UMAction Briefing

Summer 2018

## Inside:



# GOOD NEWS: Across-the-Board Traditionalist Victories on UMC Constitutional Amendments!

Last year, annual conferences around the world voted on whether or not to ratify five proposed amendments to the United Methodist Church's constitution.

After curiously concealing results for months, the Council of Bishops released the results in May. On all five, the position promoted by UM*Action* prevailed.

Proposed Amendment #1 had some great language defending the equality of women in God's eyes. But one sentence broadly committed our denomination, without very careful language, to avoiding talking about God as male or female. While there is some truth there, this would have encouraged the unhealthy ways some United Methodists refuse to say "Father God" in worship or minimize how Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully man. UM*Action* argued that it would be better to vote "NO" this year and then come back next time with a better-worded affirmation of women's equality (since amending the proposed wording was no longer an option).

**For now, the people of the UMC have spoken: We *overwhelmingly* want more accountability, especially for our bishops, as well as more democratic openness.**

Proposed Amendment #2 would have committed all levels of UMC "governance" to absolute non-discrimination on the basis of "age," "gender," "marital status," and "ability." Establishing an absolutist prohibition of "age" discrimination would have invalidated all current requirements that UMC leaders retire after a certain point. Demanding inclusion of every "gender" in UMC leadership, without specifying that this means only male or female, would have surely been used to advance transgenderist ideologies. And a new constitutional requirement to accept every "marital status" would have surely been cited in defense of clergy in same-sex partnerships. UM*Action* campaigned hard to defeat this effective Trojan horse.

Despite numerous heavy-handed actions by some American bishops to inflate the support for these first two amendments, both were defeated.

*See* GOOD NEWS: Across-the-Board Traditionalist Victories, *page 6*

The Rev. Cynthia Meyer came out to her congregation during her sermon and faced church disciplinary charges after she announced she was in a "committed relationship" with another woman. See "Prominent Lesbian United Methodist Minister Removed" on page 3.(Photo: Central Congregational Church)

# United Methodist Scholar Traces Cultural Trends and Marxist Politics Contributing to UMC Decline

Our denomination has been steadily losing American members every year since its founding, via merger, in 1968. Much of this can be traced to our *internal* failures of unfaithfulness and how in too many of our pulpits, people in our mission field will not hear much that is different from what the secular world already offers.

A leading Wesley scholar recently examined *external* shifts in American culture contributing to our decline. Rev. Dr. **Ken Collins** is Professor of Historical Theology and Wesley Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary and a UM*Action* Advisory Board member. Last November, he presented his paper, "The *Missio Dei* in the United States: The Challenge of a Baffling Cultural and Political Context" at a colloquium of United Methodist scholars.

Dr. Ken Collins of Asbury Theological Seminary (Photo: YouTube screen capture)

Collins traced a growing cultural hostility to Christianity from as far back as the aftermath of the Civil War, when the Methodist Episcopal Church, the largest predecessor body to today's United Methodist Church, began succumbing to external cultural shifts. Eventually this denomination "basically abandoned the intellectual defense of Christianity in the face of its emerging critics."

So American Methodists and other "mainline" Protestants shifted their message to society from Gospel proclamation to promoting mere ethical codes. But this proved to be an unfirm foundation. By the mid-1930s, with the repeal of Prohibition, Collins noted how U.S. cultural elites grew weary of Protestant moral crusades and "set in earnest to remove Protestant leaders from cultural power."

Then "[t]he moral and cultural space that Methodism had once enjoyed in the early twentieth century with its social principles and reforms was soon taken over during the 1960s [when the UMC was born] by revolutionaries and radicals who were unceasingly critical of most religion but especially the Christian faith." This "New Left" embraced Marxist analyses and, increasingly, identity politics. It sought to either replace or co-opt churches in its efforts to "move to a centralized state," and became "so culturally pervasive" that it deeply influenced much of the UMC hierarchy and seminary world.

Collins urges three responses for revitalizing the UMC's commitment to the *missio Dei* (God's mission):

1. "The church must repent of its spiritual idolatry, on the one hand, in overvaluing the sinful and divisive narratives of American political and cultural life and, on the other hand, in undervaluing the gospel narrative"
2. Focus on "loving persuasion" rather than "frontal assault" against the opposition
3. "Become a loving and healing presence among peoples who have suffered so greatly" from the divisiveness of American culture

**FOR REFLECTION:** ***Colossians 2:8.***

**ACTION:** ***Pray for the Holy Spirit to move mightily within the UMC to bring revival, repentance, and a renewed commitment to the mission of God.***

# ACTION NEEDED: Lobby Office Attempts Major, Far-Left Rewriting of UMC Social Principles

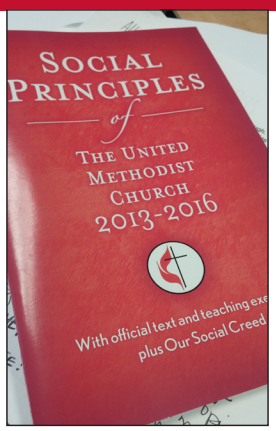
The United Methodist Social Principles are our denomination's core teachings on social and political concerns. In 2011, European United Methodist leaders proposed revising them to be (1) shorter, (2) more biblically and theologically grounded, and (3) globally rather than American oriented.

