

UMAction

Briefing



Post-General Conference, UMW Doubles Down on Sexual Revolution

Local United Methodist Women (UMW) groups are important and valued parts of many of our congregations.

However, over the years, *UMAction* has exposed how UMW's New York headquarters has used its millions of dollars raised at UMW bake sales and other fundraisers by often unsuspecting local congregations to support partisan, far-left political agendas, including ones contrary to traditional Christian values.

This has been especially apparent in UMW's uncritical embrace of the sexual revolution in Western culture. In recent years, national UMW has commissioned two employees of the Reconciling Ministries Network—an unofficial caucus devoted to

Since General Conference, the UMW's national leaders have not shown much interest in soul searching...

promoting church acceptance of homosexual practice as well as premarital cohabitation, with notoriously divisive, any-means-necessary tactics—as United Methodist deaconesses. This year, UMW also commissioned as a deaconess **Robin Ridenour**, the legal “wife” of lesbian activist **Karen Oliveto** (whose illegitimate election as bishop this year in the Western Jurisdiction is currently

being challenged to the Judicial Council). And for many years, UMW has uncritically supported the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC), which stridently decries any legal restriction on or even moral opposition to elective abortion, while demonizing Christians who disapprove of homosexual practice and premarital sex.

The more these well-documented facts have become known, the more women have been leaving UMW. In recent years, UMW has been losing members at a rate over three times faster than the decline of our denomination's overall membership in the United States.

At the 2016 General Conference, the ongoing erosion of support from moderate and evangelical women eventually caught up with the formerly politically powerful national UMW bureaucrats. Delegates to this supreme governing body of our denomination delivered stinging rebukes to the UMW's sexually permissive agenda, with committee votes decisively rejecting petitions to roll back our church's moral disapproval of homosexual practice (as well as petitions that would have done likewise for adultery and premarital sex). Then this General Conference voted overwhelmingly to reject a UMW-submitted petition defending abortion on demand and also commanded UMW as well as our denomination's General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) to end their organizational membership in RCRC.

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The Rev. Karen Oliveto accepts her election by the Western Jurisdiction as a United Methodist bishop. Oliveto was senior pastor at Glide Memorial United Methodist Church in San Francisco, Calif. Her “wife,” Robin Ridenour, stands behind her (Photo: Patrick Scriven/UMC Pacific-Northwest Conference)

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In a related development, this General Conference amended the UMC's governing *Book of Discipline* to explicitly encourage congregational women's ministries other than UMW. The renewal movement has long sought this, but has encountered resistance in some areas to this threat to UMW's monopoly.

Since General Conference, the UMW's national leaders have not shown much interest in soul-searching over the overwhelming and growing majority of women in our congregations who want no part of them, the costs of pursuing an unbiblical agenda on sexual morality that is increasingly out of step with the rest of our denomination, and United Methodist ladies now officially being encouraged to develop non-UMW women's groups.

Rather, they have militantly insisted on pursuing the same embrace of the left-wing sexual revolution that has been so instrumental in UMW's decline.

Together with the GBCS, UMW released a statement in June praising RCRC, dismissing the concerns the great majority of United Methodists have about such a group, and publicly lamenting General Conference requiring them to end their status as RCRC member organizations. In July, the UMW's "Mission U" promoted a study guide called "The Bible and Human Sexuality" by **Ellen Brubaker**, which seeks to replace biblical boundaries on sexual behavior with a more secular ethic lacking clear boundaries other than consent and safety. And in

August, UMW launched a protest against North Carolina's so-called "bathroom bill" (aka HB2), which, among other things, was intended to prevent anatomically male adults from entering multi-use public showers, changing rooms, or bathrooms designated for women. In its uncritical embrace of LGBTQ activist rhetoric about transgender rights, national UMW completely dismissed concerns about the safety and convenience of women and children cited by HB2 supporters.

But now women in our churches are explicitly encouraged by Paragraph 256 of the 2016 edition of the UMC *Book of Discipline* to develop supplemental women's groups not affiliated with UMW. ✚

FOR REFLECTION: Ephesians 5:1-16.

