



‘Waiting Is Just Not Good Enough Anymore’—Several Liberal Congregations Leave UMC

Since August, at least five liberal congregations across the country have secured approval to leave the United Methodist Church. As Grandview UMC in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, declared, they “respect the necessity for having rules that guide the shared life of any group” but cannot bear our denomination’s rules “that discriminate and exclude.”

The 2019 Special General Conference increased accountability for clergy to keep their behavior within biblical sexual-morality standards, and also ratified a “gracious exit” provision allowing dissident congregations to leave with their properties after paying a significant exit fee.

While a greater number of conservative congregations have left the UMC in recent years, liberal congregations leaving is new.

Prominent gay activist **Will Green** in October got the blessing of the New England Annual Conference’s October virtual session for his small Brackett Memorial Church in Peaks Island, Maine, to leave. Before the vote Bishop **Sudarshana Devadhar** noted that Green’s status as a United Methodist pastor was technically a separate matter, and expressed confidence that Green “will be in communication with the board of ordained ministry depending upon the decision of this annual conference.” While several speakers expressed sadness over this departure, the

Rev. **John Lucy** agreed that “they’re making the right decision to not wait,” as after many years of fighting to liberalize UMC standards, “waiting is just not good enough anymore.”

After a two-year legal struggle, the California-Nevada Conference and Glide Memorial UMC in San Francisco announced a legal settlement for Glide to leave. Its over 13,000 members accounted for nearly 19 percent of all California-Nevada United Methodists. Glide has been widely criticized for its post-Christian spirituality, with many of its participants identifying with various non-Christian faiths, including atheism and Wicca. Yet Glide was long prominent in liberal UMC circles, launching its senior pastor

January 2021

Inside:

Liberal Visions for Post-Separation United Methodist Church 2

GOOD NEWS: Accountability Continues. 3

UMC Seminary, Agencies Host Vulgar Lutheran. 4

Liberal United Methodist Bureaucrats Target Africa 5



Activist Will Green protesting at the 2016 United Methodist General Conference, in hopes of promoting the LGBT liberationist cause. Green’s small congregation of Brackett Memorial Church in Peaks Island, Maine, received permission from the New England Annual Conference to depart the United Methodist Church. (Photo: Mike DuBose / UMNS)

See ‘Waiting Is Just Not Good Enough Anymore,’ page 4

Liberal Visions for Post-Separation United Methodist Church

In expectation of our coming denominational split, theologically traditionalist United Methodist leaders have been diligently preparing the necessary rules and structure for the denomination for like-minded United Methodists. Meanwhile, liberal leaders have begun offering their visions for the liberalized “post-separation United Methodist Church” (psUMC).

In October, officials of the UMC’s U.S. Western Jurisdiction launched a new campaign called “Where Love Lives, Creating a Fully Inclusive United Methodist Church.” It focuses on “promoting the Protocol” and offering a liberal vision for the psUMC.

The “Where Love Lives” campaign admits that the psUMC will be a “new church” with a significant “resetting and reforming,” despite keeping the United Methodist name. The campaign encourages traditionalist believers to passively go with the default option of continuing into the psUMC, but warns that they “must be willing to accept” that others in their denomination “will have a right to conduct same-sex marriages and ordain qualified lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons.”

Openly partnered lesbian Bishop **Karen Oliveto**, who recently became the Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops President for 2020–2023, prominently features in “Where Love Lives.” As Oliveto’s star appears set to rise in the psUMC, it is worth recalling her more extreme heresies, such as using the bishop’s office to warn against “creat[ing] an idol out of” Jesus Christ—claiming that He had “his bigotries and prejudices” out of which He needed “conversion”—and before her election urging recognition of both “the benefits and flaws” of Scripture, such alleged “flaws” including a “theology of election and chosenness.”

