

# Liberal United Methodist Caucuses Plot to Increase Protests, Stridency at 2016 General Conference

In August, the Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) and the Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA), two unofficial liberal United Methodist caucus groups, organized a “Gather at the River” conference in San Antonio, Texas. Central emphases were preparing for the 2016 General Conference and promoting the disobedience movement. Shattering any illusions about RMN and MFSA being relatively moderate, these older groups invited their formal coalition



The Rev. Will Green of Massachusetts leads a protest on the floor of the 2012 United Methodist General Conference in Tampa, FL. (Photo: Mike DuBose /UMNS)

partner, Love Prevails, a self-described “radical sexual liberation-ist” LGBTQ group led by Amy DeLong, to lead two workshops on “Disruption.” Organizers did not allow IRD/UMAction’s on-site reporter to observe these sessions, citing a desire to protect people’s privacy. Many attendees wore shirts with the Love Prevails slogan: “Disclose, Divest, Disrupt.” The “divest” portion refers to the group’s openly calling upon people to stop attending Methodist congregations or even praying for any parts of the UMC that do not support DeLong’s agenda. In a plenary session, DeLong encouraged activists to bring “gallons and gallons and gallons of piss and vinegar” to General Conference, adding “just think of the trouble we can cause.” Admitting that liberals would not have a majority of votes, she called for “new and disruptive tactics,” explaining that they had nothing to lose. Activists have routinely staged disruptive, angrily self-righteous pro-homosexuality demonstrations at the last several General Conferences. At the 2000 General Conference, 30 were arrested, including two bishops, allowing delegates to do their work and adopt many helpful reforms. Since then, our bishops have shown much less collective resolve.

At the 2012 General Conference, rather than call police to remove protesters who were illegally occupying the floor and halting all business, representatives of our Council of Bishops basically negotiated a deal with activists to restructure the business schedule, prevent delegates from voting on certain petitions, and offer a pandering statement to the protesters, all according to DeLong’s dictates. This emboldened DeLong as she vows to take her protests to a new level of disruption. At this Texas event, Bishop Minerva Carcaño of the California–Pacific Conference, who the Council of Bishops chose to represent them on the powerful Commission on the General Conference, promoted the Commission’s plan to have all “sexuality-related” petitions addressed via a new process in which all delegates, not just those in some legislative committees, will talk about their feelings about the proposals. Many suspect, given the open liberal biases of many on the Commission, that the process is intended to stop accountability-strengthening reforms favored by a majority of delegates. Indeed, Carcaño expressed her hope that this new process would produce results on sexuality issues more to her liking. Rev. Sara Thompson Tweedy, an openly partnered lesbian activist minister, decried liberal church officials who support the LGBTQ cause without going far enough, such as those who had ordained her “with a wink and a nod.” Last year, the late Bishop Martin McLee of New York dismissed formal complaints of sexual immorality filed against Tweedy. In San Antonio, she proposed a national “coming out day” for gay UMC clergy. The conference also plugged causes such as transgenderism (complete with “gender-neutral” bathroom policies at the event), targeting Israel for demonization and boycotts, and unlimited abortion. Thus, while marching under the banner of “inclusion,” the liberal caucuses excluded unborn and Israeli lives. One speaker defined “inclusion” in starkly exclusive terms: It means “all who are NOT white, NOT straight, and NOT over 45.” Other bishops who spoke supportively at the gathering were Mel Talbert (retired from San Francisco) and James Dorff of San Antonio. ✚

**ACTION: Write to your bishop to politely but strongly urge him or her to stand firm in allowing the General Conference to do its work, even if that means arresting a significant number of protesters who disrupt and take over the conference. Your bishop’s contact information can be found by asking your church staff or going to [www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org), clicking “Directory” at the very top of the screen, and then selecting “Bishops/Episcopal Area.”**

# Mississippi Conference Calls UMC to Reform

At their June annual conference session, Mississippi United Methodists elected an overwhelmingly evangelical delegation to the 2016 General Conference. A resolution was adopted, with reportedly about 90 percent support, protesting the lack of consequences for recent high-profile violations of our church’s biblical policies against same-sex unions. The resolution also called on the next General Conference to strengthen our accountability structures for such abuses, and for the resolution to be sent to all active bishops, asking them to share it with their areas’ delegates. The conference also overwhelmingly voted to adopt petitions to the next General Conference that would:

