

# UMAction

## Briefing



## General Conference Redirects UMC to Historic, Wesleyan Orthodoxy

**T**he 2016 General Conference of the United Methodist Church, held May 10-20 in Portland, Oregon, will likely be remembered as a historic turning point in the history of our 12.7-million member denomination.

Held once every four years, United Methodist General Conferences are the only body that can change denomination-wide policies and position statements. Recent General Conferences are recalled for being dominated by some of the most liberal Americans, the lack of more than a tiny number of non-U.S. delegates, and American evangelicals seeming like a besieged minority.

This year, previously very powerful liberal agencies saw their influence wane as our denomination's membership has shifted overseas and UMAction and other renewal groups have become better organized.

### The voting revealed a clear, growing majority of orthodox American and overseas delegates.

African delegates, who are generally more theologically traditional than American United Methodists, were more numerous and more engaged in the process than ever before. As an elected delegate, UMAction director **John Lomperis** helped lead the successful efforts to defeat liberal "global segregation" proposals to limit the voice of African members in denominational affairs and to instead adopt reforms to require future General Conferences to function better and offer better translation services.

The voting revealed a clear, growing majority of orthodox American and overseas delegates. Every new member the General Conference elected to our denomination's Judicial Council (which reviews disputes related to upholding the UMC's governing *Book of Discipline*) and University Senate (which oversees our seminaries) was supported by this coalition. Other elections added strong evangelical voices to the previously liberal-dominated Commission on the General Conference.

On core spiritual concerns, we adopted reforms to promote our denomination's orthodox doctrinal standards, support re-introducing a version of the "class meetings" of early Methodism, and encourage a spiritually helpful broadening of women's ministries.

This General Conference maintained our denomination's biblical, traditionalist standards on marriage and sex, while making some progress in advancing accountability for violations of these standards.

This was the General Conference that finally overcame decades of resistance by some of our denomination's most powerful "heavy hitters" to end our denomination's official support for "pro-choice" extremism on abortion.

## Summer 2016

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The Rev. Jerry Paye-Manfloe Kulah, a clergy delegate from the Liberia Conference, speaks to the United Methodist General Conference in Portland, Oregon, on May 12. Kulah spoke against adoption of Rule 44, which would have introduced small group discussions for sensitive issues. The proposed rule was not approved. (Photo: Paul Jeffrey/UMNS)

# UMC Maintains Biblical Sexuality Teaching

This General Conference once again maintained our denomination's biblical standards on marriage and sex.

This was no small thing. Approaching this General Conference, a flurry of petitions would have deleted these parts of our denomination's governing *Book of Discipline*:

- The *Social Principles* teaching that sexual relations are only for “the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage,” that homosexual practice is “incompatible with Christian teaching” and that marriage is only between one man and one woman
- The prohibition on our congregations hosting or our clergy performing same-sex union ceremonies
- The ban on ordaining “self-avowed, practicing homosexuals”

Such petitions were bolstered by lavish funding poured into liberal caucuses, powerful external cultural pressures, and the once-influential Connectional Table, which submitted and heavily lobbied for what it misleadingly labeled a “Third Way” or “compromise” plan to effectively mandate acceptance of same-sex union services and homosexually active clergy in every local area in our denomination.

All such proposals were defeated in their legislative committees.

Some petitions submitted by advocates for the LGBTQ cause—the New York and Upper New York Conferences along with liberal congregations in Oklahoma and Norway—would have, in various ways, removed denominational stances against not only homosexual practice, but also sex outside of marriage more broadly.

While some activists initially expressed optimism for at least partially liberalizing our sexual-morality standards, by the end of the initial committee voting, it was clear that on such issues, this was perhaps the most conservative General Conference in modern times. In frustration, liberal delegates, in cooperation with an extraordinary intervention from our bishops, urged a “pause button” proposal that had been hastily endorsed (with some dissents) by the UMC Council of Bishops. This motion tabled all “sexuality” matters for the sake of “refer[ring] this entire subject to a special Commission, named by the Council of Bishops,” and possibly having a specially called General Conference focused on the subject at some point between now and 2020. General Conferences are the only bodies capable of changing United Methodist denomination-wide policies.