ACTION: Encourage women in your congregation interested in women's ministries that are more spiritually grounded and less concerned with secular, partisan politics than national UMW to contact the Renew Network, an independent network of evangelical women in our church committed to Seeking, Sharing, and Serving Christ. It offers coaching in how to organize vibrant women's ministries in your congregation and recommendations for some of the best resources that are biblically faithful and steeped in evangelical Wesleyan theology: Renew Network / Good News / P.O. Box 132076 / The Woodlands, TX 77393 / 832-381-0331 / renew@goodnewsmag.org / www.renewnetwork.org

Methodist Theologian Thomas Oden, 1931–2016

Rev. Dr. Thomas C. Oden, one of Methodism's and American Christianity's most esteemed theologians, passed away at home on December 8.

An ordained elder in the UMC's Oklahoma Conference, Oden previously chaired the board of the Institute on Religion & Democracy (UMAction's parent organization) and was professor emeritus at our denomination's liberal Drew Theological School in Madison, New Jersey.

Oden remained a prolific writer in his final years. A scholar of the early church Fathers, he edited the nearly two-dozen-volume *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*. His more recent books included *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind* and the three-volume *Systematic Theology*.



The Rev. Thomas C. Oden (Photo: InterVarsity Press)

In a 2013 speech, Oden recalled his devout Nazarene grandmother who "prayed for me daily" while he had been spiritually "misguided." She had a "high doctrine of scripture," while he grew up in a "liberal Methodist background."

In his 2014 *A Change of Heart: A Personal and Theological Memoir*, Oden recounts his remarkable journey from being enamored with liberal theology and far-left politics to becoming a prominent champion for historic Christian orthodoxy.

He was a dear friend and counselor, a brilliant and cheerful warrior for good causes, and an irreplaceable teacher. May God perpetuate the fruit of his labors. ✚

ACTION: Learn from Tom Oden by finding some of his books at your library or favorite bookstore, particularly *A Change of Heart*.

Good News: Middle East United Methodist Church-Planting

Our denomination has long had a presence in the United States, Africa, the Philippines, and Western as well as Eastern Europe. More recently, God has been growing United Methodism in a new region: the Islamic Middle East.

This region is home not only to native populations but also many millions of foreign workers from other regions of the world. In some countries, foreign workers make up a very large portion of the overall population.

Such foreign workers are often especially vulnerable to exploitation, mistreatment, violent abuse, and overt ethnic discrimination. If they protest even severe mistreatment, they can very quickly lose their jobs and be deported back to their much poorer home countries.

Conversion from Islam to any other religion is officially illegal throughout the bulk of the region. According to the major, mainstream schools of Islamic law (*Sharia*), the proper penalty for someone leaving Islam is execution. A 2013 Pew Research survey found high levels of popular support in the region for killing Muslims who become Christian. Thus even in many relatively “moderate Muslim countries,” Muslims cannot convert without putting their own lives at risk.

Even Christian ministry among foreign workers who do not come from Muslim families faces a number of legal and *de facto* restrictions on evangelism, worship services held outside of church buildings, constructing new church buildings, and more.

Yet despite such daunting challenges, Filipino United Methodists have launched ambitious, impressive, and growing efforts of planting new United Methodist congregations in the Middle East

in recent years—all without asking for or receiving any American money, and apart from our denominational agencies.

On a recent layover in the region, UMAction Director **John Lomperis** was able to meet directly with some leaders of one such congregation and see firsthand what God was doing among fellow United Methodists in the region.

Given the extreme vulnerabilities and repression they face, one may expect Christians there to hunker down with an inward-looking mentality of seeking nothing greater than survival. But instead, the leaders of this United Methodist community have been braving significant personal sacrifices and

risks to develop multiple small groups, make new disciples, grow their congregation, and plant new ones elsewhere in the region.

Those of us living in the comparative comfort of the West have so much to learn from these brothers and sisters about what it *really* means to live boldly for Christ and take risks for the spread of the Gospel, even in very difficult contexts. ✚

FOR REFLECTION: *Acts 1:8; Galatians 3:6–9; Revelation 15:4.*

ACTION: *If your congregation is interested in exploring possible partnership opportunities, please contact UMAction (serious inquiries only, please).*



Countries with majority-Islamic populations (Photo: Wikimedia.org)

Judicial Council Analysis: Good News for Accountability, Bad News for Abortion Extremism

The United Methodist Church’s equivalent of the Supreme Court is the Judicial Council.

During this Council’s 2012–2016 term, its liberal majority issued some rather disappointing rulings related to disputes about homosexual practice, advancing the personal liberal biases of Council members by using tortured logic and disregarding the clear letter and intent of church law.

But elections held during last May’s General Conference replaced four of the nine Judicial Council members. October’s session was the first of this new group’s 2016–2020 term, and was closely watched for signs of any new direction with the new people.