The liberal United Methodist Association of Retired Clergy (UMARC) caucus organized a conference in November about making the denomination more “inclusive.” There Oliveto denounced the UMC’s bans on partnered gay clergy as part of the “death in too many pots,” which should be replaced by “a stew

of sustenance.” When psUMC leaders sincerely believe it is so harmful for the church to reject partnered gay clergy or same-sex weddings, how long could we really expect them to keep making room for any remaining traditionalist congregations that still seek to uphold these moral standards?

Rev. **Mark Holland**, director of Mainstream UMC, was another speaker at this event. He claimed that recent political divisions

in America “are exactly the divisions that we have seen in the United Methodist Church.” Holland, who was a local Democratic politician until 2017, blamed “the same Trump Evangelicals” for allegedly causing problems in the UMC and lamented that over 70 million Americans voted for President Trump’s re-election. The liberal caucus leader repeatedly blasted IRD/UMAction and the Wesleyan Covenant Association (WCA) for, among other things, “want[ing] the science that can create a vaccine for COVID-19” but not “want[ing] to accept the science that sexuality in humans is non-binary.” For non-Americans remaining in the psUMC, he urged a “regionalization” plan, which he has previously admitted is a rehashed version of previous liberal proposals defeated at recent General Conferences (see “Liberal

United Methodist Beaucrats Target Africa,” page 5).

Holland’s offering such an unwelcoming posture towards fellow United Methodists in renewal groups and fellow Americans outside his own political party, as well as promoting systemic marginalization of non-Americans in his denomination, were ironic at an event called the “Inclusiveness Conference.” But at least he still expressed support for the Protocol’s negotiated separation, and admitted the impossibility of a denomination in which everyone was completely “woke,” because “no one would be qualified to be in it.” 🗳️

ACTION: Warn your pastor and others about the psUMC’s radical future and help prepare your congregation to make its choice in the coming split.



Contested Bishop Karen Oliveto of the Mountain Sky Area is one of several progressive officials offering a vision for a liberalized “post-separation United Methodist Church.” (Photo: Twitter)

GOOD NEWS: Accountability Continues

As United Methodists await our delayed General Conference to enact separation, church law still bans same-sex unions and requires clergy to be celibate if single or monogamous within male/female marriage.

Much attention has focused on activist clergy breaking the rules with no accountability. But recently a few clergy have faced real accountability. Remember, these ministers all vowed to uphold our standards, and no one forced them to pursue ministry in this particular denomination.

Rev. **Lauren Padgett** was a key organizer of liberal efforts in the Illinois-Great Rivers Conference. In early 2020, under the Traditional Plan's enhanced-accountability measures, as an openly partnered lesbian, she was forced to surrender her ordination. She publicly criticized Bishop **Frank Beard** for refusing to turn "a blind-eye" to his pastoral responsibilities for her and others impacted by her ministry. Padgett now pastors in the ultra-liberal United Church of Christ (UCC) denomination.

In the South, another minister had several conference leadership positions and was a pioneer in conference LGBTQ activism. Despite her annual conference and bishop being more liberal for the region, she went on leave of absence after photos surfaced of her wedding with another woman. Then at some point since 2019 she transferred her credentials into the Denver-based

Mountain Sky Conference in the Western Jurisdiction, without geographically relocating and while keeping her same chaplain job. Western bishops have long rebelled against enforcing the UMC's moral standards. Her transfer has shielded her from further accountability but also blocked the Western Jurisdiction's anarchy from spreading further.

In September 2019, Pastor **Lynette Cole** of the Upper New York Conference had a union ceremony with another woman. Within a week, her district committee on ministry removed her credentials as a licensed local pastor. Cole has also transferred into the UCC, and continues pastoring a federated UMC-UCC congregation. But she is no longer legally part of the UMC.

Although no church trials are likely in the next year, there are other ways our bishops could minimize disobedience, and the pastoral harm it causes. ✚

ACTION: (1) Thank Bishop Frank Beard for upholding the Discipline in the case of Lauren Padgett: Bishop Frank Beard / United Methodist Center / P.O. Box 19207 / Springfield, IL 62794 / bishop@igrc.org.