Clergy who favor changing prohibitions on homosexual practice in the life of The United Methodist Church line up outside the Oregon Convention Center in Portland, Oregon, on May 18. The protest, which included hanging the stoles of scores of defrocked clergy on crosses, took place during the 2016 United Methodist General Conference. (Photo: Paul Jeffrey/UMNS)

**Bishop Scott Jones** of Wichita soon issued a statement, later disseminated by other bishops, making clear that this motion did *not* impose a moratorium on upholding our church's standards.

The passage of this “pause button” motion in a narrow 51–49 percent vote (with the support of some conservative delegates who wanted to move on) kept in place our biblical standards on marriage and sexuality. It also allowed the expiration of an embarrassing older resolution decrying “heterosexism and homophobia” so that that foolish allegation is no longer an official UMC statement.

This was the second General Conference in a row in which liberal delegates gave up even trying to remove our prohibitions of same-sex unions and homosexually active clergy. On the other hand, the “pause button” motion resulted in many petitions to strengthen accountability mechanisms for clergy who break our standards being tabled, in the name of letting the commission handle such matters, even though some of these petitions made no explicit mention of sexuality and/or appeared likely to get the support of the majority of delegates. ✚

**ACTION:** Write to the three bishops named as moderators of this special commission and respectfully urge them to ensure that the commission membership reflects the geographic and theological balance of our denomination, that it is not “stacked” to disproportionately boost liberal voices, and that it allows fair consideration of accountability-strengthening petitions on which the 2016 General Conference was prevented from voting: Bishop Ken Carter / Florida Conference UMC / 450 Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue / Lakeland, FL 33815 / Bishop@flumc.org; Bishop Sandra Steiner-Ball / West Virginia Conference UMC / 900 Washington Street E / Charleston, WV 25301 / wvareaumc@aol.com; Bishop David Yemba / Central Congo UMC / 2867 Ave Des Ecuries, Ngaliema / B.P. 4727, Kinshasa II / Democratic Republic of Congo / bishopccongo@yahoo.com.



# UMC Decisively Turns Away from Anti-Israel Divestment

A top “social justice” priority for liberal United Methodist caucuses was to get our UMC to officially join the far-left movement in singling out Israel for punitive economic divestment. They had apparent momentum from endorsements by several annual conferences, the support of a denomination-wide agency (the GBCS), and recent victories in non-Methodist groups. **Rev. Mike Slaughter**, a megachurch pastor, recently hosted a major conference, in partnership with our denomination’s General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM), promoting targeting Israel for “Boycotts, Divestment, and Sanctions” (BDS), with the more narrowly worded Israel-divestment petitions submitted to this General Conference being a part of this wider campaign.

UMAction and others have raised serious moral concerns about activism that whitewashes the wrongdoing of Israel’s enemies and presents glaring moral inconsistencies such as the GBCS singling out democratic Israel for punitive divestment while at the same time, in another of its petitions, promoting economic investment in totalitarian North Korea.

Despite all the energy, the various petitions promoting anti-Israel divestment were decisively defeated in their legislative committee.

Hours before General Conference concluded, a move was made to amend a petition on another subject to require divestment of United Methodist assets from “companies that are involved in...illegal settlements on occupied land.” A subsequent speech made clear that Israel was the main intended target. But **Alex Joyner**, clergy delegate from Virginia and a leader of United Methodists for Constructive Peacemaking in Israel and Palestine, countered, “Divestment in this conflict is an ineffective and divisive act” and “is built on the notion that Israel alone is responsible for the situation of the occupation, and that Israel alone can end it,” which “is a simplistic and unfair narrative.” This anti-Israel amendment was rejected by an overwhelming 77–23 percent. This was a significant shift from the main vote on the issue at the last General Conference, where the divestment cause (in a more specifically worded proposal) was rejected by a 2–1 margin.

In a surprising irony, rather than divest from Israel, the General Conference instead called on the GBGM to divest itself

from extreme anti-Israel activism. By a vote of 60–40 percent, delegates adopted a petition from the Northwest Texas Annual Conference that “encourages the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) to withdraw its current membership in the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation...and to end any financial contributions, including staff participation.” This submitted rationale explained that the Campaign (which the GBGM itself helped establish) is a “one-sided political coalition” whose web-

site describes its goals as working “to isolate Israel economically, socially, and culturally,” and promoting “comprehensive divestment” from Israel.