Eventually, our denomination's controversial General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) took it upon itself to undertake such revising.

The GBCS now seems to be doing less to advance the original three goals than to boldly rewrite our Social Principles to better conform to the secular, far-left ideologies and partisan political biases of the GBCS's monolithically liberal American senior staff.

The GBCS has marginalized the global church by putting liberal Americans mainly in charge. Africans are less than 10 percent of the GBCS's board of directors, despite being over 40 percent of our denominational membership. Eleven of the 13 members of the GBCS task force for this project are Americans. The chair is Dr. **Randall Miller,** a gay activist from San Francisco

See Rewriting UMC Social Principles, *page 3*




## Rewriting UMC Social Principles

*continued from page 2*

who has served as CEO of the Reconciling Ministries Network, the main unofficial LGBTQ-affirming caucus in our denomination.

The GBCS recently published a draft of its proposed rewrite. Some highlights of ways the GBCS wants to shift the UMC Social Principles include:

- COMPLETELY replacing the current statement on abortion to remove all pro-life elements and instead broadly declaring support for abortion, with no limits
- Deleting opposition to human cloning
- Repeatedly echoing the GBCS's Universalist theology, such as by declaring that "all persons are adopted into the family of God" and calling everyone "children of God," in opposition to clear New Testament teaching that "adoption" to become "children of God" is specific to Christians
- Removing explicit disapproval of "promiscuous" relationships
- Treating all family configurations as equally "significant," with no preference for children living with their married parents
- Removing language limiting marriage to man and woman, or even to only two people
- Deleting concern about mass media opposing "human and Christian values" such as by "promoting permissive lifestyles"
- Ceasing to defend the responsibility of Christian churches and parents to teach youth the values of faithfulness in marriage and celibacy in singleness
- Broadly denouncing as "a sin" any "discrimination" against a transgendered "gender identity"
- Removing concern expressed "about high divorce rates"
- Scaling back the UMC's disapproval of pornography
- No longer recognizing that men can be domestic-violence victims
- Reducing the UMC's support for democracy as a preferred form of government
- Broadly declaring that the death penalty is always "contrary to the will of God," directly contradicting John Wesley's *Explanatory Notes* on Romans 13

The GBCS is accepting feedback from around the UMC this summer. It then plans to revise its proposed rewrite and submit it for consideration at the 2020 General Conference.

**ACTION:** ***To learn more about the specific changes the GBCS is trying to make to our Social Principles, and how YOU can complete an online survey to register your concerns, please go to*** **www.umcsocialprinciples.com** ***and encourage as many like-minded United Methodists as possible to do likewise.***

## Prominent Lesbian United Methodist Minister Removed

While it took a while, a lesbian activist minister was permanently removed from United Methodist ministry earlier this year.

In January 2016, the Rev. **Cynthia Meyer,** the former longtime Assistant Dean of Students at Candler School of Theology in Atlanta, "came out" as a partnered lesbian to the small congregation she was pastoring. This was later revealed to be a calculated publicity stunt that Meyer did as part of a campaign of the Reconciling Ministries Network to pressure the May 2016 General Conference into repealing the United Methodist Church's prohibition of "self-avowed practicing homosexual" clergy.

Meyer may have thought she could have avoided accountability, given that she was ordained within the liberal Great Plains (Kansas and Nebraska) Conference, which only the previous year voted, with some opposition, to petition General Conference to repeal our denomination's official disapproval of homosexual practice.

But Bishop **Scott Jones** (who has since moved to Texas) processed a complaint against her, and avoided a church trial only at the last minute by arranging a "just resolution" in which Meyer was suspended from ministry until after the next General Conference, after which her case was to be further reviewed in light of any potential changes in church law

Apparently, she got sick of waiting, and so earlier this year surrendered her United Methodist ordination. She has now transferred into the ultra-liberal United Church of Christ (UCC) denomination, and has taken an interim job pastoring a small, declining UCC congregation.

**FOR REFLECTION:** ***James 3:1; 2 Peter 2.***

**ACTION:** ***Pray for Cynthia Meyer's repentance. Write to Bishop Scott Jones to thank him for upholding the biblical standards of the UMC*** **Book of Discipline:** ***Texas Annual Conference / 5215 Main Street / Houston, TX 77002 / sjjones@txcumc.org***

# Majority of UMC Bishops Favor Same-Sex Unions, but Other Options on the Table

The spring 2018 meeting of the global United Methodist Council of Bishops spent the majority of its time in closed sessions. The focus was wrapping up the "Way Forward" process.

