

GOOD NEWS: West Ohio Bishop Opposes Pot Legalization

West Ohio Bishop Gregory Palmer helpfully weighed in on a recent political effort in his state to establish legalization of recreational marijuana.

Bishop Palmer released a video statement inviting fellow Ohioans to join him in voting against the ballot initiative. He expressed concern for the effects of legalized recreational marijuana

on the safety and health of communities, especially for children. Bishop Palmer shared that he was “deeply concerned” about having marijuana become as widely available as this measure would have made it. He distinguished medical marijuana (with

which many also take issue) from purely recreational marijuana – largely to highlight how Issue 3 would legalize both.

The West Ohio Annual Conference set up a web page encouraging visitors to download the bishop’s video statement to play to their congregations and noting such concerns with Issue 3 as

Disobedience Movement Update

As we and others have reported, our denomination is being besieged by a small but extremely vocal and disruptive Disobedience Movement of United Methodist clergy who flamboyantly betray the vows they made voluntarily at their ordinations to uphold our denomination’s policies of biblical standards for sexual self-control. This movement threatens the very foundations of our denomination’s faithfulness, unity, and basis for mutual trust.

Bishops in New York, Minnesota, Michigan, Iowa, and the Western Jurisdiction have in various ways allowed clergy in their regions to perform same-sex union ceremonies. This subset of U.S. bishops betrays their own vows to God and the church to uphold our governing *Discipline*. They threaten to establish a new *de facto* reality in which The United Methodist Church becomes, in many regions, a denomination whose ministers are perfectly free to perform same-sex unions or personally be sexually active outside of man-woman marriage, regardless of what the Bible teaches, what our official UMC standards say, or what they themselves promised.

Now the divisive, any-means-necessary disobedience movement is going to a new level in two annual conferences.

dramatically increased marijuana access and use, “broad exposure” of high school and college students to the drug, children being lured by pot-laced cookies and candies, and negative results in other states that have legalized marijuana.

It is rare to see one of our bishops so prominently advocate a stand on a public policy matter that is contrary to the reflexively left-wing stances of our denomination’s General Board of Church and Society (GBCS). But the GBCS board of directors adopted a “Criminal Justice” resolution, now submitted for consideration at our denomination’s General Conference, which very broadly calls for repealing criminalization of “personal drug use.” Unlike Bishop Palmer’s advocacy, the GBCS’s stance amounts to demanding legalization of all recreational drugs, not just marijuana.

Thankfully, Ohio voters overwhelmingly voted down Issue 3 last fall. ✝

FOR REFLECTION: Scripture repeatedly warns against the dangers of intoxication, as in Proverbs 20:1, Isaiah 5:11–12, Romans 13:13, Galatians 5:19–21, Ephesians 5:17–20, 1 Peter 4:3.

ACTION: Thank Bishop Gregory Palmer for taking his helpful stance against marijuana: West Ohio Conference Center/ 32 Wesley Boulevard / Worthington, Ohio 43085 / wocbishop@wocumc.org

Our *Discipline* forbids the ordination of “self-avowed, practicing homosexuals.” But in February, the Baltimore-Washington Conference Board of Ordained Ministry (BOOM) announced that it was recommending lesbian activist Tara Morrow for commissioning as Provisional Deacon (a step prior to ordination), while knowing full well that she is legally “married” to another woman. BOOM chair Charles Parker publicly stated that “we all know that she is married” and “can make assumptions” about whether or not Morrow has sexual relations with her lesbian partner, “but we don’t tend to question candidates” on such matters.

Shortly after that, the New York Conference BOOM adopted a new formal policy of explicitly welcoming self-identified “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, questioning, intersexed” (LGBTQI) ordination candidates. In a statement, William Pfohl, chair of that conference BOOM, declared, “Discriminating against married persons regardless of the gender of their spouse . . . is not the path we believe God is calling us to walk.”

On a related note, last year the Baltimore-Washington and New York Conferences reported worship-attendance decreases of 2.8 and 5.9 percent—huge declines for a single year.

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Which Way for the UMC Lobby Office?

Perhaps the most controversial part of our denomination’s hierarchy is the D.C. political lobby office, the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS). Under the leadership of the Rev. Susan Henry-Crowe since 2014, there have been improvements in tone, but concerns remain.

For many General Conferences, GBCS staff has urged church support for homosexual practice and the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC), which opposes any moral opposition to or mild legal restriction of elective abortion.

GBCS does relatively little to advocate for millions of persecuted global Christians, instead focusing more on divisive left-wing political causes, as we have documented.