Disappointingly, a petition decrying anti-Semitism around the world, authored by UMAction Director John Lomperis, was defeated, albeit by a narrower-than-expected margin. The tide seemed to turn against the petition when **Rev. Sandra Olewine**, clergy delegate from the California-Pacific Conference and former GBGM “missionary” in Jerusalem, falsely claimed that the resolution would “blanketly limit” opposition or “any sort of critique” of the Israeli government. As the pre-

senter of the petition, Lomperis was expected to have a chance to respond and set the record straight. He would have noted that this resolution was not focused on the Arab-Israeli conflict, and in fact had one section that (contrary to Olewine’s misrepresentations) very explicitly “reject[ed] over-simplifying rhetoric that calls all criticisms of actions of the Israeli government anti-Semitic” while suggesting basic principles for how to avoid crossing a line in criticisms of the world’s lone Jewish state. But that session was presided over by **Bishop Minerva Carcaño** (Olewine’s bishop), who intervened to prevent Lomperis from giving his prepared speech. ✚

**ACTION: Write to the GBGM's General Secretary to respectfully urge him to respect the will of General Conference by ending GBGM membership, support, and staff involvement in the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, and to further turn his agency away from political activism that unfairly blames Israel while ignoring the wrongdoing of Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran, and other declared enemies of Israel: Mr. Thomas Kemper / General Board of Global Ministries / 475 Riverside Drive / New York, New York 10115 / [TKemper@umcmmission.org](mailto:TKemper@umcmmission.org)**



(Photo: Creative Commons Share/Flickr)

# Election of Lesbian Bishop Candidate Challenged



The head of the United Methodist Church's Council of Bishops said the election of Karen Oliveto (shown at left being interviewed), its first openly lesbian bishop, in July raises significant concerns and questions of church polity and unity. (Photo: YouTube Screen Capture)

Council, the UMC's "supreme court," rule on the permissibility of making someone like Oliveto a Bishop.

Home to only two percent of United Methodists, the Western Jurisdiction has a long history of flaunting our denomination's orthodox standards, and of especially rapid membership decline. Oliveto's election was part of the divisive antics of a small minority.

Dr. Oliveto has a history of radicalism. Her campaign literature highlighted her previously pastoring a church when it decided to serve as a medical marijuana dispensary. In her teachings at the Reconciling Ministries Network's "Hearts on Fire" convocation, she spoke about "the benefits and flaws" of Scripture, criticized Jesus Christ's own relevant teaching about sheep and goats in Matthew 25, and bizarrely attacked Paul's exorcising a demon from a slave girl (as recorded in Acts 16) while defending the benefits the demon brought its victim.

The Judicial Council could rule on this matter as early as October. ✚

**FOR REFLECTION:** *Matthew 7:15-23; 1 Timothy 1:3.*

**ACTION:** *Pray for the Judicial Council to effectively overturn this election. Recruit as many like-minded United Methodist friends as possible to go online and endorse the [www.standfirmumc.org](http://www.standfirmumc.org) declaration. And write to your bishop to respectfully urge a new level of public leadership, making clear that the church cannot accept Oliveto as a legitimate bishop. Contact information for your bishop can be found in your church office or at <http://www.umc.org/directory>*

## Funding Doubles for Overseas Seminary Education

Highlighting United Methodism's increasingly international nature, this General Conference doubled funding for the Central Conference Theological Education Fund. This is the main fund through which apportionments from our entire denomination support seminary education of United Methodist clergy outside of the United States.

While this fund had been slated for no increase from the \$5 million budgeted for 2013–2016, a coalition of orthodox American and overseas delegates successfully doubled this to \$10 million for 2017–2020. In calling for the added funding, **Rev. Dr. Bill Arnold**, Old Testament Professor at Asbury Theological Seminary and a clergy delegate from Kentucky, noted that by 2020 over half of United Methodists will live in Europe, Asia, and Africa, and "[w]e are woefully underfunding theological

education for the very portion of our church which is growing the fastest." While our denomination has long been losing members in the United States, it is rapidly growing in many overseas regions, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where 95 percent of non-American United Methodists live.