(2) Urge your own bishop to do what they can to actively, vocally discourage clergy from disobeying the Discipline in this delicate interim period. Contact info is at www.umc.org/directory under "Regional Offices."



(Photo: Kathleen Barry / United Methodist Communications)

UMC Seminary, Agencies Host Vulgar Lutheran

Rev. **Nadia Bolz-Weber** is a foul-mouthed radical Lutheran speaker and author who recently was featured at the virtual “I AM Her Women’s Leadership Summit” hosted in October by the UMC’s Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary outside Chicago. The event was organized by the UMC’s General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (CoSRoW), and sponsored by United Methodism’s Discipleship Ministries and the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits.

Promotional material indicated that Bolz-Weber was chosen as keynote speaker at least partially *because* of her 2019 book, *SHAMELESS: A Sexual Reformation*, in which the minister recounts her own abortion, affirms her teenage daughter’s sex with a boyfriend, and defends the idea that “we can decide for ourselves what is sacred in the Bible and what is not,” especially

See UMC Seminary, Agencies host Vulgar Lutheran, page 6



Lutheran Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber addressed a Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary summit in October 2020 (Photo: YouTube screen capture)

‘Waiting Is Just Not Good Enough Anymore’

Continued from page 1

Karen Oliveto to become the UMC’s first openly partnered gay bishop in 2016, defying church law.

In November, the Peninsula-Delaware Conference approved the disaffiliation of Groome UMC in Lewes, Delaware. In August, the South Georgia Conference approved the disaffiliation of Asbury UMC in Savannah. In October, Grandview UMC secured the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference’s permission, but it is apparently reserving the right to change its mind until March 31, 2021.

Groome UMC explained their decision as “a question of conscience,” saying their area had “the nation’s fourth highest concentration of the LGBTQ community.” The other four congregations are “reconciling congregations,” affiliated with the LGBTQ liberationist Reconciling Ministries Network. Glide was the only “reconciling congregation” among the UMC’s 100 largest-membership U.S. congregations.

While a greater number of conservative congregations have left the UMC in recent years, liberal congregations leaving is new.

But the details of these recent departures make clear why current church law is woefully inadequate for most congregations.

First of all, right now, **leaving the UMC is very costly**. The recent settlement requires Glide to pay \$6 million. The four smaller congregations, unlike Glide, are using the new “gracious exits” option. But exit fees amount in some cases to having to pay, in a relatively short time, well over their *total* annual expenses, or several thousand dollars per member, on top of normal operating expenses. Under the “**Protocol on Reconciliation and Grace through Separation**” proposed for

the next UMC General Conference, congregations switching from the UMC to a new conservative or liberal Methodist denomination would pay no such fees.

Secondly, current church law **leaves departing congregations vulnerable to heavy-handed treatment** by annual conference officials. The New England Conference imposed additional, draconian burdens on Brackett Memorial, making their departure much more time-consuming. The “Protocol” would prevent this.

Thirdly, our current “gracious exit” process, unlike the “Protocol,” **requires departing congregations to seek permission from their annual conferences**, which may not always be granted. Some departures noted here faced opposition. Even after Brackett Memorial UMC’s members voted *unanimously* to leave the UMC, agreed to pay the massive exit fee, and jumped through the extra hoops, the motion allowing them to go their own way attracted multiple speeches in opposition during the New England Conference’s October session. In the future, such opposition in some conferences could block congregations from leaving, unless the next General Conference first adopts some version of the “Protocol.” ✚

FOR REFLECTION: 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1.

ACTION: *With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, many have questioned if the UMC’s already-rescheduled international General Conference will be able to meet in 2021. Please pray that (1) it will be able to meet through some virtual format in 2021, and (2) it will focus on a limited agenda of enacting a separation plan and only what is absolutely necessary to be addressed before its next scheduled meeting in 2024.*

Liberal United Methodist Bureaucrats Target Africa

Widespread support for the carefully negotiated “Protocol” to divide the UMC offers a flawed but ultimately promising way for theologically conservative and revisionist factions to divide without further fighting. Conferences and congregations could choose between a liberalized “post-separation United Methodist Church” (psUMC) and global evangelical Methodism.