Revealingly, GBCS seeks no changes to its nearly all-USA board of directors. Growing African United Methodism, with over 40 percent of our denomination’s membership, has less than five percent of the 63-member board.

GBCS marked Good Friday 2016 with a statement from its president, Bishop Robert Hoshibata of Phoenix, that avoided mention of Jesus’ dying for our sins but promoted LGBTQ liberation and the GBCS’s oft-repeated Universalist assertion that *everyone* is automatically a child of God, even without conversion to and adoption through Christ. ✝

FOR REFLECTION: Romans 8:13–20; Galatians 3:26–4:7; 1 John 2:28–3:10; John 8:44.

ACTION: Write to the Rev. Susan Henry-Crowe to respectfully ask her to support efforts at this General Conference to add more Africans to her board and lead her staff towards less divisive behavior: GBCS / 100 Maryland Avenue NE / Washington, DC 20002 / shenrycrowe@umc-gbcs.org



United Methodist GBGS President and Bishop Robert Hoshibata (seated) looks on as General Secretary Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe addresses the Board. (Photo: John Lomperis/IRD)

UMAction Briefing

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UMAction Briefing

UMAction Supports Covenantal Unity Plan

UMAction is pleased to announce our strong support for the group of petitions to the May 2016 United Methodist General Conference known as the Covenantal Unity Plan (CUP).

Spearheaded by two prominent United Methodist biblical scholars—Bill Arnold of Asbury Theological Seminary and David Watson of United Theological Seminary—CUP is a carefully developed plan that would protect as much of the true unity of our church as possible, by restoring Christian covenant to our denominational community.

Thus far, CUP is the *only* major plan submitted to this General Conference with public endorsements from all five U.S. jurisdictions of the UMC, every

other continent in which our denomination has a presence (Africa, Europe, and Asia), and even every central conference in Africa.

First, this plan fixes holes in our accountability system that some have abused to allow clergy to get away with

defiantly violating our denomination’s clear prohibition on performing same-sex union ceremonies. CUP would amend the “just resolution” process (basically out-of-court settlements that some bishops have used to protect clergy who do wrong) by requiring that these must involve the person filing the complaint. Furthermore, the offending clergy must apologize and promise to not repeat the violations of our governing *Book of Discipline* they admit they have violated. For clergy who refuse such a just resolution and are found by a church trial to have conducted a same-sex union ceremony, CUP would require that they face significant, deterrent consequences (in contrast to the token suspensions we have seen for as little as 24 hours): one year suspension for the first offense, and permanent removal from ministry for the second.

Since a few U.S. bishops have simply refused to uphold relevant parts of our *Discipline*, and the Western Jurisdiction bishops effectively protected retired Bishop Melvin Talbert of San Francisco from accountability after he became our first bishop to perform a same-sex union, CUP creates a new process through which bishops will be held accountable through a global system less likely to wink at any regionally acceptable sins.

Adoption of the CUP would give clergy who dissent from our denomination’s biblical standards for sexual self-control a clear choice: either commit to honoring the communal covenant of our *Discipline* while limiting

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CUP is spearheaded by two prominent United Methodist biblical scholars—Bill Arnold of Asbury Theological Seminary and David Watson of United Theological Seminary.

'Reconciling' Caucus Promotes LGBTQ+ Indoctrination in United Methodist Vacation Bible Schools, Sunday Schools

Some are now promoting United Methodist Sunday schools and vacation Bible schools (VBS) as vehicles for teaching young children to accept homosexual relationships and transgenderism. The January 16 "Winter Warming" gathering was one such voice. The conference was organized by the Chicago-area



Bishop Dyck introduces Bishop Carcaño, who looks on with Rev. Tracy Smith-Malone (Photo Credit: John Lomperis, IRD)

chapter of the Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN), the main unofficial caucus that urges UMC acceptance of same-sex relationships as well as extra-marital sex more generally.

A break-out workshop entitled "Make Your VBS LGBTQ+ Friendly" had the stated goal of making early childhood programs affirming of LGBTQ+ lifestyles and ideology.

To protect children from having to conform, workshop participants were urged to "drop the gender binary" by avoiding language such as "boys and girls" and having "all-gender restrooms." ("Winter Warming" organizers apparently didn't see how this could possibly go wrong with immature, vulnerable children.)