The early indicators suggest that the Judicial Council is shifting towards more serious enforcement of our denomination’s biblical standards.

The 2016 session of the New England Conference adopted an “Action of Non-Conformity,” refusing to comply with official United Methodist policies forbidding homosexual union ceremonies and related standards. But this new Judicial Council invalidated that motion.

In two other cases, the Council issued good preliminary rulings against leaders of the liberal New York and Northern Illinois Conferences seeking to ignore the UMC *Book of Discipline*’s

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prohibition of ordaining “self-avowed practicing homosexual” clergy. The ruling in the Northern Illinois case further clarified church law to empower evangelical minorities in liberal-dominated annual conferences with more tools for challenging conference leaders who disregard our biblical standards. Significantly, the ruling in the New York case expanded the long-standing standard of church law that “annual conferences may not legally negate, ignore, or violate provisions of the *Discipline* with which they disagree” by applying this restriction to official groups within an annual conference like its board of ordained ministry.

In a fourth case, the Council ruled, on technical grounds, to uphold the decision of the West Ohio Board of Ordained Ministry to refuse to affirm the appointment of the **Rev. Laura Young** as director of the Ohio chapter of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC). RCRC is a political

lobby that celebrates all abortions as “holy work,” and was overwhelmingly repudiated by our denomination’s 2016 General Conference.

This demonstrates that elections have consequences. And since evangelical-supported candidates swept the 2016 elections to the Judicial Council, these consequences are so far, so good. ✚



Eight of the nine Judicial Council members serving this term (Photo: Kathleen Barry/United Methodist Communications)

ACTION: Write to the Judicial Council to **THANK** them for their recent rulings to uphold the letter and spirit of our church’s biblical standards. Please also respectfully, **BRIEFLY** ask them to rule in an upcoming case that (1) any United Methodist clergyperson who is legally “married” to someone of the same sex is indeed in violation of our rule banning “self-avowed practicing homosexual” clergy, despite silly liberal attempts of playing word games to argue otherwise; and (2) that

the Western Jurisdiction’s recent, and currently contested, attempt to elect lesbian activist Karen Oliveto, who is openly legally “married” to another woman, is therefore invalid: secretaryjudicialcouncil@gmail.com

Please recruit other faithful United Methodists from your congregation to go online to endorse the www.StandFirmUMC.org online petition!

Yes, I (we) want to help UMAction inform United Methodists and their families about the urgent need for church reform and faithfulness

Enclosed is my tax-deductible gift of:

☐ \$50 ☐ \$75 ☐ \$100 ☐ Other \$ _____

_____ Please send UMAction Briefing to the United Methodists on the enclosed list of names and addresses.

_____ Please send UMAction Briefing to the names I have marked in the enclosed church directory.

My Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

E-mail Address: _____

Clip and mail to: **UMAction c/o IRD
1023 15th Street NW, Suite 601
Washington, DC 20005-2620**

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Your Opinion, Please!

Which is your preferred path forward?

- An evangelical minority should leave the UMC to form our own denomination.
- The UMC should completely dissolve, through an equitable division of assets, into two or more new denominations.
- The global orthodox majority should require clergy, bishops, and even entire annual conferences to leave if they will not uphold our biblical standards on marriage.
- Something else (please specify)

Resolutions, Just and Unjust

When UMC clergy are accused of breaking our denomination's covenant of conduct, we have a process of seeking to first resolve such matters through a "just resolution," with church trials being a last resort.

This is one of many areas in which United Methodist bishops are given an extraordinary amount of discretionary power, and simply trusted to always do the right thing.

We have recently seen a range of how different bishops have handled formal complaints against clergy who break our denomination's biblical standards on marriage and sex.

out" to her congregation as a partnered lesbian, in defiance of the *Discipline's* ban on "self-avowed practicing homosexual" clergy. This resolution gives Meyer a year's wages while suspending her from ministry until the end of the next General Conference. The terms basically say that if the next General Conference changes the *Discipline* to allow openly homosexually active clergy, Meyer can resume her duties in good standing; if it creates a new liberal Methodist denomination, she can transfer there; or if it maintains our biblical standards, her case will move forward to a church trial (which should permanently defrock her).

While we may not agree with all of the details, Bishops Jones and Coyner showed much more integrity than some more liberal bishops have.

