



PRAYER ALERT: Commission Considers Power Grab to Shift UMC Power Away from Africa, U.S. South

The General Conference is the supreme governing body of our denomination. The last several have trended in an increasingly traditionalist direction on sexual morality and other issues.

As more faithful regions gain more members, they gain more votes at General Conference. Meanwhile, the regions that have strayed furthest from biblical, Wesleyan faith are losing members rapidly, and so have been allotted smaller and smaller numbers of General Conference delegates. This bodes well for the future.

However, the little-known but powerful Commission on the General Conference has begun discussing fundamentally changing these dynamics by reducing the size of General Conference and shifting the distribution of votes between regions. The impact would be to dramatically change the current math to shift voting power to smaller and declining regions at the expense of larger, growing, and generally traditionalist regions.

Every annual conference (the basic regional division of our global church), no matter how small, is entitled to send at least two voting delegates to General Conference,

with larger annual conferences getting to send more, in proportion to how many clergy and lay members they have.

Of the over 130 UMC annual conferences around the world, nearly half already have so few members that they send only the minimum of two delegates. If the Commission on the General Conference reduces the overall size of General Conference, these small conferences would still send the same number of delegates, which would then constitute a greater percentage of

the whole. These minimum-size annual conferences are particularly concentrated in some regions, accounting for every annual conference in Europe and the Philippines, and over half the conferences within the radical-dominated U.S. Western Jurisdiction. In some cases, regional leaders have divided themselves into more tiny annual conferences than necessary to game the system to get a greater share of General Conference delegates.

Any reduction of delegates would come entirely from elsewhere, where there are more United Methodists and/or where the church is most significantly growing. In the big picture, under proposals being discussed, voting power would shift away from the U.S. South (the most conservative part of American United Methodism) and Africa (whose growing influence has been key to positive shifts in our denomination).

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United Methodist bishops listen to morning worship from the stage of the 2016 United Methodist General Conference in Portland, Oregon (Photo: Kathleen Barry/UMNS)

GOOD NEWS: Judicial Council Victories Help Bring Accountability

Our United Methodist Church's governing *Book of Discipline* clearly affirms biblical boundaries for sexual self-control, forbidding clergy from being "self-avowed practicing homosexuals" or otherwise engaging in sex outside "the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage." All United Methodist bishops and other clergy have chosen to vow to uphold these standards.

However, as we have reported, our denomination has for several years been besieged by a small but extremely disruptive num-



The Rev. J. Phil Wogaman (right) and Bishop LaTrelle Miller Easterling greet each other during the 233rd session of the Baltimore–Washington Conference in Washington, D.C. Wogaman handed in his clergy credentials during the clergy session over the case of T.C. Morrow, a lesbian who was not approved for ordination as a deacon in 2016 or 2017 and for others he feels have been excluded (Photo: Dawn M. Hand/Foundry United Methodist Church)

ber of renegade clergy who have been publicly betraying their covenantal vows to God and his church. And several liberal bishops have gone out of their way to protect these covenant-breaking clergy from any accountability, no matter the cost to the church. Sometimes this has involved inventing nonsensical loopholes in church law, such as claiming that the prohibition on clergy being "self-avowed practicing homosexuals" does not necessarily forbid them from entering into legally affirmed same-sex "marriages."

Last spring, the UMC Judicial Council, our denomination's supreme court, issued several landmark rulings clarifying that "a partnered homosexual clergy ... does not meet the minimum standards for certification, licensing, and ordination," and that someone's living in a same-sex "marriage" can be sufficient proof of being a "self-avowed practicing homosexual" (and

therefore ineligible to continue as a United Methodist minister). The Council found that there MUST be "a careful and thorough examination and investigation" of ordination candidates in every region to determine their commitment to follow these standards, and that boards of ordained ministry (the group in every annual conference charged with screening ordination candidates) has no right to ignore any statements of candidates "who avowed their homosexuality."

UMAction was heavily involved in these cases, submitting "friend of the court" legal briefs that appear to have influenced the final decisions.