Some liberal church officials seem reluctant to respect the right of African conferences to make their own democratic choices. Already some seem to be preparing to try to “take over” traditionalist African conferences for the liberalized psUMC.

In the “Protocol” itself, liberal negotiators secured a demand to blatantly rig decisions by any of the UMC’s seven central conferences (three of which are in Africa), so that they can only align with the global evangelical denomination if a two-thirds super-majority of their delegates vote to do so. So a 34-percent minority could force a central conference to stay with liberal psUMC. Annual conferences within each central conference, as those in

the U.S., need a 57 percent vote to join with fellow traditionalists.

African United Methodists are overwhelmingly theologically traditionalist but not a monolith. U.S. officials sometimes prop up more liberal Africans. Prominent Zimbabwean Pastor **Forbes Matonga** recently reported in *Firebrand* magazine that in the name of “church unity” “some influential African bishops, who are in support or sympathetic to this progressive sexual ethic” are seeking to lead their conferences into the liberalized psUMC, and that this is already dividing Africans.

Many liberals say the psUMC must establish a new system of regional autonomy for the U.S. and other parts of the world. Such proposals have been a longtime liberal goal but critics have nicknamed them “global segregation plans.” They would effectively strip non-American General Conference delegates (who are primarily from Africa) of much of their current influence in the denomination while likely putting them at a disadvantage in setting denominational funding priorities. Few advocates seem to realize

[See Liberal United Methodist Bureaucrats Target Africa, page 6](#)



Rev. Forbes Matonga is a pastor in the Zimbabwe West Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church and a member of the Wesleyan Covenant Association’s Global Leadership Council. (Photo: Mike DuBose / UMNS)

Liberal United Methodist Bureaucrats Target Africa

Continued from page 5

the irony of liberals imposing a “separate but equal” structural segregation between American United Methodists, who are predominantly white, and most of the denomination’s black members.

In March, a small group of liberal Americans, including leaders of the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) and the “Uniting Methodists” caucus, made a multi-stop trip to central Africa, meeting with bishops and other UMC leaders. The Americans’ message reportedly included exaggerating Africa’s financial dependence on liberal Americans. Such claims appear designed to convince African leaders that they risk financial ruin unless they align with the liberal psUMC. Many liberal United Methodists have already financially threatened non-U.S. United Methodists. But several African United Methodist leaders have vowed to never trade their biblical values for American dollars. ✝

ACTION: Pray for African conferences, and others around the world, to be allowed to make their own free, informed, democratic choices between the new denominations.

UMC Seminary, Agencies Host Vulgar Lutheran

Continued from page 4

on sexual morality. On Christianity’s “antiquated and harmful ideas about sex,” she warns a “few simple amendments” is not enough—rather, “let’s burn it the f**k down and start over.”

At Garrett, Bolz-Weber explained that she wrote this book because she “had shame over a sexless marriage.” Now divorced, she bragged that she has “great, amazing sex” with her current boyfriend, which she admitted is “out of compliance with the church” because they aren’t married. She also recounted a yurt tent ritual encountering a “divine feminine presence,” recalling, “I did have to go hang out with the Goddess for a while.”

Bolz-Weber’s message also included her trademark casual use of profanity. “I know some people think clergy shouldn’t swear. But I think clergy shouldn’t try and pretend to be someone they’re not,” she insisted.

Such programming by a denomination’s official seminaries and agencies plays an influential role in spiritually molding its clergy and teaching its members. Under the “Protocol” proposal for splitting our denomination, the liberalized post-separation UMC (psUMC) would inherit the seminary that hosted this event along with all the United Methodist agencies supporting it. ✝

FOR REFLECTION: 1 Corinthians 6:18-20; Ephesians 4:29, 5:3-7; Colossians 3:5-8.

UMAction Briefing

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

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