of globally consistent ecumenical Christian teaching, the United Methodist Church's governing *Book of Discipline* mandates that "self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be ordained as ministers" (just like people who are uncommitted to abstaining from any other form of sex outside heterosexual marriage). There is no restriction on ordaining same-sex attracted persons who are committed to lifelong celibacy.

This directive is primarily imposed upon the Board of Ordained Ministry (BOOM) in each annual conference, which is tasked with evaluating ordination candidates.

However, these bodies in the New York and Baltimore-Washington Annual Conferences recently adopted their own conflicting ordination policies. In an open letter released shortly before

last May's General Conference, the BOOM chairs from these two conferences jointly declared their commitment to not ask ordination candidates questions relevant to this *Discipline* standard, and explained that this was intended to "push the envelope" against what they called "unhealthy prohibitions on the full participation of LGBTQ persons."



Clergy members of the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference, meeting June 1 in an Executive Session, did not approve Tara "T.C." Morrow for commissioning as a Deacon in The United Methodist Church. (Photo: Steven D. Martin / Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference)

But actual implementation of these schismatic new policies has been a bit more complicated.

In direct response, the South Georgia Conference adopted a resolution in June calling on their bishop to not accept into that conference any "clergy who have publicly stated their intent to disregard the current language of the *Book of Discipline*."

The Baltimore-Washington BOOM recommended that lesbian activist **Tara Morrow**, who was open about being legally "married" to another woman, be commissioned as a deacon. However, her candidacy was ultimately rejected after she failed to receive the necessary level of support when the full session of conference clergy voted on June 1.

The 2016 General Conference added a new requirement that beginning in 2017, ordination candidates must receive a three-fourths super-majority vote of their conference clergy sessions to be commissioned or ordained. This should make it easier for even traditionalist minorities in revisionist-dominated conferences to

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## UMAction Briefing

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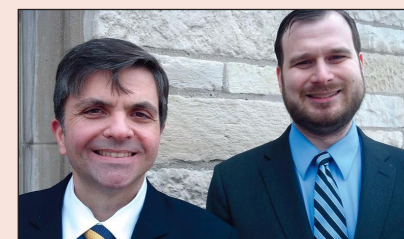
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## UMAction Briefing

### GOOD NEWS: New Room Conference Breathes Fresh Life into the Church

The third annual New Room Conference, held September 22-24, brought together some 1,500 evangelical Methodists in Franklin, Tennessee, for inspiring worship, robustly orthodox plenary sermons, and presentations by such figures as prolific New Testament scholar **Ben Witherington** and noted Wesley scholars **Ken Collins** (a *UMAction* Advisory Board member) and **Kevin Watson**. The gathering featured prayer for revival, communal repentance, and practical ministry-equipping workshops on everything from family discipleship to evangelism to women's ministry to modern-day Wesleyan bands modeled on the early Methodist accountability groups.

While a strong majority of participants were United Methodist, Seedbed (the publishing arm of Asbury Theological Seminary and sponsor of these conferences) very intentionally included participants and speakers from other denominations in the wider Wesleyan/Methodist theological family. Having doubled in size every year, the New Room Conferences have easily become the largest regular pan-Wesleyan gathering in America. There are simply not many

## Having doubled in size every year, the New Room Conferences have easily become the largest pan-Wesleyan gathering in America.

other national settings in which clergy and laity from the United Methodist Church, Wesleyan Church, Salvation Army, and other evangelical Wesleyan denominations join together for mutual encouragement and resourcing for mission and ministry.

While a wide range of ages was represented, it was one of the youngest largely United Methodist gatherings I have ever attended.

United Methodist Bishop **James Swanson** of Mississippi cited his own background in the Church of God in Christ, a predominantly African-American Pentecostal denomination, shared his continued personal belief in supernatural healing, mourned how mainline American Methodists in the 1890s "pushed holiness folk out of our denomination" because "they tried to tell us to live right and we wanted to intellectualize," and declared that "we need to invite them back into the room!"

The conference also promoted ministry beyond the USA while teaching American Christians what we can learn from our global brothers and sisters. There were speakers from Cameroon, England, India, Liberia, and Nigeria.

**J. D. Walt** of Seedbed told *UMAction* that New Room is "a twenty-first century attempt at a classical Methodist movement." They are working on

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## Christmas 2016

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Asbury Seminary Dean of Chapel Jessica Lagrone interviews band members during the September 2016 event held in Franklin, Tennessee. (Photo: Seedbed/Asbury Seminary)



## Last Gasp: Yellowstone Conference Moves to Affirm Homosexuality, Defend Abortion, and Dissolve Itself

For many years, the annual conferences within United Methodism's U.S. Western Jurisdiction have been dominated by a theologically radical faction and consequently have suffered dramatic membership decline.

For example, at its June session, the Yellowstone Conference (Montana plus parts of Wyoming and Idaho) adopted resolutions affirming a liberal perspective on homosexuality and declaring unqualified support for Planned Parenthood, America's largest abortion provider. Planned Parenthood came under fire in 2015 after an undercover video showed an executive of the abortion giant nonchalantly chatting over dinner about how they sell body parts of babies after aborting them.