The total 2017–2020 UMC apportionment budget will be \$604 million, a slight increase from the \$603.1 million budget for 2013–2016. Our denomination's U.S.-based general agencies cut their proposed income from offering-plate apportionments by rather modest amounts, ranging from 0.7 to 2.1 percent over the next four years. Meanwhile, this General Conference also approved a new system for overseas central conferences to begin contributing more to the denomination-wide budget. ✚

**REFLECTION:** *Revelation 7:9-17.*

**ACTION:** *Praise God for his work in making new disciples and growing our church overseas, where United Methodism is often more biblically faithful than in the United States.*





Retired Bishop Melvin Talbert co-officiates at the wedding of Jim Wilborne and John Romano, both 52, at First United Methodist Church in Charlotte, N.C. (Photo: Reconciling Ministries Network)

## Slow Progress on Accountability

One of the most urgent issues facing this General Conference was not merely defensively “holding the line” on our denomination’s present biblical standards on marriage and sexual morality, but strengthening our enforcement tools for the renegade Methodist clergy who have been openly violating our denomination’s bans on same-sex union ceremonies and homosexually active clergy. In recent years, an increasing number of liberal bishops have actively protected such rogue clergy from accountability.

But while many of the top-priority accountability petitions pushed by UMAction and our renewal friends passed the initial review of their legislative committees, most of these were

tabled by the motion to defer action on sexuality-related matters (see “UMC Maintains Biblical Sexuality Teaching,” page 2). The Agenda Committee, a small group appointed by the Council of Bishops for each General Conference, decided to even table some petitions framed as strengthening accountability for clergy who violate any of our standards, with no explicit mention of sexuality.

However, this General Conference did accomplish a few things. It adopted petitions to bring a little more transparency in our accountability processes, and to require those appointed as counsel for the church to be willing to uphold our

church law in pursuing charges against wayward clergy. More significantly, it overwhelmingly adopted a package of reforms to make bishops more accountable to the global Council of Bishops, rather than only to their respective regions. This would help end the impunity with which some bishops have flaunted our standards.

The need for this reform was especially evident after retired **Bishop Melvin Talbert** of San Francisco performed a publicity stunt of becoming the first United Methodist bishop to officiate at a same-sex union service. A complaint was filed against him on behalf of the entire Council of Bishops, and the process was handled among the bishops within Talbert’s Western Jurisdiction (as required by church law at the time). However, that region’s bishops are uniformly liberal, so the process resulted in no reprimand or serious consequences for Talbert. The reforms made at this General Conference will help with other actual and potential situations in which it is fairer to remove the responsibility for holding bishops accountable from the regional level for sins that certain regional cultures have come to view as acceptable.

But these crucial reforms to hold bishops more accountable cannot take effect unless an enabling amendment to the United Methodist Church’s constitution is adopted by a two-thirds vote of all UMC annual conferences. ✚

**ACTION:** *Begin talking now to your pastor, others from your church, and friends from other congregations about the importance of voting for this constitutional amendment at the Spring 2017 session of your annual conference. If it is not yet settled who your congregation’s representative(s) to annual conference will be, recruit someone who will be committed to supporting this constitutional amendment.*



Graduates process during a March 23, 2013 celebration commemorating the 20th anniversary of United Methodist-affiliated Africa University in Zimbabwe. (Photo: Kathleen Barry/UMNS)

# UMC Abandons Abortion Coalition, ‘Pro-Choice’ Extremism



The Rev. Beth Ann Cook, Indiana Conference, introduces a petition from the Church and Society legislative committee regarding The United Methodist Church's association with the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. The vote took place May 19 at the denomination's 2016 General Conference in Portland, Oregon. (Photo: Maile Bradfield/UMNS)

Methodist resolution broadly affirming RCRC's work. **Rev. Beth Ann Cook**, a clergy delegate from Indiana, deserves particular credit for her amazing presentation of her committee's recommendation to withdraw our church from RCRC.