This workshop also recommended children's books for church libraries, from cutesy stories of adorable preschoolers raised by same-sex couples (portrayed as no less equipped for parenting than any mother-father couple), to a particularly disturbing children's book about a little boy who found joyful fulfillment when his parents finally let him dress and identify as a girl (rather than taking him to counseling to address his struggles to accept the biological reality of his God-given sex).

UMAction Supports CUP

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opposition to the proper channels, or leave our denomination rather than continuing to undermine it from within. CUP does NOT "kick out the liberals," as has been falsely suggested. Instead, it would offer extraordinary graciousness to those liberal United Methodists who believe they cannot follow our biblical standards on marriage, by letting clergy keep their pensions, or congregations keep their property, if they decide to leave the UMC over their disagreement on this issue. ✚

FOR REFLECTION: 1 Timothy 5:20.

ACTION: Add your endorsement to the Covenantal Unity Plan: www.covenantalunity.org

In March, the American College of Pediatricians released a statement declaring that "Conditioning children into believing a lifetime of chemical and surgical impersonation of the opposite sex is normal and healthful [as the "Winter Warming" event sought to promote] is child abuse."

At another point during "Winter Warming," Chett Pritchett, executive director of the Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA), plugged efforts to establish a U.S.-only central conference, which would drastically limit the denominational influence of more traditionalist United Methodists from Africa and other parts of the world. Other speakers at this event included Bishops Sally Dyck of Chicago and Minerva Carcaño of Los Angeles. ✚

FOR REFLECTION: Matthew 18:2-7.

ACTION: Learn more about Transforming Congregations, a ministry of United Methodists that lovingly serves those experiencing confusion about their sexuality or gender identity by offering genuine, biblical Christian compassion—rather than dangerous encouragement of ultimately self-destructive lifestyles: www.transcong.org

UMAction Submits Automatic Penalties Plan

Among the actions UMAction has taken in response to the disobedience movement is submitting our Automatic Penalties Plan for consideration at the 2016 UMC General Conference.

For those clergy who violate our denomination's ban on same-sex union ceremonies, our petitions would establish a new accountability process that would be much more transparent, efficient, deterrent, and effective than our current mechanisms.

Under this plan, when ministers openly admit to their bishop that they performed a same-sex union (so that there is no question that they did it), bishops would be required to swiftly impose serious, specified penalties. For this offense, bishops and others charged with enforcing our church's standards would lose their ability to undermine accountability with extreme delays, simple inaction, or meaningless "slap on the wrist" penalties. For first-time offenders, bishops would be required to suspend them from ministry for 1-3 years. At the conclusion of such suspensions, offending clergy would be required to promise to refrain from violating our ban on same-sex unions again. If they refused to make such a promise, or broke this promise,

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Automatic Penalties Plan

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they would automatically be permanently removed from United Methodist ministry.

This plan would remove the costs, hassles, and risks of "just resolutions," committees that potentially overrule accountability, and church trials. The result would be clear: UMC rules do not allow clergy to perform same-sex union services. United Methodist clergy who do so are not allowed to continue performing same-sex union services. After observing this consequence, other clergy will think twice about joining the disobedience movement.

This plan goes much further than the Covenantal Unity Plan (see cover story), without conflicting with it. Since the Automatic Penalties Plan involves amending the UMC's Constitution, it would require a two-thirds super-majority vote of the delegates at this year's General Conference and of the voting members of next year's annual conferences around the world. But well over 60 percent of delegates at recent General Conferences have already affirmed our ban on same-sex unions. This plan would offer by far the quickest, most decisive way for our denomination to keep this compassionate standard and move forward in mission beyond our present internal conflicts over sexuality. ✚

FOR REFLECTION: 1 Corinthians 5.

ACTION: Commit, with others in your congregation, to pray daily that in spite of the many barriers, the May 10-20 General Conference will make many decisive, final decisions to amend our Discipline to restore faithfulness and accountability to our beloved, troubled denomination. ✚

Disobedience Movement Update

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There have previously been scattered cases of homosexually partnered clergy dodging accountability by legalistically refusing to technically "self-avow" that they are sexually active.

UMAction is supporting a petition at this General Conference that would define "self-avowed, practicing homosexuals" to include anyone legally "married" to someone of the same gender. If this petition passes, our denomination's rules will much more clearly prevent such persons from being ordained or appointed to serve as United Methodist clergy, stopping the legalistic games some activists and boards of ordained ministry have played with the phrase "self-avowed." ✚

FOR REFLECTION: Proverbs 25:28; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; James 3:1.

ACTION: Contact the General Conference delegates from your area to respectfully urge them to support the plans and petitions described in this briefing that would restore accountability and strengthen enforcement of our denomination's rules against our clergy performing same-sex unions or being "married" to anyone of the same sex.