These cases yielded positive results in even rather liberal areas. In the Northern Illinois Conference, the Board of Ordained Ministry (BOOM) had adopted a policy committing to ignore the "sexual orientation and gender identity" of ordination candidates, while publicly inviting "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, and straight" candidates. But the process of challenging this matter to the Judicial Council eventually prompted Northern Illinois **Bishop Sally Dyck** to cancel this policy as "out of order."

The Baltimore–Washington Conference BOOM announced a similar LGBTQ-welcoming policy last year. But thanks to these recent rulings, this year it rejected an openly "married" lesbian activist candidate they had (unsuccessfully) tried to promote only last year. This provoked a prominent retired Baltimore Washington clergyman, **Dr. J. Philip Wogaman**, to surrender his clergy status in protest. Wogaman was formerly academic dean of the UMC's Wesley Theological Seminary and later minister of Foundry UMC in Washington, D.C., when President Clinton was its famous congregant.

Both conferences' BOOMs issued similar public statements committing to make "full examination" of would-be clergy, admitting that they "are not at liberty to disregard [the *Discipline's*] qualifications for licensed and ordained ministry," and organizing task forces to ensure compliance with our *Discipline's* standards.

Enforcement has been more uneven in other regions. For example, at the 2016 annual conference session, the **Rev. Anna Blaedel** declared before everyone that she was "a self-avowed practicing homosexual" clergywoman. Yet **Bishop Julius Trimble** chose to wait until his last day as Iowa's bishop to simply dismiss the complaints brought against her, keeping Blaedel in place as a minister in good standing. However, a legal challenge was later brought over the dismissal of the first complaint against Blaedel. At its October meeting, the Judicial Council will rule on several questions that basically ask if Blaedel must still face accountability for rescinding her ordination vow and "being a self-avowed, practicing homosexual." ✚

See Judicial Council Victories *continued on page 3*

ACTION: *Pray for the 2019 UMC General Conference, which has been specially called in response to the crisis of disobedience in some regions. Pray for the Judicial Council's upcoming ruling on the Blaedel case and UMAction's work in presenting a "friend of the court" brief. And VERY respectfully*

urge the Judicial Council to please rule that when clergy like Anna Blaedel publicly admit to being "self-avowed practicing homosexuals," that they must face accountability, and that bishops have no right to simply dismiss complaints as a way of protecting openly homosexually active clergy: secretaryjudicialcouncil@gmail.com

Lesbian 'Bishop' Turned Down by Judicial Council, Loses Clout, Helps Bring 'FINANCIAL CRISIS' to Liberal United Methodism

As previously reported, the UMC Judicial Council recently issued a landmark decision greatly strengthening church-law prohibitions against homosexually active clergy and making clear that "self-avowed practicing homosexuals" cannot be made bishop. It also mandated that **Dr. Karen Oliveto**, the openly partnered lesbian activist who the UMC's notoriously liberal Western Jurisdiction tried to elect bishop last year, be subject to review.

As an apparent delaying tactic, every active and retired Western Jurisdiction bishop joined to send a lengthy formal request to the Judicial Council to reconsider (and potentially reverse itself on) this case. The Judicial Council unanimously rejected this request, leaving Dr. Oliveto without legal cover to continue as a United Methodist bishop.

The review of her status remains under the supervision of Western Jurisdiction leaders, for now. Current church law makes bishops accountable only within their own regions. But efforts are underway to amend the UMC constitution to empower the global UMC Council of Bishops to exercise accountability over Oliveto and other wayward bishops.

In the meantime, Oliveto has been a disaster for the geographically huge Yellowstone and Rocky Mountain Conferences (encompassing several Mountain West states) on which she has been imposed. She has made support for herself, and marginalization of remaining orthodox believers, top priorities. Oliveto even took a bizarre intimidation tour during which she briefly visited as many of the area's congregations

as possible, often staying only long enough to take pictures she could use for her self-promoting propaganda. She noted which congregations were "not as enthusiastic" about her, and later publicly denounced these "bad churches."

Area UMC leaders have been shocked to find that this is not working well. Leading Western Jurisdiction delegates announced a fundraising drive for a "sustentation fund" to alleviate "stress in some of our most theologically diverse congregations."

The "stress" included membership and giving declines after Oliveto's 2016 election.