Yet the very same 2016 Yellowstone Annual Conference session approved an action, in response to years of continuous and unsustainable membership decline, to begin the process of dissolving itself out of existence, to merge what is left of the numerically tiny conference into the neighboring Rocky Mountain Conference. In July, the Western Jurisdiction approved this process, and also very provocatively put forward openly partnered

lesbian activist **Karen Oliveto** to be bishop of these combining conferences. (The election of Oliveto as bishop is NOT final but is currently being challenged before our denomination's Judicial Council. We hope that they will ultimately invalidate Oliveto's election as a blatant violation of our *Discipline's* ban on self-avowed practicing homosexual clergy.)

The Rocky Mountain Conference, with which Yellowstone has already shared a bishop for years, and which is similarly liberal-dominated, is also in significant decline. It even has a cabinet-level member of the conference staff to oversee closing dying congregations. Among the four Rocky Mountain congregations closed this year was St. Paul's UMC in Denver, Colorado, which was one of the first three congregations to formally affiliate with the Reconciling Ministries Network, an unofficial caucus that opposes our denomination's biblically based disapproval of homosexual practice and pre-marital sex.

This year the Yellowstone Conference closed one congregation, retired three clergy, and did not ordain, commission, or receive into associate membership a single new pastor.

While the surrounding population in the areas of the merged annual conference being formed grows, the region's liberal-led United Methodist congregations are dramatically failing to reach their neighbors for Jesus Christ or even to stop the massive bleeding of the membership they already have.

And yet too many still will not see the connection between this inability of churches to stay open and their choice to reject biblical teaching, emphasizing strident pro-abortion political activism over compassionate welcoming of children, and not offering much that is different from what is easily found in the secular culture. ✚

**FOR REFLECTION: Proverbs 29:18.**

**ACTION: Pray for God to do a mighty, supernatural work of revival in regions of our denomination that have seen too much spiritual death and unfaithfulness for too long.**

### Mixed Results on Disobedience

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block the ordination of clergy candidates who are not committed to biblical standards of sexual self-control.

On the other hand, at the June 2016 session of the New York Conference, three "out" gay activists were commissioned as provisional clergy while another one was ordained. This, along with related declarations of "non-conformity" in other liberal annual conferences, is in the process of being challenged before our denomination's Judicial Council. ✚

**FOR REFLECTION: James 3:1.**

**ACTION: Write to the new bishops of these two rebellious annual conference and respectfully urge them to keep their vows to the Church by actively intervening as much as necessary to ensure that proper inquiries are made of all seeking the privilege of being entrusted with ordained spiritual leadership in our denomination, and that candidates unwilling to commit to our Discipline's minimal, biblical standards for sexual self-control are blocked: Bishop Thomas Bickerton / New York Conference / 20 Soundview Avenue / White Plains, NY 10606 / bishop@nyac.com and also Bishop LaTrelle Easterling / Baltimore-Washington Conference UMC / 11711 East Market Place / Fulton, MD 20759 / bishopeasterlingoffice@bwcumc.org .**



Pastor Bob Land, a UM Action Advisory Board member, and his wife, Amy, watch the proceedings of NCJ2016, to which both were delegates (Photo: NCJ Communications)

### North Central, South Central Jurisdictions Pledge to Uphold Biblical UMC Standards on Marriage

Recently, much noise has surrounded actions (which are being challenged) by smaller, radicalized regions of our denomination to protest our denomination's ban on same-sex unions and on ordaining "self-avowed practicing homosexuals."

However, not much attention has been paid to the fact that in July, the 2016 quadrennial conferences of the much larger South Central Jurisdiction, with some 1.7 million members, as well as the North Central Jurisdiction, with some 1.2 million members, vowed to uphold these contested sexuality standards.

This was a pleasant surprise in the North Central Jurisdiction, which has long had a reputation as being hopelessly liberal-dominated, despite many strong evangelical congregations.

In this jurisdiction, a resolution on church unity amidst theological diversity was adopted only after it was amended, by a significant majority vote, to remove a sentence calling for no church trials for violations of our denomination's "human sexuality" standards. Pastor **Bob Phillips** of the Illinois-Great Rivers Conference highlighted how in our denominational system, church trials are essential for accountability when clergy unrepentantly violate our standards. Pastor **Beth Ann Cook** of Indiana pointed out that the wording of "human sexuality" was broad enough to include such non-homosexuality matters as adultery and sexual harassment. Formerly evangelical Pastor **Mike Slaughter** and others unsuccessfully urged keeping the call for no church trials, which would have effectively invited Midwestern UMC clergy to be given free rein to openly violate our denomination's prohibitions of homosexual practice and same-sex union ceremonies, as well as our policies against adultery, premarital sex, and sexual harassment.

After the majority of even this liberal-leaning jurisdiction made clear its desire for enforcement of these standards, including with church trials when necessary, the remaining parts of the resolution as amended were either positive or vague enough to not merit conservative opposition.