GOOD NEWS: Evangelical Pastors Continue Growing UMC Congregations

Earlier this year, a study of America's large United Methodist congregations—defined as having at least 1,000 people in average worship attendance—listed the 25 that are the fastest-growing in average worship attendance over the last five years of reporting.

While there was some variation, 15 (60 percent) of these fastest-growing UMC congregations in America are shepherded by senior pastors known as biblically grounded, theologically orthodox evangelicals, most of whom have rather publicly called for accountability for clergy who betray our ban on same-sex unions. Ten of these senior pastors are graduates of independent, evangelical Asbury Theological Seminary, while no other seminary has half as many alumni on this list. Six of our denomination's more liberal official



Dale Locke, pictured with his wife Beth, pastors Community of Hope United Methodist Church in Loxahatchee Groves, FL, one of the fastest growing congregations in the denomination. (Photo: Community of Hope)

seminaries—Boston University School of Theology, Claremont, Drew, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Iliff, and the Methodist Theological School in Ohio—have *not one* graduate on the list. Twenty of the 25 churches are located in our denomination's relatively more conservative Southern jurisdictions.

Of the 12 making both this year's list of fastest-growing congregations and a similar list last year, none are in the Western or Northeastern Jurisdictions (our two most liberal regions), two-thirds are shepherded by evangelical senior pastors, half of whom are Asbury alumni.

Of the five making both of these lists as well as a similar 2011 list of fastest-growing congregations, *ALL FIVE* have senior pastors known as solidly evangelical, three of whom went to Asbury.

Trends like these are encouraging for the future of our denomination. ✚

FOR REFLECTION: John 15:1-6.

ACTION: To read interviews with the pastors of some of these fastest-growing United Methodist congregations, go to www.juicyecumenism.com/topic/effective-united-methodist-churches/

The Methodist Madrassah of Southern California

While doing little to train the next generation of UMC clergy, one official United Methodist seminary is very committed to training Muslim imams.

Located in the heart of the fast-declining California-Pacific Conference, Claremont School of Theology has in recent years educated only a small fraction of newly ordained United Methodist clergy. For example, in the U.S. ordination class of 2013, 64, 41, 34, and 4 members were alumni of Asbury, Duke, Candler, and Claremont, respectively. Not one of the pastors of our 25 fastest-growing congregations (See "Evangelical Pastors" at left in this *Briefing*) is a Claremont graduate.

Aside from training tiny numbers of United Methodist clergy, Claremont offers a master's degree in Islamic Studies and Leadership, which it explains is "for students interested in positions of leadership in Muslim contexts."

Furthermore, since 2011, an institution called Bayan Claremont has operated as a division of Claremont School of Theology. Bayan Claremont's stated mission is "educat[ing] American Muslim scholars and religious leaders" in order "to produce a cadre of pioneering indigenous Muslim scholars and leaders who will positively serve the needs of the Islamic community" and to "increase the number of those who are qualified and well-positioned to effectively present the Islamic faith to the broader American society."

So the clearly stated purpose of Claremont's master's and certificate programs in Islamic Chaplaincy, Islamic Education, and Islamic Studies and Leadership is not merely academic under-

standing of Islam or improved interfaith relations, but actively training Muslims to more effectively promote and advance their religion.

Claremont is propped up by many hundreds of thousands of dollars in yearly apportionments from our UMC offering plates. While these funds are now restricted to being used for the benefit of United Methodist students, supporting one part of an institution's budget helps its total budget.

Petitions submitted to this upcoming General Conference would prevent Claremont or other official UMC seminaries from receiving further direct funding from this Ministerial Education Fund if they continue offering programs so explicitly designed to train religious leaders of non-Christian faith communities. ✚

FOR REFLECTION: John 14:6; Acts 4:10-12; Galatians 2:21.

ACTION: Contact your area's General Conference delegates to urge them to support the petitions to stop our offering-plate apportionments from funding any UMC seminaries offering programs patently designed to train non-Christian religious leaders.



Sign for the Claremont School of Theology in Claremont, Calif. (Photo: Claremont School of Theology)

Please recruit other believers to sign our www.methodistsaffirmingmarriage.com online petition!

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Your Opinion, Please!

Should UMC seminaries sponsor training for Muslim imams?

- No. Our seminaries should promote only the Christian faith.
- Yes. We should trust the seminaries to do whatever they think is best on such questions.
- Unsure.