Much smaller groups of United Methodists later expressed their strong support of RCRC. **Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe**, the GBCS's General Secretary, and **Harriett Olson**, national CEO of United Methodist Women, penned a joint open letter expressing "regret" at having to obey the

General Conference's order to withdraw from RCRC, great appreciation for RCRC's work, and no sympathy with the concerns of the majority of United Methodists who wanted to end this relationship. But in any case, this cuts by 40 percent the number of Americans who are members of RCRC-affiliated religious bodies, leaving behind a much-smaller coalition of Unitarian Universalist, Jewish, humanist, and dying liberal Protestant groups.

Pro-life United Methodists have also been upset because our church had an official resolution very broadly affirming abortion, even in contradiction to more life-affirming parts of our *Social Principles*, and endorsing the infamous *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court abortion decision under the guise of "Responsible Parenthood." Liberal denominational officials used to love citing this resolution as allegedly giving them cover for attaching our church's name to their political activism in defense of abortion. Olson's UMW headquarters submitted a petition to this General Conference that would have re-adopted this resolution after first strengthening its unapologetic moral support of abortion. In the plenary debate, **James Eychaner** of the California-Nevada Conference warned that failure to pass UMW's petition would mean deleting a statement our church has had on the books since 1976. But **Vicki Stahlman** of Western Pennsylvania noted, "Abortion stops a beating heart" and complained that "this resolution does not recognize the humanity and value of my grandson." **Beverly Maddox** of the Alabama-West Florida Conference highlighted the petition's supporting abortion as a means of birth control and its denying that life begins at conception. "My babies' lives began the minute that those two cells joined together and began to multiply, immediately," she said. The UMW petition was defeated 59–41 percent. So this resolution is no longer an official United Methodist stance.

In other actions, this General Conference re-adopted a resolution decrying sex-selective abortion (and also describing

**F**or decades, a great source of anguish to traditional United Methodists has been the political activism of some denominational bureaucrats who defend elective abortion in all cases, contradicting two millennia of ecumenical Christian teaching defending the dignity of unborn children and their mothers.

Since 1988, General Conferences have amended the basically muddled statement on abortion in our denomination's *Social Principles* to add an increasing number of incremental pro-life nuances, from equally affirming "the sacredness of the life and well-being of the mother and the unborn child" to calling for reduced abortion rates to opposing abortion as a method of birth control, gender selection, or eugenics.

But the national headquarters of United Methodist Women (UMW) and our denomination's DC lobby office, the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS), have been enthusiastic member organizations of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC), which stridently decries any legal restriction or even moral disapproval of abortion. RCRC actually promotes rituals to bless all the work of elective abortion clinics, describing aborting unborn children as always "holy work."

United Methodist leaders helped found RCRC in 1973 and our denomination has been officially affiliated with RCRC from its beginning. Efforts at earlier General Conferences to challenge this affiliation had been defeated by well-organized liberal delegates, outright deceptions (such as one RCRC supporter telling delegates that it was not a pro-choice advocacy group), and sneaky parliamentary tricks.

But the 2016 General Conference finally overcame such barriers. There were passionate speeches defending RCRC, attempts to stifle discussion, and even testimony before the plenary session by a GBCS official (which is atypical). But after the truth about RCRC came out, the voting was not even close. Delegates voted 61–39 percent to require GBCS and UMW to end their membership in RCRC, and then 74–26 percent to delete an official United

See UMC Abandons Abortion Coalition, page 7



# General Conference Affirms Women's Ministries Other Than UMW

**A**fter many years of frustration, our denomination's evangelical renewal movement finally achieved a long-sought victory at this General Conference. Changes to the United Methodist *Book of Discipline* and *Book of Resolutions* now explicitly support "supplemental women's ministry programs" in local congregations in addition to United Methodist Women (UMW).

While members of local UMW units are often stalwartly loyal to UMW, many are unaware of the controversial causes promoted in their name and with their undesignated UMW "mission giving."