In the South Central Jurisdiction, the Rev. **Kip Gilts**, a conservative delegate from Texas, introduced a resolution calling for "Peace, Patience, and Prayer" amidst our denomination's internal controversies over sexual morality. By overwhelmingly adopting the Gilts resolution (unaltered except for one brief, unobjectionable addition), that jurisdiction's delegates declared that "we will uphold the *Book of Discipline* as we have vowed to do as United Methodist leaders."

Both jurisdictions' resolutions affirmed language from a motion adopted at General Conference that pledged to uphold the *Discipline* while echoing the *Discipline's* own ethos of treating trials as a last resort, and also called on bishops to "cultivate a spirit within their cabinets and clergy sessions that treats all clergy and laity respectfully and fairly" regardless of their views on sexual morality. The latter implicitly challenges the way some liberal bishops have mistreated traditionalist clergy in appointments. Both jurisdictions also broke a historic barrier this summer by each electing their first-ever bishop to have graduated from Asbury Theological Seminary, a bastion of evangelical Methodism. ✚

**ACTION: Write to your bishop to respectfully urge him or her to offer strong leadership to (1) offer public assurances that they will not tolerate clergy violations of our biblical, covenantal standards on sexual morality, (2) implement the call from the North and South Central Jurisdictions "to cultivate a spirit within their cabinets and clergy sessions" in which theologically conservative clergy are not mistreated, and (3) challenge their colleague bishops in other regions who have encouraged liberal clergy in violating our standards and/or who have mistreated faithful pastors. You can find your bishop's contact information through your congregation's office or online at [www.umc.org/directory](http://www.umc.org/directory)**

### New Room Conference

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setting up "micro-communities" modeled on the early Methodist classes and bands. But Walt made clear that these are not intended to create or replace a church. ✚

**FOR REFLECTION: Galatians 6:2.**

**ACTION: To find out more about future national New Room Conferences and regional Gatherings, visit <http://newroom.seedbed.com>. To learn more about opportunities to fulfill the New Room motto—"band together"—in Wesleyan micro-communities, go to [www.newroombands.com](http://www.newroombands.com) .**

## Southeastern Bishops Speak Against Breaking Covenant

Shortly before this summer's jurisdictional conferences, the bishops of our denomination's U.S. Southeastern Jurisdiction released a Pastoral Letter criticizing the "disobedience movement" about which UMAction has previously reported. Their statement pronounced that rogue clergy and annual conferences acting in "nonconformity" with the sexuality standards of the United Methodist *Book of Discipline* have committed "divisive and disruptive" actions that were "a violation of our covenant" and outside "the bounds of our church's polity."

At their ordinations, United Methodist clergy in every annual conference vow to uphold the covenantal standards of our *Discipline*, which include prohibitions on their performing same-sex union ceremonies or personally being sexually active outside of monogamous, man-woman marriage.

The Southeastern bishops mournfully recognized "the pain felt both by those advocating for and those opposing change" in the UMC. For their part, these bishops promised to continue "ordering the church" by enforcing the *Book of Discipline* while "seeking unity in Christ." They acknowledged that some church members

dislike the church's stance on human sexuality, but distinguished those who attempted to bring about change "through processes our polity has in place for making such changes" from those pursuing impermissible disobedience.

These bishops also helpfully highlighted the perspective of orthodox United Methodists "working to maintain our *Book of Discipline's* current position on human sexuality, believing that it is grace-filled, orthodox and biblically-based."

The bishops concluded their letter by encouraging those in the Southeastern Jurisdiction "to join us in prayer" and "stay the course in your covenant relationship with God, The United Methodist Church and each other."

In a later statement, Bishop **Mark Webb**, who serves within the very liberal-dominated Northeastern Jurisdiction,

affirmed this statement, saying, "I join my colleagues in the Southeastern College of Bishops in viewing the acts of nonconformity as a violation of our covenant and as divisive and disruptive." ✚

**ACTION: Thank Bishop Webb for his leadership: Bishop Mark Webb / Upper New York Conference UMC / 324 University Ave., 3rd Floor / Syracuse, NY 13210 / [bishopwebb@unyumc.org](mailto:bishopwebb@unyumc.org)**



Demonstrators bind their wrists while singing as delegates enter the May 17 afternoon plenary session. They are protesting what they believe is an attempt to silence LGBTQ voices during the 2016 United Methodist General Conference in Portland, Oregon. (Photo: Maile Bradfield/UMNS)

**Please recruit other faithful United Methodists from your congregation to go online to endorse the [www.StandFirmUMC.org](http://www.StandFirmUMC.org) online petition!**

Yes, I (we) want to help UMAction inform United Methodists and their families about the urgent need for church reform and faithfulness

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### Your Opinion, Please!

Which is your preferred path forward?

- An evangelical minority should leave the UMC to form our own denomination.
- The UMC should completely dissolve, through an equitable division of assets, into two or more new denominations.
- The global orthodox majority should require clergy, bishops, and even entire annual conferences to leave if they will not uphold our biblical standards on marriage.
- Something else (please specify)