- Change our denomination’s current ambiguous stance on abortion to a clearly pro-life position
- End the formal membership of two UMC agencies—the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) and United Methodist Women (UMW)—in the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC), an extremist political group that stridently opposes any legal restriction or moral opposition to even late-term abortions
- Allow for discipline of radical United Methodist clergy who have obnoxiously disrupted General Conference and other denominational meetings
- Stop many of the recent abuses we have seen of bishops using “just resolutions” to prevent any real accountability for clergy who violate our biblical standards on marriage, by requiring the consent of the person bringing the complaints against renegade clergy before any “just resolution” can be enacted
- Require each of the UMC’s five U.S. regional jurisdictions to pay for its own bishops, effectively ending the radicalized Western Jurisdiction’s receiving over three times as many bishops as the conservative-leaning Southeast; the West relies on heavy subsidies from the rest of the country for the over-representation of its uniformly liberal bishops in denominational leadership
- Limit the ability of the powerful Commission on the General Conference, which our Council of Bishops has stacked with liberal activist appointees, to shrink the size of General Conference in the future, as the Commission did for this General Conference, which has reduced the voting representation of larger U.S. and African church regions. ✚

**ACTION: Write to the delegates from your annual conference (area) to encourage them to support the reform proposals being submitted by the Mississippi and Indiana Conferences. Please contact us if you need help getting in touch with them.**



# UMAction Briefing

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# UMAction Briefing



## In Memoriam: David and Jean Stanley

Last August, IRD board member and longtime UMAction Steering Committee chair David Stanley died at age 86, just a few weeks after his dear wife of 67 years, Jean Leu. He was a marvelous man in every way: generous, smart, patient, kind, meticulous, steadfast, shrewd, confident, full of faith, relishing life and taking joy in the accomplishments of others. David helped facilitate IRD’s hiring Mark Tooley in 1994 as the founding director of IRD’s UMAction program and then hiring John Lomperis as UMAction director in 2012. He also helped elect Mark Tooley as IRD’s president in 2009. A self-described “child of the Depression,” he was endlessly generous toward others but frugal for himself. His faith would never allow him indifference to the institutional church or his country. He was committed to the renewal of both.

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David was a masterful organizer, chair of meetings, handler of difficult situations and people, savvy about procedure, and he had a bewitching eye for detail. Over the course of his full life, David served in the United States Air Force, founded a law firm, served as the Iowa state senate majority leader, and was a delegate to the 1992 General Conference and a reserve delegate to the 2008 General Conference. David’s mind remained sharp, his personality remained gracious, and his dedication to supporting the faithful renewal of United Methodism remained tireless to the end. Jeanie was the ever-constant companion of her devoted husband. She served for 24 years as a trustee of the UMC’s Foundation for Evangelism. She and David were active members of Wesley United Methodist Church in Muscatine, Iowa. In addition to the UMC renewal movement, they were leaders in numerous other philanthropic causes, especially United Marriage Encounter, a Christian ministry devote to strengthening marriages. The Stanleys are survived by four children and ten grandchildren. They are dearly missed, but the work to which they devoted themselves lives on. ✚

**FOR REFLECTION: *Philippians 4:13 (David’s favorite verse); 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18.***

**ACTION: The Stanleys’ legacy can be honored with special contributions to the Institute on Religion and Democracy earmarked for “Stanley Memorial Fund.”**

## Fall 2015

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David and Jean Leu Stanley with IRD President Mark Tooley



# Disobedience Movement Update

As we have regularly informed readers of this *Briefing*, the United Methodist Church has been besieged for the last several years by the “disobedience” movement of renegade clergy who openly defy our church’s compassionate, biblical prohibitions of same-sex unions. This movement is heavily promoted by the well-funded Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) and openly enabled by sympathetic bishops, particularly in the U.S. Western Jurisdiction.

Pam Hawkins, Associate Pastor of Belmont UMC in Nashville, Tennessee, performed a same-sex wedding for a former



Pastor Pam Hawkins was suspended 90 days for marrying a same-sex couple in violation of the United Methodist Discipline (Photo: Reconciling Ministries Network)

employee of the UMC General Board of Discipleship and the man with whom he had been living for fifteen years. Nashville District Superintendent Harriet Bryan filed a complaint, which resulted in a “just resolution,” the UMC equivalent of an out-of-court settlement, which, among other things, suspended Hawkins for 90 days from her church “without pay but with all benefits.” Hawkins’s church then reported that some members plus the “Clergy Defense Fund” of RMN “donated sufficient funds to ensure that Pam Hawkins will maintain her normal income during her suspension.”