At the 2016 General Conference, petitions to liberalize church policies against homosexual practice and other forms of extra-marital sex were going down in flames, while petitions to increase accountability were advancing.

So some liberal bishops intervened in VERY extraordinary, perhaps unprecedented ways. Ultimately, they used question-

From L-R: Bishops Bruce Ough, Ken Carter, and Cynthia Harvey at a press conference May 4, 2018 (Photo: John Lomperis/IRD)

able parliamentary tactics to narrowly ram through their motion, which "deferred" some (but not all) of the accountability petitions and called for the creation of a "Commission on a Way Forward" to prepare for a specially called General Conference to resolve our conflicts over sexual morality and accountability.

The commission has finished meeting, and the final report to the special February 23-26, 2019, General Conference was expected to have been finalized at our bishops' April 30—May 4 meeting.

But within days of our bishops voting on their final decision, they were publicly disagreeing on what they had agreed on.

Bishop **Scott Jones** of Texas publicly revealed some of what happened. He reported that one vote showed that a simple majority of active bishops favored the Liberalization Plan, but that this majority was less than two thirds. Then over 80 percent voted to adopt a final report that would also "include" a Traditionalist and Multi-Branch Plan, while stating that a majority "recommended" the Liberalization Plan. Apparently some traditionalist bishops voted for the final report because they had been led to understand that it would allow all three plans to be available as options.

The Liberalization Plan has been described as forcing United Methodists in every annual conference, at least in the USA, to accept same-sex unions, and likely also homosexually active ministers. Some liberal bishops are dishonestly marketing this as "the one-church plan," even though it would be the one plan most guaranteed to split the UMC.

The Traditionalist Plan has been described as maintaining our biblical standards on sexual morality and increasing accountability. The Multi-Branch, or "Connectional Conference," Plan has been described as dividing American United Methodism into two overlapping nationwide jurisdictions with separate standards on sexuality, while somehow remaining in one denomination.

As of this writing, few details have been released about what exactly would be included for each plan in the final report. But thankfully, the Judicial Council has ruled that others can submit alternative proposals (see "VICTORY: Judicial Council," p. 5).

Meanwhile, liberal bishops like **Ken Carter** of Florida and **Bruce Ough** of the Dakotas-Minnesota Area are eagerly promoting the Liberalization plan. Ough was the main proponent of the "Way Forward" proposal at the 2016 General Conference, and was Council of Bishops president from then until last spring. Carter was co-moderator of the commission, and has succeeded Ough as Council president.

Fortunately, bishops do not vote at General Conference and the Liberalization Plan is unlikely to pass. But the now-public liberal biases of the Council of Bishops as a whole, which currently under-represents Africans while over-representing more liberal areas of the USA, should give traditionalist United Methodists pause before trusting this group.

**FOR REFLECTION:** ***Matthew 18:5-6.***

**ACTION:** ***Please commit to praying regularly for the February 2019 General Conference.***

# VICTORY: Judicial Council Allows Alternative Proposals to Be Submitted to 2019 General Conference

A special session of our denomination's supreme governing body, the General Conference, will meet in February 2019 in St. Louis to consider a recommendation from the Council of Bishops to relax our prohibitions of same-sex unions and homosexually active clergy.

However, in a special May meeting, the Judicial Council, the UMC's "supreme court," issued an overwhelming, 8-1 decision that other United Methodists can submit alternative proposals to the 2019 conference.

Outgoing Council of Bishops President **Bruce Ough** and others argued that no petitions beyond the Council of Bishops report should be allowed in 2019. A coalition of annual conference chancellors (official lawyers) represented by **Thomas Starnes** framed the delegates' options as limited to either accepting or rejecting the singular recommendation of the current majority of bishops to liberalize the church's sexuality standards. If delegates wanted to take any other major action, they would have to either expand the business of the special conference (requiring a difficult two-thirds vote) or wait until the next General Conference. Another key restrictive proposal was that the right that the UMC *Discipline* gives to "[a]ny organization, clergy member, or lay member of The United Methodist Church" to petition General Conference be suspended for the 2019 conference.

But the Judicial Council declined to accept *any* of these arguments. Instead, it ruled that any United Methodist can submit alternative proposals.