The Yellowstone Conference recently announced that it is in "FINANCIAL CRISIS," facing an "unprecedented level of deficit that could end normal operations of the conference." While Yellowstone had been rapidly losing members for some time, this statement admitted that this was a recent, new level of crisis and that reaction

to Oliveto's election was a significant factor.

This conference is pursuing several strategies that are not sustainable in the long term: fundraising outside of the conference, borrowing, and squeezing more dollars out of already-struggling congregations.

If Dr. Oliveto truly loved the people of these congregations with a Christ-like love, she could publicly apologize for her unloving words and actions and then resign her office—surrendering all the wealth and prestige that comes with it—to remove a major source of decline and crisis. ✚

FOR REFLECTION: *John 10:11-13.*



Dr. Karen Oliveto (right) takes the lectern at First United Methodist Church in Evanston, Illinois, after being introduced by Bishop Dyck (left) (Photo: John Lomperis/IRD)

GOOD NEWS: Leading LGBTQ Activist Admits UMC Unlikely to Liberalize on Homosexuality, as Leading UMC Theologian Proposes ‘Mexit’ for Dissenters

At a recent “Winter Warming” of a regional affiliate of the Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN), lesbian activist **Sue Laurie** made the stunning admission that it now “doesn’t look” likely that the United Methodist Church will officially reverse its teachings and policies against homosexual practice anytime soon. Laurie was a longtime prominent staffer at RMN, an unofficial gay caucus within our denomination, and recently switched jobs to work with **Amy DeLong’s** militant protest group, Love Prevails.

In sharing her lifelong history of LGBTQ activism, Laurie recalled how in the 1990s, “we” encouraged non-celibate gay individuals to pursue UMC ordination while going “into the closet” about their sexuality, in spite of the clear church law against ordaining “self-avowed practicing homosexuals,” because, there were “real signs then that we were going to fix it soon.”

But she admitted, “now it doesn’t look that way.”

For over four decades, RMN and its allies have spent tremendous resources trying to persuade our denomination’s governing General Conferences to roll back our teachings against homosexual practice (and all other sex outside of man-woman marriage). But each General Conference has either maintained or significantly strengthened our biblical standards. Careful review of the last several General Conferences shows the votes trending in an increasingly conservative direction.

Much of this is because the membership of our denomination and therefore of General Conference is increasingly shifting towards Africa, where some 40% of United Methodists now live. We may become a majority-African denomination within a decade.

These same realities have caused one of our denomination’s most prominent theologians, the **Rev. Dr. William J. Abraham** of Perkins School of Theology, to declare that “the debate is now over.” He made his remarks at a recent gathering of United Methodist seminary professors on the theme of “Unity of the Church and Human Sexuality: Toward a Faithful United Methodist Witness.” Abraham summarized, “The United Methodist Church has stood firm across the years; there is not going to be a change of mind and heart.”

“I think that the way ahead lies with an exit plan for those who cannot accept the canonical teaching and practice of the church rather than a plan for division,” Abraham announced. He labeled this a “Mexit” (Methodist + Exit) for those among liberal United Methodists who are unwilling to live by our rules against same-sex weddings and homosexually active ministers. He stressed that such departures would be limited to a relatively small minority, and would likely “be as least disruptive as possible.”

He cautioned against a more extensive denomination-wide split, which would have “radical and long-lasting effects” on congregations as well as the UMC’s schools, including a “whole raft of legal and ecclesial changes ... that would be abruptly out of control,” as “[m]any would be torn apart at the seams if decisions have to be made on what group to join.”



Supporters gather around Susan Laurie (center) during a service of Holy Communion on the first day of the 2016 United Methodist General Conference in Portland, Oregon. Laurie, a lesbian, was ordained in an unauthorized service in the lobby of the Oregon Convention Center (Photo: Mike DuBose/UMNS)

But he also warned that given the ongoing division and disobedience within the UMC, “If we do not take up the option of an orderly exit for those who reject the teaching and practices of the church, then we are headed for division” of the denomination on a much larger scale. ✚

FOR REFLECTION: *Mark 3:24–25.*

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This would effectively punish some regions for making new disciples, reward decline and bureaucratic inefficiency, and make our denominational hierarchy less responsive to the membership of our church.