In the Upper New York Conference, we reported earlier that the recently retired Rev. Stephen Heiss bragged about performing multiple same-sex unions. Bishop Mark Webb referred the complaint to a counsel for the church, an initial step before a church trial, but then followed the counsel’s recommendation to simply dismiss the complaint with no consequences for Heiss. Some speculate that the bishop, who is not known as theologically liberal, was wary of dragging the conference through a costly trial, at the end of which nothing in the UMC’s governing *Discipline* would guarantee that the jury, which would be drawn from the ranks of the conference’s largely liberal clergy, would impose any significant consequences. IRD/UMAction and others are promoting General Conference petitions that would require a mandatory

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## Disobedience Movement Update

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minimum penalty of a one-year suspension for clergy who perform same-sex unions.

A particularly complex saga of disobedience continues in the West Michigan Conference. In July, the Rev. Benjamin Hutchinson was removed from his pastorate after admitting to having a gay partner. A few days later, supporters held a publicity-stunt wedding service for him and his partner, with two United Methodists, Ginny Mikita and the Rev. Mike Tupper, signing the marriage certificate. To obtain clergy credentials to perform the ceremony, Mikita got ordained by the Universal Life Church, which ordains *anyone* who signs up online. But since UMC rules forbid United Methodists from holding membership or ordination in any other church body, Mikita was removed from both the

## Eastern Pennsylvania Invites Covenant Breakers to Leave UMC

United Methodist annual conference in the generally liberal Northeastern Jurisdiction has officially called on covenant-breaking clergy to leave our denomination.

The disobedience movement of hundreds of clergy pledging to defy our church’s biblical standards (see “Disobedience Movement Update,” page 2), while a small fraction of the whole, has become extremely disruptive due to support from some bishops and the costliness of the judicial processes the UMC uses to hold clergy accountable.

After voting down petitions to oppose our official teaching that sex is a gift only for marriage between one man and one woman, the May 2015 Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference session adopted, by a strong majority, a statement directly rebuking the disobedience movement.

The “Resolution Relating to Affirming our Covenant and Accountability,” offered by the Eastern Pennsylvania Evangelical Connection, strongly affirmed the conference’s commitment to abide by the communal covenant of the United Methodist *Book of Discipline*. The resolution also reminded clergy that they “have voluntarily promised in ordination to uphold our church’s teachings and keep its disciplinary rules,” and defended the importance of “holding one another accountable to [such] promises made.”

For “those clergy who feel that they can no longer abide by our common covenant” and who are unwilling to limit their advocacy to the proper channels of petitioning General Conference and then living with the results, the resolution “calls upon” them “to withdraw themselves from our connection, rather than continue to cause damage to our ministry through ongoing judicial proceedings.”



UMC ordination process and the membership rolls of her local church (which she is welcome to rejoin). Last year, Michigan Bishop Deborah Lieder Kiesey apparently emboldened Tupper by announcing a “just resolution” of no consequences for his performing a same-sex union. Now that another complaint is filed against him, he is on RMN’s website calling for “martyrs” to do same-sex unions, refuse any “just resolution,” and insist on a church trial, while seeking media coverage. ✚

**ACTION: Disobedience activists hope that faithful United Methodists will grow weary and stop calling for accountability for their continued covenant-breaking. Help UMAction prove them wrong! Please contact us if you can be available to file complaints against covenant-breaking clergy in your area, and help prevent bishops and their appointees from controlling the process.**

Eastern Pennsylvania United Methodists have especially suffered from the disobedience movement. Self-described “Christian agnostic” pastor Frank Schaefer tore apart his former congregation when he refused a more amicable settlement offer and insisted on dragging the conference through a painful, costly trial over his performing a same-sex union. Faithful mem-

bers of that conference secured from their Bishop Peggy Johnson a public warning of “no more!” to disobedience activists last year. This was part of a negotiated settlement with the “Philadelphia 36” clergy who performed a publicity-stunt same-sex union to express solidarity with Schaefer. Bishop Johnson has rather ungraciously promoted a political agenda of advancing gay rights at the expense of conscience protections for traditional Christians. This year, a large evangelical congregation in the conference—reportedly the fastest-growing church in the Northeastern jurisdiction—left the UMC, citing frustration with our bishops’ failures to uphold the UMC’s marriage standards.