While Starnes's group said they did not represent their respective bishops, it seems highly unlikely that these chancellors would all take such a public stance without the permission (if not outright orders) from their employing bishops. Based on the legal briefs of this group, it included the chancellors employed by the following bishops: **David Bard** (West Michigan Conference), **Thomas Bickerton** (New York), **Minerva Carcaño** (California-Nevada), **Sudarshana Devadhar** (New England), **Grant Hagiya** (California-Pacific), **Cynthia Harvey** (Louisiana), **Jonathan Holston** (South Carolina), **Bob Hoshibata** (Desert-Southwest), **Peggy Johnson** (Peninsula-Delaware), **Bill McAlilly** (Tennessee), **Mike McKee** (North Texas), **Cynthia Moore-Koikoi** (Western Pennsylvania), **Robert Schnase** (Rio Texas), **John Schol** (Greater New Jersey), **Elaine Stanovsky** (Oregon-Idaho and Pacific-Northwest), and **Hope Morgan Ward** (North Carolina).

UM*Action* Director **John Lomperis** was among those presenting written and oral arguments. He cited precedents in church law, critiqued heavy-handed liberal attempts "to have timelines and legislative processes manipulated to steer [delegates] to certain pre-determined decisions," and urged "a fair, open, and transparent process."

The Judicial Council ruled that any properly submitted petition would be part of the business of the 2019 conference if it was "in harmony with the purpose" of "receiving and acting upon" the Council of Bishops report. Lomperis and others argued that "acting upon" the report is not limited to voting "YES" or "NO," but could also potentially include amendments and substitute motions on the same subject as the report. Thus, he argued that any proposal that would be proper as a last-minute amendment to the report could be submitted in advance as a petition. The Judicial Council left it up to the General Conference itself "to determine, in the first instance, through its committees, officers and presiders," which petitions are within the restricted areas of business.

Please keep the above facts in mind amidst the spin and misinformation some liberal leaders are promoting.

This is a major victory for ensuring a fair chance for proposals to strengthen accountability to our biblical standards and allow gracious exit ramps for those who refuse to respect them. UM*Action* is working hard to promote such proposals as we approach 2019.

**ACTION:** ***If your bishop is one of those listed above, respectfully express your concerns to him/her about the position taken by their conference chancellor. Contact information for all bishops can be found at*** **www.umc.org/who-we-are/meet-the-bishops**

## GOOD NEWS: Across-the-Board Traditionalist Victories

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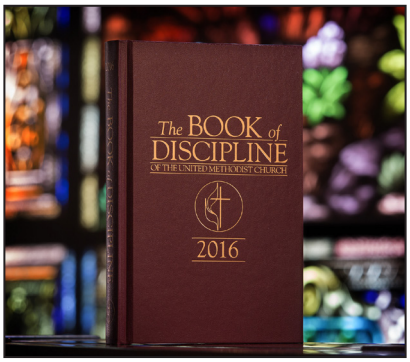


The United Methodist *Book of Discipline* (Photo: Mike DuBose/UMNS)

Amendment #3 would require elections for General, Jurisdictional, and Central Conference delegates to be by majority vote, stopping some less democratic practices in some regions. Amendment #4 would require more democratic fairness in elections of bishops outside of the USA. UM*Action* urged support for both of these. Each passed with over 90 percent support.

Amendment #5 would bring a new level of global accountability for our bishops, by allowing the global Council of Bishops to discipline any bishop in the world. For decades, bishops have only really been accountable within their respective regions. Some liberals tried to defeat this proposal, hinting that this could undermine exclusively regional accountability that allowed bishops in the U.S. Western Jurisdiction to freely violate the UMC's biblical standards on sexuality. But UM*Action* strongly urged support, and it passed with over 81 percent voting "YES." As the UMC Council of Bishops shifts its numbers away from the most liberal U.S. regions while adding more African bishops, this may eventually help bring a new day of global accountability.

For now, the people of the UMC have spoken: We *overwhelmingly* want more accountability, especially for our bishops, as well as more democratic openness. And we will not let the noble values of gender equality and welcoming all people become twisted or hijacked into undermining biblical teaching or advancing secular LGBTQ activist ideologies.

In a twist, it was later revealed that **Gere Reist,** the liberal outgoing Secretary of the General Conference, had made a "human error" in including the aforementioned problematic sentence in the version of Amendment #1 that was voted on last year, when that sentence had actually been removed from the proposal. So this year, annual conferences are voting on the correct version of this Amendment, which affirms women's equality without that single problematic sentence. We expect it to pass overwhelmingly—with UM*Action's* support.

**ACTION:** ***Give thanks for God's continuing renewing work in our denomination.***


# UMAction Briefing

*A newsletter for United Methodists working for Scripture- based renewal and reform in our denomination*

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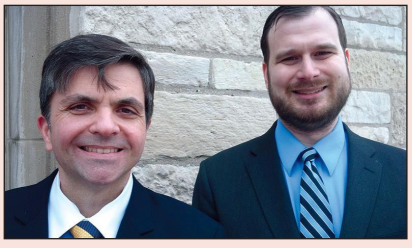

IRD President Mark Tooley and UM*Action* Director John Lomperis

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