Other arguments for shrinking General Conference are rather weak. Some claim that this is needed to save money. But shrinking General Conference would only save something in the neighborhood of a couple million dollars, a rather tiny fraction of our denomination’s \$604 million budget, which includes much unaddressed waste elsewhere. Others claim that there are too many delegates. But proportional to church membership, our General Conferences are several times smaller than the equivalent gatherings of other large, U.S.-based denominations (not to mention the greater complexity and global diversity in our denomination).

Several years ago, the **Rev. L. Fitzgerald “Gere” Reist**, the liberal former Secretary of the General Conference, argued against shrinking General Conference because “[i]t’s essential that we not undermine the level of trust” and “it is important to avoid any perception that a reduction in the number of delegates might somehow be intended to influence outcomes.” ✚

ACTION: *Pray that at its October meeting, the Commission on the General Conference heeds this wisdom and decides against shrinking the size of General Conference.*

UMC Lobby Office Sustained by Spirituality of Godless Earth Prayer and 'Vegan Gluten-Free' Chocolate Chip Communion Cookies

Prominently located next to the U.S. Supreme Court, the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) is the controversial political lobby office of our denomination.

Its three-day spring 2017 board of directors meeting showcased the bizarre spirituality that often strays from biblical Christianity and apparently inspires the GBCS's work.

An opening communion service involved elements representing six continents, including "vegan gluten-free" chocolate chip cookies as a North American substitute for communion bread.

Worship was led by gay activist musician **Mark Miller**, who had GBCS leaders sing some of his own songs.

GBCS staff and directors were also led in praying a pre-Christian Native American prayer directly TO the Earth. This prayer included no mention of God.

On another day, GBCS staff and board prayed a version of the Lord's Prayer that replaced "Yours is the kingdom" with "Yours is the kin-dom." This avoidance of the word "kingdom" is promoted by some theological radicals who cannot stand male words for God (like "King" or "Lord") and who reject the idea that God is a superior being to whom we should submit.

Under the leadership of the GBCS's General Secretary, the **Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe**, this meeting avoided mentioning that the 2016 UMC General Conference changed the GBCS's permanent charter to include a major new priority of "education, prayer, and advocacy on behalf of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who suffer persecution for their faith."

See UMC Lobby Office Sustained, page 6

Northern Illinois Commissions UMC's First 'Non-Binary Gendered' Clergy

At its June session, clergy of the Northern Illinois Conference commissioned transgender activist "**M**" **Barclay** as a provisional deacon.

Commissioning is a preliminary step that must come at least two years before ordination.

Barclay refuses to personally identify as male or female and insists on using "singular they pronouns," no longer accepting the feminine pronouns "she" or "her." (In *UMAction's* reporting, we respectfully decline to join this XX-chromosome individual's recent choice to reject the good, God-given gift of her womanhood.)

While seeking the church's affirmation, Barclay is not seeking to pastor any of our congregations. UMC deacons find their own employment, rarely as senior pastors. Instead, **Bishop Sally Dyck** appointed her to simply continue in the job she already had of full-time LGBTQ activism, as the communications director for the Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN). RMN is dedicated to promoting UMC acceptance of LGBTQ ideology, homosexual practice, and other forms of extra-marital sex by any means it deems necessary, with a strong emphasis on encouraging UMC clergy to betray their vows to uphold our denomination's biblical sexuality standards.

This self-described "non-binary trans person" is no stranger to controversy. A few years ago, when she was a self-identified woman named **Mary Ann Kaiser**, she sought affirmation as a UMC minister while openly cohabiting with her lesbian partner. Her publicity-stunt candidacy was voted down then.

But the *Washington Post* reports that "Barclay is not in a romantic relationship now, so is not violating the church's rule that



M Barclay (front left) commissioned by Bishop Sally Dyck (back left) (Photo: UMC Northern Illinois Conference)

clergy can have sexual relationships only in heterosexual marriages." The UMC's governing *Discipline* has no clear standard on transgendered clergy. At previous General Conferences, *UMAction* has sought to promote clearer statements against transgenderist ideology while RMN activists have promoted petitions on the other side, and both have been rejected.