The disobedience activists and liberal bishops have made clear that, given the choice, they would rather drive out entire thriving congregations than lose a handful of radical, ministry-undermining clergy like the Philadelphia 36. Thankfully, the grassroots people of Bishop Johnson’s own conference have pointed to a more sensible and constructive direction. ✚

**FOR REFLECTION: Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15; Titus 3:10.**

**ACTION: Contact us for sample covenant statements for church leadership positions to help you and others in your congregation begin rebuilding a United Methodist culture of covenant accountability at the congregational level.**

## GOOD NEWS: Many UMC Annual Conferences Vote to Uphold Biblical Teachings on Marriage

Many claim that the majority of the United Methodist Church, at least in the United States, is hopelessly, overwhelmingly theologically liberal and is moving further away from Scripture.

This is worsened when journalists pay disproportionate attention to a loud radical minority or when they make unfounded claims that certain United Methodists who make liberal statements somehow represent where our entire denomination “is moving.”

It is no secret that our denomination has, since before any *Briefing* readers were alive, included a radical element that rejects basic biblical teachings. But before making confident claims about where the whole UMC “is moving,” we need to look at more than just the attention seekers, and at more than just one snapshot in time.

While media attention has been lavished on the actions of small groups within our church that oppose biblical teaching on marriage, comparatively little attention has been paid to much larger groups of United Methodists who continue to affirm biblical teaching.

Since last year, the Eastern Pennsylvania, Western Pennsylvania, East Ohio, Illinois-Great Rivers, (eastern) Texas, Holston (eastern Tennessee), Western North Carolina, (eastern) North Carolina, South Carolina, North Georgia, South Georgia,

Mississippi, and Alabama-West Florida conferences of the UMC all voted in various ways to reject, often overwhelmingly, the agenda of liberalizing our church’s affirmation of the clear historic, biblical Christian teaching that homosexual practice is sinful. These areas are home to 2.6 million United Methodists.

From the South to the Midwest to the Northeast, we see United Methodists following a Higher Authority than the U.S.

Supreme Court on marriage values. Furthermore, over 40 percent of the membership of our increasingly global denomination lives overseas, mostly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the church is more theologically traditionalist and is growing rapidly.

The more the UMC grows in Africa and shrinks in the most liberal regions of the United

States, the better the prospects look for an orthodox turnaround. If you compare votes on identical questions on homosexuality, the majority vote favoring a traditionalist stance significantly increased between the last two General Conferences. The numbers show that our denomination is *actually* “moving” in a more strongly biblical direction. ✚

**FOR REFLECTION: Genesis 1:26-28; Leviticus 18:22; Matthew 5:17-20.**

**ACTION: When you hear people mistakenly portraying our denomination as “moving” in a liberal direction, share the facts to set the record straight.**



## Indiana Conference Endorses Pro-Life, Reform Petitions

Orthodox United Methodists have much to celebrate in last May’s 2015 Indiana Annual Conference session. Indiana is home to more United Methodists than any other conference in our denomination’s North Central Jurisdiction.

The conference adopted a strong statement decrying the violence of ISIS and standing in solidarity with its victims. And UMAction worked hard to successfully get the conference to endorse five petitions to next year’s General Conference:

- Amend our church’s official Social Principles statement on abortion to decry the targeting of unborn children with disabilities for abortion
- Further amend the Social Principles to move our church in a more pro-life direction in other ways
- Add a whole new section on Bioethics to the Social Principles
- Have our denomination follow the good example of other mainline Protestant denominations by ending our scandalous affiliation with the extremist Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC)

- “Make General Conference Work” by requiring plenary votes on petitions that get the endorsement of their legislative committees—a reform that would have prevented much of the dysfunction seen at the last General Conference

These petitions are being submitted in the name of Indiana United Methodists for consideration at the 2016 General Conference. Evangelicals were very encouraged by the individuals Indiana elected to this supreme governing body of our denomination, including UMAction Director John Lomperis, UMAction Steering Committee member James Ottjes, and Amy Land, wife of UMAction Advisory Board member, Pastor Bob Land (who was himself elected to the bishop-electing 2016 North Central Jurisdictional Conference). ✚

**FOR REFLECTION: Psalm 139:13-16.**

**ACTION: Commit now to PRAYING and FASTING regularly for such pro-life reforms to be adopted at the 2016 General Conference.**

Please recruit other believers to sign our [www.methodistsaffirmingmarriage.com](http://www.methodistsaffirmingmarriage.com) 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 the best way forward for the UMC?

- All current United Methodists stay together
- Radical covenant breakers leave our church
- Faithful United Methodists leave to form our own denomination