However, the left-wing politics and unorthodox theology of UMW's Manhattan headquarters is well documented. Books in its recommended-reading lists have included an anti-capitalist screed by Cuba's Communist dictator Fidel Castro, and infamous retired **Bishop Joseph Sprague's** book rejecting such foundational Christian doctrines as the physical resurrection of Christ. UMW (unsuccessfully) submitted petitions to this last General Conference unapologetically defending abortion in most cases. National UMW's other recent activism has included demanding a halt to enforcing U.S. immigration laws, strongly one-sided denunciations of Israel, criticizing our United Methodist *Social Principles* for affirming "crisis pregnancy centers and pregnancy resource centers that compassionately help women find feasible alternatives to abortion," and its 2010 commissioning of **Deaconess Rachel Harvey** to the "ministry" of employment by the Reconciling Ministries Network (a caucus demanding acceptance of homosexual practice).

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## UMC Abandons Abortion Coalition

*continued from page 6*

abortion as "violent" and opposing its being chosen for "trivial reasons") while allowing the expiration of an older resolution that complained of hospital mergers limiting abortion access.

Such dramatic moves in a pro-life direction by America's second-largest Protestant denomination were publicly cheered by leaders of America's largest Protestant denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, who recalled the relatively recent change of their own official stance from abortion-supportive to pro-life. ✚

**FOR REFLECTION:** *Genesis 1:26-28; Psalm 139:13-16; 1 Thessalonians 5:22.*

**ACTION:** *Write to the leaders of the GBCS and UMW to respectfully urge them to listen to the life-affirming concerns of the majority of United Methodist, and to redirect the work of their agencies accordingly. Rev. Susan Henry-Crowe / GBCS / 100 Maryland Ave N.E. / Washington, DC 20002 / shenrycrowe@UMC-GBCS.ORG . Harriett Olson / United Methodist Women / 475 Riverside Drive - 15th floor / New York, NY 10115 / holson@unitedmethodistwomen.org*



Democratic Presidential Candidate and lifelong United Methodist Hillary Rodham Clinton greets more than 7,000 women gathered at the United Methodist Women's Assembly 2014 at the Kentucky International Convention Center in Louisville, Kentucky. (Photo: Mike DuBose/UMNS)

But as the apparent disregard by UMW's headquarters for the values of moderate and conservative women became better known, UMW membership fell dramatically. By 2014, nationwide UMW membership was down to 480,000, far less than half of UMW's peak of 1.36 million members in 1974.

Meanwhile, far too many United Methodist women have been left behind. In some areas attempts to welcome non-UMW women's ministries outside of UMW's sphere of influence have been blocked because of concerns about challenging the monopoly of UMW, which has maintained a powerful voice in church politics.

But now that the UMC officially *encourages* a variety of women's ministries along with UMW, great new opportunities are opened. Now is a prime time for women in our congregations seeking guidance in developing spiritually vital women's ministries to connect with the Renew Network, a self-described "network of women and women's groups in the United Methodist Church that are faithfully seeking to grow in the knowledge of Jesus as we seek and serve Him." ✚

**ACTION:** *Women in your congregation seeking help starting a non-UMW women's group or ministry, biblically faithful ministry resources, or connection with other evangelical-minded women's ministries in our denomination should contact: Renew Network / c/o Good News / P.O. Box 132076 / The Woodlands, TX 77393 / renew@goodnewsmag.org / 832-381-0331 / www.renewnetwork.org*



IRD President Mark Tooley and  
UMAction Director John Lomperis

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happenings affecting The  
United Methodist Church.

UMAction staff constantly travel the country to report the latest  
developments within the UMC.

## General Conference Redirects UMC

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Those who were accustomed to meeting little challenge as they used our church as a tool for secular, left-wing political agendas found that the United Methodist Church is not the same as it was just a few years ago. Their agendas of demonizing Israel and divesting from all fossil fuels were decisively rejected. A new mandate was adopted for our denomination's notoriously liberal General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) to begin redirecting some of its time towards advocacy on behalf of Christians who are being persecuted for their faith around the world.

You can read more about such key accomplishments in the rest of this special General Conference issue of *UMAction Briefing*! ✝

**ACTION: Praise God for the wonderful work of renewal He did and continues to do in our United Methodist Church. Spread the news of these positive General Conference actions to others in your congregation.**

# UMAction Briefing

## The Institute on Religion & Democracy

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## Your Opinion, Please!

**About which of these  
General Conference  
accomplishments are you  
MOST excited?**

- Ending our affiliation with RCRC
- Rejecting "global segregation"
- Potential global accountability for bishops
- Expanding women's ministries
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_