However, annual conferences are this year voting on a proposal to amend the UMC constitution to mandate, among other things,

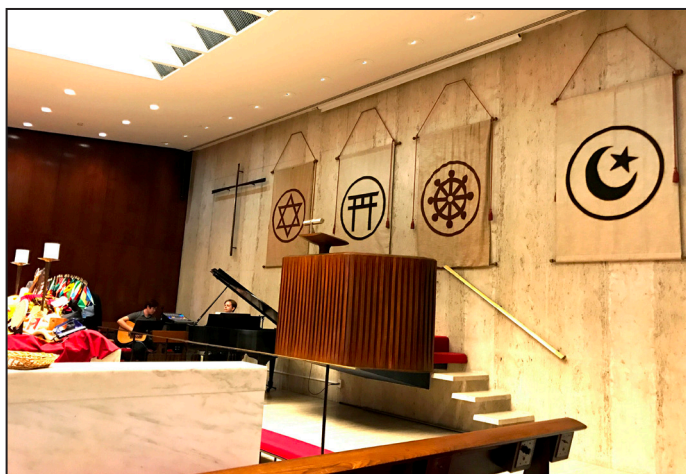
absolute inclusion at all levels of the church on the basis of "gender," without making clear that this means only male or female. While *UMAction* affirms women's equality, there is little doubt that if this amendment passes, bishops and others will use it as a mandate for ordaining transgender activists in other regions. So *UMAction* has been campaigning for the defeat of this proposal, in hopes of coming back next time with a plan to affirm women's equality without promoting other agendas. ✚

FOR REFLECTION: Genesis 1:27.

ACTION: Pray for the success of *UMAction's* efforts to defeat this dangerous proposed constitutional amendment. And write to Bishop Sally Dyck to express your concerns over her appointing Ms. Barclay to work for RMN: Northern Illinois Conference UMC / 77 W. Washington Street – Suite 1820 / Chicago, IL 60602 / bishop.dyck@umcnic.org.

UMC Lobby Office Sustained

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The GBCS meeting included worship at the chapel at the Church Center for the United Nations (CCUN), owned by United Methodist Women. The space features banners representing a variety of religious faiths. (Photo: Jeff Walton/IRD)

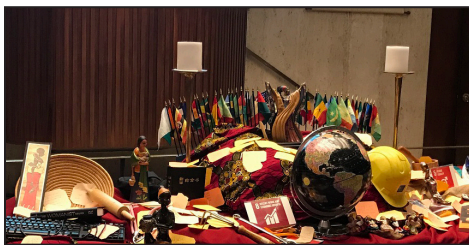
Instead, Henry-Crowe outlined the GBCS's current priorities as immigration (she has previously used her position to promote, in her own words, "open borders"), health (which she has interpreted to include lobbying for taxpayer funding of Planned Parenthood, America's largest abortion provider), poverty (which the GBCS has typically addressed with a knee-jerk partisan approach of higher taxes and bigger government), and peace (which for the GBCS has historically involved reflexive demonization of the U.S. military).

The roughly five dozen members of the GBCS's board of directors currently includes only two Africans, although some 40 percent of United Methodists live in Sub-Saharan Africa. The executive committee includes no Africans.

While the GBCS marginalizes United Methodists from the Global South and pays little attention to the global persecution of Christians, it is hoping to be trusted with a plan it will present to the 2020 General Conference to comprehensively rewrite the United Methodist "Social Principles," which are part of the *UM Book of Discipline*, supposedly to make them more global. ✚

FOR REFLECTION: Luke 6:46-49; Romans 16:17.

ACTION: Write to the Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe and respectfully urge her to listen to General Conference, spend less time on politically partisan causes, and refocus on prioritizing advocacy for persecuted Christians: GBCS / 100 Maryland Ave NE / Washington, DC 20002 / shenrycrowe@umcjustice.org



An altar at the Church Center for the United Nations (CCUN) prepared by the Commission on the Status and Role of Women (COSROW) (Photo: Jeff Walton / IRD)

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