In Western North Carolina, **Pastor Val Rosenquist** faced complaints for essentially the same offense as Dimick. But **Bishop Larry Goodpaster** chose to wait until immediately before his September 1 retirement to impose a "just resolution" in which Rosenquist was not removed from ministry (as some who filed complaints had sought) and faced no publicly deterrent penalties for her actions. Beyond that, the resolution states that its "terms and conditions shall remain confidential." Bishop Goodpaster's strategic timing, including his staff's informing local secular media of the resolution before informing complaint filers, ensured that by the time the

multiple complaint filers found out about the upsettingly incomplete and secretive resolution, they had no way to contact Goodpaster to share their concerns. The Methodist *Articles of Religion*, part of the core United Methodist doctrine this bishop vowed to uphold, echo the biblical principle that leaders who break covenant with the church should be rebuked in a public way that will make others think twice before following their bad example.

In Wisconsin, after **Rev. Janet Ellinger** performed two same-sex services **Bishop Hee-Soo Jung** arranged a "just resolution" that not only involved no deterrent penalties, but asked for no pledge to refrain from repeating this offense. It amounted to little more than rewarding Ellinger by giving her a platform in June to denounce the UMC's adherence to biblical teaching on sexuality before the conference-wide clergy session.



The Rev. Anna Blaedel speaks during the 2016 Iowa Annual Conference session on June 4, 2016. (Photo: Arthur McClanahan/UMC Iowa Conference)

In the Indiana Conference, the **Rev. Larry Dimick** presided at a pastorally harmful same-sex "wedding" in June, even though our governing *Discipline* forbids this. **Bishop Mike Coyner** (now retired) resolved the complaint by extracting from Dimick assurances that this was a one-time action he did for his son, who was one of the grooms, and that he would not do another such service. Bishop Coyner placed a record of this in Dimick's file and then shortly before his retirement in August, he issued a public statement calling on "everyone—and I mean EVERYONE—to be faithful to our current *Book of Discipline*," even though elsewhere "[s]ome persons, some groups, and even some conferences are not being faithful."

In the Great Plains Conference (Kansas and Nebraska), **Bishop Scott Jones** negotiated a "just resolution" in early August with **Pastor Cynthia Meyer**, the former Assistant Dean of Students at the UMC's Candler School of Theology, who had "come

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In Iowa, campus minister **Anna Blaedel** was even more combative than Cynthia Meyer. She interrupted the 2016 Iowa Annual Conference session with a diatribe in which she declared, “I am a self-avowed, practicing homosexual.” **Bishop Julius Trimble** subsequently gave her free rein to publicly name and promote vicious character assassinations on social media against the three faithful pastors who filed complaints against her, including encouraging proposed activist disruptions of their church’s worship services—even though “behavior that undermines the ministry of another pastor” is itself a separate chargeable offense for United Methodist clergy. Then Bishop Trimble chose to wait until his very last day as Iowa’s bishop (before transferring to Indiana) to simply dismiss the complaint and protect Blaedel from any accountability, earning Blaedel’s public appreciation. As a last resort, several evangelical Iowa clergy and laity then filed a complaint against Trimble himself over his handling of this case.

Better results would have been likely in cases like those in Western North Carolina and Wisconsin, and other similarly mishandled cases in recent years, if the *Discipline* were amended to include some basic definition of “just resolutions.” The Judicial Administration legislative committee at the 2016 General Conference overwhelmingly passed two petitions that would have done this by requiring that “every effort shall be made to have the [complaint filers] agree to the resolution before it may take effect,” and that when a clergy admits to violating a standard of our denominational covenant, they must commit to not repeating the offense as part of any just resolution. But in the last few hours of General Conference, the Agenda Committee decided to table these petitions, which were part of the Covenantal Unity Plan, because of the motion passed earlier to refer all “human sexuality” petitions to the new Way Forward Commission. ✚

FOR REFLECTION: 1 Timothy 5:20.

ACTION: Respectfully urge the three moderators of the Way Forward Commission to ensure that the specially called General Conference tentatively planned for 2019 will consider the two committee-passed petitions to reform the ways several bishops have abused the “just resolution” process: **Bishop Kenneth 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**

UMAction Briefing

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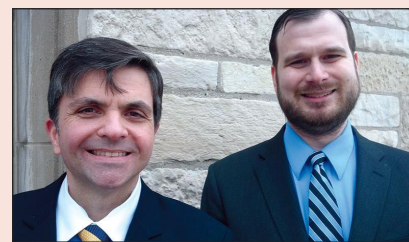
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